Title: **Hot For Teacher**  
Category: Books » Sookie Stackhouse/Southern Vampire Mysteries  
Author: makesmyheadspin  
Language: English, Rating: Rated: M  
Genre: Romance/Friendship  
Published: 06-12-10, Updated: 11-14-10  
Chapters: 60, Words: 304,742

**Chapter 1: Screaming Orgasm**

Okay, so inspiration for this came from the Van Halen song, "Hot For Teacher". Yes, it's totally on my ipod. Don't judge! I'm sure you've got a few songs on yours that would make me arch an eyebrow. Besides, if it weren't for that song I wouldn't have gotten this idea, and I think you're going to like this idea. I think you're going to like it muy mucho. But I guess you'll let me know in the reviews \*grins sheepishly\*

This is unbeta'd so all the mistakes are mine.

**I do not own most of these characters and the ones I do will be easy to spot.**

Chapter One: Screaming Orgasm

**Sookie**

"I really think we're a little too old for this." I sighed as Amelia dragged me into the bar.

"Oh, will you lighten up already? You finally got rid of that asshat of a boyfriend of yours. It's time to have some fun." She insisted as my eyes fought to adjust to the darkness. "Besides, school starts on Monday. This is the last time we're going to really be able to have any real fun until Thanksgiving weekend."

Wasn't that the truth? I sighed again, my hand linked with Amelia's as she tugged me through the Friday night crowd. I'd driven by the bar on a daily basis during the last school year but I never went in. First of all, I wasn't a drinker. Second of all, I had a boyfriend and didn't want to spend the night convincing drunk men I wasn't interested. Third, I was afraid I'd run into my students. How bad would that be? Well, it would be worse for them since they would be in the bar on a fake ID, but I didn't like the idea of being drunk in public. It just didn't send a good message to my students, even if I was legally allowed to imbibe as frequently as I'd like.

"Christ on a cracker!" Amelia stopped short, her hand squeezing mine painfully.

"Ow!" I would have yanked my hand away if she didn't have it in a vice grip. "What the hell, Ame?"

"There." She jutted her chin toward the bar.

"What?"

Her head whipped toward mine, her jaw hanging open. "Uh, hello? Tall, blond, looks like he just stepped off a magazine cover for Viking Monthly?"

I craned my neck to see what she was looking at. Unlike Amelia, I wasn't wearing four inch heels that could cause me to fall and break my neck. Call me boring, but I'll take comfort over fashion any day of the week. I was wearing my little ballerina slippers and I was quite comfortable in them. Turns out the man in question was behing the bar, shaking what might have been a martini. I watched the easy flex of the muscles in his arms before my eyes slid up his very well-toned body to his neck and then even further up to his face.

*Hello gorgeous.*

Amelia wasn't kidding. Panting. Yes, I was definitely panting. "Sweet Jesus." I muttered and Amelia grinned beside me. "Dibs!" I called out and she laughed.

"Did you forget I'm with Tray?" Now it was my head that was whipping around.

"I'm surprised *you* didn't." I teased her. Amelia wasn't exactly the monogomous type. She liked to keep her options open.

"He's special." She actually blushed. Amelia Kathleen Broadway actually blushed. Holy shit.

"Oooh, I'm telling!" I nudged her playfully.

"Shut up!" Amelia was uncomfortable with her feelings for Tray.

She wasn't used to wanting only one person at a time. This was pretty much uncharted territory for her. If she had her way about it, she'd be having sex with multiple people through me while I nursed my 'broken heart'. Thing was, I wasn't really all that upset (anymore) about losing Quinn. It was just time to let that relationship go.

Quinn owned his own business and had all sorts of plans. They were great plans and I was proud of how much his business had expanded in the three years we were together. Thing was, he had this crazy ten year plan in his head that he wouldn't deviate from. When I mentioned I wanted us to move on to the next level, his calls started coming to see me less and less frequently. When an entire month passed without contact from him, I decided enough was enough. If we weren't going to get serious about our future together then I needed to let him go. I wanted to get married and have kids and I wanted to do that before I was thirty if I could. I'd thought Quinn might be the one. Then it occurred to me that 'the one' would call me more than once a month.

He was sweet and charming and I knew that he loved me. He was good to his mother and his sister (whom I'd had in my World History class when she was a freshman), which was a pretty big thing for me. I didn't have a whole lot of family and I wanted to be sure that the man I ended up with was a family man. Quinn most certainly was. We was a bit more aggressive than I'd like sometimes, though not with me, but we all have flaws. I could overlook that. No, better, I could *accept* that because I loved the rest of him so much. I did accept it. It was Quinn.

But then things started to go south and it seemed the more I tried to talk to him about things the less he wanted to work on it. I started to wonder what the hell I'd done wrong. It wasn't like we'd only been together a few weeks. We'd been together for *years*. I didn't see the harm in talking about where we were headed. Apparently, Quinn didn't feel the same. That was a deal breaker for me. So on his last visit I told him it was over. I was tired of waiting for him to make up his mind.

It stung when he didn't seem upset or surprised. I think he was actually hoping that I'd be the one to pull the plug on us because he didn't want to hurt me. Well, he hurt me anyway but I don't think he saw it that way. I think he thought by me being the one to do the breaking it would give me some sort of power, which it did, but that didn't make it hurt any less. I mean, I'd been ready to take the man's name and have his babies for Christ's sake!

"Go get him!" Amelia shoved me toward the bar and away from my revery all at once.

"What? No!" I scuttled back to her.

"Sookie," she gave me that warning tone of hers that said either I get my ass over there and talk to him or she'd do it for me.

"Ame, please-" I whined.

"Fine." She shrugged and started toward the bar.

"Okay! Fine! You win!" I yanked her hand back.

"Get me a Scooby Snack!" Amelia called out from behind me.

*Oh, Amelia*, I sighed as I headed toward the bar. The Nordic hottie behind the bar was leaning over, talking to a pale blond woman who looked like she had raided Jackie O's closet. She couldn't have been more than ten years my senior but she was dressed in a classic Chanel suit, complete with a matching pink headband. Do women really dress like that anymore? Only it looked good on her. She definitely stood out in a crowd full of women wearing tight jeans and low-cut tops. She looked classy and sure of herself. I envied her not for her wardrobe but because she seemed to be carrying such an effortless conversation with the sex on a stick manning the bar. How did she do that? Was she his girlfriend? Why did I care?

I shook all those thoughts from my head while I decided what I was going to drink. I glanced over my shoulder once to see Amelia make a shooing motion at me. Bitch. I'd never been that good at meeting people in spite of my chosen profession. As a teacher, I met new people all the time. It was part of the job. But in a classroom, I was sure of myself. I had my textbooks to back me up. In a bar, well, that was different. I had nothing. Nothing except the blush that was deepening as I got closer and closer to the bar and the hottie working behind it.

I leaned against the bar and clasped my hands on it. Viking made a motion for Chanel Suit to hold her thought while he sauntered over to me in a pair of jeans that were slung low on his hips, his black t-shirt clinging to what was clearly a very chiseled torso. Wipe. The. Drool.

"What can I get for you?" There was an accent. It was slight, but it was there. It was heaven.

I said the first thing that came to mind. "A Screaming Orgasm." Did I really just say that? Yes, yes, I did. I wanted to melt into the floor right there.

Viking looked me up and down. "I think that can be arranged." I reminded myself that flirting with the customers upped his tips.

"In that case, make it a double." I said it. I really said it. Why wasn't the floor opening up to swallow me whole?

He smiled at me. Oh, God, he smiled at me. I felt like one of the students I'd be teaching on Monday when my Freshmen history class began. I could feel myself sweating as my throat went dry. I watched him mix up the shot and then plop it in front of me. I stared at it like it was going to pour itself down my throat. I tried to tell my brain to move my hand but it wouldn't go anywhere.

"Anything else?" His eyes were intensely blue. His lip curled with slight amusement.

"Uh... uh..." I stammered. Thank God I wasn't an English teacher. "A Scooby Snack?"

He laughed at this request. "A Scooby Snack?"

"It's for my friend." I glanced over my shoulder and Amelia waved with the biggest grin on her face that I'd ever seen. I wanted to kill her for making me do this.

Viking held up his hand in acknowledgment. His hand was massive but I would expect nothing less considering the fact that he appeared to be almost a foot taller than me. I gulped as he turned his back to retrieve the things he needed. When he bent to get the half and half out of the fridge I just about fainted. God bless the maker of those jeans. The ass on him was... I don't even know if there's a word in creation to describe it. Glorious might be a good start.

"Anything else?" He asked once the second shot was ready.

I shook my head, the ability to speak suddenly gone out the window. Kill. Me. Now. Then the Viking smirked at me. I wanted to do a quick check and see if my panties were still there. What the hell was up with me? This wasn't me. I wasn't the type that lusted over hot bartenders, and yet, there I was. Lusting. Big time lusting. I had to remind myself to breathe. My eyes locked with the Viking's at some point and we just stared at one another for a minute. It was like we had magnets in our eyes that wouldn't let us look anywhere else. I'd never felt anything like that before.

Without taking his eyes from mine he reached under the bar. In my peripheral vision I saw him pour two shots from a bottle full of clear liquid with a square bottom. He slid one of the glasses toward me with a faint smile on his face.

"What's this?" I allowed my smile to match his.

"Patron." He said slyly.

"As in tequila?" I didn't know a lot about liquor, but I knew tequila. We'd done an agonizing dance one morning shortly before finals my freshman year of college. Viking nodded at me without his eyes leaving mine. "I'm going to need a lime and salt for this." I exhaled slowly.

He crooked a finger at me to follow him to the end of the bar. I don't know how I got my legs to work but I somehow managed to make my way over to him. In a move that would have gotten any other man slapped silly, he picked up my wrist and licked it before sprinkling salt on it. I felt my pulse quicken and my temperature shoot up about ten degrees. It was suddenly very warm in the bar, no doubt about it. If we were going to do body shots... my knees went weak at the prospect. What was he doing to me that I was contemplating body shots in the middle of a busy bar on a Friday night? And I didn't even know his name!

"You know how this works?" He leaned in and whispered to me, sending shivers down my spine.

In an instant the shy school girl was replaced with a shameless sex kitten. I grabbed the neckline of his t-shirt to hold him close to me and I whispered, "Lick it, slam it, suck it." in his ear. I swear he growled at me.

"And when you're done, you get to have a Screaming Orgasm." He winked at me. Goodbye knees. Make sure my panties are okay.

Then he put a lime wedge fruit side out between his teeth. I gave myself a little pep talk. I was single and a grown ass woman. I could do this. I could hang tough with this guy. It might be old hat for him but I could fake it with the best of 'em. I cheated a glance in Amelia's direction. She looked positively stunned at what I was about to do. Frankly, I couldn't believe it myself.

Before I could talk myself out of it, I licked my wrist, slammed back the shot and then dove for the lime. My lips briefly connected with his. Not quite the first kiss I would have wanted, but it was delicious all the same. The tequila- liquid evil that it was- didn't even burn as it went down my throat. Patron was smooth that way. I closed my eyes to savor the tastes that were mingling on my tongue. When I opened my eyes I'm sure I looked like I was high, which would have been a fair assessment because that was exactly how I felt. Viking looked to be floating a little bit himself.

"My turn." His voice was low and husky. Did he really do this every night?

Again, before I could think about it I grabbed his wrist and licked it to return the favor he'd paid me. Looking down, however, turned out to be somewhat of a mistake because it was obvious he was enjoying my company every bit as much as I was enjoying his. I never would have thought Vikings liked camping. I tried not to giggle, thinking that might ruin the whole thing. I sprinkled salt on his wrist for him. But rather than putting the lime in my mouth as he'd done, I took his shot and stuck it in my cleavage.

My eyes caught his and he looked surprised. Maybe he didn't do this every night. What the hell was I doing? My mind was racing, in spite of the Patron fueled warmth that was spreading through me like wildfire. I bit my lower lip nervously to see what Viking would do. He smirked. Again. Seriously, knees, take good care of my panties.

He licked his wrist and then dove forward toward my chest to retrieve his drink- hands free. My breath caught when I heard him inhale my scent. He groaned against when his face grazed my neck and the tops of my breasts. He took his time plucking the shot glass from its nice little nest before his head popped up with the shot in his mouth. He swallowed back the liquid and then sucked on a lime wedge.

Our eyes locked and there was only thing I could think of to say, "I'll have that Screaming Orgasm now."

I woke up the next morning with a dull ache in my head and an arm wrapped around my waist. The room was dark with just tiny cracks of light getting in. The clock next to me said it was almost noon. It took a moment for my eyes to focus and I realized I was in a room I'd never seen before. I moved in a slight panic, trying to remember where I was and how I'd gotten there. A face snuggled against my shoulder and I froze.

Then I remembered! Patron! I groaned as quietly as I could. When the arm that encircled me pulled me closer to the rest of its owner I freaked out a little. I was naked! Shit! What the hell did I do last night? My mind was still a bit fuzzy but slowly, bits and pieces came back into focus. Amelia. A bar. Viking. Body shots. Patron. Patron. Flirting. Patron. More flirting. Patron. Dancing. Patron. I groaned again.

"Morning, Sookie." A faintly familiar voice whispered behind me.

Viking? "Morning." I whispered, feeling terrible that I couldn't remember his name. I had never done something like this before.

I was afraid to move. My memory was slowly coming back to me. From all I could gather, Eric- Yes! I had a name!- and I had done several more Patron shots over the course of the evening. We'd talked quite a bit in spite of the fact that it was a busy Friday night at the bar. We'd even danced a time or two. Amelia had encouraged me like no other to give Eric a chance, not that I really needed her to. By the time the bar was closing up for the night whatever it was between Eric and I had hit a fever pitch and there was no way I wanted to go home alone. So I ended up back at his place. I'd told myself we would just just makeout for a little while. I wasn't the slutty sort who slept with a guy she just met and knew next to nothing about.

What did I know about Eric? I searched my mind for the details he'd given up. After much thought I remembered he was thiry-one. He wasn't the regular bartender but he *was* co-owner of the bar. Mostly, he'd invested in his friend's business. But since he'd done some bartending back in college he would step in from time to time when the regular bartender, Felicia, needed a night off. The woman I'd been calling Chanel Suit was his business partner, Pam. He was unmarried. He didn't have kids. He had a Boxer named Jeter. He'd gone to Duke. His favorite color was red. He was also an amazing kisser.

And at the moment, he seemed to be incredibly turned on by the fact that I hadn't bolted right out of bed. Or maybe that was just his natural morning state? I didn't really know. What I *did* know is that I suddenly felt very uncomfortable being naked while I was that close to him. I tried to lift his arm from around my waist when the need to pee overwhelmed me.

"Where are you going?" He murmured.

"I have to pee." I whispered nervously.

He released me but I had no idea where to go. "Where's the bathroom?" I asked sheepishly.

He lifted one of his very long arms and pointed to a door right in front of me. I nodded, not sure if he could see it or not. I sat up slowly and looked for something to wear. Walking around naked wasn't something I could do. I ended up grabbing the t-shirt he'd been wearing the night before since my own clothes seemed to be elsewhere. I slipped the shirt over my head and the smell on it brought me rushing back to the night before.

I almost whimpered as I got out of bed to make my way to the bathroom. I was sore, but deliciously so. I closed the door and flipped on the light. I had serious sex hair, but then, I'd had serious sex. Eric was no joke. Not. At. All. I remembered stumbling back into his small house at somewhere around four in the morning after making out like a couple of teenagers on his front porch. His dog had done a little happy dance at the door when we'd arrived. Jeter had sniffed me out before barking what Eric determined to be approval. When the dog licked on me too much Eric had told him to go find his own girl. It was cute.

We'd made grilled cheese sandwiches and talked for a while before ultimately ending up on his couch. It had been innocent enough, at first, but then when he went to kiss me goodnight I was surprised to remember that I had been the one to turn it into something more. We'd fooled around on the couch before he'd picked me up and carried me back to his bedroom. The next thing I knew clothes were flying and we were both naked as jaybirds. I remembered seeing a set of abs that would make Marky Mark jealous. Good vibrations indeed.

I remembered him using his very talented fingers in partnership with his likewise talented mouth to bring me my first screaming orgasm. Remembering that I'd asked for a double, he'd rolled on a condom and gave me my second. Then my third and I think there might have been a fourth before I was too exhausted to go anymore. I would have cringed at it all if it weren't for the fact that I remembered him asking me if I was sure it was what I wanted. I was drunk, no doubt about it. He seemed to be as well- but I wasn't so drunk that I would think he'd taken advantage of me in the morning.

And I didn't. I knew what I was doing. I'd just let the Patron take the wheel. I did my business in the bathroom, even using my finger as a toothbrush since the taste of Patron the morning after was anything but appealing to me. I tried to tame my sex hair but it was a lost cause. I needed a shower. Stat. I took a deep breath and then opened the bathroom door.

Eric was exactly where I'd left him, only he was on his back instead of his side. His head turned toward me when the door opened and he smiled at me. His bed was enormous, which made sense considering how tall he was. I sheepishly walked toward it and almost had to jump to get back on it. When I did, I sat at the edge.

"Come here." He reached a hand out to me. I wanted to take it, I did, but I just couldn't. "What's wrong, Sookie?"

I took a deep breath, not sure of how to say what I wanted to say. I felt tears gathering in my eyes. I didn't want him to think I blamed him or that I was angry with him because I wasn't. I was angry at myself. What the hell was I thinking?

"I think I should go. I'm sure you have things to do." My voice, traitor that it was, completely betrayed me.

"What?" He pushed himself up on his elbows. "Stay. I'll make us breakfast."

My heart skipped a beat. I wanted to. I wanted to stay. I don't know why. But rather than say anything else, I started crying like a total basketcase. When Eric reached for me again I scrambled off his bed. I searched the room for my clothes and found them strewn about on the floor. I was making good time to the bathroom to change when Eric caught up with me. He'd somehow had enough time to get his boxers back on before grabbing me, for which, I was grateful.

"Sookie, what are you doing?" He whispered soothingly into my ear.

"Look, I had a good time last night-"

"So did I." He kissed my hair. He wasn't going to make this easy.

"The thing is, I don't know if staying is a good idea. I like you. I do. If I didn't, I couldn't have done what we did last night. I know I had a lot to drink but it wasn't the tequila telling me I liked you. I liked you before I knew anything about you at all. It's just..." I trailed off, unable to think of a good reason to go other than it was what my body suddenly needed me to do.

"Just what?" Eric prompted, his arms wrapped around my shoulders so my chin was resting on his forearms.

"I have to go, Eric." I said in a voice barely louder than a whisper.

He sighed heavily but let me go. I went to the bathroom and put my clothes back on. I folded his t-shirt and brought it out of the bathroom with me. I laid it on his bed and ran my hand over the smooth dark gray sheets. His bed was nothing if not comfortable and there was a part of me that was very sorry to leave it. I wiped a stray tear from my cheek before turning around and walking out of his bedroom.

I found him on the couch with Jeter curled up beside him. The dog lifted his head and then came running to me. He plopped down at my feet and rolled onto his back. I looked at Eric who was smiling sadly at me.

"He likes you." Eric looked wistful. I hated myself right then.

I knelt down and scratched the dog's belly. Jeter made a contented noise and rolled side to side, begging for more. Before I could get too attached to Eric's uber friendly dog, or to Eric himself, I stood up straight and looked for my purse. It was on the coffee table. I stepped closer to Eric and picked up my bag. It was a Coach purse Amelia had bought me for my last birthday. It was extravagant, but I'd be lying if I said I hadn't fallen in love with it immediately. Jeter had hopped up and was nuzzling my thigh with the side of his face. It was adorable. If I didn't know any better, I might think Eric had trained the dog into guilt tripping anyone he brought home. Come to think of it, maybe he did.

"Jeter, leave her be." Eric said in a stern tone. Jeter whimpered and then hopped up on the couch next to Eric.

I looked at the dog who looked about as sad as his owner. I felt like such a bitch. I didn't even really know why I was leaving. I liked Eric. I really liked Eric. In spite of how irresponsible the night before might have been, it felt right. I had just opened my mouth to say something when a woman's voice called out from the entryway.

"Eric, are you here?"

My heart stopped. If he was married and didn't tell me I would kill him. I glared hard at him and he just smiled. He smiled! I wasn't a homewrecker. Or at least I wasn't until that moment. I hung my head in shame and fury and waited for this woman to come in and strangle me for sleeping with her amazing husband. Well, not so amazing now that I knew he had a wife. Bastard lied to me.

"Oh, Sookie, you're still here. I'm glad I brought extra." My head snapped up to see Chanel Suit, er, I mean, Pam, standing there holding out a cup of coffee.

He wasn't married! "You're my hero." The words came flying out of my mouth before I could stop them and Eric laughed.

"There's an extra shot in there." Pam advised and my eyes glazed over with adoration.

"Marry me?" I asked jokingly, earning Pam a serious death glare from Eric.

"Looks to me like your friend here might not like that." Pam was looking straight at Eric with a quirked eyebrow.

"You could have called, Pamela." Oh, that can't be good. It was like when my mother used to call me by my first and middle name. That was never a good sign. If I got my full name I might as well kiss my freedom goodbye for an extended period of time. Not that I gave her many reasons to do that, mind you, but still.

"Seems to me I was right on time since it appears as though Sookie's on her way out." Pam was nothing if not observant.

"Pam why don't you go into the kitchen and we'll be right behind you?" Eric suggested with a pointed stare that told her it wasn't up for debate.

Pam chuckled but headed for the kitchen. Eric pressed his hand into the small of my back and led me to the back of the condo. He closed his bedroom door most of the way and spoke quietly.

"You were about to say something before she barged in. Please continue."

I sighed and looked at the cup of coffee in my hands. It smelled wonderful, as did whatever else Pam had toted in with her. Jeter stood anxiously at the door, his eyes stuck on me. Damn dog. Was it really right to stay because Eric's dog liked me? No, that wouldn't be why I stayed.

"Sookie?" He prompted gently.

"Maybe I could stay for breakfast?" I suggested with a hint of a smile.

Eric released a breath and pressed a kiss to my forehead. "I'd like that."

I took a sip of my coffee and then walked out of his room with him while Jeter followed behind us, his tail wagging happily.

**Okay, so what do we think? There's a twist to all this that will be revealed in the next few chapters. If you're really nice to me I'll load chapter 2 today too ;)**

**Go on, click that little blue button. You know you want to...**

**Chapter 2: Hard To Get**

Okay, so here's the first meeting from Eric's POV just because I'm awesome like that. I tried not to double down too much on the dialogue because I know that gets boring. So I mostly repeated the stuff that was crucial, or the things that got the most reaction out of Eric. I promise not every chapter will be like this. Although I am beyond pleased to see the first chapter was so well received.

I will tell you that the area I am basing this story on is where I went to high school. The building itself will serve as the setting for most of this story, as well as the town(s) that surrounds it. So if you're curious, you should google Franklin Park, IL. *Not* my hometown, but damn close to it. If you *are* a Franklin Park native, you will totally understand the bitching below about the trains that run through there. Holy mother, are they ridonculous! My hometown was actually too small to have its own high school. But I figure given the number of teacher/student scandals that have gone on in the years since I graduated (member of the the class of 2000, thankyouverymuch), it only seemed fitting that I let Eric and Sookie have a scandal of their own there. But, that's enough out of me.

**I do not own any of these characters but there will be at least two screaming orgasms in this chapter. Yay for citrus!**

Chapter Two: Hard To Get

**Eric**

It seemed as if fate stepped in and dealt me a hand that Friday night. Pam had called at the last minute to see if I would be willing to fill in behind the bar. As a co-owner, and mostly silent partner, I didn't do much for the business. I helped with the major decisions in the business but it was mostly Pam's baby. That, right there, was part of the problem. Pam thought with her dick when she was hiring employees. Felicia was a sweet girl but not horribly reliable. The good thing was that she'd brought a bit of a following with her when she started tending the bar. What she lacked in reliability she made up for in profits which was the only reason I didn't push for Pam to fire her.

But this would be the last time I'd take a shift behind the bar for her. I would be starting teaching on Monday and hanging out in a bar all the time wouldn't be a good idea. Adult or not, it just wasn't kosher, in my opinion. I'd moved up to help Pam get the business off the ground but since I had absolutely no intention of actually working at the bar full-time, I'd started applying for teaching positions the previous spring. I'd ended up with offers from two different districts but I ultimately chose the one I did because they were looking for a new basketball coach.

Yes, I realize it's a bit cliché for a man of my height to be playing basketball but I loved the sport. It balanced skill and luck in a way that forever blew my mind. I'd never really wanted to play professionally. Not that I wasn't good, because I was. I'd gotten a scholarship to Duke thanks to my skills on the court. I'd played well and it had earned me a place on a team that ended up winning March Madness back in 2001 when I was a senior. It had been one hell of a victory. I'd been scouted but I had no interest in going pro, much to the disappointment of my coaches, team mates and even the scouts. I was in it for the game and not the money or the celebrity. I just wanted to play and I wanted to enjoy it. I wanted to coach other kids who loved the game just as much as I did. Still, it was nice to know that I had the option if I wanted it.

So I ended up accepting an offer from a school just outside of Chicago, not too far from O'Hare airport. The bar was a few blocks away from the high school in a large strip mall home to a Jewel, K-Mart, the town's public library and a few other little shops. It was a pretty nice area. I'd spent most of the summer adjusting to the house I'd bought, which was the halfway point between the high school and the bar. It was a little too close to the local Metra station for my liking, but it was a brand new house. The windows were soundproofed and since there were so many other noises to get used to the train was only inconvenient when it was a freighter in the middle of the night.

The trains could be relentless. I'd been stuck by one several times and I often worried I'd be late in the morning as a result. I'd been hearing horror stories about them since I moved in. Still, I liked a challenge and quickly learned the streets so I could get around the train in a hurry if I needed to. So it was after sitting in wait for a train to crawl by, only for another to approach from the opposite direction, when I lost my patience. I maneuvered my Corvette and flew down the necessary side streets to get around the train. I should have just gone down Mannheim in the first place.

I pulled into the parking lot at the bar ten minutes late. Pam was dressed primly and perched on a stool while waiting for me. She arched an eyebrow my way and I gave her a look that told her I wasn't in the mood for her snark. Usually I enjoyed that about Pam but I was pissed off about the train. I hated being late. It threw me off.

"About time." My warning went unheeded.

"Stowe it, Pamela." I said in an icy tone that made her chortle.

"Don't have a stroke. There's almost no one here. It's early." She waved it off.

It was early. In fact it was just after six. But I knew the after work crowd would be hitting us up soon enough. By seven, we were busy. By seven thirty, we were slammed. By eight, I was wondering why I had ever agreed to help Pam in the first place. My eight thirty, I had been molested by several girls who were probably ten years my junior. By nine, I just felt dirty and used. Pam stayed right at her perch with the occasional walk to the door to make sure there was no trouble with security.

A teenage girl had just tried to get in with her sister's ID. Pam confiscated it and promised to mail it back to her house. The girl left in tears, begging and pleading with Pam to just let her leave. Ha! The girl was lucky Pam didn't haul her into the office and make her wait for her parents to come pick her up.

"You're getting soft, Pam." I teased her when there was a slight lull behind the bar.

"Speaking of soft, that redhead over there has been eying you since the second she parked her nicely Prada'd ass on that stool." Pam jutted her chin in the woman's direction.

I knew who she was referring to and I wasn't interested. She lived next door and had come up with several reasons to knock on my door. First she said she'd locked herself out. Fine, I let her use my phone. Then she told me she thought there might be a gas leak. Yet another time she wanted help putting together some bookshelves she'd bought. I was all for being neighborly but I had no interest in being that woman's handy man. The last straw was when she showed up at my door late at night wearing nothing more than a towel. She was wet and had soap in her hair.

"I ran out of hot water." She didn't even try to look ashamed of herself.

"Sucks to be you." Was my reply and I closed the door in her face. Rude? Yes, absolutely. You'll get no argument out of me. But I knew what she would try to make happen if I let her in and I wasn't having any of that shit.

The downside to my closing the door in her face was that she assumed I was simply playing hard to get. As if I didn't already know she was trouble, Jeter, my Boxer- and a kick ass guard dog- growled and snapped at her every time she came around. I loved that damn dog. She would glare at him and once I'm pretty sure she tried to kick him. Good thing she didn't because if she had, she would have had a one way ticket over the railing of my second story deck.

"Mmmm..." Pam perked up suddenly, her eyes glazing over just the littlest bit. "Now that's more my flavor." Her eyes darted to the right.

I glanced over where she was looking and my eyes landed on a curvy blond woman looking all sorts of nervous. Her hair curled around her shoulders. Her eyes were wide as saucers. She was tan and looked even darker when the black lights hit her. She was wearing a white skirt that glowed under the lights. The light material hugged her hips and stopped just below her knees. She wore a simple tank top that didn't show off too much cleavage which, based on her profile when she turned, wasn't something easily concealed. Her fingers grasped at the material of her skirt as she looked around for something.

"Do you see what I see?" Pam nudged me.

I didn't know if we were looking at the same woman but I sure as hell hoped not. I looked away from the beautiful blond before she caught me staring at her. I chanced a second glance in her direction to see that there was a taller brunette whispering in her ear and pointing in my direction. Pam leaned over the bar and said something about loving soccer mom tail that just made me want to puke. I closed my eyes and tried to find my center of gravity and maybe a little bit of my dignity.

"Buy her a drink, numb nuts." Pam glared at me.

"What?" I had totally zoned out.

"The blond you were drooling over is waiting for service. *You* should go service her." Pam smirked.

I wanted to, if the twitching in my jeans was any indication. Shit. Be a professional, Eric. I shook my head at Pam and held up a hand to stop her from talking anymore when she launched into some bizarre fantasy involving the soccer mom the Blond Goddess was traveling with. I sauntered over to her acutely aware of how nervous I was to talk to her, which was new. I didn't get nervous when talking to women. I had never been the nervous type. This girl, however, was different. I could tell being an arrogant prick wouldn't work with her.

When she looked me in the eyes and asked me for a Screaming Orgasm in her lilted southern drawl, I almost had one myself. I did a double take, mentally, and wondered if I'd really just heard her correctly. I realized, after a few vivid flashes of all the ways I could make that possible, that she was probably asking for a shot. Fuck me.

"That can be arranged." Yep, I actually said it like a cocky bastard. She blushed about a ten shades of red, which was too cute for words. It was nice to see a girl with a shred or two of modesty. There didn't seem to be too many of them left. Not that modesty and I were really on a first name basis, but I liked it in a girl. The Blond Goddess definitely had it.

She surprised me by saying, "In that case, make it a double." Her blush increased.

From that point on, the Blond Goddess proved to be a series of surprises to me. There was a sweetness to her that was completely innocent. Nothing about her was conniving or assuming. It was obvious to me that she hadn't come into the bar looking for a hookup, much less to score with the bartender like so many women did. It just so happened that we were in the right place at the right time.

Taking a body shot from her cleavage was completely unexpected but I didn't complain. She'd put the shot glass in there herself, daring me to take it with her beautiful blue eyes. I was actually nervous to get that close to her. I didn't even know her name and I had my face dangerously close to her breasts. She stopped breathing when I bent to get the shot to tequila and didn't start again until I'd finished with the lime wedge almost a minute later.

When she said in a very sultry voice, "I'll have that Screaming Orgasm now." For the second time in less than ten minutes, I nearly had one myself. I groaned and then went to get the shots I'd mixed for her.

I was sorry to see her walk away and made no apologies for watching her walk over to her friend, who had claimed a table on the other side of the bar. They two women bowed their heads together with the soccer mom doing most of the talking. The Blond Goddess threw her head back to laugh and I was angry that the fucking music was so loud I couldn't hear it. She hadn't let loose enough for me to hear that sound when she was closer. Then a guy walked up to their table that she quickly threw her arms around.

Fuck. She had a boyfriend. Of course she had a boyfriend. But wait! If she had a boyfriend then why was she inviting strange men to drink tequila out of her cleavage? If she had a boyfriend, fucker was about to get his walking papers. But then the guy she hugged moved over to soccer mom and he laid one on her. I felt my heart slow down just for a second at the realization that the guy was probably soccer mom's boyfriend, but then it felt like my heart was trying to bust right out of my chest at the realization that my Blond Goddess might be unattached after all.

A look at Pam told me she was disappointed that her candy was already claimed. I walked over to her and put a consoling hand on her shoulder. "Don't patronize me, Northman."

"It's a tough loss." I deadpanned. Pam was not amused, but then the wheels in her head starting turning and she lit up.

"It is. So tell me about the breasts on that one." She pointed right at the Blond Goddess, who just happened to look our way at that moment.

"Wouldn't you like to know?" I stared at her.

"Fuck yeah, I would." I sometimes wondered if they did a character study on Pam when they created Stifler for the American Pie movies.

I got back to work and lost myself in pouring drinks and chatting with other customers. I'd look over at the Blond Goddess from time to time but I didn't get another good look at her until she approached the bar again. We drank more tequila and I even managed to sneak out from behind the bar to catch her on the dance floor. God, could she move. There was such a seductive sway to her hips. I wasn't much for the loud bass of the club music pounding through the speakers but I could be converted if it meant watching her move the way she was.

After one dance I tugged her out the front doors so I could talk to her without screaming in her ear. The bar was ridiculously crowded and loud and I needed some fresh air anyway. Her hand in mine felt like it belonged there. Once we were outside we realized that while it was quieter, it wasn't any cooler. The humidity would have been a bigger bitch to deal with if I hadn't spent four years on the east coast while in college.

"Thank you for getting me out of there. I needed a minute." She smiled at me, her drawl a little more noticeable now that she was mildly intoxicated.

"No problem. It gets a little overwhelming after a while." I agreed with her. "I'm Eric, by the way."

"Sookie." She smiled. Interesting name.

"It's nice to meet you." I didn't want to let go of her hand, which seemed to suit her just fine.

"I don't know how you do this every night." Sookie shook her head.

"I don't. I'm just filling for the regular bartender. Pam, the woman I've been talking to all night, is my business partner." I wanted to get it out there that Pam and I weren't a couple. Never had been, never would be.

Sookie's face lit up a little. Ah ha! So she had been wondering. "So you own this place?"

"In paper only. Pam just needed some help getting it started and it seemed like a good investment." I shrugged.

"Until the bartender called in sick?" Sookie teased.

"If she hadn't, I wouldn't have met you. I've never seen you in here before." Not that I was at the bar a whole lot, but if she were a regular, I'd know her.

"This is my first time." She blushed again. Fucking adorable.

"Well, I hope it wasn't too rough." I teased her right back, which only increased her blush.

"Nope, you've been very gentle and attentive to my needs." She was playing along in spite of the deep shade of pink that had made itself nice and comfy on her face.

I wanted to say, "You ain't seen nothing yet." But I figured that might be a bit too forward for her. So instead I just smiled at her. That seemed to do the trick all on its own. Pam came stomping out of the bar and told me to get my ass back inside. Break time was over.

"I'm sorry if I kept you." Sookie apologized, wringing her hands in front of her.

"Not at all. Pam's just naturally bossy and bitchy. Don't take it personally." I reached for her hand and was beyond excited when she took it.

I led her back inside the building. She grabbed onto the back of my t-shirt once we got into the crowd. Her small fingers grazed my back and I shivered. The tightness in my pants started to return. Great. I'd just gotten that particular problem solved. What the hell was this woman doing to me?

"So, I guess I'll see you around?" I smiled over my shoulder at her.

She nodded with a small smile and scratched my back lightly before removing herself from my proximity. That didn't stop me from watching her. I had a hard time concentrating on the job. She was fascinating to me and I wasn't quite sure why that was. When I saw a few guys get a little too close to her on the dance floor I wanted to toss them out on their ass. My inner caveman wasn't at all happy with what I was seeing. I mean, I couldn't blame the guys for wanting to be close to her. If I weren't behind the bar, I'd be doing the same exact thing.

"Could you just take her in the bathroom or the office and get it over with already?" Pam slipped in behind the bar to help me out with the line of customers that was three deep for a drink.

"Fuck off, Pam." I growled at her.

"Ooh, Eric has a crush." She teased with a straight face.

"Seriously, Pam, fuck off." I moved away from her.

Never one to take a hint, Pam followed me. When she realized I wasn't going to take anymore of her bait she just got to work pouring drinks. What a sight we were behind the bar with Pam looking like she'd raided Jackie Kennedy's estate sale and me looking like I was ready to throw Sookie over my shoulder and maul her out in the alley. I was thinking about it. I was thinking about it a little too much.

By the time the bar closed, I was beyond worked up. Sookie had made her way over to the bar a time or two in between dances. The last drink she tried to buy (I wouldn't let her pay for it) was Bahama Mama. She took a sip of it and then signaled for me to lean closer to her. Imagine my surprise when she kissed me on the cheek and said, "It's delicious."

Before I could say anything she sauntered off. I was even more surprised when I realized she was waiting around for me when the bar closed. I stepped outside to find her leaning against the building with her eyes closed. The humidity outside had caused a sheen of sweat to make her body glisten under the streetlights. She had one foot up against the wall, her palms pressed firmly against the brick. She looked like she was meditating. Or was she just too drunk to move?

"Sookie?" I spoke softly as I moved closer to her.

Her head turned toward me and she smiled before she opened her eyes. I could tell she drunk by the way she looked at me but she didn't look to be so drunk she didn't know what she was doing. She wouldn't be balancing so well on one foot if she were. I was experienced with the various levels of intoxication a person can reach. I'd been there, done that.

"Do you need a ride home?" I asked her, wondering if her friend had abandoned her.

"I was waiting for you." Sookie informed me with a silly grin.

I couldn't hold my own back. "Were you?"

She nodded and then reached for my hand. I offered it to her and led her to my car. She giggled when we got to it. "Of course you have a sports car."

"What's that supposed to mean?" I wasn't offended so much as curious.

She just giggled some more and then surprised me again by pulling my face to hers. She looked me in the eyes and said, "I like you."

Jackpot.

"I like you, too." I smiled at her.

"Good. Then kiss me." She said firmly.

I didn't need to be told twice. My lips brushed hers to tease her and she followed. I brushed them a second time, earning me a whimper of disappointment that I wasn't giving her more. But I also knew that she was drunk and I wasn't interested in taking advantage of her. So when she pulled my face back to hers, I let her lay one on me. Her lips were soft and sweet and when her tongue traced my lip looking for entrance, there was no way I'd cut her off.

We stood there up against my car, kissing for what felt like hours before we finally pulled apart. We were both breathless and smiling like goons. "I'm so hungry." Sookie couldn't stop smiling any more than I could.

"I think I can fix that." I opened the passenger's side door for her and held her hand as she slowly sank into the seat.

I was thankful it was only a three minute car ride back to my house- assuming there were no trains to fuck it up. Thankfully, the fates were still on my side and we got to my house in record time. I parked out front where I normally did and went to help Sookie out of her seat. Our fingers laced together as we walked to my front door.

"Is this your house?" Sookie smiled up at me.

"Yep. Home sweet home." I began searching for the deadbolt key but was interrupted by a pair of needy lips.

We stood there kissing up against my front door like a couple of horny teenagers unwilling to say goodnight to each other. I dropped my keys and lost myself in the sweetness of the woman clinging to me like a gale force wind was about to blow her away. She let go of my face and her hands trailed down to my sides to grab my hips. She pressed herself against me, grinding just a little bit as she did so.

I hadn't made out with someone like that in a long time. I forgot how much fun it could be. I laughed against the dampness of her skin. "What's so funny?" She asked lazily.

"Is it just me, or do you feel like you're sixteen again, too?" I glanced up to look her in the eyes.

"Shhh." She put a finger to my lips. "Your Dad might catch us."

"Maybe we should just take this inside. He's a heavy sleeper." I winked at her and then picked up my keys. She grabbed my ass while I was bent over.

"I like the way you think." She grinned at me. Where did this woman come from?

It was obvious I made her nervous but she pushed right through it. She didn't let any anxiety she was feeling get in her way of getting what she wanted. She followed me into the house and we were immediately greeted by Jeter. He sniffed around Sookie, who stood still while Jeter came to his decision. He looked from me to her with his head cocked to the side.

"She's okay, Jeet." I scratched his head.

"Jeet?" Sookie looked up at me.

"Jeter." I corrected.

"Yankees fan?"

"I didn't name him. He was my brother's before he moved. He couldn't take Jeter with him. I'm more of a basketball fan." I reminded her.

"Right. Blue devil." She nudged me.

She knew her sports, at least a little, which was more than I could say for most girls I met. "Til the day I die."

She rolled her eyes at me and then reached out to scratch the underside of Jeter's jaw. "It's nice to meet you, Jeter."

Jeter licked her wrist, barked his approval and then curled up on the couch. "I think the feeling's mutual." I smiled at her and then led her to the kitchen.

We ended up making a huge mess in the kitchen after agreeing on grilled cheese sandwiches. They were delicious. I hadn't had one in God knows how long. A piece of cheese stuck itself to Sookie's chin and before I could stop myself I leaned over to lick it off of her. The next thing I knew we were fooling around on my couch. That led to fooling around in my bedroom and the loss of our clothing.

If Sookie was beautiful with clothes on, she was definitely a goddess when naked. She had the most amazing pair of breasts I'd ever seen, and I'd seen more than my fair share. She made the sexiest noises when I touched her. When kissing wasn't enough anymore my mouth moved down that beautiful body of hers, stopping to pay homage to her breasts before moving further south. Her taste was sweet and rich on my tongue. I slid two fingers inside her and marveled at how tight and wet she was. She screamed when she came.

"I owe you a double." I said in a daze as my lips grazed her neck. She was breathing heavy and pulled my mouth to hers while I reached into my night stand to get a condom.

She watched me roll the latex onto myself and then reached to kiss me. Her small hand wrapped around my straining erection and guided me toward her. When I asked her if she was sure she wanted this, she nodded vigorously and then grabbed my hips to pull me into her. She felt amazing around me. Her eyes widened as I buried myself inside her. Her body needed a minute to adjust.

"Holy shit." She moaned before pulling my mouth to hers. When she was ready, she arched herself against me.

I moved in and out of her slowly at first, not wanting to hurt her, but her hips were quickly moving to meet mine. Gradually, my thrusts increased and I held her hips steady for a minute until she was begging for more. She bit my shoulder and it was like she bit the lock off a cage to release the animal that had wanted to maul her all night. She came screaming a second time before I rolled her on top of me. I watched her breasts bounce as her hips rocked against me.

"You're so fucking sexy." I whispered and she bent forward to lick my jaw. Her nipples grazed my chest and she put my hands on her ass.

She sat up straight and looked at me with hooded eyes full of lust. "Watch me." She purred and then began to rub little circles around her clit.

I couldn't take my eyes off of her as she started squeezing me again from the inside. As if she wasn't tight enough already. I'd wanted to tease her a while longer but it was obvious to me that Sookie was running this show. My dick pulsed inside her and when she reached behind herself with her free hand to grab my balls, that was it. I was done. She dropped on top of me while I was still pulsing inside her.

"Where the fuck did you come from?" I asked her once I was able to speak again. She just giggled and rolled off of me. "Oh no you don't. I'm not done with you yet."

Her eyes widened and then her fingers clawed at me when I rolled on top of her in preparation for round two.

My eyes fluttered open for a moment when I heard someone groan beside me. There was a mop of blond hair in front of me that smelled like a tropical island. Sookie. I grinned from ear to ear, beyond grateful she hadn't fled my house after we passed out. God, she was amazing. I snuggled closer to her, suddenly very aware of the fact that we were both still naked and I was more than ready to fuck her again.

The fact that Sookie wasn't relaxing into my hold made me wonder if maybe she was having regrets about the night before. I'd asked her if she was sure she wanted to have sex and she'd been more than willing at the time. Still, she was drunk. I felt a little like a dick for not having the will power to just get her number and do it another time. When she moved to get away from me, I as afraid I'd completely fucked up. The night before was amazing. I definitely wanted her to stick around. Maybe never leave?

"Where are you going?" I sounded way too panicked. I needed to chill the fuck out.

"I have to pee." She informed me and then asked where the bathroom was.

I pointed to the door in front of her and she sat up slowly. I watched the curve of her spine and the way her lower back arched. Her legs swung off the bed but didn't touch the floor. She looked around the room, though I'm not sure what for. She finally got off the bed and crouched down. When she came back up she was wearing my t-shirt. As if I wasn't already wanting to jump her, now she was walking around in my clothes. Fan-fucking-tastic.

I rolled onto my back as the door closed and tried to get myself to calm down a little. I tried to rationalize why this girl seemed to have my brain going haywire along with my hormones. I was over thirty. I shouldn't be reacting to her like someone half my age. I heard the toilet flush and the water go on in the sink. I couldn't help but laugh at her quiet noise of disapproval over something. My guess, without knowing her very well, was that she'd gotten a look at the wild hair she was sporting. Personally, I thought she looked fantastic, but that was because her hair was a result of four orgasms provided by yours truly that left her shaking for a good, long while.

When Sookie came out of the bathroom she looked at me nervously, biting her lower lip while she stood in the doorway. She approached the bed uneasily, her head cocking to the side as if trying to figure out how best to get back onto it. She ended up jumping on it and settling herself at the edge. I reached out for her to come lay down next to me, but she refused.

"I think I should go." She said, when I asked her what was wrong.

Go? No. No going. Stay. "What? Stay. I'll make us breakfast."

I saw what appeared to be a flicker of pain in her eyes before she shook her head vehemently in denial. Then her tears came and she jumped off the bed again and started searching for her clothes that were strewn about on my bedroom floor. Piece by piece she gathered them. While she was digging under my bed for her bra I slipped out of bed and put on my boxers. Her sadness had done its job in willing away the morning wood I had been poking her lower back with before she got out of bed. Why the hell was she crying? Was this *my* fault?

"Sookie, what are you doing?" I grabbed a hold of her shoulders before she could shut herself in the bathroom again.

Sookie proceeded to tell me she'd had a good time the night before and that she liked me- which made me want to squeal like a school girl- but that she had to go. She couldn't give me a reason why she had to go, she just had to go. She fought her way out of my grasp and then slammed the bathroom door behind her. I heard her sobbing in the bathroom and decided to give her her space.

I opened the bedroom door to find Jeter asleep in front of it. I stepped over his large body and stomped into the living room. There had to be something I could say to get her to change her mind. Jeter hauled himself into the living room and up onto the couch next to me when I collapsed on it. He put his large head on my thigh. He looked up at me with sympathy.

She was the first girl I'd had at the house in the entire time I'd lived there. She wasn't the first girl I'd slept with, but she was the first I'd brought home. Figures. The first one I bring home doesn't want to stay. I groaned in frustration and rubbed my eyes a little rougher than necessary. Fuck!

When Sookie came into the room Jeter lifted his head to look at her. Her eyes were ready and puffy from crying and her breathing was still jagged. I wanted to say something to her but I couldn't figure out what the right thing was. Jeter jumped off the couch and nuzzled against her. Traitor. She picked up her purse off the coffee table. She was really going to leave. Jeter tried to push her over toward me and all it did was cause a heartbreaking smile to stretch her beautiful face. She opened her mouth to say something but then changed her mind.

"Jeter leave her be." I closed my eyes. If she was leaving, I couldn't watch her go.

It just so happened that Pam chose that moment to walk into the house. My eyes popped open and the look on Sookie's face wasn't a good one. She looked embarrassed and enraged at the same time. Pam walked into the living room and I saw Sookie relax. I started to wonder if maybe her memory of the night before was a bit foggy and that was why she was freaking out. Fuck. I felt like an ass. She was a small girl and with the number of drinks she'd had...

Pam offered Sookie a cup of coffee, which she gladly took. "You're my hero." Sookie sounded happy for the first time all morning and I made a note that she was a coffee drinker. If I was going to make this up to her, coffee would be an excellent way to start.

"There's an extra shot in there." Pam alerted her and Sookie was positively glowing.

"Marry me?" Sookie offered and the leer it earned her had me shooting warning glares at Pam. Sookie is mine.

Whoa, where the fuck did that come from? I didn't own her. I didn't have any sort of claim over her. Sure I'd fucked her but I didn't own her. The thing was, I didn't want to think back on her and think of her as just some girl I fucked once (or a few times). I wanted something more. If Pam so much as smelled blood in the water she would have absolutely no trouble moving in on Sookie.

"Looks to me like your friend here might not like that." Pam arched an eyebrow at me, calling me out as only she would dare to do.

"You could have called, Pamela." She hated it when anyone called her by her full name. She hissed at me and it was obvious Sookie was uncomfortable there between us.

Pam made a crack about Sookie leaving, which was completely unappreciated, before I told her to go wait in the kitchen. She left the room chuckling while I pulled Sookie back toward my bedroom. She'd been on the verge of saying something before Pam walked in. Sookie looked at me with uncertainty in her eyes but she didn't try to pull away from me. Jeter guarded the mostly closed door for us to keep Pam away.

"You were about to say something before she barged in. Please continue." I rubbed circles on Sookie's shoulder with my thumb.

Her head turned and she looked at the door and then down at my thumb but I didn't stop moving. She sucked in a deep breath. She was stalling.

"Sookie?" I prompted gently, stepping closer to her to close the space between us.

Her eyes slowly moved up to meet mine. I wanted to kiss her until she wasn't freaking out anymore but I knew I couldn't do that. She had to make a choice. I was already worried I'd forced too much on her that she didn't want.

"Maybe I could stay for breakfast?" She suggested with a shy smile.

I released the breath I was holding and kissed her forehead. "I'd like that." I smiled against her skin.

She let me put my arm around her and lead her to the door so we could go join Pam in the kitchen with Jeter following behind us.

**Hope I didn't bore you too much \*crosses fingers\* Thank you for all your reviews & alerts last chapter. I try to get back to everyone but then the writing time would be cut considerably. Doesn't mean I don't read each and every lovely word you leave for me. Thanks for reading!**

**Chapter 3: Opening**

\*wipes sweat off brow\* I'm so glad y'all weren't bored with the last chapter. I tried to give you enough to keep you interested and point out how hazy Sookie's memory was. It'll come back to her a bit more in this chapter. I also have to thank **angel\_2606** for listening to me chatter on and on yesterday. Without her there is a line in this chapter that would not be possible and the images it provided for both of us just spawned too many giggles. So I hope you enjoy this chapter. It'll give you something to do other than look at the clock while you wait for True Blood to start tonight.

**I do not own any of these characters but they're hoping Alan Ball doesn't fuck up season 3.**

Chapter Three: Opening

**Sookie**

"Christ, Northman, what did you two do in here last night?" Pam asked once we were back in the kitchen.

I looked at Eric and smiled. He was already smiling back at me. "We were hungry."

"Obviously." Pam looked around with disdain.

The kitchen was a bit of a disaster. It hadn't been when we'd arrived. Eric's house was surprisingly neat. I suppose, however, that I used my brother as the benchmark for the way the homes of all bachelor houses looked. The house had lovely hardwood floors throughout most of it, which I loved. There were rugs laid out in all the right places. The walls were painted a light mocha color that gave the house warmth without making it feel boxy. The furniture was heavy but comfortable.

When the kitchen was clean, it looked like it belonged like it belonged in a magazine. The appliances were all stainless steel. There was a cooktop embedded in the granite counters. There were two ovens built into the walls. The fixtures on the drawers and in the sink were silver. Big windows brought in the morning sun. Sheer white curtains billowed softly in the breeze. The room was light and airy.

Pam plopped down on a bar stool at the island in the middle of the kitchen and began to pull items from the large shopping bag she'd brought in with her. Container after container appeared, along with a box of a dozen bagels. Before long, there was a mammoth buffet of food set out in front of us. There was enough there to feed at least eight people.

"So, Sookie, tell me about yourself." Pam said as she spread vegetable cream cheese on her multi-grain bagel.

"What do you want to know, Pam?" I slapped on my emergency smile and noticed the look of warning Eric was shooting her.

"Do you live around here?"

"I do, as a matter of fact." I nodded and took a sip of the coffee she'd brought me. It was super strong but it was just what I needed. "I have a townhouse in Itasca."

Pam nodded her approval, causing Eric to roll his eyes. "What do you do for a living?"

"I'm a teacher." I said and both Pam and Eric made choking noises. I looked back and forth between them. "Is that a problem?"

"No, not at all." Eric grinned at me. Pam flashed a grin as well but it disappeared just as quickly as it lit up her pale face.

"I like it. I teach history at the high school a few blocks from here." I told them, watching Pam's face closely for a reaction, but she just nodded along.

"How long have you been teaching there?"

"Well, I did my student teaching there so I was lucky enough to get hired on when one of the teachers retired. So this will be my third year. I can't believe summer vacation is over already."

"A friend of mine is a teacher." Pam volunteered, her eyes cheating over to Eric with a slight smile. "He teaches PE."

"Oh?" I sipped at my coffee some more.

"Yep. He's also going to be coaching basketball this year, if I remember right. Do you coach anything?"

"Poms." I confessed with a proud smile.

"Poms? As in cheerleading?" Pam's face lit up again and Eric made another choking sound that I assumed came from the mental image of me in a cheerleading uniform. I smiled over my shoulder at him.

"Were you a cheerleader in high school, Pam?" I couldn't get that image in my head.

Both Eric and Pam burst out laughing. "God no." Pam looked at me like I should be shot for suggesting such a thing.

"Got something against cheerleaders?" I asked in mock offense.

"Not at all. I think they're delicious." Pam leered at me. Oh. *Oh*.

"Pam..." Eric warned.

"Don't tell me the image of Sookie in a cheerleading uniform isn't giving you wood. You don't lie very well." Pam looked pointedly at Eric's boxers. I kept my eyes forward.

We drifted through conversation easily. Pam told me about her bar and her partnership with Eric. They'd met in college while she was studying business at Duke. She and Eric had become partners because he had good instincts and she trusted him implicitly.

"If I weren't so into women, Mr. Northman would be off the market." Pam told me.

"Pam!" Eric glared at her.

"Oh, get over it, Northman." She rolled her eyes.

"I think you should go before I fire bomb your shoe closet." Eric threatened in the tone of a big brother who'd had enough of his younger sister's needling.

Apparently that was a threat Pam took seriously, because she couldn't seem to get out of Eric's house fast enough after that. The two of them were worse than my brother and I. I couldn't help but laugh at her hasty exit. She practically ran out the kitchen door with me chuckling behind her. I stopped laughing when I felt Eric step up behind me and put his hands on my hips. I froze for a moment before feeling his lips on my neck.

"What are you doing?" I was a bit breathless, a little coil of anticipation making itself known in my belly.

"You look beautiful." He whispered. It wasn't an answer to my question, but somehow, I didn't mind.

I turned my head and his lips met mine. If I'd thought he was a good kisser the night before, he was even better when I was experiencing it sober. I kicked myself for ever thinking of leaving. I turned on the stool so we were face to face and his hands slipped into my hair. He tried to gently work his long fingers through the knots and tangles our romping around the night before had created. His mouth had just moved to my neck when Jeter made his presence known. He whimpered and nudged at Eric's legs.

Eric let out a breath of frustration. "Damn dog." He muttered. "Wait right here." He looked me deep in my eyes and I nodded.

I watched him move to the kitchen door to let the dog out. Jeter ran and barked happily in the sunshine. Eric checked to make sure Pam hadn't left the gate open before he returned to the house. Our eyes met as he walked toward me. He had that look on his face like he was going to kiss me again. I wanted him to. I really, really did, but I also knew there were things that I needed to say before it happened.

"Hold on." I held up a hand to stop him before he got too close.

"Is something wrong?" Eric braced his hands on either side of me on the island.

I took a deep breath and then said, "I need you to know that last night- as great as it was- it wasn't really me. I went to your bar because my friend thought it would be a good idea. I'm not normally the bar type. It's too loud and crowded and it's just sensory overload for me. So I wasn't all that psyched about being there. But then we walked in and I saw you and just...wow." I paused there to catch the look of amusement and confusion on his face. "I wasn't expecting there to be a you. I said, and did, a lot of things last night that I wouldn't normally do. I mean, body shots with a stranger? Who does that after they graduate from college, right? And I'm a teacher! I wasn't even thinking about what I would do if a parent saw me." I hung me head as this occurred to me. Good God, what if a parent saw me? How was I going to look them in the face at open house in a few days?

"Sookie..." Eric lifted my chin. I gathered my courage and continued.

"What I'm trying to say is that I *do* like you, Eric. I'm just not sure if I'm in a relationship kind of place and I don't believe in friends with benefits. So I don't know where that leave us, but I just wanted you to know." I watched his face nervously, waiting for some sort of reaction.

He backed away from me and I felt myself deflate. Stupid word vomit. Why couldn't I just keep my big mouth shut and let him kiss me?

"For what it's worth, I don't do what we did last night either." Eric leaned against the island, his hand settled on me knee. "When you walked into the bar ... I don't know... I saw you and I couldn't look away. I was ready to walk out on Pam last night but then I saw you and I couldn't leave."

Grinning. I was definitely grinning. I was also back to feeling like I was sixteen again. I felt my heart flutter in my chest. What the hell was going on? I never felt like this about anyone. Ever. Not even Quinn, and I'd been in love with him. How had I fallen in love with Quinn without ever feeling the butterflies I was feeling in that moment?

"We don't have to figure things out right away, Sookie. I don't regret that we slept together last night."

"Me either." I volunteered quickly. Mornings after could be so damn awkward. He smiled at my confession which put me at ease just a little.

The familiar heat of a blush crept up my neck and I had to look away from him. That was a mistake, because the next thing I knew he was turning my face back to his to kiss me again. I felt myself melting against him. It was like time stopped and we were only yanked back into reality by Jeter, who was barking up a storm out in the yard. Eric pulled away reluctantly, pressing his forehead to mine.

"I'm sorry."

"Don't be." I touched his cheek.

"I'll be right back." He promised and then went out to investigate.

He came back a few minutes later with Jeter making a beeline for the basement. "Everything okay?"

"He had a disagreement with a squirrel." Eric looked a bit grim and then went to wash his hands.

"Ew." I cringed and hopped off the stool. I watched Eric wash up and when he was drying his hands I'd come to a decision. It was time to go. "I think I should get going now."

Eric looked disappointed, to say the least. "You don't have to."

"Yeah, I do. Monday's going to be a big day for me and I have a whole list of things I need to get done before that." I pulled my cell phone from my bag with the intention of calling a cab to take me home.

"Do you need a ride?" Eric asked, remembering that he'd been the one to bring me back to his place the night before.

"Oh, I can call someone." I didn't want to put him out.

He laughed quietly and said, "Don't be ridiculous. I'll take you home. Just let me go get dressed." He paused to kiss my hair and then moved on to his bedroom.

I paced nervously at the front door while I waited for him. When he came out of his bedroom a few minutes later in a pair of jeans, a white t-shirt and flip flops I started to question whether or not I really wanted to leave him. As good as he looked undressed, he looked just about as good with clothes on. He smiled at me and reached for his keys that he'd dropped on the coffee table the night before.

"Are you sure you don't mind? I don't-"

"Sookie, relax. It's not like I'm taking you to Missouri." He winked at me.

I opened my mouth to answer him but decided to just keep it to myself. He opened the front door for me and gestured for me to go ahead of him. Jeter came upstairs just in time to see we were leaving. He barked and tried to wiggle his way out the door.

"Sorry, buddy, you have to stay here. Not enough room for you in the car." Eric apologized to the dog, who was whimpering pathetically at the door.

"Aww." I pouted at Eric.

"Trust me, you don't want him sitting in your lap." Eric laughed.

Before he got the door closed I leaned in under his arm and scratched Jeter's head. "I'll see you another time, puppy." I made kissy noises at him and then backed away so Eric could close the door.

He locked up the house and then led the way back to his car. He opened my door for me and then closed it once I was inside. I was just fastening my seatbelt when he got in beside me and did the same. The car roared to life and we headed out.

"So, where to?" Eric asked as we headed down one of many one way streets in town.

"Uh, turn right on Grand." I smiled over at him and then dug into my purse for my sunglasses.

As if he were thinking the same thing I was, he reached over me and opened the glove box to retrieve a pair of his own. Aviators. And he looked amazing in them. My heart fluttered again. He turned on the radio and I smiled to myself when it was classic rock that came out. I located my sunglasses and leaned my head back against the seat.

"Do you mind if I open the windows?" Eric looked over at me.

"Of course not. Why would I mind?"

"It gets pretty windy in here with both of them open all the way."

"I think I'll be fine." I sat up a little and began to gather my hair into a ponytail to keep it from becoming any more of a tangled mess than it already was. I directed Eric where to go while I drummed my fingers against my thigh in time with the rhythm of "Purple Haze". Eric looked over at me while we were stopped at a red light not far from my house.

"You're a Hendrix fan?" He seemed surprised.

"Who isn't?" I retorted.

"I never would have guessed."

"I'm just full of surprises." I quipped before extending my arm out the window to let the sun fall on it.

"I'm starting to get that." Eric smiled at me again.

We pulled into my driveway a short time later. Amelia was my next door neighbor, but I considered her more like a roommate with how often she was over at my house. She sometimes joked about knocking out part of the wall in my living room to put a door in like a hotel suite. Good thing she wasn't serious, because I would veto that in a heartbeat. I like Amelia, but I like my privacy, too. She was also a teacher at the same high school as me as a chemistry teacher. I'd never been good with all that stuff and had taken it in college first thing to get it out of the way. I was much better at remembering dates and events than I was formulas and properties. While our homes were mirror images of each other, our yards were vastly different.

I had flowers and tall grasses growing where Amelia preferred a cleaner yard with bushes growing under her windows and at her property line. As a tribute to my southern roots, there was a swing mounted on my porch. I loved sitting out there on the weekends with a cup of coffee and my laptop while I graded papers and things. I would be sorry when it got to be too cold to do that anymore.

"So this is your house?" Eric asked as he took it all in.

"Yep, this is it." I smiled at him.

"Do you mind me asking how long you've lived here? You don't sound like a native."

"I don't mind." I smiled at him and pushed my sunglasses up on my head. "I moved to Illinois when I got a scholarship to U of I. They have one of the best teaching programs in the country, so I couldn't very well turn it down. Not to mention my hometown is sort of like a death trap for teenage girls without a plan. It's too easy to end up married to the first boy who invites you into the back of his pickup truck."

"Where are you from?"

"Bon Temps, Louisiana. It's a small town about an hour away from Shreveport."

"So you're not from New Orleans?"

"Nope. I've actually only been there a handful of times in my whole life. It's about a five hour drive from where I grew up."

"How'd you end up this far north?"

That was a harder question to answer because it involved Quinn. When I hesitated Eric started to back pedal a little bit for being nosy. "It's okay, Eric." I turned in my seat so I was facing him. "I was dating someone and we were pretty serious about it. He was a few years older than me. Once he graduated he moved up here to start his business and I followed him. I finished my last year of college at Elmhurst. So I have an associates degree from U of I and a bachelor's from Elmhurst. I was just thankful my credits all transferred."

"And the boyfriend?"

I looked away from him for a moment and then said, "The credits transferred better than Quinn did."

"Sorry." He tried to look pained for me but I could see a hint of a gloat in his eyes.

"Nothing to be sorry for. Quinn just wasn't the one for me." I gave him a hopeful smile and he seemed to relax. "You want a tour of the house?"

That got him to lighten up real quick. "Sure."

"Good." I nodded and then got out of the car.

Eric followed me up to the front porch and I caught Amelia looking out her front window with a curious look on her face. I knew she'd be stopping by the second Eric's car vanished from my driveway. Amelia was nothing if not a busy body. Honestly, she was sometimes worse than the little old ladies who used to call my Gran at all hours with their gossip. I could feel Eric standing behind me, though he wasn't touching me. There was this energy coming off of him that made me nervous and excited at the same time.

I fumbled with the keys for a moment before I finally got the deadbolt flipped over and the door open. Eric walked in behind me and followed suit when I kicked off my little slippers near the door. The entryway was covered in linoleum and there was a small bench near the door where I kept my shoes underneath. A small table stood next to the coat closet with a little basket perched on top to collect my mail when I brought it in each day. To the right was the garage door and the stairs that led up to the second floor. To the left was a set of open french doors that led into the 'formal' living room.

I felt bad since I hardly ever used the room. There was a sofa, coffee table and a single wingback chair in there. In the wintertime, that was where I set up my Christmas tree since there was so much room to spare. I had a few bookshelves that lined one wall. I had a lot of biographies and quite a few books about pop culture in the 1960s and 70s. I found that particular time in history to be rather fascinating and Eric caught on to that pretty quick as he browsed my books.

"Don't tell me you're a hippie?" He smiled over his shoulder at me.

"This coming from a guy who looks like a surfer?" I shot right back before I could stop myself. As if on cue, some of his hair slipped forward to cover one of his eyes.

Eric smirked at me as his body turned toward mine. "A surfer, huh?"

"What would you call it?" I leaned against the wingback chair in front of me. I didn't see him do it, but he swiped my copy of Journals by Kurt Cobain off the shelf.

"I think it's a bit more grungy than surfer."

I looked him up and down, sucking in my cheek as if I really had to think about it. "I could see that." I nodded and stepped around the chair. "But do you own any flannel?"

His eyes flashed something a bit predatory as he stepped closer to me. "I will answer that question if you'll have dinner with me."

Jaw, meet floor.

I couldn't help but laugh. "I've never been bribed into a date before." He was nothing if not creative.

"Well, you did promise to visit Jeter again." He reminded me with a twinkle in his eye.

"Oh, so you're asking me to dinner to spare Jeter from feeling the sting of rejection?"

"I do love my dog." He stepped closer to me.

"I wouldn't want to hurt Jeter. He was very kind to me, affectionate." I acknowledged.

"I noticed. He's not usually like that with new people." Eric and I were dangerously close to one another and I got the feeling that Eric wasn't just talking about his dog.

"Really? So what's he usually like?" My breath caught when his fingers grazed mine. Slowly, almost painfully so, our fingers laced together.

"Usually he's the kind that really likes to sniff out new territory and be sure before making a declaration or showing any real affection." Eric squeezed my hand and I looked down to see where we were joined.

"And once he does?" My eyes met his again.

"Once he does he's extremely loyal and very closely guards what's his." His face got closer to mine and his free hand came up to brush a loose strand of hair behind my ear.

Totally on impulse I leaned into his hand. "So it sounds to me like he's a really reliable sort."

"You could say that." I could feel Eric's breath on my face.

"What would *you* say?" I pursed my lips just a little bit.

Eric answered my question by kissing me, which was way better than any words he might have strung together. I completely lost myself in that kiss and I once again found myself wondering how in the hell I ever could have contemplated bolting earlier that morning. I felt my toes curl just a little and my hand definitely squeezed his. The kiss broke mutually and I stood there trying to catch my breath while we just looked at each other. My eyes searched his before traveling to his lips again.

He kissed my forehead and then turned toward the dining room that adjoined the living room. I stood there smiling like a goon for a second before copying his movement. He didn't let go of my hand. From the dining room we walked into the kitchen. It was nowhere near as big or fancy as Eric's, but I had a big butcher block on wheels that moved easily around the room that was very convenient when making bigger meals. Not that I had the chance to make too many of them. Attached to the kitchen was what my Mom called the family room. There was a fireplace and a high vaulted ceiling. There was also a skylight. A set of french doors led out onto the deck where I had patio table and chairs set up. Flower boxes lined the deck and there was a small shed in the back for my gardening tools.

We walked down the short hallway that led back toward the front door. There was a powder room, a linen closet and a larger closet under the staircase that housed my laundry machines. I debated about whether or not to take him upstairs, but reasoned that we were adults and completely capable of controlling ourselves. Just because I showed him where I slept, it didn't mean we would fall into bed together. I told myself to get a grip when I realized I was secretly hoping we would.

Last night was one thing. It was a wild and reckless moment that I thought was going to be a one time thing. It was different now because he'd asked me out on a date. I still wasn't sure if I was going to say yes. I liked Eric, no doubt about it. He was easy to talk to and he seemed to like me back just as much as I liked him. I paused at the top of the stairs for just a second and decided I had to give him my answer about dinner before I took him up there.

"So about this dinner..." I stood on the bottom step. He was still a good four inches taller than me at least. Damn.

"What about it?" He squeezed my hand again.

"I'll have dinner with you." I agreed and he beamed at me. I couldn't help but smile back. "But on one condition."

Eric arched an eyebrow at me. "I'm intrigued."

"I want to cook." I swung our hands back and forth.

"Done." He leaned forward and kissed me to seal the deal.

"Okay, then." I breathed a sigh of relief as quietly as possible. I turned and started up the stairs but Eric didn't budge. I turned back to face him. "Something wrong?"

"If we go up there, I won't want to come back down." He confessed and I blushed, I know I did.

"Is that a bad thing?"

"I want to know you, Sookie." He rubbed the inside of my wrist with his thumb. Just that simple touch alone had my insides fluttering.

"I want to know you, too." I smiled at him, even though I was a bit disappointed we weren't going upstairs.

"Good. Then we'll have dinner." He tugged me back down the steps.

"Bring Jeter if you want. There's plenty of room for him to run in the yard if you think he needs to get out of the house for a while."

"Whoa, whoa, are you dating me, or my dog?" He teased.

"Well, unlike you, Jeter snores." I scrunched up my nose.

"That he does." Eric laughed and then pulled me close.

I grabbed the banister to keep my balance. Our foreheads touched for a moment before he kissed me again. He was certainly every bit as affectionate as his pet. I can't say I minded one bit, especially since Eric wasn't at all sloppy about it. We didn't kiss for long, and it was Eric who broke it off. We traded phone numbers and he promised to call me. I had no doubt that he would.

"Just so you know, the only day I can't get together is Thursday. We have open house that night and I have to be there until almost ten." I cringed at the thought of how long the day was going to be.

"So noted." Eric opened the front door and stepped outside with my hand still attached to his.

"Do you know how to get back?" I asked just to be sure.

"Yep, I'll be fine." He rose my hand to his mouth and kissed hit gently. "I'll see you soon, Sookie."

He let go of my hand and I waved to him when he stopped to look at me before getting in his car. I watched him drive away and then closed my door. I leaned against it and let a great big grin spread across my face. Just like I thought, as soon as his car disappeared, Amelia was knocking at my patio door looking for the dirt.

**So, it seems that Eric and Sookie will at least be having dinner together. Three cheers for a more mature Sookie are in order, wouldn't you say? \*off to work on chapter 4\***

**Thanks for reading!**

**Chapter 4: The Game**

Lots of you were wondering why Eric didn't mention what he really does for a living. I was wondering the same thing, so Eric and I had a nice little chat about it, and he explains himself in this chapter. I warned him he might face the wrath of his dear Sookie for his oversight and it made him very repentant. We then went into a discussion about him being high handed and sneaky that ended with me gushing about how hot *I* think that is...it was embarrassing, and I think I only encouraged him. \*sigh\* Anyway, his reasons are in this chapter.

**I do not own any of these characters ('cept Jeter) but one of them almost caused me to have a stroke last night at around 8:18 p.m. \*wipes drool\***

Chapter Four: The Game

**Eric**

When I got home the first thing that hit me when I opened the door was Sookie's smell. I groaned as I closed the door behind me. Jeter's head popped up with one eye open. When he saw it was just me, his head sank down and he went back to sleep. I looked around the house, trying to figure out what to do with myself. I felt like I should be preparing for Monday, but there wasn't a whole lot for me to do. It's not like gym class really requires a lesson plan.

It dawned on me, as I was driving back from Sookie's, that I probably should have mentioned that we would be working together. I'd wanted to tell her before I'd even taken her home, but I didn't want Pam around to make crass jokes about us having a workplace romance. I didn't know how Sookie felt about the whole thing. To be honest, it wasn't as if we would be working side by side. We would be in different departments. The school was large enough that I was willing to bet we would rarely ever see each other unless we wanted to.

I debated over whether or not to call her. Part of me said she should have fair warning that I was going to be there. The other part of me wasn't convinced it was that big of a deal. She hadn't asked what I did for a living. She knew I was Pam's business partner but she also knew that wasn't my full-time gig. Then I remembered what she'd said about how last night was supposed to be a one time thing and I started to wonder if she really wanted to see me again. Was she just placating me when she accepted my dinner invitation?

The way she looked at me told me she was curious. The way she kissed me told me she didn't want the night before to be it for us. I dropped down on the couch next to Jeter who looked at me with one eye. It was a look that told me to get over myself. He was probably right. I scratched the scruff of his neck and hauled myself up off the couch.

I went back to my bedroom and changed clothes, trading in my jeans for a pair of shorts and my sandals for my gym shoes. There was only one thing to do when my brain was that cloudy- basketball. It always helped me focus. So I grabbed my ball and a bottle of gatorade and headed out. There was a park not too far from the house with a couple of courts. When I got there I was happy to see I wasn't the only one with the game on the brain. There was a group of kids- some of whom I'd probably be teaching come Monday- already playing on the court.

I went to the far end since they were playing a game of three on three. I tossed the ball around, making free throw after free throw. Some I could even do without looking. Still, the longer I played, the freer my mind became. I started getting fancier and fancier with my shots until finally one of the kids called out to me.

"Hey, Mister, we need one more to start a new game since Joey's girlfriend has him on a tight leash." One of the boys told me.

"Shut up, assmunch!" The boy I assumed was Joey shouted in response.

"You wanna play?" The kid asked me.

"Sure." I shrugged and dropped my ball on the lawn that surrounded the court.

It became pretty obvious pretty quick that having me on the team was a pretty clear advantage. "You ain't bad for an old man." The kid who invited me to play commented after the first game was over.

"Thanks, and I'm not that old." I laughed as I sipped my gatorade.

"Where'd an old man like you learn how to play like that?" The same kid asked me.

"Talent." I smirked at him and he gave me a skeptical look in response. "I went to Duke on a basketball scholarship."

"No shit?"

"No shit." I had to hold back a laugh.

"Damn. You're good for a white boy."

"Thanks."

"Shouldn't you be, like, playing in NBA, or something?" The kid asked.

"Maybe, but I never wanted to. I love the game, don't get me wrong, but I never wanted it to be my life."

"And you don't think that's a waste of the talent you been given?"

"Not at all." I made another shot from the half court line that was nothing but net. "What I choose to do with my talent is up to me, and I choose to use it to help other people develop their own."

"So you a coach?"

"I will be."

"What's that mean?"

"How old are you?" I asked when he passed me the ball.

"Seventeen."

"So you're a senior at the high school?"

"You you know it. And I can't wait to get out of that place."

"Are you on the basketball team?"

"I *own* the basketball team. We getting a new coach this year, but if he's anything like the fool we had last year..."

I had to hold back a laugh. "Well, hopefully this year's coach will do a better job."

"He better. Unlike you, I ain't looking to waste my talent on some neighborhood court. I'm going big time." He said with confidence.

"Hopefully you're right about that." It was too soon to get into the lectures of having a good backup plan.

There were plenty of guys who played with the intention of "going big time" who never got farther than college level. It was a mistake for this kid to think that just because he was a big fish in a small pond, it would translate into the same thing once he was in the ocean. The world was much bigger than this one kid, and if he couldn't get that through his skull, his chances of playing would go down. Being over-confident took away the hunger, and it was the hunger that helped to make a player great.

I ended up playing an enlightening game of HORSE and by the time that was done, my head was a bit clearer. It was also getting close to dinnertime and I was sure Jeter needed to get outside again.

"Anytime you wanna come back, you're welcome." The kid- who I found out was named Quentin- invited before I left.

"Thanks, Quentin." I waved and then headed for home.

I was out in the yard with Jeter on Sunday, playing a rousing game of fetch, when the Red Menace appeared. I turned to roll my eyes. I wasn't in any sort of mood to deal with her. The second Jeter saw her leering at me over the fence, he barked fiercely, like the good wingman he is.

"He's feisty." She stared at me.

"What can I do for you, Sophie-Anne?" I tried to sound polite. I just wanted her to go away.

"I was wondering if maybe you'd want to go grab some lunch together?" At least she was persistent, even if it was pointless.

"No, thanks. I actually need to get back inside." I whistled for Jeter and he headed for the kitchen door.

"So soon?"

I took a deep breath and said, "Look, I appreciate the attention, but nothing's going to happen with us."

She laughed in a way that was intended to make me think *I* was the one being ridiculous and reading too much into things. "I just wanted to get lunch."

"Just like you wanted to use my shower or my phone or have me help with bookshelves, right? I know what you're doing and it needs to stop." I started toward the house, thinking that was the end of the conversation.

"That girl you left with yesterday, is she your girlfriend?" The Red Menace asked.

"None of your business." I stalked into the house and closed the door.

As much as I hated that bitch, she got me thinking about Sookie again. Getting her out of my head proved to be more difficult than I'd thought it would be. I tried to remember the last time I was that hung up on a girl and I came to realization that it wasn't since college that I'd found one who held my interest for more than a few hours, and even then, it wasn't anything like the way it was with Sookie. I found myself wondering what she was doing to keep herself busy. Was she having as hard a time focusing on things as I was? When I was making dinner the night before I started wondering if she liked green peppers as I was slicing them. Was she a vegetarian? Did she like wine with her meals? All of these random ass questions were plaguing me right and left and I found myself desperately curious to know the answers to all of them.

I hadn't been joking in the slightest when I said I wanted to know her. I wanted to know everything about her. I wanted to know what made her smile. I wanted to know what shampoo she used to get her hair to smell like it did. I wanted to know where the scar on the back of her knee came from. I wanted to make her happy. The sound of her laugh was infectious, the precious few times that I'd heard it. I wanted to know how she could be a bold, confident woman who asked me for a Screaming Orgasm one minute and a shy school girl the next. I wanted to understand her.

I plugged in my iPod and decided to throw in a load of laundry. I'd been hesitant to wash the sheets on my bed the night before, but it had to be done. As much as I didn't want to wash away her smell, I figured leaving it there for too long was just plain gross. Not to mention, I didn't need to cross the line from healthy curiosity into obsession. Leaving sex sheets on my bed for more than one night would put me too close to the line for my own comfort.

Once I got the laundry started I fired up my laptop. I logged into my email to see there were a few things that Pam wanted me to take a look at for the bar. She was thinking about expanding into the vacant space next door so she could increase the size of the dance floor and maybe put in a second bar. It would be quite the project, but it seemed to me like it would be a very worthy investment. Business wasn't tapering off after being open for little more than a year. That was a good sign.

I looked through the proposals and quotes Pam had put together from various contractors and designers, as well as a copy of the lease for the extra space. We would have to look into building permits and zoning laws and all sorts of things in order to make this happen but Pam would be doing the legwork on this. It was mostly my job to tell her my opinion. I could very easily do that. When it came to business, Pam listened to me, even if she didn't give a flying fuck about what I thought of her personal life. But I tried to stay out of that.

As I made my way through the messages waiting in my inbox, I was only mildly surprised to see a friend request from Sookie for facebook. I shook my head, marveling at the fact that she'd found me first. Why the hell hadn't I thought of that? Any doubt that she was interested in me went right out the window at that moment. I clicked on the link in the email and was sent to my facebook page to accept her request. I couldn't stop grinning. I didn't care if it made me a douche.

"I think she likes us, boy." I reached down to take the toy that Jeter had brought me. He wrestled me for it before finally loosening his jaw enough so I could get a hold on it. I teased him for a minute before throwing the old tennis ball down the hall.

Thank God the basement was carpeted, or Jeter would ruin it with the amount of running around he did down there. I leaned back in my chair and clicked on the link to Sookie's page. After browsing the information on her wall- there wasn't much there outside of her hometown, employment and education information- I went straight to the albums she'd posted.

Her profile picture was one that appeared to be taken at graduation the previous spring with the woman she'd come into the bar with. They were both standing on the football field and there were kids standing around in their caps and gowns. Sookie was wearing a white sundress with red flowers on it. Her hair was held back from her face with a headband, while delicate waves of gold hung down her back. Her smile was radiant. God, she was beautiful.

I figured out quickly, in going through the albums that she only posted pictures that were student friendly. I wouldn't be seeing any of the pictures that had been taken at the bar on Friday night. I knew there were some because I'd seen her friend with a camera. The friend's name was Amelia, according to the way the pictures were tagged. There were a few pictures of Sookie with her cheerleading squad. Turns out they weren't cheerleaders, so much as a dance team that worked with the cheerleaders. Interesting. There were pictures from a lock-in they'd had in what appeared to be a dance studio. They were all dressed in pajamas and huddled together on sleeping bags while laughing and doing whatever it is that teenage girls do.

There were pictures of Sookie with what I presumed to be other members of the faculty, including a guy named Bill Compton, who appeared to be rather smitten with Sookie. I'd have to see who that guy was. I hadn't met him at any of the interviews I'd been on, or seen him on any of the tours I'd taken of the school. She was also photographed with Alcide Herveaux and Claude Crane, who I knew were other members of the physical education department. I'd met them a few months before. Alcide coached the varsity football team.

In every single picture of her I saw, Sookie was smiling brilliantly. She looked genuinely happy and content with her surroundings. I started to wonder, once again, if maybe I should call her and give her a head's up that she would be seeing me in the morning when she got to work. After a few minutes of debating about it I dug my cell phone out of my pocket and went in search of her number. I found it in my phone book and pressed the send button.

As luck would have it, the call went straight to voicemail. "Hi, Sookie, it's Eric. Listen, there's something I need to talk to you about. Give me a call when you get this." I hung up and set the phone down on the desk.

I stared at the phone like I could will it to ring using only wishful thinking. When that didn't work, I decided to put my energy into other things. I finished up the emails that needed checking and response. I switched loads of laundry. I let Jeter out of the house. I even made dinner and cleaned up. In all, a few hours had passed and there was no word from Sookie. I thought about calling her again but I didn't want to seem desperate. Was it really that big of a deal that we'd be working together?

Finally, it got late. Bedtime came and there was still no word from Sookie. I didn't know what her habits were when it came to returning phone calls. Maybe she was just one of those people who was terrible at calling others back. Not knowing was part of what drove me crazy. For all I knew, some psycho broke into her house and...no, I wouldn't go down that path. She was just busy. I'd see her in the morning. If she was going to freak out there wasn't a whole lot I could do about it, but honestly, I didn't see the big deal. I convinced myself it would be fine and then I dropped into a deep sleep.

The voice of Scott Weiland filled my ears as I lifted the weights. Sweat rolled down my face and dripped to the floor. The cool air from the air conditioning unit blew over me, sending a slight chill through my body. I was concentrating on breathing as I lifted and lowered the weight above me. I didn't hear the opening and closing of the door of the weight room, nor did I hear the click of her shoes as she walked toward me. But there she was, suddenly, standing over me in that white dress with the red flowers. Her hair pulled back much the same way, and that healthy glow to her skin.

She grinned down at me, watching as I lifted and lowered the weights. She ran her fingers through my damp hair before slowly walking around the bench press to my left side. Her cool fingers traced up my bare side, lightly tickling my ribs just under my heart. I felt that familiar fluttering I got every time I thought of her. The sensation of her touch caused several reactions from my body. There were goose bumps on my arms. I felt my chest tighten up and then there was the beginning of a tent forming in my shorts. She smiled at me knowingly and worked her way down closer to my legs.

She stepped to stand between them, angling her body just so I got a good glimpse of her cleavage when I looked her way. Her hands braced themselves on my thighs. She smiled at me for a moment before standing up straight again and stepping closer to me. Her fingernails grazed my legs, sending another round of chills through me and increasing the hardness in my shorts. Without warning, her legs swung over mine one at a time until she was straddling me. I set the weight down on the braces and pulled the earbuds from my ears.

Scott Weiland filled the room, crooning about a woman in a dress and all the things he wanted to do to her. I knew that feeling all too well. Sookie looked at me through her lashes, nibbling her lower lip, daring me to make my move. My hand slipped into her hair, cradling the back of her head as I pulled her face to mine. Her little hands began to untie the drawstrings of my shorts. No sooner had our lips met than she was stroking the painfully hard length she'd found inside. Her hand twisted on the upstroke and I growled into her mouth.

She ground her center against my thigh in search of the friction she needed. I felt her warmth and wetness on me. I couldn't take my mouth off of her. She stroked faster and faster, twisting just the right way with each pump of her small fists. She groaned against me as her own climax built.

"Here I come." She whispered to me, her breath warm and sweet on my chin as her eyes closed when she came. "Here I come, I come, I come."

Only it wasn't Sookie's voice anymore- it was Scott Weiland. My eyes opened and I was in bed alone. My alarm clock had gone off. Fuck. I didn't even need to look down to see the hardest case of morning wood I'd had since I was fourteen, and I'd had my first serious crush on my English teacher, Miss Thompson. I forced myself out of bed and into the shower to deal with my little problem. I had to get a move on if I wanted to go for a run around the track at the high school before my day really got started.

I stepped into the shower and wasted little time giving myself the attention I so desperately needed. There would be no willing this particular hard on away. I closed my eyes and thought back to my night with Sookie. I remembered the noises she made and how I'd heard them all in the dream I'd had. I remembered the smell of her hair and the way she tasted. I remembered the way her eyes got darker the closer she got to her release, and how her little hands would grip at any part of me she could reach to pull me closer to her. I stroked hard, almost like I thought I could exorcise her from my memory if I came hard enough.

When I did, I leaned against the tiled wall of the shower and took a few deep breaths. I tried not to think about Sookie for the duration of my shower. I washed up and then wrapped a towel around myself when I was finished. I went to the kitchen and made myself a bowl of cereal and got a glass of orange juice. I ate quickly and then went back to the bedroom to get dressed. Being a PE teacher meant my wardrobe was pretty casual most of the time. I planned to institute a policy of shirts and ties for game days. There was no reason to be dressed like a slob just because you were an athlete.

But for the first day of school a pair of jeans and a Duke polo would suffice just fine. I neatly folded the clothes and put them in my gym bag. I'd wearing shorts and a wifebeater for my run. I put on my running shoes and let Jeter out. I'd be able to stop by the house on my lunch break to let him out, assuming Sookie wasn't using that time to ream me out for not telling her that we would be working together. I checked my cell phone to see if she'd called back after I went to sleep. There was nothing there.

I called Jeter back into the house and then headed out to work. I tossed my bag into the car and quickly made my way over to the school. I got stopped once for a Metra that was inbound from the city. Luckily, the train passed quickly and didn't add too much time to my commute. Well, actually, it doubled my commute since it took four minutes to drive to the school and that was the same amount of time the train took to pass. Still, it could have been worse.

I parked near the Field House since the boys' locker room was underneath it. My office was down there. I decided to leave my bag in the car. I'd come back for it when I was done running. I pulled my iPod from my pocket and slipped my earbuds in. I hit the play button and then put the machine in my pocket before I starting on my jog. I watched as the school buses were lined up in their caravan way before heading out to pick up the kids. Faculty members began to trickle in slowly. I was on my third lap when I was stopped by Andre, the head of the Phys Ed chairman.

"Northman, good to see you here so early." Andre said once I'd slowed to jog in place.

"I thought a run before school would be good." I explained.

"I see that." Andre nodded. "So, I take it you're ready? You don't need anything, do you?"

"Nope, I think I'm all set." I smiled at the man.

"Good. Carry on, then." Andre stepped out of my path and I got back to running.

I was just coming up on the turn that would take me close to the theater at the end of the school opposite of the Field House when I saw her step out of her car. There was Sookie in a pinstripe pencil skirt and a crisp white shirt. Her hair was pulled back in a sleek ponytail and she was wearing glasses. Hard on renewed. Immediately. Painfully. She looked like a naughty librarian. If this was what I was going to get every day, I was fucked. Big time.

I watched her pull her bags from the car and then close her car door. Her hips swayed beautifully as she strutted toward me on a pair of three inch heels that made her legs look even more amazing than I remembered. She walked tall and with confidence. Her ponytail slapped against her shoulders as she walked. I wanted to throw her up against the brick wall out of sight of others and fuck her. I was so screwed.

But then she saw me standing there and she stopped walking. A faint smile crossed her lips for a just a second and then she looked pissed. Really, really pissed.

dun, dun, dun...so...how mad do you think Sookie really is? \*scratches head\* My router is being reconfigured this afternoon so I will be sans internet for most of the day, but I'll be back with another installment tomorrow, baby birds.

\*scampers off to watch 18 minutes into new True Blood episode\*

**Chapter 5: First Day**

Okay, so the last chapter was a bit on the slow side and this one will be as well. I promise things will pick up again soon. We just need to settle some things outside of Eric and Sookie's relationship. We'll get back to the naughty sexy tiems soon enough. Be patient, baby birds ;)

**The only character I own is Jeter. The rest belong to Ms. Harris.**

Chapter Five: First Day

**Sookie**

I pulled up to the school a few minutes later than I wanted to but my coffee machine decided to pick that morning, of all mornings, to decide that it was done. So I'd had to stop for coffee and wait in line at a drive thru that took way too long for a place that only sold coffee. Seriously, what was with people and their half cap, mocha frappe things anyway? What happened to good old coffee? I shook off my rant as I checked my lipstick.

I made it a point to dress up a little extra for the first day of school. I wouldn't always be quite as fancy as I was that morning. Three inch heels weren't my idea of comfortable. I much preferred my little ballet shoes with the amount of time I spent on my feet in a day. Teaching wasn't a desk job for me. I was an animated teacher who demanded total participation from my students. My classroom was always buzzing with chatter and discussion. I knew enough to know that if you didn't engage your students, you lost them. There were never any nappers in my classes. I engaged my students and preferred them to question me than accept everything I said on blind faith. To me, there was no such thing as a stupid question.

I reached into my purse and pulled out my cell phone to find that it was off. Shit. How had I not noticed my phone was off? I turned it on and found that I had half a dozen text messages and three voicemails waiting for me. The texts were all from Amelia wanting to know when I was going to be home on Saturday. We'd more than covered where I was since then. The second Eric was gone she was knocking at my back door, wanting all the details of what had happened.

We sat on my deck and I told her that I'd spent the night with Eric. She'd squealed and clapped like a retarded seal. She started singing that stupid song about Eric and me sitting in a tree and I wanted to slap her upside the head. Mostly, I tried not to blush furiously and let myself join in on her excitement. I didn't want to jinx whatever was happening with us. I told her we had a date for a night later in the week and that I would be cooking him dinner. She'd fawned all over it and I could practically see her picking out china patterns in her head. Ever since she met Tray, she was on the fast track to getting all of her single girlfriends married so we could all have babies at the same time. It would be sweet if it weren't so damn annoying.

After my relationship with Quinn, I wasn't so sure I wanted to jump back into something serious so soon. I had it in my head that being single was probably a good idea, at least for a little while. It's not that I was holding out hope for getting back together. I was over it. I just thought it might be good to get reacquainted with me. I'd spent a lot of time trying to be the me that Quinn wanted that I lost a little bit of myself because of it. I needed to get that part back before I could go giving away more pieces to someone else.

I dialed into my voicemail and wasn't at all surprised to find the first was from Amelia. The second was from my mother, wanting to know if I was excited about the first day of school. Then the third was from Eric. He had something important to tell me and he wanted me to call him back. He'd called in the early afternoon the day before. I saved his message, though I couldn't really say why when I deleted the others, and then looked at the clock on my phone. It wasn't quite seven in the morning yet. It was definitely too early to call. I was free third period. By then it would be about 9:30, which would be a more than acceptable time to call him. Well, assuming he wasn't on bar duty the night before. I groaned with frustration and started toward the school.

I preferred parking near the theater on the south side of the school because it would be that much easier to get away from it later in the day. I was usually at the school from seven in the morning until four in the afternoon, sometimes later. Once Poms started in a few weeks, I would be there until closer to six on practice days. I reached into my purse to retrieve my keys that would let me into the building when a flash of white and gold caught my attention on the track that encircled the football field.

I stopped outside the chain link fence and watched a very tall, very familiar figure round the curve at the end closer to the Field House. It didn't take me long to figure out who was running toward me. Eric. What the hell was he doing at the high school? Did he go running here every morning? That was certainly a perk to waking up and going to work that I hadn't been expecting. I could see the stain on his shirt from the sweat that was pouring off of him and I wondered how long he'd been running for.

Then his eyes met mine and he looked scared. He slowed from his run to a jog, and then to a walk when he got closer to me. I stepped closer to the fence, curious as to what he was doing at the school aside from the obvious. Sunlight to my right was blinding me, causing me to squint at him as he approached.

"What are you doing here?" The words came out a bit harsher than I intended them to.

Eric looked at his feet with guilt written all over his face. "I left you a message. I didn't want to tell you like this. I should have told you on Saturday." He started to apologize.

"For the love of God, you better not be a student."

Eric laughed and said, "No, I'm definitely not."

I failed to see the humor in the situation. "So?"

"I, uh, I'm a teacher. Today's my first day." He came right out with it.

"You're a teacher?" I looked him up and down. He sure didn't look like any teacher I ever had in high school. "What do you teach?" *If he says history, I'm going to faint.*

"PE. I'm going to be coaching basketball this winter." He kept his face blank.

"So *you're* the friend Pam was talking about?"

"That's me." He nodded.

I sucked in a deep breath and prepared to let him have it for keeping this from me but then decided there wasn't a whole lot of point. What did it really change? We wouldn't be working in the same department. He wasn't my boss. Other teachers dated other teachers. So long as they maintained a professional relationship during school hours, there would be no cause for complaints from the school board.

"Why didn't you tell me?" I was curious as to why he'd kept it a secret from me, more than anything.

"I didn't tell you when Pam was around because Pam has a tendency to run her mouth, and I wasn't in the mood to hear it from her right then. You still seemed pretty iffy about staying and I didn't want Pam to run you off." Eric explained to me. He stepped closer to the fence and linked his fingers around the chains. "I didn't mean to hide it from you, though. I wanted to tell you yesterday."

"I forgot to turn my phone on. I was busy with stuff around the house." I exhaled slowly and shifted the bags on my shoulder carefully so as not to spill my overpriced coffee down the front of my freshly dry cleaned shirt.

"Look, I understand if us working together is a deal breaker." Eric looked sad at the prospect, and I felt a twinge in my chest at the idea of us having a strictly professional relationship.

We'd already slept together, so the chances of us really being able to be 'just friends' when we knew we had chemistry were about zero. I thought it over for a moment before I gave him an answer, just to let him know that I didn't appreciate his little omission.

"We won't be working together, Eric." I looked him right in the eyes. "We work in two completely different departments in different parts of the school. I'm willing to bet we won't even see much of each other. We need to set some boundaries if this is going to work, but it doesn't have to be a big deal."

I surprised myself with how calm I was being about the whole thing. A little voice in the back of my head told me that if it were anyone else, I wouldn't be so calm. There was something about Eric that made me see things differently. That, and it was hard to imagine how I was going to maintain any sort of professionalism if he was going to be jogging around the track like that every single morning when I arrived, knowing I wouldn't have an outlet for the energy he stirred up in me.

"So we're still on for dinner?" Eric looked at me hopefully, a small smile on his face.

When I looked away from him in attempts to draw it out a little further just to punish him a little, one of his fingers reached out through the links in the fence and touched the back of my hand that was curled around my coffee cup. I felt sparks shoot through my veins and every single cell in my body came to life. My eyes jerked back toward his. God, he looked sexy standing there. I bit my lower lip to hold back my smile.

"You know you're very pretty when you're angry with me, Miss Stackhouse." Eric said in the sexiest tone I'd heard him use yet.

My knees shook just a little. It was so unfair he could do that with just a slight touch of hand and a lower register of voice. Now was not the time for my panties to melt away and if I stood there for much longer, that was exactly what was going to happen.

"Thank you, Coach." I teased him right back, and his eyes hooded over in a lusty sort of way that made me want to abandon all the rules that we hadn't even put in place yet so I could jump him.

"So, dinner?" He stroked the back of my hand. It really sucked to know what those fingers were capable of when I couldn't experience it all in that moment.

"Yes, dinner. How about tomorrow?"

"I'll be there." He smiled at me and then backed away from the fence.

I nodded and smiled at him before continuing on my way into the building. I paused for just a moment at the door to watch him run down the straight away. I shook the image from my brain and then let myself inside the school. It was going to be a very long day.

My first two classes went well. I taught World History to a crop of nervous freshmen who were still learning how to navigate the halls and master the locks on their lockers. I liked teaching world history because it gave me the opportunity to discuss the global view of American culture and the way we are seen through the eyes of others. My class discussed everything from the ancient lands of Mesopotamia up through the catastrophe of September 11th and the resulting war in Iraq. We covered it all and even had the chance to talk religion.

I was raised a Christian but the point of the discussions wasn't really so much about our own beliefs but in how the beliefs of a group of people shaped their lives. Certainly it could be said that religion had a profound effect on the settling of America just as much as it caused problems in Ireland. There was the debate between Muslims and Jews in the Middle East and of course, there was also the Crusades. Religion will always be a hot button issue and I found it fascinating that I was able to open the eyes of young minds to the various belief systems around the world.

I spoke to my students with excitement and touched a little on all of the things we'd be talking about throughout the course of the year. I explained to them my policies on homework and test taking. I wasn't very good at being "by the book" when it came to most things. I didn't try to come up with fancy trick questions and when I asked them to write essays, I was more concerned with what they took away from their reading than being able to quote back passages of a book to me.

"I'm here every morning at seven. I'm here until at least four and I will stay later if you need the help. All you have to do is ask for it." I told them all.

On Fridays I liked to switch gears and discuss current events in the world. Every single thing that happened was historical. Most events don't have as much of an impact as some things, but anything was up for discussion. Communication was what mattered to me more than the subject matter itself. Besides, I noticed if you give kids that age an open forum to speak freely, you'd be amazed at how a conversation can evolve. The previous year we'd started by talking about the ban of social networking sites on school computers and that evolved into a debate about gay marriage.

When my free period came up I headed to the cafeteria to see if there was any chance of the food being better than it was the year before. I sighed with disappointment and ended up raiding a vending machine for a bag of Sun Chips. It wasn't much but it would keep me going until lunchtime. The cafeteria was in the basement so when I came up the steps, I passed one of four sets of doors that led out to the football field. I paused when I saw Eric dressed in a pair of jeans and a Duke t-shirt. He was standing on the field talking to his class. Every single girl was staring at him with adoring wide eyes. I knew *exactly* how they felt.

I felt myself flush and a twinge in my chest. Jealousy reared its ugly head. I had no reason to be jealous of those girls, other than they were talking to him right then and I wasn't. Eric didn't strike me as the sort who got involved with students, although that seemed to be a scary trend that had developed over the last few years. Kids were growing up too fast and adults were failing to see that they were still children.

I leaned into the door and started snacking on my chips. I watched as Eric tossed his head back to laugh at something and I couldn't help but smile at the sight. The sun was shining down on him, and with his hair loose like it was, he looked a bit like a God. I bit the inside of my lip and cursed myself for it.

"Son of a-" I didn't finish that when I remembered I was on school property. Footsteps behind me alerted me I wasn't alone.

I turned to see Bill Compton, the American history teacher, coming up the steps. "Sookie, hello." He smiled warmly at me.

"Bill, it's nice to see you." I was polite to him as I could be. "How was your summer?"

"Quite well, thank you. Lorena and I took a trip down to Mississippi to see her family."

"That's nice." I nodded.

"Did you make it home this summer?" Bill stood a little too close to me for my liking.

He was also from the south and he seemed to think that was reason enough for us to be best buddies. You know, us Confederates need to stick together since the war isn't over, or anything. I bit back the sigh I wanted to let loose and forced my eyes to stay on his instead of rolling like they wanted to.

"I did, as a matter of fact. My brother got married this summer, so I spent a few weeks in Louisiana." I explained.

Bill went on to talk about the time he and his wife had spent with her family before reaching into his wallet to retrieve the newest pictures of their son. Lorena had given birth to a baby boy the previous winter. He was a cute little thing but he ceased to be adorable when pictures of him were forced in your face every damn day. Every time I ran into Bill he had a new picture to show me. There's parental pride and then there's obsession. Bill was very easily obsessed with his child. I wanted to punch him. If he told me one more story about how cute little Billy was, I might not have a choice but to let my fist have what it wanted.

I looked out the window toward the football field at just the right moment and found that Eric was looking back at me. I saw a flicker of a smile and I raised my hand just a little to acknowledge that I'd seen his gesture. A little chill ran up my spine when he nodded at me. I got so lost in what I was doing that I didn't hear Bill's question.

"Sookie?" Bill pulled me from my thoughts.

"Sorry." I shook my head and laughed at myself. "What were you saying?"

"I was wondering if you'll be coaching Poms again this year?"

"Oh! Oh, yes, yes I will." I was still a bit flustered and all I got was a nod and a smile? Shit. I needed to get it together, and fast. "We'll be holding try outs for that in the next week."

I could have slapped myself then, since that was what I should have been working on instead of listening to Bill prattle on about his baby and watching Eric out on the football field. I made excuses to Bill as to why I had to get going, and headed back to my classroom to get some work done. Not at all to my surprise, Bill followed me back to the C-10 area where the history class department was. I heard the steady footfall of him behind me as my heels clickety-clacked their way back to my classroom.

"Sookie, could we have lunch sometime?" Bill asked out of nowhere.

I spun around on my heel and nearly lost my balance. Sun chips went flying every which way and Bill's arm shot out to help me get steady. I pulled away quickly and smoothed out my skirt just to keep my hands busy. His question caught me completely off guard. I didn't really know what to say but since my southern manners required a response I said the only thing a polite woman could say.

"Sure, Bill, that'd be fine." I gave him a smile and a nod and then hauled ass to my classroom.

I made a note for myself to track down Claudine Crane, a teacher in the home economics department, and coach of the cheerleading team so we could coordinate try outs for the squads. I had an idea of who would most likely be returning from the year before but there were always a few fresh faces that wanted a chance to get on the squad. Not to mention, I'd lost a whole crop of girls when they graduated. The try out process could be a bit difficult to stomach. I hated that it had to be such a cutthroat experience but I didn't have time to help mediocre dancers develop.

Thankfully, the bell rang to end third period and I prepared myself for a fresh batch of freshmen. My fourth period class had to break in the middle for lunch and then we regrouped for the second half afterward. This would present a problem on test days. I hated it when my schedule got split like this but it wasn't as if I had a choice in the matter. Although I always had the option of signing passes to send the kids to lunch a period late if I wanted to. I kept that in mind for a later date.

I was free again during eighth period but I was supposed to be assisting monitoring study hall, so that's where I headed with my laptop bag slung over my shoulder. I got down to the dingy old room to see row after row of desks set up. I found an open table to sit at and took a seat in the back. I was there mostly to sign passes for anyone who wanted to leave to go up to the library, computer lab or the bathroom. I'd just gotten my laptop going when the chair beside me pulled out. I cringed at the possibility that it might be Bill coming to sit next to me. I really didn't want to spend the next fifty minutes sitting that close to him.

But then a finger grazed my forearm. A chill ran up my spine and my eyes squeezed closed. Without even looking to my left I knew who was sitting next to me. I fought hard not to smile at the realization and all my hard work went right down the drain when Eric leaned over to whisper in my ear.

"Well, well, Miss Stackhouse, fancy meeting you here." His lip grazed my ear, he got so close.

I was afraid to look over at him but I couldn't help myself. "You're assigned to be here?" It came out bitchier than I wanted. "I mean-"

"I know what you mean." Eric smiled at me and it took everything I had in me not to climb on his lap and kiss him. "Yes, it seems the fates have put us together for the next fifty minutes."

I cleared my throat quietly and looked away from him as a blush crept up my neck. "I think you should know I was invited out to lunch today."

"Really?" Eric silently moved his chair closer to mine. "Should I be worried?" He was teasing me.

I cheated a glance over my shoulder. Suddenly his fingers were ghosting up my back and I found it very hard to breathe. "I don't think so."

"I saw you watching me." His breath fell warm on my ear and neck as he whispered to me. "You made it hard for me to concentrate."

I sucked my cheeks to keep from giggling. "I bet I did."

The study hall monitor began to take roll call and I tried to remember what projects I planned to work on before Eric sat down next to me. This could become a real problem once I had papers to grade and discussions to prep for. His fingers continued to stroke my back gently and the goose bumps that broke out as a result refused to go away. If I thought sitting next to Bill for fifty minutes was going to be torture, sitting next to Eric for that long was even worse. His hand never left my back. He sat there stroking me gently while reading the newspaper. All I could do was stare at the clock and pray for the strength not to drag him from the room and attack him in a dark hallway.

When the bell rang he leaned over and whispered in my ear one last time. "I look forward to seeing you later, Miss Stackhouse. You have a lovely afternoon." His lip grazed my ear again and he was gone.

Damn him.

**Iron. Will. I know I wouldn't have one if I were in Sookie's shoes. Thanks for reading!**

**Chapter 6: Boundaries**

Yep, me again. Bet you're getting sick of me, aren't you, even if you keep leaving me lovely reviews and comments. Y'all make my day. Sorry I'm such a slacker about responding, but I promise I've been using that time to write. I wrote 3 whole chapters last night! Someone's a roll, huh? And you get to reap all the benefits \*squeeeeeeee\* Wow...hyper, much? And I haven't even had coffee today \*skips off\*

**The only character I own is Jeter, but he loves to play fetch with the ones I don't.**

Chapter Six: Boundaries

**Eric**

Being that close to Sookie without being able to really touch her, or say the things I wanted to say to her, wasn't easy. For those fifty minutes it was an exercise in trying to think of every boring subject known to man in order to keep from dragging her out of that dingy room. The second I touched her, I felt her shiver next to me. The fact that she barely moved the entire period was evidence enough that she wanted me every bit as much as I wanted her. While I hated to walk away from her, I was thankful when the bell rang. It felt like time had stopped moving. I didn't enjoy the purgatory we seemed to be trapped in.

The last class of the day was a blur for me. I don't recall what I said since my mind was hopelessly stuck on Sookie. I couldn't shake the smell of her perfume for the feeling of her warm skin under my fingertips. When the last bell of the day rang, I found myself bolting toward her classroom. I didn't know exactly where it was, but I knew the general area. I walked about aimlessly, trying to make it look like I was just out for a stroll.

When I found her, she was sitting behind her desk, casually tapping a pen against her bottom lip. She appeared to be deep in thought. I gathered her legs were crossed, based on the way she was shaking back and forth in her seat. I slipped into the room and closed the door behind me. The click of the lock was what got her attention. Her eyes snapped up to mine and she was immediately on her feet.

"Eric," She almost smiled but stopped short. "What brings you here?"

"I spent all of last period thinking about you." I had no problem telling her this, mostly because I enjoyed the way her cheeks flushed.

"That's really sweet of you, but I don't think it's a good idea for you to be swinging by like this." She stepped around her desk and perched herself on the edge of it.

"School's out, Miss Stackhouse." I advanced toward her. In three long strides I was right in front of her.

"We're still on school property, Eric." She bit her lower lip nervously.

"The door is locked." I put my hands on her hips.

"Eric-" I didn't get to hear the rest of what she had to say because I kissed her. I couldn't wait anymore. She hesitated for just a moment before she attacked me right back.

My hand slid up and eased her hair out of its ponytail. Her lips parted to allow my tongue entrance to her mouth and I took full advantage of it. She had one hand on my neck and the other on my side, holding me close to her. Seems we would need to redefine what we considered to be work appropriate displays of affection.

I kissed her until we had to come up for air. "We can't make this a habit." Sookie looked up into my eyes.

"You're right." I stepped back and she pouted, causing me to do an internal victory dance. "If you don't have plans, you could come by my house for a bit. I'm sure Jeter would love to see you."

Sookie gave me a coy smile and turned her head to the side, flipping her hair over her shoulder as she did so. "Is that right?"

I nodded and smiled at her. "He was in a funk all day yesterday."

"Are you sure you're talking about your dog?" Sookie slid off her desk and straightened her skirt before moving around to pick up her things.

Watching her bend over in that pinstripe skirt was the highlight of my day. It hugged every single one of her curves and the urge to fuck her right there on the desk was overwhelming. Somehow, I thought that *might* be crossing the line. I cleared my throat and forced myself to take a step back.

"I may have missed you." I winked at her when she looked over her shoulder at me.

Sookie appeared to be weighing her options before she stood up to give me an answer. "I suppose I could stop by for a while. I have a few things to finish up here first, but I could meet you there in an hour."

"We'll be waiting." I smiled again. I wanted to step forward and kiss her but decided it was best if I just left it at that.

She waved at me as I walked out of the room. I headed straight to the parking lot since I wasn't really in any sort of condition to be walking around a high school the way I was. I was just about to get into my car when a voice called out to me that I only vaguely remembered.

"Eric?" I turned to see a woman in pressed khakis and a light blue sweater set coming toward me. Amelia.

"Amelia, right?" She smiled at me for knowing who she was.

"I'm surprised you remember. You were pretty taken with Sookie." She lamented.

"Still am." I confirmed for her in case that was why she was following me.

"Are you here to visit Sookie?"

"Nope, I'm on my way out, actually." I opened the driver's side door of the car.

"Nice ride." Amelia looked impressed.

"Thank you." I looked at the car with pride.

"Boys and their toys." Amelia shook her head with a laugh. "My boyfriend, Tray, he's into bikes, so I get it."

"Oh yeah? What's he drive?"

"Something makes a lot of noise and requires a cold shower after I ride it." She grinned slyly. I decided right then that I liked her and Pam had missed out. I would have to rub that in later. I could tell Amelia wanted to ask about what I was doing at the school. Apparently, she hadn't spoken with Sookie all day, nor had she seen me walking around campus.

"So, are you a teacher here as well?" I figured I'd get the ball rolling by asking about her, even if I already knew the answer.

"I am. I teach chemistry and AP chem." She divulged.

"I was never good at that. Math was never my strong suit." I confessed to her.

"What was your strong suit?"

"Athletics." I pointed to the Duke emblem on the breast of my shirt.

"You went to Duke? That's impressive. It's not every day you find one with brains *and*beauty."

*Tell me about it.*"I did. Class of 2001."

"Huh." Amelia nodded appreciatively. "So then you were a basketball player?"

"Still am, but not like I was. My knees are getting older before the rest of me." That much was the honest to God truth. I could feel it a little more with each jump shot I took. It wasn't the same at thirty-one as it was at eighteen.

"I hear that." She sighed, though I couldn't imagine she was much older than Sookie. "So what do you do these days?"

"These days I teach physical education." I grinned at her and waited for her to figure it out.

"Get out of here! You took old man McCarthy's place?" Her jaw about hit the floor. "Does Sookie know?"

"She found out this morning." I said lamely.

"Ouch. Well, you seem to still have all of your skin, so that's a good sign." Amelia joked and stepped a bit closer to me. I really liked Amelia.

"There might still be a trip to the woodshed for me." I wasn't sure if Sookie was really okay with us working the same place.

Amelia took a deep breath and then looked me up and down. "Look, I know it's not really my place to say anything about this and you can tell me to butt out if you want to. The thing is, Sookie got out of a relationship not too long ago where she sort of got lost in it. The guy did a number on her and strung her along for a few years thinking he might want to settle down and get married. When it became obvious that wasn't going to happen, Sookie cut him loose. She's a strong girl, but she's still putting the pieces back together in a lot of ways. Right now the big thing for her is trust. Don't fuck it up."

"I'm doing my best not to." I gave her an appreciative smile.

"See that you don't. I would hate for one of my AP chem students to have a chemical spill so close to such a beautiful piece of machinery." Amelia looked pointedly at my car and then winked at me before getting into the SUV parked next to mine.

I chuckled quietly and then got in my car. Yes, I definitely liked Amelia.

I was in the front yard with Jeter when Sookie's car came to a stop across the street. Jeter dropped his drool covered tennis ball at my feet for me to throw it again. He was good enough to nudge me when I stared at Sookie a little too long. I bent to scoop up the ball and I tossed it across the yard. Jeter ran off barking to retrieve his toy. My eyes went back to Sookie who was wiggling her way toward me.

"So, I hear you had a lovely chat with Amelia?" Sookie arched an eyebrow at me as she got closer.

"I may have run into her in the parking lot." I confirmed for her.

Sookie closed her eyes and shook her head. "I want to apologize now for any threats she may have made."

I laughed and had to ask, "Does she threaten every guy who tries to date you?"

"Since we were fourteen. You don't seem to scared of her, though."

"Well I have no intention of doing anything to cause her to follow through on any threats she might have made."

Sookie pressed her lips together and tucked some of her hair behind her ear. It was a bit wild thanks to me pulling the elastic band out to set it free. Her glasses were gone and I wondered if they were just an accessory. Yet another question to add to my list.

"You want to come inside? I was going to start dinner soon."

"We're having dinner tomorrow, remember?"

"Yes, I remember, but I've still got to eat tonight. Besides, who said I was inviting you to stay?" I teased her.

Her mouth hung open for just a second and then she took a deep breath. I had her and she knew it, but it was fun to watch her get flustered. "I suppose I could come in for a little while."

"After you." I gestured toward the porch steps. "Come on, Jeet!" I called the dog. He was sniffing around a tree three houses down but abruptly stopped to heed my call.

"He's well trained." Sookie said once Jeter and I were in the house.

"That's all Johan's doing."

"Johan?"

"My brother. He got Jeter when he was still a puppy. He was living in New York at the time, going to Columbia. He was a med student." I explained to her.

"Was?" She arched an eyebrow.

"Half way through he dropped out to start a modeling and acting career."

"Wow."

"Our parents weren't exactly happy about it."

"That's understandable, I suppose. I guess it depends on why he was in med school to start with, though."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, was he there because it was what he wanted, or was he trying to appease your parents?"

"I think it was both. Johan is good with people and he hates to see others suffering. But he's also a very creative person and there isn't a whole lot of room for creativity in medicine."

"True," Sookie nodded and walked over to the fireplace. "Is this him?" She pointed to a family photo of Johan and I with our parents.

"Nope, that's me." I grinned at her.

She looked a little bit closer. "Oh get the fuck out of here! You're identical twins?"

"Yep."

"Good God almighty." She shook her head in disbelief.

"You sound disappointed." I teased.

"You two don't ever try to do that switcheroo thing, do you?" Sookie actually looked nervous.

"Switcheroo?" I couldn't resist. She was too adorable.

"Yeah, you know, where you say that you're Johan and he says he's you?"

"Not with anyone who matters." I shrugged and turned toward the kitchen.

"Whoa there, carbon copy!" She followed me to the kitchen with me laughing ahead of her. "So who have you done this with?"

While I began to pull ingredients from cabinets and the fridge, Sookie hopped up on the island to listen to me talk. I had just handed her a bottle of wine when she smoothly crossed her legs, her foot grazing my thigh as she did so. She winked at me and urged me to keep talking. I told her about how we'd fooled our camp counselors when we were younger. Johan had once tried to talk me into going to the dentist for him since he hated going and he'd found out he had a cavity he didn't want to get filled because the sound of the drill made him crazy. He thought we could fool the dentist into thinking he'd already done the work since I'd had that tooth filled when we were twelve. Of course, that didn't end up working out the way Johan planned.

"So you've *never* done that with girlfriends?" Sookie leaned forward, speaking over her wine glass.

"Definitely not. Physically, Johan and I look exactly alike but we have very different tastes in most things. Johan's type isn't my type."

"So what's Johan's type?"

"Not intelligent, beautiful blonds with a good sense of humor."

"Smooth, Casanova, very smooth." She sipped her wine. "Need any help?"

"How are you at onion chopping?"

"Well that depends on how you want them cut. I can do a pretty decent dice on them."

"You don't have to be that fancy. I'm just caramelizing them for burgers."

Sookie smiled over at me. "Ever try stuffing the cheese inside your burger?"

"Can't say as I have." I admitted.

"Oh, then I will have to make you burgers a la Sookie sometime." She took the onion I offered to her.

"So then I'm guessing that won't be on the menu tomorrow."

"Nope, but I guess I should ask if you prefer white meat or dark meat. I only eat white meat chicken and it's boneless, skinless." Sookie informed me.

"That's fine with me. Will you give me any other hints?"

"Not a one. You aren't allergic to anything, are you? There's nothing worse than making dinner for someone only to find out they're allergic to some teeny tiny ingredient you might have used."

"I have exactly two allergies: acetaminophin and bullshit." I smiled at her.

Sookie laughed and plucked a knife from the butcher block. "Got a cutting board?"

"Don't need one. The counters are granite, remember?"

"Ah yes, you have a fancy kitchen." Sookie looked around with a hint of envy in her eyes. "Do you cook a lot?"

We talked while we did prep work and then Sookie followed me outside to the backyard with Jeter right behind us, hoping I'd drop something. While I got the grill going, Sookie took on the job of keeping Jeter entertained while we talked. More than once I looked over to see the Red Menace staring at Sookie and I out of one of her second story windows. I started to consider taking the grill up to the deck on the second floor. Red Menace wouldn't be able to stare at us up there quite so easily.

Sookie cleared her throat and stepped closer to me. "Is it just me, or do we have an audience?"

I groaned and wanted to throw a rock at Red Menace's window. "Sorry. She's uh...she's got it in her head that we should be a couple."

Then Sookie surprised me by leaning around me and waving at Red Menace with a friendly smile on her face. When I turned to see if she was waving back, she was gone. The question, of course, was would she stay gone?

"You didn't need to do that."

"Sure I did. She was starting to bug me." Sookie smiled up at me. "Besides, you said you aren't interested in her. That's reason enough for me to help you scare her off."

"Are you sure it's not a jealousy thing?" I smirked over at her.

Sookie wrestled Jeter for one of his toys before flinging it across the yard for him to go get. She set her wine glass down on the table next to the grill and turned her body toward mine. She looked me right in the eye and held my stare for a few seconds while she formulated her answer. I was a bit surprised by her answer.

"You think you're a pretty big deal, don't you?" If it weren't for the coyness in her tone, I would have been worried.

I knew better than to answer that question myself so I said, "You tell me."

Sookie looked me up and down and took a drink of her wine before saying anything. "In spite of having slept with you already, I don't know if I can really answer that question."

Ouch. That hurt a little, I'm not going to lie.

"Not that I didn't enjoy myself, because I most certainly did." Sookie blushed at her admission before continuing. "It's just that there's more to a person than their prowess, and while you certainly seem to have that part down, I don't know about the rest of you yet."

"Does that mean you're curious?" I paid close attention to her face then, especially her eyes. She had very expressive eyes that spoke to me better than her words did.

"If I wasn't curious I wouldn't be here, and I definitely wouldn't have agreed to dinner tomorrow."

"Fair enough." I nodded and opened the lid of the grill to flip the burgers over.

Sookie ended up staying for dinner and insisting on helping to help me clean up when we were done. Jeter sat at the table like a good little beggar, hoping one of us would drop something for him to hoover up before we could stop him. He was in heaven when Sookie tossed him a piece of her burger after getting my okay to do so.

"You're never going to get rid of him if you spoil him too much." I warned her.

"I like him." She shrugged and then scratched his head.

When I pouted she leaned over and scratched my head the exact same way. "I like you, too."

Her hand slid down to touch my cheek and there was a sweetness in her eyes that told me she was being honest with me. Sensing the right moment, I leaned over and kissed her. When I pulled back she giggled and said, "Mmm, onions."

"Sorry."

"Eh, at least we match." She shrugged and then I kissed her again.

She shifted herself so that she was sitting in my lap and we were rapidly approaching a point of no return. Just as I was about to move my hands from her hair to her chest, she pulled away.

"We should go inside." She was as breathless as I was.

We picked up our wine glasses and headed into the house. Jeter refused to follow us, but then I didn't try real hard to get him in the house. He was having a good time running around the yard. Who was I to step on his buzz?

Sookie was standing in the living room when I came up behind her and encircled her waist. I leaned down so my mouth was close to her ear. "Can I just tell you that seeing you in pinstripes is incredibly sexy?" Sookie giggled quietly, keeping her head forward. "It's going to be extremely difficult not to pull you into a vacant classroom and maul you."

Sookie turned her head toward mine and looked up into my eyes. "We should probably set some ground rules about workplace displays of affection."

"Of course." I released her and went over to the couch to sit down. She followed and sat down beside me with her knees tucked underneath her.

"So, the way I see it, there's no problem with us seeing one another. We don't work in the same department. You're not my boss. We might see more of one another once the basketball season starts since I coach the Poms squad, but that shouldn't be an issue either since one doesn't really have anything to do with the other. But we can't be making out in classrooms or having sex in your office." Sookie said firmly.

"What about in the janitor's closet?" My eyebrows wiggled and she rolled her eyes.

She slapped at my arm and said, "Oh, sure, *that's* okay."

I laughed and said, "Sookie, we're adults. I think we can control ourselves."

She looked at me through her lashes and said. "I'm glad one of us is sure about that."

Then she attacked me.

**Thanks for reading! \*sticks tongue out & runs away giggling with next chapter in hand\***

**Chapter 7: Bad Things**

Hey there, baby birds. I don't have much to say other than thank you for all of your reviews, favorites and alerts you've put on this story. I love you for loving me \*group hug\* Oh! wait, one quick thing! Yes, Johan **will** be making an appearance at some point in this story. I just haven't written that part yet. ***Two Erics in one room?*** \*heart stops\*

**I now own Jeter and Johan. Be jealous. The rest, sadly, are not mine \*pouts\***

Chapter Seven: Bad Things

**Sookie**

I told myself that I hadn't gone over to Eric's house with the intention of spending my night making out with him like we were a pair of horny teenagers, but I knew that was a big, fat lie. After those fifty minutes of barely there touching and the mother of all kisses he laid on me in my classroom after school, there was no way I could decline his invitation to come by his house for a while. Before I even got out of my car I felt him watching me. It was definitely a bit of an ego boost to know I could so completely steal his attention from whatever task was at hand. It was also a little scary.

I hadn't planned to stay for dinner, much less hanging out afterward but the more we talked the more I found I liked him for reasons other than his kissing abilities or the fact that I'd had many orgasms the night we met. I didn't regret that we'd slept together, although there was a part of me that was just a little embarrassed about it. It just wasn't the way I was raised and it wasn't the kind of girl I was. Or least I wasn't until I met Eric. All of a sudden all of my rules seemed to be flying out the window. We hadn't even been on a real date yet and I found myself back on his couch, running my fingers through his hair as we kissed.

We'd talked a little bit about the boundaries for what was acceptable behavior while we were on school grounds. I was all for letting loose when I was in a committed relationship and feeling frisky. I wasn't so uptight about sex that we had to be in a bed every single time we had it, but there's a big difference between being in the privacy of your own home and being in the workplace. And for us, our workplace involved children. Sure, the children we worked with were old enough to understand what sex was but that didn't mean we should be giving a public display for them. Not to mention, I didn't really think it was anyone's business.

I wasn't a kiss and tell kind of girl. Amelia and Pam knew that Eric and I had slept together, and that was really more than enough. I didn't need my students coming to class and giving me the hairy eyeball over it. I got enough leers from male students, thank you very much. I wasn't stupid. I'd had a teacher in high school that I'd had a crush on. I'd never acted on it, of course, but I'd had one. It was hard not to. I saw him five days a week. He was smart and funny. He was totally gorgeous. He talked to me like an adult and encouraged me to follow my passions. I can honestly say that if it weren't for him, I'm not sure I would have become a history teacher.

But I was also smart enough to know it was just a crush and a little bit of hero worship. I didn't try to convince myself that he could ever be anything more than my teacher. I saw the way Eric's female students looked at him and I worried that if he and I were spotted fooling around on school grounds that not only might we lose our jobs, but that female students might start to come forward to accuse him of sexual misconduct. I didn't want that. I didn't want that one bit.

Eric's hands sank from my jaw where he'd been holding my face, down to my chest where he started to unbutton my shirt. I let him and made a promise to myself that we wouldn't go any further than the old school measure of second base. In no time at all, he got my shirt off. His mouth trailed down my neck, nipping and sucking at various spots until he found one that had my back arching. I felt him smile against my skin.

"No hickeys. We're too old for that." I muttered and he laughed quietly.

"Yes, Miss Stackhouse." He said in a deep voice that had me shivering. So unfair.

I tugged his shirt off not long after that. I was surprised that he didn't try to take off my bra but was thankful that he didn't. If he did, then stopping would have been that much harder. Part of me- and I know exactly which part- was screaming at me that I was being silly. We'd already slept together. What would be the big deal if we did it again? The rest of me wanted this to be about something other than sex and if we just fell into bed every time we got within arm's reach of one another, that wasn't going to happen.

When I pulled away and reached for my shirt, Eric had a dazed look on his face. I could feel that my lips were swollen and a little sore from kissing for so long but it was a delicious feeling I hadn't felt in a very long time. I found I was excited about Eric and not just in a sex way. The newness of him was something I didn't want to take for granted. I wanted to enjoy it for as long as it could last.

"I think we should continue this tomorrow." I said as I buttoned up my shirt.

"Study hall?" Eric teased, his fingers ghosting up my spine like they'd done earlier.

I let out a quiet moan and leaned into him and kissed him slowly. "No, not in study hall. We have a date, remember?"

"Trust me, it's been on my mind." He pulled me closer and kissed me again.

When he moved to deepen the kiss I pulled back. Always leave them wanting more, right? "It's getting late."

He sighed and his head sank back. "Damn school nights."

"It'll be morning before you know it." I climbed off his lap and walked across the room to get my shoes on.

"Let me walk you to your car." He offered, but I stopped him.

"Mmm, I don't think so." I gave him a mischievous grin.

"Why not?" He pouted at me.

"Because if you walk me to my car you're going to want to kiss me goodnight and I can't stand out there in these shoes for another hour while you do." I picked up my purse and slung it over my shoulder.

"Those are wonderful shoes." Eric gave me a hungry look as his eyes swept my body.

"Be a good boy and I'll wear them for you again." I winked at him.

He growled and then pushed me up against the front door with his lips crashing down on mine. He kissed me until we were breathless again and I pushed him away. The part of me that didn't want to leave was very angry at me for being so stubborn. I bit my lower lip to keep myself from saying, "Fuck it."

I stepped out of the way and Eric unlocked his front door for me. "I had a lovely evening with you, Miss Stackhouse."

"So did I, Mr. Northman. I'll see you tomorrow." I smiled up at him.

He offered me one last kiss on the back of my hand and then opened the screen door for me. He held it as I walked past him, inhaling the smell of my hair as I went. I walked down the front steps and across the street to my car. I turned before getting in and I blew him a kiss.

Then before my lady business could talk me into changing my mind, I went home.

I left my house a little earlier than I had the day before so I could stop for coffee. My impromptu dinner with Eric had prevented me from stopping to buy a new coffee maker. I would need to do that on my way home. I arrived at the school just before seven. Like the day before, Eric was running around the track when I pulled up and parked in the same space as I usually did. I stopped when I got to the chain link fence to watch him run. He looked damn good jogging along, lost in his own world.

When he came down the straight away and saw me standing there watching him, he smiled at me. I walked closer to the entrance of the school so we'd be blocked a bit more if he stopped to say hello, which, of course, he did. I held my coffee cup in one hand and my keys in the other.

"Good morning," He stepped close to the fence like he was caged in.

"Good morning to you. I don't know how you get up and go running every morning. It's all I can do to get my bones out of bed and be here on time." I sighed and sipped my coffee.

"I like exercise in the morning. Gets your heart rate up and sets the tone for the day."

"So you run every morning, then?"

"Only when I don't have," He looked me up and down, taking in the gray pants that were slung low on my hips and the pale pink v-neck tank top I was wearing. "Other ways of getting my heart rate up."

"I'm sure that's not all you get up." I smirked at him.

"Language, Miss Stackhouse. There might be minors present." He clucked his tongue at me.

"This from the man who suggested we continue last night in study hall?"

"That was last night." He shrugged and pressed himself against the fence. "What time should I come by later?"

"How's six?" It seemed early but I was the sort who needed at least seven hours of sleep if I was going to be tolerable to be around and I was sure we'd need time for something other than eating.

"Sounds perfect." He agreed. "Can I bring anything?"

"Just you." I stepped closer and looked around to make sure we were alone. "So, I'll see you in study hall, then?"

"If not sooner."

My breath caught at the idea of being yanked into a dark hallway by him but I quickly chased that idea from my head. *Boundaries, Sookie, we just discussed them last night*, I chided myself. Eric seemed to be having thoughts similar to my own.

"Not on school grounds, remember?" I used my best strict teacher voice.

"You're a hard ass."

"I try." I shrugged, but then broke my own rule by leaning forward and kissing him quickly. "Enjoy your run, Mr. Northman."

"Oh, I plan to. I'll see you later, Miss Stackhouse."

I turned to see him put his earbuds back in and then be on his way. I couldn't stop the grin that spread across my face as I walked into the school to start my day.

When I got down to study hall that afternoon I saw Eric sitting at the same table as the day before, waiting for me to take my seat beside him. I stopped in my tracks and smiled at him. I got a very clear message from my lady business that I was wasting perfectly good flirting time by standing there, but the more rational side of my brain told me to sit somewhere else to avoid a potentially big problem. When I had to stand there and have a debate with myself, I knew I was officially in big trouble.

In the end, the rational side won out once again, and while I did smile and wave in Eric's direction, I chose another chair on the other side of the room. He looked over at me with confusion and I'm sure he wondered what the hell I was doing sitting way over on the other side of the room. I just shrugged in response with a wicked grin on my face. He shook his head and went back to his laptop that was perched in front of him.

I got my computer set up and logged into my email. I was in the process of sending an email to the girls from last year's Pom squad to let them know try outs would be the following Wednesday. No one was guaranteed a walk onto my squad. If they wanted to be on it, they'd have to try out all over again just like they had in previous years. To me, that was the only fair way to do it. I had just sent the email when a new one popped into my box from none other than Eric.

I grinned like a big dork and clicked on the message, and before I knew it, we were emailing back and forth.

**TO: Sookie Stackhouse**

**FROM: Eric Northman**

**SUBJECT: You're Too Far Away**

Sookie,

What are you doing sitting all the way over there? I was looking forward to sitting with you, even if we can't talk. But I guess this will have to do. How's your day going?

Eric

**TO: Eric Northman**

**FROM: Sookie Stackhouse**

**SUBJECT: Re: You're Too Far Away**

Eric,

If I sit next to you now there's a big chance at least one of us won't be able to behave and then what will we have to look forward to later? I *am* a lady, after all. Besides, how did you get my email address? You aren't stalking me, are you?

Sookie

**TO: Sookie Stackhouse**

**FROM: Eric Northman**

**SUBJECT: You don't play fair**

No, I'm not stalking you. I figured that if I have a school email address, you must, too. Either that, or this is all a big jedi mind trick. And I think there's plenty to look forward to later. I don't know what I'm more excited about... dinner or dessert. I'm fairly certain that whatever you plan on cooking up for me with be delicious.

**TO: Eric Northman**

**FROM: Sookie Stackhouse**

**SUBJECT: Watch your tone**

If this is a jedi mind trick, it's a good one. As for later- you'll just have to wait and see. I'm not a big schemer, so don't get your hopes up too high. I'm not very diabolical. But I most certainly do have a plan for dessert. It'll melt in your mouth ;)

**TO: Sookie Stackhouse**

**FROM: Eric Northman**

**SUBJECT: Tease**

Now who needs to watch who's tone? I don't suppose I could talk you into meeting me in a dark hallway for a taste of said dessert that will melt in my mouth?

**TO: Eric Northman**

**FROM: Sookie Stackhouse**

**SUBJECT: Re: Tease**

Mr. Northman,

I believe we had a discussion in regards to the rules last night. There will be no meeting in dark hallways to sample dessert. I would hate to spend the first course of our dinner this evening disciplining you for being naughty. Don't test me. I'll do it. I *am* a hard ass, remember?

Sincerely,

Miss Stackhouse

After I sent that email, I looked over Eric's way and waited for him to receive it. The look on his face was priceless, as was the shift in his chair. The fact that I made him squirm a little bit had me smiling from ear to ear. When he looked my way he just about leveled me with a look that was so intense I did a little squirming of my own. Maybe emailing back and forth wasn't such a good idea after all.

**TO: Sookie Stackhouse**

**FROM: Eric Northman**

**SUBJECT: Disciplinary Action**

Miss Stackhouse,

Please accept my formal apology for any offense I may have caused you, and allow me to explain my behavior. You see, I recently met this woman who seems to cause a short circuit in my brain every time I get near her. She's very beautiful and extremely sexy. It's hard to think about anything very rationally when she's around. If you were in my situation, I'm sure you would understand. But you should know that I am not above accepting the consequences for my indiscretions, particularly if you are the one to dole out the punishment.

Regards,

Mr. Northman

Damn, he was good at this. I had to bite back a giggle that would disrupt the entire room. I looked over at Eric to see the sly smirk on his face. I tried to come up with a response that would leave him squirming and wondering, when the bell rang. Ha! Saved by the bell! I closed my computer and began to gather my things. Eric walked over to my table, trying to make it look like he was casually passing me on his way out. His fingertips ghosted the back of my neck and then he was gone.

On my way home I stopped at the grocery store to pick up some last minute ingredients I knew I didn't have stocked in my kitchen. Then I ran into Target going straight to where the coffee makers were to keep myself from walking out with a $100 in merchandise I didn't need. I don't know what it is about that store, but every time I went in there it seemed like things just jumped into my cart.

There are few things I will splurge on, and coffee was one of them. I probably paid more for the machine than I should but I knew it would be worth it. Amelia had one and I had been envying her for as long as we'd been neighbors. I realized, as I was walking to my car, that my old maker had done me a favor by breaking since I could now justify the purchase of the machine I was holding.

I raced home so I could get changed out of my work clothes. The last thing I needed was to get spattered with barbecue sauce while manning the grill on my deck. I planned to enjoy eating outside for as long as the weather would permit. It was a bit muggy outside but I was used to that. I parked in my garage to avoid Amelia coming out to chat. I really didn't have the time for it. Besides, I knew she'd be popping in the next morning while I was getting ready for work so I could tell her all about dinner. She'd caught me coming in the night before and stared me down with knowing eyes. On school nights I was rarely home past five if I wasn't working with my squad. She knew something was up and she didn't hesitate to tell me she had a pretty good idea she knew what that thing was.

I traded in my work clothes for a pair of snug jeans and Nirvana t-shirt. I debated wearing something a bit dressier since this was supposed to be a date but the whole point of it was for Eric to get to know me, and I was a jeans and t-shirts sort of girl on most days. I definitely had fancier attire in my closet but I didn't see the point of hauling it out so I could stand over a grill or a stove for an hour. Besides, something told me he would appreciate a tight t-shirt and snug jeans than he would an almost shapeless shift dress I would have to cinch at the waist. I wanted to be comfortable and relaxed and I wouldn't be if I was fidgeting with my clothes every few minutes.

I had just started the grill when there was a knock at the door. It was five minutes until six. My heart skipped a beat and I had to tell myself to breathe normally. I restrained myself from running to the front door. When I got there I opened it to find Eric standing on my porch. He had a new bottle of wine in one hand and flowers in the other.

"You're early." I smiled at him.

"Well, I got the impression that I was already in trouble earlier and I didn't want to risk raising your ire by being tardy, Miss Stackhouse. Punctuality is important." He said in a teasing tone.

"Yes, Mr. Northman, I take tardiness very seriously." I grinned at him and he handed over the flowers. Simple white daises. I loved them. "Come in."

Eric walked into the house and held up the wine. "I know you said I didn't need to bring anything, but this is pretty good stuff and goes well with chicken."

I took the bottle from him and checked the label. Good vintage. "Thanks. I'm just getting started on the prep stuff. I ended up having to make a few stops on my way home so I'm a little bit behind."

He followed me into the kitchen where I had chicken breasts on a plate waiting to be seasoned so I could get them on the grill. "Need any help?"

"How are you at peeling potatoes?" I asked over my shoulder.

"Pretty Ninja."

"Ninja, huh?" I handed over a vegetable peeler.

"Yep, ninja."

He got to work peeling the potatoes while I snipped fresh green beans. We worked side by side and talked about things that were happening at school already. I filled him in my try outs in the next week. He told me about a kid who got smacked in the face with a volleyball earlier and ended up in the nurse's office with a possible broken nose. The conversation was easy and it felt like we'd known each other for years instead of just a few days.

I rinsed my hands and decided to turn on some music. I loved music and almost always had it on. "So, Mr. Northman, what are your musical preferences?"

"What do you have?"

"You name it, I've probably got it, or something awfully close to it." I scanned the playlists on my iPod.

"I'm a pretty big fan of early to mid 90s rock."

"Oh?" I turned to smile at him and held out my t-shirt as much as I could. "So this gets you going?"

Eric nodded and said, "Yeah, and the band is pretty good, too."

I would have rolled my eyes if my blush wouldn't have beat me to a reaction. "Alright, then grunge it is."

The first song that came up was "Sex Type Thing" by Stone Temple Pilots. I don't think a more perfect song could have played right at that moment- if you ignore the possible allusion to rape. Eric and I both laughed. As I made my way back to the counter to start dicing up the potatoes that he'd peeled for me.

"You know, you're right? You *are* pretty ninja." I nudged him with my hip.

"I can't believe you ever doubted me. You should see what I can do with a carrot."

I giggled and said, "I'm sure it's a sight to behold."

Eric finished peeling the potatoes and then leaned against the counter next to me. "I had a dream the other night and this song was in it."

"Really? You think it was a psychic thing?" I was only slightly teasing. I had dreams all the time where something happened that would end up happening in the future. It was freaky as all hell, mostly because I had no way of knowing when those things would occur.

"If it weren't for the fact that the song was playing when I woke up, I probably would." He explained with a smile.

"What was your dream about?" I looked over at him. He shifted a little, clearly uncomfortable with answering the question. "You don't have to tell me if you don't want to."

"It's not that I don't want to tell you so much as I'm not sure it's first date appropriate subject matter."

"Really?" I arched an eyebrow. I was slightly intrigued. "We weren't, like, getting married in your dream, were we?"

Eric laughed and said, "Nope, definitely not married. Lets just say we were definitely breaking some of the workplace rules we've discussed."

"Ah ha." I grinned and dumped my diced potatoes into a waiting pot. "Speaking of, it's a good thing the bell rang when it did this afternoon or I think we would have gotten ourselves into some serious hot water."

"Were you not having fun?"

I reached into one of the drawers to get a corkscrew so Eric could open the wine. "I was having a little too much fun. Therein lies the problem." I handed over the odd piece of metal.

Eric went to work opening the wine and I had to force myself not to stare at his arms while he did it. All that flexing and twitching wasn't very good for keeping my lady business quiet since it was so anxious to get back in the driver's seat in the decision making department. Instead, I busied myself with getting the potatoes cooking and the beans steaming. The chicken wouldn't take very long to cook in comparison to everything else and I had it down to a science.

I retrieved wine glasses from a cabinet and put them down on the counter next to Eric. I left him briefly to go check the grill to make sure it was up to temperature. So far, everything was going according to plan, which made me nervous. The evil pessimist that lived in the back of my mind was taunting me, telling me that eventually something was going to get fucked up. I took a few deep breaths and then turned to go back inside, only to find Eric coming with two glasses in his hands.

"Thank you." I took the glass he offered me.

He held out his glass to me for a toast and with a devilish smirk he said, "To disciplinary action."

I giggled and said, "I'll drink to that."

Amelia just so happened to choose that moment to come thundering outside on a great big huff. "He can turn on that stupid PS2 but can he turn on the water? *No!* I swear, one of these days that damn machine is going in the wood chipper!" Amelia stomped around her deck and then water appeared up in the air over the high fence that separated our properties. "Men!" She shouted for good measure and then went back in the house.

"Uh oh." I shook my head.

"Looks like someone's in the doghouse." Eric agreed.

"Oh, you have *no* idea." I couldn't help but laugh. "Living next door to those two is like living next door to the Ricardos sometimes."

Eric burst out laughing. "And here I thought I had it rough with my neighbor being the Red Menace."

"Red Menace?" Before I knew it my hand had flung itself out to rest on his chest while I doubled over laughing. After getting a look at his neighbor the day before I knew all too well how accurate that nickname was.

"She asked about you again this morning when I took Jeter outside." Eric informed me.

"What'd you tell her?"

"Absolutely nothing. Who you are is none of her business." Eric sipped his wine.

There was a little part of me that was disappointed that the word 'girlfriend' hadn't come out of his mouth, but I was immediately chastising myself for that. I was a bit stunned by own revelation. Did I want to be Eric's girlfriend? Did I want him telling people I was his girlfriend? Yes, I think I did. Huh. You could have knocked me over with a feather at that moment.

"Sookie, are you okay?" Eric asked nervously and I realized what my face must have looked like.

"Oh, yeah, sorry." I shook my head and smiled with a hint of embarrassment.

He looked like he was going to say something but then quickly changed his mind. "I can handle this out here if you need to do stuff inside."

My heart sank a little further. He wanted to be away from me. "That would be great, thanks." I put on my emergency smile and headed toward the house.

"Sookie," He called to me when I was getting to the screen door and turned him. "I didn't call you my girlfriend because we haven't talked about it yet, not because I don't want you to be."

Goodbye emergency smile, hello happy dance! "Okay." I grinned at him for real, and then went into the house.

**Awwwwww! They're off to a pretty good start, wouldn't you say? I've got the next chapter ready to go. The ebil tease that lives in my brain wants to taunt you and make you wait until tomorrow to get Eric's take on the date while my obsessive fangirl side is all hyper and ready to post. Decisions, decisions \*twists fake mustache\***

**Tell ya what...if anyone can spot a reference in this chapter, then I'll post again. It's discrete, but it's there. Thanks for reading!**

**Chapter 8: The Girlfriend Experience**

In addition to being a kick ass fic writer in her own right, you all have **LindsayK** to thank for this chapter being posted since she was the first one to spot my reference in the last chapter. Seriously, go read her work. She's amazing.

Just so you know, I plan for Johan to be the Iceman type. Who didn't love ASkars in Generation Kill? If you haven't seen it, you should pause reading this story and go find it. The singing in the humvees alone makes it worth it. \*sings\* Loooooooving you is easy 'cause you're beautiful...

**I now also own Annika, in addition to Johan and Jeter. I'm collecting Northmans like no other. Unfortunately, the one I want most still isn't mine. \*stomps foot\* Would it kill Charlaine Harris to share the love?**

Chapter Eight: The Girlfriend Experience

**Eric**

The look on Sookie's face worried me. She looked a little heartbroken all of a sudden and it took me a minute to figure out the reason why. Or, at least I thought I knew the reason why. But rather than try and push for something more than what she might be comfortable with, I thought I'd put the ball back in her court.

"Sookie, are you okay?" I asked gently, pulling her back from her thoughts.

"Oh, yeah, sorry." She shook my head and gave me a faint smile.

I was so tempted to explain my reasons for not telling the Red Menace what Sookie's roll was in my life, but decided maybe I was being ridiculous. Maybe she just needed some space. "I can handle this out here if you need to do stuff inside."

What little smile there was on her face completely disappeared. "That would be great, thanks." Sookie recovered quickly, pasting on a smile that was anything but genuine. When she was really smiling, it reached her eyes, and at that moment her eyes were still sad.

"Sookie," I called out to her before she could get back in the house. "I didn't call you my girlfriend because we haven't talked about it yet, not because I don't want you to be."

Her head whipped around to see the smile on my face. "Okay." Her real smile appeared and I couldn't help but wonder if we'd just had 'the girlfriend' talk. Sookie left me outside to tend to the chicken while she finished up whatever she was making inside. She leaned over the sink inside and called to me from the window. "You should turn the chicken in two minutes."

"Yes, boss." I smiled at her, causing yet another signature flush to rise on her face.

I did as I was told and six minutes after that Sookie appeared with a bottle of barbecue sauce and a brush. I watched her baste the chicken and turn down the heat just a little before moving the chicken up to the higher rack on the grill. I was impressed by how comfortable she seemed cooking over the fire. Most girls I'd met in the past didn't really seem to know what they were doing.

"So, how much longer, Pit Master?" I asked.

"Depends on how long it takes the sauce to caramelize a little. As soon as that happens, it's done." Sookie winked at me. "Just keep the lid on it. I have to go mash the potatoes."

I watched from the deck as she got out a handheld mixer to finish her potatoes. She pulled a small jar from the fridge and added a spoonful of something I couldn't see, along with a handful of shredded cheese. I smiled to myself at noticing she wasn't a girl who was afraid to eat. I'd gotten that impression the night before when she'd dug into the cheeseburger I'd made her without complaint, but she could have just been showcasing her manners. Her choice of menu for our first date showed that her appetite wasn't at all connected to the etiquette she'd been raised with.

"How's the chicken look?" Sookie asked through the kitchen window.

I lifted the lid of the grill and smiled. "If smell is any indication, it's ready."

"Sweet!" Sookie grabbed two plates and brought them outside.

I put one piece of chicken on each plate and then followed her back into the house after turning off the grill. "So, what do we have here?" I asked once I was standing next to her in front of the stove.

"Steamed green beans and cheesy garlic mashed potatoes." She smiled up at him as she dipped a spoon into the pan of potatoes.

"Garlic, huh?"

"Well, you got me with onions last night."

"So this is my punishment then?"

Sookie laughed and said, "Hardly. I have big plans for you, Mr. Northman." There was that blush again.

"I hope that's a promise and not a threat." I bent and kissed the top of her head.

She froze where she stood and took a deep breath to steady herself. "I guess you'll just have to wait and see."

We took our food outside and sat at the table on her deck. Sookie lit some tiki torches that were mounted around the perimeter, as well as a big candle that was at the center of the table. With my first bite, I found out that Sookie Stackhouse was one hell of a cook.

"This is amazing." I smiled at her.

"Thank you." She gave me a shy smile of her own.

"Where did you learn how to cook?"

"I grew up in the south. It's almost a religion." She wiped her mouth on a napkin before I could lick the barbecue sauce off of her like I wanted to. "My Dad is really good with a grill, and since my brother is easily the most domestically challenged man I've ever met, Daddy named me his sioux chef."

"Do you have any other siblings?"

"Just Jason. He got married this summer, so I guess I have a sister now, too, but I don't really know Crystal all that well. I've been away from home for too long and keeping up with someone like Jason isn't easy."

"What's he like?" I found myself curious, but then I wanted to know everything about her. Her family was certainly a big part of the reason she was who she was.

Sookie's brows furrowed together in thought as she tried to figure out how to describe her brother to me. "Well, Jason is an interesting study, I suppose. He's a bit of a good ole boy and a homebody. He likes his little plot of land with his pond out back he can go fish in if he wants. I guess you could say he's a redneck in a lot of ways. He never went to college, skated through high school on his looks, charm and athletic abilities. He's a bit of a womanizer, so when he called me up to tell me he was getting married I was pretty surprised. I figured the only way I was gonna be Auntie Sookie was if the condom broke or Amelia had a baby. Jason may not be the sharpest tool in the shed, but he's got a good heart. If anyone ever actually required him to think he might find out he's actually really smart. He's just never had a good reason to use his brain."

"Sounds like an interesting person."

"He has his moments, trust me." Sookie rolled her eyes.

She told me about her parents and how they'd met when they were in high school. They'd had a shotgun wedding when her mother found out she was pregnant with Jason. They'd been happily married for the last twenty-nine years. She told me she also had an aunt, her father's sister, a cousin- who was married with a child of her own- and her Gran.

"I don't have a lot of family, but the family I have is important to me. Leaving them was the hardest part of going away to college. I thought about moving back after things fell apart with Quinn." She confessed to me, and then looked ashamed of herself for mentioning her ex.

"Well, for what it's worth, I'm glad you decided to stay."

"So am I. Don't get me wrong, meeting you has been..." She trailed off while searching for the right word. "Mmmm, I guess I'll say unexpected- but in a good way. But I stayed because of my job. I love my kids and I like working in this area. If I would have gone back to Bon Temps I'm not sure I would have been any happier."

She told me about the town she'd grown up in and some of the people she knew growing up. It sounded like a typical small town to me. "So Bon Temps is the kind of place where people still sleep with their doors unlocked?"

"And wide open in the summertime." Sookie smiled at me before sipping her wine. "It took me a while to get used to not doing that here. Once in a while I'll leave the patio door open at night, but not usually. Air conditioning has become a bigger necessity than it ever was before."

"I prefer open windows to air conditioning myself." I agreed with her. "Which makes it really difficult to live here sometimes."

"Did you grow up around here?"

"Nope. I'm a military brat. My father was in the Marines, so I've been around."

"Lucky." Sookie sat back in her chair and crossed her legs. "So what was it like, moving from place to place?"

I thought about it for a moment before answering. "I hated it when we were kids. All three of us did."

"Three of you? I thought you just had a brother?"

"I have an older sister as well." I set down my fork. "Her name is Annika. She wasn't in that picture you saw at my house because she died when she was seventeen."

"Oh, Eric, I'm sorry." Sookie's face darkened. "You don't have to talk about it if you don't want to."

"I don't mind." That wasn't always the case. In fact, talking about Annika's death had been very painful for a very long time. "She was out with some friends the night it happened. We'd been in California for three years, which was a record for us. Dad was stationed at Camp Pendleton after a two year stint in San Diego. Annika never had any trouble fitting in wherever she went. I think it was harder for Johan and I because we had gotten so used to being one another's best friend that we didn't really feel the need to include anyone else. Annika was also five years older than us, so to her, we were just annoying little brothers who lived to torment her."

"Did you?" Sookie grinned at me like she already knew.

"Of course." I laughed. "Although, to be fair, Johan was the mastermind behind every single prank we pulled on her."

"I'll be sure to remember that if I ever meet him."

I wanted to say something about taking a trip to Sweden that I was planning to visit him. Since we had two weeks off for the holidays I was planning to spend them overseas. Dad was long since retired from the Corps and Mom had been complaining about not seeing Johan for so long. His schedule didn't really allow him time for vacations. Besides, it would be nice to see the snow, not that Chicago didn't get its fair share.

"I'm sorry, continue with your story." Sookie said when I got lost in my thoughts.

"The night she died, Johan and I were at some camp out at a friend's house down the road. Annika had gone out for a friend's birthday. They ended up partying on the beach and apparently, the friend who was celebrating his twenty-first birthday decided it would be okay if he liquored up my sister. I knew Annika liked to party pretty hard. She was never into drugs. In fact, she was firmly against that. She'd never used once and any of her friends would tell you that. She was always trying to get the ones who did to clean up. She said she didn't like what the drugs did to her friends. After a while, a friend that was on drugs would disappear. Their body would still be there, but the spark that made them who they were would be snuffed out by whatever they were taking.

"The big thing at that point was heroin. Smoking weed was for squares, according to some of the people she knew. So the night of the party on the beach she got really, really drunk with a bunch of her friends. Someone had the brilliant idea to go skinny dipping off the edge of a pier. Annika was trying to talk them out of it when someone grabbed her around her waist and jumped over the side of the pier. It was supposed to be a joke, but Annika hit her head on a rock and fractured her skull."

Sookie looked positively horrified by what I was telling her. It was a sad story. "Eric, I'm so sorry. That's awful." She looked like she was going to cry.

"It took a long time to get over. Honestly, I'm not sure I'll ever be over it." I told her.

"Of course not." Sookie pulled her chair closer to mine and grabbed my hand. "I know it's not the same, but my Grandad died when I was fourteen. Yes, he was an old man and lived a full life so the tragic factor is a less than it is for your sister, but I still miss him every day. I don't think that every goes away. You just learn to accept it and make a space in your heart for the person you lost."

"You know, the strange part is that I'm not sure if it's worse for us- Annika's family- or the kid that grabbed her that night. He tried to kill himself on the first anniversary of her death."

Sookie cringed and looked away. "That's terrible."

I remembered the look on my parents' faces when they heard the news. The boy who'd pulled Annika off the pier had suffered his own injuries as a result of the accident. No one thought he'd hurt her on purpose but he blamed himself for it all the same. My parents had liked the kid. He was well-mannered and respectful. His father was also a Marine. Annika's death understandably changed my parents. My mother went into a pretty severe depression and my father, who was already a little withdrawn because of the job, only became more distant in the immediate aftermath of Annika's death.

"I don't know how your parents survived it." Sookie shook her head like she was reading my mind. "I don't know how a mother buries her child."

"Mom had a hard time with it. That's part of the reason my parents weren't thrilled with Johan for leaving the country. They'd already lost one child they would never have back. They thought they were failures as parents to lose the other."

"But they haven't lost him." Sookie argued sweetly. "He's just following his heart, isn't he?"

"He is, but it's harder to see that when you've buried one of your babies, I guess." I really couldn't blame my parents for being upset with Johan for leaving. I was a little pissed at him too, even if I knew he was living the life he wanted to live.

We switched gears from there and lightened the topic since talking about death wasn't all that much fun. Sookie and I carried in our plates from dinner and I helped her clean up, overriding her insistence that I take a seat somewhere.

"You helped me last night. I'm just returning the favor."

"Somewhere your mother is proud of you." Sookie teased as she handed me a plate to put in the dishwasher. "How do your parents feel about you living here?"

"They'd prefer it if I would have moved back to California after I graduated from Duke, but I never really had much of a desire to stay there forever. Don't get me wrong, I love it there. I love surfing and spending time on the beach. There's nothing like a sunset at Laguna."

Sookie giggled at the mention of the town. "Laguna Beach, huh?"

"Yeah, yeah, joke all you want but it's beautiful."

"I've never been there. I've been to Texas, Arkansas, Mississippi, Wisconsin, Indiana and Michigan. Well, and I went to Washington D.C. one time on a class trip back in high school, but I've never been farther west than Dallas."

"We should go sometime." I figured I had nothing to lose by suggesting it.

"I'd like that." She smiled over at me. "I think you'd make an excellent tour guide."

We finished up the dishes and then Sookie forced me to sit on the couch in her family room. The Smashing Pumpkins filled the house. *We'll try and ease the pain, but somehow we'll feel the same. Well, no one knows where our secrets go.* The lyrics weren't lost on me and it made me smile. I heard the clattering of dishes and turned to see Sookie pulling ice cream from her freezer.

She had her back to me when I walked up behind her silently. She froze when I pulled her hair away from her neck and leaned down to whisper in her ear, "I'm not going to lie. When you said dessert would melt in my mouth, I was hoping for something else." I planted a kiss on her neck and felt her shiver.

Her breathing became a little jagged but she didn't pull away from me as she opened the ice cream lids. She picked up one of the spoons that was resting on the counter and turned her head toward me. "I've got chocolate mint chip and rocky road."

"Surprise me." Turns out that was the best thing I could have said at that particular moment.

Sookie spun around and kissed me. Hard. It seemed to go on forever and I didn't mind it one bit. Of course, the kiss ended all too soon. Without taking her eyes off mine, she dipped one of the spoons into the container of mint ice cream and held it out for me. I took it and then kissed her again. Best. Ice cream. Ever.

We went on like that until the ice cream was dangerously close to becoming a couple of puddles on her counter. At some point she'd gotten up on the counter but I couldn't remember if I'd lifted her, or if she'd done it herself. Either way, I was grateful for it since the height difference between us could be a little rough on the neck after a while.

"Who is this singing?" I asked her, listening closely to the words I was hearing in the background.

Sookie giggled and pressed her forehead to my chest. "Sarah McLachlan."

The song sounded vaguely familiar but it was perfect given the fact that Sookie had just attacked me in her kitchen and with ice cream, of all things. Sookie cleaned up the mess on her kitchen counter and when I looked at the clock, I realized it was after ten. I didn't realize that much time had gone by. Where did it all go?

"Damn." Sookie muttered, pulling me from my thoughts. I really needed to stop zoning out on her. It was becoming a bad habit.

"What?"

"My shirt." She looked down to point out a smudge of chocolate ice cream.

I figured she'd wipe it off with a wet paper towel, but instead she just peeled the shirt right off. I determined then that there was a distinct possibility this was the punishment she'd eluded to earlier. I sincerely hoped it wasn't. I watched her walk toward the hallway and open the sliding closet doors to reveal her washer. She left the shirt on top of it and closed the doors.

She started further down the hall before looking over her shoulder at me. "You coming?"

*Not yet*, I thought but kept my mouth shut. "Where are we going?"

"You're getting the rest of the tour." She held out her hand to me and waited for me to catch up to her.

"Sookie, I meant what I said when I was here on Saturday. If I go up there, I can't promise I'll be able to come back down, or behave myself while we're up there."

"Then I guess it's lucky for you that we're not on school grounds and the rules don't apply." She tugged me up the stairs behind her.

There was a grandfather clock on the landing. The first door on the right led into a bathroom. The door on the left hid a spare bedroom. Further down the hall on the left was her office and across the hall was her bedroom. Her bed was perfectly made- something my own rarely was unless I was having company- and covered over with a white comforter that had little purple flowers on it. The room was every bit as feminine as I would expect from Sookie. Sheer white curtains hung in front of side by side windows that offered a nice view of her backyard and the deck below.

There was a second bathroom attached to her room and there was another door that I assumed belonged to a closet. The furniture in her room looked heavy and solid. She surprised me when she told me her headboard had belonged to her grandparents and that he'd built it himself.

"It was a wedding present for Gran." Sookie lovingly ran her fingers over the hand-carved piece.

"It's beautiful. Was he a carpenter?"

"Not by trade. It was just a hobby for him, but he was always working on something. You should see the china hutch he built. It's amazing."

Sookie standing there in a pair of tight jeans and a bra was beyond distracting. My mind was rapidly losing the ability to consider polite conversation as an option. She looked amazing standing there. I tried to think of something to say that had nothing to do with sex or how much I wanted her in that moment, but she beat me to it.

"I need to ask you something." Sookie climbed up on her bed and sat on her knees, her hands resting on her thighs.

I did my best to keep my eyes on hers instead of her breasts, which were damn close to being on full display. "Shoot."

She gestured for me to sit down across from her. "Did you mean what you said earlier before dinner, or were you just trying to make me feel better?"

Ah, the girlfriend thing. "Well, I guess that depends on you. I like you, Sookie. I like you a lot and that doesn't happen for me. Ever." She looked shocked but I continued. "I can honestly say that I have never been in a serious relationship. I've never lived with another woman and I've never met one that I could see in my future in a significant way. But I can see those things with you."

Sookie opened her mouth to speak but then closed it, taking a moment to consider her response. She took a deep breath and let it out slowly. "I told you about Quinn and how things didn't work out, but I didn't really tell you why. I'm only telling you this now because I want you to understand where I'm coming from." I nodded my understanding and she continued. "I met Quinn when I was in college. He was a few years older than me and it was one of those love at first sight sort of things. Looking back on it now, I know that I only saw the things I wanted to see. The signs were there all along that it wasn't going to work but I ignored them because I loved him. I think he knew before I did that we were headed for disaster but rather than pulling the plug himself, he strung me along for a few years and let me think we were going to get married and have our own happily ever after.

"I did the stupid girl thing that a lot of girls do when they see their relationship is in trouble and I changed who I was to try and fix things. In the end, it didn't work out anyway. We were together for three years before I finally broke up with him. I stayed with him for so long because he promised me that one day we would move onto the next level. If he was really the one for me, he wouldn't have needed to wait for that perfect day. We would have just done it, you know? No questions asked. We would have sealed the deal.

"But that didn't happen. Getting out of that relationship wasn't easy for me. I haven't spoken to Quinn since we broke up last spring. I spent the first few weeks wondering if I made a huge mistake. I missed him a lot. If nothing else, we were really good friends. But I think by the end that's all we were to each other. That spark I'd felt for him in the beginning was gone. It'd been gone for a really long time. I know this probably bad first date juju, or something, to be talking about my last failed relationship like this but the thing is... as happy as I was with Quinn- at least in the beginning- it didn't feel like it does when I'm with you." Her hand snaked out to take mine. "Every time I see you I get this little rush. I don't want to make the mistake of taking on too much too fast but I want to move forward, and I want to move forward with you."

I didn't say anything at first. Mostly, I was wondering how far this Quinn guy had his head up his ass to let her get away. But his loss was my gain. If he couldn't give her what she wanted, I was damn sure going to try. Sookie was waiting for me to say something and my silence was only making her feel more uncomfortable than she already was.

"So I guess we're on the same page, then?" I smiled at her and it looked like the weight of the world was lifted off her shoulders.

Sookie moved across the bed and stretched forward to kiss me. She ended up pulling me down on top of her. We rolled around, jockeying for position until she was on top of me. She put my hands on her chest when our eyes met. Having a mind of their own, so it seemed, they moved around to her back to get rid of the lace contraption that was preventing us from being skin to skin. She bit her lower lip before lowering her mouth to mine. I could still taste the chocolate on her from the ice cream we'd only slightly indulged on between kisses in the kitchen.

I could have stayed like that forever, but then Sookie pulled back. "Where are you going?"

"It's getting late." She hopped off her bed. Hopping while topless. Not fair. I gave her a look of pure disbelief. She couldn't be serious. We'd been making out and fooling around for almost two hours. I would happily skip my morning jog if it meant waking up next to her. "I don't know about you, but I need my beauty sleep."

"You're already beautiful."

She smiled over her shoulder at me as she opened one of her dresser drawers. "That's sweet of you but it doesn't make time move any slower." She was serious.

"How am I supposed to sit across from you in study hall tomorrow?" I pouted at her.

"I'm sure you'll think of something." She pulled an oversized t-shirt down over her head. Funtime was officially over.

"Be careful what you wish for, Sookie." I was already forming a plan in my head.

"Is that a promise or a threat?" She used my words against me before reaching under her t-shirt to remove her jeans.

She made the mistake of turning her back to me to put her jeans in the hamper and that was when I pounced on her. She squealed and laughed as I dragged her back to her bed. I had her pinned underneath me and her arms over her head. She wrapped her legs around me and arched her back when I kissed a special spot on her neck that always seemed to get her going.

"Eric, we have to stop." She breathed against me.

"No, we don't." My lips moved around her neck, cursing the t-shirt she'd put on to sleep in. I moved my hips against hers, the fly of my jeans hitting her at just the right spot. She moaned loudly and arched her back in response.

"Eric," She whispered again a few minutes later, pushing lightly at my shoulders.

I sighed and pulled back. When she started to apologize for putting the brakes on, I felt like an ass. "Sookie, you don't have to apologize. I'm not going anywhere. This isn't a deal breaker."

"I just don't want too much too fast." She explained with a sheepish look on her face. "I know that sounds stupid since we already slept together."

"No, it doesn't. And I can actually say with 100 percent certainty that you are worth waiting for. I've never met anyone like you." I kissed the back of her hand.

The best part of spouting off that particularly cheesy line I'd just thrown at her was that it was all true. The sex had been amazing the night we met and I definitely wanted more of it, but I wouldn't try to talk her into something she wasn't ready for. If we were going to make this work and evolve into something more than just a one night stand then I was going to have to be patient. I would give her all the time she needed, as painful as it might be in the process.

"I never met anyone like you before either." She linked her hand with mine.

I laid down next to her and pulled her close. "Just ten minutes, and then I'll go. I promise." I wrapped my arm around her when her head settled on my chest.

"Ten minutes." She snuggled against me.

Five minutes later we were both asleep.

**\*peeks out from hiding place\* Okay, so there was lemon zest, but no full on lemonade. It's coming, baby birds, I promise! Don't give up on these two. There's all sorts of naughty, good fun around the bend, but Eric keeps telling me he's not into a "wham, bam, thank you ma'am" relationship with Sookie, and I tend to agree with him.**

**Thanks for reading!**

**Chapter 9: Sleep Study**

Hi there, baby birds! I'm sorry there was no update yesterday. We got a new modem earlier this week and Comcast refused to recognize it on their end. Laaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaame. So I was sans interwebs for almost 48 hours. Totes not cool. But, I'm back and I've got the dose of lemonade y'all have been clamoring for \*squeeeeeeeee\* Thank you for all of your reviews, comments, PMs and alerts. You rock my socks \*hugs\*

**I'm still collecting Northmans, but the one I want most, I don't own \*pouts\***

Chapter Nine: Sleep Study

**Sookie**

The sound of my doorbell ringing was what woke me. My eyes fluttered open and I realized I wasn't alone in bed. I was still curled around Eric, who had his arm around me. I smiled and kissed his chest before looking over at the clock next to the bed. It was 6:30!

"Shit!" I shouted and jumped off the bed. "Eric, wake up! We're late!"

The doorbell rang again and I ran down the stairs to see who the hell was at my house so early in the morning. My face fell when I realized it was Quinn standing there. What the fuck? I groaned and threw the door open before he could ring the bell a third time.

"What are you doing here?" I snapped at him.

"Who's car is that in your driveway?" He snapped right back.

"None of your business. What do you want?"

"I was in the neighborhood and I saw a strange car in your driveway."

"And?"

"And I didn't know if something was wrong." Lame.

"Quinn, now isn't a good time, okay? I'm late. I forgot to set my alarm this morning."

"Since when do you need an alarm? You always got up every morning at six like clockwork."

"Again, it's not really any of your business." I sighed. Just then, water came on upstairs.

"You're not here alone, are you?" Nothing, and I mean nothing, ever got past Quinn.

"No, Quinn, I'm not. Now could you please go?"

"You're seeing someone?" He looked hurt. I couldn't tell you why. Did he think I would stay single forever? He probably did.

"Yes, Quinn, I am."

"Who is he?"

I groaned and fought the urge to slam the door in his face. "Seriously, Quinn, now is not the time. I have to go." *Then* I slammed the door in his face.

I raced upstairs and began to go through my closet. Once I'd found what I wanted to wear I stripped off my clothes. Eric Northman was about to be a very happy man. Without warning I got into the shower behind him.

"Hope you don't mind." I reached around him for the bodywash.

Eric looked me up and down and smiled. "Anytime you want to shower with me, you're welcome to."

"Don't get too excited about it. I'm only doing this because we're both running late." If we had just a few extra minutes to spare, it'd be game on.

"And I still have to stop at home and change clothes." Eric reminded me.

I groaned as we traded places so I could rinse off. My shower was definitely not built for two people, especially when one of them was as big as Eric. "I'm sorry, Eric. I can't believe I fell asleep. I'm not usually such a heavy sleeper."

"Sounds like you were pretty comfortable."

"I was." I'd slept a little too well.

"Then next time we just have to make sure to set the alarm first." He grabbed the shampoo and poured some in his hand.

I wasn't expecting it when he began to lather up my hair for me. I smiled up at him, enjoying the little scalp massage I was getting out of the deal. Slowly, the tension that had quickly gathered started to fade. By the time he was done washing my hair I felt as good as I did when I first woke up to see him laying next to me.

"It was nice waking up next to you." I confessed to him.

He bent to kiss me and the next thing I knew I was up against the tile wall. It was cold and we were running out of time, but I didn't care. I didn't have to be at the high school until first period started, which was at 7:35. I got there at 7:00 because I wanted to. It gave me time to go over my plans for the day and drink a full cup of coffee in relative peace and quiet. It became pretty obvious that I was going to have to forgo those things.

One minute I was kissing Eric and the next he was on his knees in front of me. I gulped for air and grabbed onto the towel bar just outside the shower when he lifted one of my legs and put it over his shoulder. He kissed the inside of my thigh and slowly worked his way up. My head rolled to the side and my eyes closed as my breathing sped up to try and catch my heartbeat.

"Sookie, look at me." Eric whispered against my hot skin, sending shivers all through me.

I looked down at him and watched his tongue dart out. I squirmed in a delicious way that had him smiling as he went to work. He licked, flicked, sucked and nibbled my most sensitive parts. My lady business was doing a victory dance and very clearly telling the rest of me to shut up and let Eric do what he did best. When my hips began to rock against him, he slid two of his very long fingers inside me and stroked quickly.

"Oh, Eric, I'm so close." I was breathing like I'd just run a 10k marathon.

He curled his fingers in response and found my sweet spot. I made a choked noise and gripped the towel bar until my knuckles were white. My other leg started to give out under the waves of pleasure that were rolling through my body. I gasped and panted my way through the aftershocks. Eric placed one more kiss on me before standing up.

I pulled his face to mine and kissed him hard. When I reached between us to return the favor, Eric stepped back and turned off the water. "We don't have time for that, Sookie."

I sputtered for a second, completely stunned. "But... you're... I can't..."

"I wanted to taste you so I did. That's all I wanted." He stepped out of the tub and grabbed the towel off the rack and handed it to me.

It took me a minute to get my limbs to move properly. I stood up and wrapped the towel around me. "Wait right here." I went to the hall closet and got a towel for Eric. We dried off quickly and Eric dressed in the same clothes he'd been wearing the night before.

"I'll see you at school." Eric kissed the top of my head.

"I'll walk you downstairs." I started to follow him.

"It's okay, I know the way. You should finish getting ready. I'll see you in a few hours." He promised.

"Wait!" I called out when he got to the top of the stairs. I ran down the hall and pulled his face to mine to kiss him one more time. "I had a really good time last night. Thank you."

He looked at me with a smile in his eyes. "So did I. Now go get dressed." He smacked my ass when I turned away and I yelped.

He laughed all the way down the stairs and out the front door. I made my way back to my bedroom and stopped to stare at my bed. It was going to smell like Eric when I climbed into it later that night. I grinned and then went about getting ready for work.

Much to my surprise there was a shiny red apple sitting front and center on my desk when I got to my classroom and I had no doubt who had left it there for me. I picked it up and held it to my lips for just a second but I didn't take a bite. I felt my heart swell a little. I couldn't recall a time when I'd been so happy. It didn't matter to me one bit that I'd left the house with wet hair and no makeup on. I didn't care about being late.

All that mattered to me as I drove to work was that I'd be close to Eric again. My heart fluttered at the mere thought of him and after the little treat I'd gotten in the shower, my lady business was doing a little fluttering of its own. Then to walk into my classroom to find a present from him when he'd been running so far behind himself... I was officially falling for him.

Concentrating on the ancient Middle East wasn't easy but I managed to get through my morning classes. By the time I was heading down to study hall in the afternoon, I was beyond excited to see Eric. I'd hoped to catch a glimpse of him while I just happened to be walking around during my free period earlier in the morning but that didn't happen. I dropped my things at the table I planned to sit at and then went to wait for Eric.

There were a few different entrances to the dingy old room. I'd come from the south end and I was pretty sure Eric would be coming from the north. In addition to the study hall, the transportation offices were down there along with the art classes. The kiln room for firing ceramics was down there, as well as the dark room for the photography class. There was also a vacant office that used to belong to the head of the maintenance department before he was moved to another section of the basement. With my master key in hand, I quietly unlocked that office and put a stopper in the door to keep it open.

I was about to break another one of my rules. When I saw Eric turn the corner, my heart just about stopped beating. I couldn't stop myself from smiling at him. I curled a finger at him for him to follow me into the small room I was standing in front of. He grinned and did as I asked. No sooner was the door closed than I was pushed up against it and his mouth was on mine.

"What happened to no fooling around on school grounds?" Eric asked when he pulled away.

"I'm making an exception. Don't fight it." I reached for the fly of his jeans.

"Sookie, are you sure you-"

"Shhh." I whispered and unzipped him.

He didn't talk after that. My hand wrapped around him and started stroking quickly. I knew we didn't have a whole lot of time and it would look suspicious if we both walked in at the same time if we were late. I nibbled on his neck and ear as I stroked, his hands settling on my breasts and feeling them over the material of my dress.

When I suddenly pulled away from Eric he looked confused. When I dropped to knees in front of him his eyes clouded over with lust. I took as much of him as I could in my mouth and used my hand on the rest. His head flew back and hit the door relatively hard. I found out then that giggling and blow jobs don't mix, but I didn't stop. I looked up at him to see he was watching me. One arm was flung out to brace himself against the wall to his left. The other stayed at his side, his fingertips gripping the door.

"Sookie..." There was warning in his voice and I redoubled my efforts. He growled as quietly as he could and then he released.

I continued to stroke with my hand while I swallowed, thereby eliminating the worry I had about clean up from a simple hand job. I released him from my mouth and tucked him back in his pants before standing up straight. He pulled my mouth to his and kissed me hard. His fingers slipped into my hair while I fastened his jeans.

The bell rang, signaling the start of eighth period. Eric leaned down and whispered in my ear, "Do you have any idea how badly I want to fuck you right now, up against this door?"

I groaned and felt my knees go a little bit weak. "We can discuss it over email, Mr. Northman." I kissed the inside of his wrist since his hands were cupping my face.

He pulled my mouth to his once more but I cut off the kiss before we could get too deep in it. "You go first. I need a minute." Eric told me.

I nodded and then opened the door. I pushed the lock back in and then slipped out of the musty old office to take my seat in study hall. I got my computer going and had just logged into my email when Eric walked into the room. He was doing his best to look normal but there was a dazed expression in his eye. He took his seat on the other side of the room and then realized he didn't have his laptop with him.

He gave me a helpless look from across the room. I felt my heart sink a little bit but decided the two of us making puppy dog eyes at one another wasn't going to get us anywhere. So, I went about my work. I got so into it that I didn't see it when Eric left the room. All of a sudden, there was an email in my inbox.

I looked across the room to find that Eric had his computer. I bit back a grin and then opened his message.

**TO: Sookie Stackhouse**

**FROM: Eric Northman**

**SUBJECT: Perfection**

Sookie,

Where have you been all my life?

Eric

I felt my eyes well up just a little bit. I looked over at him and he was smiling at me. I was speechless.

**TO: Eric Northman**

**FROM: Sookie Stackhouse**

**SUBJECT: Re: Perfection**

I don't know, but I'm glad you found me. Thank you for my apple. It was delicious. How's Jeter? I hope he was okay overnight.

**TO: Sookie Stackhouse**

**FROM: Eric Northman**

**SUBJECT: Re: Re: Perfection**

Jeter's fine. There was a small mess to clean up this morning but it was well worth it, I assure you. I think we should wake up that way more often. Tomorrow, maybe ;)

**TO: Eric Northman**

**FROM: Sookie Stackhouse**

**SUBJECT: Re: Re: Re: Perfection**

You might be able to convince me. I'd need to run home and get a change of clothes first so we don't have another incident like we had this morning. I hate being late.

I watched to see what Eric's reaction would be to my email. When he read what I had to say he looked back at me, that lopsided grin appearing once again.

**TO: Sookie Stackhouse**

**FROM: Eric Northman**

**SUBJECT: Re: Re: Re: Re: Perfection**

What would it take to convince you? I can assure you that what you got in the shower this morning was only the tip of the iceburg of what I'm willing to offer.

**TO: Eric Northman**

**FROM: Sookie Stackhouse**

**SUBJECT: Negotiations**

*As long as it ends with me sleeping in your arms, the rest is just details. I told you I'm not very diabolical.*

**TO: Sookie Stackhouse**

**FROM: Eric Northman**

**SUBJECT: Re: Negotiations**

*I think you underestimate yourself, Miss Stackhouse, but if that is your final offer, consider me surrendered.*

I woke to the smell of coffee close by, but didn't open my eyes until I felt Eric sit down next to me on his massive bed. "Good morning." He bent and kissed my forehead.

"Hi." I smiled up at him and stretched out a little.

"I brought you coffee." He held up a mug for me and set it on the table next to the bed.

"Thank you." I rolled onto my back and pushed myself up.

"Did you sleep okay?" He tucked some of my hair behind me ear and my face nuzzled against his hand.

"Like a log." I grabbed his hand and entwined my fingers with his and wished it was the weekend so we could stay in bed a while longer.

"Me, too." He smiled and shifted on the bed. "I put a towel for you in the bathroom. Why don't you go shower while I make us breakfast?"

I nodded, slightly crestfallen that there was no extra time to just laze about. "Sounds like a plan."

I reluctantly got out of bed and went to the bathroom, while Eric went to the kitchen. When I came out of the shower I got dressed quickly, leaving the t-shirt of Eric's that I'd slept in in his hamper. I went to the kitchen to find him standing over the stove, stirring a pan of scrambled eggs. Jeter paced anxiously, hoping that Eric would come down with a case of butterfingers.

"Good morning, Jeter." I stopped to scratch the dog's head. He turned his face to my hand and licked it. I giggled and went to the sink to wash my hands.

"Do you like your eggs scrambled?" Eric asked as he plated them.

"I do, as a matter of fact." I sat on one of the stools at the island and remembered the coffee Eric had brought me. How I'd forgotten it was beyond me. "Hold that thought." I jumped off the stool and ran to get my coffee. It was a little cold, so I popped it in the microwave for a few seconds before taking a seat at the island again.

"So, about later..." Eric speared a mouthful of eggs.

"What about it?"

"Well, I know tonight's going to be a late night for us both on account of open house."

"Unfortunately." I frowned just a little. I'd been excited about it before but now it was cutting into my Eric time. Not cool.

"Since open house doesn't start until six I thought maybe we could go have dinner together somewhere."

My frown turned upside down and I nodded. "That would be great."

"Good." He smiled in return and after that we were quiet while we ate.

We kissed for a few minutes at his front door before pulling ourselves apart and heading off to school. We drove in separate cars. I parked where I always did at the south end of the school, while Eric went to his normal space down by the field house. I stood at the chain link fence with my travel mug full of coffee and watched him start his first lap around the track. I felt relaxed and happy. It amazed me how comfortable I felt around him considering the way things could have ended up.

"Good morning, Sookie." Bill said from behind me. I hadn't even heard a car drive past me. I cringed internally and turned to face Bill.

"Good morning, Bill." I nodded and sipped my coffee.

"You all set for the open house?" He came to a stop in front of me.

"You bet." I nodded again and forced my eyes to stay on his instead of cheating over to Eric like they wanted to.

"It's a beautiful morning, isn't it?" He really, really sucked and small talk.

"Yes, I'd say it is." Although I bet my reasons for thinking so were different from his. Out of the corner of my eye I saw Eric coming around the bend at the field house. He'd be on his way toward me soon.

"Since it's going to be a late night, I was wondering if you'd have dinner with me later?" Bill asked and I nearly dropped my coffee.

He was married. He was married and asking me out to dinner? I tried to tell myself that it was just a co-woker asking a co-worker out, but the look in his eyes told me it was more than that. Or at least he was hoping it would be. What the hell was wrong with him?

"That's a nice offer, Bill, but I already have plans." I slapped on my emergency smile. He looked devastated.

"Well, then how about that lunch today?" He was ready with his backup plan.

"I wish I could, but I have to start getting things ready for try outs. Maybe one day next week?" I suggested. *Yeah, on a day when I can talk Eric into coming along so I don't have to be alone with this guy*, I thought to myself.

"That'd be fine. You have a good day, Miss Stackhouse." He smiled at me and then walked toward the school.

Eric came to a stop in front of me at the fence and looked over in Bill's direction. He stood at the door as if he were trying to piece things together. I felt a split second of panic but then realized there was nothing to worry about. I waved at Bill who waved back awkwardly before going inside.

"What was that about?" Eric asked casually.

"He wanted me to go to dinner with him tonight."

"Is he the one who asked you out to lunch?"

"Yep, that'd be him. He's married and he has a kid."

"What a douchebag." Eric shook his head with disapproval. "Not that I can blame him for wanting you."

I sucked in my cheeks to keep from smiling at him. "I don't know if it's like that." Eric's eyes sparkled at me and I could see just the lightest layer of sweat forming on his bare arms. Oh, those arms. So lovely and strong. "You can be very charming when you want to be, can't you?"

"You have no idea." His eyebrows wiggled and I laughed.

"Oh, I think I do." I wanted to kiss him but settled for our fingers touching through the fence. "I'll see you in study hall, Mr. Northman."

"I"ll be waiting, Miss Stackhouse." He winked at me and then took off running again.

**Okay, so they got a little action going on here. How proud are we of Sookie for breaking her rules? Does that ease some of the pressure? I promise, the main event will be happening soon. I wrote it last night/this morning \*fans self\* I think you will enjoy it. And I have to say that y'all were adorable being all concerned about Jeter being alone for the night. I promise to take better care of him in the future. Thanks for reading!**

**Chapter 10: Fortune & Fantasy**

Because I was sans interwebs, I feel like I owe you an extra chapter. So I'm posting one now before I call it a night and I'll update again later on before True Blood starts. Speaking of True Blood, if you haven't seen it yet I started posting a series called "What Dreams Are Made Of". The series started as a companion to another story I've been writing on livejournal. "What Dreams Are Made Of" is a series of one shots that are all dreams Sookie's been having since taking Eric's blood, and are based in the True Blood fandom. They're all lemony and delicious, so if you need a saucier fix, there's your place to go until these two start humping like bunnies. It'll be happening soon, baby birds, I promise. Chapter 12, to be exact ;)

**Still don't own any of these characters, 'cept Jeter and a few of the Northmans. Boo.**

Chapter Ten: Fortune & Fantasy

**Eric**

I cracked open my fortune cookie and pulled the little slip of paper from the inside. I often found myself wondering if anyone bothered look up the meaning of the word 'fortune' before labeling what was on those little slips of paper as such. Although, if what was on mine was correct, I was going to be a very happy man very soon.

"So, what's it say?" Sookie urged from across the table with a devilish glint in her eyes.

"Do not mistake temptation for opportunity... in bed." I added those two extra words at the end, playing the game that was always good for a laugh. This time was no exception and Sookie blushed a bright shade of pink as she threw her head back to laugh. "What's yours say?"

The amusement vanished from her eyes and was replaced by lust and a little bit of longing. I gulped, wondering just what her cookie was telling her. She cleared her throat almost ceremoniously and then read the little piece of paper in her fingers.

"Flattery will go far tonight... in bed." Damn right it would.

"Why, Miss Stackhouse, does that mean you would consider spending another night with me?" I reached for her hand.

She gave me a look that I couldn't quite decipher. The fates intervened at that moment as the waitress placed our check on the table between us. Sookie made a grab for it but I wouldn't let her take it. We argued over who would pay until I told her she could next time. She nodded her agreement reluctantly and I put a credit card inside the little folder that had been left on the table.

"What's on your mind, Sookie?" I asked her after she stayed silent for a few minutes. I could tell she was thinking hard about something.

She took a drink of her water and smiled up at the waitress who came back for the bill. "Let's talk about it when we get out of here."

Shit. That didn't sound good. Normally the prospect of having Sookie all to myself for a little while made me do an internal happy dance. At the moment, I was feeling anything but happy. I don't know how she did it, but she had the ability to turn me into a cowering insecure mess. It really was like being sixteen all over again and having my first girlfriend. I figured out the reasons why relatively quickly. Sookie was the first girl I ever cared about what she thought of me. The others were fun and I had enjoyed their company, to an extent, but it wasn't just Sookie's company I wanted.

While emailing back and forth during study hall that afternoon she'd confessed that it had been her ex at the door the morning we overslept. He'd called her later on in the day to tell her he wanted to talk. She'd hesitated over it, not sure if it was a good idea to talk to him. She was more the clean break type, which scared the shit out of me. I knew what that meant since I was the same way. Once a relationship was over, it was over. There was no talking about reconciliations, there was no let's-just-be-friends. It was just done. Over. Forever. The thought that I might some day be on the receiving end of one of those talks made me a little sick to my stomach.

If I was about to get that talk from her, I didn't know what I was going to do. We weren't even officially a couple but that didn't matter to me. I had every intention of moving us onto that next level. I would do just about anything to see that happen. But I also knew she'd loved her ex deeply. Maybe he'd come to his senses and realized what a brilliant catch she was and decided he could offer her all the things she'd wanted. I really hoped that wasn't the case.

We stayed silent while I signed the receipts and added the tip for the waitress. With a look we silently agreed that it was time to go. I felt only a slight bit of comfort when Sookie reached for my hand as we walked out of the restaurant. The place was packed and we had to slither to get out of there.

Finally, we were spilling out onto the busy street in front of us. There were people everywhere, all of them in search of dinner. Sookie started to tug me to the left. "The car's that way." I pointed in the other direction.

"Ever had gelato before?" Sookie looked up at me. My confused expression was all the answer she needed. "It's delicious. Come on." She pulled me toward our next destination. There was a fairly long line to get inside the little restaurant called Massa's, but once we purchased our gelato, I found out why.

"This is delicious." I said as I tasted the hazelnut ice cream I was holding.

"I know." She winked at me and we started to walk.

"So what's going on in your head, Sookie?" I wanted to clear the air. I didn't like the tension that had built between us over the last few minutes. If she was going to break off whatever this was between us, I'd rather she just got it over with. She hesitated and I stopped walking. "Sookie, if you're going to break up with me..." I couldn't even finish my sentence. Just saying the words hurt.

"What?" She whipped around to face me. "Eric, why in the world would I do that?"

"You've just been really quiet and when I mentioned us spending more time together you looked disappointed."

Sookie closed her eyes and took a deep breath. That didn't ease my nerves one bit. "Eric, I don't want to break up with you."

Ah, relief, there you are. "So then what's the problem?" I tried to be as gentle about it as I could.

"The problem is that I want to spend *more* time with you." Sookie smiled faintly. I failed to see the problem.

"And that's bad?"

"It's bad because it's not summer anymore and we don't have all the free time we usually do. I think about you all day long. Knowing that you're somewhere in the same building drives me crazy. All I want to do is walk out on my classes and go be with you but I can't do that. And then I see you in the halls sometimes," She never mentioned that to me before. When had she seen me? "And I just want to drag you into an empty classroom and do all the things we said we wouldn't on school property."

"Don't let me stop you." I teased and she swatted at my arm.

"Not. Helping." She glared up at me even though she was smiling.

"I'm sorry, Sookie, but I will *never* discourage you from wanting to sexually harrass me."

Sookie groaned and turned away in frustration. "Eric..."

"Sookie, it's normal to want the things you want when you meet someone you're attracted to. Believe me, I think about you all day long myself." I reached up to touch her face and she leaned into me just a little. "Do you know what the best part of my day has been this whole week?"

"Making out on either of our couches until we can't breathe?" Sookie snickered.

I smiled at her and said, "That has certainly been good. It will absolutely make the highlight reel in my life, but no, that hasn't been the best part."

"I'm intrigued." Sookie popped her hip and took a bite of her gelato.

"The best part, without fail, as been the way you smile at me when you see me first thing in the morning. It's like you're afraid it's all been a dream and you're happy to realize that it's not." I explained to her and I saw her lower lip quiver just a little. Shit. If I made her cry I'd never hear the end of it.

But suddenly there was her Morning Smile and she tugged me closer by my belt loops. I lowered my mouth to hers and kissed her. The kiss deepened and she backed up against the building behind her. We stood there kissing until a car full of teenagers passed by us, whooping and hollering at us to get a room. We pulled apart reluctantly, both of us laughing quietly.

"What do you say, Sookie? Wanna get a room?" I whispered to her, tucking some her hair behind her ear.

"Yes, I do." She grinned at me but before I could make a suggestion, she continued. "But not tonight."

Huh? Was she serious?

"It's not that I don't want to spend tonight with you, because I do, but I don't want us to rush and we will because it's a school night." Sookie smiled up a me, her fingers slowly walking up my chest.

"Did I ever tell you I like the way you think?"

"No, but you heard what the fortune cookie said." She winked at me and then started walking again.

Open house went smoothly, though there wasn't quite as much for me to talk about as there was for other teachers. PE class was pretty much a no brainer. I taught a class that cycled through weight training, basketball and volleyball. We were starting the year with volleyball, which meant meeting in the field house five days a week. Then when we went into the weight training portion of the semester we'd be down in the weight room next to the dance studio and across the hall from the lab pre-school run by Claudine Crane, child development teacher and cheerleading coach. Our final rotation would be finished up in the north gym above the girls' locker room on the south end of the school.

By the time the night wrapped up, I was wiped out. My late nights with Sookie were starting to catch up with me. We had agreed to spend the night in our own beds. The idea of going back to my house and sleeping alone wasn't as appealing as it once was but I understood where Sookie was coming from. Sleeping in the same bed and just sleeping was becoming increasingly difficult to do. The realization that I wanted sex with her to be more than just an act fell on my head like a ton of bricks. It had never mattered to me in the past the way it did now.

So we agreed we would say our goodnights in the parking lot and then go our separate ways for the night. I'd see her in a matter of hours but I would miss waking up next to her. We also agreed that we'd go out the following night. I already had an idea of what I wanted to do but I needed to get home and do a little research on the internet to make sure my plans wouldn't be foiled.

As soon as the last parent cleared out of the gym I made my way toward the south end of the school. I'd parked my car next to Sookie's when we'd gotten back from dinner. I had been leaning up against my car for about fifteen minutes when Sookie appeared from the same set of doors she entered each morning. She was balancing her purse, laptop bag, a travel mug, a stack of poster boards and her keys. In just a few long strides I was standing in front of her and taking some of her burdens from her.

"Thanks." She smiled up at me once I'd secured the posters and her travel mug.

"No problem. What are the posters for?" I held up the sheets.

"For try outs next week. One is for sign ups on Monday. One will be for tracking scores and results and the last two will be for announcing the squads." Sookie explained to me as we walked to her car.

"Sounds very organized."

"You must go through something similar with basketball."

I shrugged and put the posters into her back seat once her doors were unlocked. "I make notes and things but that's about it. I go by my gut. I would rather take a player with a lot of heart and desire to improve than some cocky little shit who thinks he's got it in the bag because he can dunk."

"So you're not in it for the win? Does the school board know this?" Sookie teased me.

"The school board knows that I was part of a NCAA championship team." I gave her a smug smile. I was surprised when she kissed me instead of rolling her eyes or admonishing me.

"You really do think you're a big deal, don't you?" She shook her head with amusement.

"Does it bother you?"

Sookie bit her bottom lip nervously before admitting, "Not as much as it should."

I wanted to kiss her again but decided it was probably a bad idea since there were still parents and faculty members around. "Are you sure I can't talk you into coming by the house for just a little while?"

Her brows furrowed together and I could tell she was considering it. "Not tonight. If I stop by, I'm going to get comfortable and then there's going to be problems. Tomorrow, though, I promise I'm all yours starting at four o'clock."

An old John Steinbeck quote came rambling through my head about discontent and the Bastard Time and I found myself chuckling. Sookie got a laugh out of it herself when I explained it to her. I walked her over to the driver's side of her car with my hand on the small of her back. She opened the door and lowered herself down behind the wheel. I closed the door for her once she was inside and she started the car. Her window came down and she looked up at me.

"Any hints about where you're taking me tomorrow?" She batted her eyelashes at me in an almost cartoonish way.

"Nope. All I can tell you is to dress casually and bring a sweater." I leaned down, bracing my arms on the ledge of roof of the car.

"That's all I get?" She pouted.

"You get this, too." I leaned in and kissed her. Her foot hit the accelerator, revving in the engine and making us both laugh.

"One more for the road?" Again with the pouting. How could I say no?

I kissed her one more time and then backed up so she could pull out of her parking space. She wiggled her fingers at me and then headed down King Street. I watched until her tail lights got all the way down to Scott Street four blocks away, where she made a left. I sighed and got into my own car. It sucked to know that she wouldn't be waiting for me at my house when I got there.

Jeter, on the other hand, was more than excited to see me when I walked in. Instead of going in the front door, I went through the gate and opened the kitchen door. I called for the dog and he came tearing through the kitchen at top speed. He jumped on me and pawed at my chest before losing interest and running out to the yard to do his business. I grabbed a set of keys off the hook near the door and followed Jeter out into the yard. I opened the garage door and stepped inside.

I reached to the left and flipped on the light. Jeter came in behind me, attempting to squeeze in between me and the door frame. He managed to wiggle his way through and then began to sniff around the car that was covered over with a white drop cloth. I pulled the cloth off the car and looked closely at it. I hadn't taken it out since earlier in the summer. Mostly, it lived in my garage. It was Johan's car. He'd left it with me when he'd moved to Sweden.

It was a 1963 Mercury Comet convertible that had once belonged to Dad. It was turquoise with a white top and interior. It had been perfect for Johan and I when we were still living at home and going surfing almost every day. There were a lot of stories that were spawned from the back seat of that particular car, and not all of them belonged to my brother and me. Annika had driven it before Johan and I got our hands on it once we were old enough. It was a beautiful car but I only drove it for special occasions and to make sure it stayed in perfect condition.

I inspected the car to make sure it was clean and ready to go out the following night. When I was convinced it was good to go, I went back into the house and down to the basement to work on my laptop for a while. I did some surfing on the web and got the information I needed for my date with Sookie the following night. I was just shutting down the laptop when my phone started to buzz in my pocket. Before I even pulled the phone out I knew it was either Sookie or Pam calling. I hoped it was Sookie, so of course, it was Pam.

"Hello, Pam." I greeted her with as little bitterness as I could.

"So you're alive. I was starting to wonder." The background noise suggested she hadn't even left the main area of the bar before calling me.

"I've been busy."

"With Sookie, no doubt."

"Yes, with Sookie."

Pam snorted and said, "I didn't think she'd make it past breakfast. She looked like she was ready to bolt before I left."

"Things change."

"Shame I never had sex with you when I had the chance."

I groaned at that. There had been one drunken night in college that had just been a disaster from the start. Pam and I had each broken up with a girl. It wasn't the loss to me that it was to Pam. She'd legitimately cared about the person she was with. For me, it just meant sleeping alone and starting over. I wasn't heartbroken like Pam was. We'd spent the better part of the night drinking cheap wine and bitching about women. It was times like those when hanging out with Pam was like hanging out with one of the guys. Only Pam was wearing Jimmy Choos while she did it.

"Pam, I have no interest in wooing you over to my side."

"Good, because I have no interest in being wooed. All it would have done is fuck up our friendship and it's fucked up enough already." I admired Pam's ability to say exactly what she was thinking. "So, what's the deal with you and the preschool teacher?"

I sighed and said, "She teaches history, Pam."

"Whatever." I could practically hear the eye roll going on about a mile and a half away. "Quit stalling."

I told her about the last few days and the fact that Sookie and I had been having sleepovers, but no sex. Pam snorted again and I'm sure more eye rolls. I told her that Sookie and I had plans for the following night and what I had up my sleeve for our second date.

"Sounds to me like you're falling for her." Pam observed.

"I think I am." I knew I was and Pam knew it, too. She'd known me too long.

"Bullshit, Northman." That's my Pam. "For what it's worth, I like her, even if she did have that deer-in-the-headlights look about her."

"Trust me, she's not as skittish as you might think." I didn't want to tell Pam about the reasons for Sookie's odd behavior Saturday morning. Frankly, it was none of her business and I didn't think Sookie would appreciate it if I brought it up. If she wanted Pam to know, Sookie could tell her herself.

"She can't be if she's spending as much time with you as you say. You always hated the wallflower types." That was true. "You want me to pop in and let Jeter out for you?"

For a second I thought I was dreaming. Pam wasn't known for unsolicited acts of kindness. "Depends on what it's going to cost me."

"Nothing." Pam had the nerve to sound offended that I would assume she had ulterior motives than just being a good friend. "Look, Eric, you should be happy. It's about fucking time. You've been dragging your ass around existing for long enough. You should live. I mean really live."

She was right. I'd never thought of what I was doing as just existing, but she was absolutely right. Since Johan left, the only person I ever really talked to on a regular basis was Pam. While I loved her, in my own way, that wasn't exactly the ideal relationship for either of us. But until Pam said something I hadn't even realized I was looking for something more.

"So if this girl makes you happy, then I will make an effort to be nice. If that means taking care of your mutt, then that's what I'll do. Besides, you're much more pleasant to be around when you're getting laid regularly."

Call waiting beeped in my ear and I grinned to see Sookie's name flashing on my phone. "Pam, my other line's ringing. I'll call you tomorrow." I promised her.

"Must be Sookie. You wouldn't hang up on me for anyone else. Don't bother calling me back. I have a key. I do need you to stop in on Saturday to sign off on a few things, though." She warned.

"No problem. See you then." I said and clicked over. "Hello."

"Hi." Sookie sounded tired and sad.

"Is something wrong?"

"You're not here." She answered without hesitation.

"I could change that. I could be there in fifteen minutes, ten if I break a few speed laws or run a red light or two." I was completely serious.

"No, don't do that. Just talk to me for a few minutes until I get sleepy enough to drop off." She instructed.

"Am I that boring already?" I teased and she giggle quietly.

"That's not what I meant. I just like the sound of your voice."

"What are you wearing?" I asked her and she laughed again.

"Eric, stop! I didn't call you for that either." Too bad. "But for the record I'm wearing an old Bon Temps football t-shirt and a pair of boy shorts."

"Is that it? I just want a proper visual." I leaned back in my chair.

"That and a smile."

Fuck. Me.

"You know you're not making it easy for me to stay put."

"Sorry. Didn't mean to make it hard." Minx.

"Sookie..." I said in a tone full of warning. "You remember what my fortune said earlier about mistaking temptation for opportunity."

"Yes, I remember." She sighed and I heard the rustling of her blanket. "So what are you up to?"

"Just sitting in my basement. I was doing some research on line for tomorrow night. I talked to Pam for the first time since Saturday. She's impressed you haven't run screaming the other way."

"I'm no scaredy cat." Sookie said smugly.

"That's what I told her. I think she was hoping she'd have a chance in talking you into playing for her team for a little while." I explained to her.

"I've never had even the slightest bit of curiosity about that. Pam's beautiful, but I'm not attracted to her." Sookie spoke with confidence.

"That's good to know. Pam will be heartbroken, of course." She'd also bounce back in a matter of moments. Pam had a rebound rate that would make Hugh Hefner jealous.

"She'll get over it." Sookie said with a mock sympathy.

We talked for a few more minutes, most of which were spent with Sookie trying to get me to cough up the details on our plans for the next night. I refused to tell her anything even when she told me she hated surprises.

"Don't worry, Sookie, it's not like I'm taking you to witness a blood ritual or a satanic sacrifice."

"Well that's good to know." I could hear her pout.

"That's more like a fifth date activity."

"I hate you." She muttered but I knew she was smiling.

"No you don't, but thanks for trying." I teased and got out of my chair to head upstairs.

I locked the kitchen door and turned off the lights before checking the front door and turning off the lights there as well. Jeter followed me down the hall to my bedroom and made himself comfortable on the floor close to the bed. I set my alarm for the following morning and stretched out on my bed.

"You know, if you had just slept here tonight we'd already be sleeping." I pointed out to her.

"No, we wouldn't." She said with certainty. "So what are *you* wearing?"

"I thought you didn't want to play?"

"It's a woman's prerogative to change her mind. Besides, I want to make sure I have the right visual."

"I actually haven't change clothes yet, so I'm wearing the same thing I was the last time you saw me."

She moaned quietly into the phone, making my pants suddenly feel like they were a size too small. Because of the open house, I'd dressed up a little bit in black dress pants, a white button down shirt and a blue tie. I hated ties. I'd taken that off the second open house was over.

"Do you have any idea how bad I wanted to grab you by your tie earlier and drag you into that office we were in yesterday?" Sookie purred.

Yep, my pants were officially too small. "Sookie, you have to stop." I groaned at the memory of what she'd done the day before. The fact that she didn't seem to know how sexy she was only made her sexier.

But of course, Sookie didn't stop there and before I knew it we were engaged in phone sex. Not what I had expected when I'd seen her name flashing on my caller ID, but I knew after I got off, I'd sleep like the dead. Listening to Sookie pant and moan in my ear as she got herself off was a much bigger turn on than I'd thought it would be. I was once again stunned how she could be so modest and proper one minute and a mewling sex kitten the next. She also had a dirty mouth when she wanted it and had no problems telling me all the things she wanted me to do to her. I remembered every single one of those things and planned to do them as soon as she'd allow it.

"I'm so wet, Eric." She breathed into the phone. Knowing she was close enough that I could put an end to our suffering but she wouldn't let me was frustrating, to say the least. "I'm so close." She whimpered and then gasped for air.

She wasn't the only one who was close. "Come with me, Sookie." I grunted into the phone. The memory of what it felt like to be inside her when she came overwhelmed me and that was my undoing. She cried out at the same time I finished, leaving us both breathing heavy.

"Thank you, Eric." She mumbled into the phone.

"The pleasure was all mine, Sookie."

"No, it wasn't." She assured me. "Goodnight."

"See you in the morning." I promised her and then went to go get cleaned up once we'd hung up.

Ten minutes later, I was sound asleep.

**Alrighty then...wasn't that a nice little goodnight phone call? Just so you know, Massa's is a real restaurant in Elmwood Park, IL. They really do make some of the most amazing Gelato I've ever had. My fave is the Kitkat flavor. On a hot summer day there's a line wrapped around the building to get some. It's pretty awesome. The Chinese restaurant Eric and Sookie went to is called New Star and it's three doors down from Massa's. There's a whole bunch of restaurants there on North Avenue that are pretty amazing. The sucky part is finding parking. If you're at all familiar with the Chicago area then you know that North Avenue is a really busy street (that even applies to us suburban kids).**

**Got any guesses as to what Eric's got planned for his date with Sookie? I will be shocked if someone gets this. I might even have to name a Northman after you if you do. Thanks for reading!**

**Chapter 11: Night Moves**

A round of applause goes to **svmlover**. She knows why. Oh, and thanks to Bob Seger for providing the inspiration while writing this.

Chapter Eleven: Night Moves

**Sookie**

I was sitting at my kitchen table talking to Amelia after work the next day. Eric had given me a run for my money when it came to being stubborn. He refused to tell me anything about where we were going that night on our date. I was filling Amelia in on everything that had happened in the last few days since I'd been pretty busy and hadn't had a whole lot of time to catch her up on things.

"So you two have been sleeping together, but not having sex?" Amelia arched an eyebrow at me.

"Yep." I nodded and sipped my iced tea.

"I thought you said the sex was good?"

"It was great." I corrected her.

"So then what's the problem?"

"There isn't a problem. I just don't want to rush it."

Amelia laughed at me. "You realize how ridiculous that sounds, right? You didn't even know his last name and you fucked him."

"That's before I knew him."

"Hun, you know I love you, but you're not making a whole lot of sense."

"I like him, Amelia, and it caught me off guard. I wasn't planning on meeting someone so soon."

"So you're afraid he's going to be like Quinn?" She gave me one of those knowing looks and I corrected her immediately.

"Eric is nothing like Quinn. Which reminds me, Quinn came by on Wednesday morning. He saw Eric's car in the driveway and thought I was being robbed, or something."

"A burglar driving a cherry Corvette?" That same eyebrow shot up again. "Who does he think he's fooling with that?"

"Not me, but since Eric was upstairs in the shower it wasn't really the time to discuss it."

"So when *did* you discuss it? Does Eric know Quinn was here?"

"Thankfully, Eric was getting in the shower when Quinn showed up, but yes, he knows Quinn was here. Whatever it is Quinn wants to talk about, we haven't discussed it yet. Frankly, there isn't much to say. I'm not sure where things are with Eric and me, but we're moving forward, which I'm happy about. Quinn had three years to put a ring on my finger. He missed his chance." I shrugged, feeling absolutely no doubt or uncertainty about what I was saying. I was really, finally, over Quinn.

"You think he wants to get back together?"

"I honestly don't know what he wants. Maybe he just wants to be friends."

"But you don't do that."

"Nope, I don't. And with the way Quinn treated me why would I want to?"

The doorbell rang and both Amelia and I jumped. I hadn't even heard Eric's car pull into the driveway. "Is that him?" Amelia asked.

"By him, I hope you mean Eric." I smiled and stood up.

"Uh, duh?" She gave me a pointed stare.

I stuck my tongue out at her and then made my way to the front door. "Hi, Tray." I smiled and gestured for him to come in.

"Is Ame here?" He asked sheepishly.

The two of them had been on less than friendly terms since their fight on Tuesday night. Amelia couldn't even be clear on how the whole thing had started but it had escalated when she'd come home to find him playing video games instead of doing his share of the household chores. Of course, when Tray said he'd get up and do what he was supposed to do, Amelia told him not to bother.

"Don't do me any favors, Tray Dawson! I don't need your help!" She'd shouted at him in a completely irrational way that had Tray confessing if it weren't for Eric keeping me company on Tuesday, he would have been seeking refuge on my couch for the night.

"What are *you* doing here?" Amelia glared at Tray.

"I fixed the sink." Tray's eyes were down.

Amelia made some little noise and then her eyes started to water. She ran at Tray and I assumed when he caught her that all was forgiven. "I'm so sorry, baby." She cooed in his ear and without another word, Tray turned with Amelia in his arms and headed toward their house.

Eric's car turned into my driveway as Amelia and Tray were walking across the lawn with Amelia kissing on Tray like the world was ending. I shook my head in amazement and smiled over at Eric as he stepped out of a car that I'd never seen before. It was a beautiful car. I stepped out of the house and down to the driveway.

"Nice wheels, Mr. Northman." I said as I sashayed toward him.

"Thank you. It's sort of a family heirloom." He got out of the car without opening the door and landed gracefully on my driveway.

"Fancy." I smiled, tilting my face up toward his.

Without any furthering prompting, his lips were on mine. His tongue traced my lips, seeking entrance to my mouth, which I gave him. He kissed me slowly and sweetly before pulling back to smile at me. God, I loved that smile. His whole face lit up. I reached up and tucked some of his hair behind his ear.

"So, where are you taking me?" I grinned with excitement.

"You'll find out when we get there." Eric wasn't giving up a thing.

"Gah!" I spun around to walk back in the house but he spun me back and kissed me again. "Keep kissing me like that, mister, and I might not care if we ever leave this driveway."

He laughed and followed me inside, his hand linked with mine. "If you've got a throw blanket you don't mind getting dirty, you might want to bring that, too. It's supposed to be chilly later."

"Chilly, huh?" I smiled over my shoulder as I reached into the hall closet for an old afghan my Gran had made for me when I was a little girl. "Does that mean you won't be able to keep me warm wherever it is we're going?"

"I plan on doing my part." His eyebrows wiggled and I shook my head.

"So what else do I need?" I closed the linen closet.

"I guess that depends on who's house we end up at later on."

"Or I could just wear your clothes." Eric groaned as I grabbed my purse off the kitchen counter. "Come on, let's go." I took his hand and pulled him toward the door.

"You don't play fair, Stackhouse." He stood behind me while I locked the door, his lips grazing my neck. I wiggled against him when his lips that that special spot on my neck.

We stood there giggling like a couple of dorks before noise from next door wormed its way into my brain. "Uh, we should go."

"Are they okay over there?" Eric's eyes darted to Amelia's house.

"I'd say so. They're making up."

"Oh." Eric straightened up.

"Yep. So let's get out of here before we hear the grand finale." I took his hand and headed toward the car.

My blanket went into the backseat. Eric opened my door for me and I sat down on the beautiful white leather bench seat. Eric got in beside me as I dug out my sunglasses and zipped my hoody a little bit. It was still fairly warm outside but I knew it wouldn't feel that way once we were on the move. I pulled my hair up into a knot on top of my head and waited for Eric to start the car.

"So tell me about this car." I said once we were on the road.

Eric told me how it had belonged to his father in his younger days. His grandparents had stored it while his father was in the Marines. I found out that Tom, Eric's father, was a Vietnam Veteran. It was while he was traveling with the Corps that he'd met Stella, Eric's mother. Tom was in Germany at the time for debriefing before being sent home. He was out walking around, trying to erase some of the horrible things he'd seen while at war, when he saw Stella. She was standing in front of a fountain and smiling.

"He fell in love with her right then and there." Eric told me with a wistful smile on his face. "He didn't know anything about her other than that smile. All he knew was that he wanted to see it again every day for the rest of his life."

My inner romantic was gushing big time at the story. "That's sweet."

Eric nodded and said, "The only problem was that she didn't speak English very well. She was studying at the university nearby but she was from Sweden. So what little German my father had picked up wasn't very helpful in communicating with her. But that didn't stop them. They spent as much time together as they could before Dad had to get on a plane to come back home. They wrote letters for a while, which helped with Mom's English. When Dad got leave, he got on a plane and went to see her. When he came home, he had a wife."

"Oh, wow." I laughed quietly. "And they've been married ever since, obviously?"

"For thirty-eight years now. Dad was actually on his second tour in 'Nam when Annika was born. He missed the entire first year of her life because of the war." Eric confessed. "I think that's part of what got to him so much when she died. He'd already missed a year of her life and then she died so young..." He trailed off and I grabbed his hand.

"That's got to be hard." I agreed with him.

"I don't know if he'd change it, though. He loved being a Marine."

"So why did he retire?" I had to ask.

"For Mom. She wanted to have him to herself before they were too old to enjoy it." Eric smiled over at me.

I slid over on the bench seat and put my head on his shoulder. "Sounds like they really love one another."

"They do." Eric kissed the top of my head and I smiled.

Eric drove on without so much as a hint of where we were going. I knew what direction we were going but I had no idea where we would end up. And then when Eric started to shift in his seat, I moved away from him a little bit. His eyes started searching the side of the road. When he smiled beside me, I knew he'd found whatever he was looking for. My eyes followed where his were looking and I couldn't help but smile too.

"The drive-in?" I laughed.

"The only one that's open north of I-80." He turned left to pull into the lot.

Cars were lined up ahead of us waiting to get in. "I haven't been to a drive-in since I was a little kid! I didn't think these were open anymore."

"There are very few of them." Eric agreed.

"So what are we seeing?" I looked around for a board that would tell us what was playing, but saw nothing.

"They do double features on Friday and tonight is James Dean night."

"So that's why we're in this car?"

Eric laughed and said, "Well, that's part of it. Mostly, it's more because I don't think it'd be that comfortable to sit in the Corvette for that long."

"Especially if someone starts feeling frisky?"

"There's that, too." He acknowledged. Frisky indeed.

The thought of fooling around with Eric in the middle of a crowded drive-in was more exciting to me than I would ever admit out loud. It also made me wonder what it was about him that made me so willing to forget about modesty and self-control. I couldn't think right when I was around him and the ability to keep myself at arm's length was rapidly decreasing. The weight of his stare didn't go unnoticed.

"What?" I asked when I turned my face toward his.

"Nothing." He shook his head. Oh, he was thinking something alright and I was pretty sure it was something similar to what I was thinking.

"Hey." I reached up and turned his face toward mine.

The next thing I knew we were making out and didn't pull apart until cars started up around us to gain admittance to the outdoor theater. Slowly we moved forward. When I attempted to give Eric money for my ticket he pushed my hand away.

"You promised I could pay next time." I reminded him. I didn't feel comfortable with him paying for everything.

"I said you could pay the next time we went to dinner. This isn't dinner."

My mouth gaped open but rather than argue with me any further he just leaned over and kissed my cheek. That smug, high handed, son of a...

"You'll catch flies if you stay like that." Eric warned, having no idea how much he sounded like my Gran when he said it.

I didn't know if I wanted to punch him or kiss him just then so I did both. He laughed and then drove to a spot that was a little out of the way but still had a good view of the giant screen. I tried to remember the last movie I'd seen at a drive-in. If I remembered right, it was Batman back when I was maybe five-years-old.

Eric turned off the car and then climbed out. "Where are you going?"

"I have provisions on the trunk." He carefully opened the lid and appeared a few seconds later with a couple of plastic bags.

"What's all this?" I asked when he handed them to me.

"Dinner." He shrugged.

"Eric!"

"Next time you can pay. I promise." He gave me a sly smile and I had a feeling it wasn't going to happen.

He began to sort through the bags and handed me a sandwich. I got a little nervous since I could be picky about that kind of thing. I was one of a few people in the world- or so it seemed- that didn't like mayonnaise on my sandwiches. But since Eric had gone to the trouble of getting me dinner and surprising me the way he had, I would keep my mouth shut and deal with it. It wouldn't kill me.

"Have you ever been to Al & Joe's?" Eric asked me and my face lit up.

"These are from Al & Joe's? I love their subs!" I unwrapped mine quickly. They used the most amazing bread for their sandwiches. Say you what you will about the evil that is carbohydrates, but I loved bread too much to give it up in favor of a slightly smaller waistline.

The little deli was legendary in the area. Students were constantly trying to sneak off campus to go there for lunch since it was only a few blocks away from the high school. The place was always packed and on the weekends, it wasn't uncommon to see a line around the block and people standing up and down the street while eating their lunch.

"So what's on this?" I tried not to sound too nervous about it.

"Turkey, lettuce, tomato, bacon and *white*American cheese. No mayo."

My jaw dropped.

"How did you..." I trailed off. Amelia! He must have asked her. No way did he guess so accurately. "Thank you, Eric."

"You're welcome." He reached into the bag and produced a bag of cheddar harvest Sun Chips and a coke. Perfect. I would have to remember to thank Amelia for this later.

We talked while we ate. He wouldn't show me what was in the second bag but insisted I would like it. I could only imagine. After we were done eating Eric rolled up one of his windows and clipped a speaker to it. The movie was supposed to be starting in the next ten minutes.

"Top up or down?" Eric asked me.

I thought it over for a minute before saying, "Down."

I knew if he put the top up the probability of us having sex in the back seat was high, and while that would definitely be something I'd be willing to negotiate later, I didn't want it to be like that just yet. I slipped off my gym shoes and curled up next to Eric on the seat. Sitting in the Comet was definitely better than the Corvette.

The first movie shown was Rebel Without A Cause, which I'd seen more than once on account of Gran. She loved old movies and I would go with her once a month to see what was playing at an old revival theater in Shreveport. Unfortunately, Bon Temps was too small for a theater of its own. It was a big deal when we finally got a Starbucks when I was about fifteen but it didn't stay open for too long. People didn't want to pay five dollars for a cup of coffee when they could just make it at home themselves for much cheaper. Not to mention, I was of the opinion the coffee was better at home anyway.

We managed to get a half hour into the movie before we gave up on it and started making out like teenagers in the front seat of the car. The bench seat allowed us plenty of room and before I knew it, I was on my back with Eric on top of me. I was thankful I had Gran's old blanket. I was using it as a pillow. Eric's hands slowly found their way inside my sweater. He palmed my breasts before stroking my already hard nipples with his thumbs. I groaned against him and decided to let my hands do a little feeling of their own.

It didn't take long before we got to a point where we had to stop. I broke off the kiss we were in the middle of and turned my face toward the back of the seat. "Eric," I whispered and ran my fingers through his hair.

I felt him deflate a little against me and then inhale sharply. My eyes found his and I could tell stopping was as difficult for him as it was for me. He pulled back and sat up. I stayed where I was for a moment. I was afraid to move. A small war was going on inside of me. My head told me to take a deep breath and cool off. My body wanted none of that. In the end, it was my heart that settled the score.

Eric wasn't just a one night stand anymore and I knew that whatever happened in the car would only lead to better things later. I liked him. He liked me. We'd each said we wanted to make things work and we wanted to move forward. So far, I was the one holding us back and something told me that if I didn't quit it with the mixed signals he was going to get sick of me. I didn't want to go further just to appease him but I didn't want to hold back just to prove that I could. So the question, very simply, was what did I want?

The answer was just as simple. I wanted Eric. I smiled at my decision and felt something in my heart soften. I relaxed and sat up, pulling myself up onto my knees. I moved across the seat and brushed some of Eric's hair out of the way so I had access to his ear. His hair smelled like coconuts and I wanted to lick him. Instead, I nibbled on his earlobe and whispered to him.

"I think you should put the top up." I gave him a wet kiss on his neck and then climbed into the back seat.

Eric stayed where he was for a moment and just as I was about to panic, he opened his door. He as much calmer than I was at that moment. He moved methodically and got the top of the car fastened into place before joining me in the back seat. Watching him climb over the front seat was entertaining, to say the least. His long body just wasn't meant to be quite that agile. I unzipped my sweater and threw it into the front seat before reaching under my shirt to unhook my bra. I pulled the straps down my arms without taking off my shirt and then deposited the lacy contraption in the front seat with my sweater. Eric's eyes never left mine.

I climbed into his lap so I was straddling him. "Sookie, take your hair down." He whispered gruffly, and I did as he asked.

I put the elastic around my wrist where it usually lived. There was a permanent line from having it there for the better part of my twenty-five years. Eric's hands slipped into my hair, his fingers running through it to gently work out the tangles before pulling my face closer to his. Our eyes met again and it amazed me how easy it was to read him all of a sudden. It was like everything I was feeling I could see reflected in his eyes and I couldn't stop myself from smiling. He smiled back at me and then I dove forward.

The kisses were deep and passionate and quickly had me grinding against Eric. I could feel his arousal under every sway of my hips and after a few minutes my hands moved down from his very chiseled chest to the fly of his jeans. His lips moved down my neck to the spot under my ear that always drove me a little crazy and he set up camp. I got his jeans open only to find he'd gone commando. I gulped for air and pulled back to take off my t-shirt. I barely got it into the front seat before Eric pulled me back to him.

While his mouth went to my chest his hands worked to unbutton my jeans, too. I bent to kiss his neck while my hands freed the very hard length from his pants and started to stroke him. He moaned with his lips still closed around my nipple, sending a shiver down my spine. I touched his cheek with my free hand and he released my breast to kiss me. I tightened my grip on him just a little and stroked a little faster. He growled against me when my hips rocked against him.

"Sookie," There was warning in his voice and I shifted my position, getting on my knees beside him on the seat instead of straddling him. "What are you doing?"

I pulled his face to mine and kissed him hard. When I pulled back his eyes were starry and I sank down to take him in my mouth. He hissed at the sensation of it. He surprised me when his hand found its way into my jeans and his fingers started rubbing tight circles around my clit. I moaned around his length, and felt him shudder under me. My thighs rubbed together to gather more friction and I cursed myself for not wearing a skirt.

Eric groaned, his free hand cradling the back of my head, but not forcing it down. I opened my eyes to see his stomach muscles tighten and I felt him swelling in my mouth. He grunted loudly and then he released. Powerfully. I heard him gasping for air but I didn't stop stroking right away. When I released him from my mouth he pulled my face up to his and looked deep into my eyes while his fingers continued their ministrations in my panties. I climbed back into his lap and our lips met as my climax found me.

I bit his bottom lip as my breasts pressed against him. He stroked me a bit harder, pushing me over the edge. I cried out as I went limp against him, sucking in air in between the kisses I pressed to his neck. He lifted my face again, our lips locking until we couldn't breathe anymore. He withdrew his hand from my jeans and put his fingers in his mouth. My breath caught in my throat, watching his eyes as he licked his fingers.

"Delicious." He smiled at me and I felt myself blush.

"Come on, let's go home." I urged him as I climbed off his lap.

"Yes, Miss Stackhouse." He pecked me once more and then climbed into the front seat.

**Sorry to cut you off there, baby birds, but it seemed like the right place to stop. No worries, chapter 12 is currently being written- it's almost finished- and will be posted tomorrow. You have my word. Barring Comcast pulling another epic fail, that is. Thanks for reading!**

**Chapter 12: Lover Or Boyfriend**

So in honor of this highly anticipated occasion, I've get an extra long chapter for you \*squeeeeeeeee\* Thank you for being so patient with Eric and Sookie while they work out some of their issues enough to get to this point. I still think it's kind of soon, but they insisted they were ready. We'll see if this ends up being a good thing or not. I must confess, I'm a bit nervous \*nibbles bottom lip\* Okay, enough out of me. I'll see you at the bottom. \*dims lights\*

Chapter Twelve: Lover or Boyfriend

**Eric**

The drive back to Sookie's house seemed to take forever and I was going well above the posted speed limit. The car smelled like her perfume and sex and it was intoxicating. I could still taste her on my tongue. We were attacking each other at every red light we got stopped at. By the time we got back to her house I was pretty sure we were both going to explode soon if we didn't get upstairs to her bedroom. I barely had the car in park before she was out and headed for the front door. I was right behind her.

While she fumbled with her keys I pressed myself against her back, swiping her hair out of the way to kiss her neck. "You're not helping." She purred with a slight giggle in her voice.

I backed off just a bit and she was finally able to focus enough to get the key in the lock and open the door for us. We stumbled inside and the second the door was closed I had her pressed against it. She looked up at me with sparkling blue eyes hooded with desire. She dropped her keys and purse on the floor at her feet. Her arms encircled my neck when my lips met hers. My hands slid down her body and picked her up by her thighs. Her legs circled my waist while the kiss deepened.

She pulled away and whispered, "Bedroom."

Slowly and carefully I made my way up the stairs with her attached to me. We made it to her bedroom and I set her down on her bed. She'd put her t-shirt on after climbing into the front seat but hadn't bothered to put her bra back on. I'd taken that as a good sign and the fact that she peeled her t-shirt off again the second I set her down was an even better one. She reached for my shirt and pulled it up over my head. She unbuttoned my jeans and then lowered the zipper while sucking gently on my neck. She pushed my pants down off my hips and left them to me to remove the rest of the way.

She moved closer to the center of her bed and I followed after her. She unbuttoned her jeans for me and then laid back to let me do the rest. I took my time with her because she'd said she didn't want to rush. I was going to hold her to that, even if she'd changed her mind. It was hard to believe it had only been a week since we'd met. We'd gotten to know one another pretty well in such a short amount of time. It dawned on me then just how much it would suck to lose her.

I pulled off her jeans, taking her tiny white cotton panties along with them. Lingerie had its place, and I had no doubt Sookie would look amazing in it, but there was something even sexier about the simplicity of cotton. It was unassuming and innocent, two words I might have used to describe Sookie if I hadn't been exposed to her wilder side in the last few days. To look at her you'd never know she was the sort to pull a guy into a closet and give him the best blow job of his life, but that's exactly what she'd done, and I had been lucky enough to get a repeat performance in the back seat of the Comet only an hour before.

With nothing left between us, and all the time in the world, I kissed my way up her body, starting with the top of her foot and moving slowly up her leg. I nuzzled the inside of her thigh and then skipped over her center, which wasn't easy to do with the sweet scent that was radiating from her. She was clenching at the sheets underneath me, rolling her hips and whimpering for me to 'get on with it'.

"Patience, lover." The new pet name came rolling off my tongue and I decided I liked the sound of it.

"We've been patient." Sookie whined but I paid her no mind and started all over again from the top of her left leg. She groaned in frustration and tried to urge me on. "Eric, please," She reached for me in attempts to pull me closer to her.

I moved up her body, avoiding the areas I knew she wanted me to touch until my lips found hers. She nibbled my bottom lip and wrapped her legs around me. "Condom." I managed to say through my own little haze of lust.

"Unless you're planning on giving me something more than an orgasm, we don't need one. I'm on the pill." Sookie brushed my hair back from my face.

"I'm clean." I whispered, earning me a smile from her.

I'd been sure to get tested after every woman I'd slept with just to be on the safe side. I always used protection but I would rather be safe than sorry. The idea of finding out I had contracted something and having to make those phone calls to figure out how just didn't appeal to me. Nor did having to call the women I'd been with to tell them to get themselves checked out.

Sookie's hand reaching between us to position me jarred me from my thoughts and brought me back to the moment we were in. Her eyes never left mine as she guided me inside her. I moved slowly, watching her eyes widen as her body slowly stretched to take me into it. The little noises she made as I slowly pushed forward made me want to go faster but I kept myself in check. I didn't want to hurt her and I knew I would if I went too fast. She stretched forward to kiss me and continued to do so until I was as far inside her as her little body would allow. I remained still just for a minute until she had time to adjust.

She was so hot and tight around me. She fit perfectly. Her hands came up to find mine and I shifted to brace my weight on my elbows. She whimpered with pleading eyes and rolled her hips to get me moving. I pulled back slowly, only to push back in. Her hands squeezed mine and her back arched. We continued on at a slow pace, just enjoying the feeling of being together like we were. Just like Sookie wanted, we took our time. It was romantic and slow with the moonlight being the only thing illuminating either one of us.

It sounded cheesy to me in my head, but I realized for the first time there was a difference between sex, fucking and making love. This felt different to me than it had any other time in my life. It wasn't just a series of mechanical movements designed to get us off. There was a connection building between us, and it got stronger with every thrust of our hips. I felt something in my chest tighten and when I kissed her, I got the impression she was feeling very much the same as I was in that moment.

She pulled her legs up higher, allowing me to go deeper inside her. She whimpered and said, "Eric, please, you have to go faster."

I gave into her and moved faster. Her breathing increased as well. Her hands let go of mine and found their way to my shoulders before reaching around to my back. I buried my face in the crook of her neck, nipping and kissing the soft skin I found there before sinking down further to her collarbone. She scratched at my back and any pain I might have felt from her scratches was overshadowed by how good she felt around me.

I pulled back to look in her eyes when I felt her starting to muscles starting to spasm just a little, a warning that she was close to finding her release. "So beautiful." I whispered to her and then caught her lips with mine.

She moaned in my mouth, her hands moving down to my hips to pull me closer and closer to her. "Eric, I'm close." She whispered to me, although I already knew. I moved with more intensity and her whimpers became cries. "Come with me, Eric." Her voice shook with her impending orgasm getting closer and closer.

She hitched her legs up even higher and I was able to hit a spot inside her that made her scream. Hearing my name come from her sounding the way it did pulled me over the edge with her and I swelled and then released inside her, her muscles clenching and squeezing, pulsing around me with her own pleasure at its peak. Her legs squeezed my sides, her knees digging into me and her hands grasping me tightly. Her chest heaved below mine, both of us sweating and sucking in air before our lips found their way to one anothers.

I fell to the side and pulled her close to me, breathing in the scent of her hair. We were quiet at first, just letting it all sink in. I put one of my legs over both of hers, effectively wrapping myself around her. I hadn't realized until that moment that there was a part of me that was worried she might bolt or panic like she had a week before. I didn't want her to run from me. Slowly, my heart rate returned to normal and I relaxed against her.

"That... was... intense." Her voice was staggered when she finally spoke.

"Yeah." Was all I could summon up to say. We fell into another silence after that.

"Thank you." She whispered against my chest a few minutes later.

I tilted her face up toward mine and asked, "What for?"

"For being patient with me and for trusting me enough to let me come to you when I was ready." Sookie gave me one of those sad smiles again that had me wondering what was going on in her head.

"You don't need to thank me, Sookie. You are more than worth the wait." I promised her, kissing her forehead.

Sometimes it was so easy to understand her, while other times it was next to impossible to know what she was thinking. I supposed it would all just come to me in time. There was much to be learned about the beautiful woman lying next to me, and I wanted to know it all.

"There's something I need to tell you." Sookie sounded a bit haunted.

I rubbed little circles on her back and said, "Okay."

"The only reason I'm bringing this up now is because it's part of the reason why I can get so stuck inside of myself sometimes and I don't want you to think that it's because you did something wrong." Sookie tried to pull back from me but I just held her closer to me.

"No, Sookie, don't push me away. Lean on me." I whispered to her. Her breath caught and I thought she might be crying. Shit. Whatever it was she had to tell me couldn't be good.

Still, she nodded against me and tucked herself closer as if she was trying to make herself smaller. "When I was a little girl, my brother and I spent one weekend a month at my Gran's house so our parents could have some adult time. I used to love those weekends. They were always so much fun, even if Jason was constantly teasing me or being a jerk. My Grandad would take him fishing while my Gran would teach me how to make pies or how to sew. We always did these simple little things that didn't cost a whole lot but were fun all the same.

"When I was six, my Gran's brother, Bartlett, moved in with Gran and Grandad after there was an electrical fire in his house. He was only staying there while the house was being rebuilt, but it took several months for that to happen. Summertime rolled around, and my parents decided they wanted to go away for a week. So Jason and I went to Gran's while they were away. A bad lightening storm knocked down a couple of the trees out back behind Gran's house, so Grandad had to go out back and clear them out. He took Jason along with him, as he usually did, when he had outdoor chores to do. Normally Jason put up a big fight about helping but then Grandad promised to teach Jason how to use a chainsaw. Jason's eyes lit up like a Christmas tree and he didn't complain after that.

"Gran had her Descendants of the Glorious Dead meeting to go to," I gave her a questioning look, but then motioned for her to continue when I realized it wasn't the right time to discuss what the Descendants of the Glorious Dead was. "I was too young to find any of that interesting just yet, so I had the choice of staying behind with Uncle Bartlett or going along with Grandad to clear out the trees. I could tell that I wouldn't be welcome, as far as Jason was concerned, so I decided to stay behind with Uncle Bartlett. Gran left for her meeting. Grandad and Jason went out to the woods and I was alone with my great Uncle. At first, everything was okay. He made me lunch and then put on a video. I was still young enough at that age that I took naps in the afternoon sometimes.

"So there I was, curled up on the couch. I had fallen asleep while watching The Wizard of Oz, like I almost always did." There she paused and tears started rolling down her face. Her body tensed against me and I could feel her shaking. "When I woke up, Uncle Bartlett was crouched on the floor next to me. He was running his fingers through my hair and kissing the side of my face." She gasped for air like she was living this story all over again. I rubbed slow circles on her back in effort to calm her, but I'm not sure how helpful it was. "His hand was... well, it wasn't where an adult should be putting their hand on a child. When I asked him what he was doing, he told me he was loving me and that he couldn't help himself." Right at that moment I wanted to kill. How any adult could do that to a child, let alone a girl like Sookie, I would never understand. "He made me promise not to say anything to Gran or Grandad, and since I was scared, I agreed. He promised he would never do it again. He lied to me." Motherfucker. If I ever meet this scumbag, I'll kill him. "It didn't happen again on while I was staying with Gran that week, but the next weekend that Jason and I went to stay with her, it did. I never told a soul about what was happening. I thought maybe no one would believe me. Bartlett told me everyone would think I was a liar and what he was doing was completely natural. He told me it was my own fault for being such a pretty little girl.

"When I stopped wanting to go to Gran's, my parents knew that something was wrong. I hated being alone with my Daddy, which I'd never hated before. I wouldn't let him tuck me in at night and I wouldn't let him help me with my baths anymore either. I didn't want to ride in his truck with him to go to the store for little things like I always used to. I wouldn't go down to the dock out back to go fishing with him. I just wasn't being myself. Then one night I had a nightmare after a trip to Gran's and I guess I was screaming for Bartlett to stop touching me. That's how my parents found out what had been happening.

"Daddy left the house in a blind rage in the middle of the night with a shotgun in his hand, swearing up and down that he was going to kill Bartlett." I wish I could have been there to help. "I don't know what Daddy said when he confronted Bartlett, but I do know that that was the last time anyone in my family ever spoke to him. My Gran threw him out of the house. Grandad warned him that if he ever came back, he wouldn't stop Daddy from doling out his own justice." I wouldn't have been so generous if it were my child. "My parents filed a police report but there wasn't enough evidence to press charges. I think it was more like they didn't want to put me through the stress of a trial.

"I spent a lot of time in therapy trying to work out my feelings over what had happened to me. Jason had to see the therapist too, just to be sure that Bartlett hadn't tried anything with him, but he never had. Bartlett only wanted me, and for a long time he had me convinced that no one would ever want me *but* him." The thought of Sookie sitting there blaming herself just for being there made me sick to my stomach. It wasn't her fault that old perv couldn't keep his hands to himself. "It took me a long time to understand that what happened to me wasn't my fault and that I had no control over it. What he did to me didn't happen because I was too pretty or because I had tempted him too much. I had to let go of the guilt and the shame that came along with what he'd done.

"I'd like to think that I'm over it but there are times when it all comes rushing back to me, and I wonder if it's ever possible to really get past something like that. It doesn't just go away, and it's not just this thing that happened. It changed me. What he did made it really difficult for me to trust adults, particularly men." She looked up at me then to gauge my reaction and I tried not to have one since I didn't know what the right reaction was supposed to be. I understood why she'd kept her distance but I figured it was better to remain neutral than to plant my flag somewhere just yet. "I didn't date at all in high school because of it. Quinn was the first boyfriend I had. Regardless of the way things ended between us, he made me feel safe. He never pressured me for more than what I was willing to give. I think there was a part of me that was anxious to marry him because I didn't believe there would be anyone else out there who would want me if they knew the truth about me.

"I'm tell you this because as safe as I felt with Quinn, I never told him about what Bartlett did. He always just assumed that I took things so slowly because I was a virgin when we met. I realized after he stopped here the other day that I never trusted him enough to tell him, and maybe it's crazy, but there's something about you that makes it easy to say these things." I wanted to stop her there to tell her that she could tell me anything, that she didn't need to be afraid of me, but I wanted her to finish unloading whatever it was she'd been holding back. "I'm not afraid that you're going to judge me for it or make me feel ashamed. I'm starting to realize that part of the reason things didn't work with him is because I couldn't tell him the complete truth about who I was. But I want you to know. I want you to know everything."

I sat there with my arms still around her, letting everything sink in. She'd just put out a pretty big piece of herself for me to examine. The fact that she'd never mentioned any of this to a man she thought she wanted to marry was a pretty big deal. I wasn't sure how I'd come to earn her trust so quickly, but I wasn't about to question it. I was going to just go with my gut on things and not spend so much time mulling them over. What happened to her as a child didn't change my opinion of her. I didn't think she was damaged or disgusting, but I wouldn't say that to her unless she asked me directly if I thought those things. I didn't want to go planting ideas in her head that me thinking those things was even a possibility.

"Sookie, I'm sorry you were hurt." Was all I could think of to say. Making empty threats to tear out the throat of some pathetic old man wasn't going to make me a hero in her eyes, I could tell that much. "What he did was despicable and I'm sorry you had to go through it."

She nodded against me and I felt wetness on my chest. "I'm sorry if I said too much."

I turned her in my arms and pulled her up so she was sitting up next to me. "Don't apologize for telling me about yourself, Sookie. If you want me to know things, I want to know them. It doesn't matter if it's good, bad or somewhere in between. All of those things that happened to you have made you the beautifully strong woman sitting next to me. Your tears," I wiped them from her cheeks with my thumbs and kissed her cheeks. "They aren't weakness. Frankly, I'd be more worried if this didn't still get to you."

She nodded, her eyes sinking down. "For what it's worth, that was the last of my deep, dark secrets. The only person I've ever told about this is Amelia, and that's only because she was with me when I found out that Bartlett was dead."

I hoped he died painfully and slowly- perhaps red hot pokers were involved. "How did he die?" I had to know.

Sookie smirked and said, "Prostate cancer."

"Good. Serves the fucker right." I couldn't restrain myself from saying it. "Sorry." I only apologized because I didn't want to make things harder on her.

Sookie sighed and rested her head on my shoulder. "Don't worry, I thought the same thing myself a time or two." I leaned down and kissed her hair. "I'm sorry if I ruined the night for you. I was having a really good time."

"You didn't ruin anything, Sookie. You told me something very important to you, and I appreciate you showing me that kind of trust. It means a lot to me that you would let me in that way."

"You told me about Annika, and I know that wasn't easy for you. So I guess this is my way of saying thank you for that." She sighed, her eyes drifting closed as the last of her tears fell against my chest.

Her arm snaked across my chest and her fingers lightly tickled my ribs. She sat there quietly for a while and when her breathing evened out, I knew she was asleep. Slowly, I sank down in her bed, bringing her down with me. She snuggled against me, her fingers still moving against my side. I kissed her forehead and let myself drift off.

"Eric, wake up." Sookie whispered in my ear.

"Saturday." I grumbled, unwilling to open my eyes.

"I'll make it worth your while." She kissed my temple.

"Saturday." I grumbled a second time.

Her hand took mine and I felt it run down her curves to the space between her legs. I felt the hot wetness there and it had other parts of me stirring, even if my brain and eyes weren't quite ready to join the party yet. Just as soon as my hand was surrounded by warmth it was removed.

"Eric, wake up." She said a little more loudly with more dominance in her voice. Her frustration was evident.

Then I felt my fingers tracing her lips before her mouth opened and her tongue darted out to lick my fingers. Only it was like she wasn't seeing my fingers in front of her, but another part of me. A part that was rapidly standing to get her attention. She put my fingers in her mouth and started to suck and that was what got my eyes to open. When I looked over at her I realized she was already looking into my eyes.

"There you are." She purred once her removed my fingers from her mouth. "Thank you for joining me this morning."

It was still dark outside. "Morning? Sookie, I still see stars." I looked to the windows.

She giggled and said, "Let's go see them from my deck." There was mischief in her voice and daring in her eyes but I ignored it.

"What? No, it's Saturday. We sleep in on Saturday." I tried to pull her back to me. As much as I wanted to bury myself inside her, I was exhausted.

"I promise we can come back to bed soon, but I really want you to come with me." The way she said it, all low and sultry had my curiosity piqued. I groaned, but let her tug me out of bed. I got the feeling she wasn't going to give up.

She was dressed in the t-shirt I'd been wearing the night before. She handed me my jeans and I put them on. She tugged me down the stairs behind her and grabbed a blanket off of the back of the couch before opening one of the French doors that led onto her deck. She slid back the screen door, and pulled me outside. She turned one of two chaise lounges to the east and told me to sit.

"Sookie, we can snuggle in bed and it's much warmer up there and requires no clothing. Jeans and a hard on don't go together." I was pouting. I was a crabby bitch when I didn't get enough sleep, and I always let myself sleep as late as I wanted to on Saturday.

"Well allow me to fix that, then." Sookie sat between my legs and spread the blanket out over us, making sure we had adequate cover before her small hands unzipped my jeans. "Don't close your eyes, Eric." She instructed as she freed me from the denim.

She started to stroke as the sky began to lighten. She was so relaxed about it, like it was the most natural thing in the world to be giving me a handjob in her backyard while we watched the sunrise. Not wanting to be accused of being a selfish lover, since nothing could be further from the truth, I returned the favor my dipping my fingers between her thighs. Her legs bent and her knees parted under the blanket to allow me better access.

"You aren't the least bit worried someone might see us?" I whispered to her hoarsely, a combination of sleep and lust husking my voice.

She turned her face up and kissed my jaw. "Our nearest neighbor is Amelia, and I can guarantee she and Tray aren't up yet. And if they are, they're not going to be watching out the windows."

*Because they're still in bed*, I said bitterly in my head before chastising myself. On a scale of ways to wake up, this wasn't too bad. In fact, this was probably the only way Sookie was going to get me to watch the sun rise with her on a Saturday morning. The lighter the sky got, the faster she stroked. We laid there on the chaise lounge, toying with each other. She would take me to the edge and then back off and I merely followed her lead. By the time the sun had risen above the horizon, we were both panting and wanting each other more than I had ever wanted anything in my life. Putting my jeans on just wasn't going to happen.

"Come with me." Sookie purred again and then slipped out from under the blanket before I knew what was happening.

She darted into the house, leaving me on the chaise lounge all stunned and starry-eyed. I wrapped the blanket around myself as best I could and then darted into the house behind her. I let my jeans fall around my ankles, expecting to find her on the couch- or if I was really lucky, the kitchen table- but she wasn't there. She wasn't in the dining room or the living room. I bolted up the stairs, taking them two at a time. I found her back in bed- just like she'd promised me before taking me outside- propped up against a bunch of pillows.

There was no evidence of the insecure victim who'd cried on my shoulder last night about the things she'd been through as a child. I wondered how she was able to turn it on and off like she did. She could stowe things away so easily sometimes, while there were other times when it was obvious she couldn't hold anything back. I came to the conclusion that on anyone else, I would have found the complexity to be maddening and too troublesome to learn how to navigate. On Sookie, I found it endearing. I wanted to learn all the triggers and ways to push her buttons, just as it seemed she wanted to learn those same things about me.

I climbed up onto the bed beside her and pushed her onto her side so we were both facing her windows. I lifted her leg and set it on mine before placing myself at her entrance. She gasped when she felt my tip there and reached back to pull me closer to her. I considered teasing her some more, but decided we'd waited long enough. I entered her slowly, reveling in the feeling of her slick heat surrounding me, drawing me deeper inside her. She moaned when I was as deep as I could get and brought my hand up to her mouth, my fingers again finding sanctuary inside.

I kept my strokes long and slow, waiting for her to prompt me to move faster just as she'd done the night before. With anyone else, it would have felt like torture to get so close and still feel so far away from what I wanted. With Sookie, I didn't mind the intensity or the build up. I didn't mind that she'd keep me right there on the edge because I knew that once we tumbled over it, it would be way more than worth it. She released my fingers from her mouth and turned her head as far as she could to look back at me. My lips connected with hers, her tongue slipping into my mouth to probe against mine in time with my thrusts.

She pulled her mouth from mine when her fingers dug into my hip behind her. "Faster, Eric." She breathed heavily, sucking in air as quickly as she could.

I complied easily with her request and I felt her starting to squeeze me from inside. The clenching of her muscles triggered my own release. Her hand grabbed mine, placing it between her thighs, guiding me to where she needed it most. I rubbed tight circles on her slick skin and her grip on me from the inside began to tighten. I groaned against her neck, kissing her shoulders and thrusting a little faster. She was amazing.

"Oh, God, don't stop." She moaned loudly, as if there was a chance in hell that was going to happen.

Her small hand was on top of mine, directing it where to go. If I wouldn't have been able to feel its effects on her, I might have been offended by it. But I was certainly reaping the benefits of her little tutorial and it was all knowledge I would store for another day. And then, all of a sudden, my name was tumbling from her lips as her muscles clamped down like a vice. Her nails dug into the back of my hand as she came. Two hard thrusts later I was tumbling down the rabbit hole right behind her. My arm moved away from her center and locked around her chest, holding her tight to me.

Her breasts heaved against my arm and her head angled down and kissed my fingertips. Her breath fell warm and moist on me, her own hand reaching up to stroke my cheek. She turned her head again as far as she could and accepted the kiss I offered her. Amazing, simply amazing.

"Well what do you know? I'm seeing stars, too." She giggled, and then kissed me again.

We stayed locked in each other's arms for the next few hours until Sookie pried herself loose. "Where are you going?" I whispered, not wanting to let her up.

"Bathroom. Then I think we need food." She whispered and kissed my hand.

"The only thing I want to eat is right here." My hand traveled down her body and she gasped when I touched her between her legs.

"Later." She promised and then got out of bed before I could stop her.

When she emerged from the bathroom a few minutes later my eyes were closed. She sat on the edge of the bed and kissed me until my eyes opened. "Why do you have clothes on?" I almost pouted at her.

"I will not cook naked in my kitchen. Amelia is infamous for just popping up and she doesn't need to see all of that." Sookie warned me and then got off the bed.

She wasn't really dressed, she'd just put my t-shirt back on. I got out of bed as she was going out her bedroom door. I walked to her bathroom and took care of business before realizing my jeans were still downstairs where I'd left them earlier. I grinned at the idea of strolling into her kitchen naked and joining her downstairs. She'd already gotten the coffee started and was pulling food from her fridge. When she turned to see me walk into the room, she nearly dropped the carton of eggs she was holding. She flushed bright pink and bit her lower lip. Already I knew that meant she was having trouble controlling herself. I smirked at her and then went to retrieve my jeans.

"You're evil." She whispered to me when I approached her.

"You brought it on yourself. Maybe next time you'll just stay in bed with me like I wanted." I teased, and she handed over the carton of eggs for me to start cracking into a bowl for her.

She groaned when her phone started ringing. She looked at the name flashing on the screen and her eyes narrowed with disdain. "Eric, I'm sorry, but I have to take this or he'll just keep calling me."

"The ex?" I didn't want to be jealous but it flared up just a little. I knew he'd stopped by but Sookie had been short on the details of what it was he'd wanted to talk to her about.

"It'll just be a minute, I promise." She pushed herself up on her toes to kiss my cheek and then headed out to the deck to take the call.

I stood there watching her pace back and forth as she talked. Her hands shot out, gesturing wildly as her face started to turn red. Whatever he was saying to her clearly didn't make her happy. Finally, just when it looked like she was going to hurl her phone over the fence, she slammed it shut and came back inside. I wanted to ask if everything was okay but decided it wasn't really my place to ask. She'd talk about it when she was ready.

"I don't know what I ever saw in that guy sometimes." She put her phone down on the counter and I took that as an invitation to ask about the call.

"What happened?" I tried not to sound too interested.

"He called to tell me he thinks he made a mistake." Oh hell fucking no.

"And what did you tell him?" I had a pretty good idea but I wanted to hear her say it.

"I told him that I've moved on and that I'm seeing someone and I have *absolutely no interest* in trading down." She wrapped her arms around me tightly.

"I'm guessing he didn't take that well?" I knew I sure wouldn't.

"Not really, but that's not my problem. He had his chance." Sookie looked up at me, her voice went a bit sheepish. "And I told him my boyfriend and I would appreciate it if he would leave me alone from now on."

"Boyfriend, huh?" I smiled down at her.

"I could call you my lover." She teased, squeezing me as she said it.

"I'd answer to either." I assured her and leaned down to kiss her softly.

"Good to know." She winked at me and then pulled away to start frying bacon.

"What should I call you?" I asked while I started beating the eggs I'd cracked.

"What do you want to call me?" Sookie looked over her shoulder with a hint of nervousness on her face that wouldn't allow me to tease her like I would have liked to just then. Did she really not know how much I liked her? I would have to remedy that. I set down the bowl I was holding and took the package of bacon from her hands. "Eric, what are you doing?"

I picked her up and set her down on the counter before leaning down so we were eye to eye. "In case I haven't made it abundantly clear to you, you are the most fascinating woman I have ever met. When I'm not around you, I want to be. You make me very happy and I don't want to be with anyone else but you. I am very much in like with you, Miss Stackhouse."

Her eyes watered and she smiled that morning smile I liked so much. I silently pleaded with her not to cry. She must have seen it in my eyes because she took a deep breath and willed her tears away. She kissed me and then hopped off the counter to resume making breakfast. I went back to my eggs while she went back to her bacon. I was leaned up against the counter, watching her move around the room. When she reached up to get a baking dish I was treated to a visual that let me know she wasn't wearing underwear, causing an almost violent twitch in my pants.

I forced myself to stay where I was until she turned to look over her shoulder at me. "Could you get that pan?" She pointed.

"It'll cost you." My voice dropped and my insides did a little victory dance when she shuddered just a bit.

"What do you have in mind?" She turned her body toward mine.

"Oh, I've got an idea." I looked at her like a lion stalking its prey as I closed the distance between us.

She pressed herself into the corner, having nowhere else to go. She didn't fight it when I bent to kiss her, nor did she push me away when I picked her up and set her on the counter. I wanted more than kisses but we didn't get there before the smell of something burning filled the room and the smoke alarm went off. Another first with Sookie- I'd never been cockblocked by bacon before.

Sookie giggled then hopped off the counter. "I guess I'll have to owe you one."

"I'll put it on your tab." I promised and then got down the pan she wanted before going to open windows to clear out the smoke.

**Not much else to say here, other than reviews are love. Thanks for reading!**

**Chapter 13: Confessions, Breakfast & Pam**

Mmmmmmm lemons. Taste so good, don't they? \*licks lips\* We'll be having more of them and on a regular basis. Hope that's not a deal breaker for you. Okay, so there's going to be a bit of doubling up on this chapter from the last. I tried to condense it down as much as I could so that you don't get too bored, but with all that happened I thought it was important to get Sookie's POV on a lot of it. She revealed something pretty big, and she's got lots of feelings in regards to it. So hang in there- I promise there's new stuff toward the end. Okay, enough out of me. I'll see you at the bottom.

Chapter Thirteen: Confessions, Breakfast & Pam

**Sookie**

The things I was feeling for Eric made me question if I'd never really been in love with Quinn at all. Being able to tell him about Uncle Bartlett and the things that had happened to me in my past took a huge weight off my shoulders. I had never been able to tell Quinn. I knew that I should, but I just couldn't bring myself to say the words. I think that was partially because I knew he was going to look at me with pity and want to take vengeance on my behalf, even though it was too late for that. He would stomp around making threats and growling about how it was unfair that I'd been damaged. Any reaction he might have had wouldn't have been about me, but about how it made *him* feel. Dealing without own feelings over the whole thing was hard enough without him adding his own burden to it.

And then to top it all off, the sex was phenomenal. If I'd had any doubts left over from the haze of my memory the night we met, they were all erased. Being able to tell him everything, or anything, and knowing that he still wanted me just as much was almost unbelievable to me. The way he looked at me had changed, but only for the better. He looked almost proud of me, which was something I wasn't expecting. Hearing him tell me that I was strong and beautiful did wonders, and it didn't sound clichéd. My parents and my Gran had tried to tell me those same things from the time I was small, but it always felt like they were saying it because they had to. I didn't get that feeling from Eric. With him, I felt like he really meant it, like he really believed his words.

I felt lighter after I told him the truth and I promised him there weren't anymore dark secrets waiting to be dropped on him. He'd told me about the death of his sister, which I knew wasn't easy for him. It was a life changing event for him. He'd had about as much time to process that loss as I did the loss of my childhood. We'd both suffered a loss of innocence at a young age, but in very different ways. I started to wonder if maybe everyone had their own little tragic tale to tell and I just never gave it much thought in the past because I was too busy dealing with my own to notice.

Sure I'd feel bad for someone if they had a death in the family or if they lost a job or something like that, but I never gave much thought to the story that got them to the point where those things occurred. Was that the worst it would ever get, or was that just the tip of the iceberg? I laid in bed thinking about those things before the sun had come up. Eric was sound asleep next to me. I could see his eyes moving under his lids. His breathing was deep and even. His left arm was wrapped around me, clutching me to his chest. I closed my eyes and listened to the steady drumming of his heart beating under my ear.

I turned my head toward the window and realized it was getting close to dawn. A new day was about to start. I got the idea in my head that I wanted to watch the sunrise and I wanted to watch it with Eric. I wanted my new day- my new chapter- to start with him. So I did everything I could think of to wake him up. I whispered dirty things in his ear, thinking that would get him where calling his name didn't. I rubbed up against him but he only held me tighter. It took a few different attempts before I was finally able to rouse him, and what did he tell me?

"We sleep in on Saturday." I hadn't realized he was a crabby morning person, but maybe that only applied to weekends. The rest of he week he was anxious to get out of bed and go for his run before school started.

There was a part of me that said I was crazy for even considering getting out of bed, but for whatever crazy reason it was really important to me to go out back and watch the sun come up. It took a lot of coaxing and promising of sexual acts to be named later to get Eric out of bed. He reluctantly followed me downstairs, obliging what I'm sure he considered to be a silly whim. I doubt he felt like it was so silly when we started fooling around on that chaise lounge. I *know* he didn't think it was silly when we went back inside a little while later and had more amazing sex.

By the time I woke up for the day I was starving. I didn't know how Eric's stomach wasn't waking him up. Still, he didn't want to get out of bed. We had all weekend to be silly and naked with each other. If we were going to keep up with that, we'd need food. So downstairs we went to the kitchen. I got the coffee going and started Eric on cracking eggs for me so I could make a fritatta with bacon, vegetables and cheese. My phone rang and I was beyond disappointed to see that it was Quinn calling. I wasn't really in the mood to talk to him but I wanted to tell him that he needed to stop calling me.

I apologized to Eric for taking the call, but went outside to do so. I saw him watching me from the kitchen window out of the corner of my eye as I walked to the edge of the deck. I flipped my phone open just before the call could go to voicemail. The sooner I could settle this mess with Quinn, the better off I'd be.

"Hello, Quinn." I didn't care that I sounded irritated.

"Did I wake you?" Quinn was used to me being an early riser on weekends. I always had chores and errands to run.

"No, you didn't, but now's not really a good time to talk." I sighed.

"You got company? Amelia and Tray over for breakfast? I could stop by." He suggested and I figured he was searching for a home cooked meal. He was going to have to keep looking.

"Nope, I haven't seen them since yesterday afternoon, but I do have company."

"That guy who was over the other morning?"

"Not that it's any of your business, but yes."

"He your boyfriend?"

"Quinn-"

"I miss you, Sookie. I miss you a lot. I know it's going to sound stupid, but I didn't realize just how much until I drove by your house the other day. I know I screwed things up, but-"

"There are no buts, Quinn. What we had is in the past. It's over for us and I'm not interested in trying to work things out. You had your chance. I'm with Eric now, and I'm happy. Please don't ruin that for me." I said firmly, knowing that pleading would do me little good where Quinn was concerned.

"But babe," I hated it when he called me that. He only used that particular pet name when he was trying to talk me into something he knew I didn't want to do. "You know I love you. You know we were good together. I just wasn't ready before for all the things you wanted."

"And what's changed, Quinn? You're still building your business. You've still got your family to take care of. I get it, okay? I don't want to be another thing you add to your list of responsibilities. I want to mean more to you than just another thing to take care of."

"You know that's not how it is, Sookie." He was getting angry with me.

"That's the way it would always feel, Quinn, like you were with me because you thought you were doing me a favor. You don't need to worry about me. I'm just fine, and I'm more than happy with my life right now."

"You in love with this guy?"

"That's none of your business."

"So it's just a sex thing then." Quinn's voice took on a nasty tone.

"You shut your nasty mouth, John!" I only called him by his first name when I was pissed off and he damn well knew he crossed a line. "You listen, and you listen good. You and me are done. We're not getting back together. We're not even going to be friends. You need to stop calling me and coming by because you've got some crazy notion in your head that I'm a damsel in distress that needs your protection. I can take care of myself just fine, and if I can't, you would be the last person in the world I'd turn to. Whether or not I love my boyfriend isn't any of your business. All you need to know is that we're together and *we* would appreciate it if you left me alone. You got that, *John*?"

I heard him breathing heavy on his end and I knew he was every bit as angry as I was. When he didn't answer me I asked him again if he understood what I was saying. I really didn't want to have that conversation again in a few days. Quinn was notorious for hearing only the things he wanted to hear.

"I don't like it, but I heard you." He acknowledged.

"Good. Then I expect this is the last phone call to get from you. Goodbye, Quinn." I didn't wait for his response before I hung up.

I took a few deep breaths before going back into the house. Eric was trying not to look like he'd been watching me on the deck and I appreciated that he was giving me my space and not pouncing on me to explain what Quinn wanted. I grumbled and stomped around the kitchen for a minute or two before giving Eric an opening to ask what was wrong and he immediately took the bait, although he managed to maintain a casual tone about it.

I gave him the short version of the call since I didn't see much point in quoting back the things Quinn had said. It would only piss Eric off more and I didn't want the two of them to get into some stupid altercation if Quinn went back on his word and showed up at my house while Eric was here. To say things could get ugly would be an understatement of epic proportions. Eric and Quinn were about the same height, but Quinn was definitely heavier than Eric. I couldn't say how they matched where strength was concerned, but my gut tipped in Quinn's favor. Although, I was quite sure Eric would be more than capable of handling himself in a fight. Being bigger and stronger didn't necessarily equal a victory. My brother was living proof of that. He'd gotten into fights with plenty of guys who were bigger or stronger than him, and he still managed to put their lights out.

When I mentioned that I'd told Quinn that my boyfriend and I didn't want to be bothered by him anymore, I immediately noticed the way Eric perked up. We'd sort of had that talk on Tuesday night but hadn't really come to any conclusions about where we were at in our relationship. I didn't think he'd freak out or react badly to me calling him my boyfriend, but it was one thing for us to say it to each other. It was something different to tell others and I wasn't sure if he was ready to go public with the information. Hell, I wasn't really sure if I was yet.

Still, since I'd brought it up, we had to talk about it. Eric was more than okay with me calling him my boyfriend. And when I asked what he was going to call me, I sounded a bit more nervous than I wanted to. I hated that my feelings for him made me feel so vulnerable. The thought that he might change his mind or decide to walk out scared the hell out of me. He hadn't given me any reason to think he might. If anything, he had every reason to think I was the one who was less than sure about where we stood. I needed to stop worrying and just go with the flow.

Eric looked like he wanted to tease me for being such a girl about the whole thing, and I was thankful when he didn't. Instead, he picked me up and put me on the counter. He looked me in my eyes and said, "In case I haven't made it abundantly clear to you, you are the most fascinating woman I have ever met. When I'm not around you, I want to be. You make me very happy and I don't want to be with anyone else but you. I am very much in like with you, Miss Stackhouse."

My heart was racing and I thought I was going to cry. I couldn't help but smile and I didn't want to go completely girlie on him and ruin the moment. I took a deep breath and got my shit together. He was smiling back at me when I opened my eyes, so I leaned forward and kissed him. He kissed me back and it felt really good to know we were on the same page. I got off the counter before we could go any further. I was still starving and there was plenty of time to get all handsy with one another later.

Things were going along just fine until I asked Eric to get me a baking dish from a high shelf. Normally I'd drag out my step stool and get it myself, but I figured Eric would be offended if I didn't just ask him to do it. So of course, when I did, he teased that it would cost me. He gave me the single most predatory stare I'd ever been on the receiving end of, and I was happy when he put me back on the counter since my knees had gone a little shaky. We got to kissing again and we must have lost track of time because all of a sudden I could smell something burning and the smoke alarm was going off.

We pulled apart, both of us giggling. I hopped off the counter and went to go tend to the bacon while Eric got down my pan for me and then opened the windows and the back door. Once we got the smoke cleared out and the burned up bacon out of the pan, I started a new batch and put Eric in charge of dicing up veggies for the frittata. He went in search of my iPod and got it going. I loved that he liked listening to music while doing chores around the house. I preferred it greatly to news in the morning. I was an evening news sort of girl. I didn't need to watch it three or four times a day, plus read the paper and get the headlines in my email. Sometimes it was nice to shut out the rest of the world and concentrate on what was right in front of me.

Eventually I got the eggs in the oven to bake. Eric and I were just sitting down with a cup of coffee- with me in his lap- when Amelia popped up at the back door. "Aren't you glad you didn't come down here naked?" I asked as Amelia breezed right in.

"Morning, kids." If she'd heard me, she was choosing to ignore it. Not that it would take much to figure out what we'd been up to. Not only was I wearing Eric's shirt, but I still had serious sex hair from the night before. Amelia smiled at me knowingly. "How was your night?"

Eric and I looked at one another and I said, "Phenomenal."

Eric grinned at me and Amelia laughed before saying, "That's good to hear."

"I take it you and Tray worked things out?" As if the grin on her face didn't give it all away. Amelia was rarely so chipper before noon on the weekends.

"For the moment, but you know we'll have that same fight again in a month or two."

I laughed and said, "Sometimes I think y'all fight just so you can makeup."

Amelia wiggled her eyebrows and said, "And sometimes we do."

After getting all the gossip out of me she was going to get with Eric around, she asked if she could borrow a couple of eggs. I got them for her and sent her on her way back to Tray. She went out the front door, promising she would ring the bell next time she came by just in case Eric and I were 'busy'. I rolled my eyes at her and made sure I locked the door just in case. Amelia had a spare key for emergencies just like I had a key to her place, but I rarely ever had to use it. Amelia, on the other hand, had a very different idea of what constituted an emergency. We would need to go over that in the near future to prevent embarrassing situations from occurring.

Not long after that breakfast was ready. Eric and I talked while we ate, debating what to do with the rest of our weekend. He was strongly in favor of spending it in bed, but then remembered he'd told Pam that he would stop at the bar to sign some papers for her.

"It won't take long. We could stop in there and then go back to my place. Pam took care of Jeter for me last night, but he's going to need attention pretty soon." Eric seemed almost hesitant to mention it.

"That's fine with me. I'll bring a change of clothes for work on Monday and I'll just stay at your house, if that's okay with you?" I suggested.

"That's more than fine with me." Eric smiled and then drained his coffee.

Things were going so well it was scary. It seemed almost too easy with us. We were both quick to compromise to make one another happy and I wondered how long that was going to last, since it couldn't last forever. I wasn't naïve enough to think we would agree on everything. A point would come when we wouldn't, and I was curious as to how that was going to work out. When it came down to the flight or fight debate, I was more of a flyer than a fighter. It was obvious to me that Eric was the opposite. The good news for me was that he also seemed to be a very patient person.

After breakfast we cleaned up and loaded the dirty dishes into the dishwasher before heading back upstairs. I was too stuffed to even consider anything other than a nap or a shower. Personally, I wanted to save the shower for later, since I had a feeling we'd just get dirty again. Talking Eric into getting back into bed wasn't at all difficult. I closed the blinds and climbed into bed beside him so that my back was to his chest. He pulled me close to him and in no time at all, we were both sound asleep.

When I woke up it was well after noon. I rolled over to find that Eric was already awake. "How long have you been up?"

"Not long." He rolled us so I was underneath him.

"We should get in the shower."

"We, huh?"

"If you're not comfortable with that, I can wait. I wouldn't want to crowd you." I let my hands slip into the waistband of the back of his jeans.

I felt him smile against my lips, his eyes sparkling with amusement. "If my girlfriend wants us to shower together, who am I to decline such an offer?"

I giggled and then squeezed the very firm skin under my hands, earning me a growl and a nudge from the very noticeable bulge in the front of his jeans. "Well, if you insist."

His lips met mine but didn't stay for long. Instead he began to tug off the shirt I was wearing- his shirt- and tossed it on the floor. He slid further down the bed and settled himself between my legs. He used his mouth and fingers expertly to have me moaning and calling out his name until I felt like I couldn't breathe. When my body stopped trembling, he slipped off my bed and took off his jeans. I expected him to dive on top of me again. Instead, he picked me up and carried me to the bathroom. He got the water going for the shower and then leaned down to kiss me until the water was ready.

In no time flat we were under the warm spray, finishing what we'd started in the bedroom. I found myself up against the tile wall just as I had been a few days before, only this time Eric was holding me up much higher than before. My body stretched to take him, and he lowered me onto him slowly. Our eyes met, as they always seemed to do when we were that close to one another, and ever so slowly my hips began to rock against his. Eric took it slow until he was sure I was ready for more.

When he was, the pace increased and I did my best to keep up with him. I hated myself a little for comparing the two, but Eric was bigger than Quinn when it came to one size in particular. Quinn was above average, from all I'd heard on the subject, but Eric... well, Eric was bigger. He also seemed to have a better idea of what he was doing. Quinn was okay, but he wasn't always so concerned with whether I was enjoying myself as he should have been. Towards the end of our relationship we weren't having sex anymore and I can't really say that I missed it all that much. Then I met Eric and a week seemed like it's stretched on for years. Amazing how that happens.

I also knew that if we didn't slow down the frequency just a little, I was going to end up really sore. Before Eric, it had been almost nine months since the last time I'd had sex. My hormones wanted to get all they could but I knew my body was going to start filing complaints really soon, and if I ignored them, it would wage a full on protest against me. I wasn't looking forward to that one bit. But I pushed those thoughts away, resigning myself to enjoy the benefit of Eric's many skills while I could.

When my eyes went in search of Eric's, I found they were looking down to see where we were joined. I squeezed my muscles tight around him and his head snapped up. His knees went just a little weak and he groaned loudly in reward.

"Sookie," He leaned against me and my arms went around his neck. I loved hearing my name from his lips like that so I squeezed again, getting another groan and a warning. "Sookie, you're not going to get to finish if you keep that up."

"Oh, I think I will." I whispered in his ear, rolling my hips against his and then squeezing him a third time.

His thrusts got harder and faster. With a slight shift of my hips he was hitting a new place inside me that had my back arching and my voice calling out to him on its own accord. Then I was squeezing him involuntarily and twice as hard. My fingers went tight around the back of his neck, holding him tightly to me as my orgasm unleashed itself. My legs started to go weak, and Eric held them tighter. Just a few more hard thrusts and he was falling with me. He turned as around quickly and leaned against the wall so the water was hitting my back. How I was going to stand up and wash myself off after that, I had no idea.

Slowly, he let my legs down and I stayed there leaned against him while we caught our breath. His fingers laced with mine and I snuggled against his chest. One thing was for sure, I never felt anything like that before. It was amazing. *He* was a amazing. I didn't want it to end, and it occurred to me that it didn't have to. Well, theoretically it didn't. Physically, I had to reign it back or I'd end up on the disabled list. I giggled at the use of a sports analogy in my head.

"What are you laughing at?" Eric's hands slid down my body, making me squirm a little against him.

"I was just thinking about how much I would love to go another round with you, but I'd better pace myself before I end up on the disabled list." I looked up to see his expression and he laughed right along with me.

"Disabled list, huh?" I nodded and he bent to kiss me.

After a few minutes I pulled back and said, "We better get washed up before the hot water goes."

He reluctantly agreed, although that didn't stop him from dropping the soap more than once. He was sneaky, I'd give him that. After the longest shower of my life I dried off and went to my closet to figure out what to wear. I knew we were going to the bar so he could take care of some business but we hadn't made plans for afterward.

"What are we doing tonight?" I asked over my shoulder. Eric was still wrapped in his towel and standing in front of my bed, watching me as I debated over what to wear. His eyebrows danced and he wore a lopsided grin that made me roll my eyes. "I didn't mean *that*, Eric."

"I hadn't really thought about it. I figured we'd make dinner and then do whatever we feel like doing. I've got a few ideas, of course."

"Of course." I couldn't stop the smirk that appeared on my face.

"You don't need to dress up, if that's what you're asking." Eric dropped his towel unceremoniously and I had to look the other way or I'd jump him. "You're blushing, aren't you?" He was teasing me. Jerk.

"You don't know me." I sassed him and he just laughed. Double jerk. He was right, of course. While I liked that he was starting to know me well, there was also a part of me that was irked by it. It seemed too fast for him to be able to read me like he did. Was I really that obvious, or was he just really perceptive?

"Oh, I think I do," his arms snaked around my waist, pulling my back to his chest. "I bet you're biting your bottom lip right now, aren't you?"

I was. Damn him. "Eric, I need to get dressed."

"No, you don't." My towel just happened to fall at that moment and we were naked again and ready to go.

What the hell was wrong with me? I'd never felt like this about Quinn. I'd never had that feeling where I just had to have him all the time. It was never this rush of emotion and need that completely consumed me, demanding to be sated only to rise again a short time later. I can honestly say there was only one time I'd jumped him in our whole relationship and it was after some stupid fight we'd had after we'd been dating for two years. My brain wanted to rationalize the attraction I felt to the man that was very obviously just as attracted to me and had no problem letting me feel it.

I fought my way out of the haze that was starting to envelope me, thanks to the wet kisses being trailed on my neck, and managed to escape Eric's grasp. "We have to go meet Pam, remember?"

The mention of Pam's name seemed to do wonders and Eric came back to reality. He didn't look happy about it, but he got dressed and waited for me while I did the same. I felt bad that he was going home on the same clothes as the ones he'd been wearing the day before, especially since I'd been wearing his shirt for the better part of the day. Well, when I wasn't naked, anyway. I went back to the bathroom to blow dry my hair and put on just a little bit of makeup.

Eric went downstairs and made himself comfortable on the couch and was watching a baseball game when I got down there. His eyes immediately snapped to me when he realized I was in the room. He smiled approvingly at the outfit I'd chosen- jeans and an old Bon Temps football t-shirt that I'd had for as long as I could remember. I was carrying an overnight bag with clothes for the next two days. He didn't know it, but I'd stuffed my red heels into the bag to surprise him later.

"You ready to go?" I asked him as I closed up the patio doors and made sure my windows were locked.

"Whenever you are." He turned off the television and got up to follow me out of the house.

We agreed to meet at his house so he could drop off the Comet. I drove my own car since I would need to be able to take myself to work, and then home, on Monday. He'd offered to drive me, but I'd already decided that we would be spending the night in our own beds Monday night. I couldn't let myself get into the habit of sleeping at his place every night. We needed to have some semblance of separate lives. Surely he had things at the bar that he'd been neglecting, just as I had been less involved in setting up the poms try outs than I usually was. Not to mention I got the feeling that Amelia was feeling a little neglected as well.

That, and it just didn't seem healthy to be around each other all the time. We needed to come up for air once in a while, didn't we? The problem was that my resolve seemed to take a nosedive whenever I was within five square miles of Eric. I'd never had so much trouble saying no in my whole life. *Farewell, independence, you've served me well but now I've found a man who can rock my world like no other. Thanks for playing.*Was I really one of *those* women? Was I really going to trade that in because of a few orgasms? Okay, so really, *really* good ones, but still... it just didn't seem right.

By the time I got to Eric's house my skin was crawling. I was split in half with my little Devil Sookie on one shoulder and Angel Sookie on the other. The Devil wanted nothing more than to get him in the house and jump his bones because it had been more than two hours since we'd touched each other. The Angel, however, wanted nothing more than to lay down some ground rules so that he didn't think our relationship was going to turn into sexapalooza. Somewhere in my brain I realized I was going to need to find a balance between those two things. I just wasn't used to feeling the way I did, and until I got comfortable with it, I was going to keep battling myself.

Jeter went crazy when Eric walked into the house. Poor thing had been by himself for almost twenty-four hours with the exception of the few minutes Pam had supposedly stopped by to let him out of the house. Dry dog food was spilled on the kitchen floor, suggesting she'd been there to feed him, at least, but Jeter looked starved for attention. He wasn't at all happy with us when we brought him back in the house so we could head over to the bar.

"Poor guy." I pouted on his behalf as Eric walked with me to the Corvette.

"He'll get over it. Although we might get the cold shoulder from him later." Eric warned me.

"Eric, I meant what I said about you bringing him with to my house. I don't mind. I just never had a dog myself because Quinn and dogs don't mix. He was always more of a cat person." I explained before getting into the car.

Then I tried to picture Jeter riding shotgun in Eric's car and I couldn't hold back the giggles. Eric asked what I was laughing at but I just shook it off. We pulled up to the bar a few minutes later. It was still relatively early on Saturday afternoon. A few staff members were inside getting set up for the night. The radio was on, tuned to the local top 40 station. Pam was at the bar with her ledger and a few other stacks of paper spread out around her.

"Let's get this over with." Eric said by way of greeting and I slugged him for it.

"Ha! I bet Sookie says the same thing before you have sex with her." Pam got him right back. Bah-zing!

I blushed and giggled at the same time, earning me a taste of the glare he was offering Pam. "Wouldn't *you* like to know?"

"Fucking right I would." Pam leveled me with one of her smoldering looks she'd been giving Amelia the first night I'd gone into the bar and I felt myself reaching for Eric's hand, which of course, had him laughing. Jerk.

"So where's the shit, Pam?" Eric began to paw through her piles of paper.

The dynamic of their friendship was one I was going to have to get used to. Amelia and I certainly didn't address each other that way. They reminded me of Jason and Hoyt. It was like being a fly on the wall of a frat house. I stood back, completely amused by the way they interacted with one another. While Amelia and I used abbreviations of each other's name as nicknames, Eric and Pam had certainly chosen more colorful words. Eric was partial to calling Pam "ball buster"- and more than once- "bitchface". Cute. Pam, on the other hand, preferred more surly and snarky nicknames that were dripping with sarcasm. She called him a vampire and "Master". It was hard to believe the two of them even liked each other with the way they talked, but I knew they loved each other in their own weird way.

"How's attendance been?" Eric asked while looking over a proposal that had been submitted by a contractor.

Eric explained to me that Pam was considering expanding the business, but Eric was leery of putting more money into the bar so soon. While it was true they were doing well and their numbers were holding, he didn't want to take on too much too soon. I knew that feeling all too well. I looked around the bar and really took in the details. I don't know how I'd missed it my first time there, but there was a stage set up against the wall they were talking about taking down to expand the bar. A crazy idea popped into my head and when Pam mentioned how dead it was on Tuesday nights, I couldn't stop myself from speaking up.

"I know this isn't any of my business, but have you ever thought of having an under-age night?" I asked suddenly, earning surprised looks from Pam and Eric. "It's just that there isn't a whole lot for the kids in the area to do and having someplace to hang out that isn't the woods with alcohol swiped from their parents' liquor cabinet would be a good thing."

Pam looked at me like I had three heads while Eric's eyes were lighting up. He started to pontificate about all the things they could do to expand their business a little, but Pam shook her head vehemently.

"Eric, no. I do not want some snot nosed teenagers running around my bar trying to talk the bartenders into slipping them a little something." Pam argued.

"Pam, Felicia isn't stupid enough to serve minors. Besides, you'd be here the whole time watching them like a hawk. You can be a scary bitch when you want to be." That was Eric's idea of praise. The scary part was that it made Pam smile.

"While I appreciate your confidence in me, Master, I'm not sure it's a good idea. I don't want to run a nightclub for kiddies." Pam sneered. The idea of Pam being maternal to anyone made me laugh, and I didn't even really know her well enough to know if she had those sorts of instincts. My guess was probably not.

"You could have a battle of the bands." I suggested, unable to keep my mouth shut. Pam was looking more and more annoyed with me, while Eric looked like he wanted to kiss me. "Eric and I have access to a lot of kids with talent, Pam."

Pam snorted and said, "You want to be a promoter for my bar?"

My eyes drifted to Eric's and he looked like he'd just struck gold. Shit. What had me and my big mouth just gotten me into? I was kicking myself for saying anything at all. I should have just waited until we were out of the bar and told Eric my thoughts when we got back to his house.

"She'd be great. She knows the kids and the town. She's got amazing taste in music," Eric winked at me. Damn Nirvana t-shirt. "And this idea might help keep up attendance. Besides, even if these kids can't drink now, they'll be able to sooner or later."

That wasn't quite what I'd been thinking when I mentioned the idea of an under-age night, but I understood it from Eric's perspective. Pam seemed to catch on to it, too, and before long she was starting to come around. By the time Eric and I were leaving the bar, Pam had tasked me with the job of rounding up a bunch of bands that might be interested in playing at the bar. I reminded her that they would have to open earlier on Tuesday to accommodate an under-age crowd since there was the town curfew to consider. Pam waved all that off dismissively. She had ideas in her head, as Eric explained, and she would leave it to him to sweat the small stuff.

No sooner were we back at Eric's house than I was being tugged back toward the bedroom. As predicted, it seemed Jeter was giving us the cold shoulder. "Eric, we should get started on dinner." I tried to fight him off. Useless. Completely and totally useless.

"We will." He promised before slamming his bedroom door and pushing me up against it. "But right now all I want is to hear you scream my name."

Cocky bastard. "Yes, Master." I teased, earning me a growl.

Still, he got what he wanted. Twice.

**How cute are these two for not being able to keep their hands off one another? A few of you have asked when the angst will start. It'll be coming in the next few chapters, fear not. Eric and Sookie insisted we get a solid foundation in their relationship before I start hurling curve balls at them. Actually, we'll start getting into the drama next chapter, which will be posted tomorrow if all goes according to plan. Thanks for reading!**

**Chapter 14: Strategizing**

Okay, so I'd planned to start getting into the angstier bits in this chapter, but it just didn't flow the way I wanted it to. So I guess we'll have to let Sookie take it in the next chapter. Instead, we get a tasty little surprise from one of the Northmans I own \*squee\* OMG two Eric's in one chapter! \*fans self\* That's a whole lot of hot Swede. Yum. And damn that Sookie for not sharing the love.

Bror- brother

Chapter Fourteen: Strategizing

**Eric**

The next couple of weeks went by with the Sookie and I settling into as much of a routine as we could. Sookie's schedule got a little crazy with the addition of her poms squad. It took quite a chunk out of her time. She had practice every day after school until six. She would come to my house for dinner one or two nights a week. We'd cook together, clean up and then we'd try to watch a movie and just unwind. That lasted for a little while before we' end up making love on just about every flat surface we could, and up against more than one wall. Occasionally she'd spend the night at my place since it was closer to the school, but usually she went home to her own house.

If there was a football game on Friday night, I'd go in support of her squad. She was working hard with her girls to get things right since most of the girls she'd ended up selecting were new to her. There'd been a few catfights she'd had to referee and getting her squad to gel hadn't been easy. After the first game we came to the realization that we were going to have to figure out how to deal with our relationship in front of our students. Obviously there wouldn't be any making out under the bleachers- not that I hadn't tried to talk her into it- or other perverse displays of affection in front of the kids.

The first step we'd taken in going public was to talk to the heads of our respective departments. Octavia Fant, the head of the history department, hadn't seen any problem with our relationship and I was thankful when Andre said the same thing. He mostly reminded me to keep my hands to myself and asked me to try to keep the eye fucking to a minimum.

"Honestly, Northman, I've known about it since the first day of school. I saw the two of you out by the track that morning. At first I thought maybe I was just seeing things, but I've seen you two kiss once or twice in the morning. Not to mention your cars pull up at the same time. It's not that hard to figure out." Andre seemed a bit jealous but he wasn't telling me to put the brakes on, so I let it go.

I couldn't blame him if he had a thing for Sookie. Who the hell wouldn't? She was fuckhot, smart and funny. She was friendly and kind to everyone, including that creeper, Bill Compton, who kept hounding her to go out to lunch with him. So far Sookie had been able to avoid whatever bizarre advances he'd been throwing her way, but I was getting really annoyed with him for his persistence. There's a fine line between devotion and stalking and Bill Compton was straddling it. I wondered how his wife would feel about his attempts to get Sookie alone.

With the blessing of our bosses, we proceeded in our relationship. We still hadn't gone public about it with everyone, but we were less nervous about being spotted together. If we were seen having dinner together or hanging out at Pam's bar it was easily explained as two co-workers unwinding after a long day. We kept the PDA to a minimum, which wasn't easy, but made it that much better once we were alone.

Before long, Homecoming came around. Sookie had to be at the game because of poms. She had also volunteered to be a chaperon for the dance which meant I would be volunteering my services as well. No way in hell was I going let her get all dressed up in one of the many slinky dresses I knew were in her closet just so she could go mingle with students all night long. While I was sure none of those boys would be brazen- or stupid- enough to try and lay a hand on her, I wasn't going to take any chances.

There was also the issue of the under-age night. After the initial dragging of her heels, Pam had gotten on board with the idea of it pretty quickly. Sookie had found a few students who were in garage bands that were interested in doing a public performance. She coordinated auditions with Pam for the Saturday evening before Homecoming. If things went well, and Pam was able to schedule a couple of bands, we would start the under-age night after Halloween. Sookie was excited to be a part of the new project, and was diligently doing her part to promote the night at the bar. The buzz around the school grew a bit louder each day.

"I think we owe Sookie a cut of the profits if this works." Pam said one evening I was at the bar. She had more papers for me to sign.

I set down the paper I'd been reading and looked at her. "I agree with you, but I sincerely doubt Sookie will take the money."

"Why the hell wouldn't she?"

"Because she sees this as a favor and not a job."

"She's working her ass off." Pam looked at me with disbelief. She couldn't fathom why Sookie wouldn't take the money and run.

"Believe me, I know." I sighed, picking up the paper again. Sookie's dedication to not doing things half-assed was admirable, but it also took more of her time than I would have liked.

"Well, I know you're still fucking regularly. If you weren't, you'd be a crabby bitch." Pam smirked at me. She was all class, that Pam.

"That's not the point." It really wasn't, although if that started to become an issue I'd find a way to make sure Sookie was relieved of her duty to the bar.

"I was thinking five percent." Pam suggested and I nodded my agreement.

"Sounds fair."

"I could go ten."

"Pam..."

"Fine, five, but it's a damn steal."

"Since when do you have a conscience?" I looked up at her, watching her grin.

"I like Sookie." Pam shrugged and I rolled my eyes. "No, not like *that*." I arched an eyebrow and she amended herself. "Okay, fine, your girlfriend is fuckhot and if she were playing for my team I'd be all over her in a second, but that's not the point. We both know that if I thought she was hot but still hated her, I wouldn't be letting her do this. I like her. She's been good for you. If nothing else she got you to stop being such a crabby bitch. For me, that's reason enough to like her."

"You're too generous, Pamela."

"And don't you fucking forget it." Pam turned on her heel and went out to the bar.

I sat on the couch in her office and read through all of the papers she'd handed over to me. Construction was set to start the following week on the space next door. That would be the under-age portion of the club and a space reserved for private parties on other nights. We were installing a new dance floor over there, along with a new bar. Only the bar on that side wouldn't be stocked with liquor. We'd have juice, bottle water, energy drinks and sodas over there, but no alcohol. Ironically, Pam had decided to call that side of the bar "The Bottle," and themed the décor around a genie's bottle. I blamed that on her crush on Barbara Eden and Pam watching too many episodes of *I Dream of Jeannie*. As long as she didn't ask me to help pick out throw pillows, I didn't care what she did.

My cell phone rang and I expected it to be Sookie telling me she was on her way to my house. I was really looking forward to seeing her, since she'd been too busy to come by for the last few days. I'd offered to meet her at her place, but she was too tired by the time she was done with work. Between teaching, poms and the things she was doing to help Pam get the under-age night off the ground, her time really was pretty taxed. Unfortunately, it wasn't Sookie who was calling.

"Hej, lillebror. Du är inte fan är du?" Johan. What a prick. I couldn't help but laugh anyway. I hadn't heard from him since before I'd started seeing Sookie almost a month ago.

"Inte just nu, skitstövel." I retorted, getting me a laugh from my twin.

Sookie had yet to find out I was fluent in Swedish. I'd learned on account of my mother, who had been partial to yelling at us kids in her native tongue. She'd insisted we learn the language since it was part of our heritage. As a child, I actually spoke better Swedish than I did English, which worried my father to no end. Johan, surprisingly, had had a more difficult time picking it up. Now it was almost all he ever spoke and I was the one who was rusty.

"Mom says you have a new girlfriend. I want pics." Johan demanded and I shook my head. I also thanked the Gods that Pam was a lesbian or she would have been boning my brother. Not that Pam being a lesbian ever stopped Johan from trying.

"Yeah, I bet you do. She's a goddess." I taunted him.

"I can't wait to meet her, bror. I'll be in the States for Halloween. Pam invited me to your dive." I was going to kill Pam when I got off the phone.

"You called Pam before you called me? I'm hurt."

"You always were a girl."

For being identical in body, my brother and I couldn't have been more different in personality. Where I was the more responsible, sensitive one, Johan was the carefree, arrogant one who did as he pleased. It's not to say that Johan didn't have any redeeming qualities, because he did. They were just harder to find sometimes. He was funny but lacked the brain filter to know when to stop sometimes, especially around people he didn't know very well. I immediately worried he'd say the wrong thing to Sookie and totally misrepresent himself to her. I wanted her to like my brother every bit as much as I wanted him to like her. It was important to me they got along.

"Speaking of girls, I just sent you a text." I grinned into the phone and waited for Johan's response to the picture I sent him.

I'd taken it that first weekend she'd spent at my house. She was in the yard playing with Jeter. She was the first girl I'd ever introduced him to, and she had no problem getting down in the grass and wrestling with him. Jeter had knocked her down and was trying to lick her face. She was laughing hysterically and pushing the giant dog away from her when I took the picture. She looked beautiful and had no idea I'd even taken the picture, she was so lost in her laughter.

"Holy shit, bror." Johan said once he'd looked at the picture.

"She's mine. Don't go getting any ideas."

"Mom always said we should share our toys." He reminded me in such a way that I could practically hear the drooling.

"She's not a toy, and you should know better than anyone that I don't share well."

"You're serious about this one?"

"Abso-fucking-lutely." I answered easily. No way was I letting go of Sookie anytime soon.

"Selfish."

"Bror, you're in Sweden. Don't tell me there aren't any hot blondes there for you to dick around with."

"There are, but they're all the same."

"Then maybe it's time to expand your search criteria." I suggested, knowing Johan always went for the same type. He never switched it up but was always wondering how he ended up in the same mess over and over again.

We talked for a while longer and he gave me his flight information. He would be coming in three days before Halloween and would be staying for a week. He asked to stay with me, as if I'd say he couldn't. Hell, even if I'd said no he still would have found a way into my house. Knowing Pam, she would have let him in just to piss me off. Just as we were about to get off the phone, Sookie called.

"Gotta go, bror, Sookie's on the other line." I told him.

"What happened to bros before hos?"

"You wouldn't be asking me that if you had a girlfriend. See you in two weeks." I clicked over to Sookie's line. "Hello, lover."

She giggled and said, "You sound like a phone sex operator when you call me that."

I laughed in response and asked, "Are you done with practice?"

"Yes, and my feet are killing me. I know you love those red shoes, but they're going to be the death of me one of these days." Sookie groaned. She'd come to school in what I referred to as her 'naughty librarian' outfit, complete with those red heels that always made me want to do the naughtiest of things to her.

"I'm at the bar, but I'll be at the house in a few minutes. I left the side door unlocked for you just in case."

"Oh, thank God. I need to get these damn shoes off in the worst way." I sincerely hoped that wasn't all she'd be taking off.

"Have you had dinner yet?"

"Nope, not yet."

"Then I'll stop and pick up something. Got a taste for anything?"

"You." She answered quickly. Fuck food.

"I'll be there soon." If I said anything else we'd end up having phone sex, and I didn't want to waste my time with that when I could be having actual sex.

"You better be." There was urgency in her voice.

We hung up shortly after that and I gathered the papers Pam wanted me to sign. It would have to wait. I put them back in their file and took it with me to read over when I got back to the house. I typed out a text for Pam and sent that off without bothering to search the bar before leaving. If I found her, she'd want to have an hour long discussion and I was more set on having sex with Sookie than I was talking about what type of tables to put in next door.

I got back to my house to find Sookie in the downstairs basement, soaking in the giant whirlpool tub down there. That tub was one of the reasons I'd bought the house. She looked so small in it. She smiled when she saw me.

"Room for one more?" I asked as I kicked off my shoes.

Sookie looked around at all the empty space and said, "I think I could squeeze you in." A coy smile spread across her face and that was all the invitation I needed.

"Not to rush you," I said as I slipped into the water beside her. "But I did order a pizza. It should be here in an hour."

Sookie kissed me hard and turned herself so she was facing me. "But what will we do with the other fifty-seven minutes?" She teased before wrapping her small hand around one of the many parts that had been missing her for the last three days.

"I'm sure we'll think of something." I nipped at her neck, and from then on the only talking was the sound of us calling out one another's name.

"Johan called tonight while I was at the bar." I told Sookie as we ate on my couch.

"How's he doing?" She asked after swallowing her mouthful of pizza.

"Good, I guess. He's coming to the States for awhile."

Her eyes lit up and she smiled. "That's great, Eric! When's he coming?"

"At the end of the month. He'll be staying with me for a week, at least. I really want you to meet him."

"I'd love to." Sookie smiled down at her dinner, and then lifted her eyes to me. "Does he know about me?"

I nodded and said, "Yes, I told him tonight when he called."

"Well, I promise to give you all the space you need while he's here. I'm sure you don't need me tagging along for everything."

I laughed, earning me the hairy eyeball from Sookie. "Lover, if I leave you alone I can guarantee that Johan will take that as a sign you're still on the market."

"Oh, really?" She looked mildly amused. "I thought you said you two didn't have the same taste in women?"

"I did, but apparently that was before you came along."

"How's that?" She looked at me through her lashes. I hesitated for a moment before caving and telling her about the picture I'd sent him. "You two better not be thinking about swapping identities for the night."

"I told Johan that he is to stay hands off where you are concerned. It's bad enough he flirts with Pam the way he does."

Sookie laughed loudly, nearly doubling over to clutch her stomach. "He *does* realize Pam's gay, doesn't he?"

"He knows. He just never lets it stop him." I snickered.

"Pam must *love* that."

"It's quite a sight." I agreed with her.

Pam actually put up with it rather well. Better than she would if I were the one coming onto her. She took it in stride because she assumed that Johan was just fucking with her. The fact that he was dead serious never seemed to enter her mind. The good thing about it was that it was pure entertainment for me to watch the two of them lob pickup lines and insults back and forth. They were both masters of their craft.

"Well, I look forward to seeing it." Sookie took another bite of her pizza.

"Are you staying here tonight?" I asked hopefully. I hadn't been back to the bedroom yet to see if she'd brought a change of clothes with her.

She looked thoughtfully at the slice of pizza in her hand and her eyebrows furrowed together. "I don't know if that's such a good idea."

"I think it's an excellent idea." I argued.

"Yes, but it takes *you* ten minutes to get ready for work in the morning." She pointed out, that beautiful blush of hers creeping up her neck. "And something tells me that if I stay, I'm going to be more tired in the morning than I will be rested."

"I promise to make sure you get to sleep at a decent hour." I crossed my heart. "And I bought a new bag of that coffee you like."

Sookie pursed her lips in thought before speaking. "Hands off by eleven and coffee in the morning? Throw in breakfast and I'll think about it."

"Breakfast, too? You drive a hard bargain, Miss Stackhouse, but I believe that can be arranged." I smiled at her.

"Well, then, Mr. Northman, you've got yourself a deal." She winked at me.

"Good, let's go seal it." I took her plate and put it on the coffee table before pulling her into my lap.

"It's a good thing I like cold pizza." She mumbled just before my lips crashed against hers.

**Okay, so who's excited for Johan to make an appearance? I know I am. My apologies if the Swedish is poorly translated, but you should totes blame Google for that. Thanks for reading!**

Hej, lillebror. Du är inte fan är du? **Hello, little brother. You're not fucking are you?**

Inte just nu, skitstövel. **Not at the moment, asshole.**

**Chapter 15: Surprises**

**Sookie's dress:**S/3079811/0~2376776~2374327~2374331~6014149?mediumthumbnail=Y&origin=category&searchtype=&pbo=6014149&P=1

Chapter Fifteen: Surprises

**Sookie**

The week before the dance, Amelia and I went shopping to find me a dress suitable for chaperoning Homecoming. After much consideration there wasn't anything in my closet that I liked enough. More accurately, there were too many dresses Eric liked a little *too* much. While I appreciated his enthusiasm, this would be a work function so we would be limited in the amount of contact we would have for the majority of the night. After hitting up the third mall of the day, I finally found a dress that I loved at Nordstrom's. Thankfully, it was on sale or I would have had to put it back.

It was a lavender floor length dress that showed some cleavage but not too much. There were darker purple swirls on the dress that got bolder towards the bottom. The back of the dress criss-crossed and the skirt was a full A-line. The real selling point for me was that it had a built-in bra. It was comfortable and I felt very pretty in it. The hard part would be keeping it away from Eric's eyes for the next week.

"Are you sure I can't talk you into chaperoning with us?" I asked Amelia once I was dressed in my street clothes again.

"Hell no. I didn't even want to go to homecoming when I was actually *in* high school. No way do I want to spend my night on bathroom patrol, busting girls for smoking and taking hits off of flasks." Amelia, while a good teacher, didn't have much desire to be more involved than that. She did her job- and quite well- but that was it. "Besides, I don't know how you think you're going to go the whole night without Eric molesting you."

"We've already talked about it. He can control himself."

"Ha!" Amelia rolled her eyes at me. "Did you forget that we share a wall, dearest? I've heard you scream that man's name more times than I care to count."

"Amelia!" I swatted at her playfully, to which she replied by doing an imitation of the sounds I'd been making the night before. "Amelia Broadway, you stop that!" I laughed at her.

"For what it's worth, Tray thinks I'm jealous so he's been trying a little harder than usual." Amelia admitted.

"So I noticed. Why do you think I've been staying at Eric's during the week?" I stuck my tongue out at her.

"Next time just bang on the wall and we'll knock it off." Amelia giggled.

"No, you won't, and you shouldn't have to. You're adults." I whipped out my credit card to pay for my dress and was beyond excited to see it being put into a pretty plastic bag for me to take home. It just so happened I already had a pair of silver sandals that would go perfectly with it.

"It's good to see you looking so happy, Sookie." Amelia said out of nowhere, which got my attention. "You never smiled like that when you were with Quinn."

I didn't quite know what to say. I was having so much fun with Eric, and I missed him terribly when he wasn't with me. "I don't know what it is, Ame, but he got to me."

"It wouldn't happen to have anything to do with the sex, would it?"

There went that damned blush again. "It's part of it, but it's not even that. He's easy to talk to and we like a lot of the same things. We understand the stress each other goes through on a daily basis because we have the same job. It just works." I shrugged and then signed the receipt.

"It doesn't hurt that he's a fucking GQ model come to life."

"No, that'd be his brother." I teased her.

"When's he getting in?"

"A week from Friday."

"You nervous about meeting him?"

"A little. Eric told me not to worry about it, that Johan is going to love me, but this is his family. His twin, for Christ's sake. I know Johan's opinion carries a lot of weight with Eric so I really don't want to screw this up." I confessed to her.

"You won't. Just be your wonderful, charming, sweet-as-pie self and everything will be fine."

I hoped it was that simple. I was also starting to think about what I was going to do about the holidays. I already had plans to go home to Louisiana for the holiday. I would be flying out very early on Thanksgiving morning. The plans were set long before I even knew there was a possibility of Eric. In fact, there were still two tickets booked for that flight because Quinn and I had still be dating at the time I booked them. I didn't know what Eric's plans were, but I'd have to ask. I assumed he was going home to California to see his parents but we hadn't talked about that yet.

I got back to my house to find Eric and Tray in the front yard tossing beanbags back and forth. It was really a stupid game but that didn't stop me from playing it. I grabbed my dress out of the backseat and started toward Eric. He was facing away from me and wearing a pair of jeans that made me want to jump him right there on the lawn. That ass just wasn't fair, and I told him so all the time. I figured that made us even for the way he stared at my boobs like they were going to disappear if he didn't keep an eye on them.

"Who's winning?" I asked as I made my way to Eric.

"I am." He grinned.

"Yeah, yeah, only because he doesn't have the sun in his eyes." Tray was pouting. He was an even bigger sore loser than Eric.

"Or maybe it's because you throw like a girl." Eric suggested, earning him a smack from me. "You're a woman, lover, there's a difference." He bent and kissed my forehead and I rolled my eyes at him.

"Uh huh. Well, you two play with your bags. I'll be inside hiding my dress."

"Then I guess I'll be going on a treasure hunt later." Eric called out after me.

"No you won't, Eric Northman!" I shouted back at him and then headed inside.

I had just tucked the dress away in the closet of my office where I kept most of my winter clothes, when Eric came upstairs. I tried to make it look like I was legitimately working in the room but my failure to close the closet doors was a dead giveaway as to what I'd been doing. With one of those Cheshire Cat grins on his face, Eric stepped closer to the closet.

"What's in here?" He pointed, attempting very lamely to sound innocent.

"You stay out of there, mister." I said over my shoulder.

"Just a peek?" He asked as he moved closer to the closet.

"Oh, no you don't!" I darted in front of him and attempted to block the closet from him.

He had a playful smile on his face. I loved that smile. "You realize I could just toss you across the room, right?"

"You wouldn't."

"I might."

"Do it and you lose your shower privileges for a week." I threatened, hoping that would work because I really didn't want to follow through on my threat.

"You must be hiding something good if you're willing to go a week without showering together." Eric was weighing the risk for the reward.

"That's right, I am, and I want it to be a surprise."

"Give me a hint." He was incorrigible.

"Okay." I nodded and his face lit up just a little.

I tried to think of something that would both get him all hot and bothered and quench his thirst at the same time. "I won't be able to wear a bra with it."

He growled and then attacked me. I don't know what was running through his mind but if his kisses were any indication, he assumed my dress was going to be awfully racy. After christening the wall next to the closet in my office, Eric followed me to the shower. I had auditions to sit through with Pam. Why she was insisting I help her make those decisions was beyond me. Eric did his best to start round two while we were in the shower, but we were already running late.

"Eric, we don't have time. Pam'll have my ass- literally- if we're late." I reminded him. He was pouting again.

"I hate Pam." He announced and I just rolled my eyes.

"We'll go for the auditions and then we'll come back here and I will turn off my cell phone and lock my doors. We will have a full twenty-four hours all to ourselves."

"Promise?"

"Well, we might have to share a *little* time with Jeter." I conceded as I passed him the shampoo. "Otherwise, I promise you will have me all to yourself."

"Oh, I'll have you alright." Such a cheeseball.

"Calm down there, big boy." I rinsed my hair and went for the conditioner.

"Big boy, huh?" He gave me one of those lopsided grins that made me giggle.

He slapped my ass when I was stepping out of the shower, and laughed at me when I yelped. A few minutes later he emerged from the shower to find me zipping myself into a pair of pinstriped capri pants he'd never seen before. I paired them with a red sleeveless button down shirt with small ruffles running down the front seam. Eric stopped dead in his tracks and stared at me like a pit bull eyeballing a t-bone. When I reached into my closet for the infamous red heels he loved so much, he groaned as if he were in pain.

"You're going to kill me, Stackhouse." He flopped back on my bed.

"You're a big boy. You'll live." I winked over my shoulder as I slipped on the shoes.

I went to the bathroom to pull my hair back and put on my makeup. I was a little more dolled up than usual but figured it was appropriate for the task at hand. Eric fought fire with fire and filled out a pair of jeans that had me biting my bottom lip and praying for strength. He topped it with a tight black t-shirt. He looked just like he had the night we met and I was suddenly overwhelmed with the image of sneaking into the bathroom at the bar and...

"You ready?" Eric broke into my thoughts. The grin on his face suggested he knew exactly what I'd been thinking.

I cleared my throat but my blush betrayed me as usual. "Yep, let's get out of here."

He blocked the bathroom doorway and leaned down so his lips were right at my ear. "So what were you thinking, bathroom or the office?"

"I guess you'll have to wait and see." I bit his ear and then squeezed out.

"I'll get you for that." He warned as I sauntered out of the room, feeling awfully sassy all of a sudden.

"You better!" I shouted over my shoulder and headed downstairs.

About three auditions in it became apparent to me why Pam wasn't doing them alone. Eric had informed me that Pam had horrible taste in music but I refused to believe that. Everyone was entitled to their own tastes. But when Pam told me she preferred showtunes and the more Barry Manilow side of life, I almost fell off my chair. I couldn't imagine the wisecracking sassmouth sitting next to me singing along to "Copacabana" without extreme irony. Then Eric explained to me that Pam's first girlfriend's name was Mandy. I rolled my eyes and laughed. Pam was just full of surprises.

Pam was an excellent reminder of why a person should never judge a book by it's cover. Eric also pointed out that I didn't exactly look like the kind of girl who would know all the words to "Sympathy For The Devil," but I did. There was one band that was partial to Jimmy Eat World and Dashboard Confessional covers that was pretty good. They were also partial to Brand New, The Spill Canvas and Taking Back Sunday. The singer, who had been in my class two years before, claimed that Morrisey was his hero. I found that interesting but was in no position to judge. I was pretty partial to Robert Smith and Trent Reznor myself.

We ended up booking two of the bands we saw for the opening night of the under-age club. When Pam told me she was going to be decorating that section of the club to look like the inside of Jeannie's bottle I didn't know what to think. I would have thought she'd keep up with the devil theme she had going in the regular bar- called The Blue Devil Lounge in honor of her and Eric's shared collegiate past- but she said she wanted something different for the younger crowd.

The renovations to the bar were coming along nicely and the contractor assured her the new space would be ready to go in time for opening night. I sincerely hoped he was right, or Pam would have his balls for earrings. Pam was just finishing up showing me around the new space when Eric came out of the office. He walked over to us and put his arm around me, causing me to lean into him. My arm went around his waist like it belonged there and the next thing I knew we were dangerously close to making out in the middle of the bar.

"You two are disgusting." Pam turned her nose up and walked away. I might have been offended if she wasn't constantly mocking us for our public displays. In fact, Eric and I liked to crank it up a notch just to give her something to bitch about.

"This is getting to be too easy." I looked up at Eric.

"Don't tell me you aren't enjoying the benefits?"

I shrugged just to mess with him and quickly found myself on the receiving end of a kiss that made my toes curl. "Yowza." I giggled when he pulled back.

After Pam threatened to pelt us with ice if we didn't "knock it off with the kissy face," Eric and I decided it was time to head out. I was tired anyway and we were both hungry. Pam decided there was something she needed Eric to sign before we left, which for Eric, meant that was the perfect time to kiss me before she got back. I was just starting to melt against him when I heard a familiar voice calling me.

"Sookie?" I groaned and pulled away from Eric to follow the wounded voice.

I turned to my right and there was Quinn, looking for all the world like I'd just run over his new kitten. "Quinn, what are you doing here?"

"Having a drink. Looks like I'm gonna need a double." Quinn shook his head.

"I didn't know you come here."

"Victor said it was a nice place. He never mentioned you, though."

"I'm not here all the time." That was about to change thanks to the under-age night. Then I remembered that I was standing next to Eric and I couldn't really get out of introducing the ex to the new guy. "Quinn, this my boyfriend, Eric. Eric, this is Quinn." I gestured back and forth between the two men who were instantly sizing one another up.

"You didn't used to hang out in bars when *we* were dating, babe." Quinn said instead of acknowledging Eric, who was tensing up beside me.

"I'm friends with the owner, and don't call me babe." I glared at Quinn. I shouldn't have been surprised by how rude he was being. Quinn turned into a six-year-old when he didn't get his way.

"Never used to bother you before." Quinn started coming closer to me, which was a mistake.

"It bothers her now." Eric spoke up on my behalf and I glared up at him to let him know I could handle Quinn just fine on my own.

He put his hands up in surrender and stepped behind me. "You got him tamed. That's sweet, Sook."

"Don't be a dick, Quinn. We both know that's not you." I didn't like this new, jealous Quinn. While we were dating he never cared if I was hanging out with other people when he was busy.

"You know, when you said you were dating someone, I didn't think it was this guy," Quinn nodded to Eric. "I figured it was that history teacher you used to talk about who was from the south."

"Bill?" My face wrinkled in confusion. "Why the hell would I date him? He's married and he has a kid. I might be a lot of things, but a homewrecker isn't one of them."

"I know his wife." Quinn confessed to me.

"You know his wife?" I arched an eyebrow and cheated a glance at Eric, who seemed to find the information as interesting as I did. "How do you know his wife?"

"She works for Russell." Quinn shrugged.

"Who's Russell?" Eric whispered to me, but I shook my head. I'd explain it to him later.

"Okay, but why would you think I'm dating Bill if you know his wife?"

"Because he moved out a month after Junior was born." Quinn revealed to me.

You could have knocked me over with a feather just then. That certainly wasn't the story Bill had been feeding me. He was always talking about what a family man he was and how excited he was to be a father to his brilliant baby boy. He talked about how much he loved his wife and what a blessing it was to finally have a child after being together for as long as they had been.

"Quinn, are you sure you've got it right? Bill never mentioned any of that to me." Not that it was really any of my business, or that I wanted to be involved in Bill Compton's personal problems. I just couldn't figure out why he'd try to keep up the good guy, family man act. Especially got I'd gotten the notion that his invitations to join him for meals weren't simple business lunches to him.

"All I know is that Lorena told me Bill came home one day and told her he wasn't in love with her anymore and that there was a woman he worked with whom he'd fallen for. When Lorena asked for details about this woman, he described you to a fucking tee, Sookie. He even knew about the birthmark on your hip." Quinn told me and I cringed. Eric, on the other hand, was ready to punch something.

"Eric, I never..." I trailed off, but I knew I didn't need to tell him. What I *did* wonder was how Bill knew about that birthmark on my hip. It was too low for someone to see it unless we'd been intimate, and both of the men I'd had sex with were in the room. Talking to each other. That wasn't *too* awkward. "Why didn't you mention this sooner?"

"When I first found out, I didn't believe it. I didn't put together the connections that Lorena was Bill's wife since she never took his last name. But then one night I was flipping through your yearbooks and I saw Bill's picture. Lorena's got their wedding picture on her desk, so when I saw him, I knew who he was. I knew he was the guy you'd mentioned to me a couple of times. I started thinking about all the time I'd been spending away from you and I started to wonder if maybe you'd strayed on account of it." Quinn had thought I was cheating on him? Well, that was new information. "But then I remembered how annoyed you looked every time you talked about him. It was the same look you'd get when Jason would call in the middle of the night, threatening to move in with you when he'd get in a fight with his girlfriend."

That much I knew to actually be true. There was a very specific face I made when I talked about Bill Compton. It was made of equal parts annoyance, disgust and cynicism. "So why didn't you tell me about this, Quinn?" Quinn looked at Eric, clearly uncomfortable to be having this talk in front of him. "Whatever you tell me, he's going to find out anyway, so you might as well just come out with it."

"We were having problems already and I didn't know why since you were always trying to pretend like everything was fine. I started thinking maybe you were seeing him. I was willing to let it go since I wasn't around like I should have been. But then I felt guilty for even thinking you would cheat because I know you're not that kind of girl. You don't have it in you. So I kept it to myself because I didn't want you thinking I would think something like that about you, even if I had for just a little while. I didn't want to lose you over a suspicion." Quinn confessed.

I felt bad for him then. Pam cleared her throat from behind us to break up the little moment we seemed to be having. Eric brushed his lips against my temple and squeezed my side before releasing me to go deal with Pam. I watched him walk away with a smile on my face. I got lost in my own little world for a moment before Quin clearing his own throat brought me back to reality. I stepped a little closer to him, only glancing over my shoulder once to see Eric and Pam talking at the far end of the bar.

"So that guy makes you happy, huh?" Quinn's eyes traveled over to where Eric and Pam were talking.

"Yeah, he does." I smiled, watching Quinn's expression change just a little. His dark brows furrowed together in a mixture of frustration and longing. "Quinn, you and I were better off just being friends."

His face whipped around so we were eye to eye. "I loved you, Sookie. I still do. Always will, in fact. Don't tell me we were never happy together."

"Yeah, we were," I agreed and bit my lower lip. "But that doesn't mean we were supposed to be a couple, or that we should have stayed together any longer. Didn't you ever feel like there was something missing from us? Like there should be something more?"

Quinn growled and the way he was looking at me told me he knew I was right but didn't want to admit it. He waited until Eric was walking toward me again to speak.

"If he hurts you, I'll kill him." Quinn threatened in a tone that was only sort of joking.

"I don't think that'll be necessary, but I appreciate the offer." And I did. For a second, I started to think that maybe being friends with Quinn wouldn't be so bad if he could just keep the talk of us getting back together from coming out of his mouth.

"You ready to go?" Eric's arm slid around me and I leaned into him in response.

"Yep, I'm starving." I wasn't just talking about food and Eric knew it. "I guess I'll see you around, Quinn."

He gave me one of his warmer smiles and nodded to Eric. "Take good care of her."

Eric nodded in return, the awkwardness of their initial encounter now over. "I will."

My arm went around Eric's waist and we walked out together. Once we were back in the car and on our way toward my house, I told Eric about Russell. He was one of Quinn's regular clients and since Lorena was Russell's executive assistant, they spent a lot of time making small talk while Quinn waited for Russell to get out of a meeting or finish a phone call. I wouldn't go so far as to say they were friends, but they attempted to be friendly with one another. Honestly, I felt a little stupid for not putting things together myself. Quinn had mentioned Lorena more than once, relaying bits and pieces about her. There'd been a time when I'd thought maybe he was seeing her and mentioning her casually to keep me from thinking he was sleeping with her. But, like Quinn thought of me, I knew he wasn't the cheating type. When he talked about Lorena he always talked about how happy she was in her marriage and had even come home with a cigar from Russell when she'd had her baby. It just hadn't clicked in my head that Quinn's Lorena was the some Lorena as Bill's wife. I felt like a real dum-dum for most of the drive home.

"Why do you think Bill would lie about separating from his wife and child?" Eric asked me as we pulled into the parking lot of a Mexican restaurant close to my house that we both liked.

"Your guess is as good as mine." I shrugged and reached for my seat belt. Frankly, I didn't really want to know.

"And that birthmark, how did he know about that?" Eric's eyes were icy cold.

"I don't know." I shrugged again. "Eric, I swear, Bill and I never so much as had lunch off school property, much less had sex."

"I know." Eric nodded and I could tell he believed me. "It's just bizarre that he would be able to make a guess and be so accurate."

"There was a car wash last spring that I volunteered to help with. I don't remember seeing him, but maybe he was there?" I thought back to the previous spring.

I was co-sponsor of the Freshman class on the student counsel, and we'd had a car wash to help raise money for the following year's homecoming festivities. I'd been there in a bikini top with a half shirt over it and a denim skirt. I was showing much more skin than usual but it was a car wash on a warm spring day. No way could I show up in jeans or my usual teacher's attire. I was dressed for the event. I tried to remember if the birthmark was visible but couldn't get the image in my head.

Eric opened the door for me and I took his hand when he offered it. We walked through the chilly night air to the restaurant and were seated a few minutes later. Eric ordered a beer while I got a margarita. Slowly we let the topic of Bill drift from the conversation since I refused to spend the night driving myself crazy trying to figure out what his motives were for lying to me and his wife like he had. Yes, I was pissed that he was telling her we were involved in some great love affair when nothing could be further from the truth, but what could I really do about it? If he was that delusional, my best bet was to just stay as far away from him as I possibly could. Eric, on the other hand, planned to be more vigilant.

"If he comes near you again, for any reason, I want you to tell me, Sookie." Eric said with concern in his eyes.

I wanted to argue that it was probably just some silly crush Bill had, but he had taken it to a whole new level by supposedly leaving his wife for me. I really didn't know what to make of the situation. Aside from a lot of idle chatter that got on my nerves and his inability to accept that I wouldn't see him outside of work, Bill hadn't done anything to me personally to make me think I should be afraid of him. At least, not until that night.

"If he comes near me again I will tell him that we have a strictly professional relationship and I have no interest in branching out in our relationship. It's not like I can tell him that I know he left his wife when he's constantly telling everyone otherwise." I pointed out to Eric.

"Just be careful, Sookie. Clearly something's not right with him and I don't want you to end up hurt as a result of it. You're too nice to people who don't deserve it." His hand reached for mine on top of the table.

I wanted to tell Eric I was sure everything was going to be fine but there was a little voice whispering in my head telling me that Eric was right. My smile faltered for just a moment and Eric opened his mouth to say something, but then our waiter brought our dinner and all thoughts of Bill Compton's creepery were forgotten about in favor of enchiladas and fajitas.

A week later I was in my bathroom just slicking on my lip gloss when my doorbell rang. I turned from side to side while looking in the mirror to make sure I looked okay. My hair was pulled into a low swooping ponytail that left one side of my neck bare. The dress looked as good on me as I remembered it would. My skin seemed to be glowing thanks to my tan and the color of the fabric. I was probably pushing the envelope where my cleavage was concerned but Amelia had loaned me a shawl of hers that went perfectly with the dress. I picked up my shoes and was just getting to the top of the steps when the bell rang again.

"Just a minute!" I called out as I made my way down the stairs. I slipped my shoes on and went to the door. I took a deep breath and then stepped back to open the door.

Standing on the other side was my boyfriend in dark grey suit that fit him perfectly. He wore a crisp white shirt and a lavender tie that matched my dress perfectly. His hair was tied back at the nape of his neck and I almost giggled at the idea of us both going to such a formal affair with our hair in ponytails. His eyes drank me in the way mine were doing the same with him and I felt my heart flutter when our eyes finally met.

"You look good enough to eat." Eric said without a hint of sex in his voice, which was shocking.

"Later." I winked at him and he grinned.

"Indeed." His eyebrows did their little promising wiggle. "This is for you." He held out an orchid wrist corsage that I immediately fell in love with.

"Thank you, it's beautiful." I said as he slipped it on my wrist. "So, was the dress worth waiting for?" I batted my eyelashes at him.

He motioned for me to turn around and I heard him suck in a breath when he caught wind of the back of the dress. "I don't suppose I'll be able to talk you into meeting me under the bleachers, Miss Stackhouse?" His hands settled on my hips and pulled me closer to him.

"You know the rules, Mr. Northman. Hands off on school property," I tilted my face up to kiss him. I moved my mouth to his ear and said, "But you can eye fuck me all night long if you want." I looked down the length of his body and said, "I know I certainly plan to do my share of that." He looked pretty edible himself in that suit.

He growled and reluctantly released me when I pointed out we were going to be late. I had a bag all packed and ready for me to spend the night at his house. It seemed silly to come all the way back to my place when his was so much closer. I had no doubt that by the time we'd spent a few hours trying to keep our hands off one another, we would be desperate to be hands on again. Eric took my bag from me and waited on my porch while I locked up the house. We were almost to his car when Amelia came bursting out of her house next door with a camera in hand, looking for all the world like a jilted mother who didn't get the perfect candid refrigerator shot of her only child.

"Hold up you two!" Amelia called out as she ran.

"Ame, we've gotta get going." I caught myself before I went into full whining mode.

"You've got time for one picture. You'll thank me for it later." Amelia lifted her camera, adjusting the focus on it.

"Just one." I said as Eric put my bag in the trunk of the car.

Amelia looked us up and down with a smile of approval. "You know, I'm not sure which one of you looks better."

"My girl. Definitely my girl." Eric smiled at me and I felt myself starting to blush.

"Sweet talker." I curled against him.

We were still smiling at each other, oblivious to the rest of the world, when Amelia took our picture.

**Wtf is Bill up to? Will Pam finally pelt our lovebirds with ice? Can Eric keep his hands to himself at the dance? When will we finally meet Johan? Find out in the next chapter of Hot For Teacher. Thanks for reading!**

**Chapter 16: Storebror**

Alright, I have to start off by thanking you for your reviews last chapter! Many of your had me laughing for extended periods of time over your reaction to the Bill scenario. "Man, Bill sounds like a bunny-boiler." -**Gallathea**One of my favorite reviews. Seriously, I totes had tears rolling down my face for a good 5 minutes over that one. Thank you so much for being so awesome lovies \*Northman brother bear hugs to all\*

Lillebror- little brother

Storebror- big brother

Chapter Sixteen: Storebror

**Eric**

Sookie stood with me, curled against my side as we waited for Johan to come off his plane. My idiot brother opted to take a flight that would have him arriving at O'Hare at just after two in the morning. He'd offered to take a cab to my place but I didn't want him ringing the bell like a jackass and making all sorts of noise that would piss off my neighbors. There are very few things my brother does quietly and has little regard for subtlety. I've warned Sookie of these things but that hasn't dampened her spirits one bit. She's anxious to meet my twin. I can only hope that he doesn't scare the hell out of her and send her running the other way.

"Eric, honey, you need to relax. You're driving me nuts." Sookie stroked my back with her small hand while she nuzzled against me. Her voice was quiet and dreamy. I could kick my brother for arriving in the middle of the night like this.

"Sorry. Why don't we sit?" I suggested.

"Nuh uh." Sookie shook her head against my side. "If I sit down, I'm staying down and I don't think you want to carry me back to the car."

"If I didn't, I'm sure Johan would." I teased her and she pinched me. "Ouch!"

"You're such a big baby." She teased.

"I'll be expecting you to kiss that better when we get home." I leaned down to kiss the top of her head.

"Put it on my tab." She squeezed me closer to her just as the door finally opened.

I heard Johan before I saw him. I love my brother but he can be a walking clusterfuck. His rowdy departure from the plane was a shining example. He was walking between two women who were obviously from the motherland. They were both immaculately tanned with blond hair, blue eyes and designer clothes on. My brother, ever the self-proclaimed pimp, paused to kiss each girl's cheek before releasing them into their own worlds again. He spotted me standing there with Sookie leaning on me, half asleep and very close to needing me to carry her back to the car anyway. One of my fingers grazes over her nipple and she perked right up. She slapped at my hand but then noticed where I was looking.

"Lillebror!" Johan dropped his carry on bag and launched himself at me like a soldier returning from war.

Sookie barely got out of the way in time before I found myself wrapped in the biggest bear hug of my life. For all of my bitching about Johan, I do love the man. The look on Sookie's face to essentially see two of me standing before her was priceless. I wished I had a camera to capture her expression.

Before I could make formal introductions, Johan lost his interest in me and latched onto Sookie instead. She was hauled up in the air, wrapped in my brother's arms. I could tell she was nervous and wasn't quite sure how to react to him. He gave her the stereotypical European kisses on each cheek, which he normally skipped over, so I know it's just an excuse to kiss my girl. I'll kick his ass for that later.

"You must be Sookie." He hadn't set her down yet.

"And you better be Johan or I'll kick Eric's ass for not telling me there's three of you." Sookie shot right back, making both of us laugh. I loved her sass.

"I don't think the world could handle three of us." Johan looked back at me.

"I'm not sure it can handle two." Sookie looked over at me with amusement in her eyes.

"Hey, storebror, why don't you put her down?"

"Jealous?" Johan wiggled his eyebrows at me, and for the first time I realized how ridiculous that must look to Sookie.

"I could use some oxygen, Johan." Sookie tapped him politely on the shoulder.

"My apologies, lilla docka." He kissed her forehead and set her down. The gratuitous kissing needed to stop and I told him so in Swedish.

Sookie looked back and forth between us, sensing some irritation to my mood. She stepped closer to me and took my hand. "Now boys, no fighting or I'll have to send you to bed without any of that tasty cake I baked earlier."

That was more of a threat for Johan since I was sure Sookie would withhold much more than cake from me. I took her hand and we headed toward the baggage claim to get Johan's luggage. Johan filled us in on his flight. He'd stopped at Heathrow before catching a connecting flight to Chicago. Of course he hadn't slept at all on the flight but that was a good thing. It meant he'd drop like a log when we got him back to the house. I was thankful for that since I knew Sookie was exhausted and I was pretty close to passing out myself. We would have to wait to really get into conversation until after we'd all gotten some sleep.

On the drive back to my house Johan insisted that Sookie sit in the front seat even though she'd offered to sit in back so Johan and I could catch up a little. I was thankful that my brother at least had the sense not to take her up on it. I held her hand all the way back to the house, which thankfully, wasn't too far from the airport. At almost three in the morning there weren't many cars on the road once we got away from the airport. Before I knew it we were turning onto Belmont and then onto my street a few blocks later.

Johan was interviewing Sookie diligently, asking her all sorts of questions about where she'd grown up and her family. He was as nosy as our mother. Sookie handled it like a champ but I figured if she could not only survive Pam, but come to *like* Pam, then Johan would be a cake walk. Jeter was waiting at the front door all anxious for us to return. The second he caught wind of Johan's scent he went nuts.

Johan was on the ground wrestling with his dog like they hadn't been separated for more than a year. I had a feeling Sookie and I would be chopped liver to him for the duration of Johan's stay, which was just fine with me. Even though I'd told her not to, Sookie had put fresh sheets on the bed in the guest room and had opened the windows to air it out a little bit. When I told her not to help me with Johan's luggage she looked put out by it. I rolled my eyes and took the bags down the hall to the spare bedroom.

"Johan can I get you something to drink?" Sookie offered once I was back in the room.

"What do you have?" Johan had Jeter in a headlock. The dog would be worn out in no time.

Sookie made her way to the kitchen with my twin and I in her wake. She opened the fridge and ran down the list of things inside. I was thankful I had fought the urge to buy energy drinks or I had no doubt Johan would be drinking one. I didn't need him keeping us up all night long. As it was, I was ready to turn in for the night. He settled for orange juice, of all things, and made himself comfortable on the couch.

Sookie yawned beside me. "You ready for bed, lover?"

She nodded sleepily. "I'm sorry. I really thought that nap we took earlier would give me a bigger energy boost."

"It's been a long day." I smiled at her.

The nap she was referring to included a quickie before taking a twenty minute power nap on my couch. We'd had a football game to go to. We'd stopped by her place with the intention of picking up her overnight bag since she was spending the weekend at my place, and we'd ended up having sex a second time. Not that I was complaining, mind you, but it took more energy than it gave us. As tired as I was, if Sookie would let me go another round with her I wouldn't turn her down.

"I'm sorry for ducking out so early, but I'm exhausted. Sleep well, Johan." Sookie gave him a shy wave.

My brother, never one to miss an opportunity, shot off the couch and wrapped her in another hug. Sookie hugged him back and even kissed him on the cheek. She wasn't intentionally encouraging him but she was encouraging him all the same.

"We'll catch up in the morning, lilla docka." Johan let her down and she scampered off toward my bedroom. More and more I was thinking of it as *our* bedroom. Once the door was closed Johan turned toward me. "I like her, bror."

"Hands off." I reminded him sternly.

"I'm not in the business of stealing girlfriends, bror. Especially not from you." Johan assured me before resuming his place on the couch. "Are you living together?"

"Not yet." I said quietly and sat down on the couch next to him.

"Why not? I don't think I'd ever be able to get out of bed if I..."

"Don't finish that sentence." I had to laugh. I knew what he was thinking, as if the way he was staring at my bedroom door didn't give it all away. "And don't even think about trying to pretend to be me. She'll kick your ass."

"You think I couldn't pull it off?"

"Not a chance. Other women might go for it, but she'd know. Trust me."

"No fun." He pouted.

"Don't worry, bror, you'll see Pam tomorrow." I couldn't wait to see what sort of tricks he had up his sleeve to try and convince Pam to give dick a chance.

"You know, I'm convinced I haven't hit that yet because I look like you." Johan glared at me, completely serious.

I didn't even know what to say to that. "Hey, I could have closed the deal with her. I just didn't want to go there with her."

"I'm not giving up." Johan warned me and I just shook my head.

"Well, speaking of getting laid, I'm going to bed." I got up off the couch.

In a rare moment of clarity, Johan had the tact to switch to Swedish before asking, "Du är på allvar kommer att gå in och knulla din flickvän med mig sovande höger i korridoren? Du är en skitstövel."

I shrugged. "Bror, if the shoe were on the other foot, what would you do?"

"I'd already be fucking her." Johan grinned, all traces of tact completely gone.

"Goodnight, storebror, and no molesting Sookie in her sleep." I said over my shoulder as I went to the bedroom.

"Only if she asks me to. Goodnight, lillebror."

It was the sound of Sookie's laughter that pulled me from my sleep sometime later. I reached out, expecting to find her next to me pushing Jeter away from her feet. That damn dog had a foot fetish where my girlfriend was concerned and more than once, he'd woken her up by licking her feet. But Sookie's side of the bed was empty and slightly cool. She'd been up for a while. Then I remembered my idiot brother was in town and I jumped out of bed.

The laughter was coming from the guest room. I walked down the hall to find Sookie in bed with my brother. She wasn't cuddled up next to him, just sitting on her feet toward the edge of the bed, keeping a respectable distance from him. I was relieved to find Johan under the blankets. He took the same stance on nudity as I did, as in it was no big deal, but I knew Sookie didn't feel that way. She was modest, even around me, and I'd seen everything on her body there was to see- repeatedly. I willed away thoughts of a naked Sookie before I had an embarrassing situation on my hands.

"If you think that's funny, you'll love this. So there's this one time we drove up to Laguna," I already know what story he's going to tell and I want to go in there and stop him. "Eric has a thing for this girl that lives up there. I don't remember what her name was but I called her Tits McGee-"

"Classy." Sookie interjects with a laugh.

"Thank you. So we go up there and Eric's trying to make it sound like he just really wants to hit the waves but I've seen him making eyes at this chick for the last month. She never paid any attention to either one of us which was pretty uncommon." It sounds egotistical, but it's also entirely true. Just one of us garners a lot of looks from the female population but the two of us together is like some big anomaly that gets all sorts of gaping stares.

"Not that you need me stroking your ego anymore than Eric does, but I can understand why. If I saw the two of you walking around on a beach I'd probably lose my shit a little bit, too." Sookie admitted, which made Johan laugh. I admit, I chuckled a little in the hallway, too. I kept out of sight and just listened to the two of them talk.

"So there's my lillebror acting all bad ass trying to get this girl's attention. He's doing every trick on a surfboard he can think of to do. The swell comes up and he's riding the waves pretty well. It was actually bordering on some legendary hang time. Then, less than gracefully, he lost his balance and face planted in the water." He wasn't embellishing at all. It was a good ride and it hurt like a motherfucker when I fell.

"Ouch." Sookie winced on my seventeen-year-old self's behalf.

"But Eric takes it like a champ and pops up a few seconds later. It's not that unusual for surfers to fall, but it's a bit of a spectacle when it's a dude that's as tall as we are. So here he comes up to the shore to make another run when a sudden swell comes crashing up against the shore. It was a pretty righteous wall of water that hit. Somehow his board got under him again and the next thing you know he's being tossed onto the beach, face first, with his board under him to soften the fall." Johan was laughing hysterically.

"Are surfboards soft?" No. Hell fucking no.

Johan sucked in air and said, "Ask his capped tooth."

Sookie gasped and then giggled. "Oh no! Oh, please tell me that at least Tits McGee was impressed enough with him to go out with him." I found it amusing that my girlfriend was rooting for me to be with another girl at any point in my life, and that she would refer to said girl as Tits McGee.

At that point I showed myself in the doorway but Sookie couldn't see me there since I was behind her. "He did eventually get the girl but it turned out his board had more personality than she did. I tried to tell him that would happen but he was insistent. So ever since then we have a scale on which we rate girls and if you get classified as a Tits McGee, there's serious consideration as to whether or not to make an investment."

He was right about that. Her name was Valeria and that was the most interesting thing about her. While she was absolutely a knock out, she wasn't at all interesting. Even my teenage self knew she would be a waste of my time and money. We went out on the worst date of my dating history and I never called her again. I couldn't believe Johan was telling her about the rating system. That was supposed to stay between us. Not even Pam knew about that shit.

"Oh really? So where do I fall on your scale?" Sookie asked in a teasing manner.

Johan shot me a quick look and I shook my head. I had a feeling I knew what he was going to say just so he could mess with her a little. Part of me wanted to revert to the way he and I had been as kids and tease her mercilessly like we'd done with Annika. The other part- the protective boyfriend part- wanted to steal her out of the room before he could say anything that might offend her in the slightest.

Johan gave Sookie an appraising look before he said something that shocked the hell out of me. "He should marry you."

Sookie sputtered for a second before formulating her response. "I think it's a little soon to talk about that."

I perked up at the realization that it wasn't a no, or an outright denial. I felt my own heart speed up a little at the idea of marrying her. We hadn't gotten that far in relationship talks just yet. We weren't even talking about living together. It was too soon. We'd only been together for about a month. The biggest of our plans so far was deciding on a Halloween costume for the party at the bar. We talked about which house we would stay at for the weekend and whether we wanted to go out for dinner or stay in. We hadn't discussed anything long-term.

He cursed in Swedish and said, "Sookie, don't waste time. If you know he's the one, then that's all that counts."

I saw the pained expression that landed on Johan's face and I knew he was thinking about Thalia. They'd dated when he was in New York, and while Johan never said as much, I suspect part of his decision to move to Sweden had something to do with their breakup. It had been messy and he hadn't taken it very well at all. Thalia was his Sookie and he'd dicked around too much and lost her. She ended up marrying some guy named Charles who looked like a pirate. Thalia was Johan's achilles heel.

I cleared my throat to let them know I was there and as soon as Sookie whipped around to see me standing there, that telltale blush crept up her neck. Johan definitely had jump started her thinking about the future. I wasn't sure if I should thank him or punch him in the balls for it. Only time would tell.

"Good morning." I smiled at them.

Not quite ready to give up on giving Sookie a hard time yet, Johan said, "To answer your question, Sookie, you are definitely *not* a Tits McGee. In fact, I think you just created a new notch on the scale."

Sookie's blush only got deeper before she scampered off the bed. She stopped in front of me to give me a good morning kiss. "I'm going to go start breakfast." She slapped my ass and then went to the kitchen.

We waited until she was out of earshot before Johan said anything. "Seriously, bror, put a fucking ring on her finger before some peg leg looking motherfucker does it for you."

"They're not all like Thalia, bror."

"Yes, they are, Eric. Some are just better at hiding it than others." Johan said with a pained expression on his face.

I made a resolution right then and there to make sure I never ended up like Johan, pining for the one that go away. In the distance I heard Sookie humming the melody of "Heart Shaped Box" and I wondered if maybe she'd overheard our conversation. If she did, she showed no signs of it when I met her in the kitchen.

"Need help?" I looked at the ingredients gathered on the island.

She gave me one of her challenging grins and asked, "How are you at flipping pancakes?"

I grinned at her and watched as she mouthed the words along with me, "Pretty fucking ninja."

She laughed and handed me a spatula. "I knew you were going to say that." She pushed herself up on her toes and kissed me before getting back to cooking.

I spent the afternoon with Johan and Jeter at the park I'd gone to shoot hoops at the day before school started. I hadn't been back since. I'd been far too busy with Sookie over the last few weeks to get in a decent game. Johan wasn't the most skilled basketball player but his height gave him an advantage, regardless of his talent. We were just clowning around, calling the most ridiculous shots for one another to take. We'd had the court to ourselves for about an hour when the group of kids I'd played with last time appeared.

"Hey, old man, where you been? I was starting to think you broke a hip, or something." Quentin taunted me as he walked out onto the court.

"Jesus, Eric, how old do these kids think you are?" Johan looked back and forth between Quentin and me. I just shrugged.

"I've been busy, Quentin." I didn't feel the need to get much deeper into it than that.

"Yeah, I heard." Quentin seemed to know more than he was willing to let on himself. "I also heard you're gonna be my coach this season."

"That's assuming you make my team."

Quentin looked shocked that I would insinuate at a possibility he might not make it. "Coach, let me break it down for you. I'm the best you got, believe me. If you want to win any games this year, you're gonna need me."

I looked over at Johan who was shaking his head. "You want to take this one?" I asked my brother.

"You let your clone speak for you?" Quentin didn't seem to care that he was speaking out of turn, or that I was taking note of this attitude.

"Hey, Junior, while your confidence is a must when you're on the court, you might want to remember you aren't guaranteed a walk onto it. When you talk to my brother, and the man you *hope* will be your coach, you should do so with respect." Johan had no trouble putting the kid in his place.

Quentin didn't look the slightest bit phased by Johan's admonishment. "Look, I just came out here to have fun. I didn't realize it was senior citizen hour."

He was going to be trouble. The worst of it was, I was pretty sure he was right about needing him on the team. His ego was going to be the biggest problem. He was going to need to learn to function as a team member and not as a hero. I could see his hunger for a win, but if he was going to drag my team down with all of his self-important bullshit I wasn't sure it'd be worth it to take him. I'd rather fight for every win with a team that got along than have rivalry within my own team just to keep our scoring records on the positive side.

"He's going to be trouble." Johan predicted.

I nodded my agreement. We went back to goofing around for a while and I only looked Quentin's way a handful of times before we decided to call it quits and let the kids have the court to themselves. We walked back to the house and showered up. Sookie was at a football game and would be meeting us at the house before we went up to the bar. Johan was all sorts of anxious to see Pam again. While she wouldn't admit it, I knew Pam was excited Johan was in town as well. She'd been stocking up on insults over the last few weeks and was just waiting to hurl them at him.

The two of them could put on quite a show. We were in the kitchen drinking beers when Sookie pulled up to the house. She was dressed in her poms outfit which was a pair of tight maroon yoga pants with her last name spelled across her ass in gold letters, and a gold tank top with an eagle- the school's mascot- on the front of it. Her hair was pulled back in a high ponytail and she was wearing more makeup than usual. She always went to the games ready to stand in in case one of her girls didn't show up for some reason. Watching her practice her routines on the weekends was one of the best perks of being her boyfriend. My girl was nothing if not a good dancer.

"Holy fucking hell, bror! She's a cheerleader?" Johan looked like he was going to have a stroke as he watched Sookie walk up to the house.

"Poms." I clarified for him.

"What's the difference?" He couldn't take his eyes off Sookie.

"She dances instead of cheering." I grinned at him.

"I hate you." Johan deadpanned.

"Wipe the drool, bror, she's taken." I threw a towel at him as the front door opened.

"Hello?" Sookie called out. How she missed Johan staring at her from the kitchen table, I have no idea.

"In here!" I called out.

Sookie appeared in the doorway with her warm up jacket hanging open and her cleavage enticing me into dragging her into the bedroom to help her make sure she washed every square inch of her back. A look at my brother told me he was thinking the very same thing. He gave me the death glare and then chugged the rest of his beer.

"How was the game?" I bent to kiss her.

"JV didn't do so hot, but Varsity is going to end up at State if they keep playing like they have been. Alcide looked like he was ready to shit a rainbow he was so happy." Sookie informed us, causing Johan to choke on his beer.

"Shit a rainbow?" He asked when he stopped sputtering and then starting laughing loudly. When we found something amusing we had the same booming laugh.

Sookie reached into her bag and handed me an envelope. "Here. I thought you might want to see these."

"What are they?"

"Just look at them. I'm going to go take a shower." Sookie pecked me on the cheek and turned to walk away.

"I can help you with that!" Johan offered, earning a him a growl.

"Save it for Pam!" Sookie shouted back, not at all phased by the ridiculous pickup lines Johan had been hurling at her all day.

"You've got to cut that shit out, bror." I sat down at the table across from him and opened the envelope Sookie had given me.

It was full of pictures from the dance the week before. Oh, what a night that was. I'd avoided those dances like the plague when I was in high school. They were much more Johan's thing and he only went because it was an excuse to feel up on girls on the dance floor without getting slapped for it. I'd told Sookie as much, which was why she was so surprised when I offered to chaperon right along with her. I think she was pretty well onto me that it was a bit of a jealousy thing but she didn't say a word about it. If she suspected, she kept it to herself.

She looked like a goddess that night. We'd managed to behave ourselves, for the most part. I'd caught her briefly when she was walking out of the bathroom and pulled her under the bleachers. It was the best three minutes of the entire night- at least until after we left the dance. My girl could be a tiger when she wanted to. She broke her rules yet again and I started to wonder if maybe the key to getting her to do so was to pick the right moment. Prior to her bathroom break we'd been out on the dance floor, keeping a respectable distance between us. Well, right up until the slow dance, that is.

The DJ had played a slow acoustic mix of a woman covering the Bryan Adams song "Heaven," and the lyrics weren't at all lost on me while we were dancing. Her little body fit perfectly against mine and it was hard to believe I'd gone more than thirty years without her in my arms. We couldn't stop staring at one another- or smiling, for that matter- and at the end of the song there was nothing I wanted more than to kiss her until we had to pull away to breathe. I wanted to do other things, too, but I'd settle for kissing her. Turns out I got my wish when she let me take her under the bleachers for those few minutes. She didn't even try to fight me.

The following Monday there were rumors flying around the school that Sookie and I were dating. I didn't even realize anyone was paying attention to us, I was so busy looking at her. Apparently our students had taken notice of how comfortable we were with one another, much more so than just two co-workers would be. It wasn't until Thursday that Sookie's student aid, Jessica, got up the nerve to ask Sookie if she and I were a couple. Sookie and I had talked about it and since our superiors were made aware of our decision to date, we saw no reason to hide it from our students. So, Sookie told Jessica the truth. By Friday morning I was getting angry glares from teenage boys who didn't at all like the idea of their dream girl being off the market.

Johan looked at the pictures when I was done. He held up one of Sookie and I while we were slow dancing. "Don't let Mom see this or she's going to ask when she should start knitting baby blankets," he warned with a smirk.

I laughed because I knew he was right and because I didn't want him to know that all of his talk about marriage was starting to get into my head. I told myself we'd only been together for a month. We hadn't even said we loved each other yet. Thinking about marriage and babies was just way too much, way too soon. Still, the thoughts were wiggling around in my head, and for the first time in my life, I wasn't anywhere near tempted to cut and run.

I was scared to death.

**So, what do y'all think of Johan? He makes me giggle. Don't tell Eric, but I think I might have a little crush on his twin. Is that creepy? \*strokes imaginary beard\* Oh, well... So, I'm going to put this to a vote: who wants Eric to take the open plane ticket to Louisiana for Thanksgiving? All in favor, please click that little blue button there. Thanks for reading!**

Courtesy of Google Translate:

**Du är på allvar kommer att gå in och knulla din flickvän med mig sovande höger i korridoren? Du är en skitstövel.** "You're seriously going to go in there and fuck your girlfriend with me sleeping right down the hall? You're an asshole." (And for the record, no, Eric and Sookie didn't have sex.)

**Chapter 17: The Odd Couple**

I just have to take a quick moment to thank my RL friends who helped to inspire some of the craziness that is in this chapter. Johan's toast, especially, I owe a thank you to my bff's brother-in-law who makes a point to give this toast every time our little motley crew gets together for drinks. It's a tradition in our little family and a toast we all shout with pride. Without further adu, I give you drunken Northman twins \*passes out Patron shots\*

Chapter Seventeen: The Odd Couple

**Sookie**

"So Pam," Johan slithered up beside her at the bar. She was already rolling her eyes. "Do you sleep on your stomach?"

Pam turned to Johan with a look of pure confusion, clearly not expecting that to be his first question. "No."

"Can I?" There went the eyebrows.

Eric and I both groaned while he leaned over and said, "That's nothing. He's got a million of 'em."

"Great." I was already feeling for Pam if this was how it was going to be all night.

Eric wasn't at all kidding about the pickup lines. Johan was throwing them out right and left and every time Pam came back at him with something scathing. Yet, I couldn't help but notice a little twinkle in her eye when Johan's attention would be diverted to something else just for a minute. Even if she didn't play for his team, it was obvious to me that in some sort of twisted way Pam enjoyed the attention she was getting from Eric's twin.

Johan kicked off what he had christened our 'liver disaster weekend' with the four of us taking a shot of Patron and a toast that only Johan would give. "Here's to honor, to getting honor, keeping honor and if you can't come in her, come on her!" My jaw dropped at his toast but I drank to it anyway.

Pam leaned over to Johan and said, "Just for the record, you won't be doing either."

Johan wiggled his finger at Pam, motioning for her to come closer to him. She rolled her eyes but he kept it up. Finally, about three minutes later Pam gave up and moved closer to Johan who had a look of pure triumph on his face.

"I knew if I fingered you long enough, you'd come." He leered at her.

"Oh gross!" I groaned and hid my face in Eric's shirt.

"Bror, don't be surprised if Pam rubber bands you." Eric shook his head in warning. Pam burst out laughing. I knew I was missing something.

"What's that all about?" I asked Eric as he led me to a table far, far away from Pam and Johan who were about to go another round on the world's worst pickup lines.

"A couple of years ago Pam and I went up to New York to go visit Johan. Pam had finally found a woman she thought was worthy of her attentions. So Pam's pretty much got this woman right where she wants her when Johan goes stumbling up to her and says something about how he thinks he knows her, but doesn't recognize her with her clothes on." Eric told me with a sigh of exasperation. It was things like that that made it really hard to believe Eric and Johan were related, let alone twins. "So of course, the woman Pam was chatting up walks away. We get back to Johan's apartment and he's so drunk that he falls face down on the living room. Total face plant. Pam proceeded to coil up rubber bands and throw them at the back of Johan's head so they got stuck in his hair."

"Oooh, ouch." I knew how much that had to hurt.

"He ended up having to get his hair cut pretty short as a result." Eric nodded.

"Wow." That seemed a bit extreme for anyone else, but it seemed oddly justifiable since it was Pam. I made a note to myself never to bug her when she was with a prospect.

"Well, well, lillebror, look what I have here." Johan suddenly appeared at Eric's side and slapped down a quarter.

"Ooooh. I have one, too." I teased Johan, clearly not getting the joke. In my defense I'd already had three gin and tonics. I was a bit cloudy by then.

"No, lover, it's for a game. You've heard of Quarters, right?" Eric looked to me. I shook my head and Johan slapped the tabletop.

"Game on! Pam, get the whiskey!" Johan hollered.

"You want to play Quarters with whiskey?" Eric's head whipped around like it was on fire.

"We're big boys now, bror, I think we can handle it." Johan said with confidence.

"How, exactly, do we play this game?" I asked Eric.

He explained the rules of the game to me, which sounded simple enough, but told me it was very easy to get very drunk very fast. "Normally it's played with beer."

"So you're upping the stakes by playing with hard liquor." I observed and Eric nodded. "You realize that if you get really, really drunk you're probably going to end up sleeping on the lawn, right? There's no way I can carry you in the house."

"I'll be fine, Sookie." He leaned over and kissed me.

"Famous last words, Mr. Northman." I felt a bit anxious about the whole thing but decided to throw caution to the wind. I knew I'd be perfectly safe with Eric and Johan. I also knew my limits and would bow out gracefully when I knew I'd had enough. I didn't want to spend the night with my head in the toilet.

Pam procured a bunch of glasses from behind the bar as well as a few bottles for us to play with. Since I wasn't much of a beer drinker I was allowed to play with my mixed drinks instead, easy on the alcohol at Eric's insistence. Apparently he didn't want his girlfriend to spend the night with her head in the toilet either.

"So are you any good at this game?" I leaned against Eric.

"I do okay." He winked at me.

"Just okay?"

"You'll see." Another wink. Shit. I knew what that meant.

"You're a fucking ninja at this, aren't you?" I whispered in his ear and then bit his lobe. He shivered before turning to face me.

"You'll see." His lips caught mine and it wasn't until Pam finally followed through on her threat and thew ice at us that we broke it up.

"Sorry, Pammy." I giggled at her. The look on her face was priceless.

"Do *not* under any circumstances on this earth *ever* call me that horrific name ever again." Pam's eyes were narrowed and hostile.

"Sorry Pam." I had to stifle a giggle.

Since I'd never played before I paid close attention to what the others were doing. It seemed as if had unofficially taken teams. Eric and I were on one team with Pam and Johan on the other. Thankfully Eric was as ninja as I'd thought he'd be or we would have been in deep shit. I tried to mimic the movements he made with his wrist to get the quarter to bounce effortlessly into the glass but it just wasn't happening for me. Having Pam taunting me didn't help one bit, nor did Johan's occasional use of a really bad pickup line.

At one point Johan leaned over the table to Pam and said, "I love every bone in your body... especially mine."

Eric nearly choked on his drink and I about fell out of my chair, both of us were laughing so hard. "I'm glad you two are enjoying this." Pam glared at us.

"Oh, lighten up, Pammy, it's all in good fun." I leaned over and hugged her.

"Is this pick on Pam night?" Pam pried me off of her and threw me back at Eric.

Eric got his revenge on Pam and Johan with his next turn by bouncing three quarters successfully into the glass. In addition to getting Pam and Johan a little bit closer to obliteration he made a rule that everyone at the table had to be referred to by a nickname for the rest of the night, no street names allowed. I cringed on the inside, having a feeling things could get really ugly. I was the new kid on the block and didn't have the sort of dirt on the three of them that they had on each other.

Somehow I ended up with the nickname 'Jiggles' and it wasn't hard to figure out how I got that when I caught all three of them staring at my cleavage. "Ha. Ha." I rolled my eyes at the three of them.

Eric gave me a reassuring squeeze and kissed the side of my head. Pam instituted the next rule where we all had to tell one embarrassing story about the person to our right. Finding an embarrassing story to tell about Eric wasn't really possible for me since I couldn't recall him doing anything embarrassing in my presence. Since it was Pam's rule, she was the one to go first.

"The only remotely embarrassing story I have about Jiggles," Pam winked at me, proud of herself for remembering to refer to me by my new nickname. "Is the night she met Eric and it's not even really *my* story."

I winced at having to use Pam's nickname, but I wasn't about to get myself into trouble by not saying it. "Vodkaknockers," I could barely get it out without laughing. It was the most ridiculous name I'd ever heard and I was hoping that Johan would be telling the story of how Pam had come to acquire it. "Don't you dare tell that story!"

"Sorry, Jiggles, it's the rules." Pam shrugged her shoulders all innocent like. "So Wallmark," Eric's nickname that made him turn bright red when it was mentioned. I definitely wanted to hear the story on that one, too. "Was working behind the bar because Felicia needed the night off for some bullshit reason or another. In walks Jiggles with one of her girlfriends and it's her first time here. After a violent shove from her friend, Jiggles makes her way to the bar. Being the good barkeep that he is, Wallmark walks up to her and the first words out of her mouth are to ask for a Screaming Orgasm."

I felt the heat of a furious blush climb up from my toes. Johan's jaw dropped and he turned to Eric and said something in Swedish I didn't understand, but got him a dirty look and a punch on the shoulder. Pam winked at me and it was my turn to come up with a story about Eric.

"Okay, this is going to sound lame but we haven't known each other long enough for me to have an embarrassing story to tell." I admitted. I was mocked with cooing sounds from Pam and Johan. "It's true!"

"I call bullshit, Jiggles." Pam shook her head. "I've known Wallmark for more than a decade. He's not nearly as perfect as you make him out to be."

"I never said he was perfect. I just said I don't have an embarrassing story to tell." I said in my own defense.

"Fine. Then you owe me a shot of Patron." Pam poured the shot and slid it over to me. Did I mention she poured it into a double size shot glass?

I took a deep breath and stared down the shot. By that point I was beyond buzzed and making myself comfortable in Drunkville. If I took that shot, that'd be the end of it for me. I was so busy staring down that shot of tequila that I didn't notice Eric had licked my wrist and put salt on it.

"Come on, Jiggles, we're all waiting for you!" Johan encouraged from the other side of the table. Eric gave me a wink and I sighed before picking up the shot.

"You got a lime?" I groaned, causing Johan to cheer for me and pound on the table. If he weren't normally so rowdy I'd think he was my next door neighbor in Drunkville.

Pam picked up a lime wedge and put it between her teeth. I looked over at Eric who looked less than amused. Johan, on the other hand, was practically drooling. I didn't need a devil Sookie and an angel Sookie on my shoulders. I had the Northman Twins instead. Besides, I think the two of them were kidnapped by Jose Cuervo at some point during the evening.

"It's up to you, lover." Eric's expression was one I couldn't quite make out.

He seemed about as torn as I did over taking the lime wedge from Pam. It seemed as if he couldn't decide whether seeing me almost kiss Pam would be really hot or a really good reason to go all caveman on my ass. There was a part of me that wanted to be a little bit bolder than usual and prove I could hang with the rest of them and not feel weird about it. On the other hand, I didn't want to piss off my boyfriend.

"Do it! Do it! Do it!" Johan was banging on the tabletop.

I looked over my shoulder while I licked the salt off my wrist. I sucked back the tequila and before I could talk myself out of it, I dove over and took the lime from Pam without using my hands. Eric's grip on my thigh tightened just a little bit. When I pulled back from Pam her eyes were all starry. Johan was silent and looked like he was going to have a stroke. I went to wipe the lime juice from my chin but was stopped by Eric.

"We're going home. Now." The look in his eyes told me he'd had a very specific reaction to my little stunt and he sure wasn't angry.

Eric and I were making out like teenagers up against the wall outside the bar while we waited for our cab to pick us up. He was pressed against me and it was quite obvious that he'd gotten quite excited over my methods of procuring the lime. The only thing that allowed us to pry ourselves apart when the cab showed up was the knowledge that we were just five minutes away from his house- from his bed. We were just about to get in the car when the DJ announced he had a special request.

"This one is for Vodkaknockers from Thundercock with love and hopes for many happy returns." Then 'Love Me Dead' by Ludo started to play and Eric and I collapsed into the cab in a fit of laughter.

I woke up the next morning with the worst hangover I'd ever had in my life. I groaned and rolled away from the window to bury my face in Eric's shoulder, only there was no Eric. Without opening my eyes, I stretched out my arm. The bed was still warm so he couldn't have been gone for too long. I heard the awful creaking of the bathroom door opening and I whimpered at how loud it was. I'm sure it wasn't really as loud as it felt but it was like nails on a chalkboard to my aching head.

The mattress sagged when Eric sat down next to me. "Here, drink this."

I opened one eye and looked up at him. "Please don't shout." I pouted and he smiled at me.

"You'll feel better." He spoke softly and held out a glass of water for me.

I groaned again before forcing myself up onto my elbows. He handed me a couple of aspirin and the glass of water. I swallowed the pills and drank the entire glass of water in just a few gulps. I handed the glass back and asked for more. He bent and kissed my head gently before disappearing into the bathroom. He came back a few seconds later with another full glass of water and I had to force myself up again. My muscles were screaming at me.

"I feel like I was hit by a freight train." I grumbled after handing the glass to Eric again.

"We'll take it easy today. Johan's not back yet, thank God. We can just stay in and watch movies if you want."

"I want breakfast and more sleep." I snuggled under the covers to find I was naked. That pretty much answered the question of whether or not we had sex when we got home the night before. If I woke up naked, we had sex.

"What time is it?"

"Almost noon." He stretched out next to me and I groaned with the realization that half the day was gone already. "What do you want for breakfast?"

"Not eggs." There was a horrible taste in my mouth that would require some serious mouthwash in the near future.

"How about blueberry pancakes?" Eric suggested.

"Yes, please." I offered him the weakest smile.

"I'll keep Jeet out. Go back to sleep. I'll bring you breakfast when it's ready." Eric kissed my head once more and as much as I would love to say that I hauled my ass out of bed to help him, I went right back to sleep.

The smell of blueberries and bacon pulled me from a dream I was having about being chased by a giant bottle of tequila, but it was the gentle sensation of Eric stroking my hair that got me to open my eyes. I turned my face toward his and smiled up at him. "How are you feeling?" He asked quietly.

"Better, thank you." I started to sit up and then remembered I was still naked. "Could you pass me my bag?"

"No one's here, lover." Eric reminded me.

"I know but if Johan comes back I don't want him bounding in here and catching me topless. You know if he did he'd never let that go."

"It should be illegal to cover breasts that beautiful." Eric handed me my bag.

"Watch it, Mr. Northman, you're starting to sound like your brother." I teased as I dug into my bag for my nightgown."Where do you suppose he went after we left last night?"

"Your guess is as good as mine." Eric shrugged and grabbed the tray he'd brought in from the kitchen.

Eric had gone all out for breakfast. He made his pancakes from scratch- I'd found that out the hard way when I woke up one morning to make them myself- and they were heavenly. I felt better once I had something in my stomach. I tried to get up to help Eric clean the kitchen but he wouldn't let me. He insisted I stay in bed and be lazy for a while. I felt bad for sticking him with the clean up but I knew arguing would do me no good. I got out of bed long enough to use the bathroom. I washed my makeup off and tamed down my crazy bedhead as much as I could. I brushed my teeth and contemplated taking a shower, but decided to wait for Eric on that one. Maybe I'd be able to talk him into the big tub downstairs.

I'd just gotten back into bed when he came back to the bedroom and closed the door behind him. He made sure to lock it in case Johan came home. He slipped into bed beside me and we just laid there for a while, both of us silent. I tried to get comfortable enough to go back to sleep- the only logical thing to do with a hangover and a very full tummy- but it was just too bright in Eric's room.

"Where are you going?" He grabbed for my hand when I got out of bed.

"Closing the shades." I stumbled to the window to close the shades and then the curtains. All of a sudden it felt like I as in the Batcave. Perfection.

I tumbled back into bed only to be pulled across the mattress and secured in Eric's arms. More and more it was becoming my favorite place to be. When I wasn't there, I wanted to be. I missed him like crazy not more than five minutes after I'd walk away from him. It was the most insane thing. I started thinking about what Johan said to me before Eric woke up the morning before. I'd felt him standing there in the door for a few minutes before he made his presence known. I don't know who he thought he was fooling. He's got such a heavy stare that it's almost impossible for me *not* to feel it.

"What's going on in that head of yours, Miss Stackhouse?" Eric squeezed me closer to him, his fingers trailing up and down my arm.

"I'm thinking about something Johan said to me yesterday." I admitted with a deep breath. Eric's fingers stopping moving for just a split second and it was enough to make me wonder if maybe he was doing the same thing. "He asked me why we're not living together."

"And what'd you tell him?" Eric seemed almost hesitant to ask.

"That it's too soon." I tilted my face up toward his. "I know you heard what he said yesterday about where I fall on that silly scale you two have- which, by the way, is slightly offensive- and a part of me thinks it was just your brother spouting off to give the new girl a hard time, while the other part thinks he was entirely serious. I guess I just want to know if that was coming from him or from you?"

Eric tensed up a little bit and I started kicking myself for saying anything about it. What the hell was I thinking, bringing up the marriage talk so soon? There were a whole bunch of other steps that came before that and we hadn't been together for that long. Mom had always said that when I met the right person, I'd know it. She used to tell me the minute she laid eyes on Dad she knew he was it for her. For the last month I'd been asking myself the same thing about Eric. Was he really 'the one,' or did I just want him to be? Waiting for him to say something was torturous and I started to get uncomfortable. My body started a revolt against whatever rejection I was suddenly sure I was going to be on the receiving end of, and I couldn't be in Eric's arms when he told me that he had no intention of us ever getting that far. Maybe this was a fling after all.

My eyes filled with tears while I silently cursed myself for not keeping my big mouth shut. It felt like hours had passed even though it really couldn't have been more than a minute. Still, it was too much. The silence that stretched between us was unbearable.

"Sookie, wait," Eric almost begged when I got out of bed. I kept my back to him so he wouldn't see me crying.

"It's okay, Eric. I'm gonna go shower and then I think we should go pick up your car." I wiped at my face and grabbed my overnight bag off the floor.

Of course Eric didn't listen and jumped out of bed before I could get to the bathroom. "Forget the car. Why are you crying, lover?" He brushed away my tears with the pads of his thumbs before cupping my face in his hands.

I struggled against him, not wanting to say anymore than I already had. How could he seriously not know why I was upset? "I shouldn't have said anything."

"Sookie, no, don't do that." Eric held my face up so I had to look at him when I wanted to look away. "Don't run from me."

"Then answer me, Eric. Was that Johan talking or was that you?"

Eric took a deep breath and closed his eyes. I got this sinking feeling in my chest that told me I should have listened to that little voice in the back of my mind that said Eric wasn't taking this as seriously as I wanted to believe he was. The same voice had told me that if something was too good to be true, then it probably was. I'd silenced that voice because I wanted to believe that it was wrong, that Eric and I could really make things work. Then his hands fell away from my face and my tears started all over again. Whatever it was he was going to say he was having a hell of a time getting the words out.

"Say something!" I finally yelled at him. He flinched and went to sit on the edge of the bed. "Are you breaking up with me?"

Eric's head snapped up. "No, God, Sookie, no, not at all."

"So then what's the problem, Eric?" I looked at him expectantly, hoping he would pull it together enough to say whatever it was that was on his mind. When he didn't, I turned the other way.

"I love you." He whispered it so quietly that at first, I wasn't sure I heard it. It took a moment for my brain to process what he'd said.

I turned around slowly to find he was waiting for my eyes to find his. "What did you say?"

"I didn't want to tell you like this." He stood up and crossed the room in two long strides. His hands nearly swallowed my face the way he was holding it. "I wanted to tell you when you opened your eyes this morning, even before that. I should have. I love you, Sookie."

My mouth hung open, not sure of what to say. Did I love Eric? I hadn't given it a whole lot of thought. It felt like I should say it back but I didn't want to say it just to say it. I wanted to be sure that I meant it when I said it. I stammered for a few seconds, trying to find words that would mean something- anything- but I just made sounds.

"You don't have to say it back." He didn't look hurt or disappointed. "I didn't say it so you would say it back. It's how I feel and I wanted you to know it. I just didn't want to say too much too fast."

"Eric, I..." I trailed off, wanting badly to tell him I felt the same, but the words just wouldn't come. "It's not that-"

He cut me off with a kiss which was probably the best thing he could have done. "Say it when you're ready, Sookie. I'm not going anywhere. I promise."

His eyes told me he was telling me the truth and I immediately felt like an idiot for freaking out like I did. "I'm sorry I panicked like that."

"No, it's okay. I should have just told you instead of being dramatic about it. In trying not to freak you out I ended up doing it anyway."

I got an idea at that moment that might take the sting off of me not being able to tell him I loved him just yet but I wanted him to know I wasn't going anywhere either. "Listen, I have an idea and you can totally say no if you're not into it."

"I'll be into it. You haven't had a bad idea yet." Eric smiled at me.

"Well, it's just that it's sort of a big deal and we haven't talked about this kind of stuff, so there's no pressure for you to say yes." I was stalling.

"Sookie, just spit it out." Eric prompted and brushed some stray hair away from my face.

"See, the thing is, I planned on going home for Thanksgiving. I bought the tickets months ago before we met. I don't know what your plans are, but I'd really like it if you came to Louisiana with me." I suggested nervously.

Eric's face lit up like a Christmas tree. "Of course I'll go with you. I was actually thinking of asking you to come to California with me to see my parents if you didn't have any other plans."

We both laughed and then I felt guilty for taking him away from his family. "Eric, if you want to go see your parents-"

"No, Sookie, it's fine. I want to meet your family." Eric assured me and I let out a breath I didn't know I was holding. It was like a huge weight was lifted off my shoulders. "Now how about that shower?" His eyebrows wiggled.

"You read my mind." I wiggled my eyebrows right back and off to the shower we went.

Eric rolled us over so he was on top of me and my legs immediately wrapped around him, urging him deeper inside of me. His mouth hungrily sought out mine and my fingers tangled in his hair to keep him close. My hips met his, keeping up with the quickening pace he was setting. I was getting close and the growl that escaped his mouth told me he was, too. I tugged on his hair gently, moving his head so his ear was close to my lips.

"Faster, baby, I'm so close." I moaned and licked his ear.

I got another growl and he moved faster. I was right there and then he backed off. He pulled back and looked me in my eyes. He punctuated each of his words with a sift thrust of his hips. "I love you, Sookie."

I'd never cried during sex before, but there was such intensity in his eyes that I couldn't help it. He looked a little afraid, like he thought maybe he hurt me or that he'd been too rough so I pulled his mouth to mine again. I hated myself a little bit for not being able to say that I loved him. I poured everything I was feeling into that kiss so that he would know that I was more than okay. I wasn't crying because I was in pain, but because I was happy and maybe a little overwhelmed. No one had ever looked at me the way he did.

My hands slipped out of his hair to find his. Our fingers laced together and we were still kissing when my orgasm washed over me. It seemed to go on forever and I wondered if that was the product of really being in love with someone. I'd never experienced anything like that with Quinn. I never felt like the world stopped around us and we were the only ones in it. Eric's release came right after mine and he collapsed on top of me. I didn't mind the weight on me. It felt good. It felt safe. It felt like I was exactly where I was supposed to be.

He kissed me lazily as we rode out the aftershocks of our orgasms, our skin sticky and slick with sweat. He moved to roll off me, but I held him in place. "No, stay." My eyes were a bit frantic. I wanted to stay that close to him.

He smiled at me and smoothed some of the damp hair off my forehead where it had matted itself. He kissed my face lightly, avoiding my mouth for the longest time. When he finally got to my lips there was more passion in that kiss than I'd ever felt from him before. My toes curled and my chest swelled. It hit me like a mac truck that I loved him and I was just about to say it when I heard the front door slam. Johan was home and I was never more glad Eric remembered to lock the bedroom door than I was about fifteen seconds later when Johan tried to walk into the room.

"We're busy!" Eric shouted. He was ready to go again and I was in no position- literally- to turn him away.

"Well take a break. I have something I have to tell you!" Johan shouted in return.

Eric growled and I trailed my fingers up and down his back, making him shiver. "Go talk to your brother. I'll wait for you."

Rather than getting out of bed, Eric crashed his lips against mine. Apparently Johan was going to have to wait his turn. I felt weird about having sex with Eric, knowing that Johan was probably standing on the other side of the door, trying to figure out how to pick the lock to get into the room.

"Eric, I can't with Johan standing outside the door." I reluctantly turned my face away from his. He growled again and muttered something in Swedish, which took me completely by surprise. I didn't know he could speak another language.

"I'll kill him." Eric forced himself off of me.

"Eric, can you speak Swedish?" I reached for his arm.

He looked over his shoulder at me and gave me one of those predatory looks that always made my lady business take the wheel. "Är det lägga dig på, älskare?" I felt shivers go through me and my skin broke out in goosebumps. Hearing him speak that way did things to me I never would have imagined. "Jag antar att det gör."

"What did you just say?" My voice was all breathy. I hated Johan just then.

"He asked if it turns you on, Sookie!" Johan shouted from the other side of the door.

My face turned bright red and I rolled to bury my face in the pillows. I completely forgot Johan was standing on the other side of the door. I groaned with embarrassment.

"Excuse me, lover, I have to go kill my brother." He leaned down and whispered in my ear so Johan couldn't hear. "Bli inte klädd. Jag är inte färdig med dig än."

The look in his eyes told me he'd said something serious and that I should stay right where I was. I was a little bit too much of a puddle to move, so I just nodded my agreement. He kissed me and then got out of bed to go kill his brother.

**Well huh...this chapter turned out to be a bit more than I'd planned when I started it. Totally didn't plan on Eric confessing that he loved Sookie so soon, but it just couldn't be helped. I'm guessing I won't be getting any complaints about that, though. Thank you all for your awesomesauce reviews from last chapter! I'm so excited that everyone loves Johan! He's such a fun character to have chattering in my head, even if he is a horny bastard. The overwhelming response was for Eric to go to Louisiana with Sookie. When my baby birds chirp, I listen. Now I'm thinking about where they should spend the New Year. I've got a few ideas, but I'm open to suggestions if anyone's got something killer. Next chapter gets a bit angsty, but we'll get through it quick, I promise. Thanks for reading!**

Är det lägga dig på, älskare? *Does it turn you on, lover?*

Jag antar att det gör. *I guess it does*.

Bli inte klädd. Jag är inte färdig med dig än. *Don't get dress. I'm not done with you yet.*

**Chapter 18: The Misadventures of Thundercock**

Okay, rather than translating the argument Eric and Johan have with one another, I'm just going to type it in English and we can all assume that they're speaking in Swedish. It would be too much to translate and it's really annoying to have to scroll down to the bottom of the chapter or use a translator while reading. That work for everybody? Sweetness.

Oh, and if you're in need of a little mood music, I created a playlist in honor of Johan & Pam's drunken night. playlist/20183552267

On with the show...

Chapter Eighteen: The Misadventures of Thundercock

**Eric**

I stomped out of the bedroom prepared to punch my brother right in the balls for interrupting us like he did, but the look on his face when I walked out of the room told me he'd had one hell of a night. His left eye was bruised and his lip was swollen. Whatever he'd done clearly didn't agree with someone and I wondered if Pam had finally lost whatever patience she had and clocked him.

"What the hell happened to you last night?" I led him toward the kitchen so he'd have more privacy- not that he cared much about that- but also because I didn't want Sookie to hear it.

"After you left last night things got a little crazy." He told me in Swedish. "Pam and I kept drinking. We were goofing around like we always do and I guess she had just enough drinks to forget that she was into women."

I cringed at the idea of my brother and Pam having sex. "Did you sleep with her?"

"Bror, Pam and I are never going to happen, we both know that. And honestly, if she suddenly changed her mind it would be too weird. I'd always have it in my head that she was thinking she wasn't really with *me*."

"Bror, don't-" I held up my hand. I was so past the point where the idea of having sex with Pam sounding remotely appealing to me. She was beautiful and I loved her, but I had absolutely no desire to sleep with her.

"We were dancing and it got a little heated. We ended up kissing for a few minutes, but that's it." Johan admitted and I shook my head.

"Bror..."

"I know, it was stupid." Johan collapsed on one of the stools at the island. "So there we were on the dance floor and all of a sudden some guy comes up to me and pulls me off of Pam and decks me. I knew it wasn't her boyfriend since, well, Pam doesn't have a boyfriend. He started shouting about how he knew I was a cheating asshole and I would do nothing but hurt her."

I groaned and my head sank. "What'd he look like?"

I was expecting Johan to tell me the guy was about my height, bald and had purple eyes. Instead he described a guy that was about six inches shorter with dark hair and eyes. He had a southern accent and he was wearing a wedding ring. Bill fucking Compton.

"For a little guy he hit pretty hard. It took Clancy, Chow *and* Rasul to get him away from me. They threw him out of the bar and told him not to come back. Pam was pissed and wanted to go out there to finish what he started but Indira and Felicia held her back. Once all the excitement calmed down people got bored and started to leave the bar. Pam went back to the office with that waitress Ginger and I didn't see her again for the rest of the night. I was outside waiting for a cab to bring me back here when this woman pulls up. She stopped and offered me a ride home. She thought I was you. She said she was your neighbor and I figured it would be easier to just catch a ride home than it would be to wait for a cab."

I flinched, knowing exactly which of my neighbors had picked him up. I looked over toward Red Menace's house and had the overwhelming urge to go over there and slug her. Up until I met her, I thought Pam was the most infuriating woman I would ever meet.

"Please tell me you didn't spend the night with her." I said in a stressed tone with my eyes closed.

Johan's silence was all the confirmation I needed. "Bror, I didn't think it would be a problem. I was fucked up and worked up from the fight and dancing with Pam and-"

"Stop!" I didn't want to hear anymore.

"Eric-"

"Don't, Johan, just don't." I turned to walk out of the room.

"Bror, we can work this out."

I snickered and shook my head. "Not right now, Johan. I'm gonna go stay at Sookie's tonight. I'll see you when I get back from work tomorrow."

"For what it's worth, I'm sorry." He apologized, which was something rare for him to do so I knew he meant it.

"We'll talk about it tomorrow. You should eat something and get some sleep." I didn't look back at him before heading back to the bedroom.

Sookie was right where I left her but she'd obviously heard us. "Is everything okay?"

I closed the door behind me and leaned against it for a minute. "Can we stay at your place tonight?"

"Eric, what happened?" She looked at me with concern.

She looked beautiful laying there with the sheets pulled up over her body. I wasn't quite ready to talk about about it yet. I heard the water start downstairs for the shower and decided to make the most of the few minutes I knew we'd have without Johan bothering us. I locked the door and then got back into bed with her.

"Eric, Johan's here." She pushed at my shoulders when I climbed on top of her.

"He's in the shower." My lips brushed hers.

"Okay, but he won't be for long and-" I cut her off with a much deeper kiss and didn't waste anytime reaching between her legs to touch her. "Eric," She whimpered while I touched her.

Her hips bucked up against my hand when I found the right spot and my lips crashed against hers again. "Gud, du är så sexig." I whispered to her as she writhed underneath me. She moaned and small hands started to push my boxers down. Her eyes met mine and I said, "Jag älskar sättet du ser på mig när du vill att jag ska knulla dig."

Her legs hitched up around my waist, both of us breathing like we'd been running a marathon. My boxers were down just enough for her to free me from their confines. She stroked me gently a few times before guiding me inside her. She was so warm and wet. Nothing in the world felt better than being inside her. The sex was frenzied, almost as if we were afraid it was the last time we'd ever be together. We both came hard and fast, clinging to one another as it happened.

She smoothed my hair back from my face and kissed me gently. All of the tension and frustration I'd been feeling over what my idiot brother had done was gone. All that mattered to me just then was her. Her body was still shaking under mine when she looked up into my eyes.

"If you keep speaking Swedish, we're never going to get out of bed." She alerted me and I couldn't help but laugh.

"I'll have to remember that." I lowered myself to kiss her.

The water turned off downstairs. Funtime was over, at least for the time being. "Do you really want to go back to my house, or do you want to stay here and work things out with your brother? I could go and let you two have some time to yourselves."

"No, you should stay. There's something I have to tell you." I sighed and rolled to the side.

"Well, let's get out of bed and get started on dinner. If it's bad news, I don't want to get it while we're in bed." Sookie kissed my cheek and then rolled out of bed.

I watched the sway of her hips as she went to the bathroom. She closed the door quietly behind her leaving me to fight the urge to follow her. The room smelled of Sookie and sex- an intoxicating combination. I closed my eyes and smiled. I told her I loved her. The look on her face when she'd realized what I'd said was something I would always remember, if only because it had taken her completely by surprise.

I hadn't planned to say it like I did but I couldn't keep it in anymore. While Johan had planted the seed in my head, the realization that it was very much the truth had hit me when I'd woken up earlier that morning. Sookie had been asleep next to me. She was laying on her stomach and her hair was fanned out on the pillow beneath her. There was the faintest trace of a smile on her face that would probably be imperceptible to anyone else. Her arm was stretched out over my chest and when I tried to move, her grip on me tightened just a little. Even in her sleep she didn't want to be too far away from me. I knew that feeling all too well.

Then, all of a sudden, the thought that I loved her was running through my head. It sort of took me by surprise but after thinking about it for a minute, I realized I was more happy and excited by it than I was scared or freaked out. It seemed like the natural thing to be feeling for her. I almost started wondering what had taken me so long to figure it out. I watched Sookie closely and when her eyes fluttered just a little I prayed it was because she was dreaming and not because she was waking up. I knew if she opened those pretty eyes of hers she'd know something wasn't quite right with me.

It's not that I didn't want to tell her how I felt, so much as I wasn't sure how she'd take it. I knew we were happy being together and miserable when we weren't. It all just seemed to be happening so quick and I didn't want to overwhelm her or scare her off. It sort of scared me a little that I wasn't freaked out about getting closer to her. What scared me more was the idea of losing her.

Sookie came out of the bathroom in a pair of gray yoga pants and a pale pink t-shirt. She brushed her hair out and left it hanging down her back in waves. Her eyes were bright and sparkling, all traces of her hangover were gone. She was beautiful.

"What?" Sookie asked when I failed to stop staring at her.

"You're beautiful." I smiled at her. She blushed and rolled her eyes. "You are."

"Thank you." She mumbled quietly, though I know she wanted to argue with me. Her modesty, while amusing, was almost one of her most endearing qualities. How she could fail to see how beautiful she was was completely beyond me.

I wanted to pull her back into bed and get rid of the clothes she'd covered herself with. I really didn't see a reason for her to ever get dressed. I also knew that we had to go deal with the Johan situation and she wasn't going to let me push it off for too much longer. So, I begrudgingly got out of bed before she could nag me into it. When I came out of the bathroom a few minutes later she was in the process of making the bed.

"I don't know why you bother. We're just going to mess it up again in a few hours." I grinned at her.

"Oh, you think so, huh?" She teased as she fluffed one of the pillows.

"I know so." I said with confidence.

"Does that mean we're staying here so you can deal with whatever your brother did to get you all hot under the proverbial collar?"

I would have been worried she was complaining about my reaction to Johan, if I didn't know for a fact she'd had one hell of an orgasm as a result of it. I leered at her while thinking of the way it felt to be inside her when she felt that good and I had to work really hard to will away yet another hard-on that was threatening to undo all of her work on my bed.

"Yes, we'll stay. Just don't be surprised if I punch him at some point."

"Are you going to tell me what happened?"

"No, I think I'll let him tell you himself."

Sookie looked at me nervously. "Is it that bad?"

I shook my head with disapproval and said, "Lover, you're going to have to judge for yourself."

"Shit." Sookie sighed.

*My sentiments exactly*, I thought to myself and then led her out of the bedroom.

**Johan**

Eric and Sookie left so abruptly last night that Pam and I weren't sure what to make of it. We had a pretty good idea of why they left, of course, but dragging a woman out of a bar like he did wasn't usually Eric's style. It was obvious to me that there was something special about Sookie from the second I saw her and that was only confirmed for me when I saw the way Eric looked at her. I'd seen him with other girls before. It was sort of a running joke about how closed off Eric was. He kept to himself, only allowing a select few into his life in a real way. He had experience with women- and plenty of it- but he never allowed himself to get too close. But the way Sookie was leaning on Eric when I got off the plane, I knew she was different. He was in love with her.

Fucker didn't seem to know it, though. After what I went through with Thalia I didn't want to see my brother suffer the same way. I knew how much it would suck if he lost Sookie, even if he didn't realize just how much he cared about her. I wasted too much time, thinking we were too young, or not mature enough to make a real commitment to one another. Thalia got tired of waiting for me to figure it out and she moved on to someone else. I guess that's really a sign that she wasn't the one for me after all, but I refuse to believe that things wouldn't be different if I had just pulled my head out of my ass before it was too late.

"So, how long do you think it'll be before your brother puts a ring on her finger?" Pam asked once we were alone.

"He hasn't even figured out he loves her yet." I told Pam, who just rolled her eyes.

"You know I love your brother, but he's a fucktard." Pam poured us each a shot of tequila.

"You'll get no arguments out of me, Vodkaknockers." I winked at her, chuckling to myself at how she'd come to earn that nickname.

"Fuck you!" Pam passed me one of the shots.

"Name the time and place." I tossed back the shot and slammed the glass down on the table. "Meet me on the dance floor, Pammy."

"I hate you!" She shouted as I walked away.

I had no doubt she'd be there like I told her to. Pam does a really good job of pretending to hate me for the lines I throw at her but it's just how we relate to one another, always has been. Deep down she knows I love her and I know she feels the same way about me. It's lucky for her partners that she's into chicks because otherwise I would have had to kick more than a few asses on her behalf. Not that Pam needs that sort of help. She's pretty vindictive and vengeful all on her own, but it's the thought that counts.

Eric doesn't know this, but Pam was the first person I called when Thalia left me. She got on a plane and spent the next three days listening to me bitch and cry before she finally told me to man up and either try to get Thalia back or let her go. I wanted Thalia to be happy and since she'd made it clear that I no longer had the ability to do so, I let her go. That's what real love was about, right? There's that old saying about how if you love something you should set it free and if it comes back to you it was always yours. But if it doesn't, then it was never yours to begin with. Well, I found out the hard way that Thalia was never mine to begin with.

It only took three years, a lot of yelling from Pam and more than one bottle of tequila for me to figure that out. On her last night in New York we got stinking drunk on Irish Car Bombs (it just happened to be St. Paddy's) at a bar in Chelsea and then ended up back at my place. I don't really remember everything that happened, but Pam and I definitely had sex. More than once, and it was good. Really, really good. I also knew that it was a one time thing. There would be no hook ups or booty calls when we had an itch we couldn't scratch. That was my one shot with Pam and I enjoyed the hell out of it. I just wish I could remember it better.

But then, maybe it's better that I don't. If I did I'd probably start getting all serious about her and that wouldn't do. I knew when we had sex that it wasn't going to lead to a relationship. I also knew that I could never tell Eric about it, which hasn't been easy for me. Eric and I don't keep secrets from one another. We never have. But this is different. If he and Pam weren't such good friends it wouldn't matter to me so much if he knew, but I the idea of Pam and I getting together bothered him. I suppose I understood why. Yeah, he wanted us both to be happy, but the chances of it working out were almost nonexistent. Being that he's my brother and her business partner, there was a lot of potential for things to get really shitty for him.

Besides, I can't say that I ever really thought of Pam in the context of someone I wanted to be serious with. She was an awesome person to hang out with and I trusted her judgment enough to ask for her advice but she wasn't the woman I saw myself waking up to every day for the rest of my life, or helping me raise my children. She was just Pam.

I walked up to the DJ and made a request for a song that I knew Pam not only liked, but that we had danced to at the bar that night in New York. I waited until the DJ announced the song before making my way closer to Pam. The second the song started she was lost in eye rolls and laughter but she danced with me all the same. We spent a good hour out on the dance floor. I didn't think Eric and Sookie were coming back but that didn't stop me from looking at the door every once in a while to see if they'd gotten it out of their systems.

But then, I figured, there was no way in hell that was happening. My brother's girlfriend or not, Sookie Stackhouse was a fucking knockout. I couldn't fathom a situation in which I would be able to talk myself out of having sex with her if the option were made available to me. My brother was lucky motherfucker and I made it my goal to make sure he knew it before I moved onto Cali to see our parents. Mom was going to have a million questions about the two of them.

Pam and I were dancing to an old Green Day song when all of a sudden I was spun around by a guy almost a foot shorter than me and punched in the face. Before I knew what the fuck was happening, he took another swing at me and got me in the mouth. He started shouting about how he knew I would only hurt her and I was a cheating bastard and a bunch of other things that didn't make one bit of sense to me. Three of the bouncers came up and pulled him away from me and Felicia came out from behind the bar to pull Pam away from the guy who attacked me for no reason.

I had no idea who that little guy was, but he was lucky I was not only drunk but had the protection of the bouncers or I would have wasted his ass. The guy got dragged outside and Felicia took me behind the bar to get me some ice for my face. Pam disappeared toward the offices with a waitress named Ginger and I lost track of her after that. Patrons started to leave the bar, none of them sure what the hell was going to happen next. Felicia got me some coffee and I started to sober up just a little bit.

When the bar closed I still had no idea where Pam was and I wasn't about to go back to her office and get her. I called a cab instead and went outside to wait for it. I was out there for maybe two minutes when a car pulled up with a red head behind the wheel. She looked at me like she knew me and when she laughingly reminded me that we were neighbors, I assumed she knew Eric. She seemed nice so I got in the car with her. I wasn't worried about her overpowering me. She was a small woman, even smaller than Sookie, and I had no doubt I could handle myself if she got out of line.

When she pulled into a parking space in front of the house next door to Eric's place, I didn't think I had any reason to worry. But then as I was getting up to the sidewalk she asked me if I wanted some company. I looked over at the house and saw all the lights were out. I figured Eric and Sookie were either sleeping or having sex. I wasn't quite ready to call it night just yet but I didn't want to listen to my brother nail his girlfriend either. So, I figured what the hell? I went next door to the red head's house.

She told me her name was Sophie-Anne and that she and Eric were friends. They weren't too close, but just friends in a neighborly sort of way. She seemed okay. She was also hot and coming onto me. My drunk self decided it would be okay if I hit that, and so when she made a move, I didn't push her away. The rest of the night is a bit of a blur for me, but I know we put her kitchen table to good use at least twice. By the time I passed out, it was almost sunrise. Just before I drifted off, I heard Sophie-Anne call me by my brother's name. That pretty much killed the night for me.

When I woke up hours later she was still sound asleep next to me. I got out of bed quietly and went home. I didn't even bother to tell Sophie I was leaving. I figured I couldn't avoid seeing her again since she lived next door and I didn't want to wake her. Nor did I want her thinking she woke up next to my brother. That would probably really fuck things up for him and Sookie.

When I walked into the house I saw that Eric's bedroom door was closed. Since Sookie's car was out front and Eric's wasn't, I was pretty sure they were still in his room. Good thing he remembered to lock the door our I would have just walked in on them. I probably could have just gone and taken a shower and gotten something to eat, but I wanted to tell Eric what happened before anyone else besides maybe Pam had a chance to do it for me.

I heard Sookie mumble something about Eric speaking Swedish and I had to restrain myself from laughing over the fact that she didn't know he could. He used to use that all the time to pick up women. For me, that was just another sign that he was head over heels for this one. So when he answered her in Swedish and she sounded all confused and turned on at the same time, I couldn't help but answer for him when he spoke the other language to her. Then Eric threatened to kill me, which was nothing he hasn't done before.

By the time he finally got the door open I could tell he was genuinely pissed off. I hadn't had the chance to look at myself in a mirror yet, but I could tell by the look on his face that I didn't look good. I told him what happened the night before and he was clearly unhappy about the situation. He said something about some guy named Bill Compton, but I had no idea what that meant. He stormed off and locked himself in his bedroom while I went downstairs to take a shower. I knew my brother well enough to know he needed some time to cool down when he got all wound up like that. Continuing the argument would only guarantee me a second black eye, and who needs that?

Apparently he was even more worked up than I thought, because I could hear him and Sookie going at it pretty loudly over my head. I wondered if maybe he did that on purpose just to piss me off. Thankfully they were finished by the time I got out of the shower a few minutes later. I got changed and waited for him in the kitchen, hoping he wasn't going to storm out of the house with Sookie in tow. I really wanted to talk things out and see if I could make sense of the reason why I was attacked the night before. Eric seemed to know why but I would have to wait for him to tell me.

My cell buzzed in my pocket and I was relieved to see it was Pam calling. "What the fuck happened to you last night?" She demanded when I answered.

"Long story, Pammy." I was the only person allowed to call her that, so long as no one knew it.

"You fuckface if Eric hears you..."

"Don't worry, he's still in bed with Sookie."

"Lucky fucker." Pam muttered. "He's lucky he saw her first."

"No shit." I agreed with her.

"How's your face? Felicia said you looked like shit when you left."

"I suspect it'll be a few days before I'm 100%, but I'll be fine."

"Make sure you put some ice on it. I don't want your ugly mug to be permanently disfigured."

I laughed, knowing Pam was joking with me despite the seriousness of her tone. "So am I going to see you again before I have to head home?"

"Only if you promise me not to spend the night trying to get in my pants."

"I think I can make that promise."

"Well when you know for sure, give me a call." Pam snapped at me and then hung up. That Pam.

Just then Eric's bedroom door opened and I heard Sookie giggling about something. Her face was the first I saw when they came into the kitchen. Her eyes began to water and she rushed toward me to give me a hug.

"Oh my God! Johan, what happened to you?" She stroked my face gently and I looked over at Eric who was glaring at me.

"I got clocked by a midget suffering from a case of mistaken identity."

"What?" Sookie pulled back and looked between Eric and I.

"It seems Bill was at the bar last night and thought Johan was me." Eric explained.

"So why would that..." She trailed off, looking at me with confusion before her eyes widened. "You and Pam didn't...you know?"

"No!" Eric and I said at the same time.

"No, we were just dancing. I might have kissed her because of the song that was playing, but it wasn't like we were making out on the dance floor. The next thing I know I've got some little guy taking swings at me."

"Oh, Johan, I'm so sorry. Let me get you some ice. Are you hungry? How about something to drink? Oh, Eric, go get him some aspirin." Sookie was moving around the kitchen gathering up the things she needed to make me an ice pack.

Eric glared at me one more time and then went to do as Sookie asked. She filled a ziploc bag with ice and then wrapped it in a towel before giving it to me. She was such a sweet girl. If I didn't love my brother so much I'd say she was almost too good for him. Lucky fucker.

"Sookie, what's the deal with Eric and the lady that lives next door?" I nodded toward Sophie's house.

"You mean Red Menace?" Sookie chuckled.

"Red Menace? I thought her name was Sophie." I smirked as I held the ice to my eye.

"I don't know what her name is. All I know is that Eric calls her Red Menace and she's been trying to get in his pants since he bought this place." Sookie told me as she poured me a glass of water. "Why?"

I looked away with guilt on my face and she must have figured out where I'd been. The smile on her face disappeared as she handed me the water. She sighed heavily and had a hard time looking at Eric when he came into the room with the aspirin.

"Here." He dropped three pills in my hand.

"Thanks, bror." I took the pills and swallowed them down along with half of the water Sookie had brought me.

We were silent for a few minutes after that until Sookie remembered she had been about to start cooking. "Eric, will you get a pot of water boiling for me? I thought I'd make homemade mac 'n cheese since it seems we could all use a little comfort food."

Eric was dangerously quiet and doing everything Sookie asked him to do. "So, does anyone want to tell me why this Bill guy was so sure Sookie was going to get her heart broken by Eric?"

"Jeet, let's go outside!" Eric hollered and opened the side door. My dog- well, really Eric's dog now- appeared from the basement and ran out the door.

Sookie pleaded with Eric to stay but he just shook his head and went outside. "He'll get over it, Sookie."

"Look, what happened last night wasn't your fault. Bill sort of has this crush on me. He knows that I'm with Eric, but I think he was hoping it would just be a fling. Guys that look like you and Eric aren't usually the sort to settle down with just one girl, at least that's the stereotype. I think Bill was hoping that Eric would fall into that category. Bill is also married and has a child and up until recently, I assumed that he was still with his wife. Apparently, Bill has left her in the hopes that I would dump Eric and go to him. Where he got the idea that was going to happen, I have no idea. He told his wife that we were already an item and that he was in love with me. Eric knows about all of this and he's none too pleased with Bill. I'm sorry that you got dragged into this." Sookie looked genuinely upset about what had happened.

"Okay, first of all it's not your fault that the bunny-boiler can't accept that you're with someone else. Second of all, if Eric won't beat this guy's ass, I will. He's got it coming for several reasons now. Third, I didn't know that the Eric and Sophie had problems. She said they were friends and since Eric had never mentioned anything about any trouble he was having with her, I didn't think it would be a big deal."

"Johan, I don't think Eric's mad at you." Sookie leaned against the counter next to me and I arched an eyebrow at her. "He's mad at Bill and Sophie-Anne and he's just taking it out on you because you're here. You didn't know about any of the shit we've been dealing with. It's not your fault. I'm sure he'll cool off and realize that he's being a dick about the whole thing. He'll get over it."

"You know him pretty well." I smiled at her.

"I'm starting to." Sookie went over to add some salt to the water that was heating on the stove. "Why don't you go out there and talk to him? I'll call you when dinner's ready."

I wasn't so sure it was a good idea but the look on Sookie's face told me her suggestion wasn't really up for debate. I paused to kiss the top of her head before walking out the side door with the ice still pressed to my face.

**So, did y'all enjoy that little bit from Johan's perspective? Bet you didn't see the couple of surprises coming that got dropped in this chapter. Did you really think I was going to let Johan go home with Pam? That was waaaaaaaaay too predictable. Besides, I think what happened is a little more interesting. But I'm sure you'll tell me if you disagree. Oh, and thank you for your suggestions about where Eric and Sookie should spend the New Year. I'm still taking opinions if you've got 'em. Up next is the big Halloween party at the bar. Thanks for reading!**

*Here goes nothing*, I thought as I headed toward the yard.

Gud, du är så sexig. *God, you're so sexy.*

Jag älskar sättet du ser på mig när du vill att jag ska knulla dig. *I love the way you look at me when you want me to fuck you.*

**Chapter 19: Double Trouble**

I hate to disappoint, but we won't be getting to the Halloween fun in this chapter. It just sort of took on a life of its own, but I don't think you'll be too disappointed with what came out instead. The good news is that we will be getting to Halloween in the next chapter. Thank you so much to everyone who reviews, alerts and favorites this story. Y'all rock my socks in ways you can't even imagine. Also, thank you for your suggestions in regards to the New Years plans. I still haven't decided what to do with these lovebirds, so if you've got an idea, feel free to spit it out.

Chapter Nineteen: Double Trouble

**Sookie**

I was sitting up against the headboard on Eric's bed with a stack of papers next to me, reading over a crop of essays that I'd been meaning to grade, when Eric came into the room. He closed and locked the door behind him and immediately pulled off his t-shirt. I didn't look up from the paper I was reading.

"What are we going to do about Bill?" Eric asked when he came out of the bathroom after brushing his teeth.

"I don't really want to think about that just yet." I put the paper down on top of the pile.

"We have to have some sort of plan of attack, Sookie. It's just going to get worse." Eric unzipped his jeans.

"Well what would you suggest, Eric?"

"You could stop being so nice to him all the time." Eric suggested with a hint of bitterness in his voice.

"Maybe that's how *you* deal with things but I don't see the need to be rude." I argued, feeling awfully defensive all of a sudden.

"He thought he was attacking *me*, Sookie. My brother got punched because of me." Eric was dangerously close to shouting at me.

"So you think this is *my* fault?" I pulled off my glasses and threw them on the table next to me. "What, are my skirts too short? Or maybe I lean in too close to him when we talk?"

"That's not what I'm saying!" Eric yelled at me and I flinched.

"Don't you raise your voice at me, mister." I jumped out of bed. "You think I'm happy that Johan got hurt? You think I think it's sweet that Bill thought he was somehow defending my honor by punching out someone?"

"I think you need to drop the southern belle act and lay down the law with him. Obviously whatever you've been saying to him hasn't been harsh enough to hit home that you're not interested." Eric turned slowly and muttered, "Or maybe you are."

Oh that did it! I grabbed my papers off the bed and stuffed them into my bag. I grabbed my purse off the floor and my duffle bag from the bed. Hell if I was going to sleep in the same bed as him. He was being ridiculous.

"If you think for just one second that I have any sort of romantic interest in Bill Compton, then I don't know what the hell we're doing here. I'm going home. Don't call me." I said in a steely voice before walking course Eric followed me to the front door and when I stopped to put my shoes on he grabbed my bags away from me. "Gimme those! So help me, Eric, if you don't-"

He dropped the bags and grabbed my face instead, pulling me to him to kiss me. It was one of those kisses meant to tell me to shut up and just accept that he loved me already. It made me feel like I was on fire. The next thing I knew, we were tearing each other's clothes off and I was climbing Eric like a tree. He slammed me up against the wall with a speed and strength I didn't know he had. He entered me hard and fast and I screamed. It didn't hurt, I was just surprised by it. He buried his face in my neck and hair but I felt no breath like I expected.

When he pulled back to look at me, to watch what his determined thrusts into my body were doing to me, he had fangs. I gasped, not just in pleasure, but in surprise. He had fangs? Since when did Eric have fangs. I turned my head to the side, baring my neck to him. He growled loudly in a primal kind of way that had my turning into goo and his thrusts only got harder. My body clenched up and my fingernails dug into his shoulders so hard that I knew I drew blood. That only made him growl louder.

Just as I was reaching my orgasm, Eric bit my neck. Hard. I felt him sucking the life right out of me as I came. I was screaming and panting, gasping for air as I felt myself slipping away, lost in the most amazing feelings. With my last breath I uttered the last words I would say.

"I love you." I whispered and then I was gone.

"Sookie?" Eric's voice called me to me. "Sookie, wake up."

I groaned and opened my eyes to see Eric crouched on his bed next to me, looking concerned and a little confused. "What? What happened?"

"You were dreaming, I think. You were screaming and gasping for air. Are you okay?" Eric pulled my glasses from my face and the papers from my hands.

I took a moment to look around the room. It was exactly as it had been in my dream. My papers that needed to be graded were stacked around me on his bed. I was dressed in my nightgown and Eric was wearing only his jeans and a concerned expression. I shook my head, trying to make sense of my dream.

"I'm fine. It was just a really weird dream." I gave him a reassuring smile.

"You want to tell me about it?"

I cleared my throat, suddenly feeling parched. "We had a fight. You thought I had feelings for Bill and I thought you were blaming me for what happened to Johan."

"Sookie, that's crazy. I know you don't give a shit about Bill and more importantly, I know what happened to my idiot brother is in *no way* your fault. It's my fault. I should have clocked that fucker when he couldn't take the hint that you weren't interested." Eric said with conviction.

I sighed and took my glasses and papers from Eric. I moved everything off the bed because I knew I had to tell him the whole thing and I was pretty sure once I was doing saying all the things I wanted to say, those papers were going to get destroyed if I left them on the bed. I turned so I was facing Eric and took his hands in mine. Well, I grabbed his hands and ended up letting them swallow my own.

"Eric, there's something I wanted to tell you earlier but there just wasn't a good time to say it and I think that's part of the reason why I had this dream." I bit my bottom lip nervously.

"You're not breaking up with me, are you?" He teased in attempts to break the ice a little.

"No, I'm not breaking up with you." I felt tears spring into my eyes, which I'm sure did little to ease his mind. "In my dream when I tried to leave, you followed me to the front door. But instead of letting me go, you threw me up against the wall and fucked me."

"I like this dream." Eric smiled at me. "Is that why you were screaming?"

I rolled my eyes at him. "Can I finish, please?"

"Sorry." He apologized.

"To answer your question, yes, that's why I was screaming." The glint of amusement coupled with lust didn't go unnoticed. "But that's not the part that freaked me out. You had fangs. I think you were a vampire in my dream and you tried to drain me."

Eric laughed loudly and looked at me like I was either very imaginative or just plain nuts. But when I didn't join in on his laughter, he took on a more somber expression. "So you dreamed that I killed you?"

"Kind of, but it was more like I was giving you my life. It wasn't violent and it didn't feel like you were killing me, if that makes any kind of sense." I tried to explain to him. He seemed disturbed by this information and started to let go of my hands, but I wouldn't let go. "Eric, I think the reason I had this dream is because I didn't tell you what I needed to tell you earlier."

"And what's that?" Eric looked at me suspiciously.

I took a deep breath and let it out slowly to calm my nerves. "That I love you. That I'm in love with you."

Eric's head snapped up and his eyes found mine. He searched me for just a moment before the biggest smile I'd ever seen spread across his face. His hands let go of mine and grabbed my face instead, pulling me to him to kiss me very much the same way he did in my dream. For a split second I expected him to yank me off the bed and throw me up against the wall, but that didn't happen. He did, however, yank my nightgown up. Our lips parted long enough for him to toss it to the floor and then I was tackled backward onto the bed.

"Say it again." Eric lips were close to my ear and unlike my dream, his breath was warm and minty as they grazed my skin.

"I love you." I whispered, which got me one of those primal growls I'd dreamed of.

He didn't ask me why I hadn't said it sooner, which I was thankful for since I didn't have an answer for him. All I knew is that I felt a million times better for getting it off my chest. I felt silly for ever hesitating about it. I loved him and he loved me. I had to stop doubting myself and my worth. I had to stop letting my past dictate my future. The sensation of his tongue on my chest put an end to any further thoughts and I lost myself in the feel of him on me, and very soon, in me.

It was slow and passionate, the total opposite of what I'd experienced earlier in the afternoon after his argument with Johan. We whispered words back and forth, taking our time in finding our release. When we were both sated, I rolled onto my side so he could pull me close to him. I could feel his heartbeat against my back and the steady rhythm of it slowly lulled me to sleep.

I was standing at the chain link fence the next morning, waiting for my usual morning kiss before heading into school. Only there were two Erics running around the track instead of just one. If it weren't for the difference in their hair, it would be much harder to tell which one was my Eric. My Eric. I liked the way that sounded and it made me smile. Eric and Johan were just rounding the bend near the field house when I heard a somewhat frantic voice calling out behind me. I cringed and then turned toward Bill Compton.

"Sookie, boy, I'm glad I found you out here this morning." Bill gave me this shit eating grin that I could only assume meant he thought he was about to play the hero.

"I'm glad you caught me out here too, Bill. You owe someone I care about an apology." I didn't give him the chance to make his big speech and it was obvious I took the wind right out of his sails.

"Beg your pardon?"

"You punched my friend repeatedly, if I heard correctly, and for no good reason." I accused, knowing I as well within my right to say it.

"Sookie, I know you and Northman are seeing each other." He argued right back.

"Yes, we are, but the man you punched wasn't him."

Bill laughed and said, "Did Eric tell you *why* I punched him?"

"Bill, you didn't punch *Eric*. You punched his brother, who was well within his rights to be dancing with Pam when you did it."

"He wasn't just dancing with her, Sookie. He was grinding on her and-"

"It doesn't matter, Bill. What Johan does is his business."

"Johan, huh?" Bill laughed at me like I was a silly little girl. "Sookie, men will say anything to get a woman to forgive them for cheating."

"Well, you wouldn't know anything about that, would you? You're happily married to Lorena, right?"

Bill looked a bit sheepish and then said, "Actually, Lorena and I have separated. I'm not in love with her anymore. I haven't been for a while."

"Yeah, I know all about it." I shook my head and snickered before noting that Eric and Johan were approaching out of the corner of my eye. "You owe Johan an apology for what you did. You had no right to do that."

"I was defending you." Bill stated, as if that changed anything.

"First of all, I don't need you to defend me. Second of all, even if you were right about what thought you were seeing, that still doesn't give you permission to haul off and hit someone for it. Third, I thought you would be a big enough man to admit when you were wrong. It's very disappointing to find out you're not, Bill." I used my best teacher voice on him and he seemed properly chastised for his mistake.

"Morning, Sook!" Johan called out to me. He hadn't seen me before I'd left the house.

"Morning, Johan. Did you sleep well?" I completely ignored Bill who was scrambling to get a look at the guy I was talking to.

"After you two got quiet, I slept great." Johan winked at me and that damn blush that always betrays me was at it again. Johan's eyes settled on Bill in an icy stare. "How's your punching hand?" Then he muttered something in Swedish that had Eric laughing quietly beside him.

I looked over at Bill who was clearly shocked to discover he'd fucked up. He looked back and forth between Eric and Johan, his index finger raising to point back and forth between the two of them in attempts to make sense of what had happened.

"They're twins." I supplied for him.

"You decked my brother for no reason." Eric glared hard at Bill, who seemed to be thinking about what bodily harm would be caused to him if Eric and Johan got him alone in a dark alley.

Under other circumstances, this might have been something we could all laugh at, but given that it had come out that Bill was obsessed with me, it was nowhere near a laughing matter. Bill sputtered, gasping for straws. He clearly wasn't going to apologize.

"What I saw was you cheating on Sookie, which is unacceptable." Bill said firmly.

"What you saw," Johan stepped closer to the fence and I realized just how intimidating he could be when he wanted to. "Was me dancing with a very good friend of mine. Rather than asking questions you just started swinging, and it's fucking lucky that I was drunk and those bouncers pulled you off of me so quick or I would have knocked you into the middle of next month."

"I will not apologize for doing what I thought to be the right thing." Bill stood straight and I rolled my eyes in disbelief. "I care a great deal for Sookie, and-"

"Yeah, about that." I turned toward him. "You need to stop asking me to have lunch with you. I'm not interested in you, Bill. Up until recently I was under the impression that you were happily married. The fact that you've left your wife doesn't change anything. I'm with Eric. I love Eric. That's all you need to know. I have every intention of maintaining a professional relationship with you because I'm an adult and I think we can move past this, but if you can't let it go, I won't have any other choice but to go to Octavia."

Bill smirked at me and asked, "And just how do you think she's going to feel when she finds out that you're dating another teacher?"

Eric, Johan and I shared a look. "What makes you think she doesn't already know?" Eric stared hard at Bill.

Bill looked like he was going to be sick. He was pale except for the bright red flush of his anger on his cheeks. Since there wasn't much else for him to say he simply stormed off and headed into the school. I shook my head as he walked away, wishing the whole thing could just be one of those things that happened. Instead, I had a feeling this was going to follow us for a while.

"What a prick. I'll kick his ass if you want me to." Johan offered.

"That's sweet, Johan, but I think it's better if we just leave him alone. I've told him to back off. He knows he messed up, even if he won't admit it. Outside of reporting this to Octavia, I really think it's better to just drop it." I gave a half smile.

"I vote for ass kicking." Johan winked at me.

"Trust me, bror, if he doesn't leave her alone..."

"Eric, stop!" I shook my head at him. "I have to get inside. I'll see you at study hall."

"What period do you have lunch?" Eric asked me suddenly.

"Um, I have my split class fourth period, so I usually run down to the cafeteria during five. Why?"

"Johan's going to shadow me today."

"Oh, hell." I muttered and closed my eyes. "You realize you two are going to start a riot, don't you?"

"A riot?" They asked in perfect synchronization, as innocent as can be.

"Don't give me that look! Eric especially knows what I'm talking about."

"I think the kids will be able to control themselves."

"Uh huh." I took a deep breath. I was really not happy with the idea of teenage girls flirting with my boyfriend all day, even though I knew not a single one of them stood a chance. "Well, if there's anything left of Johan during fifth period we could have lunch together."

"I was hoping you'd say that." Eric smiled at me and motioned for me to follow him over to the opening of the fence. "I'm serious about Bill. If he bothers you, I want you to tell me about it. Enough is enough."

"Cross my heart." I made the motion over my chest.

"That's my girl." He grinned at me and then bent to kiss my forehead. "You know, I sort of love you, Miss Stackhouse."

"Really? Well, I guess the feeling's mutual, Mr. Northman. I'll see you in study hall. Don't be late." I gave him a pointed look.

"Yes, ma'am. I'd hate it if you had to punish me later." His eyebrows wiggled at me and then he turned to join his brother on the rest of their run.

Johan gave me a wave and then I headed into school.

I grabbed my change of clothes from under my desk and headed toward the dance studio to work on some of the choreography for a new dance I wanted to teach the girls in the next week or two. I bounced down the steps that would take me past the weight room to the studio and stopped in my tracks when I saw Eric. I smiled to see him bent over and stretching, that wonderful backside of his up in the air just begging to be grabbed- or maybe bitten. I bit my lower lip, knowing it would be extremely inappropriate for me to do such a thing. I could only imagine the reaction if a student happened to wander in.

My brain, however, wandered off into fantasyland, thinking of all the wonderful things I could do with that butt of his. Thinking about it was allowed, acting on those thoughts was not. I got so lost in my thoughts that I didn't notice it when Eric stood up straight and turned around to catch me staring at him. I jumped about six inches off the ground when he called my name. I turned bright red and thought about bolting for the dance studio, but it was too late. I'd already been spotted.

"Sookie, come in!" He waved me inside.

I pulled the door open and stepped into the weight room. I'd been in there before, but it had been a while since my last visit. And that visit certainly didn't include the potential for a sweaty tutorial with my super hot boyfriend. Somehow the idea of working out with old man McCarthy (seriously, the man had to be almost 80) just didn't get me as excited, even if he was spry for his age.

Eric looked through the windows behind me to make sure we didn't have an audience before bending to kiss me. "What are you doing here?" He asked when I pushed him back gently. I held up my change of clothes. "You came to model for me?"

I slapped at him playfully. "No, I was going to work on some choreography in the dance studio. But if you're really nice to me I might be convinced to do some modeling for you later."

"And how nice would I have to be for you to wear nothing at all?" Eric stepped closer to me.

I bit my bottom lip again when I felt that little bit of emptiness low in my belly. I was just about to answer him when I heard chatter and footsteps approaching the weight room. I stepped back from him with a coy smile on my face. The weight room door opened and I was greeted by a chorus of teenage boy voices.

"Hey Miss Stackhouse!" They all waved as they made their way to their places on the floor.

"Hello, boys. Keep an eye on Mr. Northman for me, will you? Make sure he doesn't hurt himself." I smiled at Eric over my shoulder.

"I could bench press you, Miss Stackhouse." Eric said with confidence.

I could have sworn I heard one of the boys mumble something about Eric being a lucky bastard and I had to restrain a giggle. Instead I turned back toward Eric and whispered, "Later."

He was still smiling at me when I walked out of the weight room and headed next door. It was about two thirds of the way through the period when I decided it was time to get back into my work clothes. I grabbed the boombox I'd been using for practice and took it with me to the equipment closet to lock it up and get changed. I was just about to pull on my dressier pants when the lights went out. I froze for just a second to let my eyes adjust to the darkness. The closet wasn't all that big but I didn't want to trip over something.

But then a very familiar scent filled my nose and my heart started to race. Eric. I'd know that smell anywhere. Fingers reached out and trailed up my spine, making me shiver. I knew those fingers. My head was screaming at me to tell him to get back to his class, to stop this before it went too far. I was standing there in the darkness in nothing but my underthings. My pants had fallen around my ankles when the lights went out. My hair was pulled gently from its ponytail and I could feel the heat of another body behind me.

Warm lips pressed against the back of my neck after my hair was moved to the side. My breath caught and I couldn't move. The fingers that had been ghosting up my spine moved around to my stomach and then down toward my underwear. Somewhere in my head I knew I should stop, but I couldn't get the words out. They were right there on my tongue, but I couldn't make myself say them. Eric's hand took mine and pressed it against the very firm bulge in the front of his pants. No way could he go back to class with that. If he didn't get arrested, he'd definitely get fired.

His hand reached inside my panties and I heard a slight hiss when he realized his mind wasn't the only one that had been in the gutter. All through my dancing my brain had imagined him watching me, or had tried to picture him doing sit ups. Or, perhaps my favorite, him following through on his threat and bench pressing me. My knees shook just a little with the thoughts as his fingers rubbed all the right spots between my legs. One arm rose up to grab the back of his neck so I had something to hold onto, while my other hand continued to stroke the bulge behind me.

The next thing I knew I was bent over a tall stack of yoga mats. My pants were down and Eric was tugging at his jogging pants. I looked over my shoulder but all I could make out in the darkness was his tall frame and the heat of his body so close to mine. I couldn't believe I was really going to let this happen, and yet I couldn't tell him not to. He entered me with one swift stroke and I screamed into my hands to muffle the sound. His thrusts were fast and hard, his grasp firm on my hips. He grunted quietly behind me while I moaned into my hands. Eric and I weren't really known for quiet sex, so the whole thing was quite a challenge.

My hips moved to meet his thrusts and one of his hands came around to help me along. There was no way Eric wasn't going to make sure I didn't finish. There was something incredibly sexy about not the silence and the darkness of it. We had to rely solely on our bodies and just feel things. Without sight, all of my other senses were heightened and when I came, it was the most powerful thing I ever felt. Eric came right after me and rested against my back, both of us gasping for air.

Finally, I was the one to break the silence. "You are in *so* much trouble for this later." I whispered to him.

"I look forward to it, lover." He whispered back and turned my face to kiss me.

He pulled out of me and I whimpered with the loss. Damn him for doing this while we were at work. I had every intention of getting him back for it later. He put his clothes to rights and I started to get dressed myself.

"I better get back. I love you, Sookie." He kissed me once more and then disappeared from the dark closet.

I stood there a bit dazed. My brain tried to process what just happened while my body told me to just shut up and enjoy it. My legs were a bit like jelly but I somehow managed to get dressed. I locked up the closet when I was done and then did the same with the dance studio doors. I stopped outside the weight room and peered inside to see Eric and Johan standing together. Johan caught my eye and waved at me. Eric's eyes followed his brother's and when he saw me standing there, he mouthed 'I love you' to me.

I couldn't help but smile. I waved back and then hightailed it upstairs for my next class.

**Yeah, so um...yeah. \*giggles\* Naughty, naughty aren't they? Anyone else disturbed by the last scene of TB last night? Hopefully these lemons will help to erase those memories. Thanks for reading!**

**Chapter 20: Helloween**

\*peaks out from behind couch\* Hey there, baby birds... sorry it's taken so long to update. Let me start by saying that I've become a twitter junkie, and that has slowed me down considerably. In my defense, the Sookieverse girls are fuckawesome and hard not to chat with. There was also some distracting conversation involving Eric and massage oil that really messed with my brain. Finally, my Eric muse seems to be MIA, which doesn't help one bit. I'm hoping that since I got over this hurdle, things will be a bit smoother from here on out. Keep your fingers crossed for me, k? Thanks for being patient with me.

Chapter Twenty: **Hell**oween

**Eric**

I agreed to meet Sookie at her place at seven so she'd have time to get home and change clothes before I got there. I could understand needing a few minutes to yourself. We'd certainly been spending a lot of time together but I didn't mind it at all. Actually, the idea of not spending time with her was more bothersome than the idea of spending *too* much time together. With her, there just didn't seem to be such a thing as too much. It was slightly amazing to me how Sookie had just dropped into my life like it was no big deal. There was no rearranging my schedule for her or any big shifts that needed to be made to accommodate her appearance in my life. It was like she was belonged there, which gave me something to think about. I started hearing Johan's chattering in my head and all of his talk about Sookie and I moving in together. We were just under a week away from the two month anniversary of the night we met.

I found it curious how it would seem like not that much time had gone by, and yet, it felt like I'd known Sookie for much longer than two months. It was a strange paradox I was living in but as long as I had Sookie with me, I'd be just fine. That was one of the few things I was sure of. When the final bell rang I met Johan at my car and headed home. As promised, Pam had left our costumes hanging over the back of a kitchen chair. It took me a minute to figure out what they were but once I did, I couldn't stop laughing.

Pam was nothing if not creative. She had also been listening to me, for once, which I found shocking. She'd clearly labeled who was supposed to wear what like I wouldn't have been able to figure it out on my own. But I also knew Pam was in hyper-organize mode, which meant her inner Mistress of Pain was at the wheel. We were all at her mercy until after Friday night. All I could do was hope that Felicia wouldn't pull one of her disappearing acts. Failure to show up at the bar would most likely result in her termination and there was no way I was forfeiting valuable Sookie time to play bartender for more than one night.

"Where does Pam come up with this stuff?" Johan asked after taking in the costumes.

"God only knows. I've learned it's better not to ask." I sighed as I handed over Johan's costume to him.

"You know, this would work much better if she wouldn't have shot those rubberbands in my hair. That wig is fucked up, bror." Johan laughed as he pulled it from the bag of props that went along with his costume.

The wig *did* look like roadkill. "Good luck arguing with Pam over it."

"No thanks, I like my balls right where they are." Johan knew better than to argue.

I left him to his own devices with the keys for the Comet if he didn't want to stick around the house all night and then I headed over to Sookie's. I planned to get there a little early in the hopes of surprising her in the shower. I pulled up to her house a short time later to find her car in the driveway. I parked along side it and grabbed my bag from the backseat before heading up to the house. I tried the door to see if it was unlocked and it was. I let myself inside and dropped my bag in the foyer. I slipped off my shoes and closed the door behind me.

"Sookie?" I called out but didn't get an answer. I listened for running water but didn't hear any. I contemplated the idea that she might be at Amelia's since she wasn't expecting me for almost another twenty minutes.

I jogged upstairs to see if she was in her bathroom. Nope, she wasn't there, either. The clothes she'd been wearing earlier were in her hamper, so I knew she'd at least dropped in and changed. I was just about to stand up when I something relatively hard and thin slapped my ass. I jolted upright and turned around to see Sookie standing there with a smug look on her face. My jaw dropped at the sight of her.

She was standing there in those red heels that always make me want to throw her up against the nearest flat surface and pillage her. She was also back in those pinstripes, that skirt hugged her hips and ass perfectly. She was also wearing the starched white shirt with one button too many left open, showing off her abundant cleavage. Her hair was pulled back and she had her glasses on. Then, to top it all off, she was smacking a wooden ruler against her hand. The word 'erection' doesn't even begin to describe what was going on in my pants.

"You broke one of my rules, Mr. Northman. That's a punishable offense." She was talking in her teacher voice, which wasn't helping to restrain me from throwing her on the bed. "What are we going to do about this?"

I couldn't stop watching that ruler as it bounced against her hand. "I'll do whatever it takes to make it up to you, Miss Stackhouse. What did you have in mind?" My throat went dry with the possibilities.

Sookie looked me up and down like she was contemplating her next move, although if I new her as well as I thought I did, she'd been planning this all day. Minx.

"Strip." She said in an authoritative voice.

"Yes ma'am." I bit back a smile and slowly began to remove my clothes, watching her watch me as I did so. Once I was naked I asked, "Now what?"

Sookie arched an eyebrow at me and said, "Go stand in the corner. That's where naughty boys belong."

I almost laughed to hear her say that. It sounded so cheesy and yet, fuckhot at the same time. I walked over to the corner she was pointing to and she followed right behind me. I couldn't resist asking, "Should I face the wall?"

Quicker than I would have thought possible that ruler shot out and cracked me on the ass. It stung for just a second and Sookie seemed almost surprised at herself for doing it. She recovered quickly and said, "Do you think this is funny, Mr. Northman?"

"No, ma'am." I answered with a straight face. Fucking fun was what it was. Or at least I thought it was until she stepped away from me.

"Keep your hands at your sides. Don't move unless I tell you to. Don't speak unless spoken to. Are we clear, Mr. Northman?" Sookie kept her eyes on mine. All I wanted to do was jump her.

"Yes, Miss Stackhouse." I nodded.

"Good boy." She finally smiled at me, but there was too much mischief in that smile for me to really relax at all.

Then my punishment began.

The bar was filled to capacity much quicker than Pam had anticipated and I'd thought for sure she was overestimating things. I was wrong. Even with the extra staff Pam had hired for the night, the bartenders were still swamped. Pam had decided to open the bar in the under age portion of the club to make it a VIP area. An invitation was needed in order to get into that side of the bar and Pam had been very selective about whom she gifted those invitations to.

I'd gotten to the bar early to help Pam get last minute things all set up. Sookie was planning to meet me. She was coming with Tray and Amelia and would be spending the night- if not more than that- at my house. I was behind the bar with Felicia, Pam and Indira when I heard the unmistakable sound of my brother's wolf whistle. The look on his face told me he was looking at something good. I followed his line of sight until my eyes met Sookie's. Goodbye pants that fit comfortably.

"Pam, have I told you that I love you lately?" I leaned over to her without taking my eyes off of Sookie.

"Save the dry humping for your girlfriend." Pam rolled her eyes at me. "It's just a dress."

Pam may have had a point but Sookie looked fuckhot in it. Pam had outdone herself in coming up with costumes for the four of us. I hadn't expected us to go in what was essentially a group costume, but Pam had chosen well. By Pam's standards, her costume was extremely conservative. She'd dressed herself, Johan, Sookie and me up as characters from Scooby Doo. Pam, was Velma, the sexually ambiguous smarty. She was wearing a modified version of Velma's classic outfit. The orange turtleneck was sleeveless and the skirt was pleated- not to mention much shorter than the one Velma wore. Still, she had on the knee socks and sensible shoes and she topped it all off with an odd rust colored wig.

Johan, who was sitting at the bar, was dressed as Shaggy. I was dressed as Fred and wishing the pants Pam had picked out weren't so tight. Of course, they'd been just fine before Sookie walked in. She was dressed as Daphne and even with the orange wig she was wearing, she still looked amazing. She was wearing a light purple mini-dress and matching go-go boots. The dress hugged all of her curves and the little cut out at the neckline showed just enough cleavage to make me want to... well, that's not important.

"Who does a girl have to sleep with to get a drink around here?" Sookie teased as she fought her way up to the bar.

"Start here." Pam winked at her.

"If I can't dry hump my girlfriend then neither can you, Pam." I almost growled at her.

Sookie leaned over the bar, putting more of her cleavage on display. I leaned down to kiss her hello and when we pulled apart she smiled up at me. "You look good, Fred."

"I hate this wig." I stared up toward the top of my head.

"It's only for a night. Besides, you should just be thankful that Pam didn't put you in the Shaggy costume." Sookie smirked at me.

I could only imagine the field day Johan would have had if our costumes were reversed. Without even having to ask I got Sookie a gin and tonic. I promised I would get out from behind the bar as soon as possible. I wasn't there to work, but to enjoy a night out with my brother and my girl. I kept an eye on Sookie, even though she was dancing with Johan, Amelia and Tray. Eventually Pam considered me more of a burden than a help and she ejected me from behind the bar.

"Go make nice with your girlfriend so you get proper blood flow to your brain." Pam said as she shoved.

It just so happened, at that moment, that two people walked into the bar that I immediately wanted to toss. The first was Red Menace dressed in a Tim Burton-like Queen of Hearts costume. The second was a confederate soldier. Bill fucking Compton. I groaned and turned back toward Pam.

"Are you seeing this?" I nodded my head toward Red Menace and Bill.

"That's the fucker that popped Johan." Pam started to move out from behind the bar.

"Where are you going?" I asked with mild amusement.

"To have a little fun." Pam winked at me and then disappeared into the crowd.

Felicia seemed to have the bar under control so I went in search of Sookie. I found her on the dance floor surrounded by Tray, Amelia and Johan. She wiggled her way over to me when she saw me approaching. It was obvious to me she had a bit of a buzz going.

"There you are. Mistress Pam finally let you off the leash, huh?" She pushed up on her toes to kiss me.

"For now." I let my fingers lace with hers and she started to pull me toward our friends. "Wait, come with me for a second."

"Where are we going?" She asked as I pulled her off the dance floor.

We walked through the crowd toward Pam's office. I didn't want to have a conversation with her about Bill on the dance floor. Once we were in the office I closed the door behind me. Sookie walked over to the couch and plopped down like her legs had simply given out on her. I sat down beside her and she slung her legs over my lap.

"So, what's going on that we had to come in here?" Sookie asked.

"Bill Compton and the Red Menace are here." I informed her.

"That's it? That's why you brought me in here?" Sookie giggled, making me think she was a little more drunk than I'd originally thought. "Eric, who gives a shit if they're here?"

"This is *my* bar, Sookie. I don't want another stupid fight to break out, especially on a night like this. There are too many people around and I don't want anyone getting hurt. Especially you."

"Eric, I'm fine. If Bill so much as looks at me funny I'm sure there are at least five people around who would be willing to toss him. I'm not worried about it and you shouldn't be either. Let's go have fun." Sookie started to get up.

"Just promise me that you'll stick close to someone if I have to get back behind the bar." I grabbed her hand.

She gave me a look that said I was being silly but she indulged me all the same. "I think you're being paranoid but if it'll make you feel better, I promise to adhere to the buddy system for the duration of the evening." She even held up three of her fingers like she was giving the Girl Scout pledge.

"Thank you." I smiled and stood up.

"It's sweet of you to want to protect me. I do appreciate that you care, even if you're being weird about it." She pulled me face to hers and kissed me. Yep, she was definitely drunk. How had I missed that?

We went back to the dance floor where I was able to dance and hang out with Sookie and our friends for a while before the bar started to get backed up again. I kept scanning the crowd for Bill and the Red Menace since I didn't trust either of them. I didn't know if they had come together or if it was just coincidence that had them showing up at the same time. I didn't really care what the circumstance of their arrival was so long as they didn't bother Sookie at any given point. I knew Johan was keeping close watch on her and I appreciated that.

"I threw them out." Pam stepped up beside me when she caught me scanning the crowd.

"You did? When?"

"Almost as soon as they walked in. I told them their presence wasn't appreciated, gave them their money back and told them never to set foot in my bar again."

"And you couldn't have mentioned that a few hours ago?" I glared at Pam. My night certainly would have gone smoother if she had.

"I like watching you squirm." Pam shrugged and went back to pouring her beer. Bitch.

Finally, the bar was winding down. Last call was announced and Tray offered to drive Sookie back to my place since it was going to be a while before I could leave. Johan was going to stick around to help with the close up and since Sookie was in no position to stay, I figured it was best for him to take her home. Not to mention, she wasn't going to fit in the car with Johan and me anyway. So Johan handed over his keys and I helped him carry Sookie out to the car. She and Amelia were officially smashed.

"I want to stay with you." Sookie pouted when I scooped her up to carry her out to the car.

"I'll be home soon, I promise. You should drink some water and get to bed." I kissed her forehead.

"But I had tricks *and* treats planned for you." Sookie slurred and giggled as I walked toward Tray's car.

"How about a raincheck?" I suggested.

"Only because you're a very good boyfriend, Mr. Northman." She snuggled against me and closed her eyes.

I had no doubt she'd be passed out by the time I got back to the house. I got her buckled into the backseat of Tray's car, which was a small victory in and of itself. I smoothed the ridiculous fake hair away from her face and smiled at her.

"I love you, Sookie." I whispered and kissed her forehead.

"You too." She whispered back with a small smile on her face.

I handed Tray the keys Johan had given me and showed him which one was for the front door. "Don't worry, I'll make sure she gets to bed." He promised me.

"Thanks, Tray, I owe you one."

"Think nothing of it. Sookie's a good friend. I owe her for all those times she let me crash on her couch." Tray laughed.

I stepped back and watched Tray get in the car. I stood by while he back out of the space and headed out of the parking lot. I was just getting to the door of the bar when I heard the sound of tires squealing and then the horrible crunch of metal and the breaking of glass. I whirled around to the left to see Tray's car smashed in on the rear passenger's side. My stomach dropped immediately.

"Sookie!" I screamed as I ran toward the accident.

Before I could get there, flames appeared under the hood of the car.

**And the Cliffhanger Queen strikes again! Thanks to the ladies of Sookieverse for kicking my ass into writing this chapter. You know who you are and your encouragement is totes appreciated. I'm going to get cracking on the next chapter, so hopefully you won't have to wait too long to find out Sookie's fate. Also, I plan to start a collection of outtakes in the near future for this story, and an extended version of Eric's punishment will be one of them. Thanks for reading!**

**Chapter 21: In Case of Emergency**

Mornin', baby birds! I'm happy to see the response from last night's chapter, as evil as it was of me to leave it like I did. For those that aren't familiar, I take pride (and \*joygasms\*) in a good cliffie. I'm an evil bitch (as several of you told me last night) and love it. So this probably won't be the last cliffie you see out of me. You've been warned.

Chapter Twenty One: In Case of Emergency

**Sookie**

There was searing pain in my side. My head was throbbing. When I opened my eyes my vision was blurry. I tried to remember where I was and what happened but nothing was coming to me. I called out the first thing that came to mind.

"Eric!" I screamed loudly. I tried to move, but was pinned. Where was I?

There was something in my eyes. I lifted my hand up to my face. It was all wet and sticky. Blood. The smell told me it was blood. Worse, I smelled smoke. I leaned forward, causing more pain in my side. I was trapped. Seat belt! I was in a car! Tray's car. Tray was taking me home. He was turning left when we were hit. I coughed because of the smoke that was pouring into the car.

"Sookie!" Eric was screaming my name over and over. Then he was there beside the car. "Sookie, can you hear me?"

"I'm trapped!" I said as loud as I could.

"Sookie, unlock your door. I'm going to get you out."

"I'm trapped!" I repeated. I didn't think he would be able to get the door open anyway.

Eric ran around to the other side of the car. "Lover, cover your head." He called to me.

I turned away from the driver's side and a few seconds later I heard him trying to break the window. I coughed and gagged over the smoke that was pouring into the car. It took a few attempts, but Eric finally broke the glass. He reached inside and unlocked the door. When he opened it, he nearly yanked it off the hinges to get to me.

"Sookie, where are you hurt?" I felt his hands on my face, wiping away the blood that was near my eyes.

"My head and my side. My leg is a little sore, too, but I think it's just bruised."

"What about your neck? Can you feel this?" Eric prodded my left arm.

"Yes."

"How about this?" He reached down and pinched my left calf.

"Yep."

He breathed a sigh of relief and reached over into the front seat to turn off the engine of the car. "I'm going to get out but it might hurt."

"It's okay, just get me out." My voice cracked.

"You're going to be fine, Sookie, I promise. Just stay awake for me, okay?"

I nodded carefully and tried to push myself over in the seat to get out of the car. Eric ended up lifting me once I worked my way free of the front seat that had been a bit contorted in the crash. I hadn't heard a peep out of Tray or Amelia since it happened. Both of their airbags had gone off. Amelia had been out of it before she'd been put in the car, thanks to the amount of alcohol she'd had. I could see blood coming out of the side of Tray's head. It was smeared on his window.

Eric pulled me from the car as sirens started to wail in the distance. The closest firehouse was about two miles away. He kissed my cheek and then turned me over to Pam, who had just shown up with Johan, Felicia, Indira, Chow, Clancy and Rasul. Pam and Felicia attended to me while the men went about trying to free Amelia and Tray from the wreckage. I coughed and coughed, trying to suck in as much air as I could. Pam pressed a towel to my head where I'd been cut.

"Sookie, what happened?" Pam asked me as she and Felicia walked me to the side of the road so I could sit down at a bus stop bench while we waited for the ambulances to arrive.

"I don't know. We were making a left and then we were hit. I came to and Eric was calling me. I didn't see who hit us." My lower lip trembled as I watched Eric and Johan trying to free Tray from the car.

Emergency crews started to arrive and Eric was forced away from the car. He gave what information he could about what he saw before returning to me. The first ambulance arrived and Amelia was loaded into it since she was unconscious. A police officer approached me to take my statement about what had happened. I told him the same thing I told Pam. I felt guilty for not knowing more about what had happened, but I'd barely been awake when we'd been hit.

"What about Mr. Dawson? Was he drinking tonight?" The officer asked.

"I think he might have had a beer earlier on in the night but he definitely wasn't drunk." I knew that for a fact. Tray had planned on being the designated driver. He'd lost his father in a drunk driving accident when he was thirteen, his father being the drunk. As a result, Tray had very strong feelings about the whole issue and made a point never to drive drunk. Ever.

"And you don't recall anything about the vehicle that struck you?"

"No, sir, I my eyes were closed when it happened. I just saw light. When I opened my eyes there was blood in them and my boyfriend was screaming at me." I explained to the officer, my eyes drifting over to Eric, who had been taken to be treated for smoke inhalation and was sitting on the bumper of an ambulance breathing through an oxygen mask. I gasped and started to stand up.

"Sookie, no stay here." Pam wouldn't let me up.

"Eric." My lip trembled.

"He's fine, just a little smoke inhalation." Pam's voice was surprisingly soothing and gentle.

The ambulance with Amelia in it was about to take off. "Could you let the paramedics know that she's allergic to acetaminophen?"

"Of course." The officer nodded and then spoke into his radio to relay the information. He asked a few more questions as a new set of paramedics made their way over to me to assess my injuries.

I was still having a little trouble breathing and my side still hurt. The bleeding from my head seemed to have stopped but they were concerned I might have a concussion all the same. They took my vital signs and told me there was a possibility I might have a few broken ribs. X-rays would confirm it once I arrived at the hospital. One of those foam collars was put around my neck, even though I said I wasn't feeling any pain there. I was put on a gurnee and Pam walked with me to the ambulance.

"Sookie, are you okay?" Johan appeared, sans roadkill wig.

"I'll be fine. Thank you for helping my friends." I squeezed his hand when he offered to me.

Before the paramedics could load me into the back of the ambulance, he bent and kissed my forehead. "You're a tough cookie."

"Take care of Eric for me, okay?"

"I'm going with you." Eric appeared.

"Family only." The paramedic said.

"He's my boyfriend. I don't have any family up here." I looked up at the paramedic with scared eyes. I really didn't want to go to the hospital alone.

Thankfully the medics relented and Eric was allowed to come with me. Once I was loaded into the ambulance he sat down on the bench to my left and carefully picked up my hand. He leaned closer to me and kissed my hand, keeping a close eye on what the paramedic was doing. The doors to the back of the ambulance slammed shut and then we were off.

"On a scale of one to ten, Sookie, how bad is the pain?" The medic asked.

"I'd say about a six. I'm still having trouble breathing."

An oxygen mask was put over my face. "It's probably just from smoke inhalation, but if you broke a rib, there's a possibility you punctured your lung. We won't know until the docs can get you x-rayed."

I looked over at Eric who was doing his best to give me reassuring smiles and gentle squeezes to keep me calm. Believe it or not, the ambulance got stuck by a train. We had to sit there and wait since they weren't allowed to take an alternate route.

"What if I was having a heart attack? You'd still have to sit here?" I looked to the paramedic.

He nodded and said, "It's protocol to wait for the train to clear."

"Wow." I was suddenly worried about Amelia and hoped her ambulance had made it to the hospital before the train started.

"Is there anyone you want me to call when we get to the hospital?" Eric asked me while we waited.

I thought about it for a moment. It was late and I wasn't in life threatening condition. "I'll call my parents in the morning. The only person we might need to call is Amelia's father."

I really didn't want to have to be the one to call Copely Carmichael but if Amelia didn't wake up on her own I wouldn't have much of a choice. Cope- as he insisted I call him- didn't much approve of Amelia's relationship with Tray. He couldn't quite get past the age difference between them and didn't think Tray was good enough for his baby girl. If he bothered to look at something other than a person's bank account or pedigree, he'd realize that Tray was perfect for Amelia. He tolerated all of her quirks. He found all of her little neurosis and outbursts to be endearing. He had endless patience for her exuberance. Her rapid mood swings didn't phase him at all. And most importantly, he loved her more than anything in the world. If that wasn't good enough for Copely, then no one ever would be.

The train finally finished and the ambulance was able to pull into the emergency bay. Eric go out and waited for the paramedics to unload me. He held my hand as I was wheeled into the emergency room, his thumb rubbing circles on the back of it. He was stopped by a nurse who told him he wouldn't be able to go into the trauma room with me.

"I'll be fine, Eric." I smiled up at him, ignoring the pain in my head that it caused.

He dipped quickly to kiss my forehead. "I love you."

"I love you, too." I gave his hand one last squeeze and then I had to let go.

I was poked, prodded, tested, scanned, stitched, x-rayed and examined until I couldn't keep my eyes open anymore. I was doped up on various medications to prevent infection and keep the pain to a minimum. I was passed out when they let Eric into my little curtained off section of the emergency room. If it weren't for the drugs, there's no way I would have slept. There were too many people seeking treatment on Halloween night. I had strange dreams of cartoon flames tap dancing on the seats of Tray's car, but none of them actually touched me.

When my eyes fluttered open Eric was sitting in a chair next to my bed, slumped over with his head resting on my hip. I lifted my hand and it took much more energy than I ever could have imagined. I carefully ran my fingers through his hair and waited for him to stir. He groaned my name, which made me smile.

"Ten more minutes, lover." He whispered. How could I say no to that?

I rested my hand on the back of his head and let my eyes close. The next time I opened them it was because a nurse came in to check my vital signs. I had no idea what time it was and I'd forgotten which hospital I'd been brought to the night before. The only thing that remained constant was Eric resting beside me. He was breathing evenly. My hip was numb from being used as his pillow but I wouldn't dare push him off of me.

"How are you feeling?" The nurse asked.

"Like I was hit by a car." I joked wryly.

"Dr. Ludwig will be making her rounds shortly and she'll go over everything with you. My name is Kim. I'll be taking care of you until we get you situated in a room upstairs." The nurse told me.

"Upstairs? How long am I staying?" I really wished Eric would wake up for this.

"You'll have to wait until Dr. Ludwig gets here." Kim gave me a bright smile meant to set me at ease but it did precious little. "In the meantime, if there's anything you need, just push this button. If you're hungry I can have a tray brought in."

"No, I'm fine. I just want to know what's wrong with me."

Kim stepped around the bed and checked the IV bags that were hanging from the pole next to me. "All I can tell you is that you're very lucky, Sookie."

"What does that mean? What about my friends? Are they okay?" My eyes began to water and I wiggled under Eric, hoping it would wake him up.

Kim gave me a sympathetic stare and my heart sank. "The gentleman, Tray, was taken into surgery about two hours ago to repair some internal bleeding."

"And Amelia?" I squeaked as Eric started to sit up.

"I can't give you details on Miss Broadway's status." Kim's eyes dropped.

"Bullshit. Please, she's my best friend. I'm the closest thing she has here to family. We grew up in the same town. Please, just tell me if she's okay. She has to be okay." My voice quivered and tears spilled down my cheeks, burning my eyes.

"Sookie, you need to calm down. Now, as soon as Miss Broadway's family has been notified-"

"What's going on?" Eric interjected when he saw how upset I was.

"Something's wrong with Amelia and they won't tell me." I glared at Kim.

Eric picked up my hand and laced his fingers with mine. "Can you give us a minute?" He asked from behind me.

Anxious to be out of the line of fire, Kim scurried from my little area. I squeezed my eyes closed and let my head roll toward Eric. He wiped away my tears with the pads of his thumbs. His chair dragged loudly on the floor as he pulled it closer to the bed.

"Lay with me." I moved over and made as much room for him in my bed as I could.

Awkwardly, Eric got up and stretched out beside me in my uncomfortable hospital bed. I snuggled close to him and closed my eyes, trying to pretend that we were back at his house, in his bed. I felt safer there. In Eric's bed Tray wasn't in surgery and Amelia's life wasn't hanging in the balance. I wasn't hooked up to monitors and IVs. I wasn't broken and bruised. I wasn't stitched or sore. In his bed it was just the two of us and the rest of the world didn't exist. I'd never wanted to feel Jeter licking my feet so badly.

"I think I need to call Cope." I whispered to Eric, who was gently twirling some of my hair around his fingers.

"It's not even seven in the morning yet, Sookie, and you don't even know what to tell him other than there's been an accident. Why don't we wait until Dr. Ludwig comes back?" Eric suggested.

"You met her? What'd she say? Why am I being moved upstairs?" I rapid fired questions at him.

"I met her briefly when they finally let me come back here after you were taken for tests. From all I could gather, they're concerned about head trauma. They ended up having to put in two stitches to close your cut and you have a severe concussion. They just want to make sure there's no further significant damage." Eric explained to me calmly.

"I want to go home." I whined.

"It's better if you stay, at least for the night. Let them make sure you're okay."

"But you could take care of me."

"Lover, I have no plans to leave your side whether it's here or at home, but I would feel much better if we got the okay from the doctors before they let you out of here. Why don't you try to get some more sleep before Dr. Ludwig comes back? I promise to wake you when she gets here." Eric kissed my forehead.

He was doing his best to pacify and placate me. Under other circumstances I would have argued but I was just too tired for that. I turned onto my left side since my right was still too tender to lay on. Eric moved up behind me, spooning me the way he did when we were back home. He put his arm around me but not too tightly. I felt his warm breath on my neck and heard him inhale the smell of my hair. He hummed quietly behind me to the tune of a Smashing Pumpkins song I knew we both loved and I fell asleep.

Dr. Amy Ludwig was a tiny woman who spoke to me matter-of-factly about my condition. While it wasn't serious, she told me I should consider myself lucky to be so undamaged considering where the impact had been on the car. In addition to the concussion I also had two cracked ribs, lots of internal bruising and several cuts from the broken glass. I'd also sprained my right wrist. I would be kept overnight for observation just to make sure my head injury wasn't more severe.

"What about Tray?" I asked her.

She set her lips in a line while she considered what to tell me. "Mr. Dawson presented with fluid in his belly. He suffered some internal bleeding which the surgeons were able to stop. He's in recovery and will probably be here for a few days. He also suffered a broken nose, a concussion and whiplash. All things considered, he was lucky as well."

I swallowed hard and asked, "And Amelia? How's she doing?"

"Amelia's condition is far more serious. She required surgery also. She hit her head quite hard and there was some swelling in her brain. She's currently in a medically induced coma. The impact of the crash caused an compound fracture in right leg. She was also burned by the engine fire. Her burns weren't too severe but there's still concern for infection. Ultimately, only time will tell if she will make a full recovery. She's being monitored closely in intensive care." Dr. Ludwig informed me. "Do you have any emergency contact information for Miss Broadway?"

"I have her father's phone number. He's the only blood relative I know of but he's all the way in Louisiana, assuming he's home. Her father travels extensively for business. I'm the closest thing Amelia has to family." I explained to Dr. Ludwig.

"If you could get me the contact numbers, I would appreciate it so I can pass it along to her physician." Dr. Lugwig stepped back from my bed. "We're hoping to move you upstairs in the next hour or so. Kim explained to you about the call button?"

I nodded that she had and Dr. Ludwig took her leave. I breathed a sigh of relief that Amelia was still alive, even if her condition wasn't nearly as good as I'd hoped it would be. Eric gathered me closer to him and kissed the top of my head while I cried. I cried for me, for Tray, for Amelia and even for whomever it was that had hit us.

"Eric, have they found the person who hit us?" I asked suddenly.

"Not yet, lover. There weren't a whole lot of details to go on since you were the only one conscious when the police came."

"You didn't see anything?"

"I didn't see the actual accident. I heard it as I was walking back into the bar. I heard the impact and when I turned my head the car was already speeding away. It was too far away for me to see what kind of car it was. All I know is that it was painted a dark color. The airbags must have been disabled because I didn't see them when the car sped off. So whoever hit Tray's car is probably being treated at another hospital somewhere."

"Who would do this, Eric? I mean, who would hit someone like that and just leave the scene?" I figured it had to be a drunk, but even so, you'd think there would be some sort of compassion or guilt that would keep them from fleeing the scene of an accident.

"The police are checking the security footage from the hardware store to see if maybe they can get something." Eric told me.

There was a hardware store right there on Grand Avenue that had security cameras all around its perimeter. He was right in that it was our best shot to at least see what other cars were on the road, even if it didn't happen to catch the actual accident. I doubted we would be that lucky. I wondered what the odds were that the person who'd hit us would turn themselves in. I doubted it was going to happen but I would keep my fingers crossed.

An hour later I was moved up to the fourth floor and brought a breakfast tray. I wasn't very hungry and only ate the oatmeal. Eric tried to insist I eat more but I couldn't, so he finished it. The medications I was on kept me sleepy and flitting in and out of consciousness. Before I could drift off again I gave Eric Copely's phone number to pass along to Amelia's doctors. Then I sent him home to shower and get us each a change of clothes. He took my keys from my purse and then realized he had no way of leaving, so he called Johan to come stay with me.

I wasn't very good company, I'm afraid, since I slept the entire time Eric was gone. I fell into a deep, dreamless sleep. My body felt heavy and wrong against the hospital bed. Johan remained surprisingly quiet and watched television while I slept. A woman's voice calling my name was what woke me. My eyes fluttered open and immediately welled with tears.

"Mommy." I croaked and then fell apart.

\*lets out deep breath\* So, are you feeling better now that you know Sookie's alive and going to be fine? Just so you know, that bit about the ambulance waiting for the train is something that ACTUALLY happened. My friend passed out one time while I was at her house so I called an ambulance. I was riding with her until her family could get there, and we had to wait for a train to go by before we could get to the hospital. I was stunned that it was protocol for them to wait. Seems awfully unsafe for someone with a life threatening condition, but I don't make the rules. Oh, and I have to thank **LindsayK** for providing lovely feedback last night and **Slacker Dee** for keeping Indy at bay long enough for me to write \*giggles\* I've started the next chapter, so hopefully it'll be up tomorrow. Thanks for reading!

**Chapter 22: Family**

Because I am totes epic fail at self pimpage, I'm going to leave this note here before I forget. In case you haven't heard, I've started a little contest (tis the season, apparently) based on the 7 Deadly Sins. It's a contest for M rated one shots. For more info, please go check out the profile set up for it.

u/2426932/7DeadlySinsContest

And because they're so awesome, the awesome **zigster**, **smeadows**, and **chicklette** also present The Age of Eric contest. Go check it out. Looks like it's gonna be lots of fun.

u/2424937/The\_Age\_of\_Eric\_Contest

*My apologies now for some of the duplication in this chapter, but I thought it was important to get Eric's POV on the accident. Not to mention, Sookie was a little disoriented last time. Hopefully this'll clear things up just a bit.*

Chapter Twenty Two: Family

**Eric**

I thought there was nothing in the world that could top the look on my parents' faces when they told Johan and I that Annika died. I was wrong. That moment was easily replaced when I saw Sookie trapped in that damn car. The terror in her eyes was something I'll never forget. Not being able to just reach into the car and pull her out was horrible. I hated feeling helpless. There was so much adrenaline running through me that I was shaking the entire time I was trying to rescue her. When I finally got into the car I was so relieved to hear her talking and to know that she could feel me wherever I touched her that I almost forgot the car was on fire.

Thank God it didn't take long for the emergency workers to arrive. Tray's a pretty big dude and even with Johan's help, moving him wasn't easy. With all the blood on the window I was worried about the possibility of a neck injury and didn't want to move him without being able to stabilize it first. There was no way to do that, so it was best to wait for help. As soon as the firemen and paramedics took over I went to where Pam had Sookie situated on the side of the road. There was broken glass all over the street.

When Tray's car had been hit, he was facing north, maybe slightly northwest. The impact of the crash had spun the car around so that it was facing southwest instead. I stood in front of Sookie. Being able to look at me seemed to calm her, though I wasn't convinced she was really seeing me. She seemed to be looking through me, trying to recall all the details she possibly could for the officer who was taking her statement.

A medic knelt down beside her and started treating her smaller cuts and she didn't even notice it was happening. She got lost in her own little world and I was pulled away to be checked out. I had a few cuts on my hands from the broken glass and I was wheezing a little from breathing in so much smoke. The firemen were able to put the fire out before the car exploded. I watched as Amelia was extracted from her seat. They had to use the jaws of life to get her out of the car. I marveled at the fact that I had been able to pull Sookie from the back seat of the car so easily.

I wanted to tell the paramedics to fuck off and let me get back to my girl. She needed their attention way more than I did but I also knew I was no good to Sookie if I was injured so I stayed right where I was and got the treatment they said I needed. I kept an eye on her as she talked to the police. She was so calm about it all. Her poise was most likely due to shock. The full weight of what had happened to her would hit her later. Still, I was impressed. The only woman I knew who might have handled it better was Pam.

When I saw that Sookie was being put on a gurnee I whipped off the oxygen mask I'd been wearing. No way in hell was I hanging back while my girl went to the hospital alone. I'd pulled Sookie's purse from the back of the car before the paramedics had shown up and given it to Pam to hold. She handed it back to me when I announced to the paramedic I was riding along with Sookie. It wasn't up for debate, regardless of what he might have thought. Their protocol didn't matter much to me right about then.

When we got stuck by a train, I was floored. Fucking trains. We sat there for a good ten minutes before we were able to cross the tracks that were cleverly situated right next to the emergency entrance for the hospital. I wondered who's brilliant idea it was to put it there. Sookie rolled her eyes, obviously wondering the same thing as me. Letting go of her hand when we got to the emergency room just completely sucked. I hated the idea of her being alone but I also knew there was nothing for me to do but wait. If I went back there I would just be in the way. I would distract Sookie and her doctors would need her to focus on their questions instead of me.

I leaned against a wall since there weren't any open seats in the waiting room. I was approached by a couple of police officers that had come to ask Sookie a few more questions about what she'd seen. I gave them what information I could.

"You know, now that I mention it, I didn't hear brakes screeching or anything like that before the accident. It was like the other car came out of nowhere." I told officer Dearborn, who was making notes on his pad as I talked.

He asked a few other questions about what we'd been up to earlier in the evening. I told him that Pam and I co-owned the bar. I also told him about Bill and Red Menace's appearance at the bar. I explained the bit of back story I knew as far as Bill's obsession with Sookie and the fight he'd gotten into with Johan. Officer Dearborn quirked an eyebrow at me like I was making the whole thing up. I offered up copies of the security tapes from the bar to back up my story. There was evidence on film of Bill attacking Johan. Pam just hadn't turned it over because Johan didn't feel the need to press charges.

Although, if it came out that Bill was somehow responsible for the accident, there was no doubt Johan would be adding to the list of charges against him. I didn't know what to think when it came to the possibility that Bill might be responsible for the accident. Yes, he was obsessed with Sookie, no doubt about that. But was he so obsessed with her that he would kill her if he couldn't have her? Was he really *that* far gone?

I tried to push it from my brain because if I thought about it too much I would end up leaving the hospital to go hunt him down myself. The best course of action was to let the police handle it. As much as I wanted to kick his ass personally for the shit he'd already pulled, it wasn't worth going to prison over. Sookie was more important to me than vengeance.

When I was finally allowed back to see Sookie I heard her doctors talking in her little curtained off area. I didn't hear much other than something about head trauma and needing to keep her overnight for observation. I knew Sookie wasn't going to be happy about that, but there wasn't much to be done. If the doctors wanted her to stay, she would stay. I'd make sure of it. Sookie was asleep when I got to her room. I was still holding her bag. She'd said she would wait to call her parents, but I figured a familiar face couldn't hurt. So I fished through her purse and found her cell phone.

I'd never spoken to either of her parents and I didn't even know if they knew about me. I'd told my parents about Sookie and hoped she'd done the same. Still, I felt a little awkward over the fact that the first conversation I'd ever have with either of her parents was one in which I'd have to tell them their daughter was unconscious in the hospital. I pushed the send button and waited for someone to pick up on the other end of the line.

"Hello?" A sleepy woman answered the phone.

"Is this Mrs. Stackhouse?" I asked nervously.

"It is. Who's this?"

"My name is Eric Northman," I started.

"Eric. Sookie's Eric?" There was a hint of panic in her voice. I felt a bit of relief at knowing she knew who I was.

"Yes, ma'am, Sookie's Eric." I smiled as I looked at Sookie, sound asleep in the hospital bed. My hand reached out and covered hers.

"What happened? Is she okay?"

"There was an accident, Mrs. Stackhouse. She's in the hospital, but she's going to be fine."

"How bad is it?"

"Her doctors won't tell me much since I'm not family, but I was the one who pulled her out of the car. She was awake pretty much the whole time. I think she's got a concussion. There was a cut on her head, but it looks like that's all stitched up. She's got a few other cuts on her face and arm from the broken glass. She told me before that he side hurt but there didn't seem to be anything broken and she wasn't feeling any pain in her neck or back." I relayed everything I could to her mother.

"Can I talk to her?"

"She's sleeping now, but I can have her call you when she wakes up." I offered.

"No, don't. I'll be on the first flight out. What hospital is it again?" I ran through all the details I could give her, including my cell phone. She thanked me for calling. "I'm sorry our first conversation had to be like this, Eric. Sookie's told me a lot about you. I'm looking forward to meeting you."

"Likewise, Mrs. Stackhouse. Call me if you need anything."

"Will do. See you soon. Give my baby a kiss for me."

"I will." I promised and then we hung up.

I put Sookie's phone back in her purse and moved my chair a bit closer to her bed. I was relieved that when I squeezed her hand she squeezed back. I put my head down and just watched her breathe as she slept. Her eyelids moved in her dreams and I wondered what she was seeing in her head. I hoped she wasn't reliving the crash over and over again. I wouldn't let my mind go to the place that considered what I would do if I lost her.

"Her friend's in bad shape. Docs don't think she's gonna make it." A nurse said outside of Sookie's little area.

"This one was lucky. From what I heard the entire passenger's side of the car was smashed in. There but for the grace of God, huh?" Another woman suggested.

Shit. Amelia. I braced myself for the possibility that Amelia hadn't made it. I'd seen how bad she was when she was finally pulled from the car. I knew she was in rough condition but I didn't think it was so bad she might not make it. My heart sank for Sookie. I liked Amelia, but she was Sookie's best friend. I squeezed Sookie's hand again and decided the best thing to do was to try and get some sleep. I was exhausted. Between the adrenaline rush, pacing and talking to the police I was just wiped out. I wanted to crawl into bed but I wouldn't let that happen until Sookie could be laying next to me. I was staying in the hospital whether the staff liked it or not.

I rested my head on Sookie's hip, concentrating on the slight movement that came with each breath she took. I could hear the little noises her body made and it was enough to soothe me to sleep. Sometime later I thought I felt fingers running through my hair but I convinced myself it was just a dream. I thought I heard Sookie call my name, but I wasn't sure if it was real or not. Again, chalking it up to a dream, I went back to sleep. I was just too tired to sit up yet.

Ultimately it was the sound of Sookie arguing with another woman that woke me. My eyes opened to hear her on the verge of having a breakdown and I sat up quickly. I grimaced to see the swelling, cuts and bruises on Sookie's beautiful face. She was flushed with anger and even though she was weak from the accident, I could tell she was moments away from losing her temper. I squeezed her hand to get her attention and she explained to me what was going on. When I asked the nurse for a minute alone with Sookie, she was more than willing to oblige and left the room quickly.

I told Sookie what I knew of her condition and talked her into following the doctor's orders when she insisted she wanted me to take her home. I got into the hospital bed and let her snuggle up to me. We both relaxed after that, feeling the same sense of relief just to be close to one another. The smell of smoke hadn't really gotten into her hair thanks to the wig she'd been wearing and being able to breathe in her smell was comforting. I couldn't stop myself from humming the tune to 'Mayonaise,' the song that had been playing that first night at her house. I felt her relax a bit more beside me and then she drifted back into sleep. I fell asleep myself soon after.

When Dr. Ludwig came in to break down her injuries for us, I braced myself to hear the worst. Fortunately, none of the injuries she had were life threatening. As long as swelling didn't start in her brain, she would be fine. She had no broken bones, though she had sprained her wrist. She seemed surprised by that. I figured she hadn't felt the pain of it since her body was pumped full of adrenaline at the time of the accident. Hearing that Tray and Amelia were battling much more than Sookie was hard to hear. I didn't know them very well, but they had become friends. Sookie was very disturbed by the update given to her by Dr. Ludwig but there wasn't much either of us could do.

I contemplated telling Sookie that I had called her parents but decided that since her mother was coming up from Louisiana, it might be best to let it be a surprise. I went with her when she was moved upstairs and did my best to get her to eat something more than the oatmeal and banana that was on her breakfast tray.

"Eric, I can't really eat knowing that two of my best friends in the whole world are so hurt. I'll be fine, I promise." Sookie assured me as she sipped her apple juice. She pushed the scrambled eggs, bacon and pancakes at me that were on her tray.

I got her to take a few mouthfuls of everything that was on the tray, but she left most of it for me. I helped her to the bathroom since she said her legs felt a bit shaky from the medications they'd put her on. The last thing either of us needed was for her to fall because she was too stubborn to ask for help. Her hair was a bit matted around the area where her cut was and she looked at herself with a hint of disgust when she saw her reflection.

"God, look at me! I look like an extra from a horror movie." Sookie whined, leaning closer to the sink to get a better look at herself. She moved the wrong way and froze.

"What's wrong?"

"My side. It hurts." Tears welled in her eyes.

"Come on, let me help you get back to bed." I held a hand out to her.

"You should go home and take a shower. You smell like smoke." Sookie said as we walked back to her bed.

"I'm fine."

"I know you are, but that's not the point. I need a change of clothes since they cut everything off of me, including my underwear. My keys are in my purse. Just grab me some yoga pants and a t-shirt. Maybe a few extra things so I can stay with you?" She looked at me nervously, like she was afraid I was going to turn her away.

"Lover, there's no way you're going home alone. Whether you stay with me, or I stay with you, we'll be together." I kissed the back of her hand.

A tear rolled down her cheek and she smiled. "Thank you for saving me."

My heart stopped for a second and all those thoughts about what I'd do if I lost her hit me at once. "Sookie, it was either save you or die trying."

She nodded and tilted her face up to kiss me. It was gentle and sweet since I didn't want to disturb any of the bruises on her face. I got her tucked back into bed and reached into her purse to get her house keys. I was about to kiss her goodbye when I realized I wasn't going anywhere. My car was still in the parking lot at the bar. So instead I reached into my pocket and called Johan.

"Lillebror, how's Sookie?" Johan asked immediately, sounding awfully alert considering how late it must have been whenever he finally got to sleep.

"She's stable. She's got a concussion, a couple of cracked ribs, a sprained wrist and a lot of cuts and bruises, but the docs think she's going to be fine." I told my brother, who breathed a sigh of relief.

"Man, that's good to hear. Is she awake?"

"For now, but she needs rest. She wants me to get her a change of clothes but my car is at the bar." I told him.

"Shit, that's right. I'm still with Pam, so we'll get pick up your car and we'll meet you at the hospital. What room is she in?"

I told Johan where to find me and where the spare key was for the Corvette. He promised to be there as soon as possible. Pam was yelling in the background about something but I couldn't quite understand what she was saying. I hung up and sat on the edge of Sookie's bed. Her hand found mine and squeezed. Her eyes stayed closed. True to his word, Johan and Pam arrived a short time later. Sookie was out cold and gripping my hand tightly. I gently disentangled my hand from hers and then got up.

Johan pulled me into one of those big bear hugs of his while Pam hung back, trying not to look too uncomfortable with the situation. I knew she really liked Sookie a great deal and that didn't happen often. There were few people in the world Pam took an honest liking to and she'd never been good at dealing with the loss of loved ones. I could tell she'd been thinking about how things might have gone differently and I wanted to tell her to stop. Sookie was going to be fine.

"Look, I uh, I called Sookie's parents earlier while she was asleep. Her mother was planning to fly up to see her. She might get here while I'm gone, so just be nice to her." I was saying this more for Pam than for Johan but then I turned to my brother. "I don't know if she knows we're identical twins or not, so don't be surprised if she thinks you're me."

Johan laughed and said, "Don't worry, bror, I'll set her straight. You want me to call if she comes in before you get back?"

"Yeah, that'd be good. If you hear anything about Amelia or Tray, could you let me know? I don't want Sookie to have to tell me when I get back."

"We'll take good care of her, Eric. Go take a shower and get something to eat. You look like shit." Pam gave me a playful punch in the arm. That Pam.

I left Johan with Sookie while Pam walked me out to show me where the car was parked. "What were you yelling about before when I was on the phone with Johan?" I asked Pam while we were walking to the garage.

"The police interviewed Johan and me after you left with Sookie. We told them about what happened with Bill and I turned over the surveillance tapes. They know that Bill and Sophie-Anne were thrown out of the bar and told not to come back. I think they consider the two of them to be suspects." Pam confessed to me.

"I think they're the most obvious choices for people who would intentionally do something like this." I agreed.

"What kind of car does your neighbor drive? I asked Johan but he couldn't remember."

I had to think about it for a moment. I knew she drove a Lexus but I was having trouble picturing it in my mind. "I think it's a dark red? I can't really remember. I try to ignore her."

"Well, think about it. Do a little research and get back to the cops. My security cameras caught Bill getting into his car and it was a light colored SUV. Sophie-Anne didn't get into the car with him, so I don't know where she went. Just look into it." Pam instructed.

"I will." I wanted to catch whomever caused the accident as bad as anyone else. Then, shock of all shocks, Pam stepped up and hugged me.

"I'm glad Sookie is okay." She pulled back before I could see any real emotion in her face, but the hug was enough to let me know she'd been troubled by it.

"Me, too, Pam. I'll be back as soon as I can." I promised her.

"Don't worry, if there's any change we'll call." Pam waved to me as I backed out of the parking space and then headed for Sookie's house.

Since it was closer to the hospital, I stopped at my place first. I looked outside for Red Menace's car but didn't see it. I went inside and I showered, changed clothes and let Jeter outside. I stripped the bed and put fresh sheets on it, thinking it would be a nice touch if Sookie came back to my house when she was released from the hospital. It dawned on me that it was my brother's last night in town before he headed west to go see our parents. As if I didn't already hate the person who had caused the accident in the first place, I was really pissed off that I wouldn't be able to spend my brother's last night in town with him. I knew he understood and wouldn't hold it against me but it didn't make it suck any less.

After I got Jeter back in the house I headed over to Sookie's place. I packed a bag for her with enough clothes for a week away from home. I grabbed her tooth brush, hair brush and a bunch of books from her 'to be read' pile. I found her laptop and added that to the things I was taking back with me. I was just about to walk out when I remembered her iPod. I found it connected to her dock on the entertainment center and put it in my pocket before leaving her house.

I stopped for coffee on the way back to the hospital. I figured Sookie could probably use some. I knew I certainly could. I parked my car in the same lot as the one I'd found it in and headed back into the hospital. The place was a maze. How anyone easily found their way around, even with the posted signs was completely beyond me. I got lost twice while looking for the elevators but ultimately found them. A petite blonde woman about the same height as Sookie was standing to my right, her foot tapping anxiously as she waited for the elevator doors to open in front of us.

When they finally did, I gestured for her to go first. "After you."

"Thank you." Her southern accent was identical to Sookie's and I couldn't help but smile. The woman had to be Sookie's mother.

"You're welcome, Mrs. Stackhouse." I said when I stepped in behind her.

Her head whipped up and she looked at me curiously. "Oh my stars! *You're* Eric?"

"Yes, ma'am." I nodded to her.

"My goodness you're tall." She giggled, much the same as Sookie would have.

"Yes." I agreed with her.

"I'm sorry, forgive me," She shook her head as if she were trying to clear it. "Sookie emailed me a picture of the two of you but it just didn't click in my head. It's very nice to meet you, Eric."

"Likewise, Mrs. Stackhouse." I was a bit taken aback when she stepped over and gave me a hug.

"Thank you for calling me. My stubborn mule of a daughter would have waited until she was released from the hospital. She gets that from her father." Mrs. Stackhouse explained.

I laughed and said, "I like that she's stubborn. It's a challenge but one I enjoy."

"Either you're her soulmate or glutton for punishment." Mrs. Stackhouse laughed.

"How was your flight?" I asked as the doors opened on the fourth floor.

"I was able to get a few more hours of sleep. We hit a little turbulence but nothing too horrible. How's my Sookie doing?"

"When I left she was resting. My brother and business partner should be in with her."

"Ah, yes, Sookie mentioned your brother was visiting. Is he older or younger?"

"Older by about twelve minutes."

"Twins?" She looked me up and down. "Your poor mother."

I laughed loudly at that. "My poor mother, indeed."

I showed Mrs. Stackhouse the way to Sookie's room. Pam was sitting in the chair I'd vacated, filing her nails and Johan was perched on the big vent watching something on Animal Planet. Mrs. Stackhouse set her bag down near the door and slowly made her way over to Sookie's bed. Johan and Pam both looked up at the same time. No one said a word as Mrs. Stackhouse leaned over Sookie's bed and gently brushed some hair away from Sookie's face.

"Sookie, sweetheart?" She spoke softly but got no reaction. "Sookie?" She tried again, a little louder.

It took another minute but Sookie finally opened her eyes. "Mommy?" She whimpered and then started crying.

Sookie raised her arms and Mrs. Stackhouse carefully hugged her daughter. I gestured for Johan and Pam to follow me out in the hall to give them a few minutes alone. They didn't need an audience for their reunion. I knew it had been a few months since Sookie had seen her family. She'd said the last time she'd been home was for her brother's wedding over the summer. She was excited about going home for Thanksgiving. I had a feeling it would mean even more to her after the accident.

"Did you see that bitch's car outside your house?" Pam asked once we were out in the hall.

"No, she wasn't home." It was probably for the best that she wasn't. If I saw so much as a ding on her car I'd have no problem turning her in to the police.

I didn't want to focus so much on who had caused the accident as I did making sure Sookie recovered from it. I apologized to Johan for not being able to hang out like I'd wanted to on his last night in town. We'd planned to go out to dinner with Sookie and Pam on what would arguably be one of the strangest double date type situations ever and then Sookie would be spending the night at her place.

"Bror, don't apologize. If I were in your place, I'd be doing the same thing. Besides, if I got to Cali and told Mom you ditched Sookie to hang out with me, she'd kick your ass when you got there for Christmas." Johan pointed out. He was right.

"I just feel like we haven't had the chance to spend too much time together since you've been here." I'd had a few things I'd wanted to do with him and there just hadn't been enough time for it all.

"It's okay, bror. Bring Sookie with you when you come to visit in the spring. Assuming she hasn't dumped your ass by then." Johan teased.

"I bet they'll be engaged by then." Pam was still filing her nails and not looking at either of us when she spoke.

I had just opened my mouth to say something when Mrs. Stackhouse appeared in the doorway. "She's more awake now, if you y'all wanna come back inside?"

"Mrs. Stackhouse, this is my business partner, Pam Ravenscroft." I gestured to Pam who finally had the sense to stop filing her nails.

"It's lovely to meet you, Pam." Mrs. Stackhouse shook her hand.

"Same here. I don't like many people, but your daughter is an exception."

"Well, thank you." Mrs. Stackhouse didn't seem sure how to take that. I rolled my eyes and looked over to Johan.

"And this guy," I jerked my thumb at Johan. "This is my brother, Johan."

"Ah, the *older* brother." Mrs. Stackhouse held out her hand to Johan but instead got a hug very similar to the one Sookie had received when they'd first met. "Oof! You're a strong one, aren't you?"

"I can see where Sookie got her beauty from."

"Give it a rest, Johan, she's Sookie's mother." Pam rolled her eyes.

"Don't hate me because I said it first." Johan set Mrs. Stackhouse down.

"It's nice to meet all of you. Please call me Michelle." She insisted and then turned to head back into Sookie's room.

Sookie smiled when she saw me and she outright grinned when she saw I had two coffee cups in my hands. "*Please* tell me one of those is for me?" She pouted.

I handed one to her and said, "I wouldn't be so cruel as to bring coffee into this room without expecting to share. I know better."

Sookie gulped at the coffee and I decided it was a good thing we'd given her a few minutes with her Mom or she probably would have burned the hell out of herself. "I knew there was a reason I love you."

"It's certainly not for his pretty face." Johan said from behind me.

"It's a good thing you boys have different haircuts or I wouldn't be able to tell you apart." Michelle took a seat in the chair next to Sookie's bed, while I sat on the edge of it.

Pam opened her mouth to say something but then closed it again. I assumed whatever she had planned to say was completely inappropriate and I was thankful her brain filters had kicked in for once. The five of us made small talk for a while before Pam had to excuse herself to get back to the bar in preparation for opening that night. Johan went along with her, leaving me alone with Sookie and her mother. Sookie filled Michelle in on what had happened the night before to land her in the hospital in the first place.

"I bet you it was that Bill you've been telling me about." Michelle shook her head. "I told you to take a firmer line with him sooner, Sookie. I know you were just trying to be nice but there comes a point when you have to take a bull by the horns."

"And I did, Mom. I told him I wasn't interested." Sookie insisted, leaving Michelle looking skeptical.

"She did. Johan and I were there." I spoke up on Sookie's behalf.

Michelle sighed and asked, "Does the school know what he's been up to?"

"I didn't see any reason to bring it up. His personal life is his own business and he's never accosted me on school property. He's approached me to go out to lunch or dinner but co-workers do that sort of thing all the time. And he's left me alone since I told him to back off."

For Bill's sake, I hoped he was able to keep it that way or I wouldn't be able to restrain myself from kicking his ass. Michelle went on to tell us that she would only be staying for a few days before she had to head back to Louisiana.

"Will you be okay on your own once I go home?" Michelle looked at Sookie with concern.

"I'm going to stay with Eric for a little while until I can move around better on my own. When I was transferred up here Dr. Ludwig told me I'd be off work for at least three weeks, so I might not get back to work before December. It just depends on how well my ribs heal. For now I have this pressure bandage on and I'm supposed to just kick back and take it easy. If I stay with Eric, there aren't as many stairs in his house." Sookie explained to her mother.

Sookie and I hadn't had a chance to talk about how things were going to work once she was released from the hospital in the long-term. I'd figured she would stay with me for a week or so, but the idea of having her around for longer than that hadn't entered my mind. I realized I liked the idea of it. It also dawned on me what I could give Sookie for the anniversary that was quickly approaching.

"Well, I'm starved. I'm going to hit the cafeteria. Can I bring you anything?" Michelle asked us.

"I have a taste for something sweet." Sookie piped up with a big grin on her face.

"Chocolate?"

"Of course."

"How about you, Eric?"

"No, thank you, I'm fine."

"Alright, I'll be back in a bit then." Michelle smiled and then headed off in search of food.

No sooner was Michelle out the door than Sookie dropped somewhat of a bomb on me. "So, what do you think about us living together?"

**Soooo...will they or won't they be moving in together after Sookie recovers? Hmmm...haven't decided yet. Yay for a longer chapter, though. Thanks for reading!**

**Chapter 23: The Best Medicine**

Chapter Twenty Three: The Best Medicine

**Sookie**

Johan stopped by the hospital before he had to leave for the airport. I was glad I got to see him once more before he left. I really liked him a lot and I was sorry he was leaving. I knew Eric felt badly about not being able to spend more time with him and I couldn't help but feel a little guilty for sucking up so much of his time.

"Take good care of my lillebror for me." Johan said when he bent to kiss my forehead.

"I will, I promise." I kissed Johan's cheek.

"If he makes it to Sweden in the spring I expect to see you with him."

I gave a faint smile and said, "If he asks me, I'd be happy to go with him."

"Oh, he'll ask, I have no doubt." Johan stood up straight and turned to Mom. "It was very nice to meet you, Mrs. Stackhouse. Have a safe flight back to Louisiana."

"Thank you, Johan. Enjoy your visit with your parents. Hopefully we'll meet again." He squeezed her hand when she offered it and then walked out into the hall with Eric. "I really like them." Mom smiled, watching the doorway.

"Me, too."

"You seem happy, honey. Much happier than you were with Quinn."

"Eric and I are a much better fit. I loved Quinn, but not the way I needed to for us to stay together."

"I know. I'm just happy that *you* figured that out before it was too late." Mom squeezed my hand and gave me a reassuring smile.

Shortly after that a nurse came in with my discharge papers and aftercare instructions so I could go home. Mom had spent at the hospital with me while Eric had gone home. He'd come back with the Comet since there wasn't going to be enough room for the three of us in the Corvette. Not to mention I wasn't sure I was in any condition to try and get myself in and out of that particular car. It was too low to the ground for me with the injuries I had.

I signed the paperwork that needed signing and Eric went to get the car while Mom stayed behind to walk down with me. Pam was kind enough to take Johan to the airport since Eric was busy dealing with me. Rather than going home to my own house, I was going to Eric's. I had enough clothes in the bag he packed to get me through the next few days. We'd talked a little bit about the idea of living together. He'd looked surprised for a minute when I mentioned the idea to him but I quickly discovered it was only because he had been thinking the same thing as me.

Our conversation had been cut short by Mom coming back from the cafeteria but we could table the discussion until after she left. There were lots of things to consider in the whole deal and neither of us wanted to rush into something we weren't sure of. Although, there was nothing about living with Eric that scared me. I knew what he was like in the morning. I knew he was horrible about putting his socks in the hamper. I knew that his least favorite kitchen chore was emptying the dishwasher. I also knew there was a lot to learn and I was excited to find out more of his quirks.

We were just stepping off the elevator when Copely Carmichael came rushing toward us. I braced myself for whatever he was going to say and I was sure he would try to strong arm me into blaming Tray for the accident in some way.

"Sookie, where's my baby?" Copely about demanded.

"Copely, nice to see you again." Mom stepped between Cope and I, acting as the buffer I needed.

"Michelle. Have you seen my Amelia?"

"Sadly, no. They wouldn't let me in to see her since I'm not family. I hear that she's about as stable as can be expected, given her condition."

"I can't believe this is happening to her. I told her one of these days that good for nothing boyfriend of hers was going to ruin her life." Copely seethed.

"Don't be silly, Copely. Tray has never been anything but good for Amelia. The accident was no more his fault than it was hers."

"He was drunk, I know it. It was Halloween. They were at a bar. He was drunk."

"He wasn't drunk, Cope. Tray doesn't drink much and he certainly doesn't when he knows he's going to be driving. I was there, I know."

"*You* were drunk." He accused.

"Yes, I was, but I wasn't driving. My boyfriend would hardly have put me in the car with someone who was intoxicated. It was an accident, Cope. A horrible accident."

"No such thing. If you'll excuse me, I'm going to check on my baby." Copely stepped around us and began jabbing at the call button for the elevator.

"He's a real piece of work." Mom muttered as she pushed me to the entrance.

"You know, it's got be difficult to be him. He's got more money than he knows what to do with and not a penny of it is going to be useful in getting Amelia to wake up. There isn't a person he can bribe to fix her if God has decided it's not meant to be." I hated to think about the possibility that Amelia might not wake up but I knew I needed to deal with it. Pretending like it wasn't possible wasn't going to do me any favors. It's not that I was giving up, just preparing.

"Copely's always been one to think that throwing money at a problem will make it go away. Did you know that he payed off that kid Amelia was seeing before you moved away?" Mom revealed to me.

"You mean Bob?" I looked up at her.

"He paid him ten thousand dollars to cut all ties to Amelia."

"He didn't!" I knew deep in my heart that Copely wasn't above doing something like that.

"He did. Cope didn't see me but I was sitting at the table behind his at some restaurant in Bossier City when he made the offer. The worst part is that Bob jumped at it."

"That's awful. I never knew."

"I don't think Amelia did either so don't tell her I told you."

*Might not have a choice*, I hated myself for thinking like that. "My lips are sealed."

"Good girl." Mom bent and kissed the top of my head.

Eric pulled up a moment later. Mom fawned over the car, talking about how much Dad would love it. Dad wasn't a mechanic by trade but he'd restored a car or two in his time. It hadn't even occurred to me that he would love the Comet. Eric helped me out of the wheelchair while Mom got into the backseat. I was thankful the seat belt went over my lap only since I wasn't sure how I'd do with a regular seat belt.

We stopped at our favorite diner in Schiller Park for lunch before going back to Eric's house. By the time I got there I was in need of a nap. Eric tucked me into his bed and I snuggled as close to his pillow as I could so I could breathe in his scent. Being somewhere familiar and more comfortable made it much easier for me to relax. I dropped off into sleep while listening to Eric and my mother change the sheets in the guest room.

It took about three days after my Mom left for me to start feeling positively stir crazy. I wasn't one for lounging around. When Eric come home for lunch one day to check on me to find me sweeping the kitchen floor he only half jokingly threatened to handcuff me to his bed if he had to before leaving for work in the morning.

"Handcuffs, huh?" I smiled coyly at him. It had been a week since we'd had sex. I think that went a long way to putting us both on edge.

"I'll do it." Eric's eyes darkened with lust as he stepped toward me and took the broom from my hand.

"While that sounds like a lot of fun, I'm not sure that would be comfortable right now." I backed up against a counter. Having the house to ourselves again was pretty much a dream come true and I cursed whomever it was that had caused the accident for keeping us from taking full advantage of it.

"Then I'll just have to be more creative ways of keeping you in my bed." Eric bent and kissed my neck on just the right spot to make my knees shake a little.

Not one to give up so easily, I asked, "Is that the best you've got?" My traitor voice was shaky at best.

I found myself being lifted up onto the counter and Eric's lips crashed against mine. My legs wrapped around his waist to pull him closer to me. We spent the next fifteen minutes or so making out like teenagers and then he had to pull back. Stupid job.

"I have to get back, lover." His forehead pressed to mine.

"Tease." I giggled.

"I'm not finished with you, I assure you." He trailed kisses down my face and back to my neck, making me whimper.

"You don't play fair." I pushed him away.

He had a Cheshire Cat grin on his face. "Always leave them wanting more, right?"

I stuck my tongue out at him and unlocked my legs from his back. "You suck."

"Meet me in study hall." He winked at me.

My laptop! How could I have forgotten? A grin lit up my face. Eric laughed at the expression and then kissed me once more before helping me off the counter. I walked to the front door with him. He issued me one final warning to stop doing housework upon various penalties if I failed to obey him. His threats sent a delicious chill through me and I nearly retired to the shower to take care of my little problem. My body was pulsing with want for him but I would hold back. I'd attack him later when he got home. Not that we were into rough sex, per se, but we would just have to be more careful than usual. We'd waited long enough as far as I was concerned.

We had yet to really discuss my proposition about us living together. We didn't want to talk about it while Mom was in the house and there was enough going on with my transition home and the police calling to update us on their findings in their investigation into the accident. I didn't know what to think when it came to the possibility that it might have been Bill and Sophie-Anne. How the hell would the two of them even know one another? True, I didn't know a whole lot about Bill's personal life. If I did, I would have known he and his wife separated from one another.

It just seemed that I would have seen Bill coming or going from Red Menace's house given the amount of time I was spending at Eric's place. I'd never seen him. Of course that didn't mean they didn't know one another. It just seemed a bit far fetched for me. Even though both Bill and Sophie-Anne had proven they were more than crazy enough to do something like it, I just couldn't get on board with the idea that they were at fault. What good was I to Bill if I was dead? It was obvious to me the accident was meant to kill me. I wasn't meant to walk away from it the way I had.

I had just fired up my laptop to spend study hall with Eric when my cell rang. Quinn was calling. I debated not answering but I assumed he'd heard about the accident. I knew it had been on the news and I was actually a bit surprised he'd waited so long before calling to check in on me.

"Hello, Quinn." I said as brightly as I could. Sounding mopey or sad was the fastest way to have him tracking me down to try and cheer me up.

"Oh, thank God you're okay." He muttered with relief.

"I'm fine. Well, I'm not *fine*, but I'm fine." I looked at the background picture on my laptop. It was from Halloween. Amelia had taken a picture of Pam, Johan, Eric and me at the bar all together. It was a cute picture and it made me smile every time I looked at it.

"I stopped by your place yesterday but you weren't there. I was worried you were back in the hospital."

"I'm staying with Eric for a few weeks while I heal. I'm supposed to stay off my feet as much as possible and his house has less stairs than mine." I explained as I clicked to load the internet.

"Do you need anything, babe?" That was Quinn's way of saying he wanted to see me.

"Eric's taking very good care of me, Quinn, I promise. I've got Jeter here to keep me company during the day. He's a very good guard dog." Jeter's head lifted from the floor at the mention of his name.

As if on cue, the dog stood and came over to lay down next to men on the couch. He put his big head on my thigh and I scratched his head. Jeter really was pretty good company, even if he was back to licking my feet to wake me up. The first time it was cute. Now it was just getting to be an annoying habit of his.

"How's Amelia doing? I heard she got the worst of it." Quinn's voice was full of concern. He'd liked Amelia and Tray quite a bit.

"Tray's been released from the hospital and he's been banned by Cope from going to visit her. No matter what anyone tells him, he thinks it was Tray's fault that we got in the accident. There hasn't been any change to Amelia's condition. She's still in her coma and there's concern she might have suffered some brain damage because of the swelling. We won't know how severe it is until she wakes up- if she wakes up." I still wasn't sure how to process the possibility that I might lose my best friend.

I knew Cope would keep Amelia on life support indefinitely if he had to. He wasn't the sort to give up, especially when his millions might be the thing that saved his baby's life. Not that I was rooting for him to pull the plug, but I figured after a certain time it would seem obvious as to whether or not she was ever going to come out of it. I also knew Amelia didn't want to be on life support for an extended period of time. She'd put it in her will. I'd witnessed her signature.

The kicker was, while Cope had power of attorney over his daughter, she'd left everything she had to Tray, including the house. Copely had paid for that house but it was in his daughter's name. If Amelia died, the house and all of its contents would go to Tray Dawson. For Copely Carmichael, that was reason enough to keep his daughter alive. I wished I could understand Cope's vendetta against Tray. I couldn't think of a single reason for him to be so hateful when Tray had never done anything but treat Amelia well.

"Aw, babe, I'm sorry." Quinn apologized.

I shrugged, not sure what to say after that. "It is what it is. I'm hoping she recovers but I'm preparing myself for the opposite."

"You know there's no way Cope's going to let anything happen."

"Cope can't exactly control whether or not she survives." I reminded Quinn. "As much as Cope thinks he can, he can't."

"Do the cops have any leads on who hit you?"

"Not really. I didn't see anything useful before the accident. I'd had too much to drink that night and all I saw was headlights before we were hit. The security tapes from the hardware store didn't yield anything useful. Eric was walking into the bar when it happened. He *heard* the accident but he didn't see it. He did see a car peel away but was too far away to see what kind of car it was. All he knew was that it was a dark color. There weren't any witnesses. There isn't a whole lot for them to go on." I explained to Quinn.

He sighed and said, "What a weekend. Russell's assistant was in an accident this weekend, too."

That got my attention. "Lorena?"

Quinn didn't know anything about Bill and Sophie-Anne being tossed from the bar as far as I knew. He would have no reason to think Lorena was connected to my accident but I was all sorts of curious. Rather than clicking to get into my email I clicked on my Google browser and did a search on Russell Edgington. I clicked on a link that took me to his company's homepage. The company was out in Naperville. I searched my brain to try and remember where Bill lived. I ran through a mental list of every suburb I could think of. I knew he lived south, I just couldn't remember where.

"Yeah, she got banged up pretty bad. Her face is all swollen and bruised up. She's sprained her wrist and has a concussion, I think." It was alarming how similar her injuries were to my own but it wasn't evidence.

"Where'd the accident happen?"

"I'm not sure. From what Russell told me she was leaving a party and some drunk turned in front of her."

Bingo.

"What kind of car does she drive?"

"I don't know. Why?" Clearly Quinn wasn't putting the pieces together like I was. "All I know is that the front end of her car was wrecked pretty bad."

I couldn't wait for Eric to get home. I had to tell him what I'd learned from Quinn. "Look, Quinn, I have to get going. It's time for me to take my medications and I could use a nap before Eric gets home. Thank you for calling."

"No problem, Sookie. If you need anything, you call me." He insisted.

"Thanks Quinn. Bye." I said and hung up before he could find a way to keep me on the phone any longer.

I opened my email and clicked to start a new message.

**TO: Eric Northman**

**FROM: Sookie Stackhouse**

**SUBJECT: I think I know who hit us**

I just got a phone call from Quinn. He told me Lorena was in an accident over the weekend. The front end of her car was wrecked. I think it was her. I think she's the one who hit us. Thoughts?

**TO: Sookie Stackhouse**

**FROM: Eric Northman**

**SUBJECT: Bingo**

I think you're probably right. Did you call the police? If you didn't, stop emailing me right now and call them. Pass along whatever info you have. I'll see if I can find Bill and get any information about the condition Lorena's in.

And stay off your feet. I'm serious.

I couldn't help but smile at his mother hen warning and carefully moved to set my laptop on the coffee table before reaching for my cell phone to call the police. Our case had been passed from Officer Dearborn to Detective Twinings. I'd met him briefly the day after I was released from the hospital when he paid a visit to Eric's house to go over my statements. I knew he was hoping I would remember something new but so far, I had nothing new to report.

Detective Twinings wasn't at the station when I called, so I left a message for him to call me back when he got in. I emailed Eric to let him know I'd made the phone call and then told him I was going to take a nap. Jeter followed me to Eric's bedroom and laid down on the floor next to the bed. I snuggled Eric's pillow against me and breathed in his scent until I drifted off to sleep.

I woke to the most amazing smell filling the house. I yawned and stretched, quickly regretting my poorly planned move. My side screamed at me to knock it off, which I promptly did. I whimpered quietly for a few seconds before carefully getting out of bed to use the bathroom. I emerged to find Jeter waiting for me, ready to lead me out to the kitchen. Either he needed to go out or he just wanted to make sure I didn't whimper anymore. I scratched his head and then started toward the kitchen.

Eric was pacing back and forth while talking on *my* cell phone. I cleared my throat to let him know I was awake. He spun around quickly and smiled at me. He held up a finger to let me know he'd be off the phone in a second and I wondered who he was talking to. Jeter went to go lay down near the vent in the kitchen floor so he could feel the heat rush up at his face. There were vegetables waiting to be chopped on the counter and a pile of what appeared to be browned beef was draining on a plate. I licked my lips at the idea of homemade beef stew and immediately began to wonder if we had the ingredients to make dumplings.

"Yes, Detective. Sure thing. No, absolutely. Right. Well, you're in luck that Sookie just woke up. Yes, she's doing better, thank you. Yes. Yes. Will do. Sure, just a minute." Eric held out my phone to me as he crossed the room.

I tapped my lips with a finger before taking the phone from him. He kissed me gently and then went to get started on chopping vegetables while I talked to Detective Twinings. I told him what Quinn had told me. He asked a bunch of questions about Lorena, though I didn't have a whole lot of information to provide for him. I told him where she worked and what I knew of her marriage. Although, I didn't really know what to believe. For all I knew, Lorena was just as crazy as her husband. How was I supposed to know if she was telling Quinn the truth or not? That thought hadn't even occurred to me until just then.

I had no reason to think Quinn was lying to me. Lorena, on the other hand, was another story. If she was as nutty as a peanut buster parfait, then it would make perfect sense for her to lie about the reasons she and Bill split up. Maybe she was just looking for someone to blame for the break up of her marriage. I didn't know what the truth was but I sure as shit wasn't going to go ask Bill about it. I was about as involved with either him or his wife as I wanted to be. I didn't need to be in the eye of the storm any longer. How I'd even got sucked into it was beyond me.

I promised the Detective Twinings that I would report back any new information I was able to get and that I would stay as far away from Bill, Lorena and Sophie-Anne as humanly possible. Being that I was camping out at Eric's, at least for the time being, at least I could see when she was coming and going from her house and who might be stopping by for a visit. Although if she was buddying up to Bill and they were the one responsible for my accident, it would make sense they'd lay low for a bit. By the time I got off the phone with the detective my mind was swirling.

"You want some help with that?" I offered, staring at the pile of veggies that needing prepping.

"Nope. You stay right where you are. You're staying here so I can take care of you." Eric reminded me.

"I'm not an invalid. I can chop onions." I smirked at him.

"Yes, lover, and you are quite good at it, but tonight you just sit still and let me make you dinner. If you really feel the need to do something you could put some music on."

I glared at him but got no response. Jeter followed me to the living room where Eric's iPod was sitting on its dock. "What are you in the mood for?" I called back to him.

"You choose!"

I grumbled quietly. I'd found out relatively quickly that Eric's iPod nearly mirrored my own, only I had more indie bands listed than he did. I put on Dave Matthews Band and then went back to the kitchen to watch him cook. *It's lonely far from you oh, even when you're right by me it's only why I wait for you to take my hand...*I smiled at the words as they drifted in the space between us. I walked up behind Eric and hugged him, nuzzling my face against his back. Slowly we started swaying back and forth and my eyes closed.

"I don't want to go home." I whispered to him, my fingers scratching lightly at his stomach over the soft fabric of the v-neck black sweater he was wearing.

"Sookie, you are home." He answered.

It hit me then that I was. I was home. I couldn't stop smiling. I was home.

Thanks to Dave Matthews Band for the hit of inspiration toward the end of this chapter. "Angel" is one of my favorite DMB songs. If you haven't heard it, go check it out.

watch?v=Ei3tyzbS0aw

Thanks for reading!

**Chapter 24: Home Sweet Home**

Sorry it's taken me so long to get this chapter out. There were some big decisions to make in regards to the future of this story. On top of that I was attacked by a plot bunny for a promo fic for the Sins contest that just wouldn't leave me alone. \*sigh\* I've been busy. And as if I didn't already have enough on my plate, I've started reading the Black Dagger Brotherhood series. I imagine that is going to take up a chunk of my time. Anyway... it might be a few days before I get to post the next chapter so be patient with me.

Chapter Twenty Four: Home Sweet Home

**Eric**

"Did you really mean what you said earlier about me being home?" Sookie asked once we were snuggled up- as much as we could be given her condition- in bed later.

My arm tightened around her just a little, squeezing her to me as much as I dared. "I meant it, Sookie, but it's up to you. I hate the idea of you going back to your house. When you aren't here it just doesn't feel like home anymore."

There were details to be worked out since she owned her house. "I could start moving some stuff over in the next couple of weeks." Sookie suggested.

"Like hell you will." I shifted slightly and tipped her chin up so she was looking at me. "You need to take it easy, Sookie. If there's anything you want from your house, I'll get it."

"Eric, I can't just sit here all day long. I'm going crazy."

"Well, think of it as time to read all those books you've had piled up and never had the time for. Or you could finally watch all of the James Bond movies like you said you wanted to. I have them all in my collection. Hell, bake cookies if you want, but you can't be up on your feet all day and you definitely can't be moving boxes and suitcases from your house to mine. Leave that to me." I insisted.

"I think I can handle getting some of my clothes." Sookie argued. Stubborn to the end.

"Do I have to call your mother?" I threatened.

She gasped and punched me playfully. "Fine. You win."

"Thank you. It wouldn't be much fun for either of us if you weren't healed enough to make the trip to Louisiana. Your Mom would have both our heads." I reminded her.

She sighed and pressed herself against me. After a few minutes of quiet Sookie asked, "So we're really living together, then?"

"I'll make you a copy of the keys tomorrow." I kissed the top of her head.

She giggled and said, "I already have a copy." She did. She had Johan's copy.

"Okay, then I'll get you a shiny new keyring to put them on tomorrow. Brat."

"Can we go by my house and pick up some of my stuff? There's a few things I need-"

"Just tell me what you need and I'll make sure you get it."

Conversation drifted off after that. Sookie fell asleep next to me and I missed being able to curl up behind her. I laid there and stared up at the ceiling until I was sure she was in a deep sleep. When I was sure she was out, I slipped out of bed. My eyes, for whatever reason, wouldn't seem to stay closed. My brain just wouldn't turn off and that made sleeping impossible. I went out to the living room to find Jeter sleeping on the couch. If he heard me approaching he didn't lift his head.

I went to the big window in the living room and smiled when I saw that it was snowing. It was only the first week of November. I wondered if the snow would still be there in the morning, though I doubted it would be. I started thinking about Johan's invitation- it was more like insistence- to come visit him in Sweden the following spring. He'd planted a lot of ideas in my head. Actually, it was more like he'd shaken loose ideas that were already there but I was afraid to put too much thought into.

If Sookie were anyone else, I wouldn't be so worried about fucking things up. Meeting her had been a surprise. Liking her had been unexpected. Falling in love with her was new territory for me. The idea that I never wanted to leave her? That was equal parts miraculous and terrifying. It isn't so much that I didn't want to get married and have a family of my own, so much as I didn't think I'd find someone that intrigued and excited me enough to keep her around for that long.

But then Sookie came along and all of that went right out the window. I wanted it all with her and I wanted it *now*. I didn't want to wait around for something I knew was right just because it seemed crazy to rush into things. I wouldn't pressure her for something she wasn't ready for but something told me that she was feeling the same way. She had been the one to suggest we live together. Obviously she wanted to get married someday since she'd been waiting for that ape of an ex-boyfriend to put a ring on her finger. Unless he'd soured her on marriage.

I had just gone into the kitchen to get a glass of milk when Sookie's phone started to chirp on the counter next to mine. Being that it was almost midnight, I was curious as to who would be calling so late. I hoped to see Detective Twining's number flashing, but instead it was Copely Carmichael. My breath caught in my throat. I flipped the phone open and pressed it to my ear.

"Hello?" I tried to keep my voice down, even though a surge of adrenaline had rushed through me in preparation for bad news.

"This Sookie's boyfriend?" A haggard sounding man asked me.

"Eric, yes."

"Right. Could you put Sookie on the phone?"

Fuck. "Sure, give me a minute. She's sleeping."

"Well wake her up. This is important." Who the fuck was this guy? I wanted to punch him through the phone. If he was going to make me wake up my girlfriend so he could give her bad news, I might just punch him anyway.

"How's Amelia?" I figured it didn't hurt to ask.

"Just get Sookie." Copely's voice cracked. Fuck. Fuck. Fuck.

I pushed the mute button on Sookie's phone so Copely wouldn't hear what I said. I sank down onto the bed beside Sookie and shook her gently. "Lover, wake up. Copely's on the phone."

Her eyes snapped open at the mention of Cope's name. I told her I'd put the phone on mute. She pushed herself up slowly and took the phone from me. I grabbed her hand and squeezed, hoping to see an expression of relief cross her face. Sookie surprised me when she put the phone on speaker and then let Copely know she was there.

Copely wasn't in the mood for mincing words, apparently, because he came right out with his news. "I'm taking Amelia back to Louisiana. I'm not convinced she's getting the best care here and there are specialists in New Orleans that I trust to make my baby well. She's going to be airlifted first thing in the morning. I wanted to let you know in case you wanted to say goodbye."

Sookie's mouth dropped open and she stared at me in complete shock. "Cope, are you sure about this?"

"Quite. I'm her father, Sookie. I'm acting in her best interests. Not only will she be in better hands but she'll finally be away from that ruffian boyfriend of hers once and for all. Her flight leaves at eight. Be here before seven thirty if you want to visit. Goodnight." Copely didn't leave much room for conversation since he hung up right after that.

Sookie stared at her phone for a second before looking at me. "This is a dream, right?"

I shook my head and she finally pushed the end button on the call. "I'm sorry, Sookie."

"Amelia is going to be *furious* with him when she wakes up." Sookie's voice railed with anger. "I have to call Tray."

I nodded and squeezed her hand again to lend my support while she made that difficult phone call. Tray took the news even worse than Sookie. He was staying alone in Amelia's house and would continue to do so. He yelled a lot and cursed Copely more than once, not that I could blame him. Sookie talked him out of going to the hospital when he threatened to go there and give Copely the beating of a lifetime. While I certainly understood the impulse, getting himself arrested would do him no good.

I took the phone from Sookie's hands and set it down on the table next to the bed. She wiped tears from her cheeks and leaned against me. I didn't know much about Copely Carmichael outside of the fact that he was a rich man who believed there was no problem that couldn't be solved with enough money thrown at it. He didn't see Amelia as his daughter so much as another piece of his property. She was a living, breathing representative of him, meant only to further his reputation. Amelia handled her father's horrifying ideals with grace and dignity. As Sookie told me, Amelia 'performed' well. She tolerated her father's antics only because he was her father.

The most I could make of it was that no one really liked Copely Carmichael, they were simply too afraid of him to tell him to fuck off. Along with money comes power and no one wanted to test just how powerful a man Copely Carmichael really was. Sookie sniffled and sobbed against me. She was upset to be losing her friend but she was also sorry for Tray. I tried to put myself in Tray's position and figure out what I would do if Michelle had come here with the intention of taking Sookie back to Louisiana. I would have fought for her, that's for sure. But I suppose that's the big difference between a family like Sookie's and a family like Amelia's. Michelle wouldn't show such blatant disregard for her daughter's wishes, whereas it seemed the only person Copely genuinely gave a rat's ass about was Copely.

Eventually, Sookie was able to calm herself down. I knew she was still thinking about the things she'd learned in the last twenty-four hours and it was obvious her brain was far too alert for her to relax and get to sleep. It was nearing one in the morning and if we were going to make it to the hospital before Amelia's flight, Sookie would need to get a few hours of sleep at least. I was sitting up against the headboard with Sookie leaning against me. When she tilted her chin up to say something, I made my move.

All I wanted was to distract her enough that she could get some sleep. My lips caught hers and at first, she pulled back. She looked at me with frustration in her eyes. Her lips parted in preparation to let loose whatever words were on the tip of her tongue but I kissed her again instead. The kiss was more insistent and hungry. Sookie fought it for a second but then she gave in. She shifted her body carefully until she was straddling my lap and twisting my hair around her fingers. Our heads slanted from side to side, both of us wanting to dominate the kiss. Our tongues tangled and battled one another until my hands slipped from her face to find new purchase under her shirt. I couldn't wait for that pressure bandage to be a thing of the past. It severely obstructed and restrained my favorite part of her body.

The ripping sound of the velcro being separated wasn't exactly sexy but it was necessary in order to gain access to her breasts. When she whimpered I pulled back to make sure she wasn't in any sort of pain. She gave me one of those shy smiles where she bit her bottom lip. Green light. I dove forward and attacked her breasts with the same zeal I had her mouth and she held my head to her chest. Whatever had been on her mind had been chased away. Having accomplished my mission quickly, the rest would just be a bonus for us both.

While I busied myself at her breasts she untied the drawstrings of her pants. It became evident to me that while I had been in the one to initiate what was happening, she was the one running the show. She climbed off my lap, taking her breasts with her, and slid out of her pants. They found a new home on the floor along with her shirt and bandage. She lay back on the bed and pulled me down on top of her. Our lips met again and her fingers were back in my hair for a short time before trailing down my back to push my pants down.

I started to trail kisses down her neck, planning only to stop when I reached her center but Sookie had other plans. In a breathy voice she said, "Be sweet later. Fuck me now."

Never one to argue with a woman who knows what she wants, I was more than happy to oblige. I divested her of her panties to find that she was ready- more than ready. My pants joined hers on the floor and I slid into that familiar spot between her warm legs. Her hands held my hips and she looked down to watch me enter her while I watched the way her face changed. Her eyes rolled back just a little bit when I was buried inside her and I knew all too well what she was feeling. There was that delicious combination of tension and relief that I felt only when I was with her. That odd mix of feeling like I was home but not quite close enough to her.

She moaned against my skin, urging me to move with a thrust of her hips. I was careful not to put too much weight on her. Her legs hitched up higher, allowing me to go deeper inside her. She cried out and scratched at my shoulders. Her hips jerked to meet mine while moan after moan tumbled out of her mouth along with my name. My forehead pressed to hers for a moment before I buried my face in the crook of her neck. Her hands went back to my hair and moved my face up to hers to kiss me. Her walls began to squeeze me, trying to keep me deep inside her as her orgasm tore through her.

She was still shaking and gasping for air when I came a few seconds after her. I had to remind myself not to fall on her the way I normally would. Instead, I remained hovering above her, enjoying the quakes of her aftershocks. I watched the heave of her chest as she fought to regain her breath. She groaned when I pulled out of her and fell to the side. She snuggled against me as best she could without rolling onto her side like she normally would have.

It was a while before either of us spoke but it was Sookie who broke the silence. "I'm still worried about Amelia."

My hand found hers and squeezed. "I know. I just wanted you to have something else to think about for a little while."

"It worked." Sookie giggled and rose our hands so she could kiss the back of mine. "Thank you."

"I think we both needed that." I turned onto my side and pulled the blanket up over us.

"Yes, I definitely missed that." Sookie pulled my arm down over her stomach.

A comfortable silence settled between us and I turned off the light on the bedside table. "You know the bright side is that we'll be in Louisiana in a few weeks. You'll be able to look in on Amelia and see how's she's doing. Hopefully she'll be awake by then."

Sookie nodded but pulled in a ragged breath. "I'm trying to be optimistic. I don't want to give up hope that she's going to be okay..."

"But you're not so sure anymore?"

"I don't know what to think but I know that taking her away from Tray isn't going to make it any easier for her to come out of this. The doctors and nurses all say that she can hear everything and if she stops hearing tray, I'm worried she's not going to feel like she has much of a reason to wake up." I hated the sadness in her voice and the way her hand was shaking in mine.

"Oh, I think she'll wake up just to tell Cope to shove it." I moved over and kissed the side of her head.

Sookie giggled and said, "I hope you're right."

Her fingers trailed up and down my arm, both waking and soothing the nerve endings as she did so. It was a relaxing gesture that had me asleep in a matter of minutes.

Amelia's departure was a tearful one that did almost as much damage to Sookie as it did to Tray. Since Tray was still recovering from his injuries and the surgery he'd undergone, Sookie was worried about him being alone all the time. As nice of a guy as Tray was, he didn't have many friends. Sookie hadn't been joking when she said Amelia was his whole world. It was obvious he was sinking into a pretty deep depression. Even with Amelia being in a coma, at least there was the comfort of having her nearby. Now that she was gone, he didn't know what to do with himself.

We had him over for dinner every couple of days and on the weekends, Sookie would go over to spend some time with him while I did a lot of the packing for her move into my house. She had yet to decide what to do with her place. She was thinking about renting it out since she didn't want to sell it. With the economy being the way it was it seemed like renting the property would be a better fix than attempting to sell. I could tell that Sookie felt a little bit of survivor's guilt for how quickly- and easily- she was recovering from the accident. Her attempts at cheering up Tray were admirable, though I'm not sure how much good they did.

She fretted over leaving him alone for Thanksgiving but he had insisted she go back to Louisiana and had tasked me with making sure she got on the plane. "I need someone to go look in on my girl, Sookie, and we both know there's no way I could ever set foot in Amelia's room. I need you to be my eyes and ears." Tray had told her three days before we were supposed to leave.

"I don't want you to be alone." Sookie pouted at him.

"I won't be, Sook, I promise. I got an invite to have dinner with a friend from work. He's married and has a couple of kids. I promise I won't be spending the holiday alone." Tray gave his word and Sookie seemed to lighten up a bit after that.

"You call me if you need anything, Tray." Sookie fixed her gaze on him and jabbed him in the chest to make sure he got the point. Although what Sookie thought she would be able to do from Louisiana is beyond me.

"I wouldn't call anyone else." Tray gave her what was probably meant to be a reassuring smile but it just came out sad.

I stood back while the two of them hugged. Tray and I shook hands before Sookie and I headed back to her place to finish up her packing for our trip. We were leaving late Wednesday night and flying back on Saturday. We were looking at a four hour flight and barring any complications from the weather, we would be home by dinnertime on Saturday. We had to make a stop at the bar before we could go back to my place, *our* place, for the night.

Pam was staying in town for the holiday and planned to have the bar open for some Black Friday preparty at the bar. I could only imagine the sorry lot that would be turning up at a bar on a holiday designated for family and friends. I didn't even want to know what she was going to do as far as staff was concerned. I'd tried to convince her to close for the night but Pam didn't really have anywhere else to be. Normally she'd fly home with me and spend a few days in California soaking up the sun and the shopping. She got along exceptionally well with my father, of all people.

It was snowing when we pulled into the parking lot at the bar. Sookie stood outside the car and looked at the spot on Grand Avenue where the accident had happened. Her doctor had cleared her to only wear the pressure bandage when she needed it. Her stitches had been removed and she bruises were almost all gone. She would have a few small scars here and there from the broken glass that had cut her but other than that, she was good as new.

"I was supposed to be the one trapped in a coma." Sookie said it so quietly I wasn't sure I heard her right. "Lorena hit that car because of me."

I gathered her against me and looked at the same spot she couldn't take her eye off of. "Lorena caused that accident because she's crazy. She was living under the assumption her husband left her for you. If you ask me, Bill's every bit as much to blame for what happened as you are. What happened that night wasn't your fault. You can't blame yourself for it."

Sookie sighed and rested her head against my chest. "It would be so much easier to believe that if Amelia would wake up."

I kissed the top of her head and turned us toward the bar. "She will, Sookie, and when she does, she's going to tell you it's not your fault."

Her arm snaked around my waist and squeezed. "I hope you're right."

**Hope that was worth waiting for \*wrings hands\* I hope to be back with a new chapter in a few days. Thanks for reading!**

**Chapter 25: The Word AKA It's ALL Kacy's Fault!**

I'm *so sorry*for the heinous delay in posting. I got a wee bit sidetracked with the AH Vampire series I've been working on. So I've been writing, I just haven't been writing this. But I swear it's been there in my brain. I'm also trying to get another chapter of Always For You ready to go soon. I'm about half way there, so it shouldn't be too long. Hopefully you're still interested in it \*paces nervously\*

Oh, and for those of you not in the know, there's a kick ass series called the Black Dagger Brotherhood by J.R. Ward that the lovely ladies on twitter have gotten me hooked on. Seriously...it's addictive. So I've been reading and tweeting my little black heart out, gushing over the fuckawesomeness that is Rhage and/or Zsadist **Lubadub** can totes back me up on this. We almost had to cuddle when I was half way through Z's book. Broke my little black heart, it did. **A\_Redhead\_Thing** is trying to get me on Team Butch, but I don't know if I can do it or not. We'll see.

Okay, well, enough rambling. On with the good stuff.

Chapter Twenty-Five: The Word

Our flight to Louisiana was delayed thanks to some nasty weather in Chicago. I called my parents to tell them not to meet us at the airport like we'd planned. By the time we were set to land in Shreveport it would be close to the pre-dawn hours and I didn't want to inconvenience them. Eric and I slept through most of the flight. The wiggle of his eyebrows when we boarded the plane told me he had a very specific idea about how we could pass some of the time. I'd rolled my eyes at him and told him to get some sleep so he would be able to drive us to my parents' house.

"Where's your sense of adventure?" Eric had taunted.

"You've never experienced a Stackhouse holiday, mister. We're about to have all the adventure we can handle, trust me." I leaned over the arm rest that was between us and kissed his cheek.

"Is that so?"

"You'll see." That was all I'd say on the subject.

I'd told him what to expect where my brother and father were concerned. I knew the opinions of my family members mattered to him as much as what his family thought mattered to me. He wanted to be in their good graces and I couldn't blame him one bit for it. Not that I would give him up just because someone decided they didn't like him, but it was still nice to know you had the blessings of those around you.

My Daddy liked Eric already. He'd pulled me from a burning car. Eric never yelled at me, made me feel bad about myself or gave anyone any reason to think he made me unhappy in any capacity. And if Mom gushed about Eric as much as I thought she did, I was sure Daddy was probably sick of hearing it by now. But I knew he was anxious to meet Eric.

"You gonna marry this one, Sookie?" Daddy asked when I'd told him Eric was coming home with me for Thanksgiving.

"I don't know, Daddy. We haven't talked about that yet." It was the truth. We hadn't talked about marriage. It was too soon. Not that I hadn't given it some thought, I just hadn't brought it up.

Eric ended up falling asleep next to me on the plane, his large hand covering mine while I read the most recent issue of Cosmo. I guess someone was telling me something because I ended up reading an article about ways to keep your sex life fresh. I didn't think Eric and I had any trouble in that capacity. Getting us out of bed was harder than getting us into it. Hell, as of late we didn't really need a bed. Anywhere in his house we felt frisky, we didn't have to worry about being interrupted or caught. We just did what felt natural, and that resulted in a lot of sex up against a wall or on the couch. I'm not complaining one bit, either.

But then I got an idea. I shrugged my shoulder gently, just enough to jostle him a little. I kissed his forehead until he woke up. His eyes opened and his face turned up toward mine. "Something wrong?" He rubbed sleep from his eyes with his free hand.

"I'm going to the bathroom." I winked at him, hoping he'd get the hint. He looked confused for a second before he caught my drift. "If I'm not back in three minutes, be sure to send a search party."

Before he could say anything else, I climbed over him and headed for the bathroom. I felt his eyes on me the whole way. Most people were asleep, or at least had headphones on and weren't paying much attention to the blond with a slight case of bedhead who was walking toward the back of the plane. I bit my lip nervously, my face flushing with excitement. I'd never done anything like this before and I wondered what it was about Eric that brought this adventurous, naughty side out of me.

I decided it was because I loved him and trusted him so much that I was willing to try new things. I was willing to take chances I would never have taken otherwise because I knew there was nothing I could do that would make him stop loving me. I locked myself in the bathroom and waited for Eric to arrive. I splashed some water on my face and washed my hands just to give myself something to do while I waited. For a few seconds I wondered how this was going to work. It was an awfully tiny space and I wasn't sure the two of us were going to fit.

*Oh, I'm sure Eric will figure something out*, I thought to myself as I tried to figure out how this was going to work. After the allotted time there was a knock on the door. My heart jumped in my chest and I let out a squeak of surprise. I covered my mouth with one hand while unlocking the door with the other. Eric's head came in a second later and my heart returned to its normal rhythm for a few seconds. He managed to squeeze himself into the room with me.

The fact that I was wearing pants didn't really make things much easier. Not that I was plotting a second Mile High Club meeting, but *if* that should ever be something I would want to try again, I would make sure I was wearing a skirt when I flew. Just sayin'. Sex with Eric had never been clumsy or uncoordinated but then we hadn't been confined to a space smaller than a coat closet. I tried not to think about it too much but Eric seemed to know how to combat the problems we were facing, and before I knew it, I was biting his shoulder to stifle the scream that had welled in my throat.

My orgasm left me dazed and shaky and we kissed until we'd come down from our little high. Eric put my pants back where they belonged and then kissed my forehead before I slipped out of the bathroom to head back to our seats. I got myself settled under a blanket and waited for him to sit down beside me. When he did, I curled into his side and rested my head on his shoulder. Our fingers laced together and soon after, we were both sound asleep.

While Eric was always recharged after a nap, I was usually left feeling groggy and disoriented. Sleeping on the plane was no different. Eric and I walked into the terminal with me leaning heavily against him. It was a good thing he was so alert and ready to go because there was no way I'd be able to drive us back to Bon Temps. I said a quick prayer of thanks for the invention of the GPS and yawned as we stepped away from the gate.

"Uh, Sookie, I think we have company." Eric shook me gently.

"What?" I looked up at him. He pointed off to the left just a little. My eyes followed his finger and when I saw who he was pointing to, I lit up from the inside out. "Daddy?"

Without a second thought I let go of Eric and ran toward my father. When I jumped on him he caught me easily, his arms closing around me in the meanest bear hug I'd gotten since I graduated from college. My father was the very definition of a teddy bear. He'd put on a little weight since the summer and he'd let his beard grow in for the winter months since he worked outdoors. His grayish-blue eyes sparkled when I pulled back to look at him and kiss him on the cheek.

I giggled at the sensation left on my lips thanks to his beard and then asked, "What are you doing here? I told you not to drag yourself out so late."

Daddy put me down and said, "Your Mama- God knows I love her- has been running around like a fool for the last week getting the house just right and making all sorts of plans and preparations for this holiday. You'd think one of those Food Network chefs was coming for dinner." I couldn't help but laugh at that. Mom was nothing if not a fan of that particular channel. "And on top of that, your Gran snores worse than Pop ever did so it's not like I'd be getting much sleep anyway. Besides, I wanted a chance to meet your fella without your Mama around to swat at me for giving him the once over."

"Oh, now Daddy you be nice. He did save my life, after all." I turned to smile at Eric and was relieved when he was standing right behind me.

"So I heard." Daddy's eyes were focused on Eric. "I owe you a great big thank you, son."

"You're welcome, sir, but I must admit I did it for selfish reasons." Eric wrapped an arm around me and I snuggled against him.

"Daddy, this is Eric. Eric, this is my father, Corbett Stackhouse." I gestured between the two most important men in my life. They shook hands easily and I couldn't help but breathe a sigh of relieve at how easily it seemed Daddy was taking to Eric.

He hadn't been so keen on Quinn but I got the impression it was because he thought I deserved much better. After a time he told me he wasn't crazy about the idea that it seemed like Quinn never put me first. He didn't like the idea that to Quinn, there would always be something more important than me. I wasn't too crazy about that either but I'd come to Quinn's defense, explaining that he was just preoccupied with getting his business off the ground. Daddy never bought it and he kept a close eye on Quinn as a result. He'd had a hard time accepting my decision to move to Illinois so Quinn and I could be together more often.

Maybe my reasons for going were all wrong but if it weren't for Quinn, I never would have done it. If I never would have moved, I wouldn't have met Eric. Something good had definitely come from a less than idea situation so I couldn't be bitter. Eric was my reward for the heartbreak I'd suffered. I considered that to be a pretty good consolation prize.

"It's good to meet you, son." Daddy said while they were still shaking hands. "I've never seen my baby smile like that." He nodded to me and I blushed a bit before burying my face in Eric's side.

The two of them laughed at me like they were old friends and then we headed off to claim our luggage. I sat in the back so Daddy and Eric could get to know one another better. I listened to the easy flow of their conversation and before long, we were pulling up to the old farmhouse. The lights were out everywhere but the kitchen. The clock on the dashboard told me it was nearly four. I sighed at the very real possibility Mom was already up putting together dough for biscuits or a pie crust. I really hoped it was just Gran getting a glass of milk.

The three of us walked up the back steps with Daddy leading the charge. The kitchen was empty when we walked in. The three of us left our shoes on the mat near the back door. Daddy took our coats and went to hang them while Eric looked around the kitchen. The place was probably in need of a dozen upgrades but I liked the fact that it felt like I was stepping into another era. Daddy had replaced the flooring himself a few summers before. With Jason's help he'd refinished the cabinets along with the kitchen table and chairs.

The stove and refrigerator were the epitome of retro, and despite their age, were bright white. There were new curtains hanging in the window, no doubt Gran had sewn them himself. In addition to her many culinary talents, Gran was a whiz with a needle and thread. I'd always admired her eye for sewing. She was able to follow the most intricate patterns, whereas I got too frustrated to really put a whole lot of effort into it. Gran found it relaxing where I found it to be tedious. Maybe I'd feel differently in fifty years when sex wasn't such an appealing option to me anymore.

Although if Eric was still around at that point, I was pretty sure sewing would continue to be the furthest thing from my mind. Daddy excused himself to get a few hours of sleep before Mom forced him out of bed to rearrange furniture to make room for the card table in the living room. I showed Eric upstairs to my room, surprised no comments were made about separate sleeping quarters. Even though I tried to take my own bag up, Eric wouldn't let me have it.

"So this is your room?" Eric asked once we were in it.

"Yep. Try not to be jealous of all my academic achievements." I snickered as I looked at my small 'wall of honor' where all of my ribbons, trophies and certificates were located.

Eric set down the bags and went over to inspect the items on the wall. "Fourth grade spelling bee winner?" He smirked over his shoulder at me.

"Hey, I was the only one my class that could spell pneumatic." I said in my own defense as I slid up behind him and wrapped my arms around his waist.

"Yes, but can you use it in a sentence?" He turned without me ever unlocking my arms.

"The clouds drifted on pneumatic currents." I said easily.

"Smart ass." He bent and kissed me.

"I'll take that as a compliment." I whispered against his lips before biting the lower one.

He growled and pulled me into a deeper kiss. The grind of his hips against mine brought me back to reality and I pulled back. "What's wrong?"

"We're in my parents' house." I felt that same old blush creeping up to redden my face.

"We can be quiet." He whispered in my ear, his breath warm on my skin.

"Not very easily. Besides, we just had sex on the plane."

"Since when is once ever enough for us?" Eric pulled me closer to him.

"That, my dear, is so *not* the point. My parents, no to mention my *Gran* is right downstairs, so nothing below the waist, mister." I poked him in the chest.

My silly- and slightly sleep deprived brain- failed to realize he took that as a challenge. But being that Eric could not only be patient, but a gentleman, he backed off. He could also be quite manipulative when he wanted to, and that thought that crept in a moment too late. I went to work unpacking our things while Eric continued his tour of my past. He commented on various pictures hanging on the wall and even plucked the picture of me and Amelia all dressed up for senior prom. I hadn't thought about that in a long time.

"You looked beautiful, lover." Eric smiled up at me from the picture.

"Thank you. That dress was murder. All the tulle in the skirt was itchy as sin. I couldn't wait to take it off." I told him with a giggle when I thought of how quickly I'd whipped it off as soon as I got home.

"I would have had fun removing it for you." He leered at me and I rolled my eyes.

"I bet you would. Maybe if you behave yourself I'll model it for you before we fly back home. I still have it in my closet." I wasn't above using my own brand of manipulation to get him to fall in line.

"You don't play fair."

"And still you keep coming back for more. Wonder why that is?"

"I think it's a delicate balance of being a glutton for punishment and ridiculously in love with you." Eric put the picture back where he found it.

"Good answer, Mr. Northman." I said as I pulled my nightgown from my bag.

"I thought so." Eric smiled at me and watched while I got undressed and put my nightgown on.

I wanted to go downstairs to the bathroom to brush my teeth but I was too tired and the last thing I needed was for Gran to wake up. She'd always been an early riser and if she got a hold of me, I'd never get to sleep. I turned down the bed while Eric pulled off his own clothes. He pulled on a pair of flannel pajama pants and got into bed next to me. I snuggled into his side as I did most nights, assuming he wasn't spooned up behind me. The feeling of his arm draped over me in any capacity made it easier for me to drift off.

As per usual, Eric's long fingers traced patterns on my shoulders while I did the same on the tight muscles of his stomach. Before long, we were both breathing deep and even. It was officially lights out for the two of us. What woke me was the sound of my idiot brother and his wife arguing in the entryway downstairs. My eyes opened reluctantly and I rolled over to see that it was almost noon.

"Eric, wake up." I rubbed his shoulder gently.

"Five more minutes." He mumbled and reached out to pull me back to him.

"Eric, we don't have-"

"Five minutes. That's all. I just want five more minutes with you." He purred in my ear before trapping me underneath him. The tent in his pajama pants told me he wanted more than five minutes.

"Eric, come on, we have to get up." I tried to get out from under him but all that did was create more friction between us. He snuggled against me, pinning me under him.

I was just about to make a threat that would have launched him right out of bed if Jason wouldn't have just walked right into the bedroom. "Morning, Soo- whoa, sorry."

"It's fine, Jason. Eric was just getting up." I smiled over Eric's shoulder at my brother, hoping my blush could just be confused for being overheated by too many blankets. Eric rolled off of me and onto his back.

"Looks to me like someone might already be up." Jason grinned and any shot I had at an acceptable level of flushed was gone.

"Jason!" Leave it to my brother to call attention to something like that.

Completely unabashed, Jason continued, "Mom and Gran are about to start on the stuffing if you want to go down there and referee."

"Oh, hell." I muttered to myself.

"What's the big deal about stuffing?" Eric asked innocently, causing both Jason and I to stop moving altogether. "What? What'd I say?"

Jason and I shared a look and then busted out laughing. "Mom and Gran get along pretty well when it comes to most things, but they've never seen eye to eye on stuffing." Jason explained.

"Gran thinks there should be nuts and apples while Mom prefers sausage and sage." I chimed in.

"So why not have both?" Eric suggested with an arched eyebrow.

"Oh, we do." Jason laughed.

"So then what's the problem?" Eric looked confused. I couldn't blame him.

"Every year they make us vote on which one is better." Jason crossed his arms as he leaned in the doorway.

"And every year there's a tie." I sighed.

"Except this year there's gonna be an odd number." Jason grinned, making me groan.

"Shit." I muttered.

"Yep. So come on, get dressed and come partake in the Family Guy marathon I'm starting in the living room before the game gets going." Jason waved us out of bed.

"I love that show!" Eric jumped out of bed like there wasn't a nearly naked woman sitting next to him.

"If you have testosterone, it should be made illegal not to." Jason said in a completely serious tone.

"Man, you would *love* my brother. His impression of Mr. Herbert is scary good." Eric chuckled.

I sat there and watched as my usually fairly straight-laced boyfriend regressed into a frat boy, and started trading quotes with my brother. I shook my head in amazement, though I was happy to see the two of them getting along so well.

"Who wears short shorts? *I wear short shorts*!" Eric shouted gruffly, making Jason double over in laughter.

"Giggity, giggity...alriiiiight." Jason answered with the weirdest chuckle.

"Yes I could go for a frozen treat right about now. But no sprinkles. And for every sprinkle I find, I shall kill you." I threw in for good measure, earning me a look from both my brother *and my boyfriend* that told me I didn't belong in their little He-Man Woman Hater's Club. I rolled my eyes and listened as Eric started with another quote.

"Hi, I'm Peter Griffin. You know there's an issue facing many Americans today that I know concerns a great number of us. According to *Gallop* Polls: 1 in 12 American's is unaware that the Bird is the Word. I for one, dream of an America where everybody knows that the Bird is the Word." Every single muscle in my body tensed up at what was about to come. Eric grinned over at me, knowing *exactly* what he was doing. I was *so* going to get him for this later.

In perfect unison, Eric and Jason starting singing that damn Surfin' Bird song that had me nearly homicidal for a portion of Johan's visit. That stupid song was stuck in my head for days and I found myself humming it when I was walking the halls at school. It was a fucking nightmare.

"Oh my God shut up!" I shouted at the two of them. They stopped for a moment before Jason turned to me with this ridiculous grin on his face.

"But, Sook, haven't you heard?"

"The bird's the word." Eric finished for him.

I groaned and covered my head with a pillow as the two of them went back to singing. It was going to be a long day.

Okay so I originally planned to do all of Thanksgiving in one chapter but I wanted to get Eric's POV in as well, since he would certainly have a reaction to meeting Sookie's family. So it looks like I'm going to have to extend Thanksgiving into two chapters. You can all thank **kjwrit** for the Surfin' Bird stuff. She totes tried to pin it on me in her latest chapter of Expectations, but of all the songs in the world to pick for me to sing to her, SHE chose Surfin' Bird. So HA!

And just a reminder there's still time to get your entries in for the **7 Deadly Sins Contest**. I know lots of you have been busy with the "Age of Eric" contest or maybe even the "Kiss the Cook" (which my brain has decided I'm going to enter) contest, but the Sins contest is in need of entries. Entries are due on *August 15th, 2010 before 11:59 p.m.* If we need to extend the deadline due to these other amazeballs contests, please send a PM to the contest profile page (you can get a link to it if you look at the list of my favorite authors on my profile) we'll adjust accordingly. Just let us know what you need \*winks\*

Thanks for reading baby birds! \*snort\* Uh oh. Oh shit. You see what you're making me do, Kacy? \*sings\* *Don't you know about the bird? Well everybody's heard about the bird! Bird bird bird, the bird is the word! Bird bird bird, the bird is the word!*

**Chapter 26: Swing Vote**

Thank you for your reviews last chapter! I'm happy to see you haven't lost interest, or forgotten about this story. Thank you for being patient with me. I've just been crazy busy lately and the muses aren't able to focus on one project for too long before shifting their attentions elsewhere. It's exhausting being in my head, believe me.

Hopefully y'all didn't have Surfin' Bird stuck in your head for too long after reading the last chapter. If you did, I apologize. But really, you should blame **kjwrit** \*sticks out tongue at Kacy\*

Chapter Twenty-Six: Swing Vote

Sookie's brother was a man child. It was obvious to me that if he and Johan ever got together, it would be like corralling a couple of twelve-year-olds. It was almost like having my own brother back for a bit. We formed a quick alliance with one another and fell into a marathon of animated hilarity. I'd staunchly objected to Family Guy when Johan first introduced me to it, but it was just too funny not to fall head over heels in love with. And don't let Sookie fool you- she laughs at the show just as much as anyone else who watches it.

We were three episodes in when Jason's wife, Crystal, ran through the living room with her hand covering her mouth. Jason groaned and then got up to follow her to the bathroom. He got there a minute too late and the door was already slammed and locked. He returned to the couch with a sour expression on his face.

"Is Crystal sick?" I asked when I noted the pained expression on his face.

"Porch." Was all Jason said and then headed for the front door.

I paused the DVD and followed him outside. It was chilly out but not nearly as rough as it probably was back in Chicago. Jason leaned against the railing on the porch and craned his head around me to make sure no one was following us outside. Whatever he was about to say was clearly something big and it surprised me he was trusting me with this information.

"You gotta swear you won't tell Sookie about this. I mean, Crystal and I are planning on telling everyone at dinner, but it's sort of a surprise kind of thing." Jason said and from the way his face had turned a bit green, I had an idea of what he was going to say.

"You have my word." I nodded.

Jason exhaled slowly and then said, "Crystal's pregnant. I mean, well, she was pregnant when I married her but we never told anyone that. She lost the baby and we never told anyone that either. But we just found out last week she's pregnant again. She's scared out of her mind she's gonna lose this baby, too, and I guess so am I. She took the miscarriage really hard, like it was something she did. She did everything perfect. I tried to tell her it wasn't her fault but the more I told her that, the more angry with me she got and the more she just wanted to get pregnant again. I'm worried she's putting too much pressure on herself to have a baby."

Huh. Deep thoughts from someone Sookie had claimed to have the emotional maturity of a lemon. "I can see that."

"You don't have kids, do you?" Jason arched an eyebrow at me.

"Uh, no. No kids, never been married."

He nodded and said, "You thinking about marrying my sister?"

Way to put me on the spot, Jason. "We haven't really gotten that far."

"Come on, man, you know what I'm talking about. Just because you haven't discussed it between the two of you doesn't mean you haven't thought about it. Something tells me you do. You wouldn't have pulled her out of a burning car if you hadn't." Again with the astute observations. Did Sookie really know her brother?

"You swear you won't tell Sookie?" I looked at him pointedly.

"Cross my heart." Jason motioned over his chest.

"Yeah, I've thought about it. I've been thinking about it a lot since the accident. Crazy how it takes something so extreme to make a person realize how much they love someone else."

"Man, Crystal and I fight like cats and dogs sometimes, but I don't know what I'd do if I lost her. She drives me crazy a lot of the time, and the rest of the time I don't understand what she's on my case about. But I know she loves me. She puts up with all my shit. And in spite of all the bonehead things I say and do, she still wants to have babies with me. That's gotta mean something. I mean, women are a lot smarter than we are when it comes to stuff like this." Jason shook his head and looked off into the distance. "I think you're good for my sister."

"Thank you."

"That Quinn..." Jason growled and turned his face to mine. "He let her think she was the one. He broke her heart in about a thousand different ways. So I guess I'm telling you that if you have no intention of sticking around for the long haul, then do her a favor and let her go. She deserves better than being yanked around."

"I absolutely agree with you."

"Good. 'Cause I like you. I would hate to have to shoot out your kneecaps." Jason said with a toothy grin on his face.

Just then the door opened and Michelle stuck her head outside. "Sorry to interrupt boys, but is everything okay with Crystal?"

"She's been a bit under the weather lately, Mom. I'll go in and check on her in a minute." Jason promised.

"Well what's wrong with her? She turned green and bolted from the kitchen before I could ask."

"Just a little stomach thing that's been going around at the preschool." Jason lied so effortlessly.

"You're sure it's nothing? I don't want her getting everyone sick-"

"Mom! Your sausage is burning!" Sookie called from the kitchen.

"Oh, shit!" Michelle ran back toward the kitchen, leaving the front door open a few inches.

"Look, Jason, I don't really know much about marriage and babies so I don't know what kind of advice I can give you, but pregnancy is a very different experience for women than it is for us. I think it's pretty natural for the woman to feel like she failed in some capacity if she loses a baby. So long as she's not trying to replace the one she lost, I think it'll be fine." I advised him.

"Yeah, yeah, I hope you're right." Jason nodded before stretching his arms up over his head. "Well, I better go check on her. I'll meet you back in the living room in ten."

"Good deal." I nodded and watched him walk into the house as Sookie was coming outside. There was a thick gray sweater wrapped around her.

"Aren't you cold?" She looked up at me with concern on her face.

"A little." I pulled her close and wrapped my arms around her. Her usual smell in combination with the food being prepared was a pretty intoxicating blend. "Are you sure I can't talk you into sneaking upstairs? You smell good enough to eat."

She rolled her eyes at me and said, "No, but if you play nice with my brother I'll save you an extra piece of dessert." She winked at me.

Shit. Now I was going to be thinking about all of the ways that could be taken for the rest of the afternoon. Minx. God, I loved her. She had just pulled me face to hers when a truck pulled up in front of the house. Sookie kissed my neck (did I mention she's a minx?) before turning to greet the visitors. A blond woman about Sookie's height and shape emerged from the truck before going to the backseat to release a child from his car seat. She set the little boy down and as soon as he set eyes on Sookie, he screamed her name and started running toward us.

"Hunter, I missed you!" Sookie scooped up the little boy who was doing his damnedest to tackle her back onto the front steps.

There was a host of excited chatter that was hard to follow since I didn't speak this particular child's version of the English language, but it was obvious he loved Sookie a great deal and was beyond thrilled to see her. He snuggled against her and it was easy for me to see what kind of a mother she'd make when the time came. It dawned on me then that when it did, I wanted the child she carried to be mine. My heart skipped a beat and I felt a slight tug in my chest when she kissed the boy's forehead like it was the most natural thing in the world. I got so lost watching her with Hunter that I didn't even realize she'd introduced me to the little boy.

"Eric, honey?" Sookie tugged on my hand to get my attention.

I snapped out of my daze and said, "Right, sorry."

"Eric, this is Hunter. Hunter, can you say hi to Eric?" Sookie looked down at the little face that was buried in the crook of her neck. There was a shake of his head, letting me know he wouldn't be talking to me just yet. "He's really nice, sweetie."

"No." Hunter's voice was clear and stern.

Sookie sighed and said, "He'll come around once he sees that Jason's your buddy."

"It's okay. Little kids either think I'm a monster or something to climb on." I joked as Sookie stroked the boy's hair in attempts to calm him.

The blond woman and the man I assumed was her husband, and Hunter's father, came up to the house carrying a card table and a few casserole dishes. With all of the food being prepared inside you'd think a small army was coming for dinner. From all I could tell there would only be ten of us, but then maybe there were more people coming I wasn't aware of.

"I'm gonna put you down now, honey, so I can help your Mama." Sookie pressed another kiss to Hunter's head before setting him down. He stayed close to Sookie, only cheating glances up at me as they walked toward his mother.

Sookie greeted the woman with a hug and accepted a kiss on the cheek from the man. "Let me help you with that." Sookie took one of the casserole dishes from the woman.

"No, no, don't be silly. You've got Hunter. Casserole dishes are nothing." The woman laughed.

"How was the drive over?"

"I miss the old days when Hunter slept the whole way. Now he constantly asking if we're there yet or how much longer until we get there."

"He's just excited to see everyone."

"Yeah, I suppose. So, is this the hot Viking you were telling me about?" The woman looked at me while nudging Sookie.

Sookie turned bright red and my arched eyebrow didn't help matters. "Hadley Jane Savoy, you hush your mouth!"

"I'll take that as a yes." Hadley stepped out of the way when Sookie reached out to slap her arm. "Since Sookie seems to have forgotten her manners, I'm her cousin, Hadley."

"Nice to meet you Hadley." I smiled at her and took the dishes out of her hands before she could argue with me about it.

"Thank you. Good to see one of the two of you is polite." She winked at me while Sookie scoffed behind her. "And that big bear of a man back there is my husband, Remy."

Remy and I both nodded to one another out of acknowledgment. Then he was back to shaking his head and rolling his eyes as Sookie and Hadley were back to teasing one another. Hunter let go of Sookie's leg and ran up to the porch to take his mother's hand. He looked up at me but looked away when he caught me looking down at him.

"He's just playing shy." Hadley explained. "In no time at all he'll be climbing all over you just like he does with everyone else."

"Thanks for the warning." I smiled at her.

"Why don't I take these? There's some chairs in the back of the truck that need to be brought in if you don't mind?"

"Not at all." I handed her dishes back to her and she went in the house with Hunter following right behind. "I'm Eric, by the way." I stopped in front of Remy and offered my hand.

"Nice to meet you." Remy had a firm grip. "I'd apologize for Hadley, but if you've already met Jason, well, there's no point. Those two seem to have been cut from a similar cloth."

I liked Jason. In fact, I had yet to meet a member of the Stackhouse clan that I didn't like. Sookie's Gran had given me what Sookie called "The Eye." She scrutinized me closely, apparently not satisfied that pulling her grand daughter from a burning car was reason enough for her to like me. She was polite in her scrutiny, asking me questions about college and what lead me to become a teacher. She was tough but she was kind about it. I liked that she had a bit of an edge to her, even if Sookie sat next to her beloved Gran in total silence, completely mortified for me.

I found out a few minutes later that I had passed inspection when Gran had offered me coffee and told me to call her Gran. The breath of relief Sookie had let out was adorable. I knew it mattered to her what her family thought but I hadn't realized her Gran's opinion carried so much weight. I was afraid to ask what Gran would have offered me if she decided I wasn't good enough. She looked like she would have no trouble attempting to hand me my own ass. I think I might have fallen for Sookie's Gran a little bit because of it.

It was easy for me to see where Sookie got her spunk from. Like her Gran, she didn't let my size intimidate her. Nor did Gran seem to be all that impressed with my looks. She was judging me solely on whether or not she saw a future for Sookie and me, and whether or not Sookie was happy. In the end, we ended you having a rather lovely conversation and I knew it would be hard to leave her when the time came.

"You met Gran, I take it?" Remy jarred me from my thoughts.

"Yep, first thing this morning." I nodded as we started setting up the card table and chairs in the living room.

"Did she offer you coffee?" Remy laughed.

"Yep."

"You calling her Gran?"

"Thankfully, yes."

"Good man." Remy nodded as he propped up the legs of the table. "She's tougher than Corbett, and he's a pretty bad ass guy most of the time. But then you saved his baby girl's life, so that helps."

I shrugged, not comfortable with the label of 'hero', and said, "It was never really an option not to. I love her."

Just then Jason emerged from the bathroom looking a little green and fluster. He shook it off quickly and went to say hello to Remy. Hunter came tearing through the room a short time later to climb all over Jason like he was a human jungle gym. I could see the torment in his eyes as he played with the boy. When Crystal came out of the bathroom a short time later she made a beeline for the kitchen before Hunter could attack her like he'd done with every other adult (except me) that he came in contact with.

"Jay can we watch the parade?" Hunter asked with big eyes that I didn't think any adult in their right mind could say no to.

"Yeah, go on." Jason looked longingly at the TV screen, knowing the Family Guy marathon was over, at least for the time being. It's a good show, but not appropriate for pre-schoolers.

Without having to be shown how to change the channels, Hunter went about turning off the DVD player and getting the parade on. "Look, Dad!" He said with excitement as a little arm rose up to point at the flat screen TV. "It's Blue!" A giant blue bear was floating down 5th Avenue in New York City.

Sookie came into the room and sat on the arm of the couch next to me. Her arm slid around my shoulders and I leaned a little closer to her, wondering if someday it would be *our* kid so excited about a big blue bear.

My girlfriend plays football. I didn't know that until I saw the crushed look on her face when a pick-up game was suggested. She'd never mentioned it and I'd never thought to ask. She sat out the game on account of her ribs. They were better but still a little on the tender side, and I was glad to see she was sitting out instead of potentially hurting herself all over again. So the teams ended up being Corbett, Hadley and I versus Jason, Remy and Hunter. Sookie played referee with Gran, Crystal, Michelle and Sookie's Aunt Linda acting as our cheering section.

Hunter's team won the game but I got a little prize of my own for my stellar effort when Sookie surprised me in the shower. Her no sex rule had lasted all of twelve hours. I hadn't even heard her come in. One minute I was alone, soaping up my hair and the next, there was a pair of warm hands squeezing my ass. If it weren't for the smell of her perfume, I would have freaked out.

"I thought there was no sex in your parents' house?" I asked over my shoulder.

"A girl needs to bathe." Sookie removed her hands.

"And you couldn't wait until I got out, huh?"

"I care about the environment. We're conserving water." Sookie grinned up at me.

"Uh huh." Our showers didn't conserve anything. Water and energy were used in large quantities.

"I promise to keep my hands to myself." Sookie batted her eyelashes at me.

"Good. Put them here." I picked up her hands and put them over her mouth. She rose her eyebrows at me.

I pushed her against the wall and dropped to my knees. I could see her smile behind her hands. I parted her legs, picking one of them up and kissing my way from her knee to her hip. Her leg went over my shoulder but then I started thinking about how she got in even though I locked the door behind me.

"Maybe this isn't such a good idea. Someone could walk in."

Sookie moved her hands from her mouth and said, "I locked the sliding bolt thing. Daddy put that on the door when just locking it wasn't enough to keep Jason out."

"That's weird."

"That's Jason." She shrugged and put her hands back on her mouth.

I put her leg back down, suddenly not at all feeling the idea of shower sex. The idea of someone walking in on us wasn't at all appealing to me. Sookie's hands left her mouth and she looked at me with confusion.

"What's wrong?"

"I'm starting to see things your way about the whole no sex in your parents house issue."

She smiled and moved away from the wall, bending to kiss me. Her hands were on my face and she was pulling me back to my feet. We moved so the spray of water hit my back and just stood there kissing for a while. It would have to do until there were fewer people in the house. It was just a little too crowded.

"You know, it's funny how you could fuck me on an airplane but not in my parents' shower." Sookie teased and I got the feeling I wasn't going to live this one down.

"Yeah, but I didn't care what any of those people thought. What your family thinks matters and I don't want to mess it up. I love you too much." I told her.

"You're so cheesy." She rolled her eyes at me.

"You say the sweetest things to me sometimes." I laughed through my nose.

She picked up a bottle of shampoo and asked, "Lather me?"

"Yes, dear."

Thanksgiving with the Stackhouse clan was a glutton's dream. Everywhere I looked there was a dish of something on a flat surface. The house was quite full and while they were doing their best to hide it, it was obvious there was tension between Gran and Michelle. Jason warned me that if I was smart, I'd take equal amounts of both kinds of stuffing so as not to tip the scales in anyone's favor until I absolutely had to. I really couldn't figure out what the big deal was, but it was clearly important to Gran and Michelle.

It took Jason *and* Corbett to carry the turkey into the dining room for carving. I didn't even know turkeys got to be that big. Before anyone was even allowed to think about serving themselves, Gran said grace and everyone had to name something they were thankful for. Yes, it was a bit of a corny tradition but it was nice. It certainly wasn't like what my family would be doing. Annika's death changed the SOP in my parents' house. Holidays became less about enjoying what have and more about mourning what we'd lost.

Looking around at Sookie's family, I wondered how she was going to fit in with the more somber energy that my parents would provide. The Stackhouses were very full of life and celebration. There was a lot of teasing and goofing around that just wouldn't be happening when we went to California in a few weeks. In fact, I was a bit sorry we would be missing out on Christmas with her family. I was pretty sure it'd be one hell of a time.

Once everyone had said what they were thankful for, Corbett got to work carving the turkey. Bowls, platters and dishes of all sorts were being passed around the table for everyone to sample things. I noticed two distinct pairs of eyes on me when the stuffing came my way. I was tempted to pass on them both just so I could be absolved from voting but I figured that wouldn't be allowed. Sookie kicked me under the table when I hesitated to take Michelle's bowl. She gave me "the eye" the same as Gran had done earlier. God, that was fucking creepy.

In no time we were all stuffed silly. How anyone was going to be able to move from the table, let alone clean up was beyond me. "So, Eric, what did you think of my stuffing?" Gran when right for the jugular.

I looked around the table to see every other pair of eyes was staring down at their plate except for Michelle, who was glaring at me in wait for my response. I weighed my words carefully, not wanting to offend either of them. Stuffing shouldn't be stressful.

"It was delicious, Gran. I've never had it that way."

"It's the chestnuts. Gives it a meaty flavor without choking you with spice." Ouch.

"I didn't see him choking it down. In fact, I think I saw him go back for more. Twice." Michelle said pointedly.

Corbett cleared his throat like he thought it might clear the tension. It didn't work. The two women continued to argue about which dish was better until finally Gran was on her feet and pointing her butter knife at Michelle. Michelle got up and leaned over the table toward Gran.

"Bring it on, old woman!" Michelle challenged. It was at that point that I was sure I was dreaming the whole thing up. No way were those two really going to throw down over stuffing.

Except Sookie got up next to me to pull her mother back while Linda did the same thing on the other side of the table. "Mom, come on, it's Thanksgiving." Sookie reminded her mother.

"This old bird has been insulting me for years! I've had it!" Michelle pulled out of Sookie's grasp.

"Old bird? I'll show you an old bird!" Gran and Michelle lunged for each other and I couldn't help but move to help Sookie.

"Michelle, come on, this is silly." I scooped her up easily like she was no bigger than Hunter and moved her away from the table.

Everything in the room just stopped for a second. It was Michelle's laughter that broke the silence and everyone else soon chimed in. It took me a minute to realize I was still holding Michelle but it was Corbett clearing his throat that alerted me to it. I set the woman down and she hugged me immediately. From the looks on everyone's faces, I knew they'd been messing with me. I was in a room full of over-sized children. It was wonderful.

"You should see your face!" Gran pointed at me with her butter knife as she dabbed at her tears with her napkin.

I couldn't help but laugh right along with them. The whole thing really was ridiculous. I was tempted to say, "I knew it!" but I figured that wouldn't get me very far with that crowd, so I just kept on laughing.

"You're a good sport. Sookie said you'd laugh." Michelle patted my arm when she released me.

I turned to Sookie who was grinning like a cat who at the canary. "I survived Johan." She reminded me when I put on my best scowl and stalked closer to her. I glared down at her for a minute, which was hard to do because I really wanted to smile. Or kiss her. Or both.

"You set me up?"

"Did I not warn you that Thanksgiving with the Stackhouses was an adventure?" Her hands linked with mine.

I bent and kissed the top of her head. "You know what they say about payback, Miss Stackhouse."

"Bring it on." She snuggled into my side. "Pie anyone?"

There was a chorus of groans, all except for Hunter who said, "I want pumpkin *and* apple so I can smash 'em."

Kids.

Yeah, so there was totes gonna be a shower scene here but then someone \*glares at guilty party and she knows who she is\* had to go and mention Bill/Eric slash on twitter and I could barely keep the vomit down, let alone write lemons. My lemon-maker is on temporary disability as a result. On another note, I've decided to write the Pam/Johan outtake in the next few days so be on the lookout for a new story called "After School Specials" that will contain other outtakes from HFT (Eric's punishment, anyone? \*meow\*).

One final thing, and this is a big one! **If you've been thinking about entering the 7 Deadly Sins contest, the deadline has been extended to September 1st.** So please, please share that with anyone who has been thinking about entering but wasn't sure they'd have enough time to complete an entry. For more information, check out the contest profile. It can be accessed my going to MY profile and looking at my favorite authors.

Thanks for reading baby birds!

**Chapter 27: Tis A Gift**

Chapter Twenty-Seven: Tis A Gift

Eric and I were stretched out on the floor next to one another, watching "It's A Wonderful Life" with Hadley, Aunt Linda and Crystal. To say I felt like I was having a food baby would be the understatement of a lifetime. I felt like I was having an entire litter. Eric was snuggled up behind me, spooning me as if we were alone in bed. His arm was draped over my stomach and the pressure was killing me.

"Eric, you gotta move your hand." I whispered and slid his hand over to my hip instead.

"Stomach bothering you?" He whispered back.

"The food babies are kicking." I joked, making him snicker behind me.

"Maybe a piece of pie will settle it." He teased.

My head twisted as far as it would go and I glared up at him. "If I wasn't working on my best beached whale impersonation, you'd be in big trouble."

He dipped down to kiss me and I had almost talked my body into rolling over when Crystal suddenly bolted from the room. I'd done by best to be polite to her. It's not that she was a bad person, so much as I didn't really like the way she treated my brother. I knew he was happy and he loved her, but she could be so snappy and demanding. She expected to get everything she wanted and didn't care what Jason thought or felt. She would just steamroll right over him like he didn't even exist. Granted, my brother could be darn selfish when he wanted to be but he at least tried to be more considerate where Crystal was concerned.

I pushed myself up off the floor with Eric sitting up right behind me. "Where are you going?" Eric asked.

"I'm gonna go check on Crystal. Jason said she's been under the weather." I started off.

"Sookie, you should just let Jason deal with her." Eric hopped up off the floor almost like he was an alternate for the Jesse White Tumblers.

"Jason deal with a sick woman?" I snorted at the idea. "Eric, it's fine."

"No, Sookie, really... you should get Jason." Eric insisted.

I looked at him suspiciously, my eyes searching him for answers. "What's going on, Eric? Is this payback for dinner?"

"No, it's not." The sincerity in his eyes told me he was being honest.

We could hear Crystal retching and gagging in the bathroom. "I'll go get Jason." I agreed and Eric breathed a sigh of relief.

In the dining room I found Mom, Daddy, Jason, Remy, Hunter and Gran playing poker. Hunter was perched on Gran's lap while she taught him how to play. He had more tells than he did years of his life, but he looked adorable with his little green visor and the bubble gum cigar Daddy had given him. Aunt Linda appeared from the kitchen with a glass of wine and leaned in the archway that connected the two rooms.

I walked up behind Jason and bent down to whisper in his ear, figuring Crystal didn't need the whole family getting in her business. "Jason, Crystal's throwing up again."

"Ah, hell." He muttered and handed me his cards. "Take my hand, will ya?"

"Sure." I muttered, clutching his cards to my chest. I looked over my shoulder to see a look pass between my brother and my boyfriend. Well, what the hell was that about?

The two of them hadn't even known each other for twelve hours and already they were sharing secrets? Stupid He-Man Woman Hater's Club. I moved to take Jason's seat, but Eric put his hand on my shoulder, pulling me out of the way. He took the seat instead and then pulled me down on his lap.

I leaned close to his ear and asked, "Are you going to tell me what's going on?"

"It's not my place, lover." He kissed my jaw and then looked at the hand Jason had given me.

I was a pretty good bluffer. The problem was that I had a rather terrible hand to play, so I folded before I lost too much of Jason's "money." They were betting with candy and snack foods. I was just getting started on my fourth hand when Jason came back from the bathroom looking a little ragged. He dragged his hand through his hair and asked Mom if she had a shirt Crystal could borrow.

"Jason, honey, are you sure it's the flu? Crystal's been just fine the rest of the day." Mom pushed back from the table to get him a shirt.

Crystal appeared from out of nowhere. "It's not the flu. I'm pregnant."

Well knock me over with a playing card. I looked to Eric who was looking at Jason. Jason stood there looking guilty like he'd done something wrong. Crystal burst into tears behind him and they weren't happy tears. I was confused. A baby was a good thing, wasn't it? Yet no one seemed to be rejoicing any of this.

"Does that mean I get to be brother?" Hunter broke the silence with his question and the look of confusion on his little chocolate streaked face.

"No, sweet boy, you'll be the baby's big cousin." Gran patted the boy's head through his disappointment.

"I want to be a brother." Hunter looked sadly at the stack of treats in front of him.

All of the good mood in the house had suddenly been sucked out. In attempts to bring it back, I got off Eric's lap and went to hug my brother. "Congratulations, Jason. A baby is wonderful news."

He hugged me back loosely, which wasn't Jason at all. He was a bear hugger like Daddy. "Thanks, Sook." He mumbled quietly.

"Sookie's right, this is a good thing. I'm going to be a great-grandmother." Gran beamed from the end of the table.

"And I'm gonna be a cousin." Hunter smiled up at her.

Slowly, very slowly, the mood started to turn again except for everyone but Crystal and Jason. There was a hint of somber on Eric's face that told me he knew what was really going on. I wanted to ask what all the drama was about but it didn't seem like the right time. Still, something had to be up because otherwise Jason would be bragging about what a man he was.

Mom got Crystal a shirt to wear. I drifted back to Eric and perched myself on his lap while Jason and Crystal went go get her cleaned up. "You knew?"

"He told me on the porch this morning right before Hurricane Hunter showed up." Eric's arm snaked around me waist, holding me a little closer to him. "He asked me not to tell you."

Jason keeping a secret... that was new. Usually he was the king of loose lips. Something was definitely up. Remarkably, Crystal came back with an entirely different attitude, ready to talk about all sorts of pregnancy and baby related things. We learned the baby was due somewhere around the middle of May and she'd been battling some pretty serious morning sickness with the baby. It still didn't explain all the sadness that she was fighting, but I figured the truth would come out in due time.

Hunter walked right over to Crystal and stared at her stomach. "Is the baby in your tummy like I was in Mama's? I can't see it."

There were quiet chuckles around the room. Considering Crystal worked with small children on a regular basis, she seemed a bit uncomfortable with Hunter. She had never really struck me as someone who would be working with little kids. They needed someone much warmer and more nurturing than she was. Still, she did her best to explain pregnancy to a child of Hunter's age. Hunter nodded along like he was understanding everything but it was obvious he was still unclear on why Crystal's tummy wasn't bigger.

Crystal looked extremely uncomfortable with Hunter's line of questioning, which I found strange, but then I'd always thought Crystal was a little on the strange side. Mom and Gran stepped in to distract the boy. Not long after that, Crystal made the announcement that she was tired and ready to go home. Jason didn't seem to want to go just yet, but I promised him we'd see him once more before we left. It was funny to watch Jason and Eric swap cell numbers like they were pre-teen girls who couldn't wait to gossip over which of the Jonas brothers was the cutest.

I never would have thought my brother and boyfriend would end up in a bromance.

Not long after that Hunter fell asleep on Gran's lap. Eric and Remy packed up the card table and chairs while Hadley bagged up the leftovers Mom was sending her home with. While Remy, Jason and Eric had definitely done their fair share of damage to the ridiculous amount of food that had been cooked, there was still plenty left over. No way could Mom and Dad eat it all on their own in just a few days. Eric and I walked Hadley, Remy and Hunter out to their truck. I kissed Hunter's cheek before Remy put him in the car and then gave Hadley a hug.

"I'm gonna miss you, you pain in the ass." I muttered to her.

"And I'm gonna miss you, too, you preppy bitch." We really did have the oddest way of showing our love for one another, but she was one of my favorite people. She shoved me away and grabbed onto Eric. "And you... you be good to her or I'll shoot out your knees."

Eric laughed while he squeezed Hadley, lifting her up off the ground. "You know, it's freaky how similar you and Jason are."

"You ain't telling me anything I haven't been hearing all my life, sugar. Now put me down before I leave my husband for you." Hadley slapped at his shoulders with a smile on her face.

I couldn't help but laugh at that. Remy had the patience of a saint, and thank God for it or there's no way he and Hadley would work as a couple. Eric and Remy shook hands like men do and then I got a kiss on the cheek from him. I snuggled into Eric's side while Hadley and Remy got in the truck. I closed my eyes for a moment, thinking about the football game earlier in the afternoon. Hunter had scored a touchdown and came running over to me with the biggest smile on his face, all excited about his achievement. He'd jumped up on my lap and threw his little arms around my neck. I'd hugged him back and when I'd looked over at Eric, he had a look on his face I couldn't quite place but I knew it would stick with me.

"You ready to head in?" Eric asked after Remy and Hadley were gone.

I nodded against him and looked up into his face. "You were good with Hunter today. Thank you for that." I pushed up on my toes to kiss his chin.

"He's a cute kid." Eric smiled, his voice suggesting it was no big thing that he'd made an effort to get along with Hunter.

"Yeah, he is, but that doesn't mean everyone wants to be his friend." I wrapped my arms around his waist as we started back toward the house.

"Well, I want kids someday, so I better get used to it." Eric confessed. It wasn't really a surprise to hear him say that. He was a teacher, after all, and based on his relationship with his brother I had to assume family was important to him on some level.

"You do, huh?" I opted to play dumb anyway just to keep conversation going.

"A few years ago if you would have asked me, I would have said no." Eric admitted.

"Well that's reasonable. We change as we get older."

"Do you want kids?"

"Always have. I can't speak for all women, of course, but I think it's different for us. As much as things have changed, there are still things that are ingrained in little girls. And being that I'm from the south, marriage and babies are especially important. In a lot of circles here, I'd be considered an old maid."

"Instead you're just living in sin?" Eric squeezed me. I stopped then and pulled away from him. "What? Did I say something wrong?"

I folded my arms over my chest and said, "Is that all you see for us, Eric?"

"What?" He looked surprised and I really couldn't blame him. I hadn't walked Hadley and Remy out with the intention of having this particular conversation, but we were having it.

It dawned on me that we hadn't even hit our three month anniversary and we were already talking marriage and babies. Could so little time really have gone by? It seemed like I'd known him so much longer than that. Things had happened so fast with us that it didn't seem inappropriate to be broaching this subject but maybe it was too soon.

"Never mind." I shook my head. I didn't want to push for something and corner him into saying something he didn't mean.

"Sookie, I-"

"No, it's okay. You know what? Let's table this. We'll talk about it when we're ready." I smiled at him and reached for his hand.

When he didn't say anything further on the subject, I was pretty sure I had my answer.

The next morning I was up before Eric. Daddy was off hunting with Jason. Mom, Gran and Aunt Linda were Christmas shopping, hitting every sale imaginable from Shreveport of Baton Rouge and would be gone for most of the day. The house was silent. I started a pot of coffee and then went back upstairs. We had plans to go visit Amelia. She was still in a coma and being 'treated' at a nursing home in Monroe. My heart broke for her, knowing how badly Tray was missing her. I was certain that wherever Amelia was, trapped in the ether, she was missing him, too. I was convinced that if Copely had been thinking of Amelia's well-being instead of his own ego, Amelia would have come out of her coma much sooner with regular visits from Tray.

I hated the idea of her being left in a bed somewhere indefinitely, spending day after day alone, a shell of the dynamic woman I'd always known. Okay, so Tray and Amelia weren't legally married but she'd been his from the moment they met. Maybe even before that. They were perfect for each other. Amelia said it was love at first sight. As I slid back into bed beside Eric, I wondered if it had been the same for us and we just hadn't known it.

I snuggled closer to him and his arm moved around me, pulling me closer. I loved how even in his sleep he couldn't get close enough to me. I looked up at his face and stroked his cheek gently with my fingertips. It bordered on disgusting how much I loved him. After Quinn, there was a part of me that thought that was it. I was going to end up alone. I'd put so much of myself into that relationship and I'd held onto the belief that if I just held on long enough, I would get what I wanted. I loved Quinn enough to sacrifice some of my own happiness to keep him. But where had it gotten me?

I shook myself from those thoughts. Eric wasn't Quinn and I couldn't start comparing them based on the conversation we'd had the night before. It wasn't fair to hold him responsible for the things Quinn had done. Eric had already proven his love for me several times over. I didn't want some silly wedge to form between us so I set about making sure that any bricks that had started to pile up were knocked out of place.

I traced a finger down the side of his face and tickled him under his ear. He twitched but that was it. I smiled at the way the corner of his mouth lifted when I grazed the shell of his ear. My hand sank further down his body until it was underneath the t-shirt he was wearing. I scratched at his stomach lightly and traced the V of his hips. He grunted and his arm tightened around me. I untied the drawstrings of his pants and let my hand slip into them. I tilted my face up toward his ear and whispered to him.

"Eric, wake up." I kissed his neck and he groaned again. "Eric..."

I went back to feathering kissing along his neck and jaw while I stroked him gently. His breathing became a bit labored. His brows furrowed briefly before his eyes opened. They were hooded with lust and sleep.

"Good morning." I purred and nibbled on his ear.

"Morning." He kissed my forehead.

"We're alone." I told him when he tensed up.

"You're sure?"

"Yep. No one will be here for hours and the only one with a spare key has gone hunting, so there won't be any surprise visitors." I kissed his jawline.

I sometimes wondered if maybe I was addicted to him. I wanted to be with him all the time. I never got bored or annoyed. I worried if it was normal to be as drawn to someone as I was to Eric. Going back to work was going to be difficult, if for no reason other than it was going to cut our time together. I had my Poms squad and basketball season was about to start. I intended to make the most of our time together.

Eric seemed to catch my sense of urgency. He rolled me onto my back and settled himself between my open legs. We kissed deeply in an almost frenzied manner. His mouth moved down my neck while his hands moved the front of my nightgown up. My hips rocked against him while my hands sought purchase in his hair. God, I loved that hair. I'd never been into guys with long hair until Eric came along. There was something almost Kurt Cobain about it that I found incredibly sexy. His mouth on my breasts made me tremble just a little bit and I felt him smile against my skin.

I was so ready to be done with the foreplay. I'd had a good fifteen minutes before he woke up to think all sorts of nasty thoughts and it had done wonders. In hopes that he would get the hint, I used my feet to push down his pajama bottoms. God bless the inventor of the drawstring. My hands left his hair long enough to divest him of his shirt and run my nails up and down his chest a few times.

"I'm overdressed." I rasped.

Eric gave me one of those smirks that would have soaked my panties if they weren't already, and I lifted my hips so he could take off my nightgown. Instead he moved to take off my panties. I adjusted my legs and bit my bottom lip as he slid them off. I reached up to kiss him and pull him back to me. Long fingers found their way between us and teased me for a few seconds before plunging into my core.

Eric nuzzled my neck while my fingers threaded through his hair. "So wet," he murmured against my skin.

My hips rose to meet the thrusts of his fingers. I moved his mouth to mine and kissed him hard. His tongue slid against mine in a familiar way, but as usual, it made my toes curl a little. I decided then and there that when we got home, I wanted a good old fashioned make out session on the couch. I could kiss him for hours and not get bored.

I moaned in his mouth with the first pulses of my impending orgasm. My hand drifted down his torso to stroke him some more. The paradox of soft and hard never ceased to amaze me. I pumped my hand a few times, earning me one of his warning growls that made me shiver. I let go of him when he pressed his thumb to my clit and started to rub. My vision got a little blurry and I was almost gasping for air. His lips crashed down on mine and when his fingers curled inside me, I went over the edge.

I had to break the kiss to breathe. My heart hammered in my chest while my cored pulsed around his fingers. But of course, Eric wasn't finished with me yet. He withdrew his fingers and licked them clean while I guided his very hard length to my entrance. He nudged against me a few times, teasing me as he liked to do. It took a little more writhing on my part and a few dirty words before he buried himself inside me.

He moved slowly at first, both of us savoring the feeling of being so closely connected to one another, but it wasn't long before the pace picked up. My legs wrapped around him, my feet pushing him deeper inside me with every thrust of his hips. I looked down to see where we were joined and I moaned as I watched him slide in and out of me. His mouth dropped close to my ear and whispered dirty things that made me shiver and never want to leave the bed.

We rolled so I was on top of him and to pay him back for his dirty talk I let my fingers do some walking. The settled between my thighs as my orgasm got closer. Eric's eyes left mine to watch my fingers move in time with his thrusts as I pushed myself over the edge. I screamed his name when I came with him holding onto my hips and thrusting up into me. My body shook and my head flew back. My hair grazed his bare thighs and he took the fingers I'd used to pleasure myself and licked them clean.

I bent forward to kiss him quickly, tasting myself on his lips before moving down to his chest. I drew one of his nipples in between my teeth and flicked it the way he would do if he were me. Three hard thrusts later Eric was shouting out with his own release. His grip on my hips was probably strong enough to leave bruises but I didn't care. I pressed myself against Eric's chest, not wanting to break our connection just yet.

"You amaze me." He muttered with a dazed expression after a few minutes of lazy kisses and remembering how to breathe normally.

"I wanted to say I'm sorry if I freaked you out last night with the talk about kids." I traced shapes over his heart.

"Why would you think that?" Eric tucked some of my hair behind my ears, a more thoughtful expression replacing the blissed out one.

"You just seemed a little...skittish."

"Sookie, watching you with Hunter yesterday just made me realize what a great mother you were going to make some day. I want kids. And I *do* want them with you, I just didn't know if it was too soon to say that." Eric explained to me.

God, I loved him. Since I couldn't think of a way to put that into words I rolled off of him only to pull him on top of me. Whoever said the best part of waking up was Folger's in your cup clearly never had sex with Eric Northman.

It took a few hours and I lost track of how many orgasms but Eric and I finally got out of bed. He showered while I made us breakfast. He did the clean up while I went upstairs to shower. I had mixed feelings about going to see Amelia. It's not that I didn't want to so much as I knew it wasn't going to be the same. I knew the image of her being alive thanks to machines was going to stick with me. It wasn't really living. I would be going to see a body, not my friend.

Frankly, if it wasn't for the promise that I'd made to Tray, I probably wouldn't have gone at all. After checking in at the nurse's station- we had to show picture I.D. per Copely's orders- we were shown to Amelia's room. It was a beautiful room painted in an almost mauvey shade of pink with Thomas Kinkade paintings on the wall. Amelia was going to hate it when she opened her eyes. It wasn't her style at all. But then Copely had never cared much for what Amelia wanted.

I hung back for a moment, reluctant to look at Amelia for more than a few seconds. My throat closed up some and my eyes filled with tears. The woman on the bed looked like a poor imitation of my best friend. On the table next to her bed was a picture of her with her father when she was about twelve. It dawned on me then that Copely's image of his little girl hadn't changed much over the last decade and a half. I got the concept that she would always be his little girl since I knew my father felt the same way about me, but it was different with Cope. He was in denial.

"This is bullshit, Eric." My voice cracked as my hand fluttered up to cover my mouth.

His hand rested on my shoulder and he dropped a kiss on the top of my head. "I'm sorry, lover."

"You know, I can't wait until she wakes up and tells Copely to fuck off. She will never forgive him for this." I moved closer to the bed.

Machines were still breathing for her. Her bruises were long gone and her cuts had healed but that wasn't enough to bring her back. I put my hand on hers and prayed she would grab it. Of course, that didn't happen. Her eyes moved under her lips and there were slight twitches of her body that I'd been told while she was still up in Chicago were just reflexes. She wasn't having any "purposeful" movements.

"Ame, I am so sorry you're stuck here. I tried to talk Cope out of moving you, I swear. This room...well, it's beautiful but it's *way* obvious that you didn't choose this. And Tray misses you. Ame, you have to wake up just because I'm not sure he's going to be okay without you. I see him whenever I can but Eric and I moved in together a couple of weeks ago. I don't think I told you that the last time I saw you." I lost it then, completely breaking down.

Eric moved to stand behind me and I leaned into him. His arms circled my shoulders and I held onto his wrists. There was so much I wanted to say to Amelia but there was this sinking feeling in my chest like I was wasting my breath. For the first time since I found out she was in a coma, I felt completely hopeless. I drew in a few ragged breaths and gently parted myself from Eric.

"Can you give me a minute alone with her?" I asked without turning to face him.

"Yeah, of course. I'll be right outside." He kissed my head again before going out to the hall and closing the door behind himself.

I went to the edge of Amelia's bed. I looked around at the room and realized there was a security camera installed up in the corner. I wondered why that was necessary. She was in a coma for fuck's sake. Were they worried she was going to sneak out for a midnight pizza or something?

"Listen, Ame, you know I love you. You're the best friend I ever had and I miss you so much I can't even begin to explain it. The thing is, if you're ready to let go then you should. I almost didn't come here today because I wasn't sure I could handle seeing you this way. But I promised Tray." My voice broke again. "I don't know if you can hear me wherever you are. I don't know if you're trapped somewhere in that body of yours trying to fight your way out or if you're floating somewhere in the ether. All I know is that I want you to be happy. I want you to be free. So however it is you can have that, I want you to have it. Even if it means this is the last time I ever hold your hand."

I squeezed her hand hard, hoping it would be enough to jostle her awake. When that didn't happen I squeezed my eyes closed and let my tears fall silently down my cheeks. I stayed that way for a few minutes before I decided I'd had enough. I stepped closer to her bed and leaned down to kiss her forehead.

"Until we meet again, dearest friend." I whispered and stroked her cheek gently.

Then before I had to stop myself from pulling the plug on every machine she was hooked up to, I left the room. I was pretty sure it was the last time I would ever see Amelia alive.

Okay, so I know the ending here was a bit on the sad side. Sorry for any tears that may have been shed. The God's honest is that I still don't know wtf I'm going to do with Amelia. A few of my tweeps have made it clear what they'd like to see happen, but I guess we'll just have to wait and see what the muses decide.

Thanks for reading!

**Chapter 28: Wills, Dirty Talk & Teacups**

A couple of things need mentioning here before we get to the chapter. \*gets out soap box\*

A story was pulled this morning from this site for reasons unknown (as far as I can gather from the outburst on twitter this morning) and that pisses me off. Part of the reason I was hesitant to get involved with this site is because of the censoring that goes on here. I don't feel like I should have to stifle myself or my creativity. It's bullshit. I'm seriously considering going back to posting strictly at livejournal. It'll take some time to get all of my posts caught up and my journal all spiffy, but it would be worth it. That said, I'm in the process of putting together a community at livejournal where readers can find their favorite authors since it seems more and more people are starting to make the leap over. I started posting here for a bigger readership so that when the Support Stacie auctions came up, I might be able to raise more money. I didn't come here for some unknown "bot" to tell me that I've lost my posting privileges because some uptight wanker decided my posts are too racy. It's M Rated for a reason. If you're not mature enough to handle the content, then shop in the teen section, kthnx. So if you see a decline in my postings here, it's because I'm shifting back to livejournal. Should I decide to give up on posting here entirely, I will be sure to let everyone know via a chapter update and/or notice in my profile. There IS a link to my journal in my profile. It's listed as my "home page." Or you can simply search "makesmyheadspin" in the user's section over at LJ. Trust me, I'm there lol. Maybe if there's a decline in authors they'll get the point that what they're doing is not only offensive to us, but unconstitutional. We have rights. In fact, I believe it's the very first one we're issued... \*gives the finger\*

\*puts away soap box\* On with the chapter...

Chapter Twenty-Eight: Wills, Dirty Talk & Teacups

Sookie was in need to cheering up after our visit to Amelia. If we were home, I would have known exactly what to do to take her mind off things but I was out of my element in Shreveport. We walked to the car hand in hand and I put her in the passenger's seat to drive us back to her parents' house. She directed me to go a different way than we had on the trip over. We took side roads and a few back roads so I got to see more of the state than just highway and trees.

"Turn left there." Sookie pointed to a dirt road that was coming up ahead.

I made the turn and found us stopping at what appeared to be a bayou or pond. "Where are we?" I asked Sookie.

She gave me the goofiest grin and said, "I have no idea." We both laughed for a second before she said, "I just didn't want to go back to the house yet."

"It's fine with me. We can sit here for as long as you want." I reached for her hand.

We were quiet then. I loved that we could sit in comfortable silences like that without feeling any sort of pressure to talk or fill the empty space between us. After a few minutes Sookie slid across the bench seat of the old truck we were in. I'd be lying if I said it hadn't crossed my mind what we could be doing on that seat. I wanted her to smile because she genuinely felt better and not just because she thought she was appeasing me. I knew her well enough to know when a smile was real and not a mask she was throwing on to avoid dealing with what was bugging her.

"I think I said goodbye to Amelia today." She admitted once her head was resting on my shoulder. "I wasn't planning on it, but I hate the idea of her being alone in that room every day. I don't understand why Cope took her away like he did. Why is she going to come back to us if she thinks she's got nothing to come back to? It just pisses me off that he's being so fucking selfish. He's not the only one who loves her."

I wasn't quite sure of what to say. I wasn't a father so I didn't really understand where Copely's head might be at and I didn't want to defend him unjustly and raise Sookie's ire. Frankly, I thought Copely was a dick. Although part of me also thought Tray was being a bit of a quitter. If it had been Sookie that had ended up in Amelia's place- and thank God it wasn't- I would have fought every single day to see her until I managed to convince the powers that be to let me be close to her. I couldn't imagine just walking away like Tray seemed to have done.

"I want you to promise me something." Sookie sat up and turned her body toward mine.

"What's that?" I rubbed the inside of her wrist with my thumb.

"I want you to promise me that if we're still together and something like that ever happens to me, you'll make sure that I don't get kept alive by machines and stuck in some strange place." She stared at me with intensity. When I hesitated to promise her she said, "I swear to God, Northman, I will come back from the grave just to haunt your ass."

My head tilted a little bit and I let go of her hand to touch her cheek. "It would kill me to let you go, you know that, right?" She nodded.

"Promise me."

"If it's what you want, I would do it." I ran my thumb over her bottom lip and she turned her face to kiss my palm.

"Thank you."

"You know, if you feel so strongly about it maybe we should see a lawyer when we get back. We have one on retainer for the bar. You should file the paperwork."

"You mean like a will?"

"A will, power of attorney, a D.N.R."

"Do you have one?"

"Yes, I do."

"So who... I mean if something happens to you..." She trailed off, clearly as uncomfortable with the idea of losing me as I was of losing her.

"Johan. I know he can be really irresponsible and flighty sometimes but I know if I needed him he would be there in a heartbeat and he would fight harder for me than anyone."

"Except maybe me." Sookie gave me a weak smile and then slid closer to me again.

"I've been thinking about changing a few things." I confessed to her.

"What things?"

"With the will and whatnot. You should have some sort of say if things got bad."

"Eric, we're not married."

"We don't have to be. As long as there's a notary and a witness, that's all that matters. There's no need to bring a marriage license into this. Yet." I made sure to add on that last part.

"You think about us getting married?" She looked up at me.

"Ever since the accident, yeah, I have."

"Why didn't you ever mention it before?"

"Because it's fast, Sookie. I think we both know that this, what we have, it wasn't part of the plan for either of us. It just sort of happened. Don't get me wrong, I'm beyond happy that it did. You're the best thing to happen to me in a very, very long time. I just don't want to put too much pressure on us to move forward. We have time."

Sookie sat up again. "What if we don't? I mean, look at Tray and Amelia. They put off getting married because they thought they had time, too. Now Tray doesn't get any sort of say in what's happening to her. He can't even go see her without having to worry about being arrested. If he was her husband, that wouldn't be happening."

"Sookie, I don't want to marry you just because we're scared that we might be forced apart at some point. If and when we decide we want to take that step I want it to be because we're sure we want to be *together*. I don't want fear to be a factor anywhere in the decision." I explained to her.

She sighed and sat back against the seat. Her brows furrowed and she stared out at the water in front of us. "I'm not afraid of the future. Everything happens for a reason and even if we do everything exactly right and make decisions for all the right reasons, there's no guarantee that we'll be together forever."

"You're right," I agreed with her. "But I don't see any reason to start us off on the wrong foot."

She turned her head toward me with tears in her eyes. Shit, I hated it when she cried. It always broke my heart a little bit. "You know I love you, right?"

"I know." I nodded.

She lunged at me then, claiming my mouth with hers. She managed to climb into my lap and straddle me. She pulled off her coat and threw it to the other side of the seat where it landed on the floor board instead. I tried to remember the last time I had sex in a car. I was probably nineteen at the time. I already knew this was going to be much better. My hands went up her sweater and pushed the cups of her bra out of the way. As much as I loved her naked, there was something equally hot about having to be creative when working around clothing. We certainly had our work cut out for us since we were both wearing jeans and sweaters.

When she leaned back she ended up hitting the horn, making us both jump and laugh at the loud burst of sound. "Good thing we're in the middle of nowhere." She gave me an impish grin and then unbuttoned her jeans.

"Good thing we're in a truck. This would never work in the 'Vette."

"Wanna bet?" She arched an eyebrow at me.

"Is that a challenge?"

"It's a promise." She said and then attacked me again.

It was a damn good thing Sookie was so flexible or those jeans wouldn't have come off so easily. They ended up balled up on the floor of the truck next to her coat. She moved to take off her own panties but I stopped her.

"Leave 'em." I whispered against her skin.

She shuddered but moved her hands the fly of my jeans. She nipped at my neck as she unbuttoned them and then pushed them down just a little. She stopped all of a sudden and looked down.

"Commando, huh?"

"Would you believe it if I said I forgot to pack more underwear?"

"Not really since I did your packing for you." Her hand gripped me and began to slid up and down.

"Then I guess I was just really hoping I'd get the chance to fuck you somewhere public. You do seem to enjoy that." I teased her.

She blushed slightly and I almost threw her back on the seat. I loved that in spite of all the things we'd done and all of the different ways we'd done them, she could still blush over the littlest things. There was no way she could know how perfect she was. Her modesty would prevent her from seeing herself in such a way, but that only endeared her to me further. After a few minutes of mutually stroking each other and making out like the world was going to end, she pulled her mouth from mine. She bit my earlobe, although there was more sucking than biting.

"Eric, fuck me now." She moaned against me.

She didn't talk like that often but when she did, I knew she meant business. I also knew she was close to her orgasm and since I'd done more than enough teasing earlier in the day, I decided not to press my luck. It would absolutely suck to have to drive back to her parents' house with a severe case of blue balls, and I knew she would have no trouble pulling the plug on me if she decided she wanted to. Not to mention, why the hell wouldn't I do what she asked?

She lifted herself up so she was sitting on her knees instead of just on my lap. Her panties were pushed to the side and she lowered herself on me in one fluid stroke. She rolled her hips, letting her body adjust to my presence inside of it. My hands went up her sweater to cup her breasts while her lips grazed my throat before pausing near my ear.

"When we get *home*, home, I want to spend the night making out on the couch with you until I'm so wet, I'm dripping. Then I want you to bend me over the arm of the couch and fuck me hard." She whispered to me.

I groaned at the imagery of what she was suggesting. "I can do that."

"You better." She nipped at my neck and started rocking her hips.

"You are so fucking sexy." I pinched her nipples just hard enough to make her squeak and she rewarded me with a deep kiss.

We traded back and forth between rough and sweet and by the time we were done, we were both sweating and gasping for air. I don't know how the sex always seems to get better each time we have it, but it does.

"You know, one of these days I might actually explode when I come." I warned her.

She giggled against my chest. "Yeah, but what a way to go, right?"

Jason ended up driving us to the airport on Saturday. I knew Sookie had mixed feelings about leaving her family. I knew we were both happy to be going home to our own house but I also knew that Sookie was going to miss seeing her family at Christmas. They understood why she wouldn't be making an appearance for the holiday, which I was happy about, but I knew there would be a part of her that would want to be with them while we were in California with my family.

The plane ride was rather uneventful. We had to circle the runway for a while when we got in to O'Hare since there were so many incoming flights. Thankfully the house wasn't too far away from the airport and twenty minutes after getting into a cab, I was carrying our luggage up to the front door while Sookie was paying the driver. Jeter was whining on the other side of the door, scratching and pawing like he was going to dig himself out if I didn't get the door open fast enough.

We'd only been gone for a few days but he was used to having at least one of us around. I imagined Pam probably didn't spend a whole lot of time with him when she came by to let him out and feed him. I'd tried to convince her to keep Jeter at her place but I knew that wasn't going to happen. If I would have thought about it a little more, I would have left the dog with Tray. He could have used the companionship and I had no doubt Jeter would have gotten a hell of a work out with the runs Tray went on the morning.

I got the door open just as Sookie was coming up the walkway to the front steps. Jeter shot out of the house and stood up on his hind legs to greet me with the sloppiest kiss I'd ever gotten from him. Sookie burst out laughing behind me, covering her mouth in attempts to hide her giggles.

"Okay, okay, down Jeter. I missed you, too." I pushed the dog away from me and he sank down to all four legs again.

He sniffed at me like he was trying to figure out where I'd been. Sookie carefully approached the house, not wanting to be accosted like I was when I walked in. I set down the bags I was carrying and grabbed Jeter's collar before he could jump on her like he wanted to. He whined and lurched forward in attempts to get to her.

"Hold on, buddy, let me take off my shoes and then we'll play." She promised him. She set down her purse, took off her coat and shoes and said, "Okay, let me have him."

I let go of the collar and Jeter took off like a shot, knocking Sookie back into a chair near the door. She scratched the dog's head and let him sniff and kiss all over her. It was obvious that neither of us were going to be able to go anywhere for a few days without Jeter having a bit of a tantrum about it. He followed us to the bedroom where Sookie unpacked our things. I went to go check the state of the backyard and make sure there weren't any piles around the house that Pam had missed while she was over. There was almost no water left in Jeter's bowl but there was plenty of dry food on the floor. I decided then and there that when we went to California I'd talk to Tray about taking the dog for a week instead of leaving Pam in charge.

Sookie came out of the bedroom carrying a laundry basket full of our dirty clothes. "You know, if we ever end up buying a bigger house, I want a laundry shoot."

"That's it?" I smirked at her.

"I have a few other requirements, but that's just a convenience I would greatly appreciate." She winked at me as she started toward the stairs with Jeter right behind her.

"Jeter, let's go outside." I called the dog back. He walked around in circles in front of the door like he did when he needed to relieve himself. When I took too long, he started to whimper.

The yard was a mess but I wasn't surprised. Jeter rolled in the snow and did his business while I did my best to straighten up a little bit. Sookie appeared at the side door and asked if I wanted anything from the grocery store since she was going to run out for more detergent.

"Nah, I think I'm good." I smiled over at her. "I can go if you want?"

"No, it's fine. You stay here and keep Jete busy. I'll be back in a few minutes." She blew me a kiss and then went back into the house.

I was tossing a beat up tennis ball that Jeter had managed to dig out of the snow when I heard Sookie's car start a few minutes later. That reminded me I should check to make sure the Comet was running okay. I knew the 'Vette would be fine. I reached into the house and grabbed the garage keys off the hook. It had only been a few weeks since the car had been driven but with the recent cold snap that had gone through the city, I didn't want to take any chances of the engine freezing up.

The car was covered just as I'd left it. Jeter followed me into the garage and proweled back and forth while I got the cover off the car. I balled it up and tossed it off to the side. I hit the button to open the big door and Jeter took a seat, knowing better than to bolt out into the alley. The car started no problem and I let it run for a few minutes. Johan had remembered to fill the tank before he brought the car back the last time he took it out. I loved the Comet but trying to drive it in the snow could be a bit of a problem. A car like that was great for cruising empty highways but not so much for navigating poorly plowed suburban areas.

I waited about twenty minutes before turning the car off and closing the larger garage door. I'd let the car cool down some before putting the cover back on it. I whistled for Jeter and he followed me into the house. He went straight to his bed downstairs and lay down while I started my laptop. I checked emails and put the wash into the dryer when the buzzer went off. A quick check on Facebook told me I had friend requests from Jason, Hadley and Remy waiting for me. I accepted them all and then looked at the pictures Pam had finally posted to the fanpage we'd created for the bar.

There were some pretty good pictures there. My favorite was one of Sookie sitting in my lap at one of the tables with our arms wrapped around each other and stupid grins on our faces. Sounds petty, but I was sort of pissed her costume didn't survive the accident. She looked hot in that mini dress with those go-go boots. Pam had done well where Sookie was concerned. I paused to laugh at the roadkill parked on Johan's head. That was a bit of a disaster.

The night was ended in such a tragic way it was easy to forget how much fun we'd had before the accident happened. It was while I was sitting there thinking about Halloween and the events leading up to the accident that I started to wonder what I was going to get Sookie for Christmas. She wasn't a material person and I knew that while I could go out and buy her something, she would probably tell me not to waste my money.

But then a flash of brilliance came to me when I opened the email Jason had included with his friend request. It was a simple message: *I'm so Team Jacob \*faints\**. If I weren't a high school teacher I wouldn't have the slightest clue as to what the hell he was talking about. The fact that *he* knew, however, made me wonder if maybe he was being completely serious with his message. I decided I didn't want to know. But I wrote him back all the same with my idea for Sookie's Christmas present.

Sookie was just walking in upstairs when my phone buzzed in my pocket. I had a text message from Jason. He was excited about my idea and thought Sookie would love it. He promised to get everyone else in on it. This would be payback for Sookie's little stunt at Thanksgiving. But hey, at least I'd given her fair warning.

"Looks like it's gonna start snowing again." Sookie said as she put away the groceries she'd picked up.

"Well, if we're lucky, we'll get snowed in and have to take a day off of work." I wiggled my eyebrows at her.

"I was thinking the same thing." She confessed as she crossed the room to the fridge. "I miss my kids and all, but things are going to be so crazy for us for the next couple of months."

"We'll get through it." I pulled her into a hug and kissed the top of her head. "Besides, I owe you a really got make out session on the couch."

"Damn right you do." She wiggled against me.

"I was thinking of ordering Chinese for dinner. You got any objections to that?"

"Just don't let me anywhere near the Mongolian beef this time." Sookie smirked up at me.

"I told you I liked it spicy." I reminded her with a grin.

"My lips felt like they were on fire for almost a full day afterward. Not cool, Northman." She pouted.

"Fine, I will make sure to keep the Mongolian beef away from you." I dropped another kiss on her head before letting her go.

She finished putting the groceries away while I placed an order to be picked up. By the time I got to the restaurant it would be ready. Sookie offered to come with me but there was laundry in the dryer that was going to need folding and I was fairly certain Jeter would have a fit if we left him alone so soon. Besides, I wanted to start making arrangements for Sookie's Christmas present. It was going to take some pretty thorough planning on my part. Not to mention, I needed to touch base with Pam and let her know that Sookie and I were home.

Sookie followed me into the living room when she was done with the groceries and watched while I put on an old pair of boots that were by the door. She absolutely hated them. She glared at me every time I wore them like I should know better. They were comfortable and warm. I had no plans to throw them away anytime soon.

"One of these days when you're not looking those things are going in the trash." Sookie informed me.

"You do that and that ridiculous nightgown with the teacups on it will be going to keep them company." I threatened her right back.

"What's wrong with the teacups?" Her mouth hung open.

"Aside from the fact that it's hideous, you mean?"

"It's comfortable! Besides, I'm just sleeping in it. It's not like I wear it out of the house. Those boots look like the rejects from the local homeless shelter." She said defensively.

"You don't have to wear them and they don't make that nightgown any less ugly." She stuck her tongue out at me. I pulled on my coat and opened the door to go.

"Hey!"

"What?" I turned around.

She took the few steps across the room and pulled me down to kiss her. "Drive safe."

"Yes, dear." If that was the worst fight we'd ever have, I'd consider myself a lucky man.

And just an FYI, that teacup nightgown actually exists. My BFF has one. I hate it. I've threatened to set it on fire several times. It's really the most heinous piece of clothing ever. Sookie's Christmas present will be revealed in coming chapters, and NO, I won't tell you in review responses what it is. Even if you bribe me with GP shaped treats \*winks\*

On another note, there are now 2 Sins contest entries posted Sins of Omission and Seven Again. Reviews are love. The deadline has been extended, so if you were thinking about entering you still have plenty of time. Entries are now due no later than **11:59 p.m. on September 1st.** If you've got sinful tendencies, put them on paper...er, or, a word document, as the case may be.

Thanks for reading, baby birds!

**Chapter 29: Snow Day**

Okay, so this was originally going to be an outtake, but then I figured why the hell should it be? We could all use a chapter of fluffy goodness after the drama of the last couple of chapters, right? So, to lighten the mood up in hurr, I give you this chapter. Y'all should thank **lubadub** for this because it might not be possible without her. We had a delightful twitter conversation Sunday which is how the idea for this chapter came to me. How we can go from talks of kink, to sexy dance parties to building pillow forts is beyond me, but there you have it. Seriously, if you're not on twitter, you're missing out. Just sayin'. Oh, and watching TB in a pillow fort makes all the stupidity just a little more tolerable, in case you were wondering.

Chapter Twenty-Nine: Snowed In

Well, it seems I got my half-hearted wish. The snow that started when we got back from Louisiana didn't stop. In fact, we got dumped with one of the biggest snowfalls in recorded history. Thank God I went grocery shopping when we got back or we would have been in trouble. Poor Jeter was going stir crazy from being cooped up in the house. He clearly didn't share the enthusiasm of his owner when it came to being shut up in the house.

When we went to bed on Sunday night it was around eleven. There was a few inches of snow on the ground, but nothing too bad. When our alarm went off in the morning, however, it was like a confectioner's sugar plant exploded. We were absolutely buried. There had to be at least a foot of powder on the ground. The drifts pushed up against the house were nearly three feet high in some places, and Mother Nature wasn't finished with us yet.

"Holy shit." I mumbled under my breath.

"What?" Eric groaned from the bed behind me.

"I think we might have a snow day on our hands." I grinned over my shoulder at him.

"I heard this is the one high school that never closes." Eric sat up slowly.

"Yeah, well, if you want to tunnel us out of the house, I guess we can strap on some snow shoes and try to get there." I snickered at him.

"Is it really that bad?" He climbed out of bed- completely naked- and stood behind me. Hello morning wood. "Oh, shit."

"I told you so." I tilted my chin back. "Good morning, by the way."

"Good morning." He smiled down at me and let go of the curtain so it could fall back into place.

"We should probably check the school closings just to be on the safe side." I said as he pulled me back toward the bed.

"You're probably right." The twinkle in his eyes told me my suggestion was going to have to wait.

And it did. It waited for about an hour and by then we were both sweaty, sated and ready to go back to sleep. But Eric being the wonderful man that he is went to retrieve his laptop so we could check the school's website to make sure it was closed. He also started a pot of coffee. Have I mentioned recently that I love this man?

"Looks like we got the day off." Eric grinned at me.

"Looks like. You know, I've never had a snow day before?"

"Me either. Growing up in California doesn't really make that a possibility."

"What do you think people do on snow days?" I snuggled up next to him.

"I can think of a few things we can do without ever having to leave this bed or put clothes on." His voice dropped a little at his suggestions.

"Making up for lost time, are we?" I snickered, as if we hadn't had sex at all while we were gone.

"Do you have a better idea?" He kissed the top of my head as he closed the laptop.

"I think we should go outside and play."

"It's freezing out there."

"Yes, but think of all the ways you can warm me up when we're done." I stole a move from his playbook, and wiggled my eyebrows at him.

"Why Miss Stackhouse, I do believe I like the way you think."

"Thank you, Mr. Northman." I tilted my face up to kiss him.

We stayed in bed for a little while longer, just snuggling and making out a little before I finally pulled away and got out of bed again. I felt his eyes on me as I slipped on my robe and went to the bathroom to wash my face and brush my teeth. When I emerged from the bathroom, Eric was gone. The smell of bacon wafted through the house and I breathed deep. Jeter was prowling back and forth near the stove, hoping for Eric to develop a case of butterfingers.

"What are we going to do about Jeter's bathroom needs?" I asked out of nowhere.

Eric laughed and said, "I put down newspaper in the basement just to be on the safe side before we went to bed last night."

"You think of everything, don't you?" I wrapped my arms around his waist and kissed him between his shoulder blades.

"I try." He flipped the sizzling bacon. "Do you want eggs or pancakes?"

Grease rocketed out of the pan and landed on my forearm, making me jump back and yelp in pain. "Stupid grease!" I yanked my arms away from Eric and looked at where I'd been burned.

He turned around and tried to see where I'd been hit. He located the spot and placed a kiss on it. "Better?"

"Almost." I pushed myself up on my toes and tilted my face up. He kissed me gently and then pulled back. "We're getting there."

Next thing I knew we were making out again and somehow my robe got untied. The smell of bacon starting to burn brought us back to reality and I quickly tied up my robe while Eric dealt with the food. I started pulling out the electric griddle for pancakes while he mixed the batter. Being with him was so easy. I didn't ever feel out of place or like I didn't belong. We moved around one another so simply and with little to no argument over much of anything.

I kept waiting for us to find something to fight about, but nothing ever really seemed to come up. I knew it would happen eventually. No relationship was perfect and thanks to what had happened with Quinn, I knew better than to let myself fall into a situation where the person I was with agreed with me on absolutely everything. I didn't want Eric to try and be something he wasn't just to make me happy. It's not like I wanted to fight him, necessarily, so much as I wanted to see how he handled it. He seemed to be the 'let cooler heads prevail' sort of person, whereas I tended to let my mouth run away from me when in a heated argument.

With Quinn, he'd always backed down to let me have my way. That is, unless we were talking about marriage or where we saw our future going. He didn't bother to fight with me over why it was important for the towels to be washed once a week or why I had to make the bed first thing when I got up in the morning. The more I thought about it while I waited for my pancakes to be ready to flip, the more I realized I wasn't the same woman I had been when I was with Quinn. Being around Eric had changed me a little.

He'd made me braver and more relaxed at the same time. His laid back surfer vibe had rubbed off on me. I loved that he could go from being the most mellow person I'd ever met to being the most passionate. Sometimes it felt like I got a two for one deal when I signed on to be Eric's girlfriend. That also lead to thoughts of, "What the hell is he doing with *me*?," but I didn't let myself linger on thoughts like those.

We sat down to breakfast together in front of the television in the living room. We watched Cartoon Network like we were younger than the kids we taught. We agreed that old school Tom & Jerry cartoons were some of the best to ever be created, even with the lack of fancy visual effects. Eric's impression of the maid yelling at 'Thomas' was hilarious. We left our plates on the coffee table and I curled up next to him, my head resting on his chest and his arm slung around my shoulders.

We ended up falling asleep that way. When I woke up, Eric was in the kitchen cleaning up from breakfast. I hopped off the couch to see if he needed a hand. "You could have woken me up, you know."

"I know." He turned to kiss me.

"So when do we get to go out and play?" I danced around like I had some serious ants in my pants and he laughed at me.

"Whenever you want, lover, but I would advise wearing more than a robe." He winked at me.

"Smart ass." I nudged him with an elbow. "Hey, you know, it's too bad we don't live in the middle of nowhere. We could run around naked in the snow."

"You're crazy." He shook his head.

"Worried about shrinkage?" I looked down at his boxers with a serious expression on my face.

"Nope." Eric turned to grin at me. "And you shouldn't be either."

"I guess only time will tell about that one." I smirked and started to walk away.

Eric grabbed my forearm with his yet hand, turning me around. "You can count on it."

Yikes. Yahoo. Yum.

Before we got to the fun stuff we managed to shovel a narrow path in the back that lead from the side door to the garage. Then we did a walk/crawl through the snow out front where the drifts were much higher and shoveled the front steps and the walk way. Eric did most of the heavy lifting, bless his heart, while I sprinkled salt and attempted to clean off our cars a little bit. The plows had come through and if we weren't careful, we weren't going to be able to get our cars out for work the next day. By the time we were done working we were both exhausted but we weren't quite ready to go back in just yet.

Jeter had a ball he was more than willing to chase when we tossed it for him out in the backyard. We attempted to build a snowman, but Jeter kept getting in the way. We did, however, manage to have one hell of a snowball fight that only ended when the two of us were covered in snow from head to toe and wrestling in the dense powder. Thankfully we had the forethought to do the shoveling out front before we started goofing off, or it would have gone undone.

"I told you that salt was going to come in handy." I wiggled against Eric, who I was straddling in the backyard after he let me wrestle him into submission.

"Lover, I'm hardly thinking about salt right now. Unless it's the sort I can lick off your neck." Eric pulled me down to kiss him.

After a few minutes and some serious grinding of my hips, I pulled away. "Okay, we are *not* giving the neighbors a show."

"Said the woman who was just grinding against me like a cat in heat." Eric teased with that impish look in his eyes.

"I think it's time we find out whether or not you can really handle the cold as well as you say." I pushed myself up to my feet. "Last one in the whirlpool has to clean up Jeter's newspapers!" I shouted over my shoulder as I ran to the house.

The best thing about Eric's basement was the bathroom down there. There was a whirlpool tub big enough for four people to sit in. We'd taken advantage of it a time or two, but not nearly as often as I would have liked. Not enough hours in the day and such. I pulled off my boots at the door and started the process of removing my layers of clothing and protective gear as I headed down the basement steps. Jeter was shaking himself off and heading over to his bed. He was clearly tuckered out from all the running around in the snow.

I got the water started in the tub and continued to pull off my wet clothes. Eric was doing the same thing behind me and before long we were both very naked and it was obvious Eric was right about his lack of shrinkage issues. Our skin was cold to the touch, but bright pink as blood started to flow back to our nerve endings.

"After you." Eric gestured for me to get in the water. He held out his hand to steady me so I didn't fall flat on my ass when I got in the tub. Stepping into it could be a bit of a safety hazard if you weren't careful.

"I guess this means you're in charge of cleaning up after Jeter, huh?"

"Guess so."

I got myself settled in the water and watched Eric climb in. God, that ass of his... we sat there soaking and talking for a while. He asked me if there was anything I wanted to do while we were in California. We were going to be there for almost the full two weeks we had off for Christmas break. Eric had mentioned he'd made plans for New Year's Eve, but refused to tell me what they were. I was okay with that since Eric never came up with plans that disappointed me. I used to hate surprises, but that was another thing that had changed since being with him.

I trusted him and because of that, it was easy to let go of control. I felt perfectly comfortable letting him take the wheel and be the awesome person he was. I knew he would never do anything to hurt me. He hated it when I cried, regardless of the reason for it, so I was fairly certain he would do anything to keep that from happening. Whatever he had up his sleeve, I was sure I was going to love it.

"I know this sounds cheesy, but I would really just love to go to the beach. I'm sure it's not warm enough to swim right now, but just to hear the roar of the ocean, you know?" I drifted a little closer to him in the water.

"There's nothing like it." He admitted with a nostalgic smile on his face. "I remember the first time I saw the Pacific. We had literally just gotten to California and it was the first thing I wanted to see. Dad had to get to base so Mom took all of us. I remember she and Annika got in this huge fight over the bikini Annika wanted to wear. Man, could those two go at it. Mom said there was no way she was going to let her daughter go out of the house looking like she just got back from working The Strip. Annika thought Mom was being overprotective and uptight. Johan and I just sat there and kept quiet. They fought all the way to the beach. Then, all of a sudden there's nothing but water. The fighting stopped and we just had fun. We ran in the sand for as long as Mom would let us before she wrangled us back into the car. I remember seeing the surfers there and being jealous of what they could do. It looked like magic to me."

"Sounds like you had fun."

"I did." Eric pulled me closer.

"Do you miss it?"

"California?" I nodded. "Sometimes. The weather is always great and I like that it can be a much more relaxed atmosphere there. But it's a double edged sword. I like that there's a change of seasons here and every day is different. And besides, there's no you in California."

"Smooth talker."

"I try." His fingers found mine under the water. "What about you? Do you miss Louisiana?"

"Sometimes." I smiled at him. "I miss hearing crickets chirp at night instead of planes flying over my head. I miss being able to sleep with my doors and windows open without worrying I'm going to be robbed or raped in the middle of the night. I miss swimming in the creek not far from my parents' house. I miss the smells. But in Louisiana there's no you."

"If you wanted to move there, I'd go." Eric revealed.

I hadn't even thought of moving. "Eric, I don't want to move back. I mean, yeah, I miss my family sometimes, but not enough that I want to leave what we have here. I like this house. I like the neighborhood and the kids we work with. I don't want to go anywhere."

He nodded, a slightly relieved expression on his face. What was that about? I wanted to ask but darn it if him kissing me didn't distract me from my thoughts. I ended up straddling his lap with our hands roaming all over one another until I lifted myself up and lowered myself onto him. We moved slowly against each other, taking our time. Honestly, I wasn't a big fan of sex in the tub. The shower was one thing, but the tub was an entirely different ball game. The sensations just weren't the same, not that it was for lack of trying. Water sloshed around us, making a small mess on the floor and on the tiles that surrounded the high walls of the tub.

The resulting orgasm was good because, well, it was an orgasm, but it wasn't one that had me screaming and praying for the speedy recovery of my legs afterward. It left me feeling loved and very relaxed and definitely wanting more. We stayed there in the water, clinging to one another for a few more minutes before deciding we'd had enough and got out of the tub. We went upstairs still wrapped in towels and got dressed. Eric located the pajama pants he'd worn at my parents house while I threw on my most comfy sweats.

"So what now?" Eric asked after we were dressed.

"We could watch a movie?" I suggested.

"I could be on board with that. I seem to recall owing you a little something on the couch." Apparently I wasn't the only one who was left wanting more.

I grinned at his suggestion but said, "Later. I think I have another idea. You go pick the movie and I'll take care of the rest."

Eric arched a questioning eyebrow at me but I shooed him out of the room. I had materials to gather. I went from room to room, closet to closet, taking the things I needed before dumping them all on the love seat. I pushed the coffee table off to the side of the room and got to work. Eric came into the living room with a selection of DVDs in his hand.

"What are you doing?" He arched a curious eyebrow at me.

"Building a pillow fort." I said as if it were the most natural thing in the world. "If you're nice, I'll let you play in it."

Eric shook with laughter like I'd just extended a challenge. "A pillow fort?"

"Yep. Don't tell me you and Johan never did that when you were kids?"

"Not since we were about ten."

"Then I'd say you're long overdue." I said as I continued construction.

Eric held up the DVDs and said, "I brought winter-themed options."

"It's your choice, remember?"

"Okay. Then National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation it is." He waved the case at me.

"Good one!" I grinned. "You know, next to the animated version of How The Grinch Stole Christmas, that one is my favorite Christmas movie."

Eric got the movie set up while I finished stacking pillows and blankets. "So, do I get to play in your fort?"

I looked up at him and said, "Yes, but there's a rule and it has to be followed. It's not up for negotiations."

"What's that?"

I stood up and pulled off my shirt. "No clothes allowed in the fort."

Eric leered at me and said, "This is the best snow day I've ever had." Then he dropped his pants.

It was my best snow day ever, too.

Alright baby birds, so here's the skinny... In response to some recent fuckery by the lame-o powers that be around here there have been a few authors who have decided to take the show on the road and find new stomping grounds. It was while I was helping an author set up their account on livejournal that I was struck with what I think was a rather brilliant idea. Being that I used to post exclusively to livejournal I always had people asking me where they could find me on this site. Back then I turned my nose up at the very idea of posting here. Some days I still wonder wtf I was thinking when I made the leap (not on account of the readers, mind you, but because I love my baby birds to pieces). Anyway... the point is that I thought it would make a hell of a lot of sense for the readers to have a place to go on livejournal where they could find their favorite SVM authors. Justlikethat! the **sookieverse\_lj**community was born. The community officially went live at midnight last night, so it's now open for business.

It'll probably be a while before all of the authors have their work transferred over, but trust me, it's happening. It's not to say that they're going to discontinue posting here, but it's a backup place to store their work in case the window lickers that run this site decide to yank their work without so much as a reason. The best part is, you don't have to have a livejournal account in order to read the entries. You won't be able to get alerts if you aren't an account holder, however. Posting access is limited to authors and artists and in order to receive posting access you must PM a maintainer (myself or the fabulous ChanelAddict). When you send out that PM you will need to include your outside email so that we can send you a "welcome packet" to the community which includes tips, rules and guidelines that are especially helpful if you are a first time user at livejournal. Can I get a woot! woot! for color copiers and PDF files?

If you're already a livejournal user and are interested in receiving alerts from your favorite authors, all you have to do is add them to your friends list. If they're already on your friends list but you aren't receiving alerts, simply go to their profile page and click on the little push pin on the right side of the screen. That will allow you to "track" the user and that sends emails to you any time they update their journal. It's easy enough, folks. LJ really isn't such a bad place to post and there won't be any fuckery with missing chapters or stories mysteriously disappearing. Not to mention, I think it's a more interactive site. If you want to know what I mean, take a gander as some of the comments left in my journal entries. I've had some great discussions with the ladies there and made some pretty kick ass friends as a result.

Okay, okay, enough yammering out of me. Where's the link already?

**sookieverse\_lj/**

Please be sure to check out the tag for contests that are currently going on. I'm working with The Sookieverse on this project so we're all in it together. If you have any questions about any on-going contests that haven't surpassed the submission deadlines, that entry is right up your ally. Speaking of which, submissions for the **7 Deadly Sins** contest are due September 1st, so if you were thinking to write, there's still time.

Okay, I swear, I'm done now. Thanks for reading homeskillets xoxo

**Chapter 30: Team Player**

Just a note... I'm not a basketball player. All I know about the sport, I learned from watching One Tree Hill. I have no idea what goes into a try out or what, exactly, a coach would be looking for. I tried to research it on the web, but there were few resources on the subject. So, forgive me if what I've got here is inaccurate.

Chapter Thirty: Team Player

Getting back into work our regular work routine sucked. It had been too easy to forget the rest of the world and just focus on being together. The week after Thanksgiving I had basketball try outs to deal with. My assistant coach was an English teacher and a Vietnam veteran by the name of Terry Bellefleur. He was a nice enough guy, but he really didn't seem to have that thing a person needed to be a coach. He was good for spiritual leadership and I knew his English class was one of the most popular in school. He taught English IV to the seniors, and there wasn't a single student who didn't want to be in Terry's class. His attitude was one of ordered chaos. He managed to maintain the laid back vibe of a hippy and the control of a soldier. It was weird how he did it, but it worked for him.

I wasn't the least bit surprised to see Quentin- the kid who'd done nothing but verbally harass me in the past- walk into the gym for try outs. He walked in with a couple of his friends. It looked more like an entourage than anything else. I wasn't anywhere near impressed with that, although he seemed to think it set him apart from everyone else. I didn't care how popular he was. I knew he was king of the street courts, but I had yet to see him in a serious environment. Did he bring that same arrogance to the court when he was part of a real team? If he did, that was going to be a serious problem.

I overheard him talking about how this was all just a formality. He thought he was too good to try out with everyone else. Maybe that was the case but I wasn't about to make any exceptions. If his talent was there, it would speak for himself. He needed to learn when to shut his piehole, since it certainly wasn't currying him any favor with me.

Terry came to stand next to me in the gym. If he were four inches taller, we would have been shoulder to shoulder. "That Quentin kid is the best chance we have at a winning season."

"Not if he keeps that up." I nodded to where Quentin was showboating and acting like a total fool.

"Well, son, here's where my military trainin' will be a big help to you." Terry gave a slight smirk and I decided maybe he would make a better coach than I thought.

"What branch of the service were you in?"

"Army. B Company, 504th military police battalion. Spent a good chunk of my time as a Roadrunner keeping highways safe for travel. Then I got shot and the party ended." Terry spoke of the whole thing as if it were no big deal.

"Pop was a Marine. He saw some action in Da Nang before his unit was pulled out."

"Yeah, I bet he did." Terry shook his head as if he were trying to erase a memory- like an Etch-A-Sketch with a bad drawing on it.

"What'dya say we get this dog and pony show going, huh?" I suggested to keep Terry from slipping into some crazy flashback involving Agent Orange or phantom choppers flying overhead.

Dad always said the only thing that saved him from a life like that was Mom. She was what kept the ghosts away at night. That's a pretty powerful thing. I never quite understood how that was possibly until I met Sookie. Not that I had a whole lot haunting me, but life just didn't seem so hard with her next to me. It was nice to have someone to share the load with.

We had about 100 boys show up for try outs, which was much better than I had anticipated. The final roster only allotted for 15 players per squad, and my only concern was the varsity team. We'd have our starters, our B Squad and an alternate just in case someone went down unexpectedly with an injury or someone was sick. We took weights, measurements, wing spans and tested how high they could jump before getting to the basics. We had boys running laps and testing their speed in 50 yard dashes. We tested their basic skills in the game to see what their percentage was on something as simple as free throws, lay ups and how well they handled a basketball.

It was a strange thing to be on the sidelines of it all being the one to do the picking and choosing. I wasn't used to being the one critiquing other players to spot their potential. I was used to measuring them as opponents to find their weaknesses, but then that came in useful as well. A good player could always spot the littlest flaws in the players he was up against. Knowing that a player would take just a half step in either direction when you moved a certain way could be the difference between scoring and losing at the buzzer. It was important to be able to spot little things like that.

Before I knew it, two hours had passed and it was time to send everyone home. Terry and I had notes to compare but it would have to wait until the next day. It was after six already. I was wiped and wanted to get home to Sookie. I promised Terry I'd email him the notes I'd taken, even though we'd done some talking throughout the whole thing. It was too soon to know for sure who we'd be taking on the team since basic skill was only a portion of what counted.

I was more concerned to see how the guys played. Skill was something that could be learned, but being a team player or a leader took much more time and work, not to mention someone who was willing to learn to take on a bigger role. My gut told me Quentin had potential to be something bigger than a loudmouth but he was going to have to make the effort. Like I told him the first time we met, a good team was more important to me than victories.

By the time I dragged myself into the house, Sookie was just setting the table for dinner. She was dressed in her usual evening attire- a pair of yoga pants and a t-shirt- and her hair hung loosely down her back. She met me at the door with plates in her hands and rose up on her toes to kiss me hello.

"You look you've had a rough day." She rubbed my cheek with her thumb.

"Lots of choices to make." I sighed as I pulled off my shoes and left them on the mat by the door.

"How did try outs go?" She asked over her shoulder as she started toward the kitchen.

"Not bad. I'm going to have my work cut out for me, though." I walked into the kitchen and inhaled the smell of whatever it was she was cooking. "What's for dinner?"

"Well, I figured with the crappy weather yesterday and you having to stay late at work today, I thought a little comfort food was in order." She grinned as she opened one of the oven doors. "So I made pot roast."

"Have I told you lately that I love you?" I grinned at her as I made my way to the sink to wash my hands.

"Yes, you have, but feel free to say it again." She winked at me. "I just need to mash the potatoes and finish up the gravy and we're all set."

Dinner was fantastic. As if Sookie wasn't amazing enough already, she was a wonderful cook. It was nice to meet a woman who was capable of making something more complicated than a box of macaroni and cheese or a frozen pizza. I didn't have to worry she was going to burn my house down when she told me she was going to cook. We sat down together and talked about our day as we ate.

Sookie's students had been happy to see her back in the classroom. She'd heard a few horror stories of substitutes with no personality and even less interest in helping the kids actually learn anything. Then again, from all I could gather, Sookie had her own style when it came to teaching. It helped that the girls wanted to be her best friend and the boys wanted to... well, that was never going to happen, but it helped all the same. There was a lot of backtracking she was going to have to do in order to get everything back on-line again, which would mean her students would be flocking to see her in the morning before first period.

"Well, I guess we can get back to our morning shower routine." I wiggled my eyebrows at her.

"I have missed those showers." Sookie nodded her agreement.

"Well, how about I wash up these dishes and then we have a little hot tub therapy?" I suggested to her.

"That is a great idea." Sookie smiled at me.

I was on the phone with Jason, going over the final arrangements for Sookie's Christmas present when there was a knock on my office door. The team roster had gone up earlier in the day, and as expected, Quentin was pissed.

"Hey, Jay, I gotta run. Keep me posted, will you?"

"Sure thing. Say hi to my sister."

"Will do." I hung up and set my phone down on the desk. "What can I do for you, Quentin?"

"You can tell me that I got knocked in the head and forgot how to read, because I know you didn't put me on the B Squad." Quentin glared at me like I'd just slapped his mother in the face.

"You have talent, Quentin, no doubt about it. I see a lot of potential in you, but it's like I told you before-"

"Man, all that team harmony bullsh-"

"Language." I reminded him.

"You really think they're gonna let you keep on coaching if your best player is sitting on the bench waiting for Captain Tenderheart to need a breather?"

"I think I was hired because I have a good eye. I know the game. I've played it. I was part of a team that was about more than wins and losses. I'm giving you the opportunity to develop your skills beyond ball handling and shooting abilities. Being a leader is one of the things scouts look for, Quentin, and right now you don't have those skills."

"I lead in scoring." Quentin said smugly.

"There's more to it than what's in the box scores." I shrugged. "Here's the thing, Quentin- it's *my* team, regardless of the way it used to be. I put you on the B Squad because it was either that, or you don't play at all. Whether or not you're willing to take that role is entirely your choice."

"You're making a big mistake, man." Quentin shook his head.

"Practice starts tomorrow after tenth period. I hope you'll be there." I reminded him as he walked out the door.

I had no idea if Quentin was going to be there, and his attitude made it difficult to care. If all he was interested in was being a local celebrity, I didn't have time for him. I started going over some of the plays Terry and I had been working on, including a defensive strategy that had been a big part of the reason Duke had won the championship my senior year at college. I did a little tweaking in hopes of playing up the strengths of the players on my team. I had a list of things that needed to be worked on, both as a team and as individuals. Terry was going to be working mostly with the B Squad, which was probably a good thing.

For some reason, I got the feeling Quentin would be more receptive of the messages Terry and I were trying to get across if it wasn't coming out of my mouth. I didn't know why, but it seemed I rubbed Quentin the wrong way. The bell rang to end seventh period and I grabbed my laptop to take with me down to study hall. Sookie and I had found a way around the school's firewalls and had taken to using gchat when we got bored.

I got my laptop going but Sookie never appeared in study hall. I kept waiting for her to slip quietly into the room, but that didn't happen. I tried to keep myself occupied in the sports section of the day's paper and pretend like it didn't matter where she was, but I was definitely curious. I started kicking myself for leaving my cell up in my office but I didn't think I was going to need it.

I didn't bother waiting for the period to end before heading back to my office. I had a bad feeling something was going on. It wasn't like Sookie to just not show up. I got back to my office to find I had several missed calls from Sookie, all resulting in messages wondering why I wasn't picking up my phone. I certainly would have if I'd seen her calling me in the middle of the day, given she was never more than a few hundred yards away from me at any given time.

"Eric, I don't know where you are, but I got a call from Detective Twinings. Lorena has been arrested. They wanted to see if I could identify her. I'll be at the police station. Call me when you get this. I love you." Sookie said in a breathless voice.

Shit. I knew something was wrong. I immediately called her back but the calls went straight to voice mail. I sent her a text to let her know I was on my way. I ran to Andre's office to tell him I had an emergency and had to go. I was a bit surprised I hadn't been contacted about this since Sookie had virtually no memory of the crash. While it was true I had been far enough away that I couldn't give a description of anything more than the car, I was still able to provide more information than Sookie.

"They finally caught the person who hit her?" Andre looked relieved.

"We don't know for certain it was her, but they've been working to gather evidence. This whole thing moves a lot slower than it does on TV." I said in frustration.

"I take it we don't have our very own Gil Grissom in this town?"

"More like Barney Fife." I snickered while Andre chuckled.

"Go on, Eric. I'll cover your last class. Let me know how it goes." Andre stood to walk me out of the locker room like I'd lost my way.

I bolted out the side door and ran down the track toward the other end of the school. Sookie's car was gone. She'd been parked right next to me. I got in the Corvette and had to remind myself not to speed or I'd end up fishtailing all over Rose Street. The last thing we needed was for me to end up in the hospital because I wrapped my baby around a light pole.

Thankfully, the police station was only two blocks away from the school and not on the other side of the train tracks at the Franklin Street stop. I parked my car next to Sookie's and then ran into the building. Ice and slush flew under my feet as I pounded the pavement. I wasn't anywhere near winded when I walked into the vestibule of the department. There was a small sitting area and the dispatch center was to my left. What I assumed to be a bulletproof window kept me separated from the officers inside.

"Can I help you?" A gruff voice asked.

"Yes, I'm here to see Detective Twinings."

"You have an appointment?"

"Uh, no, no, I don't. He called my girlfriend in to see if she could make an I.D. on the person who nearly killed her."

"Oh yeah. Stackhouse, right?" Gruff looked bored out of his skull. I nodded while he looked down at a bank of monitors. "Wait here."

I paced back and forth while the officer went through a door in the back. I checked my phone to make sure Sookie hadn't called or texted me back while I was on my way over, but there was nothing. I only paced for a few minutes before the door at the end of the little waiting room opened. Sookie was standing there looking shaken and a little on the pale side.

"Sookie, what happened?" I looked from her to Detective Twinings who was standing behind her.

"If we find any other information, Sookie, I promise to be in touch." Detective Twinings patted Sookie's shoulder.

"Thanks." Her eyes were a little vacant, which didn't help my nerves to settle.

"Sookie, what's going on?" I stepped closer to her, prepared to grab her shoulders.

"Can you just take me home?" She wrapped her arms around herself.

She was wearing her heaviest parka and I knew she was wearing warm clothing underneath it, yet it seemed like she was freezing. I tucked her close to my chest and walked with her out to the car. I got her settled in the front seat before going around to the driver's side. If I had to, I'd have Pam swing by later so we could come back for Sookie's car since Sookie clearly was in no condition to drive.

The drive home took less than five minutes. Sookie moved like a zombie from the car to the front door. Jeter pounced the second we walked in but Sookie ignored him, which was something she never did. Even when she came home from the hospital all bruised up, she'd stopped to pat and scratch the dog's head. Not that day. That day Sookie shrugged out of her coat and kicked off her boots before collapsing on the couch in a heap.

"You want to tell me what's going on?" I asked gently.

"I had to do a photo I.D." Sookie pulled her knees up to her chest.

"I thought they brought Lorena in?" I sat down beside Sookie on the couch.

"I thought so, too." Her eyes filled with tears and she immediately brushed them away when they spilled over. "I didn't think anything of it when I heard Bill wasn't in today. I figured it was just some bug going around. I didn't know."

"Didn't know what?" I reached for her hand and squeezed it.

"Lorena's dead." Sookie was positively haunted by what she was saying, and I couldn't blame her. I was shocked myself. "She drowned the baby in the tub..." She had to pause to wipe away more tears. "She drowned the baby and then she hung herself."

I didn't know what to think of that. "That's... that's horrible."

"She left a note but she didn't mention the accident in it, so if it was her, we're never going to know. What I *do* know is that she never gave up on the idea that I was sleeping with her husband. She killed the baby to spite him for hurting her." Sookie turned her face toward mine with a mixture of anger and sadness in her eyes. "She killed that baby because of me."

"No." I said forcefully and pulled her closer to me. "Sookie, there was probably a lot going on in that marriage that we'll never know about. Obviously she had problems that went much deeper than anyone realized if she could kill herself, much less her own child. What happened isn't your fault."

"I know that." Sookie sighed and snuggled against me. "I know this isn't my fault but it doesn't change that it happened because of me."

"So what are the police going to do about the accident?" I kissed the top of her head.

"They're going to keep investigating to see if they can find anything to link Lorena to it beyond a reasonable doubt. Obviously they can't charge her with a crime, but it would be nice to know who was responsible."

I wrapped an arm around her, holding her close to me. My money was still on Bill. If it weren't for him, Lorena would have had no reason to go after Sookie in the first place. The two women had never even met. The only other link between them was Quinn, and he had no reason to want Sookie dead. I don't think the jilted lover theory held up where Quinn was concerned, although I suppose Lorena's murder/suicide ordeal proved anything was possible. What a mess.

"The funeral is in two days." Sookie spoke quietly. "I don't know if it's appropriate for me to show up or not. It seems tacky considering the circumstances. If Lorena thought I was sleeping with her husband, she probably told that to anyone who would listen. Showing up is probably a bad idea."

"You're probably right about that." I twirled some of her hair around my fingers.

"I just feel so bad for that baby. He didn't have anything to do with any of this. Why did she have to kill the baby?" Sookie started crying again and I'd never hated Bill Compton more.

His lies had not only hurt his wife so much she felt like she was left with no other choice but take her life and the life of their child, but his lies had also nearly killed three people I cared about. So far, he had yet to apologize to Sookie at all for what happened to her. He didn't seem to give a rat's ass that his lies may have gotten her killed. And to think there was a time when he thought he wanted to date her?

Once Sookie stopped crying, she pulled away from me. "I'm going to make some tea. Do you want some?"

"No, thanks. I'm gonna give Pam a call and see if she'll come with me to go get your car."

"No, you don't have to do that. I can go with you to get it later."

"Don't be ridiculous. You stay here. Have some tea and maybe go for a swim in the tub downstairs. I have to run up to the school to get my laptop anyway." I kissed the top of Sookie's head but when I started to pull away she pulled me down to give her a real kiss.

"Thank you for coming for me."

"I'm just sorry I didn't get there sooner."

"Nothing you could have done to change the outcome." She wrapped her arms around me, hugging me tightly to her.

I really didn't want to leave Sookie alone in the house. It's not like I was worried she would hurt herself, or anything like that. I just didn't want her to be alone.

"How about I make you your tea while you take a bath? I'll bring it downstairs. We can figure out the car stuff later." I suggested.

I felt Sookie smile against my chest. "There's only one thing wrong with that plan."

"What's that?"

"You should be in the tub with me." She squeezed me a little tighter.

"I think that can be arranged." I kissed the top of her head once more before leading her into the kitchen.

Hey baby birds! So I've got a couple of announcements to make here.

1) The Sookieverse on livejournal community is now open for business! So if you're looking for an author that may have evacuated LJ recently, you might be able to find them over on livejournal. If you're a writer interested in posting there with us, please send me a PM so I can get you further information.

**sookieverse\_lj/**

2) I am proud to announce that the fuckawesome **kjwrit** and I have formed a partnership we have dubbed **MKayProductions**. We are currently working on our first collaborative story that came to us courtesy of a plot bunny from **meadowslark**. I do believe this marks kjwrit's first venture into TB!verse. I know this is my first venture into crossover fiction and I think this is the first time for both of us that we've ever worked with someone on a writing project. I'm so excited about this. Minus the Seinfeld stuff, she's my sister from another mister. In all things but ASkars, we're a total buds before studs sort of team. When it comes to ASkars? Well, I'd shank her for him, and she knows it. She would also do the same thing right back. We're awesome like that.

**u/2515912/**

I think that about covers things. Hopefully I'll have another chapter for you soon. I may need to get myself set up on a regular posting schedule a la the fab MissusT. It's something to consider.

Later lovers \*blows kisses\*

**Chapter 31: Awakenings**

**This is IMPORTANT. Please read.** If you've been following this story, you should know that I've started a community on livejournal for SVM authors who have evacuated in light of recent issues with the administrators and a user by the name of **Lord Kelvin** who is involved with the Literate Union. For those who don't know about the Literate Union, they are responsible for a bunch of M Rated stories being pulled earlier in the year. The problem seemed to be going away, but it appears as though we should be prepared for a second wave of stories being pulled. I've had quite a few of you comment in previous chapters to say that there's something that needs to be done about this. Here's the thing: I completely agree with you. The problem is, there was a massive letter writing campaign that happened and the admins did NOTHING to stop this from happening. If they don't give a rat's ass about the authors who post here, then I have other places to post. Perhaps if business/readership drops off, they'll get the point that they need to be more considerate of their author's rights. For now, I'm not leaving, but this isn't my only option for posting. I was doing very well at livejournal before I started posting here as well. I would hate to leave the readers here, but I may not have much of a choice. It's all going to depend on what happens with the admins here.

On that somewhat depressing note, on with the chapter...

Chapter Thirty One: Awakenings

I wanted to go to Lorena's funeral. Even though I knew what happened to her wasn't my fault, I felt like I owed her an apology of sorts. I felt guilty even though there wasn't anything I could have done to change the outcome. I was shocked, to say the least, when Detective Twinings told me what had happened. I'd thought nothing of Bill being out sick. I figured it was just some bug going around. Finding out he was planning his wife and child's funeral was a real shock to the system.

The whole situation was beyond tragic. In spite of all he'd done to potentially make my life hell, there was a part of me that felt badly for Bill as well. Honestly if it weren't for the loss of his child, I probably wouldn't have felt so badly for him. Lorena's death was just another reminder of how lucky I was to have Eric.

Eric was great to me about the whole thing. I knew it bothered him that I was feeling any sort of pity or sympathy for Bill. Eric told me more than once not to waste my time worrying. He'd put himself in the mess he was in and there was no one to blame for what happened besides Bill and Lorena. I knew Eric was right but I still felt badly.

In attempts to make up for my less than good mood, I opted to do the bulk of our Christmas shopping. We would be shipping gifts down to Louisiana since I wasn't going home for the holiday. The idea of not seeing my family for Christmas made me sad. It's not that I needed to wake up in my childhood bed on Christmas morning, necessarily, but it would just be nice to see them all again.

Eric was already home from practice by the time I staggered inside with a bunch of bags in my hands. "There's more in the car." I informed him when I dropped the load on the floor.

"Is there anything left in the mall?" Eric stared at the bags.

"Laugh it up, but I'm not done yet. This is just for my parents, Jason, Crystal and *my* gift for Pam." I turned to go back out to the car.

"You got Pam a gift? You know she loves you already, don't you?"

"Yes, and I would very much like to keep it that way, which is why I made a stop in the Coach section at Marshall Fields. Now will you *please* help me with the rest of the stuff in my trunk?" I batted my eyelashes at him.

"Yes, yes, I'll be right out." Eric promised.

Ten minutes later we had all of the bags in the house and I was starting to sort through my purchases to get things organized. In addition to the gifts I'd bought there was wrapping paper, bows, gift boxes, ribbons and gift tags. Eric stood there looking stunned, as if the concept of gift wrapping was foreign to him. Although, to be fair to Eric, I was pretty sure it wasn't just him- gift wrapping isn't really something most guys bother to fool around with. My own brother was infamous for bribing Mom or me into doing it for him, and when that didn't work, there was always a gift bag. By that, of course, I mean a plastic grocery bag bound for recycling.

Eric worked on dinner while I got started on wrapping the gifts. I was planning to take the ones that needed to be mailed to the post office over the weekend but I didn't want to spend the day doing nothing but gift related work. Besides, Eric and I had a Christmas party to attend at the bar since we were going out of town the following weekend, and Pam had insisted we come.

"I was thinking we could go get a tree on Sunday." Eric stood in the archway between the kitchen and the living room with a dish towel over his shoulder.

"Good idea. Do you have any decorations? If you don't, I've got a ton of them in my garage that we can use."

"I've got a couple but I didn't bother with a tree last year since I was in Sweden during the holidays." Eric confessed.

"Let me guess... if I wasn't living here, you wouldn't have a tree this year either." I arched an eyebrow at him.

"Maybe a small one." Eric shrugged.

"Men." I rolled my eyes. "So then suggesting we decorate the outside of the house is probably a waste of time, huh?"

"No, it isn't. If you want to, we can do it." Eric was completely indifferent to the notion but I appreciated he was willing to go along with me on it.

"I don't have to worry about you playing with a staple gun, do I? I mean, I'm not going to drive up to find you hanging off the side of the house or something, am I?" I was attacked with images of Clark Griswold and I had to stifle a laugh.

"First of all, I don't own a staple gun. Second of all, I am much more coordinated than Clark Griswold, thankyouverymuch." Eric turned to go back to the kitchen to check on dinner. I loved that he got me without even trying.

After dinner I helped Eric with the dishes and got a few more gifts wrapped up before we called it a night. Eric told me about how practice went. He'd been surprised to see a player named Quentin show up.

"I know Quentin. I had him when he was a freshman. He's a good kid." I told Eric.

"Well, he's a pain in the ass for a coach."

"Nah, you just have to find the right motivation." I rubbed up against him.

"That simple, huh?" Eric looked amused.

"Definitely." I climbed on top of him. "For instance, I bet with the right motivation, I bet I could get you up on a ladder to put lights on the roof if I wanted to."

"Oh really?" Eric watched with hooded eyes as I started to pull my nightgown up a little bit.

"Mmmhmm. You just have to find," I bent down and kissed his neck. "The right way," I paused again to kiss the other side. "To give him what he wants." I took off my nightgown. "So he's willing," I put his hands on my breasts. "To give you," I kissed his mouth gently. "What you want."

"You know, somehow I don't think straddling him and letting him feel me up is going to work." Eric smirked at me. I bit back a smile and climbed off him. "Where are you going?"

"Well, I wouldn't want to give you the wrong idea." I turned on my side so I was facing away from him, but I was smiling the whole time.

Eric spooned up behind me, letting me feel just how well my tutorial had been going for him. "I think with the proper teaching, I might be able to make the necessary tweaks."

I rolled over to face him and slung my leg up over his hip. "You probably shouldn't do that either."

"Probably not." Eric agreed. "But feel free to show me some other things I shouldn't do."

Boy, did I. By the time I was done with Eric, I'd shown him a whole host of things that could get him fired and jailed, but he was happy as a clam. Eric was breathing heavy and staring up at the ceiling with a dazed expression on his face while I snuggled next to him. He pulled me closer to him when he felt like I was too far away.

"So did you want colored lights, or just plane white ones on the roof?" He whispered to me and I couldn't help but laugh.

I woke in the morning before the alarm went off, thanks to a certain someone who had set up camp between my legs. Before I was even awake, my hands were in his hair. I looked down to see him staring up at me and a sleepy smile stretched across my face.

Eric stopped long enough to grin at me and say, "Good morning, love," then he was right back at it.

"Morning." It was all I could eek out before a moan escaped right after.

This was my payback for the night before when I refused to let him reciprocate. Eric always felt like there was a debt owed if I insisted on leaving any sort of sexual activity one sided. I loved him for it, even if I hadn't been looking for payback. His tongue flicked against me in time with the stroke of his fingers that were curled slightly inside me- like he was beckoning my orgasm to him. Just when I got to the edge, he pulled back.

"Eric, don't stop." I gasped, my hips arching up off the bed. There were times to tease and times to get on with it and since we had a limited amount of time to work with, it was time to get on with it. "Eric..."

I could feel his warm breath where I wanted his mouth to be but he remained completely still. I groaned my frustration, prepared to finish the job myself, when his head dipped back down. His eyes stayed on mine while his lips closed around my clit. His tongue flicked in that wonderful way and his fingers started pumping in and out of me again. He'd gone from zero to sixty in all of two seconds and he was unrelenting. His name fell from my lips in a chant that got louder and louder the closer I got to my release.

My orgasm hit so hard my voice just up and left me all together. Some sort of choked noise left my throat instead of the scream that had been welling there. I hadn't even realized my hips had left the bed again until I felt them fall onto the mattress. I lay there shaking and trying to catch my breath. I hadn't even fully recovered when Eric flipped me over and pulled my hips up so I was on my knees. I moaned when he entered me from behind, his fingers trailing down my spine as he did so.

My heart hammered in my chest and I tried to push myself up but my arms just wouldn't work at the moment. Eric pounded into me fast and hard, his hand reaching around to rub circles around my clit. It was like lightning bolts struck my arms and I found myself up on all fours, my head turning as much as it could to look at Eric over my shoulder. He leaned forward and kissed me between my shoulder blades. I glanced at the clock knowing we had only a few more minutes before the alarm went off, but what a way to start the day.

As usual, Eric made sure I got off first but quickly followed. We both dropped on the bed with Eric falling right behind me. He continued to kiss my shoulders and the back of my neck, moving my hair this way and that to get to the skin he wanted to taste. I glared at the alarm clock with hatred. It was still dark outside. I really, really despised winter.

"I want white lights, but you don't have to put them on the roof." I reached behind me to pat his ass and he laughed against the skin just under my ear.

I was in the middle of grading quizzes during my first free period of the day when Octavia Fant came to my classroom and closed the door behind her. I looked up from the stacks of papers organized in front of me and leaned back in my chair.

"Octavia, how nice to see you." I smiled at her.

"How are things going?" She asked as she pulled a chair up along side my desk.

"Better. I was concerned the kids were going to have trouble catching up but most of them have been coming in early for help or staying late in the afternoon. It's a nice thing to see." I couldn't help but smile.

So many teachers complained about how apathetic their students were, but there were few teachers who seemed to be willing to put in any extra effort themselves to make sure their students were really learning. Not to mention, they were boring as all get out. It was easy to get a kid's attention if you weren't preaching from a textbook and droning on and on without allowing them to interact with you. The kids felt like they had a hand in their own education, like their opinions counted for something.

"That's good to hear." Octavia nodded with a smile, though her eyes told me she wasn't coming to me with the best news.

"What's going on, Octavia?"

She took a deep breath and crossed her legs, clasping her hands around her knee. Shit. "When I got in this morning I had an email waiting for me from Bill Compton. He's given his resignation."

My eyes widened, although I wasn't really surprised. "That's too bad."

I didn't like the man personally, but he wasn't a bad teacher. His absence would leave us in a lurch for the remainder of the year. I wondered if he was planning to move back to the south since he no longer had Lorena and Junior around. He'd always made it seem like he'd moved north at Lorena's behest. If that was the case, there was no reason not to move back to Louisiana anymore.

"Given the tragedy that happened, I think it might be for the best. Parents are questioning his ability to effectively do his job and there have been inquiries into whether or not his wife's death was, in fact, a suicide." Octavia informed me.

Now that last bit shocked the hell out of me. Detective Twinings hadn't mentioned any sort of investigation into Lorena's death. He hadn't produced a suicide not for me to read but he had made it clear Lorena's death had been ruled a suicide. The baby's death had been declared a homicide. Baby's don't just fall into full bathtubs to take a swim. Someone had to put that baby in there. I shivered at the idea that maybe the police had gotten it all wrong. What if it was Bill who had drowned his son and not Lorena?

"Wait, are you telling me Bill is a suspect in his wife's murder?" I wanted to be clear on what I was being told.

"I can't say anything official, but there were some detectives asking questions." Octavia was usually all business but at the moment, she seemed like she was interested in some good ole fashioned gossip. Her and my Gran would get on famously if they ever met.

"Look, Octavia, all I know is what Detective Twinings told me yesterday when he asked me if I could make an identification on Lorena. The idea that her death wasn't a suicide is news to me." I said as gently as I could. I really didn't want to hash out the details of it all with her.

"It's a shame, isn't it? That poor child." Octavia shook her head and clucked her tongue.

"Yes, it is." I agreed with her because it was the truth.

"With Bill leaving his post, we're going to have an opening to teach American History next year. I'd like it very much if you would consider taking over that course load." Ah ha, the real reason for Octavia's visit.

"Oh, I don't know." I pressed my lips into a thin line. "I know it's a more rigorous workload, so I appreciate your vote of confidence in my ability to do the job but I think I'm happy with the class I'm currently teaching. I like being able to help the fresh blood around here find its way."

Octavia chuckled at my rationale. "Freshmen are an interesting breed, aren't they?"

"All teenagers are."

"I know you're more interactive with your students, and I appreciate the time and extra effort you put into your classes. I just think you could do just as well with the juniors as you do the freshmen."

"Can I have some time to think it over?"

"Absolutely. We won't be interviewing anyone for the position until after the first of the year, so how about you take the break to think about it and you let me know when we get back." Octavia offered, reaching over to pat my hand.

"That sounds like a plan to me." I smiled at her and picked up my pen, hoping she'd get the hint that I had work to do and time for chit chat was over.

Eric finally had a night off and we planned to spend it at home doing absolutely nothing. We were both exhausted. His first game was on Friday and he was on edge for it to be over with. I couldn't wait for it to be over with either. Eric was starting to stress me out. I wanted to help him but there wasn't much I could do other than be there for him. It was all in his head. Once he saw his team come together for real in a competitive environment, I was sure he'd loosen up a little.

Octavia excused herself and I went back to grading my papers in peace. My classes flew by and I tried not to pay attention to the things the kids were saying about the circumstances that led up to Mr. Compton's sudden resignation. As teachers go, Bill wasn't on the more popular end of the scale. The kids- from what I overhead, of course- thought he was patronizing and 'uppity' toward them. They didn't enjoy being treated like they weren't capable of thinking for themselves. He was a straight from the book sort of teacher who took every single quiz or test from the practice section in the textbook he taught from. Except, of course, for his essay questions. From my understanding those essays were nearly impossible to answer and after having gotten my hands on them one day while in the copy room, I had to agree with my students.

I pushed Bill from my mind and instead focused on my own life. During eighth period study hall I wrote up a list of all the things I had to do in the next couple of days.

1. Finish Christmas shopping for gifts to send home.

2. Buy dress for Pam's party.

3. Finish grading essays on Crusades.

copies of "Christmas Around the World" project, assign teams.

5. Pick up Poms gifts from store/wrap gifts for Friday's game.

6. Check in with Tray/get update on Amelia/talk to Tray about taking Jeter while Eric and I are gone.

7. Hang posters for NYE battle of the bands contest at the bar.

8. Find shoes to match dress for Pam's party.

9. Email Mrs. Northman for her Butterhorn recipe/bake cookies for neighbors & faculty party.

10. Get x-mas decorations from the house.

11. Get a full night's sleep.

I laughed when I wrote that last one, knowing it probably wasn't going to happen until the winter break officially began. I was excited about going to California. I thought back on the conversation I'd had a few days prior with Eric's Mom. She'd called his cell phone while he was in the shower after getting back from practice.

"*Hello?" I said when I answered.*

"*Is this Sookie?" Mrs. Northman asked.*

"*Yes, it is." I couldn't but smile. Her accent was beyond adorable, although her question left me wondering what other woman might answer Eric's phone as of late. "Eric's in the shower at the moment."*

"*How is his team? He was nervous the last time we spoke." Mrs. Northman sounded concerned and I couldn't blame her for it.*

"*I think things are going well, but you know Eric... if it's not perfect, he's not happy."*

"*He gets that from his father."*

"*So I've been told."*

"*You know, when he was a little one, he would spend hours at the beach building sandcastles with those little plastic buckets or old pieces of Tupperware that were too stained or warped to be useful to me. If the sides of the pieces he packed into the plastic weren't absolutely perfect and smooth, he would smash them and start all over." Mrs. Northman's laugh was a sweet, tinkling sound that made me wonder what Annika would be like.*

"*Eric is definitely a slave to perfection." I nodded my agreement, although she couldn't see me.*

"*I am excited to meet you, Sookie. Eric speaks very highly of you, as does his brother. Johan is even more difficult to impress than Eric." She told me, which I found surprising considering how easily Johan seemed to get along with everyone.*

"*I'm happy to hear that, Mrs. Northman. I'm excited to meet you, too."*

"*You call me Stella until you call me Mom." She said in a sweet, yet stern voice.*

"*Mom, huh?" I couldn't help but giggle.*

"*Do you not want to marry my Eric?" Well, that just got interesting, didn't it. Eric and I had briefly talked about marriage, but nothing had been decided. I had to wonder what he'd been telling his parents.*

*I heard Mr. Northman yelling in the background for Mrs. Northman to 'stifle herself' in a very Archie Bunker-like fashion. I wondered what he would do if I blew a raspberry at him if he said something I didn't agree with. I made a mental note to try it once just to see his reaction.*

*Thankfully, Eric came into the kitchen fresh from the shower. His towel was still wrapped around his hips. I winked at him before returning my attention to the phone.*

"*Stella, your son is out of the shower if you'd like to speak to him."*

"*Yes, I believe I would. I'll see you soon, älskling." She blew a kiss to me over the phone.*

I liked Mrs. Northman, er, Stella. She'd asked Eric for my email address during that conversation after I gave the phone over to him and she'd been sending me silly chain mails ever since. She was delighted to learn I was what she considered a nice blend of old fashioned and modern woman. I was completely capable of taking care of myself but I didn't mind taking care of Eric. I wondered if she realized he did the same.

Eric and I left the school hand in hand after tenth period. I handed over my car keys to him so he could drive us home. It was silly for us to take separate cars anymore. I was coming in early to get my last minute projects done before the winter break and he was still going for his morning runs. I used to think it was just about exercise for him but I realized that running helped him clear his head. Besides, with all the snow on the ground, riding in the Corvette was like riding a rickety roller coaster. I refused to ride in it after we fishtailed twice on accident.

I was in the process of changing clothes when my cell rang in the other room. Eric answered for me since he knew just about everyone I did at that point. I heard him tell the person on the other end of the line to hold on and then the sounds of his heavy footsteps approaching the bedroom.

"Who is it?" I whispered.

"A nurse named Halleigh calling from the facility Amelia's at." Eric said with a big smile on his face.

"Ohmygod!" I launched myself over the bed to get the phone. "This is Sookie Stackhouse."

"Sookie, hi, my name is Halleigh. Mr. Carmichael asked me to call you."

"How is Amelia? Is she okay?" My heart was racing.

There was a pause that seemed to go on forever before Halleigh said, "She's doing better than okay. She's awake."

Yes, yes, I'm the devil for cutting the chapter there, but I had to! It was just the natural place to cut it. I'm surprised with my amped up hatred for Bill this chapter doesn't have a more angry tone to it. Seriously, who among you listened to Bill talk about fishing trips and teaching third grade like he **thinks he's a human** and had to restrain yourselves from throwing something at your TV? Gah! I'm really, REALLY over that douchecanoe.

In other news, the **7 Deadly Sins** contest deadline is 11:59 p.m. Central time on September 1st so it's not too late to get your entries in. We're up to 6 so far. I KNOW there has to be more coming. With a couple like this, hitting the sins should be no trouble at all.

Until later, baby birds \*smooches\*

**Chapter 32: For The Win**

Sorry for the delay on this chapter. I really thought I was going to get it up sooner, but my promo for the "A New Chapter" contest took presidence this week. If you haven't read Accidents in the Dark yet, I don't know what you're waiting for, but hop to it. I think you'll enjoy it. But, for now, onto the HFT goodness...

Chapter Thirty Two: For the Win

**Amelia**

It was the strangest thing to be able to open my eyes again. I'd been telling my body to do it for what felt like years, but my body just wasn't going along with the program. I heard every word ever spoken to m e the entire time I was lost in my own version of Wonderland. I heard my father bitching and wrongfully accusing Tray of nearly killing me. The accident was no more his fault than Sookie's. When I opened my eyes, I didn't have the slightest clue of where I was. Nothing about the room looked familiar to me. It had taken me a while to figure out where the call button was on the bed I was in.

A blonde nurse came running in a few minutes later with a welcoming smile on her pretty face. "Well, hello, there. I'm Halleigh Bellefleur. It's nice to finally meet you."

"Amelia Broadway." I barely croaked. My throat was incredibly dry.

"Try not to talk, hun. I'll get you some juice."

"Where am I?" I whispered, since I didn't have the slightest idea. All I knew was the walls were a hideous shade of pink, and the paintings on the wall made me angry. I hated that country kitschy sort of shit, and the room I was in was full of it.

"You're at Regency Manor in Shreveport, Louisiana." Halleigh's bright smile didn't dim a bit.

"I need a phone." I told her.

"I'll bring one in to you, but first we have to run some tests and see if we can get you off of some of these machines."

"Fuck that. Bring me a phone." I was relieved to find I was getting my voice back, even if it was weak.

"Now don't go upsetting-"

"You listen to me." I said with narrow eyes. "I'm a grown ass woman, and I didn't ask to be brought here. I know my rights. I can sign myself out of here in two seconds and there isn't jack shit any of you can do about it. Now get me a phone, or I'll get it myself."

Halleigh looked positively stunned by my outburst. Apparently, most folks who have been unconscious for an extended period of time aren't quite so demanding. Still, Halleigh disappeared from the room, and came back a few minutes later with a cordless phone.

"You can go now." I dismissed her. I had exactly two phone calls to make. I dialed the first number from memory, and prayed it was still in working order.

"Hello?" A gruff voice answered, and my eyes squeezed shut.

Sweet Jesus, how I'd missed that voice. "I'm awake."

There was silence and I was afraid he either hadn't heard me, or he thought it was a joke. "I'm getting on a plane. I'll see you tonight."

"I love you, Tray." My voice cracked as my tears started.

"I love you, too, Ame. I'll be there soon."

"I'll be waiting." I continued to hold the phone to my ear long after it went dead. I cried for a few minutes before I dialed the other number I had in mind.

"Copely Carmichael." My father's slick, velvety voice answered.

"Tray is coming to get me tonight. I'm going back to Chicago. If you're smart, you won't try to stop me. I can't believe you took me from him. How dare you. Goodbye." I didn't wait for a response before I hung up.

Maybe I was being ungrateful for what he'd done, but I knew without even having to ask that my father hadn't consulted with Tray or Sookie about moving me out of Chicago. Yes, Cope was my father, but he wasn't really my family. He wasn't in my life every day. He didn't see the shit I dealt with, or how important my friends were to me. I had no doubt I would have come out of my fog sooner if Tray had been closer to me. I hated my father with a passion. I never wanted to see him again.

Looks like I'd woken up in more ways than one.

**Eric**

Finding out that Amelia was awake left Sookie in the best mood I'd seen her in since we met. I couldn't blame her for it, though. If it had been my best friend in a coma for more than a month, I would have been as excited as she was to learn it was over. She'd been hit with a quick wave of guilt after getting off the phone with Amelia's nurse.

"I thought she was going to die." Sookie looked absolutely stunned. "I told her goodbye. What if she heard me? What if she thinks I don't care anymore?" Tears welled in her eyes.

"I don't think it's going to matter, Sookie. She's awake- that's all that matters now." I reassured her.

"I have to call Tray." She grinned.

I left her to make her phone calls to everyone who knew Amelia while I got started on dinner. There were a lot of happy tears shed that evening while Sookie spread the news. Turns out the first person Amelia called was Tray. He was already booking his flight to Shreveport when Sookie called to give him the news. I was happy for him. God knows what I would have done if I had been in his position, and I hadn't known Sookie for nearly as long as Tray and Amelia had been together.

Getting Sookie off the phone long enough to eat dinner would have been much more difficult if I hadn't made her favorite meatloaf recipe- how strange is it she even has one?- that consisted of cheese oozing from the center of the loaf. The house smelled phenomenal, though, and Sookie came running when the timer went off on the oven. We dished up our plates and sat down in our usual spots at the table to eat.

"I have something for you. I wanted to wait until Saturday night to give it to you, but I think now might be a better time." I looked across the table at Sookie, who was chewing a mouthful of her dinner.

"If this is my Christmas present, I don't want it until Christmas." Sookie said in a very matter-of-fact tone after swallowing her food.

"It's a part of it. I would wait to give it to you if I could." I gave her a small smile.

"Eric, no!" Was she whining? She was the first woman I ever met who whined at the idea of getting a gift from someone.

"Cool your jets. You'll be excited in a minute." I got up and went downstairs to my desk in the basement.

Sookie was back to picking at her green beans when I came upstairs with a folder in my hands. "What's that?"

"Open it." I handed her the folder.

She sighed and opened the folder, glaring at me like I was forcing her into doing something she really didn't want to do. She looked down at the contents of the folder and the expression on her face changed almost immediately.

"Airline tickets to Louisiana?"

"I thought we'd make a brief stop in your hometown before going to see my parents." I shrugged. She dropped the folder, jumped off her chair and launched herself at me. "But if you don't want to go..."

"Are you crazy?" She wrapped her body around me and kissed me hard. "Thank you!"

"Amelia sure has great timing, doesn't she?" I kissed her back.

"Always did." Sookie said quickly before pressing her lips to mine.

Dinner was quickly forgotten about.

The next couple of days were insanely busy for us both. Sookie had a to-do list up on the fridge and I helped her check things off of it one by one. By the time Friday came around, I was beyond ready for my first basketball game of the season. Quentin had done essentially nothing but stare at me with contempt on his face throughout most of the practices he'd attended. Although, it seemed like maybe working with Terry had been a good idea. I could see some change in him already and I was hoping it would only get better with more time.

For some reason, Terry was able to find the right words to get through to the kid. Quentin sat on the bench when the game started, staring at the other players with hunger in his eyes. I knew he was pissed about not being out there, but when he saw that he wasn't the only one who could play, the hot air in his balloon deflated a little. Still, that didn't stop him from grumbling every time I walked past him and I moved up and down the sidelines with the plays being made.

At half-time, we were up by seven. We were mid-huddle, going over the plans for the second half when the Poms squad made their way to center court. Sookie had been working with her girls at the far end of the field house, going over last minute changes to their routine. I had the benefit of watching her practice it at home and more than once, she'd been interrupted half way through because I couldn't keep my hands to myself.

She was dressed the same as her girls in tight black pants a red shirt with a wide neck that hung off her shoulder to reveal a black sports bra underneath. Her hair was hanging down her back in waves and she had painted my old jersey number on her right cheek. My eyes caught hers for just a moment and she winked at me.

"Coach?" More than one player nudged me into the moment before laughing at me.

"Man, you're worse than us." One of the guys teased before I got back down to business.

Sookie really was one hell of a distraction but I told myself to save it for later. At the next game I was going to have to remember to stand with my back to the court if I wanted to get anything accomplished. Try as I might, my eyes kept cheating over to where Sookie was standing, doing the moves along with her squad from the sidelines like the hottest stage mom ever.

The second half of the game flew by. Quentin got his chance to play in the game when my starting small forward started to look a little winded. Rather than risk the lead that had already been cut from twelve to five, I sent Quentin in. He was an aggressive player, which was part of what made him so good. The problem was, if he was serious about wanting to play ball in college or on a professional level, he was going to have to switch positions. Small forwards in the NBA were at least six inches taller than Quentin currently was, so barring a major growth spurt, he was going to have to change positions. Moving to shooting guard wouldn't be so difficult for him if he could just learn to be on a team instead of an island unto himself.

The crowd cheering him on didn't really help matters. He was the last kid in the world to need a confidence boost, but I was used to dealing with egos much bigger than his. The game ended before I knew it, and we had our first victory of the season with a final score of 98-82. Quentin had no trouble strutting past me to let me know he was positive he was responsible for a good deal of those final points. Never mind the fact that by the time he'd gotten into the game, 54 of those points had already been on the board. I sighed with frustration and followed my team to the locker rooms for the post-game wrap up.

Sookie emerged from the bathroom in a tiny pale pink nightgown that had my eyebrows shooting toward my hairline, to say nothing of other parts of my body that started rising. She had a bottle of baby oil in her hands, and I couldn't help but smirk at her.

"Got a plan, wily?" My eyebrows wiggled on their own accord.

"I do." She climbed up onto the bed.

"Want to share with the rest of the class?"

"Take off your shirt." She winked at me.

I didn't know what she had planned, but if it involved oil and being naked, I was in. She positioned me so I was laying on my stomach. Not quite what I was hoping for, but when I felt her warm hands on my back a few seconds later, I forgot why I was ever silently complaining. For such a small woman, she was much stronger than I ever would have guessed. Her slight weight was settled on my ass as her fingers worked the muscles of my lower back. I grunted when she got to a particularly tense spot.

"Feels good, huh?" Sookie leaned down to whisper in my ear.

"You have no idea." I groaned when she reached another knot in my back.

"If you like that, just wait until I get to the front side." She nibbled on my earlobe.

"Are you trying to relax me, or kill me?" I quipped, making her giggle.

"I haven't decided yet." She ground her hips against me. Minx. "So, how'd things go with Quentin after the game ended?"

I sighed, not really wanting to think about my team while Sookie was rubbing all over me like she was. I was having a hard enough time keeping my mind on the gamewhen she *wasn't* on top of me. Still, I knew she wasn't going to give up the topic that easily, and she was just trying to help.

"I really would like to say that he's getting what Terry's trying to tell him, but I'm not sure he gets it just yet."

"Give it time. I'm sure he'll come around." Sookie encouraged, her small hands moving up my spine. "For what it's worth, though, I thought tonight's game was great."

"You were one hell of a distraction." I told her.

"Was I?" She sounded genuinely amused. "Now what could I have possibly done to distract you?"

"You were breathing, for starters." I teased, and she pinched me.

"You're worse than the boys you coach." I was sure she was rolling her eyes behind me.

"That's what they tell me." I laughed.

True to her word, Sookie did her best to keep me guessing as to whether she was trying to relax me or kill me, and by the time we fell asleep, it was more like we were passing out from sheer exhaustion. I hadn't been so anxious for winter break since I was a senior in college. Mostly, I couldn't wait to have more time alone with Sookie, although that would be fairly limited. I knew my parents were anxious to meet her. Every time I talked to my mother, she would ask if I'd proposed to Sookie yet. I presumed that had more to do with whatever nonsense my big mouth twin was telling her than the things she'd heard from me.

But her constant questioning had me wondering if maybe Sookie hadn't said something to her in the emails I knew they had been exchanging. Sookie and I had talked about marriage over the Thanksgiving break. I'd met with my lawyer shortly after we returned to make the changes to my 'estate,' in the event I met an early demise. The shares of the bar I owned would revert back to Pam. There wasn't a whole lot of money in the bank, but it would go to Johan.

The harder decision was what to do with the house. I'd wanted to talk to Sookie about it, but she didn't really seem open to talking about planning for the future just yet. It was difficult enough to bring Sookie flowers without getting the stink eye from her. I couldn't imagine what she would say if I told her I was leaving her my house, but I was sure it wouldn't be pretty.

By the time I woke up the next morning, Sookie was already gone. She left me a note on the fridge, telling me she would check in throughout the day, and be home in time to get ready for Pam's party. The only thing she asked me to do was go to her house and pick up all of the boxes marked for Christmas decorations. I hoped there weren't too many, since the Corvette wasn't really meant for hauling boxes. Still, considering all of the prep work she'd been doing for the holidays, I figured it was the least I could do.

I had to go pick up my suit from the cleaners, which just happened to be next door to a barber's shop. I walked inside with the intention of just trimming my hair. It had been a long time since it had been shorter than shoulder length. The barber told me there was going to be a bit of a weight, since he already had someone in his chair. So, I took a seat and flipped through an older issue of GQ Magazine. Inside there was a story about one of those vampire shows that was all the rage I had yet to get into, or see any real appeal to. Still, one of the actors had hair similar to my own, and it got the wheels turning in my head.

Okay, so originally this chapter was going to end at some point during the party at the bar, but I wanted to get back to Sookie's POV for what's about to happen. That means a new chapter is in order. Yeah, yeah, I know, I suck for cutting the chapter here. But I promise I'm gonna get to work on chapter 33 right away.

I also have my collaborative fic with the fab "other me" **kjwrit** to work on. Writing with this woman is a blast. I seriously wish y'all could see the direct messages we exchange on twitter. She's easily the cheese to my mac. I love her dearly. So if you're in need of awesome fic to read, go check out Expectations or Men in Uniform. They're both steamy and delicious. Just don't try to lay claim to Island!Eric. I'll cut you. Seriously.

Later baby birds xoxo

**Chapter 33: Wonderful Tonight**

**Sookie's Dress:** store/ModCloth/Womens/Dresses/Celebrate+Good+Times+Dress

Chapter Thirty Three: Wonderful Tonight

I hated to leave Eric without telling him where I was going, but he looked so peaceful sleeping next to me that I didn't have the heart to wake him. I had a whole bunch of things I needed to get done before I had to get back to get ready for the party at the bar. I left him a note on the fridge, along with a pot of coffee, and headed out. I was still mailing the presents I'd bought for my family, since it was cheaper to do it that way than it was to pay the extra fees the airline would have charged for them.

From there I had to go dress shopping, since I had been putting that off. I got lucky at one of the vintage shops in a small strip mall in Melrose Park, not too far from the house. I shook my head at the line of people outside of Best Buy, waiting for it to open. I'd gotten at malls what I couldn't get on-line. I walked into the store to find it essentially empty. I browsed through the racks, and found a few dresses I thought might be suitable.

After trying on about a half dozen dresses, I found one I thought was perfect. Even better, I already had shoes at home to wear with the dress, so I wouldn't have to make another stop. I had an appointment to get my nails done at two, but I planned to get there a little early since I was sure it was going to be packed.

Once I had my dress secured, I ran from one place to the next to get the last minute things I needed and to finish up my errands. By the time I got to the nail salon, I was more than ready to sit back and relax for just a few minutes. Soaking my feet in that magic tub was pure heaven, and the foot massage was even better. I walked out of the salon feeling a million times better and far less stressed. I got back to the house just before four, which was an hour ahead of schedule.

I made myself something to eat to give my nails a little more time to dry before I had to get in the shower. I pulled my cell phone from my purse and dialed Eric's number. I wasn't the least bit surprised when I heard the phone ringing in the bedroom. I sighed and hung up before heading back toward the bedroom.

I figured I might as well get in the shower. Being ready early couldn't hurt. I went to the bathroom and started the water for my shower before stripping off my clothes. I was rinsing conditioner from my hair when the shower curtain pulled back. Large hands wrapped themselves around my waist. Before I even opened my eyes, I smiled.

"Where've you been? You left your phone here." I said as I squeezed water from my hair. My eyes opened to see Eric standing in front of me looking way too much like Johan for my liking, and I screamed. "Eric?"

"Who else would I be?"

"You better not be Johan!" I moved to cover myself and the man I hoped was Eric laughed at me.

"Of course I'm not Johan." Eric moved closer to me.

I reached up with one hand and turned his right arm just a little bit. When I saw the small scar on the inside of his arm, I breathed a sigh of relief. The relief lasted for all of two seconds before I realized he'd cut off most of his hair. Why the hell did he do that? I loved his hair!

"What did you do to your head?" I glared at him.

"I thought it was time for a change." Eric shrugged.

"But I liked it the other way." I pouted like a child who'd been told no more sweets before supper. "Why didn't you tell me you were going to do this?"

"Did I need your permission?" Eric arched an eyebrow at me.

I scoffed and said, "That is not even close to the point. What if I would have gone out and died my hair bright red? Wouldn't you be upset with me for not mentioning it to you first?"

"It was an impulse decision. It's hair, lover, it'll grow back." Eric gave me a sympathetic smile, but I pulled away from him.

I don't know why the haircut bothered me so much. Truthfully, he looked damn sexy with his hair cut that way with just a few strands falling close to his eyes. As if his eyes didn't smolder enough already. Gah! I guess it was mostly upsetting because he didn't look like the Eric I was used to.

"Are you really that upset?" Eric's tone was light, but the look on his face told me he was a little frustrated with me for my reaction.

"I loved your hair long. It suited you." I shrugged. It was something stupid to argue about. I knew that deep down, but it still bothered me.

"So you don't like it?" Eric asked.

I closed my eyes and took a deep breath. "I didn't say that." My eyes opened, and I stepped closer to him. I really didn't want to fight. It was supposed to be a good night. I didn't want to ruin it with a stupid fight over something I couldn't change. I reached up and touched his hair. "You know, I bet this is going to look sexy as hell in the morning."

He bent down so I could run my fingers through it and moved closer to me. "I told him not to cut it too short. I know you would never forgive me if you didn't have something to grab onto." His eyebrows danced in front of me.

I moaned softly and tugged on his hair gently. "You mean like that?"

"Not quite. Let me show you?" He moved to kneel down in front of me.

My breath caught in my throat, and I found myself all kinds of grateful I'd decided to get in the shower early. Eric pushed me up against the tile wall, which was now warm from all the time I'd spent under the warm water. He lifted one of my legs up over his shoulder as he'd done so many times before. One hand stayed in his hair while the other pressed against the wall to help me keep my balance as Eric's very talented tongue and fingers went to work doing what they do best.

There was definitely enough hair left to pull on, and Eric made sure I made good use of it. I hadn't even recovered from my first orgasm when he hoisted me up against the wall and sheathed himself inside me. My legs instinctively went around his waist and my arms went around his neck. By that point, we knew one another's bodies well enough that keeping balance was easy for us. We knew all the right angles and ways to lean on one another. We knew when to to go fast and hard and when to slow things down. I tried to keep track of the minutes that passed in my head, but time ceased to matter.

"Ugh, God, Eric, harder." I moaned against his neck, and he happily obliged me.

I felt him swell inside me, the first hint that he was close to his orgasm. His hand managed to slip between us and his thumb found my clit. He hated itwhen he finished before me, even if I'd already come- not that I was complaining. He shifted my weight, ever so slightly, causing him to pound into me at a different angle that hit the magic spot inside me, and I exploded. Eric followed right behind, as he almost always did.

I took a few deep breaths and pressed kisses to his neck and chest. "God, I love you." I muttered between kisses.

He tilted my chin up and kissed me deeply, in a kiss that was so passionate I couldn't remember ever getting one like it from him before. My hear fluttered in my chest, and by the time he pulled away, I was breathless and wanting more. I cursed the time, knowing we were probably going to be running late as a result of our little detour in the shower. Reluctantly, we pulled apart. He reached for the shampoo, while I washed my body off.

"Leaving so soon, lover?" He smirked at me when I pulled the shower curtain back.

I looked him up and down and moaned quietly, biting my bottom lip. "Maybe next year we skip the Christmas party."

"Deal." He winked at me.

I smiled before stepping out of the tub. I wrapped a towel around myself and went into the bedroom to get ready.

Eric in a suit is a beautiful thing. If he'd thought I was a distraction in my tight pants at the basketball game, he must not have been aware of how good he'd look in his suit on the sidelines, yelling to his players. It really was all I could do not to drag him behind the bleachers and jump him. I waited until my hair and makeup were done before I put on my dress. I was thankful the drive to the bar was a short one, since I had no intention of wearing pantyhose with the dress. My legs were still nice and tan from the previous summer.

I opted to put my hair up and curl it since I knew we'd be dancing at some point, and combining that with alcohol meant leaving my hair down was a bad idea. I only stepped out of the bedroom when I couldn't get the zipper of my dress the rest of the way up by myself. The skirt was a flowing layers of chiffon that stopped just above my knees. The bodice of the dress was champagne colored sequins. I had to wear a strapless bra with the dress, which I hated. My girls were a bit too big to go without the added support of straps, but the dress itself wasn't strapless.

Eric was sitting on the couch watching ESPN to catch the scores from whatever football came had been on earlier in the day. His eyes immediately moved to me when he heard my footsteps approaching him. He rocketed off the couch like his ass was on fire, and moved closer to me.

"You look..." He couldn't finish his thought, but based on the look in his eyes, I knew the dress was a winner.

"Thank you." I smiled up at him before turning around. "Would you finish zipping me up?"

"You sure you want the zipper up?"

"Unless you want me to go to this party in my panties." I smirked over my shoulder at him.

"And reward Pam for being such a pain in my ass? No way."

I laughed and then turned to kiss his cheek. "I just need to get my shoes and bag, and I'm ready to go."

I got my shoes out of the closet, knowing my feet were going to hate me in a few hours for wearing them, but it was necessary. I grabbed what I needed out of my regular purse and crammed it into the little black beaded clutch I was taking along for the night. I carried my shoes to the front door, waiting to put them on until the last possible second. If I didn't fall and break my neck outside, it would be a miracle.

Eric grabbed my coat for me and held it open so I could slide my arms inside. He bent to kiss the side of my neck. "It's not fair you smell so good all the time." He whispered in my ear.

"I do it to torment you." I winked at him.

"Minx." He shook his head at me as I opened the front door. Jeter whined as he made his appearance from the kitchen. "Sorry, buddy, you wait here. We'll be back in a few hours."

Jeter let out an unhappy growl, which had both of us laughing quietly. Eric locked up behind us, and held my hand as I went down the front steps. They were fairly ice free from all of the salting we'd been doing, but it was better to be safe than sorry. The last thing I needed was to end up in the hospital with a broken ass. Eric was driving us to the party, but taking a cab home would be easy enough if we had too much to drink.

"Anytime you're ready to go, all you have to do is say the word, and we're out of there." Eric told me when we pulled into a parking space outside of the bar.

"Oh, I won't hesitate to holler if I've had enough for the night." I promised him.

We walked to the front door door of the bar hand in hand, and Eric held the door open for me to walk in ahead of him. I had to give it to Pam, she did one hell of a job on the decorations. The bar looked more like a cross between Santa's Workshop and a Winter Wonderland than I ever could have imagined.

"Wow. Pam really goes all out for parties, doesn't she?" I looked up to Eric with wide eyes.

"You didn't figure that out at Halloween?" He nudged me gently, with a small smile turning up the corner of his mouth. It wasn't quite a smirk, but it was damn close, and it made me want to lick him.

No sooner did we get our coats off than the song changed from some obnoxious tune full of too much bass and not enough lyrics, to the Stevie Wonder classic 'Signed, Sealed, Delivered I'm Yours'. Eric reached for my hand and gestured toward the dance floor. We would certainly have it all to ourselves, since no one else was even in the bar, much less on the dance floor. I loved dancing with Eric. There was no awkwardness the way there sometimes was, and he moved very well for someone so tall.

"Ugh, if you two are going to be that cute all night, I'm going to lose my dinner." Pam rolled her eyes at us as she made her entrance in a slinky red dress.

"Nice to see you, too, Pam." I called out to her. I'd decided to hold off on giving her her Christmas present until the following day. I didn't want someone to swipe it from the bar.

"You really should kennel your mutt for the duration of the trip." Pam said out of the blue.

Eric and I walked off the dance floor and over to the bar where Pam was mixing herself a martini, extra dirty. "Is it really that difficult to stop by the house for an hour to feed Jeter and let him out in the yard?"

"No, it's not." Pam strained the drink into a large glass.

I loved the martini glasses at the bar, and I was beyond tempted to ask where they'd gotten them. The bar in the basement at home was in serious need of glassware, not that we had a lot of people over. Although, with Amelia on the mend, that would most likely change. Amelia was more of a cat person, and really only dealt well with smaller dogs. I was hoping that since Jeter was so well trained, she would be willing to make an exception.

"Then would you put a sock in it?" Eric suggested.

"Oh, I would love to, Northman. Unfortunately I've ended up making plans for this holiday that won't allow me to take care of that mutt." Pam winked before taking a drink of her martini.

"Who's the unwitting victim?" Eric teased.

"Me." A familiar voice spoke up from behind us, from up in the DJ's booth.

Eric and I both whipped around to see Johan standing there with a shit eating grin on his face. Well, well, things had certainly just gotten more interesting, hadn't they?

To say Eric and I were surprised to see Johan standing there would be an understatement. Johan had said engagements in Holland would keep him across the pond until two days before Christmas. Apparently, we'd had the wool pulled over our eyes big time. Eric went to go give his brother a hug, but he was knocked aside.

"You look beautiful, lilla docka." Johan swept me up.

I squealed in surprise at how quick he was, and couldn't help but laugh at the enthusiasm of his hug. "You look pretty good yourself there, Johan. Why didn't you tell us you were coming into town?"

"And lose the opportunity to see the look of pure shock mixed with a little bit of horror that was on your faces? Not a chance." Johan kissed my cheek before putting me down.

"What am I, chopped liver?" Eric asked from behind his brother.

Johan looked him up and down. "Actually, you look more like a loan shark."

Pam choked off a laugh from behind the bar, and I elbowed Johan. "I think he looks sexy."

"You should see *me* in a suit." Johan wiggled his eyebrows at me, and I was laughing again.

"It really is a sight to behold." Pam piped up from behind the bar.

I looked over at Eric, who was slightly red at being ignored like he was. I pouted in his direction, which was the wrong thing to do since it seemed that was signal for Johan and Pam to go open season on Eric. I just moved closer to him and held his hand through the barrage of insults and teases being hurled at him. 'Fell In Love With A Girl' by the White Stripes started playing, and Johan's face lit up.

"Why Pammy, I do believe that's our song playing. You owe me a dance."

"I owe you a kick in the balls for calling me Pammy."

"Pretty please?" Johan begged.

Watching the two of them was better than most movies or sitcoms. Pam rolled her eyes like she was beyond put out by the request Johan was making of her, but I was willing to bet dollars to donuts she'd be putting down her martini any second to go dance with Johan. Sure enough, Pam knocked back the rest of her drink before slinking out from behind the bar to take Johan's hand. I stood there grinning and shaking my head at them as they walked out to the dance floor.

"Would you like a drink?" Eric asked me.

"The usual." I muttered, watching Johan and Pam as they were pretty much grinding on one another. I didn't think I'd ever really understand their relationship. I turned away when Johan grabbed a hold of Pam's hips and pulled her closer. "You okay?"

"Fine." Eric said, although his tone and the tension rolling off of him suggested otherwise.

"I call bullshit."

Eric glared at me for a minute before pouring my drink into a glass and handing it over. "I love my brother. He's my best friend. I love Pam. I just don't get those two."

"What's there to get, Eric? Unless you're jealous of Johan, it shouldn't bother you." I shrugged, trying to be casual about the whole thing. Eric had never once talked about Pam in terms of someone he was interested on beyond a friend, or a business partner. I didn't understand why seeing Johan and Pam so close like that would bother him.

"She's like a sister to me, Sookie, and I know my brother. He'll get bored eventually-"

"Whoa, whoa, Eric, hang on a second. First of all, Pam's into women. Second of all, from what you've told me, Johan's been pretty serious about chasing Pam down for more than a decade. I don't think that's just some passing fancy. Besides, whatever it is they have going on is none of our business. They're both adults." I tried to reason with him.

I could tell from the look on Eric's face there was something I didn't know that I probably should, but it wasn't the time to discuss it. The song ended quickly, bringing Pam and Johan back. Johan stepped behind the bar where Eric was retrieving a bottle of champagne. Pam stood beside me while the two Northman boys worked out whatever had their collective knickers in a twist.

"So how long have you and Johan been planning this little surprise?" I asked Pam, knowing this most likely wasn't an off-the-cuff operation.

"Since the day Johan returned to Sweden." Pam gave me a sly smile.

"Nicely done. Eric and I had no idea."

"You two tend to be off in your own little bubble. Comes in quite handy when planning surprises. Or ambushes."

I couldn't help but laugh at that. It was ironic, considering how Eric and I often felt like we didn't get enough time together. It was somewhat of a crazy notion considering we lived together *and* worked together. Although I often thought we could be stranded on an uncharted island somewhere, and we would be perfectly happy to be just by ourselves.

"So, Pam, can I ask you something?" I turned toward her.

"You can ask. I can't promise I'll answer." Pam was an expert at playing coy when she wanted to.

"What's the deal with you and Johan? One minute you're snipping at one another, and the next you're flirting and making eyes at each other like a couple of teenagers."

"Are you asking for you, or for your sweetie?" Pam narrowed her eyes at me suspiciously, not that I could blame her one bit.

"Is there a difference anymore?" The words left my mouth before I could stop them, earning me another smirk from Pam.

"Let me just say that Johan and I have almost as colorful a history as Eric and I have. We go back a long way, and there are things between us that even *I* don't understand. But if what you're really asking is whether or not I have feelings for Johan, the answer is yes." Pam said in her typically honest fashion, and then sauntered away when Chow called her over to discuss security issues.

I watched Eric and Johan at the other end of the bar as they talked. With Eric's new haircut, it was going to be much harder to tell him and his twin apart. Thank God they weren't wearing matching suits, or I'd be in deep shit. I sipped my drink and fell into conversation with Felicia when she stepped behind the bar to do some prep work. Before any of us knew it, it was time to open the bar for business. There was quite a line outside already. Pam was nothing if not a crackerjack promoter.

Eric had disappeared into the office to take care of some paperwork Pam needed him to look at when I caught sight of someone who most definitely didn't belong in the bar. I shook my head in disappointment, and abandoned my drink to go take care of it before Eric or Pam got wind of the situation. If they did, it was guaranteed not to end well.

Uh oh...who's in the bar that doesn't belong there? Who else is excited to see Johan is back? I've missed that crazy Northman! You know, the temptation to write a Johan/Pam fic is incredibly strong. I love these two so much. They make me laugh. For the first time ever, I'm going to apologize for a cliffhanger, since I've given you two in a row. The good news is, I'm on a serious roll with this story at the moment. Since I have the day off, and I'm not leaving the house unless I have to, I plan to spend the day writing. So I'll be starting chapter 34 right away.

Later baby birds xoxo

Oh, and "Lilla docka" means little doll, fyi.

**Chapter 34: Dare You To Move**

I have to take a minute to give a little shout out to the amazeballs **Northwoman** who stayed up all night Sunday night to read the first 32 chapters of this story. How she did it, I'll never know, but *that* is dedication. I'm glad it was worth her while. And thank you all for loving Johan as much as I do! I love writing that cocky bastard. He puts a smile on my face and a giggle in the air whenever he makes himself known. I promise to let y'all know when I get that Pam/Johan outtake written up. It should be in the next couple of weeks, since all of my contest obligations are winding down.

And now onto the next chapter...

Chapter Thirty Four: Dare You To Move

I was definitely surprised to see Johan at the bar. He and Pam had definitely pulled off a pretty big surprise, which was shocking considering my twin's big mouth. After having a quick discussion over what sort of things he'd been filling our mother's head with, I was convinced Johan had been the one to put the idea in her head that Sookie and I were talking about marriage as something we were seriously considering in the near future. I wanted to kill him.

"You realize that every single time she calls, she asks if I've proposed to Sookie, right?" I glared at my brother.

"She wants to be a mormor, lille bror." Johan shrugged. "We all know I'm too irresponsible for that."

"She's been wanting to be a grandmother since we turned twenty-five." I rolled my eyes at the thoughts of all the nagging conversations about how Johan and I needed to get ourselves settled.

I'd tried to explain that not all of us were lucky enough to find our soul mate the way Mom and Dad seemed to have done, but it went in one ear and out the other where my mother was concerned. Frankly, the fact that Johan didn't have a few little ones running around was a little on the shocking side. He had certainly been less discriminating where women were concerned.

"She wants us to be happy, Eric. I might be the flighty one, but she obviously worries about you more."

It was true. Mom had always worried more about me, while Dad had worried about Johan. I think it was because I had inherited my father's more disciplined personality. When I set my mind on something, I didn't let anything get in my way of obtaining it. The most impetuous thing Dad had ever done in his life was fall in love with Mom. It was a risk that had paid off quite well for him, and I could see shades of the same thing happening between Sookie and me. Without really knowing her all that well, I had let myself fall for her. But I wouldn't change it any more than Dad would go back and do things differently with Mom.

I knew Mom worried about me because I was more of a perfectionist. I saw things a certain way, and I had no tolerance for plans not going accordingly. She worried my drive, or need to have things go my way would ultimately lead to heartbreak for me. Thing was, I'd never had to worry about not getting what I wanted. I never expected anything to fall into my lap. I worked for everything I had. There was no coasting along, waiting for opportunities to find me like they did with Johan. My twin would have made an excellent hippy, which was part of the reason he and my father clashed so frequently.

"Tell me something I don't know, stor bror."

"You're wasting your time with Sookie." Johan said in a dead serious voice.

"Excuse me?" My defenses rose, and for a second, I thought I might have to punch out my brother.

"You love her, yes? You've told me you've talked about marriage. You want to marry her. You live together. She loves you. She wants to marry you. So what the hell is stopping you from putting a ring on her finger already? Don't dick around waiting for some perfect moment that's never going to come." Johan jabbed me in the chest before walking off to go dance with Pam.

I glanced over at Sookie, who was laughing with Felicia, while helping her slice limes. I excused myself from behind the bar to go take care of some paperwork I knew Pam was waiting for me to sign off on. I really didn't want to have to come back to the bar just to sign papers. If all went according to plan, I wouldn't be setting foot in the bar until after the first of the new year.

I looked over the papers Pam needed me to sign, and made quick work of them. I flagged the papers I wanted copies of for my own personal records before leaving the office. Johan's suitcase was in the corner, and I wondered if Johan would be staying with Pam before the two of them followed us to California. My father and Pam together was one hell of a combination. It was hard to tell which of them had been in the service when they got rolling. Sookie was certainly in for a treat.

I sighed and stood against the wall for a minute. The office door opened and Pam stepped inside. "There you are. I was starting to wonder where you'd disappeared to. You're almost unrecognizable these days without a curvy blonde attached to your side."

"Stifle it, Pam." I wasn't in the mood.

"What crawled up your ass and died?"

"What's going on with you and my brother?"

"Can't we team up once in a while to pull one over on you?"

"If I thought that's all you were doing, I wouldn't care. Where's he staying while he's in town?"

"I encouraged him to stay with you, but he reminded me how cranky you are if you aren't getting laid regularly." Pam snorted before taking a seat on the edge of the desk.

"Pam..." I shook my head.

"Oh get your knickers out of the twist they're in, will you?"

"What the hell are you doing with my brother? You never used to keep secrets from me, Pam."

It was true. In fact, Pam was the queen of TMI, and I often found myself cringing from the things she told me. I didn't really need to hear about her menstrual cramps or about the irritation caused from an over-zealous bikini waxer. Pam had always just rolled her eyes and told me to get over myself. If she was keeping mum now, it had to be something big.

"Did it ever occur to you that there are some things that happen in my life that aren't any of your business?" Pam glared at me. Oh, she was *definitely* hiding something.

"Pam, you tell me all sorts of shit that isn't my business. If you're hiding this from me, you must be ashamed of it." From the look on her face, I knew she was- at least on some level.

"You remember when Thalia broke up with Johan?" Pam could barely look at me.

"How could I forget? It was during March Madness our senior year."

"Yeah, well, I never told you I went up to New York when Johan called me. I missed the UCLA game because of it." Pam looked me right in the eyes as she spoke. "I spent three days in New York with him. We talked about what happened with Thalia. On my last night there, it was St. Patrick's Day. We got stinking drunk on Irish Car Bombs and whiskey shots. We ended up sleeping together."

I laughed through my nose. Of course they slept together. Why the hell hadn't I put it together sooner? It certainly explained a lot. I just shook my head. I really didn't want to know any more about their relationship. I was sorry I'd even asked. I don't know if it was the fact that the two of them had been lying to me for almost a decade, or if it was just the knowledge that they'd slept together at all. Either way, I was pissed off.

"Eric, I-"

"That's enough, Pam." I waved her off and left her in the office. I couldn't be around her anymore.

I walked out to the bar intending to get myself a shot of tequila, and then dance with Sookie until I wasn't pissed off anymore. Instead, I found her face to face with Bill Compton and the Red Menace, who had been keeping a surprisingly low profile since the accident. In fact, the last time I remembered seeing her was the night of the accident. Not that I'd missed her. As far as I was concerned, she could fall off the planet, and it wouldn't make the least bit of difference to me. I just wasn't crazy about how close she was to Sookie.

When Bill reached out to touch Sookie, I snapped. Before I knew what was happening, I was across the room and throwing a punch at Bill that sent him flying into some unsuspecting girl standing behind him. But I didn't stop there. I was vaguely aware of Sookie yelling from behind me to stop what I was doing, but I couldn't. It hit him over and over again. I couldn't stop myself. I completely lost whatever control I had, and it wasn't until Johan and Chow pulled me off of Bill that the fighting stopped. Actually, it wasn't really a fight so much as me completely annihilating Bill.

I was shaking with rage, and would have gone back for more if Johan wouldn't have pulled me toward the back of the bar. Felicia was already on the phone calling 911, since Bill had lost consciousness. Sookie was following behind us with a look of pure shock on her face. Pam wiped her tears as Johan pushed me into the office.

"What the hell happened?" Pam took one look at my bloody hand and stared from me to Johan to Sookie.

"Rambo here decided to unload whatever frustration he was feeling on that Compton asshole."

"What?" Pam about shrieked. "What the fuck is that asshole doing in my bar?"

"Apparently he got past security. A little ice would be nice, Pam. The cops will be here soon."

Pam groaned and shook her head. "Great! Thanks, Eric!"

"Fuck you, Pam!" I yelled at her. The last thing I was worried about, at the moment, was Pam's party.

I collapsed on the couch and closed my eyes. The office door closed and then Sookie's smell filled my nose as her small hand reached for mine. I could feel her staring at me, waiting for an explanation, but I couldn't get my eyes to open.

"What the hell was that about, Eric?"

"I was pissed off at Pam, and then I saw Bill touch you after everything that's happened, and I just snapped." I explained to her.

"I'll say." She sounded tired and extremely disappointed in me.

"I'm not sorry." I opened my eyes and looked into hers. "I probably should be, but I'm not. That fucker is going to get away with all of the shit he pulled."

"So you thought maybe you'd exact your own brand of justice on him? You could go to jail for this, Eric! You think he's not going to press charges? You just assaulted him in a bar full of people for no reason. I wasn't in eminent danger. He didn't have a knife to my throat or a gun to my head. He hadn't said anything remotely threatening to me. In fact, he was the same creepy polite he always is to me. There are witnesses to what happened, and none of it is going to look good for you." Sookie stared hard at me.

The reality of the situation started to filter in. I still wasn't sorry I'd clobbered Bill, but I was sorry for the trouble I was about to cause everyone involved. In a matter of seconds I'd managed to beat Bill to hell, ruin the bar's Christmas party, and maybe it's reputation. The worst of it was, I clearly had a very pissed off Sookie sitting next to me who wasn't feeling too sorry for my situation. I'd really fucked things up.

Johan came back into the room with a bucket of ice and some napkins. "The cops are here. They want to talk to you."

"Yeah, of course they do." I sighed.

"I can take Sookie home, if you want?" Johan offered.

Sookie and I locked eyes. "That's probably a good idea. I'm sure Eric's going to be there for a while." Her voice was bitter, and I didn't blame her one bit. "Call me when you know how much your bail is."

She didn't kiss me goodbye or offer me any sort of comfort before she got up and stormed out. I was seriously in the doghouse with her. From the look on Pam's face, it was obvious Sookie wasn't the only woman in my life who was pissed at me. I walked over to Detective Twinings, and pretty much turned myself in. The detective looked disappointed as he pulled a pair of handcuffs from his jacket pocket.

"Eric Northman, you're under arrest for the assault and battery of Bill Compton..." He read me my rights as he closed the cuffs around my wrists.

I nodded along numbly, but couldn't take my eyes off of Sookie, who was crying silently in the corner as she watched.

Up until that night, I figured the worst night of my life was the night Annika died. I hadn't realized how much I loved my sister until I lost her. Not to mention, it was like she'd taken a part of all of us with her when she'd gone. It was while I was being interrogated at the police station that I realized I'd seen a look in Sookie's eyes that was very similar to the way my mother looked when she'd told Johan and me about Annika's death. I felt like shit, and I hated myself for putting her through this.

I told Detective Twinings everything he wanted to know. I really didn't have any excuse for what I'd done. I'd attacked Bill because he was the most convenient punching bag at the moment. The detective seemed slightly sympathetic, and admitted that if he had been in my position and saw someone like Compton touching his wife, he'd probably react badly, too.

"Look, Eric, I get it, I do. You just can't go around beating the hell out of people like that." Detective Twinings rubbed his eyes.

"It's not how I normally deal with things."

"Yeah, I know. You don't have anything more serious than a speeding ticket on your record."

"So what happens now?"

"Well, I'm going to type up your statement. You'll read it over and sign off on it. You'll go back to lock up until your arraignment, which won't be until Monday since tomorrow is Sunday."

I grimaced at the idea of having to spend more than a few hours in jail. This was really, really going to suck, but it's not like I had a choice. "Can I make a phone call?"

"Yeah, you get one phone call." The detective nodded.

Great. I really hoped Sookie would have her cell in her hand when I called. At least I wasn't issued a jumpsuit. Since Franklin Park was a smaller town, I didn't have to worry about sharing my cell with a bunch of gang bangers and drug dealers. I did, however, have to start thinking about how I was going to explain my shiny new arrest record to the school board, since I was pretty sure they would be notified I'd been arrested for a violent crime. My life started to flash before my eyes, but I had to put a stop to it. I wasn't prepared to face the consequences of what I'd done quite yet.

First, I needed to know where Sookie stood with me. Coming to terms with everything was going to be much easier if I knew she wasn't going to walk away from me. The realization that she was the absolute, hands down, most important thing in my life had me thinking about what Johan had said behind the bar. He was right. I had been wasting time where Sookie is concerned. I wanted to be with her for the rest of my life. Nothing else mattered anymore if she wasn't there. If she couldn't forgive me for this, jail time would be the easiest part of the consequences I suffered.

Pam already had the contact info for my attorney, and I knew she was probably already making the call before I was even being taken out of the bar. I waited in the interview room while Detective Twinings typed up my statements for me to sign. After that was done, I was taken out to the hallway to make my phone call from a dirty old phone mounted on the wall. Detective Twinings stood there while I dialed Sookie's cell number, and prayed she would answer.

"Eric?" The sound of her voice brought tears to my eyes.

"Yeah, it's me."

"So, what's the damage?"

"I've been charged with Battery. It's a Class A Misdemeanor."

"What do I have to do to get you out?"

"My arraignment will be on Monday, so I'll be in lock up here at the police station until then." The sound of her gasping and then sputtering for air on the other end of the line broke my heart. "Don't cry, Sookie."

"You're an idiot, Eric." She spat at me.

"I know."

"I don't think you do." She was agitated and as sad as I was, I knew it. "What were you thinking?"

"I wasn't." I said simply, since it was the truth.

"What about your lawyer?"

"Pam's taking care of it, I'm sure."

"I'll follow up with her. What time is your arraignment Monday?"

I looked to Detective Twinings and asked him.

"Nine." He said loud enough for Sookie to hear.

"Did you get that?"

"Yeah. Where?"

"Where?" I looked to the detective.

"Maywood." He said loudly.

"I'll be there." Sookie sounded resigned.

"Sookie, I'm sorry." I apologized to her.

"No, you're not." She said coldly. "I love you, you son of a bitch." She hung up before I could say it back, and it broke my heart all over again.

**Sookie**

I couldn't believe it. Eric rarely even cursed in traffic, much less did I think he was capable of something like what he did to Bill. I'd be lying if I said I hadn't imagined taking a swing or two at the man myself, but I never would have acted on it. To see Eric fly off into a rage like he did was just shocking to me. It made me wonder just how well I knew him. I thought I knew everything, but after the attack, I wasn't so sure anymore.

I didn't say much after Eric had been taken from the bar. I wanted to go over and kiss him goodbye, but I just couldn't do it. Johan had driven me home like he'd promised he would. He offered to stick around but I really just wanted to be alone for a while. I needed time to think about things, and I didn't want Johan around when Eric called. I promised to keep him updated on what was going on before he left.

I took off my dress and hung it in the closet. I pulled on a pair of warm flannel pajamas and crawled into bed. I rolled into Eric's pillow, and before I knew it, my body was wracked with sobs. I cried until there was nothing left. I tried to imagine where Eric was, and the idea of him in some dirty holding cell made my insides twist. I wanted to call Amelia and tell her all about this. She would know what to say to make me feel better. If nothing else, she would drop whatever she was doing to sit with me until I knew what was going to happen.

When my cell phone finally rang, I took a second to clear my throat before I opened the phone to take the call. Eric sounded as broken as I felt, which didn't make things any easier. He told me he was being charged with a Class A Misdemeanor, but I didn't have any idea what that meant. I knew it was better than being charged with a felony, but I still didn't feel good about it. Finding out he was going to be stuck in jail until Monday, at least, was hard to take. I was angry with him, but I wanted him home.

When I hung up on him before he could tell me he loved me, I immediately regretted it. I didn't doubt he loved me. I knew something was up with him even before we went to the party, but obviously something had happened with Johan to make things worse. After a second round of more tears than I thought my body was capable of producing, I called Johan.

"Eric's being charged with Battery." I told Johan, although from the sound he made, he already figured that much out. "He's being arraigned on Monday at nine at the Maywood courthouse."

"I'll be there. So will Pam."

"I don't think that's a good idea. Look, I don't know what happened between you two before he snapped like that, but I'm not sure if it's a good idea if you and Pam are there."

"Sookie, he's my brother." Johan argued.

"Yeah, I know, which is why I'm asking you to put him before yourself." I didn't want to fight with Johan. "Let me bail him out, assuming that's even possible, and then when he gets home you two can talk."

"I don't like this, Sookie."

"You think I do?" I yelled at Johan since there was no one else to yell at. "I'm sorry. I'm mad at Eric, and I'm taking it out on you. It's not fair."

"Well, if you can't yell at Eric, I guess I'm the next best thing." Johan joked, but I wasn't in the mood.

"Not funny."

There was a long pause before Johan said, "If you really think it's better for us to stay away, then that's what we'll do. Besides, I know you two probably have some things to talk about, and you don't need a peanut gallery decked out in Prada telling you your business. Ouch!" Johan shouted something to Pam in the background I couldn't quite make out. "Just promise you'll call me if you need anything."

"I will, I promise. Goodnight, Johan."

"Goodnight, Sookie." He said before hanging up the phone.

I closed my phone and put it down next to my pillow, praying for a miracle that would somehow get Eric out of this whole mess. Somehow, I was pretty sure my prayer was going to go unanswered.

In order to keep my mind off of what was happening with Eric, I decided to stick to my original plan for Sunday. I woke up later than I wanted to, but I still made myself the waffles I'd been craving. After I ate, I showered and got myself dressed. I only stared longingly at Eric's side of the bed twice before I forced myself out of the room. Jeter had taken on the role of my shadow, as he almost always did whenever I was in a bad mood. He'd spent the night cuddled up at my feet, and didn't complain when I called him into the house after I'd let him out to do his business.

I started to wonder whether or not our plans for Christmas would have to change. Could someone facing criminal charges leave the state? I groaned at the thought of having to call Eric's parents to see if they would be willing to come to Chicago instead of us flying out to see them. I had really been looking forward to a break from the cold weather, but the more I thought about it, the more I was sure Eric wouldn't be able to cross state lines without facing further charges.

I got in my car and headed for a tree lot in Mt. Prospect I'd been told had really good trees. I immersed myself in Christmas music, hoping it would help lift my spirits. Singing along with Brenda Lee had done its part, but then the song changed to "Please Come Home For Christmas," and I almost had to pull over, I was crying so hard. My makeup was completely ruined by the time I got to the tree lot on the corner of Golf Road and Busse Highway. I cleaned up my face as best I could before getting out of the car.

I started drifting along the rows of trees, looking for a tree that was about six feet tall. I was walking through the rows of trees when a man that looked a little too much like Eric for my own liking approached me to ask if I needed any help. He wasn't quite as tall, and his complexion was a bit more ruddy, but he had the same masculine lines to his face. His shoulders were just as broad and his build was very similar.

"Anything I can help you with?" He asked with a warm smile, in spite of the chill in the air.

"Just looking around." I offered a weak smile in return.

"Alright, well, if you need me, I'll be just over there." He pointed to a small trailer at the other side of the lot.

"Thanks." I nodded, and went back to looking at trees.

It took a while before I found one I liked, and headed over to the little trailer to pay for the tree. The young blond man was sitting with a brunette girl who had a hearty laugh and bright hazel eyes. The way they were sitting suggested they were probably a couple. The girl kissed the boy on the cheek when he got up to help me, and I hated them both for a split second. They looked so happy with one another. All it did was remind me that Eric was supposed to be doing this with me. *We* were supposed to pick out a tree together. *We* were supposed to take it home and drag it into the house. *We* were supposed to decorate it while listening to Christmas music. *We*were supposed to sit on the sofa and admire our work until we couldn't keep our eyes open anymore. That wasn't going to happen now.

I paid for the tree and let the blond man tie the tree to the roof of my car. I was thankful I didn't have to get on an express way in order to get home. I would be taking the drive slow as it was. Just getting the tree in the house could potentially be a problem. I was hoping it wasn't too heavy. I really didn't want to call Johan over to help me, but I worried I wouldn't have a whole lot of choice in the matter. The drive home took longer than I thought it would, thanks to a train that stopped me in Bensenville.

I tried to get the tree off the roof, but to no avail. So, I begrudgingly called Johan. He promised to leave immediately. Twenty minutes later he was pulling into a parking space across the street from the house. It was hard to see Johan walking toward me, knowing that even though he was wearing the face of the man I loved, it wasn't him. We greeted each other silently with a wave and a smile.

He helped me get the tree into the house and upright in the stand. I'd shifted the furniture around before he'd come by, and had to decide what to do with the arm chair that was usually in the space the tree was occupying. I went to get the boxes of decorations Eric had retrieved from my house for me from the basement where he'd left them. Johan was fiddling with the stereo upstairs, searching for the station that played Christmas music.

"You're looking for 93.9." I told him.

"Thanks." He smiled over his shoulder at me, and my heart cracked.

"So, no Pam?"

"She wanted to come, but I wanted to talk to you alone." Johan turned toward me after finding the radio station he was looking for. "Pam told me what happened with her and Eric last night before the fight happened."

"It wasn't really much of a fight, now was it?"

"I don't think Eric was hitting Bill last night."

"No, that was Bill."

"That's not what I mean. Years ago I was dating someone years ago, and it ended badly. It was the first, and only, time I've had my heart broken. I thought Thalia was the one. Apparently, she felt differently. Anyway, it was a messy breakup, and I was devastated. It was around the same time Eric was just going into March Madness, so it's not like he could take a leave of absence to help me deal, but I wasn't really ready for the guy attitude of keeping a stiff upper lip about things. I ended up calling Pam to get the female perspective on what went wrong.

"I'd known Pam for about three years at that point. We weren't super, but that was exactly what I needed. I needed someone object to my situation to tell me things like they were. If anyone will tell you like it is, it's Pam. So she came up to see me for a few days. We hung out and talked about what happened with Thalia. After the first twenty-four hours she told me to regain possession of my balls, and start moving forward. We ended up going out and getting extremely drunk on St. Patrick's Day. Everything after we left the last bar we were at is pretty fuzzy, but I know for sure that we slept together."

"And that's what pissed Eric off? You and Pam had sex years ago, and Eric completely flipped his wig and attacked Bill because of it?" I looked at Johan suspiciously.

I refused to believe Eric lost his shit over finding out Johan and Pam had slept together. There had to be something else going on with him that no one knew about. I just didn't have the slightest idea as to what might be going on in that head of his. Eric was usually pretty open about what was bothering him. Once again, I found myself thinking that maybe I didn't know Eric nearly as well as I thought.

When Johan open his mouth to speak, I held up my hand to stop him. "Is this the first time Eric's done something like this?"

Johan looked hesitant to tell me, but after a few seconds of pleading with my eyes, he relented. "No, this isn't the first fight Eric has ever been in. It's the first time he's ever attacked someone unprovoked like he did last night, but he's been in fights before. It sort of comes along with the jock package he signed up for when we were younger. Testosterone runs high, guys talk smack and the next thing you know, they're throwing down."

"So Eric has a violent streak in his temper, is that what you're telling me?"

"I'm saying he *used to*. He hasn't gotten into it with anyone since college."

"Until it came back with a vengeance last night." I flopped down on the couch, buried my face in my hands and cried.

**Amelia**

I didn't know what to think when I found out I'd lost more than a month of my life. I'd been in a coma for forty-eight days. When Copely called to try and talk to me, I told the nurses I didn't want to speak to him. All I needed was for Tray to get to Louisiana, and I was history. I was leaving. I would go back to Chicago and follow up with my regular doctors.

I was going over the results of the tests my doctor had ordered shortly after I woke up, when Tray walked into the room. My heart stopped for a second to see him standing there. My head got light, and at first, I thought I might pass out. My doctor seemed to get the hint that Tray and I needed a minute alone, and promptly excused himself from the room.

"You look so much better vertical." Tray grinned at me as he practically ran across the room.

"I missed the sound of your voice." It was all I could think of to say.

In no time flat I was in his arms, being squeezed senseless. I sobbed against him, holding him as tight as I could. I had no idea it was possible to miss a person as much as I had missed Tray. Whatever anger I was feeling toward my father was momentarily pushed aside so I could focus on being with Tray. His lips found mine, and it was like my whole world slid back into focus.

When we finally pulled apart, I looked deep into Tray's eyes and said something that should have been said long before that particular moment. "Marry me."

We've got quite the pickle here for our lovebirds, don't we? I knew a drama llama was going to get all up in this story's grill, but it took on a totally different role than I thought it would. I was totes kicking around ideas on twitter, and Eric going apeshit on Bill and getting arrested wasn't even close to being one of them. But, when the muses speak, I listen.

Hopefully this little bit here with Amelia is enough to lighten your spirits some. I've got a plan, baby birds, I promise. I think I know how this story is going to end now. I had absolutely no idea up until the last day or two ago. Crazy, huh?

Oh, and to my other me, thanks for sending that bag of tricks. I was rather starry eyed for the better part of last night. \*waits for GK pic in your profile\*

**Chapter 35: Sour Girl**

As I'm typing this, I'm quite sure there are a lot of you saying, "WTF is up with Eric?" and feeling extremely blindsided by what happened in the last chapter. It took me by surprise, too, trust me. It was just too good not to run with. As I said in my closing A/N, though, I have a plan. Just stick with me, and I promise, things will work out. In the meantime, if anyone wants to bake a cake with a shank in it (sound familiar, other me?), I'm sure Eric would appreciate it.

P.S. The Illinois State Board of Education was absolutely useless in telling me what sort of offenses would result in a teacher's certification being yanked. Thankfully **lubadub** was able to save the day and answer my question for me. I really hate my muses for complicating this story way more than I wanted it to be. \*misses my fluffy Eric & Sookie\*

**Don't forget your Kleenex! You've been warned!**

Chapter Thirty Five: Sour Girl

I was stretched out on a bunk that was way too small for someone of my size, staring up at the ceiling, when my name was called. I rocketed up off the bunk, hoping someone was coming to tell me the charges had been dropped and I was free to go. Somehow, I was pretty sure that wasn't going to happen. Still, I walked over to the bars of the cell, and stopped short when I saw Sookie approaching with Detective Twinings behind her.

"I really shouldn't be letting her back here. You have five minutes." The detective said in a stern tone before turning and walking away.

"Hi." I spoke softly, taking in her face.

Sookie looked every bit as distraught and exhausted as I had imagined she would. She looked like she hadn't slept at all, which wouldn't surprise me one bit. I knew I sure as shit hadn't. If I wasn't thinking of her, I was thinking of the million things I would have done differently the day before. The fact that she'd come to see me gave me hope that all wasn't lost. Maybe we could work this out.

"You look like shit." She said with a straight face.

"I feel like shit."

She stepped closer to the bars and put her fingers up. I reached out to touch them back, and when we made contact, her eyes closed. A single tear rolled down her cheek, and I felt a lump rise in my throat. I wanted to find a way to explain to her what had happened, but I just couldn't get the words out.

"I talked to Johan, and he told me what happened with the two of you yesterday. He told me about him and Pam." Sookie whispered, unable to meet my eyes.

"Sookie-"

"No, let me talk." Sookie took her fingers back. "I'm not even going to try and pretend like I understand why you would fly off into what I can only assume to be a jealous rage. I don't believe for a single second that you were worried about them getting hurt. They're adults. Johan knew what he was getting himself into when he got involved with Pam. Whatever happens between them has nothing to do with you. So why you took it the way you did doesn't make any sense unless you have feelings for Pam."

"I do *not* have feelings for Pam." I insisted, which caused Sookie's eyes to finally meet mine.

"I don't believe you." She shrugged as more tears fell from her eyes. "Maybe if Johan wasn't your brother, I might believe that, but..."

"Sookie, I swear, I don't have feelings for Pam. I love you. You're the only one that matters- the only one who ever has."

Sookie nodded, but I could tell my words weren't really sinking in. "Look, I came here because I wanted to tell you that I'll be at the hearing tomorrow morning. I'll bail you out and take you back to the house, but I think after that I'm going to spend some time at my house."

*So this is what a broken heart feels like*, I thought to myself. "Sookie, don't, please. We can work this out. Just please, *please* don't leave."

"I'm not leaving you, Eric. I just need some space, and I think you need to work out whatever it is you've got going on in your head." Sookie's voice cracked as she talked.

"Sookie, please..." I trailed off, letting my head rest against he cool iron of the bars in front of me.

Her fingers wrapped around mine and I felt her lips press against my forehead. "I love you, Eric. That hasn't changed."

I knew that was meant to reassure me, but all I could think of was her not being in my house- *our house*. It wasn't going to feel like home anymore. I was going to see her everywhere, but she wouldn't actually be there. There had to be a way to fix this. I had to find a way to convince her to stay. I couldn't lose her, too.

"Time's up!" Detective Twinings called from the doorway.

"I love you, Sookie. Please, *please,*reconsider. I can't lose you." Tears fell from my own eyes. I hadn't cried since the night of her accident.

"I love you, Eric." She kissed me once more, and then she walked away, taking my heart with her.

**Sookie**

I stood in front of the full length mirror in the bedroom, checking to make sure my skirt was smoothed out properly. Just what was a girl supposed to wear to her boyfriend's arraignment, anyway? I settled for a knee length wool skirt and a crisp button down shirt. My hair was pulled back in a twist, and I was wearing minimal makeup, since I was pretty sure I was going to cry when I saw Eric come shuffling into the courtroom.

The sight of the bag I'd packed the night before sitting in the corner made me tear up. I didn't want to leave, but I didn't feel like I had much of a choice. I needed some space to figure things out, and I figured it would be better to give Eric some time to do the same thing. I debated over whether or not it was a good idea to make arrangements to go home for the holidays to see my family. Maybe a little time with them would help me to gain some perspective on what was happening.

I slipped my shoes on and grabbed my purse before heading for the front door. Jeter trailed behind me, watching carefully as I put on my coat and opened the door. He'd spent the last thirty-six hours looking for Eric when he wasn't at my side. He barked when I opened the door, and I turned to face him.

"Don't worry, Jeter, Eric will be home soon." I gave the dog a weak smile before scratching the top of his head. I hoped I was right.

My left knee bounced against the car door the whole way to the Maywood courthouse. The parking lot was a bit of a nightmare, not that going to Rolling Meadows would have been much better. I took only what I had to inside with me. I waited in line for my turn to go through the metal detectors, and once I was cleared through security, I checked the index to see if I could find the listing for the Honorable Niall Brigant. I found he was up on the third floor, and made my way to the elevators.

Part of what tipped the scales in favor of me spending some time back at my own house was the research I'd done on the charge Eric was facing. It was entirely possible the book could be thrown at him. If the judge decided to make an example of Eric, he could be facing up to a year in jail and a fine of $2,500.00. I was hoping that since Eric didn't have a record- that I knew of, anyway- and was rather prominent in the community he lived in, the judge would be lenient with him.

Although, I was pretty sure the school board wasn't going to be very forgiving. Barring the charges being dropped, I was pretty sure Eric was going to lose his job over this. Not that Eric didn't have other options, but I knew how important coaching was to him. The only real silver lining to this whole clusterfuck of a situation was knowing that he wasn't facing a felony charge. The charge could still be upgraded if it was determined any of the damage Bill had suffered was permanent, though.

I stood outside the courtroom, tapping my toes against the marble floor while I waited for the courtroom doors to be opened. I didn't know whether or not to feel comforted by the number of other nervous people standing in the hall with me. I checked my watch every couple of seconds, appalled that time wasn't moving any faster. My throat was dry and my hands were all jittery. My heart was racing. In short, I was scared to death that things were going to go horribly wrong.

Finally, a bailiff opened the doors, and I waited my turn to walk into the room. I took a seat toward the back of the room on the left side. I watched as lawyers and other people filed in to wait for the proceedings to begin. I caught a few distraught faces of middle aged women, and I had to assume they were someone's mother come to find out the fate of her child. I started thinking about Eric's parents, and how they must be coping with all of this.

I'd left it to Johan to deal with Tom and Stella since I had yet to meet them, and frankly, I didn't want to be the one to give them the news that Eric was in jail. I could only imagine the way Stella would break down at the news, and that didn't do much to make me feel any better. I tried to shake the thoughts, but that was much easier said than done.

It seemed to take forever, but court was finally called to order. I stood with everyone else as Judge Niall Brigant entered the courtroom. He was a regal looking man who appeared to be old enough to be my grandfather. He had flaxen hair neatly combed back. His face was lined with light wrinkles. He had kind eyes and a warm smile- not at all what I would have expected from a judge if what I'd seen on Law and Order was any indication of what a judge should look like.

I was surprised that Eric's case was the first one called. When he was brought into the courtroom, I got so transfixed on him that I completely lost focus of what was being said. He looked miserable. It was obvious to me he hadn't slept at all. My heart went out to him. I wanted to launch myself across the courtroom and wrap myself around him, but I couldn't do that. I sat there quietly, just staring at him. What finally got me to pay attention to what was going on was Eric's plea.

"Guilty, your Honor." Eric said clearly.

The judge's eyes snapped up from his paperwork. Clearly he wasn't used to hearing a defendant admit guilt in his courtroom. I watched the judge's face as he looked Eric up and down. He looked at the lawyer standing at Eric's side before speaking.

"Are you sure about this, young man?" Judge Brigant asked, his eyes shifting back to Eric.

Eric nodded and said, "I have no defense for what I did, your Honor."

I wanted to jump out of my seat and say something, but I couldn't do that either. My outburst wouldn't curry any favor with the judge, and Eric's best bet was that his honesty and remorse for what he'd done would get him a lighter sentence. It was up to the judge's discretion whether or not Eric would face jail time. He could be sentenced to probation instead, and that's what I was hoping for.

After conferring with both lawyers, Judge Brigant set a date for sentencing. Eric would be released pending his sentence, and since it was a misdemeanor charge, no bail was set. I breathed a sigh of relief over it, and slumped back in my seat. The next case was called, and I watched as Eric was escorted from the room. On his way out he turned to look at me over his shoulder.

He mouthed the words, "I love you." before he was taken out of the room.

I blinked back my tears before gathering up my things and heading out of the courtroom.

I stood in a hallway where an officer had directed me to wait for Eric. I worried that once I saw him, I wouldn't be able to breathe any easier. When the door finally opened, and he stepped through it, my heart did a flip-flop in my chest. It was like my brain completely turned itself off, and my body took over. I dropped my coat and bag right where I was and threw myself at him. He caught me easily and held me tightly to him.

We stayed like that for a few minutes before I squirmed for him to put me down. He reached for my hand and led me over to where my coat was. I stooped down to pick up my things without letting go of his hand. My emotions were so conflicted. On one hand, I wanted to hold onto him tighter than I ever had before. On the other, I was sure I needed time away. I didn't know what the hell to do. I had so many questions, and it was like nothing made any sense. I wanted *my* Eric back, but I was pretty sure he was gone.

"Are you hungry?" I asked him once my coat was on. I hadn't had breakfast. I was afraid to eat anything on the chance that Eric wasn't released. I was pretty sure I would have thrown it all up.

"Starving." He raised my hand to his mouth and kissed the back of it.

"Me, too." I offered a weak smile and tugged him toward the door.

We walked through the parking lot hand in hand, and I handed over my keys to let him drive. He followed me to the passenger's side and backed me against the side of the car. He leaned down with an intense look in his eyes that made my heart race and my lips part just a little.

"I missed you." He whispered to me, his warm breath a nice contrast to the cold wind kicking up around us. Whether it was his tone or the cold that gave me the shivers, I couldn't tell you.

"I missed you, too." I looked into his eyes.

He moved just the few inches necessary, and kissed me gently. It took a second for me to respond, but when I did, he deepened the kiss immediately. I'd never realized how conflicted I could feel about a kiss. I wanted him so badly. I always wanted him. From the second I saw him behind the bar when all I knew about him was that he was a gorgeous man, I wanted him. Chemistry and lust would never be a problem for us. The problem was, my trust was shaken, and I wasn't sure if I could just let that go.

"Eric..." I pushed him back gently, his taste lingering on my lips.

"I'm sorry. I've just been thinking about you for the last thirty-six hours."

I scoffed and said, "You didn't think there was something more pressing to consider than sex?"

"That's not what I meant." He reached up to stroke my cheek. "We have a lot to talk about."

"Yeah, we do, but we should go eat first." I pulled away from him.

He sighed heavily and opened my door for me. I sank into the passenger's seat and reached over to open his door for him. It was something I was used to doing out of habit. I watched him fold himself into the driver's seat. I'd forgotten to push the seat back before getting out of the car earlier. In no time, Eric had the seat adjusted the way he needed it, and we were off.

Breakfast was awkward, to say the least. In fact, I think it rivaled our first morning together. I almost wished Pam would be around to make some sarcastic comments to break the ice. We ate slowly and made small talk. We both had things we wanted to say, but I wasn't willing to discuss them in the middle of a crowded restaurant. I paid the check since Eric didn't have cash on him, and then we headed back to the house.

As expected, Jeter went nuts when Eric walked through the door. "He was looking for you." I told Eric, as he played with the dog.

Jeter settled down a couple of seconds later, and made himself comfortable over the heat vent. Eric looked around the room like he'd been gone for years instead of just hours. I couldn't blame him. I'd moved around his furniture to make room for the tree. I'd ended up sending Johan home after he filled me in on what had happened Saturday night. I needed to process what he'd told me, and I decided I didn't feel right about decorating the house alone until I knew I didn't have any other choice.

"You went tree shopping." Eric walked over and sniffed the tree.

"I needed something to do to keep my mind off you." I said quietly.

"Did it work?"

I snickered and said, "Not like I hoped it would."

Awkward silence filled the air. When I couldn't take anymore, I forced myself up off the couch and went to the bedroom to change. I was down to my underthings when Eric walked into the room. My heart leapt into my throat, and for a minute, I couldn't breathe. I was battling with myself again, part of me wanting to cover up, while the other part wanted to tackle him back onto the bed. Eric sat down while I moved toward the dresser to get some comfier clothes.

"Sookie, wait." He reached out, his hand curling around my hip to gather me closer to him.

I found myself standing between his parted knees. His head lowered so that it was pressed against my stomach. My hands rested on his shoulders, and it took a moment before I realized he was crying. The sagging of his shoulders my my spine stiffen.

"Eric, what's going on with you?" I reached down and forced his face up so he had to look at me.

He tilted his face down just enough to kiss my stomach, and of course, my traitorous body responded, inching closer to him. Before I could get too lost in the trail of kisses he was leaving along my skin, I pulled away from him. We needed to talk. Sex wasn't going to fix this, no matter how much I wished it could.

"You've always been straight with me, Eric. It's one of the reasons I fell in love with you. But right now, I feel like you're hiding something from me, and until I know what it is, we aren't going to be us." I told him.

He sighed heavily as he looked around the room. His eyes settled on the bag I'd packed. "You're really leaving, aren't you?"

"I don't want to." I admitted.

"So then don't. Sookie, we can fix this."

"Not if you don't start talking. Eric, I've shared everything with you. Every other problem we've come across in this relationship, we've worked through together. I've had your back, and you've had mine. I want to be there for you, and help you with whatever it is you're dealing with, but I can't do that if you won't let me in. If you can't let me in, then I have no place here. So either you start talking, or I leave. It's up to you."

"I don't even know where to start." Eric sighed.

"How about at the beginning? Johan told me this isn't the first fight you've been in." I informed him.

"Great." He muttered.

"Hey! Don't be mad at Johan. *He's* not the one who tried to hide something from me. Maybe it wasn't his place to tell me, but he had assumed I already knew. I wish I would have."

"I didn't tell you because that's not who I am anymore."

"Oh no? Eric, you could spend a year in jail because of this!"

"This is different from those other fights." He shook his head.

"How? Because you didn't get arrested for those? Eric, whether or not you faced criminal charges isn't the point. The person I thought I knew couldn't do something like what you did to Bill. I understand that you probably thought you were protecting me, on some level, but you went above and beyond that. What would have happened if Johan and Chow hadn't pulled you off of Bill? Have you thought about that, because I have. You could have killed him, Eric. I saw it in your eyes. It scared the hell out of me to see you like that. You were so numb to it, like it didn't even matter. That's not the person I fell in love with."

"I know it sounds like an over-simplification on my part, but it was a case of really bad judgment. I was pissed off at Johan. Then Pam had to go and tell me about whatever the hell situation she's in with him, and to top it off, I walk out of the office to see that scumbag putting his hands on you. Yeah, I snapped. I completely lost my shit."

"What is it about Pam and Johan together that bothers you so much, Eric? If you don't have feelings for Pam, then I don't get it."

"They're my family, Sookie. They're two of the most important people in my life, and I can't lose either of them. Johan is the other half of me. Literally. And Pam... she's been with me for so long that I..." He trailed off, at a loss for words to describe it.

"Eric, I get that they're important to you, but you have no control over what they do. They're adults. They're also mature enough not to put you in the middle of their problems. Look how well they've handled their situation. They managed to keep it to themselves for almost a decade without you having the slightest clue as to what happened between them. You don't need to protect them from each other."

"I'm protecting myself, Sookie."

"No, Eric, you're not." I moved closer to him again and held his face in my hands. "You're tearing down everything you worked so hard for. Why would you do that?"

"I don't know." The honesty in his eyes floored me. He really had no idea why he was acting so crazy all of a sudden.

The words 'mental disorder' popped into my head. Could he be manic? It would certainly explain the break in his character, but that seemed a bit extreme. I took a deep breath and tried to think of some sort of rationalization for all of this.

"I think you need to see someone about this."

"You mean a shrink?"

"Yes, I do."

"I'm not crazy, Sookie."

"I know you're not. But I also know that whatever is going on in that head of yours is something I can't fix. I'll talk to you about it as much as you want, but maybe there are things you need to get off your chest that you can't say to me. If that's the case, then you need to find someone you *can* say them to. You need to figure this out, Eric."

"What about you?"

"What about me?"

"I need you to stay, Sookie. I already know I'm going to lose my certification for this, which means I pretty much fired myself this weekend. No more coaching. No more teaching. I can live with losing those things, but I can't live with losing you."

I had just opened my mouth to answer Eric when my cell phone rang. By the ring tone, I knew it was Amelia calling. I didn't want to leave Eric, but I had to take the call. I excused myself from the room and ran to the living room to get my phone from my purse.

"Hey, Ame, how are ya?" I tried to sound cheerful.

"Married. How are you?" She said with glee.

"You're what?" I shouted into the phone.

"Tray and I did it this morning. We hopped a flight to Vegas and got married at sunrise."

I was stunned, to say the least, but very happy for them. "Well, it's about time. Congratulations. I wish I could have been there."

"Oh, we'll have a party like no other when we get back. We're going to spend a few days in the desert soaking up the heat and casinos before we head back to Chicago. Listen, I'm calling because I started to get some of my memories back from the night of the accident."

"You did?" I'd always thought Amelia was too drunk to know what the hell was going on.

"I know it happened fast, but I remembered something about those few seconds after the crash. My eyes opened and I could very clearly see into the front windshield of the other car." Amelia told me.

My heart stopped for a second. "Ame, what did you see?"

"Well, Tray Googled a picture of that Lorena chick that everyone was convinced hit the car."

"And?"

"And the woman I saw behind the wheel didn't look a damn thing like her."

My heart sank. Did that mean we were back to square one? "Well, I guess that solves the mystery, then."

"Oh, you bet your sweet ass it does." Amelia said with smug satisfaction.

"How do you figure?"

I could almost hear the smile in Amelia's voice when she said, "Because the woman I saw behind the wheel was Eric's neighbor."

Holy. Shit.

I stayed up until 2:30 in the morning to finish this. It wouldn't leave me the hell alone. Thanks to **SlackerDee** and **Scribeninja** for letting me spoiler them. I was too excited to keep it to myself. See? *THIS* is why it pays to be my homey on twitter. I email advanced copies if you're around when I finish them.

\*falls into bed and passes the fuck out\*

**Chapter 36: You're The Storm**

Okay, so I'm scratching the original author's note I had here to kick this puppy off. There has certainly been a strong reaction to the last couple of chapters, and I'm surprised by how split it's been. There hasn't been a real definitive opinion on how to handle this situation, and believe it or not, the things you guys say in reviews really does influence where the story goes. I just wanted to take a moment to remind you that there is more coming. This story isn't over yet. There are still lots of loose ends to tie up, and I'm working on that. The car accident wasn't something I had planned from the beginning. It was just one of those light bulb moments where I thought, "Hmmm...that could be interesting." So I did it. It was the same thing with Eric's crazy rage attack. I have a tendency to write myself into a corner, only to write myself out of it again. I have no idea how I'm going to untangle the webs I make, but it's going to happen. I know a lot of you have a lot of questions, and I'm going to do my best to answer them all.

I've been pretty fail at responding to reviews, and I don't want *any* of you to take that personally. I really do appreciate **AND READ** every single word you take the time to type for me. You guys remind me of things that I forget about. You should hear us authors on twitter. Oy. We're constantly talking about how we have to go back and look at the deets of our stories because we forget. You guys are like steel traps when it comes to this stuff, and I love the stuffing out of each and every one of you for calling me on any fuckery that may occur in my chapters. I appreciate the nudges and reminders, because you ultimately help to make the story better. So thank you for that. \*group hug\*

Chapter Thirty-Six: You're The Storm

I sat on the edge of the bed never to thankful for a phone call in my life. It's not that I didn't want to straighten things out with Sookie, so much as she wanted answers I didn't have. She was right when she called my behavior self-destructive. That wasn't me. I'd never been that way in the past. I had always been the kind to carefully weigh my choices, and diligently pursue the things I thought were worth my time. There were precisely two things in my life that I gave a shit about anymore: Sookie and basketball.

I could kiss basketball goodbye for good thanks to the appearance of my own Mr. Hyde. Whether or not I'd lost Sookie was still anyone's guess. She'd told me she still loved me, which was only a moderate comfort. To be honest, I couldn't blame her one bit for having her doubts about me. I could have kicked my own ass for not telling her about the fights I'd gotten into in college. I had to wonder how Johan had described them to her, though, because they weren't attacks like what had happened with Bill.

It was more about a bunch of jocks riding high on testosterone and the drive to win, and when one person started talking too much shit, it had a way of getting under everyone else's skin. It set a tone. Put too much of that volatile hostility in a room, and you're going to end up with a fight on your hands. It wasn't just me. We were young guys who felt like we had something to prove, and no tolerance for the assholes who were trying to step up to us. It was a stupid, macho posturing thing that always managed to get out of control.

The fights were always confined to a basketball court, or the gym. They were never street fights. I wasn't out there kicking anyone's ass just for looking at me funny, or for no reason at all. There was provocation in all of the fights I'd been in. Most of them were broken up by fellow players or referees before they got too far past the shoving stage. The last fight I ever got in was before March Madness my senior year.

A player for UNC at Chapel Hill had sucker punched me from behind. I turned around and clocked the guy before I knew what was happening. We ended up rolling around on the floor until we were separated, bleeding and ejected from the game by the officials. I don't know what happened to the other guy, but I had been suspended from play for six games as a result. It was enough of a punishment back then to get me to chill the fuck out, and take a deep breath before I considered getting violent on someone again.

Sookie yelling from the living room jarred me from my reverie. "Amelia, are you sure?"

My head snapped up, and I stood to go see what was going on with her. I walked into the living room to see Sookie pacing back and forth in front of the undecorated Christmas tree in nothing but her underwear. She had a huge smile on her face, which only furthered my curiosity as I got closer to her.

"Amelia, you have to come back. This could change everything." Sookie pleaded. "Yes, I know, I know. You and Tray definitely deserve to have that, but something happened over the weekend and your memories could have a big impact on how things go."

I waved to get Sookie's attention, and she held up a hand to keep me from talking. I stopped where I was standing and watched her as she resumed her pacing. I could practically see wheels turning in her head as she moved.

"Ame, Eric got arrested on Saturday. Yes, I'm serious. Well, he pretty much beat the hell out of Bill Compton." Sookie looked to me with a pained expression on her face, and my head sank with guilt. I still didn't feel bad about attacking that fucker, but I felt like an asshole for hurting her like I had.

I stood there and listened while she described the last day and a half, and I only hated myself more for it. I knew she was holding back some of the things she'd been feeling, but I could understand how she might not want to go into all of it over the phone. I was sure there would be lots of conversation about it when the two of them got face to face.

"Ame, what I'm trying to say is that if there's a way to connect Bill and Sophie-Anne to the accident, there's a chance the judge might be more lenient with Eric. Not to mention, there should be criminal charges filed against them. And on top of that, Bill's wife and son died under mysterious circumstances. If what you're saying is true, I would think this would give police a really good motive for murder. Maybe they'll take a second look at the deaths and see what they can find."

Hearing Sookie talk like she was, was beyond a turn-on. She was sexy as hell, and she had a brain just as amazing as her body. She was perfect for me, and I couldn't help but think I'd severely fucked up our relationship in the course of thirty seconds. For her, I would take it all back if I could.

"Ame, please, just write down this number and contact Detective Twinings. I'm sure he's got some questions for you anyway." Sookie pleaded over the phone. She breathed a sigh of relief, and then recited the detective's cell number. "Promise me that you'll call him, okay? Okay. Yes. Call me with your flight info and I'll pick you guys up from the airport. I know. I love you, too. I missed you. Tell Tray I said congratulations. Right."

I thought Sookie was going to hang up, but instead she held out her phone to me. I took it from her and held it to my ear. "Amelia?"

"What the fuck were you thinking?" Amelia started on me in her mother hen tone of voice she usually only used on Tray when he failed to take out the trash or mow the lawn.

"I was thinking that asshole had something to do with hurting my girl, and hurting two of my friends."

"You know, Eric, you're a big boy. There comes a time when throwing punches causes more problems than it solves."

"I know."

"Don't do it again." Amelia said in a stern tone.

"I don't think it'll be necessary." I sighed, enjoying the grin on Sookie's face as I was being chastised by a woman half my size, but with twice in the intimidation factor. Amelia Broadway, simply put, was one hell of a bully when she wanted to be.

"For what it's worth, I probably would have clocked him once myself." She admitted, and I cracked a smile. "But Sookie loves you. Did you think about that when you decided to give him the Rodney King treatment?"

The truth was, I hadn't thought about anything other than hitting the guy. "Not really."

"Well, you might want to factor that into your decisions from now on." Amelia advised. She was right, of course.

"Yes ma'am." I agreed with her.

"I'll let Sookie fill you in on the rest. And Eric?"

"Yes, Amelia?"

"Work it out. Don't let her run. It's going to be really easy for her to think you're Quinn right now. I know you're not, and deep down, so does she, but her gut is going to tell her to run. Don't let her do it." Amelia advised.

"Thanks, Amelia."

"You're welcome. I'll see you soon." She said, and with that, she was gone.

I hung up the phone and handed it back to Sookie. "Well, Amelia is definitely back."

"Oh, she's back, firing on all cylinders and then some." Sookie agreed.

"So what's the rest of the news you're supposed to fill me in on?"

Sookie's grin broadened and sincere happiness filled her eyes. "Amelia and Tray got married earlier this morning. They hopped a plane to Vegas last night, and they got married this morning."

I smiled right along with her. "Good for them."

"Yeah, it's about time." Sookie nodded, and tossed her phone to the chair. "But there's something else."

"Oh?"

Sookie stepped closer to me, and it was like I was looking at the Sookie from before the attack. For the moment, all traces of her sadness and disappointment with me were gone. She grabbed my hands and pulled me over to the couch to sit down beside her. I was disappointed she didn't sit in my lap the way she almost always did whenever we ended up on the couch, but given the situation, the fact that she was urging me to sit anywhere near her was more than good enough for me.

"Amelia remembered something pretty crucial from the night of the accident." Sookie could barely contain the smile that was straining her face.

"What did she remember?" I tried not to let her enthusiasm sweep me away, too, but it was hard not to.

"She said that after the crash, her eyes opened and she could clearly see who was driving the other car."

"Holy shit."

"That's what I said. Well, at least in my head. Anyway, the point is, when she told Tray that she had seen who was driving, he Googled a picture of Lorena." Sookie paused for dramatic effect, and I had to wonder if she was drawing this out just to make me crazy.

"And?" I prompted.

"And the person driving the car wasn't Lorena." Her smile only broadened, which stopped my heart from sinking.

"Sook, you're killing me here." I sighed.

"The person who hit the car, and almost killed me? It was the Red Menace." Sookie squeezed my hand.

"What?" My eyes locked on hers. "Is Amelia sure about this?"

Sookie nodded and said, "She said the only thing she's ever been more sure of is how happy she is she married Tray."

"Well, then, I guess she's sure." I was a bit dazed. What did this revelation mean for me?

"Eric, this could change everything. I don't think it'll get the charges against you dropped, but if the police can link Bill to being involved with the accident, the judge might be more lenient with your sentence. I really don't want to think about what I'm going to do if he throws the maximum at you." Sookie gave me those pleaded eyes of hers.

"Believe me, I don't want to think about it either."

"I got Amelia to promise me she would call the detective. If Bill and Sophie-Anne really were going to leave the state like they said, maybe it's for the best you put him in the hospital. It wasn't the ideal way to keep them here, but it might give the police a chance to question them again. Maybe they can get them to flip on each other." Sookie suggested.

I couldn't help but laugh. "You watch too much Law and Order, lover."

She slugged me playfully on the arm, and it felt good, oddly enough. It was something *my* Sookie would do. But just as quickly as her good mood had come, it started to fade again. She looked up at me with serious eyes, and surprised me when she climbed into my lap so she was straddling me. She held my face her hands as she spoke. Feeling her slight weight and the intense heat from between her thighs definitely had me paying attention to whatever it was she was about to say.

"You owe Amelia a huge thank you. She reminded me to trust my instincts where you're concerned because they've never failed me before. I don't think I'll ever approve of what you did, but I want to understand it because I want to understand you. I love you, Eric. I want us to work. But I meant what I said. I think you should see someone about what happened, and I think you need to work out whatever it is that's going on in that head of yours. I'll do whatever I can to help you, but you're going to have to do the heavy lifting on this one. If you can promise me that you'll do your part, I promise I will meet you half way on this because the truth is, I can't lose you either."

"I swear, Sookie, I will do whatever you want me to to make this better." I looked her dead in the eyes as I spoke.

She searched my eyes with her own before she nodded. She licked her lips and then leaned forward to kiss me. It was a kiss meant to seal the deal, but it quickly grew into more than that. Sookie's hips had just started to rock against mine when my cell phone buzzed in my pocket. I didn't want her to, but she pulled away.

"You should get that." She said breathlessly.

"Voice mail." I went to her neck, but she pushed me back.

"Eric, that could be your lawyer." Her eyes dropped sadly.

I sighed with frustration that was only compounded when she climbed off my lap and left the room to give me some privacy. I pulled my phone from my pocket, and growled quietly when I saw Pam's name flashing on the display. I wasn't in the mood for her just yet. I really didn't need to get my ass chewed out by her yet.

"Hello?" I tried to keep an even tone to my voice.

"Thanks for the update, lille bror." It was Johan. Thank God.

I sighed and answered him in Swedish. "I had more important things to worry about."

"You better call Mom and Dad." Johan warned.

"You called them?"

"I didn't have a whole lot of choice, Eric. We didn't know if you were going to be released, or if you were going to be stuck in there until your trial."

"There isn't going to be a trial. I pleaded guilty."

"You did what?"

"You heard me."

"Eric, are you insane?"

"Johan, how the hell was I going to come with a defense for what I did? There were how many witnesses that saw me come out of nowhere and just wail on the guy."

"So you're going to throw away your life over this fucktard?"

"I'm taking responsibility for what I did. I fucked up, bror. It's the adult thing to do. If I'm lucky, the judge will give me probation and a fine."

"And you'll have a record for the rest of your life."

"I'm going to have that either way, Johan." I sighed, contemplating hanging up on him. "And thanks, by the way, for telling Sookie about the old days."

"Fuck you, lille bror. I would have thought you would have told her that yourself. We all have shit in our pasts we're not proud of. She probably would have taken it better if she'd heard it from you." He was right, but that didn't make me dislike him any less in that moment. "So, Eric, about Pam and me-"

"Not now, Johan. I can't even go there right now. I have too much other shit on my mind to get caught up in whatever you and Pam may, or may not, have going on."

Johan snorted and said, "Bet you wish you would have felt that way Saturday night."

"Fuck you." I retorted, but couldn't help the smile that cracked my face.

"Look, bror, you know I have your back, right? If I would have seen that asshole anywhere near Sookie, I probably would have done the same thing you did. Well, not *exactly* the same thing you did, but I wouldn't have been buying him a beer, either. I know things are different now than they were ten years ago. This was special circumstances."

I sighed and said, "Yeah, well, I hope the judge sees it that way."

"There isn't a whole lot you can do about that, other than be completely honest. Worry about Sookie."

"Did you know she was thinking about leaving?"

"She mentioned maybe taking some time to herself. I think that might be a good idea."

"You think she should leave me?"

"No, that's not what I'm saying. You know I like Sookie. I think she's good for you. The problem is, right now, I'm not sure you're good for her. If you love her, you have to put her ahead of yourself. Take some time and get your shit together, bror. Then when you get your head straight, you go back to her and you work things out. Don't make your problems *her* cross to bear." Johan advised.

As much as I hated to admit it, I was pretty sure Johan was right. I certainly had a lot to think about. We got off the phone a few minutes later, after I promised to do a better job of keeping him up to date on what was happening, as well as to call our parents. I knew I was going to have to deal with them, too, but I figured one thing at a time was the best way to go.

I dropped the phone on the couch and got up to see what Sookie was doing. I found her in our bedroom, stretched out on her side. She'd put on a t-shirt, but nothing else. Her eyes were closed, and she looked like she was asleep. I wanted to climb into bed with her. God knows I was tired. Instead, I pulled off the clothes I'd been wearing since Saturday, and headed for the bathroom to take a shower.

After washing up, I stood under the hot water until it started to run out. I stepped out of the tub, and wrapped a towel around myself. Sookie had rolled onto her other side, giving me a wonderful view of her ass. I took a deep breath and corralled all the thoughts I had of just getting in bed with her. I brushed my teeth and combed my hair out before tousseling it with my fingers. I dried off the rest of the way before going into the bedroom to retrieve a pair of boxers. Normally, I would just get into bed, but given the circumstances, I wasn't sure that was a good idea.

No sooner did I lay down on my side of the bed, than Sookie was rolling over and cuddling up next to me. I breathed a sigh of relief and wrapped an arm around her before closing my eyes. The next time I opened them, Sookie was gone, and the house smelled amazing. Christmas music wafted in from the living room. The darkness in the room told me I'd slept well into the afternoon. A glance at the clock next to the bed it was actually into the evening. I stretched out before getting out of bed.

I walked through the living room where Jeter was still laying near the heat vent. I could hear Sookie quietly singing along with Nat King Cole, and I couldn't help but smile. She was standing over the stove with a wooden spoon in her hand. It was then that I realized she was wearing one of *my* t-shirts, and I wanted to attack her. It was strange to have to curb that instinct. Just three days ago, I could have completely distracted her from whatever she was doing, and she wouldn't have complained.

"How'd you sleep?" Sookie asked without turning around.

"How'd you know I was here?"

"I feel you watching me."

"You look good in my clothes."

Sookie smiled over her shoulder at me. "I'm swimming in this."

"Doesn't matter." I stepped closer to her. "What are you making?"

"Beef stew with dumplings."

To say my mouth was watering would be an understatement. "It smells amazing."

"It's my Gran's recipe." She opened a cabinet to reach for a mixing bowl. I would have gotten it for her, but I was too busy staring at her. With her reaching like that, the shirt she was wearing had revealed more of her body to me. Fighting my instincts wasn't easy.

"You need help with anything?"

"It just needs to simmer. I'm going to start on the batter for the dumplings in a half hour or so. Dinner should be ready in an hour." She explained as she finally got the bowl she wanted, and set it on the counter. "So, you never answered my question."

"What question?"

"How'd you sleep?" She smiled at me again.

"Very well. I'd forgotten how much it sucks to try and sleep without you next to me."

"I know what you mean." Her lips pressed into a thin line. She took a deep breath, and I could pretty much figure out what she was thinking. "I don't know if I could do it for a year."

"Sookie-"

"Look, Eric, we have to talk about it. I mean, there's a chance you might end up going away for a while. What am I supposed to do for that time?"

"Do you want to break up?"

"No." She shook her head. "No, that's the last thing I want. What I want is for things to go back to the way they were, but that's not going to happen."

"I want that, too."

"I have a confession to make." Sookie came closer to me.

"Okay."

"I wasn't sleeping earlier. I was just laying down. When you got into bed next to me, everything just felt normal again for a little while. The rest of the world didn't matter anymore. I wish there was a way to push the rest of it out as long as we're in this house, but it doesn't work like that. I started thinking about how things are going to change for us, and about the things we've been talking about lately."

"You mean getting married?"

She nodded and said, "I think that's a discussion we should table for a bit. I'm not saying I've changed my mind. It's just that we have some things we need to work out. We've both been worried about rushing into things, and I think maybe what happened proves we did a little bit."

"Do you regret any of it?"

"No." She said with conviction, and stepped closer to me. "I meant what I said earlier when I told you I wanted us to get through this together. I know that you're good for me. I don't doubt that you love me, and I really hope you don't doubt that I love you, because I do."

"I know you do."

"Good." Sookie pushed herself up onto the counter behind her, and I closed the distance between us by standing between her knees.

"Johan suggested that maybe it was a good idea if you spent some time at your old house." I wanted to see her reaction to the suggestion.

"I'm not convinced he's wrong about that."

"Is that what you want?" My hands settled on her bare thighs, and I felt the goose bumps spread underneath them.

"Honestly, Eric, I don't know what I want. There's this war going on inside of me. I am completely torn on this. I want to be there for you. I want to help you with whatever's going on with you. I want us to work on things in our relationship. I want to understand you better. On the other hand, I feel like maybe it's better if you don't have me around as a distraction."

"You're not a distraction." My hands moved to cup her face so she was looking at me. "I want you here. I always want you here."

"I'm not going anywhere. I promised you I would stay as long as you made the effort to meet me half way, and get yourself together again. I'm not going to go back on that promise." She bit her bottom lip, a clear sign she was about to say something she wasn't sure I was going to like. "Can I ask you something that might sound completely out of left field?"

"You can ask me anything." I stroked her cheek with my thumb.

"Why did you cut your hair?"

I couldn't help but laugh quietly. "I guess I decided it was time for a change."

"You should have stopped at the haircut." Sookie gave me a pointed stare that had me smiling back at her.

"Yes, you're right about that."

"You know, I'm not so mad that you hit Bill." Sookie my hands from her face and looked at them. My right hand was bruised up, and there were a few scabbed over cuts on my knuckles. The fact that I hadn't broken anything was amazing. "I think if I can understand what went into it, I'll feel better about it."

I sighed, and leaned in to hug her. The gesture seemed to catch her off guard. She was tense for a few seconds before she melted against me. The honest to God truth was, a perfect storm had happened in my brain. There were a whole bunch of things I was thinking about right before it happened, and seeing him so close to Sookie just pushed me over the edge.

"I know you think I have feelings for Pam." I pulled back a little, and made sure I caught her eyes. "Sookie, I swear that's not even close to being an issue. Do I care about Pam? Yes, very much. She's been my best friend for a very long time, and it wasn't until you came a long that she started to be like a third wheel in my life. It's an adjustment for us both. My brother is always going to be a part of my life no matter what. I couldn't get Johan even if I wanted to. I'm stuck with that guy."

"He's not so bad." Sookie smiled up at me.

"No, he's not. In fact, sometimes I think maybe he's the better twin."

"Eric, you both have your strong suits. This thing that happened, it's a single moment in your life. It doesn't have to define you for whatever time you have left, but you have to make the choice to rise above it." Sookie laced her fingers with mine.

"I want to explain something to you." I squeezed her palms to my own. She nodded for me to continue. "I know you think that if things don't work out wth Johan and Pam, that I'm not going to get caught in the crosshairs, but you don't know that. Regardless of whether or not they intend for me to end up there, I'm going to because I love them both. It's going to cause a problem, and it's a stress I really don't need. I want them to be happy, Sookie, and I know both of them well enough to know they aren't ever going to be happy together."

Sookie bit her lip again and asked, "But don't you think that's *their* call to make, and not yours? Johan has been nothing but supportive of your relationship with me."

"He doesn't know you."

"What about Pam?"

"Pam is still hoping you'll come to your senses and realize you should be batting for her team."

Sookie rolled her eyes. "Forget I asked."

"I was also pissed off they didn't tell me about this years ago. Maybe it was none of my business, but the fact that they've been lying to me for almost a decade? Yeah, I feel like I have a right to be mad about it. You're right in that what they do is their own business. I know I can't control it, but it doesn't mean I have to like it. You know, kind of like your brother and Crystal?"

Sookie glared at me for bringing her brother into it, but I was just trying to put things into terms she could understand. Sookie had made it more than clear that if she'd been given the power, she would have vetoed her brother's marriage to Crystal. That got me thinking about traveling, and whether or not it was possible for us to still go to California, since I wasn't scheduled for sentencing until after the first of the year. Shit.

"I'm not friends with Crystal." Sookie pointed out.

"Okay, well, imagine if Jason married Amelia, then." I suggested, and Sookie recoiled at the thought. "See?"

She sighed and said, "Fine, fine, I get what you're saying." Sookie paused for a moment, and then it was like a light went on in her eyes. "You think of Pam like a sister, don't you?"

"Pretty much."

"And you already lost a sister." Her voice was distant.

"Yes."

"You don't want to lose another one." Sookie's lip trembled. The last thing I wanted was for her to start crying. I hadn't even connected those dots myself. Leave it to her to know before I did.

"No, I guess I don't." I know I sounded surprised by my words, but that's because I was.

"I think you need to have a talk with Pam." Sookie told me.

"I think you're right." I agreed with her.

"Duh." She nudged me with her knees, and then tilted her face up to kiss me.

Alright, baby birds, I'm in need of a break from the angsty goodness of this story. I'm trying to wrap up all the killer heavy angst that makes most of you want to hide under a rock until it's over. I'm thinking it should be in the next two chapters or so. We'll see what the muses decide. While I *do* have a plan for how the rest of this story is going to work out, there's no guarantee the muses won't throw another curveball at me. Tis the fun of exploring where the muses want to go.

That said, I'm going to be working on the collaborative piece my lovey **kjwrit** and I are doing. We both need a serious break from all the \*head walling\* we've been doing. Sooo...you probably won't get an update on this until the weekend. Depends on whether or not the muses will leave me be just for the night.

Personally, I'm hoping for a round of gchat with a side of Skarsporn \*winks at Kacy\* Later lovers xoxo

**Chapter 37: Long Way To Happy**

Before we get back to the angsty/dramaliciousness of this story, I have to take a quick second to thank **Slacker Dee, Scribeninja, ARedheadThing and Northwoman** for being so effing supportive over the last few chapters (and to think I ever turned my nose up at Twitter!). Special love (how do naked Viking hugs sound to you?) goes to **Scribeninja** for planting a seed in my head that the muses allowed to grow into a portion of this chapter. When she reads it, she'll know what she did, and I thank her profusely for it because it gives this chapter an added layer of emotion/introspection I think is absolutely critical. I'm hoping to wrap up the angsty/dramaliciousness in the next chapter or two so we can start to get back to the fluffy, marshmallowy goodness this story has mostly been, but I am at the mercy of the muses.

Stick with me, baby birds, Mama has a plan \*winks\*

Chapter Thirty-Seven: Long Way To Happy

After dinner, Eric and I cleaned up the kitchen the same as we always did. It was so easy to slip back into our regular routine and forget about everything else. Once we were done, we headed into the living room. I looked at the bare tree and decided it was time to decorate. Maybe that would help me put the weekend behind us. I knew we couldn't fix it all with something so simple as a pretty tree, but if getting back to our lives would make things better, then I was all for it.

I went down to the basement to retrieve one of the boxes of decorations that Eric had brought over from my house, and carried it upstairs. I set it down on the couch and carefully removed the lid. Most of the ornaments inside were handmade by one person or another. Gran had been big on that sort of thing. It made the ornaments unique, which I liked. There were lots of them that had been hand painted, many of them by me when I was still a little girl. Gran had a flair for painting, and she loved to lend her talent to ornament making.

"Where did you get these?" Eric asked as I unwrapped the ornaments.

"We made them."

"We?"

"Gran, Mom, Jason, Grandad even made a few of them. I think Hadley painted this when she was eleven." I handed Eric a snowman ornament with a hot pink scarf wrapped around its neck.

"Wow." He looked impressed.

"You never did anything like this when you were a kid?"

"Uh, no, not really. We had one of those fake white trees." He cringed at the memory, and I cringed right along with him.

"Well, I can promise you that we will *never* have a white tree. It's not natural." I assured him, and I noticed the way his face lit up at the suggestion that this wouldn't be our last Christmas together.

"They're also ugly as sin."

"Agreed." I nodded as I continued to unpack ornaments. "Will you start with the lights? Those long arms of yours will come in handy for it."

"Yes, ma'am." He got up off the couch and went downstairs to get the box of lights. "Do you want white lights or colors?"

"Surprise me." I said without looking over my shoulder at him. "Although I will say the white lights have a remote on them that allow the lights to chase or blink if you want them to."

"White it is, then." Eric opened the box and started digging.

In no time, he had the tree wrapped in lights. It would have taken me much longer, and far more frustration to do the job myself. Stringing the lights was always my least favorite part of decorating the tree. It was rather meticulous work, and my lack of wing span only made the job harder. For Eric, it was a piece of cake, and it was done beautifully.

"What about tinsel or garland?"

"I don't bother with tinsel. It makes too much mess, and it's going to be enough work to clean up after the pine needles as they drop." I scrunched up my nose, wondering if the needles would be a problem for Jeter. I hadn't thought of that when I bought the tree. "The needles aren't going to be a problem for Jeter, are they?"

"Nah, I don't think so, but I'll check it out online later just to be safe." Eric promised me.

Together we hung the ornaments on the tree, with me stopping every now and then to explain where an ornament came from, or who had made it. There were a few commercially made ones, but most of them were handcrafted. By the time we were done, the tree was fairly full, and I figured I was going to have to weed through what was there when we took it all down, and decide what I wanted to keep. What I didn't, I would pack away to someday give to my own children.

I bit my lip at the worry Eric and I wouldn't be able to make this work. I'd started to get it in my head that when I had babies, they would be his. My heart sank a bit at the idea that might not happen anymore. I pushed those thoughts away. Doubt wasn't going to make any of this easier. I'd promised I was going to be here with him, and I'd meant all of me. So far he was living up to his end of the bargain. He hadn't run away from the conversation I'd started in the kitchen before dinner. He'd been open and honest with me. He'd explained his feelings for Pam.

There was a part of me that questioned whether or not Eric was being entirely truthful when he said he wasn't the slightest bit attracted to Pam. She was a beautiful woman. In some ways, I'd think he was crazy *not* to be attracted to her. It was entirely possible to be attracted to someone without acting on said attraction. I mean, take Johan, for instance. The man is a living, breathing replica of my boyfriend. So, yes, I think he's a gorgeous man. Do I want to sleep with him? No. Even though Johan wears and Eric mask for life, he's not Eric.

But then my mind circled back to the idea that maybe I didn't know Eric as well as I thought. I took a few deep breaths and reminded myself I was going to find out. Yes, Eric had done something completely out of character. He'd made a huge mistake. Was it an even bigger one to try and move on too quickly, or was it better to just put it behind us as a lesson learned? I didn't know the answer to that question. All I had was what my gut told me, and my gut said to give him another chance.

Of course, my gut had said the same thing about Quinn in the past. Look where that got me.

"Sookie, are you okay?" Eric asked, yanking me back into the present.

"Oh, yeah, sorry. I just zoned out there for a minute." I smiled at him.

"I noticed. What's going on in there?" He tapped my head gently with this finger.

"Thinking about you and me. There's lots to consider."

Eric looked a bit deflated and then suggested, "Maybe I should sleep in the other room until things blow over a little more."

"What?" Where the hell did that come from?

"Well, I've been thinking about things. You seemed awfully set on spending some time alone when you came to see me yesterday. I don't want you to leave, so please don't think that. It's just... well, I got to thinking about some of the things Johan said to me earlier today, and I think maybe he's got a point. It's not really fair for me to drag you down with-"

"Eric, I'm here by choice." I cut him off.

"I know, and I love you for it." He reached for my hand. "I don't want you to leave because I would miss you, and because with Bill and Sophie-Anne on the loose, who the hell knows what would happen. If Amelia's right about Sophie-Anne being the one who caused the accident, I don't like the idea of you being alone in your house. If we weren't already living together, I would ask you to move in with me, or at least suggest you stay here until the police can sort things out. I want you to be safe, Sookie. You're what matters to me in all of this. You were right when you said I have some things I need to work out for myself, and I want to do that. I want to figure out why I lost it the way I did, because no matter how many times I go over it in my head, it doesn't make any sense.

"But I also don't want to drag you down with me. I want us to work on whatever it is we need to work on to get back to where we were. I want you to trust me like you did three days ago, and I don't want to see that little shadow of doubt in your eyes ever again. I want you to be as sure of me as I am of you. So if that means we give each other some space to figure things out, then that's what we'll do. If I can accomplish that by sleeping in the guest room, then I'll do it." Eric squeezed my hand, a sad smile teasing his lips.

"We can talk about you sleeping in the other room tomorrow. Tonight, I need sleep and I know that if you sleep in the other room, I'll just follow you in there." I said honestly, slightly embarrassed to make the admission.

"I have a hard time sleeping without you, too." Eric winked at me, and I didn't feel quite so bad anymore.

"What are we going to do about California? We can't exactly travel right now."

"I was thinking of inviting my parents here."

"You were?"

"I know you were looking forward to meeting them, and given the turn of events, I'm sure Dad's been talking Mom out of hopping a flight here. This way we get to kill two birds with one stone, and we never have to leave the house." Eric shrugged.

"Are you sure now's a good time for me to do the whole meet the parents thing? There's enough stress without all of that."

"My Mom loves you already, Sookie. Dad, well, once he sees that you're loyal and well-mannered, he'll probably fall in line with the rest of the Northman males." Eric said with confidence.

"And if he doesn't?"

"Then that's his problem." Eric shrugged.

"Easy for you to say. My family *loves* you." I rolled my eyes.

"Do they know about Saturday?"

"No, I haven't called them yet. I didn't want to until I had a better grasp of it all myself, because they're going to ask a lot of questions, and I'm just not ready to deal with them quite yet."

"They're expecting us in a few days." Eric paused, and pressed his lips together for a second before saying, "I think you should still go see them."

"You do?"

"I do. I saw the look on your face when you were talking about your family while we were decorating the tree, and I don't want you to miss out on a chance to see them because of me. Besides, if my parents come while you're gone, it'll give me a chance to work things out with them over what happened this weekend. By the time you get back, all of that will be settled and you won't have to worry about all of that weirdness anymore. Besides, I know you still want to see your family. I can see it in your eyes." Eric reached out to tuck some of my hair behind my ear.

"I *do* want to see them."

"Then you should go." Eric said softly, stroking my cheek with his thumb.

"I'll think about it." I didn't like the idea of leaving him, even if it was just for a few days.

The trip would probably do me some good and give us both a chance to clear our heads a little and put things in perspective. I wasn't really looking forward to telling my family about what had happened, but I wasn't going to lie about it either. I decided to put it off until later. I still had time to make up my mind, and at the moment, all I wanted was to be with Eric.

Once we were done decorating the rest of the house, we turned off the lights in the living room and sat together on the couch. We watched the lights on the tree chase one another while Christmas music played softly. We didn't say much to one another, but I think we were all talked out at that point. It was nice to feel that familiar silence without the awkward need to say something. It was nice to be tucked into Eric's side and listen to the steady beat of his heart. His fingers stroked my arm lightly, and before I knew it, I was falling asleep.

I stirred slightly at the feeling of Eric's arms sliding around me to pick me up and carry me to bed. I snuggled against his chest, and didn't want him to put me down on the cool sheets. He did, of course, and my eyes fluttered open to see him standing over me with a look of longing in his eyes. Before I could tell them not to, my hands reached up and pulled his face to mine. My lips brushed against his as our eyes searched one anothers.

His lips met mine more definitively, and it didn't take long before he was sinking on top of me. It felt like all of the things we couldn't or didn't know how to say where there in those kisses. It was apologies and promises of making things better, of rebuilding what had been broken. It felt like the turning of a page in the story of our life together. Our clothing came off quickly, not that we were wearing much of it. Neither of us had seen much point in getting dressed after our nap earlier.

I pushed away all of my worry and doubt, and concentrated on being in the moment with him. I could worry later. Right then, I needed to feel the connection we'd had from the beginning. It surprised me when Eric rolled us over, and I found myself straddling him. My eyes stayed on his while his hand moved between our bodies. His fingers started doing some familiar exploring when I leaned forward to kiss him. I moaned into his mouth when his thumb found my clit and started rubbing slow circles around it. His other hand massaged my breast before sliding up into my hair to hold me closer to him.

My hips bucked against his hand, and when I was sure I was ready, I reached between us to put him at my entrance. Slowly, I sank down on him, rolling my hips a bit as I did so. Eric sat up so we were eye to eye, and my legs went around his waist. His mouth took over the work his hand was doing on my breast, and my fingers combed through his hair. I rocked against him slowly at first, savoring the feeling of him inside me. It had only been two days since the last time we'd had sex, but it felt so much longer.

My brain started to filter back into the equation again, and I started thinking about how much worse things could have been. I didn't know if I should feel grateful that Eric had been stopped when he was, or appalled he had gone so far. The sight of my bag still packed in the corner brought tears to my eyes. I felt guilty for even considering leaving him. It had felt like my only option, at the time.

Part of me wondered if maybe it wasn't still the right thing to do. I'd spent so much time already on a man who wasn't what I thought he was. I knew Eric wasn't Quinn, and that he was completely serious about our future together. I wanted to be with Eric. I wanted him so much- maybe too much- and that worried me. I had built my entire life around Quinn, and the future he'd hinted we would have, but never really made plans for. Was I making the same mistakes all over again with Eric?

I unlocked my legs from around his waist and pushed him back onto the bed. I buried my face in his neck so he wouldn't see the tears that had started falling. His hands buried themselves in my hair as I moved up and down, faster and faster, pushing myself closer and closer to release. I felt Eric swell inside me, a sign he was as close as I was. In true Eric fashion, his hand moved between us to find my clit with his thumb. Always the gentleman to make sure I finished first.

Only when I orgasmed, I sobbed instead of screaming like I normally did. I completely broke down and started crying like my life depended on it. Eric froze immediately, like he was afraid he'd hurt me. He had, only not the way he thought. He lifted my face away from his neck, and looked deep into my eyes.

"Sookie, what's wrong?" He smoothed my hair away from my face. "Did I hurt you?"

His questions only made me cry harder. I didn't really know how to explain what was going on in my head at the moment. I was overwhelmed and confused. So rather than say something I would regret, I just wrapped my arms around him, and hoped he would weather the storm with me until it passed.

**Eric**

Sookie's little breakdown- for lack of a better term- had me worried, to say the least. I had no idea why she was suddenly so upset, but I was willing to bet I was the cause of it. I was terrified I'd hurt her in some way, but when I tried to pull away from her to give her some space, she only clung tighter to me. There were all sorts of mixed signals going on, and the fact that she wasn't talking didn't make things any easier.

In the end, I held onto her and stroked her hair until she calmed down enough to talk. She climbed off of me and sat on her knees beside me on the bed. She wiped her face with the palms of her hands, and sniffled like she had the world's worst head cold. Her body was shaking in a jittery sort of way, and there was a pained expression on her face that just about broke my heart.

"What's going on in there?" I reached up to touch her head.

Sookie took a few deep breaths before she said, "I think you were right about me going back to Louisiana for a few days. I think maybe a break is a good idea."

My heart sank. I didn't want her to leave like this. I'd meant for her to go as a way to help put all of this behind her, not so she could get away from me. Fuck if Johan wasn't right earlier. I felt anger fill me, but I wasn't angry at anyone but myself. I wasn't naïve enough to think just two days was enough time to heal whatever had broken between Sookie and me, but I'd thought we were making progress with our earlier conversation. There had to be a piece of the puzzle I wasn't seeing quite yet in order for me to understand where she was coming from in all of this.

"Are you leaving because you miss your family, or because you want to get away from me?" I asked her gently.

She looked a bit haunted as she shrugged her shoulders and said, "Honestly, Eric, I don't know."

\*peeks out from hiding place\* Okay, so you're probably pissed at me for cutting the chapter there. If you'll just promise to put down your pitch forks and torches, I'll come out and talk to you like a normal human being. We good? \*waits for weapons to be surrendered\* Okay. Phew! \*wipes brow\* As I told you in previous A/Ns, I listen to what y'all say in reviews and PMs, and there were a few who thought Sookie was coming off as either too hard on Eric, or too squeaky clean in this whole mess, and I tend to agree with that. Sookie is obviously flawed in her own way, only she's been more upfront about it. It's a switch from the Sookie we're used to seeing, which was one of the reasons I wrote her this way. But just because she's upfront about her baggage doesn't mean it doesn't still get to her, or that she's not going to fumble from time to time. Love has a way of getting people to do crazy things, and these two are no different.

The good news is, I'm already most of the way done with chapter 38, and I can honestly say that I will, in fact, be wrapping up the angsty stuff really soon. I think it's safe to say we've weathered the worst of the storm. We'll also be getting more of Amelia and Johan soon, so that'll bring some comic relief, which I think is much needed at this point. Annnnd just because y'all have been so kick ass about reviewing and leaving me wonderful thoughts that make me consider the direction of this story, I'll reward your reviews with a teaser of the next chapter. Damn twitlonger is down right now anyway, which totes effs up my ability to tease on twitter like I usually do. Lame, right?

Peace out, girl scouts! \*wanders off to finish chapter 38\*

**Chapter 38: Down With The Sickness**

You guys rock my socks right off. The last chapter got me more reviews than I've ever had for a single chapter of this story. Seriously, it's amazeballs! What's even more amazing is that I replied to each and every one of your reviews and/or PMs, and STILL managed to finish this chapter. It's been a busy day for me, considering I only got about 4 hours of sleep this morning. Just in case I wasn't clear about it in my responses today, THANK YOU for sticking with me. The worst really is behind us.

Chapter Thirty-Eight: Down With The Sickness

A horrible wave of nausea pulled me from my sleep. I got out of bed as carefully as I could so I wouldn't wake Eric. We'd stayed up much later than either of us had planned, talking about my freak out the night before. I'd never had such a powerful reaction to sex in the past, and I felt bad about the panic he'd been feeling. Although, to be fair, I wasn't exactly Joe Cool. I made my way downstairs to the bathroom in the basement. I started the shower for good measure before another wave of nausea had me diving for the toilet.

I gagged a few times, but nothing came up. I pulled my hair back in a ponytail just in case. My stomach continued to churn, and after a few more minutes of gagging and retching, whatever had been left in my stomach from the night before finally came up. I stayed there, hovering over the toilet until my stomach started to feel a bit normal again, and the gagging had stopped. I flushed the toilet and went to the sink to rinse my mouth out. I found a bottle of mouth wash under the sink, and swirled it around my mouth until I could get back upstairs to brush my teeth.

I had no way of knowing if Eric was awake, although I had to assume he was still in bed. If he'd heard me throwing up he would have broken down the door to check on me. I chalked up the episode to residual upset from the night before, and stripped off my clothes to shower. I emerged a few minutes later when I felt another wave of nausea. I didn't think there was anything left to throw up, but I was wrong.

By the time I finally got upstairs I had been down in the bathroom for over an hour. Eric was definitely awake, since there was a pot of coffee waiting for me in the kitchen. The side door of the house was left ajar, suggesting Eric and Jeter were out in the yard. I was just about to put a couple of slices of bread into the toaster, when Eric's phone started ringing in the living room. According to the clock on the microwave, it was just after ten in the morning.

I dropped the bread in the toaster, but didn't lower it down. I went to the living room to see who was calling, figuring it was probably Pam or Johan. My breath caught when I saw it was Eric's parents. Since I didn't want them to worry any more than I was sure they already were, I answered the call.

"Hello?"

"Sookie, sweetheart, is that you?" Stella's voice greeted me with relief.

"Yep, it's me."

"Oh, thank goodness." More relief. "I was starting to worry when we didn't hear from Eric yesterday. He was supposed to call us."

"He wanted to, but he needed a little time to figure some things out."

"Are you with him? Oh, what a silly question. You're answering his phone." Stella laughed nervously. "Although, I suppose he could still be..." She trailed off, her breath catching in her throat.

"No, no, he's here. He's just out back with Jeter. I can call him in, if you'd like?"

"No, that's okay, I can wait. I'd like to talk to you, anyway."

I pushed the button to start my toast, and settled in to listen to whatever it was Stella had to say. She mostly rambled on like a nervous mother, which was to be expected. She praised me for not just walking out on Eric, and for having the loyalty to stand by him in the face of what he was going through. I don't know if it occurred to her that I didn't have much of a choice. It's not like I could just turn off my heart and walk away, even if a part of me wished I could do just that. It's not that I didn't want to be with Eric anymore, so much as I just didn't want to feel all of the emotions that came along with being him at the moment.

"I don't suppose you're going to be able to come visit now, are you?" Stella said with disappointment heavy in her voice.

"We're waiting for a call from his attorney before we change our plans." If I didn't want to tell Stella Eric had been arrested, I sure as hell didn't want to be the one to tell her the trip had been canceled.

"Well, Tom and I got to talking this morning, and we were thinking it might be better if we came to Chicago, anyway. Tom's never been there, and I haven't had a cold winter since before I was married. We thought it might be a nice change of pace." Stella said with as much cheer as she could muster.

"I'm sure Eric would like that." I didn't really know what else to say.

Thankfully, the side door opened, and Jeter went down the steps to the basement. Eric kicked off his shoes, and closed the door. He smiled when he saw me standing there watching him. My toast popped up a few seconds later, and I reached into the fridge for butter. Stella was talking about how much she wanted to see the Magnificent Mile all lit up at night, when another wave of nausea hit me.

"Oh God..." I groaned and thrust the phone at Eric before taking off for the bathroom.

"Sookie!" He called out after me, but I didn't stop for him.

I enclosed myself in the bathroom and prayed I would just gag some more. I was sure there couldn't possibly be anything left in my stomach. I heaved and gagged and prayed for it all to stop. I was still bent over the toilet when Eric came into the bathroom, and attempted to crouch down next to me.

"Are you okay?" He asked gently.

"Do I look okay?" Tears were running down my face from the force of the gagging I'd been doing.

"Can I get you something?" He asked.

"A damp washcloth and some water would be nice." I said a bit more gently.

Eric was on it immediately, starting with the washcloth. It was delightfully cool, and felt good pressed to the back of my neck. The water came shortly after that, but I learned the hard way I needed to sip, or it was going to come right back up. The whole episode had taken more energy than I ever would have thought possible, and when I tried to stand up, my knees gave out. Eric picked me up gently, and set me down on his side of the bed.

"You think it's a stomach bug?" He sat at the edge of the bed next to me.

"I have no idea." I turned onto my side and curled up a little bit.

"Do you want anything?"

"I think I better just lay down for a while. I hope I didn't freak your Mom out too badly."

"She was worried. She'll probably call back in a bit to check up on you." Eric's thumb rubbed my upper arm gently.

"Ginger Ale might be good." I smiled up weakly at him.

"I can get you some." He smiled back.

"Your Mom suggested she and your Dad might want to come here for Christmas instead of us going to California. I didn't tell her we'd already talked about that alternative."

"I'm sorry, Sookie, I didn't want you to be stuck in the middle of this."

"I think it might come with the territory from time to time."

"Mom can be a bit of a bully. She just hides it better than Dad because she's so sweet most of the time."

"Yeah, I noticed. It seems to run in the family." I patted Eric's knee and closed my eyes.

He chuckled softly and said, "If that wasn't so right, I'd be horribly offended."

Eric stayed there with me until I fell asleep. When I woke a while later, it was because my stomach rumbled with hunger instead of nausea. I slowly pushed myself out of bed and headed for the kitchen. Eric was on the phone, and from the tone of his voice, I assumed he was talking to his parents again. I listened to his end of the conversation while I attempted to make toast for the second time. Hungry as I was, I wasn't willing to chance losing the contents of my stomach to something stronger.

A two liter of Ginger Ale was chilling in the fridge, along with fresh orange juice and a tub of the tapioca pudding I loved so much. I buttered my toast lightly when it popped up, and sat down at the island to eat while Eric finished up his conversation with whichever of his parents he was talking to. His shoulders were tense. His brow was furrowed, and he looked like he'd aged ten years since I'd seen him last.

"Yeah, I know, Mom. I don't know why she puts up with me either. No, she's not awake yet." Eric winked at me, and I smiled at him. I just wasn't in the mood. "No, it's fine. Yes, I'll pick you up from the airport. No, not in the Corvette. Sookie's going to go visit her family for a few days, so I'll probably drive her car. What difference does it make?" Eric shook his head, and I could tell his patience was wearing thin. "Yes, I know Dad's got a bad knee. I know he can't...Mom? Mom! Would you please..." Eric sighed and held the phone away from his head.

I gestured for him to give me the phone. I quickly swallowed my bite of toast, and took the phone from him. "Stella, is that you?" I asked sweetly.

"Oh, Sookie, Eric said you were still asleep?"

"Just woke up. Listen, while I'm in Louisiana, Eric is more than welcome to use my car to pick you and Tom up from the airport. I know how tricky it is to get in and out of that Corvette." I winked at Eric, who just rolled his eyes at me and called me a traitor under his breath.

"You know, he's going to have to trade that in when you two have babies." Stella said with frustration in her voice.

The mention of babies had my stomach turning again. Like a ton of bricks, a possible explanation for my nausea dawned on me. I'd been so busy lately I hadn't given any thought to when I'd had my last period. I gulped for air, and tried to stay as calm as possible. I was on birth control. I was supposed to get pregnant when I was on birth control. Not that it didn't happen. It wasn't one hundred percent effective against pregnancy, and being on antibiotics only lowered its effective rate. Since Eric and I couldn't keep our hands off each other for more than a few hours at a time, the chances of me being pregnant as opposed to just late because of stress were sky high.

I said whatever I needed to in order to get Stella off the phone. By the time she hung up, my toast was cold- not that I had much of an appetite left. I gave Eric back his phone, which he promptly turned off to avoid another phone call from his mother.

"You look a little green, lover." Eric said with concern, his large hand stroking my back.

"I must have caught something." I tried to sound flippant about it, but inside I was panicking a little. "Are you sure about me going to Louisiana? I don't want to come back to a body count."

Eric kissed the top of my head and said, "I'll have Dad here as a buffer. It'll be fine."

I hoped he was right.

Two days later, I stepped off a plane to find Jason waiting for me in the terminal. I couldn't ever remember being so happy to see him in my whole life, and for the first time I could ever recall, I ran to hug him. Jason and I had always had a hot and cold relationship. We were very different creatures, and we had a hard time seeing where the other was coming from. Our current choice of significant others put us on more equal footing, I suppose.

Eric had manned up and called my parents and Jason himself to explain why he wouldn't he joining me for the visit. It was a nice preparation round for how he was going to deal with his own parents. Although, with my family, they weren't so focused on the fact that Eric completely snapped and lost touch with reality, as they were that he'd rescued me again. They were outraged that Eric had been charged with a crime at all, since they were convinced Bill had a hand in the accident. Given that Amelia remembered seeing Sophie-Anne driving the car that hit us, I wasn't so sure they were wrong.

Still, did that excuse what Eric had done? I added it to the list of questions in my head, and things I needed to think about. While I knew hugging my brother was nothing like hugging my Mom, which I couldn't wait to do, it felt good to be with family.

"How was the flight?" Jason asked when we pulled apart.

"Not bad. I read most of the time." I shrugged as we walked. "How's Crystal doing?"

Jason sighed and said, "She's Crystal."

"What's that mean?" I had to ask since I wasn't too sure.

"She's been feeling better physically, lately, but I know she's still worried something's gonna go wrong with this pregnancy, too."

"You mean this isn't the first time she's been pregnant?" News to me.

Jason actually had the sense to look a bit abashed when he said, "She was two months along when we got married."

I managed to stop myself from asking if that was the reason he'd married her, since I hadn't figured my brother for the marrying kind, but my brain filters seemed to be functioning properly. Instead I just nodded along, and let Jason tell me about the miscarriage they'd already been through together.

"I'm sorry, Jason. I had no idea." I said sympathetically.

"I'm surprised Eric didn't tell you."

"Why would- *Eric* knew about this? I'm your sister, but my *boyfriend* knew?" I slugged him on the shoulder.

"Crystal got sick while Eric and I were watching the Family Guy, and we ended up talking on the porch before Hadley showed up. I needed to hear a guy's perspective on the whole thing, otherwise I woulda told you about it."

"And you didn't think to, oh, I don't know, mention it since then? I've talked to you once a week!" I glared at my brother.

"Yeah, well, it's not like we've been the kind of siblings who share everything, Sook." He reminded me with the same intense stare I was giving him.

"You're right." I backed down just a little. "You still could have told me."

Jason rolled his eyes at me and picked up my bag when it came by on the conveyor belt. "Jiminy Christmas, Sook, what's in here?"

"Your Christmas present, you dolt."

"Oh." That effectively got him to stop bitching.

The ride back to our parents' house was filled with conversation about what had happened the previous weekend. Jason was totally on Eric's side in the whole thing, and was adamant he would do the same thing if someone ever treated Crystal the way Bill had treated me.

"I'm not saying maybe he didn't go overboard a little bit, but if I were in Eric's shoes, I probably woulda done the same thing. That fucker had no right to even talk to you, much less touch you. He's lucky Eric didn't break his neck."

I sighed and said, "I get the protective instinct. You and Daddy have always been like that, so I understand. The thing is, you weren't there to see it, Jase. You didn't see the look in his eyes. That calm, laid-back Eric we both know wasn't there. Elvis *definitely* left the building, and it scares me to think what would have happened if Johan and Chow wouldn't have pulled him off of Bill."

"Yeah, but Sook, you can't really think about the what-might-have-been angle here. You're charging him with a crime he didn't commit, and that's not fair to either one of you."

Huh. Jason had a point. It wasn't really fair to think about what might have happened, since it didn't. I also knew, deep down in my gut, that this was a one time thing. All of the things I knew about Eric, his past notwithstanding, pointed to this being an extreme case of bad judgment compounded by really bad timing. I needed to focus on the things I knew, and the questions that could actually be answered. I had to let the rest of it go.

"Is it really that easy, though, Jason? I mean, if Crystal just up and did something that was completely out of character for her, would you be able to just look the other way?"

"Sook, I'm not saying you have to look the other way. I'm just saying you have to stick to what's important about all of this. I mean, do you really think Eric is capable of what I think you're suggesting he's capable of?"

"Do I think he would have killed Bill?" I looked at Jason, who was looking over at me. "No, I don't think he could have done that."

"Well, alright then. There's one thing you can stop worrying about." Jason grinned at me like he'd just cured cancer. God bless my brother for being such a simpleton sometimes.

We pulled up to the house to find Daddy wrapping lights around the railings of the front porch. He and Mom always fought over decorating the exterior of the house, since it was set so far back from the road. No one could really see it, and Daddy thought it was pointless to run up the electric bill to put on a show for the woodland creatures. I probably would have been more inclined to agree with him if it weren't for the fact that he always did such a nice job. I sometimes thought Mom and Daddy argued just because they liked to, and because they were good at it.

Their arguments were mostly them teasing or mocking each other back and forth, almost berating the other into submission. My parents never said anything to one another in a nasty tone where us kids could hear it, so if they ever fought over something serious, they hid it well from Jason and me. I wasn't foolish enough to think they had a perfect marriage, but I admired them for never airing their marital problems in front of us kids.

I climbed out of Jason's truck and ran over to my father much the same way I did when I saw him at Thanksgiving. He swept me up in a great big bear hug that felt better than I ever could have imagined. No matter how old I got, I was always going to be a Daddy's girl. Really, my father was what I should be measuring men by, and not what Quinn did.

"How are you, baby girl?" Daddy asked once he set me down.

"I've been better." I smiled against the gloved palm on my cheek.

"Well, I'm glad you're here. You know I approve of that man of yours, but I think it's probably a good idea you put some space between you for a spell." Daddy gave me a sympathetic look.

"I'm inclined to agree with that." I nodded.

"Are ya inclined to help me with your bags?" Jason asked from behind me, earning him a stink eye from Daddy.

"How 'bout I get Sookie's bags, and you shimmy up on the roof and hang lights for your Mama?" Daddy countered.

"Daddy, do you really want Jason playing with your power tools?" I nudged our father, and Jason's jaw dropped.

"Hey, that nail gun had an easy trigger, and it's not like Hoyt lost that toe." Jason said in his own defense.

I just shook my head and laughed. Jason and Hoyt had decided to build a fort out in the woods behind the house when we were kids. To this day no one knows exactly how it happened, but Jason somehow ended up shooting Hoyt in the foot with the nail gun. Ever since then, I make it a point to run screaming from the room at the mere mention of Jason with any sort of power tool at his disposal.

"Whatever you say, Jase." I continued to grin at him.

He grumbled under his breath before going on into the house. Daddy just shook his head as Jason walked on. It was funny to me how Daddy and Jason were so similar in just about every way except smarts. While Jason was standing in the line for charisma, he missed the line for brain power.

"So, you feel like holding the ladder while I string lights around those befrigged gutters?" Daddy asked me.

"Sure." I nodded. "Just let me run inside and say hello to Mom."

"I'm glad you're here, baby girl." Daddy pulled me into another hug.

"Yeah, Daddy, me, too." I kissed his cheek, and then headed into the house.

I was walking toward the kitchen when another wave of nausea hit me full force, sending me to the bathroom instead. I barely made it before the snack I'd had on the plane came rocketing out of me with brutal force. I hadn't taken a pregnancy test yet, mostly because I wasn't really ready to deal with the results if it was positive. I wanted to tell myself it was just stress, or maybe some bug that was going around like Eric had suggested. Was bringing a baby into the mess I was currently in a good idea?

I took a few minutes of quiet to get myself together before going off to find Mom. She was sitting at the kitchen table clipping coupons from the weekly paper. I don't know why she bothered with it. I couldn't recall her ever actually using them. Mom turned when she heard me approaching, and set down her scissors.

"Holy Hannah, honey, what's the matter with you?" Mom launched herself out of her chair to take a closer look at me.

"I think I have some kind of stomach bug. I haven't been feeling well the last few days." I didn't want to talk about the pregnancy possibility until I knew for sure if there was anything to talk about.

"Of course you haven't." Mom wrapped me in a warm hug that only she could give me. "You've had one hell of a week."

"You have no idea." My lip quivered.

"Oh, sure I do." Mom rubbed my back, but didn't let me go. "Relationships are never easy. I remember when your father and I were just starting out, and old Catfish Hennessy got fresh with me. Catfish was always a talker, and your Dad, well, he didn't appreciate the kinds of things Catfish was saying. The point is, I'd never known Corbett to be the fighting type. We were having dinner at The Old Plantation House rover in Ruston, and Catfish just happened to be there. It was the fanciest place I'd ever been in my whole life, and your Daddy was so nervous about screwing up. It was the cutest thing." Mom paused to giggle at her memories. "It was the first time I ever saw him in a suit, and I think I fell in love with him right then. Anyway... Catfish had been asking me out and I kept turning him down on account of the fact that I was already seeing your father.

"So there we are at the restaurant. Your Daddy mumbled and made the most awkward small talk all through dinner. It was horrible- at the time- but now when I look back on it, I know it was probably the best date we ever went on. We were on our way out the door, and had to pass by Catfish's table to get out. Catfish grabbed my backside, which was completely unappreciated, and your father punched him right in the nose. That was*after* I threw Catfish's water in his lap. I'd never seen that side of your Daddy before, and I'll tell ya... there was something scary, but sexy about it. Now, I know it's not quite what you're going through with Eric, but honey, I really think he was just trying to protect you from someone he thought might hurt you worse than he already had. He was trying to do the right thing, even if he went about it the wrong way." Mom fingered my hair before stepping back some.

I nodded because I knew she had a point on some level, but mostly, I didn't have it in me to correct her about Eric's motives. There were some things about Eric that just weren't any of her business.

"Thanks, Mom." I smiled at her. "I have to get back outside. I told Daddy I'd hold the ladder for him."

Mom breathed a sigh of relief. "Oh, thank God. I was afraid Jason was going to get at the power tools again."

That joke was never going to get old.

That wasn't so bad, was it? Based on the responses to the teasers I sent out, I know some of you have theories on what's going on with Sookie. All I can say is, I'm staying tight-lipped on it. There is no amount of Skarsporn (I'm usually totally a whore for it) that will get me to confirm or deny whether you are correct in said theories. You'll just have to wait and see what happens. Next chapter contains a lovely conversation between Eric & Pam to settle some things, as well as the arrival of Mama and Papa Northman. Good times, good times. See what awesomesauce reviews does? It gets you two chapters in one day.

Now I need to get my booty to bed, because I'm exhausted. Sweet dreams, baby birds! \*blows kisses\*

**Chapter 39: Who I Am Hates Who I've Been**

Happy TB Finale Day, baby birds! Who else is feeling bittersweet about tonight's finale? You know, it makes me sad that last year I was bummed Dexter was starting because it meant the end of TB for 9 long months. This year I can't wait for it to start in hopes that it'll wash away some of the TB fuckery. I will, however, miss my weekly Skarsporn fix. My hand to Jesus, if Eric dies tonight (he's not supposed to, but with AB, who the fuck knows?), it will be the last episode of TB I ever watch. Just sayin.

Before we get into the chapter, I am posting an notice that Kleenex might be required, since I have been told by a few of you a warning about potential for tears would be good. So, here's your warning. **YOU MIGHT CRY.** We good? If I could, I'd send a Northman twin to comfort you, but I need them right now to finish this story. Besides, Johan's off in the corner pouting right now. I think I need to go comfort him \*wiggles eyebrows\* See you at the bottom!

Chapter Thirty-Nine: Who I Am Hates Who I've Been

I was stretched out on the couch in the office of the bar when Pam walked in. She stopped short, her breath catching in her throat. She stared at me for a minute before she continued walking across the room to the desk. She dropped her designer bag on top of it and peeled off her coat. She didn't say a word.

"I was thinking about that party where we met." I stared up at the ceiling. "Do you remember the song that was playing?"

Pam sighed heavily and said, "Eric, if you have something to say..."

"What song was it, Pam? I know you know this."

"Always Be My Baby by Mariah Carey." Pam said with exasperation. "What's the point, Eric?"

"The night I met you, you were wearing those khaki pants that only came to your knees, and a light pink tank top. You were the whitest girl there. I don't think I'd ever seen someone with skin whiter than yours. You walked right up to me and you told me I'd make a great trophy husband. That was the first thing you ever said to me. I liked you right away. You never pulled any punches with me. In no time at all, you were not only my best friend, but my family. You were the first person I wasn't related to by blood that I trusted with my life. After going through the things I did with losing Annika, I guess there was a part of me that wanted to put you in her place.

"Maybe it was wrong of me to do that. I don't really know if I was or not. It's weird, though, that it bothers me that you and Johan slept together. A part of me says there's no reason to be jealous over it. Sookie keeps telling me that you're both adults, and I have no reason to worry that if things go sour with the two of you, I'm the one that's going to lose out the most. But then I don't think she really understands how important the two of you are to me. You're not just my friend, Pam, and you never were. And you're not just some woman I went into business with, either. From the very beginning, you mattered to me in a way that no one else ever has, including Sookie.

"I don't know if I can even find the right words to describe it, exactly, but I don't think I need to. You know what it is because I'm the same thing for you. What it is between us, it's just always been there. It's not like I ever wanted us to be something more than what we are, but I guess I'm just confused as to how you can be so... whatever you are with Johan and not be that way with me. I know we're two different people, but we're also the same. I don't want to end up in a position where I have to choose between you two, because to be honest, I don't know how that would work.

"So yeah, I can admit I overreacted to finding out you two slept together. I completely lost my shit. I'm not blaming you or Johan for it. There was a lot that went into it, and finding out about you guys just pushed me over the edge. There was a lot of weight on my shoulders, and finding out the two people I trust most in the world have been lying to me for almost a decade? Yeah, it pissed me off. You could have told me, Pam. I don't know if I'll ever understand it, but what I think doesn't matter. You're both adults. Sookie's right when she says you know what you're getting into." I stopped talking for a minute, which was just long enough for Pam to pipe up.

"You think it doesn't matter what you think? Eric, why do you think we never told you? Neither of us wanted to hurt you, and we knew if we told you, you weren't going to take it well. It's not like we set out to hurt you, or that it was even something we planned. It was just one of those things that happened." Pam came around from behind the desk and pulled up a chair in front of the couch.

"So were you ashamed of it, Pam? I mean, I don't get-"

"I didn't want you to think that I was with him because I couldn't be with you." Pam cut me off. "You're the closest thing I've ever had to a brother, and the only feelings I've ever had for you have been the sort I would have for a family member. But Johan isn't family to me. You're right that he looks just like you, but he's *not* you. You know that. I know that. He knows that. Hell, even Sookie knows that. Do I care about Johan? Yes, of course I do. He *is* my friend. But he's not you, and he never will be. Just like you'll never be him. When I look at you, I see all of the subtle differences that set the two of you apart. Just by looking into your eyes, I'd know it was you and not him. There's a big difference, Eric, and it takes a trained eye to see it. It was never about you. You should know me better than that."

I did know Pam better than that, which was part of the reason I didn't get her and Johan. In the end, it wasn't really any of my business, and she didn't have to explain it to me.

"You can tell me to butt out, but there's something I was wondering."

"Oh, trust me, I'll tell you to shut your fucking gob if you step out of line." Pam smirked at me in a familiar way that had the corner of my mouth lifting just a hair. "So, come on, out with it. I don't have all day."

"Was that time you told me about the only time?" I looked her straight in the eye, and she held my gaze with confidence, like the Pam I'd always known from that very first night at that stupid frat party at Duke.

"I guess it depends on whether or not you're going to leave the office in a rampage and clobber the first guy you see." Pam said smugly.

"I can control myself."

"Oh really? Because I had to surrender nearly four minutes of surveillance footage to the police department that proves you can't. Just what the fuck were you doing, Eric?"

I sighed and said, "It was a mistake, Pam."

Pam laughed harshly and said, "That's a load of bullshit. Maybe it works on Sookie and your parents, but I know better."

"There's been a lot going on lately, Pam. Between work, my mother harping on me to put a ring on Sookie's finger already, stuff that was going on with Sookie, what you told me about you and my brother, and then seeing Bill in the bar and *touching* Sookie, I just lost my shit. It's not like I came here Saturday looking for a fight with someone. It just happened." I spoke quickly, and found I felt better for saying all of it.

"You know all of these problems that were piling up? Maybe this wouldn't have happened if you didn't get such tunnel vision. You have a way of blocking out everything else when you see something you want, Eric. I know part of that has to do with your Type A personality, and your need to have what you want. I'm not saying you shouldn't want Sookie, but she can't be your whole world. It's not good for you to put that much focus into one person, and you do it all the time. First it was Johan, then it was me and now it's Sookie. You can't look to one person to be all the things you need in life, Eric. It's ultimately going to be too much weight for a single relationship, and if you're not careful, you're going to lose her." Pam warned me.

I hated to admit it, but what Pam was saying made a lot of sense. It was a pattern I hadn't even recognized with myself, but she was absolutely right. The thing was, as much as I was open with Sookie, there were a few things I kept to myself because it wasn't right to put it all on her. Especially lately, we were both so busy and stressed with our own things that it didn't seem right to go shoving our problems onto each other. Maybe that was where we went wrong?

"Eric, you have to think about things more rationally. I know you think it's your job to police everything and protect everyone. Loyalty means a great deal to you. I get that. But if you keep going like this, you're going to end up alone, and you're not going to have anyone to blame for it but yourself." Pam told me. "You've got to stop trying to control everything, and start focusing your energy on the things you can actually change. You're not responsible for everything and everyone. The only thing you're responsible for is *you*."

Pam was right about that, too. "Damn, Pam, why didn't you ever say any of this before?"

Pam snorted and said, "Because you're a stubborn asshole when you think you're right."

"Isn't that the pot calling the kettle black?"

"Yeah, well, the kettle is the one facing jail time for his fuckery." Pam retorted, effectively shutting me up for a few seconds. "I want to help you, Eric, but there isn't a whole lot I can do for you this time. You fucked up."

I laughed and sat up on the couch. "I think saying I fucked up is an understatement."

"Probably, but do I really need to run down a list of all the ways you fucked up? You know what you did." Pam crossed her legs and sat back in her seat. I appreciated Pam's ability to call me on my shit without rubbing my nose in it. "So, the question is, what are you going to do about it?"

I took a deep breath and exhaled slowly. "That's what I need to figure out. I've sort of hit rock bottom here, Pam. I'm pretty sure my job is history. School boards don't tend to look favorably on a teacher who is arrested for a violent crime, even if it's a misdemeanor. Things with Sookie are up in the air. I don't know what to do."

"Well, well, Eric Northman finally joins the rest of the world." Pam smirked at me. When I glared at her she continued, "I have an idea, but it's going to require that you stop being a whiny bitch. Emo doesn't look good on you, Northman."

Getting things straight with Pam went a long way to making me feel better. She was working with our lawyer on the possibility that Bill decided he wanted to sue the bar. The lawyer had advised Bill might not have much of a case since he was removed from the property previously, and asked not to return. There was no guarantee, however, that he wouldn't come after me, personally, so there was another thing to consider when I talked to Mr. Cataliades.

I was informed it was possible for me to travel while awaiting sentencing because I wasn't facing a felony charge, but I really didn't want to chance it. The last thing I needed was to get a speeding ticket or something while I was in California, and have that throw a really monkey wrench into the works. I had enough problems. Sticking close to home was the best bet for me, even if I was severely disappointed I wasn't going to get to spend some time at the ocean. I had really wanted to show all of that to Sookie.

For the first time in my life, things weren't at all going the way I'd planned. My job was, at best, on the line. My girlfriend was spending a few days more than a thousand miles away while she considered whether or not we had a future together. I was facing possible jail time. I had some serious baggage that needed dealing with where my dead sister was concerned, and my parents were flying in the next day. It was enough to make me want to get rip roaring drunk, but I decided that wasn't the way I wanted to deal with my problems.

I was just about to order up some Chinese food when Johan let himself into the house. Jeter tore through the house at break neck speeds to get to his buddy, and former owner. By the time I got to the living room, Johan and Jeter were wrestling each other on the floor. I swear, my twin was like a big kid sometimes. It amazed me how the two of us could be so different.

"You eat yet, lillebror?" Johan asked without looking up from the dog.

"I was just about to get Chinese."

"I was thinking the same thing. Must be a twin thing." Johan put Jeter in a headlock, making the dog growl and nip at him.

"You want sesame chicken?"

"Do I ever want anything else?"

"I'll put in the order."

"I'll be here."

I shook my head, and went to the kitchen to place the order at New Star, while my twin continued to wrestle with the dog. I had just gotten off the phone when I heard Johan disentangling himself from the dog. Jeter followed Johan into the kitchen, and promptly headed downstairs to his water bowl.

"You coming with me to pick it up?" The only downside to ordering from New Star was that they didn't deliver, and even if they did, I lived too far away for it to matter.

"Sure. I've got Pam's car." Johan waggled his eyebrows.

"How'd you swing that?"

Pam took her car almost as seriously as I took the Corvette. It was a sleek little BMW, fully loaded and excellent for doing donuts in an empty lot. I could already see the mischief on Johan's face, and I didn't want any part of it.

"We'll take Sookie's car." I shook my head at him.

"What? No offense, lillebror, because I'm sure the Scion is a great car, but we've got a Beamer to play with. *Pam's* Beamer."

"Yeah, and I'm already in hot water with Pam right now, so I'm really not looking to add to it."

"You're no fun." Johan's childish pout pushed a button, and before I knew it, I was going off on him.

"Fuck you, Johan. You know, it's really easy for you to just breeze into town and stir things up. You get to cause all sorts of chaos and then go back to Sweden, and do whatever the fuck it is you do with your life. You show up, turn everything inside out and then you disappear. You don't get to deal with the fallout from the shit you do. You don't get phone calls from Mom all panicked over what you're going to do with your life. You don't have to deal with Pam after you leave. She never says so, but I know it bothers her that you're not around. I'm not even going to pretend to understand why the two of you can get together for fuck dates, but you can't be in a real relationship with each other. I know you love her. You've loved her since the second you met her. Why don't you quit being such a stum åsna?" I yelled at my brother, and it felt good to let all of that out.

"She told you-"

"She told me that New York wasn't the only time you two were together. Look, if you and Pam are happy together, that's great. You're my brother, and Pam is... well, she's Pam. But don't dick around with her, bror. You break her heart, and I *will* bury you. And before you can accuse me of choosing water over blood, I told her the same thing. You two idiots need to quit thinking with your dicks, and make a decision."

Johan grinned at me, which wasn't quite the reaction I was expecting. "You sound so much like Mom."

I groaned in frustration and went to the living room to get my shoes on. "It's not a joke, storebror. You really have to learn how to start taking shit seriously. Whenever things get real for you, you just run. You don't deal with the aftermath of anything. You leave it for everyone else to clean up."

"I move on." Johan corrected.

I snorted as I tied my shoes. "Which is how I ended up with Jeter, right?"

"You said you didn't mind taking him."

"That's not the point, Johan. You made it sound like you either I take him, or you were going to have to send him to a shelter. I did the research. You could have shipped him over, but you chose not to. You make excuses all the time for why your 'old life' isn't working for you, and rather than dealing with your shit, you just let everyone else deal with it. You don't think about what it's like for the rest of us."

"Where the hell is this coming from?" Johan probably had a right to look confused since I'd never mentioned any of this to him before. Frankly, I'd never given it much thought. I just did what everyone else did, and chalked it up to Johan being Johan.

"This is coming from a lot of introspection on my own life, and trying to figure out how the hell I'm going to fix my fuck ups. Pam says I need to stop being such a control freak, and focus on the shit I can actually fix. I started thinking about things, and I realized that I have spent most of our life cleaning up your messes. I can't do it anymore, Johan. You're my brother, and I love you, but I can't be responsible for you anymore. I have a life of my own I need to deal with. It's time for you to grow up, storebror." I pulled on my coat, and opened the front door. Johan didn't say anything. "You still coming with me?"

"Yeah. We'll take the Scion." Johan nodded, and then walked past me out the front door.

I wasn't the least bit surprised when I saw my parents come off the plane looking exactly the same as they did the last time I saw them. Mom's arm was looped through Dad's, as it almost always was when they walked together. Dad was dressed in a polo shirt and pressed khakis, looking every bit the retired military man he was. Mom was perfectly coiffed, and wearing wool pants and a heavy sweater. I wouldn't be the least bit surprised if Dad brought little more than a windbreaker for a coat, while Mom would be burrowing inside a parka.

I was easy enough to spot in the crowd, since I was a good five or six inches taller than the tallest person there. Mom broke away from Dad to give me a tearful hug. She whispered endearments to me in Swedish, as she'd done since I was a baby. It was sweet of her to keep up those little traditions, and I was thankful to be past the age where I would be embarrassed by it. Mom could go from life of the party to blubbering mess in the blink of an eye. Dad, on the other hand, was stone faced and offered me a handshake when Mom let me go.

"Oh, Eric, we're so happy to be here!" Mom blotted tears from her eyes with a tissue she produced from the sleeve of her sweater. No doubt she had a small wad of them under her watch.

"I'm glad you could come. I wish we had better weather for you, but this is about as good as it gets here in Chicago at this time of year." I looked to the large windows of the terminal.

It was partially cloudy outside, and the forecasters were all threatening heavy snowfall overnight. There was a storm coming in from the northwest we were supposed to hunker down for, and all I could do was be grateful Sookie wasn't supposed to fly in for three more days. The cold, damp air outside was a great indicator of an impending storm. I really missed summer.

"Eric." Dad nodded to me.

"Dad." I nodded back. "Shall we get your bags?"

"Oh, yes, I suppose we should get going." Mom said with a smile full of sunshine.

We navigated our way through the airport and located their luggage. Mom sat in the back of Sookie's Scion, commenting on how roomy the interior of the car was, considering how boxy it looked. Dad fiddled with the navigation system, trying to figure out how to "shut the damn thing up." When I started to give him instructions, he gave me one of those infamous 'I got it glares' that kept me quiet. He'd figure it out, even if he had to stay out in the car long after we arrived.

"Are you hungry? I was thinking we could stop for lunch, if you're up to it?" I suggested to my parents.

"No, no, we can just have sandwiches when we get to the house." Mom waved me off from the backseat. "So when does Sookie get back?"

"Barring no problems with the weather, she should be back on Tuesday." I couldn't wait to see her. She had only been gone a few days, but I missed her. It was the longest we'd gone without seeing one another since we'd met.

"She's such a lovely girl, Eric. You got lucky with her." Mom reached forward to pat my shoulder.

"Yes, I did." I couldn't argue with logic like that. Although I couldn't help but worry how much longer I would have her.

"So where's your knucklehead of a brother?" Dad spoke up without looking away from the electronics he was fiddling with. I was surprised to hear him speak.

"He's staying with Pam."

Mom made a noise of disapproval from the backseat. "I know she's your friend, Eric, but I don't like that girl."

"She's not so bad, Mom, just a little rough around the edges." I said in Pam's defense.

"She's crude and disrespectful." Mom said with a huff.

"Oh, stifle yourself, Stell. She's the female form of our sons combined." Dad said with a hint of a smile.

"She plays with Johan's feelings, and I don't like it one bit. She's had him on the ropes for years, all the while gallivanting around with other *women*." Mom argued, her voice dangerously close to harpy level.

"Can we please talk about something other than Johan and Pam?" I suggested.

"Good idea." Dad frowned at the GPS. "How about you tell us how you ended up in jail?"

Mom gasped in the backseat, although she was already familiar with the story. I had yet to really give it to them in my own words, but I'd been saving it for when we could discuss it face to face. In spite of the fact that I was over thirty, I still felt like I was a pre-teen about to get the grounding of a lifetime. I made the mistake of glancing in the rear view mirror, and caught Mom's lip quivering. Fuck.

"Well? I'm not getting any younger." Dad prodded.

I took a deep breath, and then told them the story of what happened, leaving out as many details as I could about things that weren't any of their business. As if it wasn't awkward enough that Mom and Pam were less than friendly, I didn't need Mom blaming Pam for what happened. While Pam may have had a hand in it somewhere, ultimately, it was all my fault. No one else needed to take responsibility for it.

"Not too bright there, son." Dad shook his head with disappointment.

"Tom, that man almost killed the woman our son is going to marry!"

"Hold on just a minute there, Stell. I don't remember Eric calling to tell us he asked her to marry him." Dad looked to me. "You didn't, did you?"

"No. It's something Sookie and I were talking about before all of this happened, but I think it's best if we take that off the table for a while."

"What?" Mom screeched from the backseat.

"Mom-"

"Oh, Eric, no." Mom was full on crying. From life of the party to Sylvia Plath in record time.

"Stell, leave the boy be. He's got more important things to worry about right now than china patterns and honeymoon plans." Dad lectured impatiently from the front seat.

You'd think with the way they barked at each other most of the time they couldn't stand one another. They kind of reminded me of a cross between the Barones and the Bunkers. Archie Bunker was sitting to my right, and Marie Barone was in the middle of a breakdown in the backseat of Sookie's car. I was glad Sookie wasn't around for this. She didn't need Mom harping all over her about marriage, too.

"Mom, it's not that we don't want to get married. We've talked about it quite a bit. It's in our future, but have other things we need to focus on right now. It's not the right time." I tried to explain to her, but she was sniffling and dabbing at her eyes in the back.

I looked over at Dad who was rubbing his eyes. The five remaining five minutes of the ride back to my house were spent with Dad muttering at his breath at not being able to get the GPS to cooperate with him. So far, things had gone better than expected, oddly enough. I suspected it would go downhill when Johan showed up later for dinner.

Mom went to the guest room to take a nap, while Dad and I settled in front of the TV to watch football. Jeter was curled up near the Christmas tree, watching the light chase themselves around the branches. Dad grumbled at a bad call a referee made, and then got up to get himself another beer when the game went to commercial.

"So, give it to me straight, soldier." Dad instructed, his universal invitation to a conversation.

"What do you want to know, Dad?"

"Did that dickhead you dismantled really have something to do with Sookie's accident?"

"Nothing has been proven beyond a reasonable doubt, but my gut has been screaming at me from the beginning that he was somehow involved."

"I have to tell you, that sounds a bit crazy." Dad sipped from his bottle.

"You're telling me."

"Why do you suppose he'd do something like that?"

"He's batshit?"

Dad laughed and said, "Well, that goes without saying, son, but there's got to be another reason for it. There aren't a whole lot of people who kill just for the fun of it."

"Except for Marines, right?" I teased.

Dad laughed again. He was always in a lighter mood when he wasn't around to corral Mom's roller coaster emotions. I guess I was a great example of how the apple didn't fall far from the tree. Dad quieted down, and his eyebrows furrowed in a familiar way while he thought about what he wanted to say next.

"You know, son, there's nothing wrong with defending what's yours. I haven't met your Sookie yet, but I can tell she means a great deal to you. If she's half as sweet as your Mom says, I think you found a good one. You were right to protect her. But you have to be smarter about it. I'm not mad at you for what you did. Hell, I probably understand it better than you think. The thing is, sometimes you have to put her above your own needs, know what I mean?" Dad didn't look at me while he talked, which wasn't unusual.

"I think so." I nodded, knowing he'd see it out of his peripherals.

We got quiet again for a little while. Dad got absorbed in the game again until half time, at which point he raided my kitchen for a snack. When Mom wasn't around to monitor what he ate, he had the diet of a frat boy. He figured the fact that he was in excellent physical condition for someone his age balanced out the junk he ate. He came back from his raid with a bag of Sun Chips and a displeased look on his face.

"Since when do you eat chick food?" Dad shook his head once he was settled on the couch.

"Those are Sookie's."

"Oh." Dad stared at the bag like it might explode.

"They're actually pretty good."

"Hmph." Was all I got in return. He unclipped the bag and dug in. After stuffing a handful of chips into his mouth, he looked at the bag again with an expression of surprise. "Not bad."

I controlled the smile on my face. "So, Dad, I gotta ask you something, and I need you to not be too Marine about it." Dad had a way of clamming up and reverting to the military man he was when we got into emotional discussions.

"We'll see." Stock answer for Thomas J. Northman.

"Why did you and Mom take down Annika's pictures after she died?" I came right out with it.

Dad looked thoughtfully at his beer bottle before draining what was left in it. He got up to get another, which didn't surprise me one bit. What *did* surprise me was that he brought me one, too. He took his seat on the couch and popped another Sun Chip in his mouth. I was starting to think he wasn't going to answer, but he finally spoke up.

"Losing a child... I can't even begin to describe to you what that feels like, Eric. Maybe if it had been because of a disease where we had time to prepare, it might have been easier. I don't know. All I know is, one minute she was in the world, and the next she was gone. As a parent, you're always of the mindset that your child is going to bury you, not the other way around. Some day when you have kids of your own, you'll understand it."

"Was it just too hard to see her everywhere?"

"Son, I could burn down the world, and I would still see my baby girl's face everywhere I look. We took down the pictures because it was hard to watch you boys grow up while knowing Annika was never gonna get to where you boys are. She was never going to go off to college. She was never going to settle into a career. She was never going to buy her own house. She wasn't going to get married, or have children of her own. For eternity, she's always going to be that bright eyed, teenager who was just on the cusp of becoming what she was meant to be. The older you and Johan got, the easier it was to see pieces of her in the two of you. I'd see her in the way Johan holds his fork, or the way you tied your shoes. Little things like that kept her with us, and we didn't need pictures to remind us of her\." Dad took another long pull from his beer bottle. "We didn't take down those pictures because we wanted you boys to forget. We wanted to make it easier on you, that's all."

"You know this is the first time I've heard you talk about her since she died?"

Dad nodded and said, "Frankly, son, there's not a whole lot to say. I love her more than I can ever put into words. The grief never ends. I hope you never have to experience it for yourself, because it's a burning pain that settles right here." Dad moved his hand in a large circle over his chest and stomach. "But I *am* sorry if you boys thought we didn't care. We did care. We still care. When she died, a piece of a us went with her, and we're never going to get it back."

"You think that's why Mom's pushing so hard for Sookie and me to get married?" I suspected that was the reason, but I liked hearing Dad's point of view.

Dad laughed again and said, "Your mother doesn't want you to end up alone. She thinks you're too much like me, and Lord knows, if I didn't have my Stell, I'd be a miserable old bastard." Dad smiled warmly, and I was pretty sure he was picturing Mom in his mind. I'd seen that look on his face a time or two in my life. "She wants you to be happy."

"She doesn't push Johan." I pointed out.

"Son, Johan couldn't even take care of that dog over there. He's not ready to take care of a wife and children. But you? You're there. You just needed the one." Dad said with conviction. "Who's idea was it for that girl of yours to go down to Louisiana, anyway?"

"Mine. I thought it might be a good idea for us to get some space from each other so we could figure some things out."

Dad clapped a hand on my shoulder, the closest he got to giving hugs unless a death was involved. "If you love something, let it go. If it comes back to you, it was meant to be. If it doesn't, it was never yours to begin with."

"That's the biggest cliché I've ever heard." I deadpanned, even though I knew he was probably right.

Dad playfully boxed my ears. "Don't mouth off to your C.O."

"Yessir." I smiled at him and said, "Thanks, Dad."

Dad cleared his throat and took another drink of his beer. "It's what I'm here for." He turned his eyes back to the TV before saying, "Besides, I figure you must love your Sookie a great deal if you're willing to go to jail for her."

That particular thought hadn't occurred to me, but it was definitely the truth. That's when I knew that if I had to go back and do it all over again, I would do the exact same thing. Sookie was more important to me than I was to myself. She was the one. She was it for me.

Now I just needed her to come home so I could tell her that.

\*fixes face\* Oh, done so soon? \*straightens shirt, slaps at Johan's busy hands\* I don't know what I'm going to do with him. \*sigh\* So, it was an emotional chapter, but not in that angsty make you want to take a warm bath and slit your wrists kind of way. Progress, right? I think we got some here. You'll be happy to know I outlined five more chapters this morning, and ARedheadThing has signed on to be my playlist beta so I can put together a soundtrack for this story. I'm such a whore for music. And Skarsporn. I'm not sure which one I love more these days. They're both delicious.

That said, I'm going to get cracking on Chapter 40 before the TB finale, and depending on my mood after the show, I might finish it. We'll see how much tweeting must be done to relieve my frustration. Which reminds me, if you want to follow me on twitter, you can do so by searching for makesmyheadspin. I'm a fun twitter friend. Later baby birds. \*rolls eyes\* Johan's blowing kisses at you guys. He's such a whore.

**Chapter 40: The Rescue Blues**

Okay let me start this chapter off by clarifying something, because I got a big response about this, and I don't want anyone to be sitting there going, "WTF, Mama bird? Has your cheese done slid off your cracker?" (I love that phrase! I need to use it more in regular conversation.) When Eric told Pam that she mattered to him in a way that no one else ever had, including Sookie, that doesn't mean he's in love with Pam, or that he loves her more. The way he sees Pam is in a very different light from the way he sees Sookie. It's almost that maker/child kind of love he has for her, I guess is the best way to explain it. He trusts Pam implicitly with his life, and he has a deep admiration and respect for her, but he's *not* in love with her. He's not harboring any secret desires to be in a relationship with her, or to have a family with her. So does that clear things up a bit for you? Hopefully it does.

The other big question is whether or not Sookie is preggers. The general thought seems to be that I'm just flaunting that little nugget out there to throw you all off. Maybe I am, maybe I'm not. Y'all just going to have to wait and see, but we'll touch on the subject of babies in the coming chapters. All will be revealed soon enough, my pretties.

Until then, lets check in with Sookie down in Louisiana. She'll be back in Chicago for the next chapter...

Chapter Forty: The Rescue Blues

I was just getting into bed when my cell phone caught my eye. It was sitting where I'd left it on the bedside table. Eric and I had agreed we wouldn't talk while I was away after I called to let him know I'd gotten in okay. The conversation had been brief, and we hadn't shared a whole lot of information. I'd been in Louisiana for four days, and while I'd been having as much fun as I could, it just didn't feel like home anymore. To me, home had become a smaller split level house with a gigantic dog who tried to tackle me when I walked through the door. When I went to sleep at night I could clearly hear the freight trains a little more than a block away. I heard airplanes flying overhead constantly instead of crickets or owls.

Most importantly, there was Eric. I'd known before I even finished packing my bag to come to my parents' house that I would miss Eric. That was never a question in my mind. I would be going home to him in two days, and they couldn't pass fast enough. Part of me was considering hopping an earlier flight, and cutting my trip short. The romantic in me dreamed of Eric saying to hell with the courts, and coming down to Louisiana to bring me home. I knew it wasn't going to happen, but I still hoped it would.

I laid in bed staring at my phone, debating over whether or not it was too late to call him. I didn't want to wake him up, and I didn't want to break our no talking rule, but I wanted to hear his voice. I reached over to pick up the phone, and flipped it open to look at the picture of us that was my wallpaper. The picture had been taken before his first basketball game. I was dressed for Poms, and he was wearing that suit he looked so damned good in I nearly started drooling just thinking about it.

"It's just two more days, Sookie. You can do this." I told myself out loud. I was about to close the phone when it started buzzing in my hand. My eyes popped open, and I grinned to see Eric's name on the display. "Hello?"

"Hey, I didn't wake you, did I?"

"No, not at all. I was just thinking about you."

"I was going to say the same thing." I could hear the smile in his voice, and it made me relax. "How's it going down there?"

"Well, I guess you'd say it's been bittersweet. I've had fun with my family, and I've enjoyed the visit."

"That's good, isn't it?"

"Yes, it is. I'm glad you suggested I come down here. I think the space has been a good thing." I was smiling, and I hoped he knew it.

"I'm happy to hear that, Sookie." He managed to sound relieved and disheartened at the same time.

"You want to know the shitty part?"

"If you want to tell me."

"I miss you." I laughed nervously when I realized how that must have sounded to him. "What I mean is, I hate that you're not here with me. I think it's a good thing that I miss you. I just hate that I do. Does that make sense?"

Eric laughed quietly and said, "Yeah, it makes sense. I feel the same way."

There was a meaningful silence that passed between us before I said, "I was thinking about leaving early."

"I was thinking about coming to get you."

My heart skipped a beat. "Really?"

"I want you here with me. This is crazy. There are so many things I want to tell you, and I don't want to say it unless I can look into your eyes when I say it."

A lump rose in my throat and my eyes welled with tears. "Me, too."

Eric breathed a sigh of relief. "It's supposed to snow here tomorrow."

"Well, I guess the weather Gods are conspiring against us."

"Maybe it's just as well. Mom is still in denial about us holding off on the marriage thing." Eric informed me.

"She doesn't even know me." I said with amazement.

"She knows *me*." Eric pointed out.

"I guess that means I make you happy."

"For starters."

"Very smooth, Mr. Northman." I giggled quietly.

"I try."

"You do quite well."

"So how are you going to spend your last day in Louisiana?"

"I actually have plans to meet Tara for lunch at Merlotte's. I haven't seen Sam in a while."

"Sam?"

"My old boss. I waitressed for him years ago before I moved up to Illinois for school."

"Ah ha." Maybe I was imagining it, but his tone suggested a hint of jealousy or suspicion.

"What?" I tried not to sound accusatory. I wasn't mad at him, but I was curious as to whether or not I was right about what I thought I heard in that grunt of his.

"You're going to have lunch with another man tomorrow?"

I had to restrain myself from laughing. He was definitely jealous. "Eric, I'm having lunch with Tara. Sam's just going to be there because he owns the place. You have nothing to worry about. Besides, Pam's beautiful, and I don't give you any hassle about working with her."

"You're right. I'm sorry." He apologized. "For what it's worth, I do trust you."

"I means a lot, and thank you."

"Well, I won't keep you up all night, and I should get to sleep anyway. Mom wants to go out to Woodfield tomorrow." Eric didn't sound happy, and I couldn't blame him.

"Awww poor baby." I pouted on my end. You couldn't *pay me* to go out to Woodfield Mall so close to Christmas. It was bad enough on some random Tuesday. I wouldn't be going anywhere near that mall again until well after the New Year.

"She wants me to help her pick out your Christmas present." Eric confided.

"Oh, she doesn't need to get me anything."

"It's unavoidable, love." Eric sighed. It felt good to hear him call me that. "Thanks for picking up when I called."

"You can always talk to me, Eric. That hasn't changed." I promised him.

"I love you, Sookie." His voice was heavy with emotion, and tears sprang to my eyes.

I took a deep breath before saying, "I love you, too, Eric."

Not that it hadn't mattered before, but hearing him say he loved me meant so much more in the wake of everything that had happened. Even better was knowing I could say it back, and knowing without a doubt that I meant it. It felt like the start of a new beginning for us, and more than ever, I wanted to hop the next flight back to Chicago.

"Sweet dreams, lover." He purred in my ear in that sexy voice of his.

"I'll be dreaming of you." It was the cheesiest thing I'd ever said, but with the sound of his voice ringing in my ears, I had no doubt I was telling the truth.

We hung up after that, and I put my phone back on the beside table. I turned off the light and had just settled into a comfy position when the phone buzzed again. I laughed through my nose, having no doubt whatsoever that I'd just gotten a text message from Eric.

*I'll be dreaming of you, too, lover. 38 hours.*

I smiled at the message and contemplated writing something back, but I was pretty sure we would go from sweet little notes like that to dirtier things, and I wasn't really sure I was up for sexting. I wanted the real thing, but I wouldn't be getting it for at least another 39 hours. I put the phone back on the table, and stared at it until I drifted off to sleep.

Just like I knew I would, I dreamt of Eric. I dreamt of him sneaking into my parents' house and getting into bed with me. It was like I'd expected him to show up, which I suppose I sort of did. He didn't take off his clothes, he just got into bed with me. Well, on top of me, is more like it. For what felt like hours, we just laid there staring at one another before we moved at the same time to kiss. His lips on mine felt sinfully good. The kissing didn't last too long before my nightgown was being pulled up, and I was reaching between us to unzip his jeans. His lips stayed on mine as he entered me with one swift thrust of his hips. My legs wrapped around his waist while my arms snuck up around his ribs to settle on his back.

His thrusts were fast and hard, driving me deeper and deeper into the mattress. There was a frenzied need for possession in the dream fucking we were doing, and it had felt so real to me that it was a big disappointment when I woke up alone right after the dream version of me had exploded in orgasm. I was breathing hard, and my head felt light. My heart was thudding in my chest, and it took a few minutes before I could settle down enough to go back to sleep.

When my alarm went off a few hours later, I got out of bed and went straight to the shower. I'd promised to meet Tara at eleven before the lunch crowd of road crew workers and other locals took all the tables at Merlotte's. I dressed in a pair of jeans and a winter white v-neck sweater. When I got downstairs, there was a note from Mom telling me she was helping Gran with some last minute church Bizarre preparations for that weekend, so I had the house to myself.

I had a small breakfast of toast and some yogurt, along with some much needed coffee. I thought about taking a walk in the woods out back, but the thermometer told me it was just a few ticks above freezing, so I nixed that plan. I had an hour to kill before heading off to Merlotte's so I flipped on the TV and did some channel surfing. I stopped when I got to TCM and saw that Some Like It Hot was on. It was one of my favorite movies, and it had me laughing in no time.

Before I knew it, it was time to go. I went upstairs to get my phone and purse, and smiled when I saw I had yet another text message from Eric waiting for me.

*Good morning, lover. 27 hours.*

My heart skipped another beat when flashes of my dream the night before danced in front of my eyes. I slipped the phone into my bag, but decided I was going to text him back. I figured he could probably use the little pick me up if he was out shopping with his mother.

*Good morning to you, too. I can't wait.*

It was a simple message, but it got the point across. I didn't get a reply, but I didn't need one. I could imagine him stopping in the middle of a crowded mall to read my response, and smiling like a goon because of it. That was enough for me. I put my phone back in my purse, and then headed out to Merlotte's. It was a good thing Daddy's old work truck was still out back or I would have had to call Tara to come get me. The parking lot at Merlotte's was mostly empty when I got there.

The outside of the bar looked the same, except for some new light fixtures by the front doors. I walked inside to find the only change was a newer hardwood floor than the one I'd waited tables on back when I was still in college. Sam was behind the bar, wearing his consummate pair of Levi's and a plaid shirt. He'd let his rusty blond hair grow out some, and it was just barely brushing his shoulders. He had a slight case of five o'clock shadow along his jaw, and his complexion was a bit ruddier than I remembered it being.

"Well kiss my grits." Sam said with excitement when his eyes landed on me. He came out from behind the bar to give me a hug. "I didn't know you were in town, girl."

"It's only for a few days, and I felt bad I didn't get the chance to come up when I was here for Thanksgiving." I said as we hugged.

"Yeah, I heard you were here. I was a little disappointed myself."

"Well, it was a short trip, and Eric and I already had plans. You heard about Amelia, right?"

Sam's eyes darkened some and he nodded. "Yeah, we all heard. Fucking Copely."

"You know she's awake now?"

"No shit?"

I laughed and said, "No shit. She's been awake for about two weeks now. Apparently, the first thing she did was call Tray to come get her. He hopped a flight to Shreveport, rescued her from that nursing center Cope stashed her in and they flew off to Vegas and finally got married."

"Well, good for them. 'Bout time they finally got hitched."

"That's what I said."

"So who's this Eric fella?"

"My boyfriend." I looked at him like he should know better.

"Is he out parking the car, or something?"

"No, he's back home in Chicago. He wanted to come, but some things came up so he had to stay there. Next time we come down I promise to bring him around so you can meet him."

"Sookie?" A familiar voice called out from behind me, and I whipped around to see Tara standing at the door.

"Tara!" I ran over to her and gave her one of my Daddy's big bear hugs.

Sam went back to work behind the bar while Tara and I claimed a booth to sit in. A waitress I didn't recognize came over and handed us some menus. Tara and I both ordered a sweet tea and the infamous Burger Lafayette. There were quite a few places in Chicago to get a good cheeseburger, but *none* of them were like the Burger Lafayette. I would definitely have to bring Eric here, if only so he could try one for himself.

"So, you look amazing." Tara grinned at me as I sipped my tea.

"Thank you. So do you! I guess your new beau is agreeing with you?"

"J.B. is wonderful." Tara's face flushed with excitement. "I tell ya, I've never felt this way about anyone, and I've had my fair share of relationships."

"Tara, that's wonderful. I'm so happy for you." I reached out to pat her hand.

"And Eric? How's things with him?" Tara looked a bit concerned, and when I arched an eyebrow at her she said, "I talked to Jason when I ran into him at Wal-Mart. He told me you were coming down, and about what happened with Eric. He figured you'd tell me all about it anyway."

I would have been upset with Jason for running his mouth, but it was pretty obvious to me the only person he'd run it to was Tara. He was right that I would have told her anyway, but it still would have been nice if I could have done it myself.

"You know, when I got on the plane to come down here, I really wasn't sure what I was going to do. My heart said I'd be crazy to leave him, but at the same time I wasn't sure I could trust him. What he did was just so out of character, and it made me wonder if maybe there were other things he's been hiding from me, too."

"Things like what?" Tara leaned forward on the table. I told her about Johan and Pam, and how Eric had reacted so strongly to what Pam had told him, but Tara just waved that off. "Honey, that's just a man being a man. If he sees her like a sister, he's never going to like who she's sleeping with. And if the one she's sleeping with his brother? Well that just makes it worse. Not to mention, if things go bad that puts him in a pretty awkward position, doesn't it? Do you really think he's got feelings for Pam?"

"No, I don't. I did for a little while, but I know better than that. If he wanted Pam, he could have had her years ago. It's not to say that feelings don't change, but I've seen the way they are together, and it's nothing like how he is with me."

"Well, there you go." Tara nodded. "So what else got your ghost?"

"I guess it was just the violence in general. Eric has never raised a hand to me, and it's not that I think he ever would, but it was still scary to see him lose control of himself that way. There was something so... primal about it, I guess. Like it was some buried gut reaction that had finally clawed its way to the surface. At the time, all I could think about was what would have happened if his brother and a bouncer wouldn't have pulled Eric off of Bill."

"And now?"

"Now I think what might have been doesn't really matter. I also understand the whole thing better now. I know it wasn't some premeditated act, and I know Eric wasn't just waiting for his chance to do what he did. It just happened."

"You know you're lucky." Tara's eyes twinkled with sadness.

"I am. Eric's one of the good ones." I nodded.

"I never told you about my ex." Tara started off sadly, casually stirring her tea. "It was after I broke up with Franklin, and I was in a bad way. You'd gone off to school in Illinois with Amelia, and I just felt like maybe I needed a change, too. Somehow, I ended up at this dive bar in Jackson. The second I saw Mickey, I knew he was the one I wanted. He was dark and dangerous, and a part of me wanted to live on the wild side for a while. You know, see how far I could go? It sounds crazy now, but it seemed like the answer to all of my problems back then. I wanted to lose myself in something other than how bad I felt over losing Franklin.

"People warned me to stay away from Mickey. They told me he had a temper and a real bad side, but he was always sweet to me. I fell in love with him fast, and before I knew it, he changed. He became the monster everyone had tried to warn me he was. He was violent and mean, and he didn't care that he hurt me over and over again. It was a bad situation, and it's only because of Sam that I got out of it." Tara looked over at Sam behind the bar, and smiled his way. "Sam Merlotte saved my life. I'm telling you this because it sounds to me like maybe Eric just made a really big mistake. It doesn't sound like he's a lost cause the way Mickey is. You've always been a smart girl, Sookie, so if your gut is telling you he's the one, then you should listen to it."

"Everyone keeps telling me that, but I thought the same thing about Quinn." I admitted quietly as the waitress brought over our burgers.

"John Quinn is a jackass." Tara said with conviction. "He had the best thing in the world and he lost it because he was a damned fool. That wasn't your fault. You couldn't have done anything different to change that man's mind."

She was right, of course, and it felt good to have someone else say it. "I'm just scared, Tara. Eric means so much to me. I don't want to lose him."

"Then quit pushing him away." Tara gave me a pointed stare, and took a bite of her burger.

I hadn't thought of what I was doing as pushing Eric away, but maybe Tara had a point. We ate in silence for a few minutes before I cleared my throat and asked, "Tara, what finally got you to leave Mickey?"

Tara looked me dead in the eyes and said, "He beat me until I miscarried."

I gasped, horrified that she had been through something so traumatic, and before I knew I was on the other side of the booth giving her a hug. "Oh, honey, I'm so sorry. I had no idea. Why didn't you ever tell me any of this?"

She took a moment to collect her thoughts before answering me. "Because I was ashamed of myself, Sook. I swore that after what I went through with my parents, I would never find myself in a situation like theirs. I was going to be smarter than them. Somehow, I got it into my head I could change Mickey if I just loved him enough. But what we had, it wasn't love. Do you love Eric, Sookie?"

I didn't even have to think about it. "Yes, I do. Very much."

"Then go home to him and work it out. Everyone makes mistakes, and it sounds to me like that's what happened with him. Give him a chance to make it right before you dismiss him." Tara advised.

I nodded as tears sprang to my eyes. "There's something else. I haven't told anyone about this yet."

"What?" Tara stroked my hair gently, noting the look of worry on my face.

"Well, after my accident I was on some medications, and I forgot that it can totally cancel out birth control, and since Eric and I can't seem to keep our hands off each other for more than a few hours, I think I might be pregnant." I confessed this quietly, not wanting everyone in Bon Temps to be talking about it before I even knew for sure if I was or not.

"You haven't taken a test yet?" She asked, and I shook my head. "Well, let's go get you a test. Unless you want to wait until you get home?"

"I do, but I kind of want to know before I get there. I think I might need some time to get okay with it before I tell Eric. I mean, assuming I am. And if I'm not, I don't want to break down in front of him."

"Sook, do you *want* to be pregnant?" Tara gave me a half smile.

"Well, when it first occurred to me, I freaked out. The timing could be better, but the more I thought about it... I don't know, I guess I realized that there's never really a perfect time for a baby. Besides, I love Eric. I want to work things out with him. I *know* we'll work it out. So the more I think about it, yeah, I think I want to be pregnant."

Tara nodded appreciatively and said, "Okay, well, as soon as we're done here we'll go over to Monroe and get a test so not everyone in town knows your business."

"Thank you, Tara." I hugged her again.

"It's gonna be okay, Sook, and if I can say that after everything I've been through, then it must be true." Tara laughed quietly, and I couldn't help but laugh right along with her.

My cell beeped on the table, and I reached to pick it up. Another text from Eric was waiting for me.

*25 hours. I love you.*

Hi there! So, did we enjoy the fluff that the TB finale made me write here? OMFG I loved the finale so hard. **SPOILER ALER! If you haven't seen the finale yet, stop reading this A/N now!** I know a lot of people thought it was boring, but I thought it was a nice change of pace from the rest of the crazy clusterfuckery of the rest of the season. There were too many episodes where I was like, "Whoa! Whoa! WTF just happened?" So it was nice to see some characters get a little resolution, but keep the set up going for S4. Fave part (outside of the obvious appearance of Eric at Sookie's) was easily the intervention Mrs. Fortenberry & Summer tried to have. That was hilarious.

There's rumors about Sookie having amnesia instead of Eric, but I don't subscribe to that school of thought at all. In fact, I have a pretty solid theory about how Eric comes to end up cursed. If you want to know what that theory is, you're going to have to read What The Fae?, the story I'm co-writing with the fabulous **kjwrit**. We're looking to post the first chapter over the weekend under the name **MKProductions**, so if you're a fan, it's not too late to get on the alert bus. The link for the profile can be found in my profile under the list of my favorite authors.

Oh, and you're gonna want to check out the next chapter. There may, or may not be reunion/makeup lemons \*whistles innocently\* Later baby birds!

**Chapter 41: Baby, I Love Your Way**

In spite of this chapter being titled after the notable Peter Frampton hit, I actually listened to "Colorblind" by the Counting Crows while writing most of this chapter. It just fit. If you don't know the song, track it down and listen to it. It's beautiful.

I have to give a quick shout out to **VAlady** for a comment made in her review for ch. 40, because it had me laughing like a jackass while I was at work this afternoon. It was actually a comment on the TB finale, but I think it's worth sharing here. "Still think it's kind of weird to think of Jason being in charge of a town full of werepanthers when he probably couldn't come in out of the rain without a GPS." Seriously, baby birds, I lost my shit over that. So thank you, **VAlady** for the righteous laughs.

Chapter Forty-One: Baby, I Love Your Way

I stood at the terminal waiting for Sookie to disembark from the plane. Getting Mom to agree to spend the day with Johan hadn't been easy. She was chomping at the bit to meet Sookie, but I figured we had some talking to do before Mom got her hooks into Sookie. When Dad stepped in to remind Mom the fate of her future grandchildren could be at stake, she couldn't get out of the house fast enough. I glared at Dad for encouraging Mom, but mostly I was thankful he'd found a way to get her to agree with what I wanted. I was seriously starting to think Mom needed to be medicated.

I looked out the window at the flurries that blurred the world outside, and I was thankful Sookie's flight hadn't been canceled. I probably would have driven down to Louisiana to get her, I wanted her home that much. Even with Mom in it, the house felt empty without Sookie there. All of the talking and thinking I'd done over the last week had put things into perspective for me.

I had some changes to make, and I was going to make them as much for myself as I was for Sookie. I didn't ever want to go through this ever again. I wasn't proud of my behavior, or of the way I'd hurt Sookie. At the same time, I didn't quite regret it either. The whole thing had been a wake-up call that I had some serious shit to work out. So if I came out of this a better person, and my relationship with Sookie was stronger for it, then I would consider it all a blessing.

Then, all of a sudden, Sookie was there. She stopped short when she spotted me. I watched her take a deep breath, and it wasn't until I was lifting her off the ground that I even realized I'd started walking. Her arms wrapped around my neck, and I buried my face in her hair. I heard a quiet sob escape her, and then her lips were on mine. I kissed her like I was coming home from war, which isn't an entirely bad analogy.

"Jesus, I missed you." Sookie pressed her forehead to mine.

"I missed you, too." I pressed my lips to hers, and it took mere seconds before we were back at it like a couple of teenagers.

Sookie pulled back first and said, "Take me home."

"I'd love to." I kissed her once more before I set her down.

She tucked herself into my side, and we walked to the baggage claim together. We ended up needing a cart for her bags, and I was glad I'd driven her car instead of the Corvette. Sookie held my hand the whole way home. It felt good to have her back. It sounded cliché, but it really had felt like a part of me was missing when she was gone. We talked about her trip, and she filled me in on the Stackhouse family gossip. I was surprised at how supportive her family was being about my situation.

"Most parents would discourage their daughter from being with a guy who's been arrested for a violent crime." My eyes swung over to hers.

"Most guys wouldn't pull their girlfriend from a burning car. Face it, Eric, short of you picking up where Dahmer left off, you've got all the Stackhouses in your corner." Sookie kissed my hand and said added, "Including this one."

To save myself the embarrassment of crying like a little girl I said, "I kind of like you, Sookie Stackhouse."

She burst out at my underwhelming declaration of affection and said, "I kind of like you too, Northman."

We kept cheating glances and smiling at each other. I felt those tingles I'd felt when we first met. It was like I was seeing her through a new pair of eyes, and I seriously wondered what the hell I'd done to deserve her. I figured it was probably best not to ask too many questions.

"So, how much crazy is waiting for us at the house?" Sookie asked when I turned onto our street.

"Just Jeter. Johan has custody of the parental units until later tonight. He took them downtown to see Michigan Avenue. Mom wanted to go to the Art Museum. Dad is insisting on deep dish pizza. Johan promised he would keep them out until at least ten, even if it meant getting lost." I told Sookie. My twin was doing his part to make up for the years of being so wishy-washy, and I appreciated him taking Mom and Dad off my hands so I could have a few hours alone with Sookie.

"Good. We won't be needing an audience." Sookie smiled out the window, and my heart skipped a beat.

I parked the car and sent her inside while I got her bags out of the back. I walked inside to find her sitting on the floor while Jeter kept licking at her. I wondered if she sat voluntarily, or if Jeter finally knocked her over. It was obvious the dog missed her as much as I did.

"Alright, Jeter, that's enough." Sookie pushed him away gently. "Man, I hope Johan doesn't greet me like that."

"I'd be more worried about Mom, if I were you. Thankfully, Dad's an excellent marksman, and I'm pretty sure I've got a tranquilizer gun around here with Mom's name on it."

Sookie gasped and rolled her eyes at me. "You're terrible, you know that? I think it's sweet that she's so concerned for you. She's invested in your happiness. I don't think there's anything wrong with that."

I laughed and said, "Just wait until she starts asking you how long it's going to be before we start having kids. Then come talk to me about how sweet she is." I bent to untie the boots Sookie hated as I talked.

"Ugh, I was really hoping those would be gone when I got back."

"Sorry, lover, they're a part of the package."

Sookie growled and took off her coat. "I think I'm going to go take a shower. There were a couple of sick kids on the plane."

"I'll be in the kitchen." I tried not to sound as disappointed as I felt. I'd wanted to get right down to business and work things out. I needed to get it all out there. It felt like there was a rock in my stomach, and I needed to get rid of it.

Sookie got half way to the bedroom when she paused to look over her shoulder. "You could come with me."

I wanted to, I really did, but I wanted something more than a few frenzied minutes in the shower with her. Still, I followed her all the same because my body rejected the idea of not being near a naked Sookie. Besides, I was confident in my ability to get her to hold off on her shower. By the time I got to the bedroom, she'd already stripped off her sweater, and was going for the clasp on her bra.

"Allow me?" I bent and kissed a line from her shoulder to her neck.

"Eric." My name fell from her lips in a breathy moan I associated with a green light.

We took our time undressing each other, leaving trails of kisses on newly exposed flesh as we went along. When I sank to my knees to slide her jeans down, I paused at the intricate lace of the boy shorts she was wearing, and kissed the fabric covering her center. She inhaled sharply, a sound I loved because it told me she not only knew what was to come, but that she wanted it every bit as much as I did. Her panties quickly followed her jeans to the tidy pile of discarded clothes on the floor.

I stood up slowly and scooped her up. She was surprised when I set her down on the bed, and pointed to the bathroom with wide eyes. I just shook my head as I parted her knees and sank to the floor again. Her weak protesting stopped when she felt my breath between her thighs. She obliged me by laying back when I pushed her to do so. Her small hands slipped into my hair, alternately running her fingers through it and tugging gently to guide me where she wanted me to go.

"I love your hair. I'm sorry I didn't say it sooner." Her unexpected apology came out in a rush of breath.

I both rewarded and acknowledged her with the first pass of my tongue over her folds, and her body tensed up. I used my thumbs to spread her open before my tongue made another pass at her. She moaned in frustration when I stopped shy of her clit. It was several licks and a less than friendly tug on my hair later, when I finally sucked her clit into my mouth and let my tongue flick against it.

"Holy fuck!" The curse came flying out of her mouth, and it was the sexiest thing she'd ever said.

I let two of my fingers slide inside her and start pumping slowly. Her hips arched up off the bed, and my other hand moved up to hold her down. The sound of her gasps, moans and my name being chanted were the most beautiful sounds. I'd missed them terribly.

I felt her walls start to tighten around my fingers, a sign she was close. I redoubled my efforts at her clit, sucking, licking and even nibbling gently. With a simple hum and a curl of my fingers inside her to stroke that spot I'd found months before, she came loudly- almost violently.

"Ohmygod." She panted as she started to come down from her orgasm.

Her legs were still shaking when I rose up from the floor. My hands went to unzip my jeans, but Sookie sat up and pushed them out of the way. She held onto one of my hands, bringing the two fingers that had been inside her to her lips and sucking them into her mouth. I groaned, wanting to feel that moist heat on other body parts. Her eyes met mine, while her hands went back to work divesting me of my jeans. She released my fingers with a small popping noise, and leaned forward to leave a trail of open mouth kisses from my naval to the waistband of my boxers.

She teased the tops of my thighs with her fingernails, and I could feel the heat of her breath on what was about to be a painful erection. The need to be inside her was nearly overwhelming, but I wasn't going to rush this. I would let her set the pace from that moment on, as much as I wanted to pin her underneath me and ravage her until we both passed out from total exhaustion. I let my hands sink into the silky strands of her hair as she eased off my boxers, leaving kisses and nibbles everywhere but where I wanted them.

It was fucking torture.

Her hands went around my hips and settled firmly on my ass, gripping it as she pulled me closer to her. Her eyes found mine again, and then her tongue darted out to tease the tip of the officially painfully hard length before her. Her tongue swirled and flicked, and the look in her eyes told me she was enjoying teasing me as much as I had enjoyed teasing her. Her right hand let go of my ass, and wrapped around my erection.

Her hand pumped in time with the attention she paid to the tip, and then without warning, she took me in her mouth as far as she could. My eyes rolled into the back of my head. Her hand and mouth were a perfect partnership, and she knew only too well how to get me close to the edge, only to back just as quickly.

Her efforts were merciless, and by the time she decided I'd suffered enough, I couldn't stop myself from tackling her back closer to the center of the bed. I kissed my way of her body as I settled between her thighs. Her hands cupped my face, and she looked deep into my eyes.

"I love you, Eric." Tears shined in the familiar blue orbs I loved so much.

"I love you, too, Sookie." I smoothed some of her hair away from her face.

She stretched forward to kiss me, and then I was inside her. My strokes were long and slow, setting a leisurely pace. We weren't usually much for slow and sweet, but this was different. This wasn't just about an overflow of lust, or a way to pass the time. This was about re-establishing our connection to one another, and maybe saying things with our bodies that we didn't know how to say with our mouths alone.

I whispered endearments to her in Swedish, and she groaned. Speaking Swedish to her in med was a quick way to really fan the flames inside of Sookie, and pressure of her feet pushing me deeper inside of her let me know the time for slow and sweet was just about up. My hand moved between us so my thumb could tease her clit. She moaned loudly and arched up off the bed.

"Oh, God, Eric, faster." She had her eyes closed. Her face was contorted into the most beautiful expression, and I loved that I knew what that face meant.

I started to thrust faster and harder into her, and she nipped at my neck in response. She moved fluidly with me when I rolled us over. She sat up on top of me, her legs landing easily on either side of my hips. She leaned back so that she was bracing herself on my thighs, her hair hanging and grazing me as she moved up and down. The sensation of her hair tickling my thighs sent chills up my spine.

My eyes trailed from her face to the bounce of her breasts, before moving down to see where we were joined. I watched myself disappear inside her over and over again, and I had to fight the urge to grab her hips so I could drive myself up into her. But then I sat up, closing the gap in space between us. Sookie adjusted quickly, wrapping her legs around my waist and her arms around my neck without ever stopping the rocking of her hips against mine.

"So close." Sookie gasped against my neck before turning my face to hers to kiss me.

Six days. 144 hours had passed while she was gone, and it was too much. I never wanted to be away from her for that long ever again. I just didn't feel like myself when she wasn't with me. A rapid succession of hard thrusts and a clever maneuver of my thumb against her clit brought her over the edge, and the vice-like grip of her walls brought me with her.

Her shouts mingled with my own, and the release left both of us shuddering and panting. Lazy kisses were exchanged as we came down from our high. Sookie unhooked her legs and remained on top of me when I lay back against the pillows. Her hair made a golden curtain around our faces as we kept on kissing. Eventually, Sookie pulled back. She had a big smile on her face, and I couldn't help but grin right back at her.

"So I guess this means apology accepted?" She traced a line down my chest.

"You tell me."

She nodded enthusiastically, and then kissed me again. It was several hours before she finally got her shower.

I was sitting at the island in the kitchen waiting for Sookie to join me when the phone rang. "Hello?"

"Is it safe to bring Mom and Dad back?" Johan asked quietly, suggesting they were close by.

"Archie and Edith are giving you trouble, are they?" I joked.

"Seriously, bror, I don't know how you're living with them right now."

"It's only for a few more days." I shrugged.

"Mom's been talking about Sookie all day." Johan warned and I sighed, although I wasn't terribly surprised.

"Figures."

"So is it safe?" Johan asked just as Sookie walked into the kitchen wearing one of my t-shirts. Fuck me.

"I guess." I said absently, and Johan laughed on the other end of the line.

"You're lucky I like your girl. I'll take my time getting back. I'll text when we're ten minutes out."

"Thanks, storebror. Talk to you later." I hung up before he could say anything else. I turned my attention to Sookie who was bent into the fridge. Damn. "You know, it's interesting how seeing you in my clothes makes me want to see you in nothing at all."

Sookie looked at me over her shoulder without standing up straight. "Haven't you had enough?"

"Never." I grinned at her.

She rolled her eyes and returned her attention to the refrigerator. "We need to go grocery shopping. Does your family do anything traditional for Christmas dinner?"

I hadn't given it much thought, to be honest. Mom usually took care of food stuff, and I was pretty sure she had a plan in place already. "The usual, I guess. Mom usually makes ham."

Sookie swiveled around with a big smile on her face. "So does my Mom. How about if I take your Mom shopping tomorrow? You can spend the day with your Dad and Johan, or something."

"I should probably warn you that Mom and Pam don't get along very well, and Pam will be here for Christmas."

"Why doesn't your Mom like Pam?" Sookie leaned against the counter after closing the refrigerator.

"She doesn't approve of her relationship with Johan. She thinks Pam is rude and crass."

"It's not my place to judge, but your Mom isn't entirely wrong. Not everyone is as open minded as you are when it comes to Pam. Besides, I wasn't a big fan of Pam when I first met her." Sookie revealed to me.

"I believe the first words of our your mouth were something about a marriage proposal." I reminded her.

She scoffed and said, "I said she was my hero. Besides, Pam had coffee and I was hung over."

"Well, if you wouldn't have practically had one foot out the door when I woke up, I would have made you coffee." I crossed the room and wrapped my arms around her.

Sookie kissed my chest and said, "I'm glad I stayed."

"I'm glad you did, too." She smiled up at me and I bent down to kiss her. We stayed like that for a while before I pulled back and said, "So, I think there are some things we need to talk about."

Sookie nodded her agreement and said, "Yes, I think there are. Do you want to start, or should I?"

"Ladies first." I kissed her forehead and then backed off to give her some space, knowing she had a tendency to pace when she had something important to say.

Sookie took a deep breath and then pushed herself up onto the counter. "Okay, so, I want to start by apologizing to you because I think that's probably the hardest part. I know I overreacted in a lot of ways to what happened, and I'm not going to make excuses for it. I let my past get the better of me, and I made the mistake of comparing you to Quinn."

"Oh. Was that why you freaked out during sex?"

"Partly. I got too deep into my head, and I started thinking about all of the promises that had been made to me in the past, and a commitment was a big part of it. I know you're not him, but I just starting thinking about all of the things I was willing to overlook to keep him in my life, and I don't want to make those same mistakes with you. I let a lot of things go because I thought he was worth that little bit of unhappiness because he made me happy in other ways. But I could never talk to Quinn the way I'm talking to you right now. He would never have taken me seriously, and I know that you will. I know you're in this as much as I am, and that's what kept me from leaving the day you came home.

"I also want to apologize to you for pushing you away. Instead of looking at the bigger picture and trying to see things through your eyes, I was being a little bit selfish. I was scared. I was scared that I had been all wrong about you. I was scared of losing you. I was scared that everything was a lie. I realized while I was in Louisiana that I should be measuring the people I love by the best examples instead of the worst. So I'm sorry for all those things."

"Apology accepted." I said without hesitation. Frankly, I didn't expect an apology from her, nor did I think one was necessary, but it was still nice to hear. I went across the room and her knees parted for me to stand between. I rested my hands on her hips and said, "I owe you an apology, too. I'm sorry that I gave you a reason to doubt our relationship, or who I am in it. You are the most important thing in the world to me, and I'm sorry if I gave you a reason to think there is anyone else in my heart besides you. *You* are the one I want. Only you."

She nodded as a tear fell down her cheek and said, "Apology accepted."

She leaned forward to kiss me just as my phone rang on the island behind me. I sighed and pressed my forehead to hers. "If that's Johan calling already, I'll kill him."

Sookie stroked my cheek and said, "I'll get it if you want."

"No, no, it's okay. You just stay there and look sexy in my shirt." I winked at her and then turned to grab my phone off the counter. I answered in Swedish without looking at the caller ID.

"Uh, I'm looking for Eric Northman or Sookie Stackhouse." Detective Twining's voice greeted me.

"This is Eric." I said quickly. "What can I do for you, Detective?"

Sookie's head snapped up, and I'm pretty sure her heart rate jumped as much as my own did. I listened as Detective Twinings told me he'd just finished taking a statement from Amelia about her memories from the night of the accident. I didn't even know Amelia and Tray were back in town. Last I'd heard, they were still doing whatever it was they were doing in Las Vegas. I wondered if Sookie knew they were back, and just what Amelia knew about the situation she and I had been in lately.

"So, what happens now?" I asked Detective Twinings.

"Well, we'll pull Miss LeClerq in for an interview and see if we can find any holes in her previous story. From all the evidence we gathered from this case, Lorena Compton was our strongest suspect, but Miss LeClerq was on the list right below her, along with Mr. Compton. Have you had any contact with either Miss LeClerq or Mr. Compton since the incident at the bar?"

"No. I haven't seen so much as a light go on in Sophie-Anne's house in weeks. Bill had mentioned something to Sookie about the two of them moving out of state the night they came into the bar." I looked at Sookie, who breathed a sigh of relief that I wasn't about to be hauled back into jail. I had to admit, I was feeling the same way.

"We're looking into that. If you see them, do give me a call right away." He instructed.

"Oh, don't worry. We'll be calling."

"And Eric, don't do anything stupid." The detective sounded like a protective father.

"I think I learned my lesson." I smiled over at Sookie, who looked confused. "Thanks for calling."

"What's going on?" Sookie slipped off the counter and stood in front of me.

"Well, for starters, the new Mrs. Tray Dawson is back in town. Did you know that?"

"No. I haven't talked to Amelia since the morning you were released. I guess she went to the cops?"

"Yep. She told them everything she remembered. The police are looking for Sophie-Anne and Bill as we speak. Bill didn't mention anything to you about where they were headed, did he?"

"He said south, but that could be anywhere." Sookie rubbed her forehead, suddenly looking exhausted.

"He grew up close to where you did, didn't he?"

"He grew up in Louisiana, yes, and Lorena's family is from Mississippi."

"Then I'm extra glad you're home." I didn't want to think about what Bill might have done if he had been able to get Sookie alone.

Assuming he had something to do with the accident, and I was more convinced than ever that he did, I was pretty sure nothing good would come from Sookie running into him alone. One thing was for sure, I was definitely going to be paying closer attention to what was happening next door. It was definitely to my advantage that Dad had a tendency to get up in the middle of the night for a snack that Mom pretended not to know anything about. I was sure his military training would have him surveilling the house for the duration of their stay.

"Eric, there's something else I need to tell you." Sookie looked up at me with a serious expression on her face.

"Okay."

She had just opened her mouth to tell me whatever it was, when the phone rang again. Fucking Johan.

Okay, so I'm sorry for the delay in posting this evening. Totes got sidetracked with the season premiers of One Tree Hill & Life Unexpected. Don't judge! Mama Bird used to write for the OTH fandom before crossing over into TB/SVM. Then, on top of that I was arranging massages for **Lubadub, ARedheadThing and Slacker Dee** with Johan. Dude is obsessed with oil and wrestling. What a freak. But I'm sure you'll catch quite a show on twitter if you follow us bahahaha. If you don't, well, you should.

Anyway... I know I ended this chapter with a cliffie, and you're all dying to know if Sookie is preggers, but you're just going to have to wait until the next chapter to find out the answer to that question. That said, I may not be able to update tomorrow. I need to finish chapter 3 of the story **kjwrit** and I are working on before my fanfic wife goes all 50's husband on me and takes me over her knee. Or worse, takes away my Skarsporn \*has panic attack\* So you can understand why I need to get my arse in gear and finish that puppy up.

Hope this chapter was worth waiting for, baby birds!

**Chapter 42: Parental Units**

If you got to read the tease on twitter, you're probably wondering wtf is up with the title. Well, we're just going to have to do Christmas in the next chapter. I thought we'd get to it here, but there was some other rather important business to discuss. FINALLY, you get the answer to the question everyone has been asking in reviews for the last five chapters. Is she, or isn't she? You're about to find out, baby birds \*grins\*

**WARNING:** This story is unbeta'd, and I can barely keep my eyes open right now. I ran a spellcheck on this bitch, but Lord only knows what other nasties are lurking and I'm too lazy to give it more than a skim. I hope it's not an epic clusterfuck of failure.

Chapter Forty-Two: Parental Units

Johan had impeccable timing. He called to say he was on his way back to the house, and Eric wasn't too happy about it. Honestly, neither was I. I had something else I needed to say, and I didn't want to say it with his parents around. I excused myself and headed to the bedroom to finish getting dressed. No way was I going to meet Eric's parents in nothing more than one of their son's t-shirts. I grabbed my carry-on bag and took it with me to the bathroom to unpack the rest of my things.

I put my soaps in the shower, and set my makeup bag on the counter where I usually kept it. I reached further into the bag, and grabbed a piece of plastic that turned out to be my birth control pills. I stare at the little white compact, and sighed heavily before dropping them on the counter. I set my bag down and sat on the edge of the counter that surrounded the sink.

*The Day Before...*

"Okay, so, what does it say?" Tara asked with expectant eyes from the other side of the Wal-Mart bathroom.

I was afraid to look at the test. How strange was it that just a few days before, I had been afraid I *was* pregnant, and now I was afraid I wasn't? I knew the timing was all wrong for Eric and me to have a baby, but somehow, I knew deep down that if I was pregnant, we'd make it work. We hadn't really gotten into the subject of kids yet, although we had both said we wanted them in the future. I just didn't think that future was now.

"Sook?" Tara called out gently.

"Oh, yeah, sorry." I shook myself.

"Do you want me to look for you?"

"No!" I said quickly, shaking my head. "I just got lost in my thoughts."

"It's okay if you're freaking out. It doesn't mean you don't want to have the baby."

"I'm more worried about how Eric's going to react. I mean, I think he'll be okay with it. It's just that there's so much going and we have so many things to work out. It's a little overwhelming that all of this is happening at once."

"I know." Tara stepped a little closer. "You know, no matter how this goes, you're not going to have to go through things alone, right? I mean, if things with Eric don't go the way you want, you won't be alone."

I offered her a weak smile, and then turned to the piece of plastic waiting to be overturned on the edge of the sink. I took a deep breath and picked it up. I looked down at the little test window. I exhaled slowly, and then dissolved into sobs.

*The Present...*

Eric stood in the doorway wearing a pair of flannel pajama pants and a white t-shirt. "Are you okay?"

I looked up with tears in my eyes. I'd had the last twenty four hours or so to think about how I was going to say what I needed to say, but I wasn't really any closer to figuring anything out. I was tempted to just blurt it out so I'd be done with it, but I didn't want to do it that way. I wanted to have a conversation about the whole thing, and since his family was on their way back to the house, it just wasn't the time.

"Fine."

"You might want to tell your face that." Eric arched an eyebrow at me.

I laughed quietly, and patted the space on the tub next to me after I slid over. Eric came and sat down beside me, his hand swallowing my own. I rested my head on his shoulder, and rubbed slow circles on the back of his hand.

"What's going on, Sookie?" Eric kissed the top of my head.

"I *do* have something important I need to talk to you about, but I don't want to do it with your parents here." I said quietly.

"You're not going to tell me you're dying or something, are you?"

"No." A lump rose in my throat. "No, I'm okay."

Eric tilted my chin up so we were looking into each other's eyes. "You know, I'd be much more inclined to believe you if you weren't crying right now."

I took a trembling deep breath and blew it out slowly. "Really, Eric, I'm okay. I didn't mean to freak you out."

Eric looked at me like he wasn't buying a word I was saying. "We'll talk after they go to bed."

I nodded, and returned the kiss he offered me. Eric left me alone in the bathroom so I could finish getting myself together. My eyes were just a little bit red, and I hoped I could fool his parents into thinking I'd just stubbed a toe so they wouldn't ask all sorts of questions. I was just pulling on a pair of flannel pajama pants similar to Eric's when I heard the front door open. Mrs. Northman's familiar voice was chattering away, with Mr. Northman grumbling as well.

"Did you have fun today?" Eric asked.

"I had a lovely time. Your father mostly complained he was missing some game." Stella explained.

I left Eric's shirt on, and pulled my hair back into a ponytail before slipping out of the bedroom. Johan was just coming out of the hall bathroom, and tapped me on the shoulder.

"Hey!" I turned to give him a hug.

"Welcome back, lillasyster."

"What'd you just call me?" I laughed quietly.

"Little sister. I figure I might want to get used to it." Johan winked at me.

"Oh really? Do you know something I don't know?" My mind started leaping way ahead.

"Nothing I didn't know when I first met you in October."

I sighed and watched Johan walk into the living room. I took a few deep breaths and tried to remember the phrases Eric had taught me in Swedish. My biggest fear was that I'd say the wrong thing and make a complete ass of myself. When I was sure I'd picked the right one, I slipped into the living room.

Mr. Northman spotted me first and said, "Son, I do believe we've got a battle buddy on deck."

Stella's head whipped around faster than I ever would have thought humanly possible. I rose my hand slowly and offered a small wave. "Hi."

"Well, look at you." Stella beamed at me, and I was surprised she didn't already have me wrapped in the world's biggest bear hug. From the look on Eric's face, he was equally shocked.

"Mom, Dad, this is Sookie Stackhouse. Sookie, these are my parents, Tom and Stella Northman." Eric gestured between us.

"Trevligt att träffas." I smiled at them a little bigger when Eric gave me a small nod of approval.

"You speak Swedish?" Stella was floored.

"Eric is teaching me here and there." My eyes shifted to Eric's. As I walked toward Eric to tuck myself into his side, I started to wonder if maybe Johan had slipped something in Stella's drink at dinner. She was far more calm than I had anticipated she would be.

"Well, it's nice to meet you, too, honey." Stella stepped forward and held her arms out to me.

Without hesitation I went into them, and hugged her back. When she released me in a reasonable amount of time I turned to Tom and extended my hand to him. "Nice to meet you, sir."

"Sir? Oh, no. Those two knuckleheads call me sir. *You* can call me Dad." Tom winked at me.

"I told you she was going to be the new favorite." Johan said from behind me.

"So, Sookie, come sit with us. Tell us about your trip." Stella led me to the couch with Tom taking a seat in one of the chairs on the other side of the room.

Stella was very well behaved, and by the time she excused herself for the night, I was sure Eric and Johan had been exaggerating about how intense their mother could be. Tom followed suit shortly after, leaving me alone with the twins. We went down to the basement so we wouldn't keep Tom and Stella up with our chatter. We ended up popping in a DVD, and having a good laugh over Bad Santa before Johan headed home for the night.

I snuggled against Eric, not quite ready to haul my lazy bones off the couch just yet. "Your Mom's not so bad, you know?"

"That's because there were witnesses. Just wait until she gets you alone." Eric warned.

"If I can handle you, Johan and Pam, I'm sure I can handle your Mom." I scratched lightly at his stomach. We were quiet for a few minutes before Eric broke the silence.

"So, do you want to tell me what had you so upset earlier?" He asked softly.

I took a deep breath, figuring this topic was bound to come up again sooner rather than later. It was frustrating not to know where to start. I'd never been in this position before. I wanted to trust my gut when it told me everything was going to be okay, but there was a sliver of doubt in the back of mind that told me maybe it was too much.

"Sookie, whatever it is, we'll deal with it together." He kissed the top of my head.

I pulled away from him and shifted so I was sitting on my knees facing him. "Okay, well, here's the the thing." I started, but then stopped. I felt panic welling up in me, and then a wave of nausea hit me. "Oh hell." I muttered and then bolted from the couch to the bathroom.

Eric was right behind me, already wetting down a washcloth while I threw up. I hadn't gotten sick like that since my first day in Louisiana. I rode the waves of the churning nausea for as long as they lasted. By the time I was done, I was sure my stomach was empty. Eric wiped my face with the cool rag before leaning over to flush the toilet for me.

"Were you sick the whole time you were in Louisiana?" He asked nervously.

"No, just the first day. I've been fine since then."

"Maybe you're allergic to something in the house?" He suggested.

"No, I don't think that's it." I reached for his hand, and was just about to tell him what was wrong when another round of gags and heaves started.

By the time my body was done leading a revolt against me, I was exhausted. I tried to stand up so we could go upstairs, but I ended up slumping back against the wall. Eric scooped me up like it was no big deal, and carefully made his way upstairs with me in his arms.

"Bed or bathroom?" He asked when we got to the bedroom.

"Bathroom. I need to brush my teeth." I yawned against his chest before he set me down.

"I'll be right back. I'm just going to let Jeter out one more time and lock up the house." Eric kissed my forehead.

I went to the bathroom to brush my teeth before climbing into bed. I fully intended to stay up so we could talk, but my body had other ideas. I think I was in bed for less than a minute when my eyes closed, and I fell into a deep sleep.

Another intense wave of nausea woke me in the morning, and I locked myself in the bathroom with the shower running to muffle the sound of me gagging and heaving. This was getting ridiculous. I was left pale, crying and almost too tired to drag my ass back to bed. Eric was wide awake when I opened the bathroom door.

"I'm sorry I woke you up." My face sagged with disappointment.

"You didn't. Mom's up and making us breakfast. She came to ask where I keep the electric skillet." Eric sighed, and ran his hands back and forth over his face. "Still feeling sick?"

I nodded and climbed back into bed with him. I snuggled against him, inhaling deep breaths through my nose and exhaling through my mouth in hopes of keeping my stomach settled at least for a few minutes. Eric's fingers trailed lightly up and down my arm, lulling me back into sleep. When I woke up a while later, Eric was gone. I got out of bed and went in search of everyone else. The house was freakishly quiet.

I found Stella on the sofa watching The View, and nodding along with whatever it was Barbara Walters was rambling on about. Her attention snapped to me when she noticed I was in the room, and she put the television on mute. Her face lit up with a smile, and she patted the sofa cushions next to her.

"Good morning, dear. How are you feeling?" Stella reached up to tuck some of my hair behind my ear the way my own mother would.

"Hungry, mostly." I admitted just as my stomach rumbled to second that motion.

"Oh, well, then it's a good thing there's a plate warming for you in the oven." Stella grabbed my hand and pulled me off the couch.

I took a seat at the table at Stella's insistence. She offered me coffee, but I figured I was going to have to give that up for a while. Or at least switch to decaf. She brought me a glass of milk instead, along with a plate full of food. I wondered who she thought she was feeding, since there was easily enough there to feed both of her sons.

"Wow, that's a big breakfast." I smiled up at her.

"Most important meal of the day." She nodded before taking a seat across from me with a mug in her hands.

"So, where did the boys scamper off to?"

"I think they were going to do some last minute shopping, but they didn't really say. All I know is that Johan showed up for breakfast, and they were gone before the dishes were washed."

"Typical men." I snorted before cutting into the fluffiest pancake I'd ever seen, and that was including the amazing pancakes Eric made. "Actually, Eric's pretty tidy."

"So is Tom. Eric takes after his father who spent the better part of his life in the military. Some habits just won't be broken." Stella said with a smile.

"What was that like, being a military wife? Eric told me you moved around a bit when he was younger. I can't imagine how difficult that must have been. Just moving from Addison to here was a pain, and that's maybe ten miles away."

"It wasn't easy, but it was worth it. Tom loved his job, and being married to him has allowed me to do more traveling than I ever thought I would as a little girl."

"What part of Sweden did you grow up in?" The only Swedish city I knew of off the the top of my head was Stockholm.

"I guess you'd call it a suburb of Stockholm. I met Tom while I was visiting in Germany."

"Yes, Eric told me."

"It's funny... I didn't even want to go on that trip. I faked being sick in attempts to get out of it, and I ended up meeting my husband. Strange how that happens, isn't it?"

I thought back to the night I met Eric, and I couldn't help but smile. "I know what you mean. I met Eric because my friend dragged me to the bar. I didn't want to go, but she insisted."

Stella beamed an appreciative smile. "I tell you, life has a way of putting us where we're supposed to be when we're supposed to be there, Sookie. Everything happens for a reason, and I tend to think is the tragedies in life that provide the most opportunity."

"I agree with you there." I said as I took a bite of the scrambled eggs heaped onto my plate. I hoped she didn't expect me to eat all of it, because there was no way in the world that was going to happen.

Stella took on a thoughtful expression and asked, "Have you thought about what you're going to do if things don't go Eric's way at his sentencing?"

The question caught me a bit off guard, but I got the sense I was about to get a dose of the Stella Northman I had been so staunchly warned about. I set down my fork and sipped my milk.

"Eric and I haven't had the chance to talk about that quite yet, but I'm not leaving him, if that's what you're worried about. I know that what happened was a bit of a fluke. I trust him, and I know on some level he thought he was protecting me."

"I love my son dearly, I really do, but I have to confess that until you came along, I worried about him. Eric isn't well suited for chaos. He prefers order and being in control of things. He's a strong leader, and I knew how works well alone. I just don't want to see him end up that way."

I reached across the table and took Stella's hand. "You don't have to worry about that anymore."

Stella's bottom lip quivered as she exhaled slowly. She muttered something in Swedish that sounded like a prayer. I went back to my breakfast, while she started to chatter on about Christmas dinner. We agreed we'd cook together, and when I was finished eating, she washed up the dishes while I excused myself to shower and get dressed. I came out from the bedroom a short time later to look out the front window. I was happy to see my car out front, since I'd thought for sure Eric would have taken it. The Corvette was parked out front as well, leaving me to wonder what car they'd taken.

My question was answered when I called Jeter upstairs to let him outside before Stella and I left to do our shopping. The keys for the Comet were missing from the hook, and I imagined Johan trying to convince his brother and father to drive with the top down on a balmy forty-four degree day. Johan really was a trip. While I enjoyed having him around, I was glad he would be leaving town after Eric's sentencing. Originally, Johan had planned to be back in Sweden for the New Year, but after Eric got arrested, his plans changed.

"Are you ready, dear?" Stella asked once Jeter was back in the house.

"I just need to get my boots and coat, and we're good to go." I smiled at her.

I had just zippered up my coat when another wave of nausea hit me so hard I had to go to the kitchen to avoid making a great big mess on the living room floor. Fucking perfect.

I was napping when Eric settled onto the bed next to me. I felt his large, warm hands in my hair and my eyes fluttered open. "Mom told me you were sick again." He bent and kissed my forehead.

"We were on our way out the door, and BAM!, it hit me like a mac truck." I turned onto my side and draped an arm over his stomach as I nuzzled against him.

"Sookie, what's going on with you?" Eric sounded almost desperate for an answer, and I really couldn't blame him.

"Who else is here?" I whispered.

"Johan and Dad took Mom shopping for tomorrow's dinner, so it's just us. They only left about a half hour ago, so I'm sure we've got some time." Eric stroked my arm slowly.

I sighed before slowly pushing myself up, and turning so we were face to face. "I'm not dying, if that's what you're worried about."

"You told me that already." He looked confused, but that was about to change.

"While I was in Louisiana, I took a pregnancy test." I paused, watching as Eric's eyes widened.

"You did?"

"Yes, I did. With everything being so crazy lately I wasn't paying attention to my body the way I should have been, and I forgot that with the medication I was taking after the accident it made my birth control pretty much worthless. Since the two of us can't seem to go more than a few hours without getting each other naked..." I trailed off, realizing I was rambling.

Eric reached up and cupped my cheek with his palm. "Sookie, are you pregnant?"

I nodded slowly as tears started rolling down my cheeks. "Yes, I am. I wanted to call you from that stupid bathroom to tell you, but I didn't know for sure how I felt about it, and I didn't want to add another worry to everything else we're dealing with, but I-"

Eric sat up and kissed me, cutting me off from finishing my thought. His forehead pressed against mine. "You're sure? You're absolutely sure you're pregnant?"

"I can feel it, Eric."

"Already?" He looked down at my stomach.

"No, I mean, it's an instinct. I just know I am. I didn't even need the test to tell me, but I guess I needed to see it for myself."

"Wow." Eric looked stunned, and I couldn't blame him one bit.

"I'm sorry. I know this is really shitty timing-"

"Don't apologize, lover." His thumb stroked my cheek, his eyes locked on mine. "You didn't exactly get yourself pregnant. I helped." His smile was smug, and I couldn't help but laugh.

"If we have twins, I'm blaming it on you." I glared at him.

Eric laughed and pulled me against him as he laid back. "I admit the timing could be better, but I'm not disappointed, Sookie. It was going to happen for us one of these days. I guess the time is now."

"Are you really okay with this, because I'm way more okay with it than I thought I would be. When it first occurred to me, I freaked out. With everything being the way its been, I was afraid it was going to be the straw that broke the camel's back for us. I know you would be there for the baby regardless of what happens between you and me, but I was afraid this was going to be the thing that broke us. Then, the more I thought about it, the more I realized I was going to be more upset if I found out I wasn't pregnant." I explained to him.

"Sookie, no matter how prepared we think we are, there's never a way to really be prepared for a baby. They're unpredictable, and anything can happen." He paused for a moment. "Are *you* sure this is what you want?"

I sat up again and turned to face him. "The only thing I want more is you."

Eric smiled up at me before pulling me on top of him. "Well would you look at that? We're right back where we started."

Telling Eric I was pregnant was a huge weight off my shoulders. His family returned to find us grinning like a couple of idiots, and we just let Johan razz us about what sorts of things we might have been up to while we had the house to ourselves. We decided we wanted to keep the pregnancy on the down-low until we knew what was going to happen with Eric's sentencing. So if I wanted to talk to anyone about the pregnancy besides Eric, I would have to call Tara. I wasn't even planning to talk to Amelia about it until after the court stuff was over with.

Stella had complained a few times through dinner about Pam coming over the next day, and I was starting to see what the boys meant about her attitude. I didn't agree with her assessment, but then I wasn't a mother. Well, actually, I guess I was. Huh. The thought had forced me to smile down at my plate, and I'd reached for Eric's hand under the table to give it a squeeze. He turned to face me and give me a quick wink before going back to his meal.

Eric stayed in the kitchen to help Stella clean up, leaving me at the mercy of Johan and Tom in the living room. It was obvious there was some tension between the two of them, but it was easy to understand why. They were just polar opposites in just about every way two people can be opposites. I sat back to enjoy the show, and watch the two of them argue very much the same way I heard Tom argue with Stella when I talked to her on the phone.

"Will you stifle it, Johan?" Tom asked when he'd had enough. Before I could stop myself, I blew a raspberry. Johan burst out laughing next to me, while I turned bright red.

"I'm sorry." I apologized, but Tom was looking at me with humor in his eyes and smile curling his lips. When he smiled like that it was easy to see what a handsome man he was. "You should smile more."

"Should I?"

"Yes. It looks good on you." I nodded sincerely.

"Stell! I might have to trade you in!" Tom teased from the living room.

"Keep your hands to yourself, Old Man!" Eric retorted from the kitchen.

"Age before beauty." Tom winked at me.

It was nice to see Tom's sense of humor come into play, but the conversation was quickly approaching territory I had no interest in touching on. "No offense, but the only Old Man Northman I want is in the kitchen washing dishes."

Tom laughed loudly and said, "Good answer, Toots." He'd taken to calling me that, and coming from anyone else, it probably would have bothered the hell out of me.

Eric and I went to bed early. I was feeling exhausted and I knew the next day was going to be a long one. I was already laying bed waiting for him when he came out of the bathroom. Before stretching out next to me, he paused at my stomach to kiss it. It was cheesy, but probably the sweetest thing I'd ever seen him do. I curled myself against him, reveling in the feeling of everything being back in its right place. His arm closed around me when I slung one of my legs over his, and before I knew it, I was dead to the world.

Okay, so are we happy now? We have an answer to the big question. Pretty exciting stuff, isn't it? I know I'm jazzed. It's funny how differently the story has turned out from the way I first envisioned it. This pregnancy was always a part of the plan, I just thought it would be happening in a very different way. I think y'all would be surprised by what I originally had planned. As if the way it turned out isn't crazy enough.

Thanks for not killing me 5 chapters ago. It was worth the wait, wasn't it? Next chapter we say goodbye to Mama and Papa Northman (I almost wrote Skarsgard there \*head desk\*), assuming the muses don't get carried away with something.

Oh, and to the girl who just threatened to burn the world's Skarsporn, you should know that is the fastest way for all of my muses to die out. Then you'll never know how this story ends. Just think about that before you toss all that sexy into the flames. In this case, Sex On Fire is bad juju. You picking up what I'm putting down?

\*staggers off to bed\*

**Chapter 43: A Very Northman Christmas**

Thank you all for being so awesomesauce in your reviews yesterday, er, earlier today \*shifty eyes\* I know most of you weren't surprised by the revelation, but it's fun to keep y'all guessing. Now most of you are wondering if Mama Northman is going to figure out what's up. Well, you'll have to read on to find out. I am being so tight-lipped about this story it's not even funny. Although I do appreciate hearing your theories on what's going to happen next. The only one who will know for sure besides me is the fanfic wife, and she knows her Skarsporn (and by that, I mean her Blackberry haha) is at stake if she gets all loose lipped on me \*brandishes shiv and a Zippo\*

Chapter Forty-Three: A Very Northman Christmas

It amazed me how quickly Sookie dropped off into sleep. Maybe it was because she felt like a weight was off her shoulders by sharing her news with me, or maybe she was just exhausted from what we now knew to be morning sickness kicking her ass. I was willing to bet it was a combination of the two. The reality of her confession hadn't quite sunk in yet. I was happy, I knew that much. We'd talked about kids a little bit, so it's not that this was a disappointment in the slightest. The timing wasn't ideal, but I meant what I'd said to her about never truly being prepared.

The tricky part was going to be keeping this quiet from everyone else, at least for a little while. Telling everyone Sookie had a stomach bug was only going to last for so long before they started getting suspicious of what was really going on- assuming they weren't already. I'd come home from my errands with Johan and Dad, surprised to find Mom on the couch and Sookie still in bed. When Mom mentioned that Sookie had gotten sick out of the blue I kept waiting for her to badger me into telling her what was wrong, but all she did was ask if the rest of us were feeling alright since she assumed it had something to do with breakfast.

We were all fine, of course, and I was surprised that Mom shrugged it off so quickly. I knew, however, that it wouldn't last, and I found myself grateful their time in Chicago was almost up. If word got out we were pregnant, Mom would kick the nagging into overdrive where marriage was concerned, and I wasn't about to ask Sookie to marry me just because of some silly old fashioned notion that I was supposed to do that. Marriage wasn't going to be the solution to any of our problems. Whenever we did it, *if* we did it, it would be because it was what we both wanted.

I held onto Sookie tightly, and eventually drifted off to sleep. Although I have no idea how long I stared at her before I did. I woke in the morning to the sound of Sookie gagging and heaving in the bathroom. The shower was running and the door was closed, but that only muffled the sounds a little bit. I rolled out of bed and knocked on the bathroom door before letting myself in. Sookie was on her knees in front of the toilet. I moved quickly to stand behind her and hold her hair.

"This really sucks." Sookie said when her body let her come up for air before revolting on her again.

I felt horrible for her. There was nothing I could do to make this better, and I hoped this phase would end quickly for her. I rubbed her back and gently wrapped one of her elastic bands around her hair before tucking the ponytail into the back of her shirt to make sure it stayed out of her face. I filled one of those little Dixie cups with water and set it on the edge of the vanity. I put toothpaste on her toothbrush, and hoped it would be over soon.

"Is there anything I can do?" I asked her once she was sitting with her back against the tub.

She shook her head and sipped her water. "Just keep doing what you're doing."

I frowned, hating not being able to help her. "Toothbrush?"

She smiled at me and extended a shaky arm to take it. I watched as she brushed her teeth and spit into the toilet. I helped her off the floor when she decided she was done being sick, at least for the time being. I followed her back to bed after turning off the shower. I spooned up behind her and let my hand rest on her stomach. I tried to imagine what was was going to feel like when the soft skin there was pulled taught over the growing bump that housed our child. The idea of a pregnant Sookie was actually pretty damn sexy.

"You're going to look good pregnant." I whispered against her neck.

"Oh, you mean when I'm fat, bloated and yelling at you for breathing in my direction?" Sookie snickered.

"I won't see any of those things." I kissed her neck.

"It'll be hard to miss."

"Mmm, I don't think so." My hand moved up from her stomach toward her breasts, and her breathing hitched when I found them. "These will be much bigger, a hardship I'm more than willing to help you handle."

Sookie giggled and said, "Be careful with those, they're sore."

"Getting bigger already, I suppose." I massaged her gently.

"You're such a guy." I could hear the eye roll in her voice.

"Isn't that one of the things you like most about me?" I teased, earning me another giggle from her.

"Of course it is." She rolled over so we were face to face. "I just think you don't understand how troublesome these can be." She put my hand back on her breast.

"*These* are a thing of beauty."

She shook her head at me, but didn't stop me from kissing her. Things were just starting to get heated when there was a knock on the bedroom door. We both cursed, but I was the one to mumble under my breath I was glad we would have the house to ourselves again in a few days.

"You forget your brother will still be in town, and we aren't guaranteed Johan will knock."

"He will if he wants to live." I kissed her forehead before getting out of bed to answer the door.

"I'm sorry to disturb you, but breakfast is ready." Mom said with a big grin on her face. "Oh, and Merry Christmas."

"Merry Christmas, Mom." I returned the hug she offered me.

It had completely slipped my mind that it was Christmas morning. Mom turned and headed back for the kitchen, while I turned to see Sookie looking as mystified as I was.

"Did we really forget it was Christmas?" She laughed.

"We were preoccupied."

"You know, by this time next year I don't think we'll be forgetting it's Christmas." Sookie's hand rested on her stomach. "I'm starving."

"Good. Breakfast is ready." I extended a hand to her, and she walked with me to the kitchen.

Mom and Dad were already at the table. Dad was going over the Tribune while Mom was making a list of what I assumed needed to be done for dinner later. Sookie and I greeted the parentals before sitting at the island. The small kitchen table was only designed for two. Usually Sookie and I ate at the island.

"Eric, you should get a bigger table." Mom said without looking up.

"There isn't really room for one." I shook my head.

"Oh, nonsense."

"We usually sit over here at the island, Mom."

"Well that's not going to work forever. What about when you have kids? Or if you have people over for supper? You can't just park them on a stool."

"Stella, will you stifle? It's Christmas morning, for Pete's sake." Dad didn't look up from the paper.

"All I'm saying is a table like this isn't very useful."

"I have a bigger table." Sookie volunteered. "We just don't really have a place to put it right now."

That was true. The table in Sookie's dining room at her old house wasn't going to fit in my kitchen. Come to think of it, we were going to need more room when the baby was born. I looked over at Sookie with my brow furrowed together. Maybe it would make more sense if we lived in her house. At the moment, the place was just holding space. No one was living there, and Sookie had yet to decide what she was going to do with it. Since the housing market wasn't really ripe for selling, maybe it would be better for us to live there and put mine up for sale.

Her house was newer. It was brand new construction when she moved into it. She would be closer to Amelia and Tray. I didn't know what my fate was as far as teaching was concerned since I had yet to hear from the school board. I decided my idea would have to go on the list of things Sookie and I needed to talk about as soon as my Ringling Brothers Circus of a family went back to their own homes. I know Sookie thought my Mom was sweet, but I was willing to bet that would change when she was 8 months pregnant and Mom was calling every half hour to see if she'd gone into labor yet.

After breakfast Mom and Dad headed off to mass, and I was surprised they didn't try to guilt Sookie and I into going along. It was for the better since I'd long ago given up practicing Catholicism, and Sookie wasn't Catholic to begin with. We did, however, set them up with directions to the nearest Catholic church and the keys to the Comet. Sookie's car probably would have been better, but Dad found the GPS to be more irksome than he did helpful.

Moreover, his exact words were, "Son, I found my way through a jungle in 'Nam. I think I can find a church three miles away."

No sooner were they gone than Sookie and I were locking the door to our bedroom and stripping off our clothes to take a shower together. We got significantly more dirty before we got clean, but neither one of us were complaining. I stood at the vanity shaving while Sookie put on her makeup.

"How are you feeling?" I asked her.

"I'm fine, Eric." She smiled at me in the mirror.

"Just checking." I winked, and we went back to our tasks.

"So, I had a crazy thought earlier." Sookie said as she started to comb out her hair.

"Let's have it."

"Well, your Mom sort of started it. See, I was thinking maybe living in my house would be better. I know it's crazy, and with everything going on right now moving is really the last thing either of us needs to worry about, but there's more space and it needs less work and-" She stopped talking when I started laughing. "What's so funny?"

"I was thinking the same thing."

"You were?"

"I was. I just figured I'd wait to bring it up until some of the madness died down."

Sookie laughed and said, "Eric, sweetheart, I'm pregnant. You may or may not be employed, and you might be incarcerated soon. We don't really have time to sit on things that require a big decision between us."

"I'm not sure it bodes well for me that you can laugh about jail time." I smirked at her.

"You know what I mean!" She slapped playfully at my arm.

"Hey, there's a razor in my hand." I reminded her.

"Sorry." She leaned over and kissed my arm where she hit me. "So do you really want to talk about this, or should we just forget about it for a while?"

"No, I think we should talk about it. I was thinking it would probably be a good thing for us. Not only is your house bigger, but there's also a bigger yard. The garage is attached to the house, and you wouldn't have to take the baby out in the rain or snow in order to get him or her into the car. There's plenty of room for Jeter to move around. Assuming you're okay with him moving into your house."

"Of course I am! Jeter's part of the family." Sookie smiled at me. "Kind of like our first kid."

"You would also be closer to Amelia and Tray. You'd be farther away from work, though."

"If it meant not being woken up by freight train whistles at three in the morning, it'd be worth it."

I tried to do the math in my head. I assumed Sookie had gotten pregnant in the early part of November, which meant if I was estimating correctly, we would have a baby by the middle of August the following year. The good news was that she would be able to finish out the school year before the baby was born. She would probably miss the first two months of the following school year, if she wanted to go back to work at all. That was another talk we were going to have to have. If she wanted to stay home, I would support that just as much as if she wanted to go back to work. The decision would be hers to make.

I didn't realize how many things there were to consider in all of this, but there was a lot of planning that needed to done, and there were a lot of decisions we were going to have to make. It all started to sink in a little, and I knew it was only going to get more complicated the further into the pregnancy we got. One thing was for sure, our lives were going to have to slow down quite a bit. I decided right then and there that once all of this court stuff was taken care of, Sookie would be my number one priority. Everything else in the world could just fuck off. Her and our baby were all that mattered to me, and I would do whatever I had to to make sure they were both taken care of.

"Where'd you go?" Sookie whispered as she ran her hand up my back.

"Just thinking about the future." I shook my head.

"Mmm." She kissed my arm and then left the bathroom to go get dressed.

Pam and Johan arrived shortly before Mom and Dad got back from church. Pam was glowing in a way I hadn't seen in years, and that was only because of a two month trip to Greece shortly after we graduated from college. She was immaculately dressed, but I would expect nothing less from her. She also seemed to have her full snark back.

"Eric, can I see you in the other room for a minute?" She asked once the four of us were standing around the island.

"Sure." I followed behind Pam, leaving Sookie and Johan to talk in the kitchen.

Pam closed the door to the bedroom before reaching into her purse to pull out the little red velvet box she'd been in charge of holding for me. "It's all set."

"Sized and everything?" I asked as I took the box from her.

"Yep. The jeweler had no trouble matching it from the ring you gave me." Pam grinned as I opened the box. "So when are you going to give it to her?"

I wanted to tell Pam my plan- *her* plan- had been put on hold. She'd gone with me to help pick out an engagement ring for Sookie to make sure I didn't get anything too gaudy or too cheap. Apparently, there were rules and guidelines for buying engagement rings that I had no idea about. After visiting several jewelry stores we found one that sold vintage rings. The one I'd picked out for Sookie was an antique ring. The band was platinum and there was an intricate design in the setting. Smaller diamond chips, as Pam called them, were embedded in the band around the bigger setting. It was unique without being flashy, just like the woman who I hoped would be willing to wear it for the rest of her life.

"Do you think she's going to like it?" I asked Pam, in spite of having asked her that no less than a dozen times before I wrote the check for it.

"She'd be crazy not to." Pam said. "You're lucky I like her enough not to run away with it myself. So, when are you going to ask her?"

"I haven't decided yet."

"You mean you don't want to make Stella's year and ask her tonight?"

"Uh, no." I shook my head.

I wanted to tell Pam about the baby, but now wasn't the time for it. I was sure Pam would have a lot to say on the subject, and we had maybe another two minutes before someone came looking for us to see what we were up to. I'd also sworn Pam to secrecy about this. No one, especially my loudmouth twin, was supposed to know about this. I didn't want anyone making a big deal over it, and I definitely didn't want Sookie to find out from someone else.

"Pity. You might change your mind when she starts talking shit about me."

"Give it a rest, Pam. It's not like you don't say things to intentionally piss her off."

"I'm just being myself."

I laughed and said, "Exactly."

She punched me in the gut, and then turned to walk out of the room. "So what are you going to do with that thing in the meantime?"

Hiding the ring would be somewhat tricky since Sookie had access to everything in the house, but there were a few places I knew she'd never think of to look. "I've got it under control."

"Good. Not that I wouldn't *love* to see the look on Johan's face if I suggested he and I get married."

That brought everything to a screeching halt for me. "Pam, what's the deal with you two? I thought you guys were... well, I didn't think it was serious."

"I didn't think it was either, but things have a way of changing."

"What does that mean?" If Pam and Johan were going to drop a bomb at dinner, I wanted a head's up.

"It means I have a lot of thinking to do, and your Mom might want to figure out a way to get along with me."

"Pam..." I said in a tone of warning.

"I can retract my claws, Northman, you know that."

"Why won't you just tell me what's up?"

Pam sighed heavily and said, "Fine. You want to know what's up? What's up is that I love your brother, and he loves me. There's a distinct possibility I might be going to Sweden with him for a little while."

"You what? What about the bar, Pam? You can't just leave."

"You'll be here." Pam shrugged.

"Have you forgotten that there's a possibility that I might be in jail two weeks from now?"

"That's not going to happen."

"Oh? And how do *you* know that? Did you bribe the judge?"

Pam sighed and looked at me like I should know better. "You're not a repeat offender, Eric. Your lawyer can now prove that Bill had motive to take out your girlfriend. In spite of your ridiculous guilty plea, you were acting in defense of the same woman he tried to have killed. He was also banned from the bar and had no business showing up to an invitation only party that he certainly wasn't invited to. Frankly, the fucker is lucky I didn't find him first. At worst, you pay some heinous fine and end up with probation. You're not going to go to jail, Eric."

"I hope you're right, but I need to be prepared for what happens if you're wrong. I don't have myself to think about anymore."

"Sookie's a big girl. She can take care of herself."

I was so close to telling Pam it wasn't just about Sookie either, but as predicted, there was a knock at the door. "Everything okay in there?" Johan called out.

"Keep your pants on!" Pam shouted at him.

It was then that I realized Pam and Johan were Mom and Dad: The Next Generation.

Dinner was going relatively well considering the tense stares Mom and Pam were shooting back and forth at one another. I managed to get Johan to myself for a few minutes when I took Jeter outside, and I was able to convince him that Christmas dinner was the wrong time to announce that he and Pam were a couple. The thought was still a bit over my head, and I knew if I was having trouble with the idea, Mom was going to flat out reject it.

It's not that I was against it so much as it was just weird. For as long as I'd known Pam she had never so much as considered dating a man, much less got serious with one. Now she was talking about moving to Sweden to live with my brother who she was in love with. Pam being in love with anyone was something that required careful consideration. It certainly didn't happen often.

Even though Johan had given me his word he wouldn't bring up the move, it was obvious things between Johan and Pam had changed. Pam seemed softer, and she wasn't teasing Johan the way she usually did. Nor was she pushing him away when he got too close to her. I could tell by the way Dad was looking at them that he had figured out something was up, but as expected, he kept his mouth shut. He liked Pam quite a bit, and there had been a time when he'd questioned my sanity for not wanting Pam myself. It had just never been that way for us, and it was never going to be. Pam and I were too much alike, and I had no interest in dating myself.

We were mid-meal when Sookie suddenly dropped her fork and bolted from the kitchen. Everything stopped for a moment with everyone's eyes but mine following her out of the room. Of course it was Mom who spoke up first, wanting to know what was wrong with Sookie.

"She'll be fine, Mom. It's just a little stomach bug." I said dismissively.

Mom wiped her mouth and pushed back from the table. "Maybe I should go check on her."

"No." I said quickly. "Give her a minute."

"But Eric, I-"

"Stell, do *you* want an audience when you evacuate chow?" Dad asked without looking up from his plate. I had to restrain a laugh.

"I'll go look in on her if she doesn't come back in a minute." I promised my mother.

Mom cast those suspicious eyes of hers on me, and I knew it was only a matter of time before she put it all together. I just hoped she would keep it under her hat. When Sookie didn't return to the table five minutes later, I excused myself to go check on her. I found her kneeling in front of the toilet in a position that was becoming far too familiar for either of our likings. Even worse, there was a routine becoming familiar with all of this I knew neither of us were too thrilled about either.

"Maybe we should just tell them." Sookie suggested once the storm had passed.

"If we tell them, they'll never go back to California." I warned Sookie, who laughed weakly as I helped her up off the floor.

"Your Mom might mellow out a little, though."

"Don't get your hopes up. She'll just want to know how long it'll be before the first one has a brother or a sister to play with."

Sookie laughed nervously and said, "Let's get through this first one, and then we'll talk about going back for seconds."

"Deal." I kissed her forehead. "Are you okay now?"

"For now." Sookie shrugged. "You should go back out there before your Mom forms a one woman search party. I'll be right behind you."

I nodded and went back to the kitchen. Mom was already starting to put away leftovers. There was more food than necessary, and I had no idea what she thought we were going to do with it all. I supposed she planned to send a good deal of it with Pam and Johan, since she was very aware of the fact that neither of them could cook. Johan was used to women cooking for him, and Pam never wanted to be seen as housewife material. I once again found myself floundering at the idea of the two of them together, and yet, at the same time, it made perfect sense.

Sookie came back to the kitchen and was immediately asked a thousand questions by my mother. I could see the white flag of surrender raising in her eyes, and I knew she was just about to go back on her word to keep our secret between just the two of us when Pam intervened.

"Johan and I have news." Pam said with a big smile on her face.

I didn't know whether to hug her or bash my head against a wall repeatedly. I stood behind Sookie with my hands on her shoulders, waiting for Pam to lower the boom. I figured Pam and Johan's best shot at a positive reaction came from Sookie and Dad. Mom, on the other hand, was going to need to step away from the knives and the heavy glass platter nearby. We didn't need to start a new Northman tradition of mass murder.

"Well, spit it out." Dad winked at Pam.

Sookie blew another raspberry, as she seemed to do every time Dad got too cheeky with his commentary. If it had been one of his sons to do such a thing, it would have meant a box to the ear. From Sookie, Dad found it endearing, and I think it actually encouraged his snappy talk instead of hindered it. It was good to see Sookie was finding a niche in my family, just as I had done in hers. I wondered if it would have been this easy with anyone else.

I was familiar with the tales of others, and how meeting a significant other's family members could be a nightmare experience. I figured Sookie and I were either extremely lucky, or maybe it was a sign we were supposed to be together. I didn't know, and truthfully, I didn't care. The only thing that mattered was that it somehow had all come together. For once, it was nice to have something fit together easily. The last thing either of us needed was family drama, but it seemed we were about to get a heaping dose of it from Pam and Johan.

"Pam has decided to come to Sweden with me when I go back." Johan said with excitement in his eyes.

As expected, Mom dropped the glass in her hand. She stared at Johan as if he'd just broken her heart. Her eyes moved to Pam's, and they turned menacing. Without so much as a word, Mom's face turned bright red and she stormed out of the room, cursing in Swedish under her breath.

"That went well." Dad noted before turning back to his plate.

I looked at Johan with wide eyes. If he thought I was going to talk Mom down off her ledge, he had another thing coming. As Sookie would say, "His cheese done slid right off his cracker." No way in hell was I getting in the middle of this. The old Eric wouldn't have hesitated to step up and play mediator between the two of them, but this wasn't my problem. Mom was perfectly happy with Sookie, and that was my only concern. I'd been telling Mom for years that Pam wasn't the person she assumed her to be, and it had gotten me exactly nowhere. Maybe Johan would have better luck.

"Well, don't just sit there. Go talk to your mother." Pam elbowed Johan in the ribs.

My twin sighed, and slowly got up. Sookie whistled Taps as he walked past us, earning her the first evil glare she'd ever gotten from Johan. As soon as he was out of the room, the rest of us were fighting to keep our laughter at a low volume.

"He would have done it to me." Sookie said in her own defense.

"You know, Toots, you're gonna fit in just fine in all this crazy." Dad stopped to kiss Sookie's head on the way to the sink.

Absolutely amazing.

Mom had by no means accepted Johan and Pam as a couple, and she kept staring at me like it was *my* fault the two of them were together. Sookie and I cleaned up the kitchen together while Dad and Pam took Jeter outside. We could hear Johan and Mom arguing in the spare bedroom in Swedish. It wasn't a pretty argument, but Johan was right about everything he said. I understood Mom's concern, but it was really a moot point. She believed what she wanted to about Pam, instead of seeing what was really there. And to top it off, if what she was most concerned about was Johan's happiness, then her personal feelings toward Pam shouldn't matter. For whatever reason, Pam was like catnip for my brother.

"You know, I'm glad I got to meet your parents, but I think you're right about it being nice to have the house to ourselves again." Sookie smiled as she handed me a clean plate to put in the dishwasher.

Not long after Mom and Johan came out of the bedroom we gathered in the living room to open our gifts. Sookie and I sat on the floor together, and it was while Mom was actually admiring a sweater Pam had bought her that Sookie pulled me down to whisper in my ear.

"Is it just me, or are you thinking about what next Christmas is going to look like, too?"

"It may have crossed my mind once or twice." I smiled over at her. She kissed me gently, and our eyes met for a minute.

"Sookie, this is for you." Mom handed Sookie a beautifully wrapped box with a shiny gold bow on top.

"Thank you." Sookie took the box from Mom and began to methodically remove the paper.

"Ugh, get on with it." Johan, the Tazmanian Devil of gift opening, hated it when people took to long to remove paper. I may or may not have informed Sookie of this before we got to gift opening.

She carefully peeled back the pieces of tape, and then folded the thick scarlet paper. Johan was going nuts. It was fun to watch, I have to say. I knew what was inside the box since I'd gone shopping with Mom to find it. Every single jewelry store we passed, Mom had stopped at to look at rings. You know, "window shopping," and what not. I was sometimes convinced Mom would have made a great car salesman or real estate agent.

After taking more time than I thought possible, Sookie finally got the box open. I had great idea for Johan's presents next year I would have to remember to tell Sookie about later. She took her time removing the tissue paper one piece at a time, folding each one gently. Johan rolled his eyes impatiently, and I was impressed he didn't lunge off the couch to take the box from her to get to whatever prize lay in wait inside. Imagine the sheer frustration on his face when Sookie revealed an envelope.

"You've got to be kidding me!" Johan shouted, and everyone burst out laughing.

"It was all Mom's idea." I nodded in Mom's direction, and she turned bright pink.

"You hush!" Mom chided.

"Just wait. I'll get you back for this." Johan glared at me.

"What are you mad at me for?"

"Because Mom's not sneaky."

This was true. Mom was definitely more of the 'in for your face' style than she was a rascal. Next year's gifts would require Dad's assistance. He was far more diabolical than Mom. Sookie's gift ended up being a rather hefty gift card for Border's and a picture of a new bookshelf that matched the ones in her house that Mom had insisted on ordering for her.

"This is..." Sookie was about to protest when she remembered her manners. "Thank you." She finished instead.

"You're welcome. We weren't sure what else to get you, but Eric said you're an avid reader. This way you can pick out what you like." Mom explained, as if Sookie wouldn't have figured it out.

"It's very thoughtful of you. I love it." Sookie grinned at them, and even more surprising to both of them, she got up off the floor to hug them.

After that it was like all of the tension of the last few hours was forgotten, and for a few hours, the Northman family Christmas wasn't a total loss.

Since we couldn't go past the security checkpoints with my parents, Sookie and I said our goodbyes to my parents at the drop off point for the departures. Dad and I unloaded the luggage while Mom talked Sookie's ear off about one thing or another. In some ways I was sorry to see them go since I wasn't sure how long it would be until I saw them again. Although I had no doubt Sookie and I would have a hard time keeping them away once they learned Sookie was pregnant.

Once the luggage was handed off to be checked in, the round of goodbye hugs began. "Take care, Old Man." I told Dad when he hugged me.

"You do the same. And see if you can't keep your ass out of the clink, will you?"

I snorted and said, "Believe me, I'll do my best."

"And you, Toots, if you need anything, you call us." Dad said when he got his arms around her.

"Yessir." Sookie promised, putting a little extra drawl into her voice.

"She's a good girl, Eric." Mom whispered to me in Swedish. "Don't let her get away."

"I have no plans to let that happen, Mom." I whispered right back, keeping to the other language.

"Good boy." She kissed my cheek before pulling back. "I'm going to miss you both. You must come see us this summer after school lets out."

Sookie and I shared a look. By then she would be approaching her third trimester, and flying wouldn't be possible for her. "We'll definitely try." I said for us both.

Mom wrapped Sookie in one more hug before Dad was able to drag her inside the airport. Sookie and I stood there for a moment after they were gone, listening to planes fly overhead. She reached for my hand and squeezed.

"You ready to go home, Mr. Northman?" She smiled up at me.

"Yes, Miss Stackhouse, I think I am." I kissed her hand, and off we went.

\*puts on pimp hat\* Pretty snazzy, huh? You should see my platforms with the gold fish in 'em. Another time, though. For now, since I don't have much in the way of a closing A/N to leave you with, I'mma pimp some awesomesauce stuff that's going down.

**Kiss A Cook Contest** is still going, and is accepting entries until 9/24, so you still have time to enter. www(dot( /~kissacookcontest

Contact ARedheadThing or OhFortuntesLost for more details.

**I Write The Songs** will START taking submissions on 9/24 and will be open until 10/30 (dot(net/u/2491610/I\_Write\_The\_Songs

Contact Northwoman or Northman Maille

**A New Chapter** is accepting entries and will remain open until 11/12 u/2507718/A\_New\_Chapter\_Contest (I totes wrote a promo for this, so if you haven't read it yet, check out my o/s "Accidents In the Dark")

Ummmm there's a ton of hostesses to contact for this, but they have links to their profiles on the contest page, so clickety click on those if you've got a question.

**MKayProductions** u/2515912/

For those who are just joining us, or who haven't bothered to read previous notes, the wonderful **kjwrit** and I have formed a partnership and are writing our first collaborative story together. We plan to start posting this story over the weekend. You'll find it in the crossover section, since it's mixes up True Blood and SVM canon. The name of the story is "What The Fae," and drops TB!Sookie in SVM!verse, with SVM!Sookie being dropped in TB!Verse. You should read it if for no other reason than double the Eric. Huminahhuminahhuminah...yesssssss. This story is courtesy of a plot bunny donated by **S. Meadows**, so all props to her for planting this seed and letting K and I nurture it and help it grow.

\*takes off pimp hat\* Gotta go feed those fishes. Later baby birds!

**Chapter 44: Amazed**

Yeah, so when I started this chapter I was listening to "Amazed" by Lonestar, and totally intended for this chapter to be all fluffy and full of citrusy fun. But then reality set in and I decided I'm going to have to save that for another chapter. We have some serious business to attend to in the next few chapters, and the time for fluff isn't now. But I know I owe you guys, so we'll get one of those before you know it. I'm shooting for chapter forty-six, but obviously, the muses are unpredictable bitches.

Oh, and my apologies to **Meadowslark** for incorrectly crediting **S. Meadows** for use of a plot bunny \*bes ashamed\*

Chapter Forty-Four: Amazed

It was definitely nice to have the house to ourselves again. Christmas had been wonderful, minus the random attacks of nausea, but over all I couldn't complain. Stella wasn't nearly as difficult as Eric had tried to warn me she would be. I honestly thought her enthusiasm was sweet. Although, to cut Eric some slack, I didn't have to grow up with it. I could see how from his perspective it might come off as harping.

Eric's response was, "You're too nice, lover."

Pam had decided to throw a party at the bar for New Years. Eric and I were invited, of course, but we opted not to go. We did, however, think maybe there was a chance Bill would be crazy enough to show up. So after running the idea past Detective Twinings, we set a trap we hoped might snare Bill and Sophie-Anne. So far, the police had been unable to locate either one of them. That lead me to believe either Bill was more dangerous than I could have imagined, or the police were incompetent. Either way, I couldn't wait until he was off the street once and for all.

Eric and I decided we would get dressed up like we were going to the party at the bar. We'd take his Corvette, and leave it out in the parking lot. We'd go into the bar like we were staying just in case we were being watched. We'd stick around for a while since Eric had some paperwork to catch up on anyway. We planned to sneak out the back, and take Pam's car to my old house where we would spend the night. Johan had come by earlier in the day for Jeter since we didn't want to leave him home alone.

The hope was, Bill and Sophie-Anne would show up at the bar and a few undercover officers strategically placed inside the bar would be able to detain them for questioning. It was a long shot, since it was believed they had left the state, but it was worth a shot. Just to be on the safe side, officers would be patrolling both the house in Franklin Park, and the other in Itasca a few miles away. Bill didn't know where my house in Itasca was, but he seemed to have a way of finding things out. I was still flummoxed as to how he knew about my birthmark. God knows I never mentioned it, much less showed him.

I poured myself into a little black dress with sequins all over it, and slipped on a pair of ridiculously high heels I wouldn't be able to wear in a couple more months. I stared at myself in the full length mirror and tried to imagine what I was going to look like in seven months. I had an appointment with my doctor the following Tuesday, and I had to admit, I was excited about it. The first book I'd bought with the extremely generous Christmas gift I'd gotten from Tom and Stella was What To Expect When You're Expecting. I decided that new bookshelf would probably end up in the baby's room, since I planned on filling it with children's books.

"You look breathtaking, lover." Eric purred as he came up behind me.

"Thank you. You look pretty good yourself." I tilted my head back as far as I could for him to kiss me. Of course what I had intended to be a simple kiss quickly turned into something else, and wiggling in attempts to get away from him didn't help matters one bit. "Eric, we have to get going."

He growled and said, "We'll finish this later."

"Yes, we most certainly will." I promised him.

Eric and I had dropped off overnight bags at the old house the day before, along with groceries. Amelia and Tray were settled back into the house next door. Copley was a distraught mess over his daughter up and marrying Tray, although I don't know what he expected. I'd spoken to Amelia the day before and she told me her father was trying to slap an injunction on her to have her marriage annulled, claiming she wasn't in her right state of mind when she married him. Hell, I think it was the first time Amelia was thinking clearly in years.

Short of paying some quack doctor to make up some brand new brain disease there was no way a judge was going to dissolve Amelia's marriage. Cope needed to man up, and well, cope. He'd gotten himself into this mess. I'd tried to tell him that Amelia was going to be furious when she woke up, but Copely didn't listen. He just steamrolled right over me like he did with everyone else who disagreed with him. Amelia vowed to be at the hearing when Eric was sentenced. She was fully prepared to speak on his behalf both as a witness to what happened the night of the Halloween party, as well as a character witness for him. Not only were they friends- sort of- but they were also co-workers.

I didn't know if the judge was going to want to hear from anyone, but I started thinking about what I wanted to say in case he did. Eric had a pretty decent number of people willing to speak on his behalf, the most powerful of those two speakers being his business partner and his brother. Pam had known him for almost fifteen years, and obviously Johan had known him since they were... sperm, I guess. Weird. There's a thought I didn't let sit in my brain too long before moving on to something else.

Eric and I left the house dressed to the nines, looking very much like we were ready to get our party on. We drove the mile and a half to the bar and parked a little out of the way like we always did. Eric preferred for his car to be away from the drunken masses, and I couldn't blame him. We tried not to look like we were searching the lot for faces as we walked to the bar. It wouldn't do us any good to catch a glimpse of someone who wasn't supposed to be there, even if we were hoping to eventually see him make an appearance.

The Violent Femmes were playing in the bar when we walked in. Johan was behind the bar mixing shots. "Perfect timing!" He called out when he saw us come in. "Here, bottoms up."

Two shot glasses were put before us. "Uh, no thanks. I'm good." I pushed my glass back.

"Come on, Sookie, it's New Year's Eve." Johan insisted.

"No, I'm not drinking tonight." I insisted.

"Someone's got to be the designated driver." Eric piped up to spare me from having to come up with another lie before my guilty conscience blew our cover. I was a terrible liar.

"Good point." Johan push the shot that had been intended for me over to Pam.

"You trying to get me drunk, Northman?"

"You remember how much fun New York was." Johan winked at her.

"Actually, I don't." Pam snickered.

"I feel like we're in some alternate dimension." Eric muttered beside me.

"Stuff it, Eric. I had to watch the two of you make moon eyes at each other for months. Get off my ass." Pam snapped at Eric.

"I'm going to go get that paperwork done so we can get out of here. We have plans." Eric announced before departing for the office. After tossing back his shots and kissing Pam- which was damn weird to see- Johan followed his twin.

I took a seat on a stool next to Pam. "Thank you for letting the police stash undercovers in here tonight."

"Are you kidding? I want to nail that fucker as badly as you two do. Not only is he seriously screwing with my best friend, but he hurt someone I care about and could have ruined my business. If it were up to me, I'd crucify the bastard." Pam said in a bitter tone of voice before tossing back her shot.

"So are you serious about moving to Sweden, or were you just saying that to get Stella to stop staring at me like I had three heads."

Pam laughed and said, "Oh, I'm very serious about Sweden. It's a beautiful country, and for whatever reason, I can't seem to shake Johan from my system. Believe me, I've tried. He's a persistent little shit."

"Spoken like a woman in love." I giggled.

"So when did you find out you're pregnant?" Pam asked, not bothering to ease into the subject.

I sputtered for a few seconds before saying, "I don't know what you're talking about."

"Bullshit. Don't think I haven't noticed there's something going on with you two lately. You've been randomly puking your guts out and now you're not drinking? Come on, Sookie." Pam stared at me expectantly.

I sighed and said, "I found out in Louisiana. I suspected it before I left, but I didn't take a test until I was there. Pam, you have to swear not to say anything to anyone. Eric and I agreed we wouldn't say anything until after we got things settled with the courts and we knew what we would be dealing with there."

Pam nodded and said, "You have my word."

"Good. It's really important Johan doesn't find out."

Pam threw her head back and laughed. "Johan is a bigger gossip than a Perez Hilton/Ryan Seacrest hybrid, that's not news to me. You do realize, however, that Stella is going to lose her shit when she finds out, right? She's been nagging her sons to settle down and have kids since they graduated from college."

"Yeah, Eric mentioned that. I can handle Stella." I nodded.

"Hmmm." Pam got up and went behind the bar. She poured me a glass of water while she got herself a glass of wine.

"So what are you going to do with the bar while you're in Sweden?"

"Eric's going to take over."

"What?" That was news to me. "Does he know this?"

"We talked about it at Christmas. He didn't mention it to you?" Pam looked surprised.

"No, he didn't." I wasn't mad, necessarily, so much as I was surprised.

I probably shouldn't have been since Eric did have a stake in the bar. I just wasn't sure why he hadn't mentioned anything to me about taking on a more significant role at the bar. Being a bar owner had always been an after thought to him. When people asked what he did for a living, he told them he was a teacher. He never mentioned the bar unless someone else brought it up first. It's not that he was embarrassed of it or anything like that. He just thought of it as Pam's bar.

"We still have a lot of details to work out." Pam said casually.

"I can imagine." I sipped my water.

Pam sighed heavily and leaned against the bar. "Things sure are changing."

"I know. Eric might be going to jail. I'm knocked up and living in sin. You're a reformed lesbian." I smirked at that last part while Pam threw her head back and cackled.

Jeter was waiting at the door when Eric and I got to the house. Pam's car was safely stashed in the garage just in case any unwanted visitors might decide to drive by. My shoes were the first thing to go when we got into the house. I hung my coat in the closet, and Eric followed suit. I started toward the hall to get to the kitchen, but strong arms caught me around my waist and pulled me toward the stairs.

"What are you doing?" I smiled up at him over my shoulder, having a pretty good idea of *exactly* what he was doing.

"You have plenty of time to tidy up the kitchen. Amelia and Tray won't be here until ten." Eric's lips were on my neck.

He was right. It was barely even seven. Just to tease him I said, "You have a good point. Once we're done I'll have at least two hours and fifty-two minutes to clean up."

"You might want to strike that and reverse it." Eric all but growled in my ear as he pulled me up the stairs.

True to his word, he kept me occupied for more than two hours and we were sufficiently blissed out by the time Amelia and Tray arrived at ten. Gone were the fancy clothes of earlier in the evening. We'd all agreed to keep things extremely casual for the night. I was in yoga pants and that Nirvana t-shirt I'd worn the first time Eric came over for dinner. Eric was wearing his track pants and a Duke t-shirt. Amelia and Tray weren't any fancier, and it was a great night.

We sat at the kitchen table talking over drinks (I stuck to water, claiming my stomach bug was still lurking), while Amelia and Tray showed us pictures from their trip to Las Vegas and told us about their wedding in greater detail. Amelia went off on a slightly intoxicated rant about how arrogant and high handed her father was, and she was just getting to the apex of that rant when the ten second countdown to midnight started.

I never realized how much reflecting a person could do in ten seconds, but if the way Eric and I were looking at each other was any indication, we were both doing plenty of it. I'd spent the previous New Year's Eve with Amelia and Tray as well, since Quinn had some event for work he just couldn't get out of attending. It wasn't until just that moment that I realized how low on his list of priorities I'd been. Here was Eric, who was facing a possible jail sentence, and he was more concerned about me than anything else in the world. He was helping me plan for life without him for a little while, and Quinn couldn't even manage to tell his employees he was taking a night off to be with his girlfriend. I hated myself for ever even thinking of putting Eric in the same league as Quinn.

Eric was easily the best thing that ever happened to me, and it was crazy to think that if I hadn't gotten completely wasted off my ass the night we met, we might not be where we are now. Stella had been beyond right when she said things happened the way they did for a reason. I wondered if Eric would have eventually caught my eye somewhere around school. Would we have ended up together anyway because that's just the way it was meant to be? I wanted to think so, but I'd never know for sure.

"Happy New Year!" Everyone but me shouted.

I was crying. I didn't even realize until Eric wiped away the tears on my cheek. "What's this, lover?" He pulled me close to him and whispered in my ear.

I wrapped my arms around him, holding him tightly as I sobbed quietly against him. The reality that I might lose him in a few days hit me hard. I told myself it was just a surge of baby hormones making me all weepy, and maybe the did play a role in my breakdown, but I knew that wasn't all of it. I was genuinely scared of losing him. The more I let myself think about it, the harder I sobbed.

"Sook, what's wrong?" Amelia put a hand on my shoulder in attempts to comfort me, but I only sobbed harder.

"Ame, I think we should hit the road." Tray suggested from behind me.

"Are you kidding me?" Amelia barked. "Sookie, honey..."

"Tray's right." I squeaked out, though I don't know how. I pulled myself together enough to tell Amelia I would call her later.

It took more than one reassurance from both Eric and me that I would be fine, and a lot of tugging from Tray before Amelia would let herself be removed from the house. I missed having her around. She could be such a mama lion when she needed to be, and I loved her dearly for it. As soon as they were gone, Eric sat me down on the couch. He brought me a glass of water and went to lock up the house. Until we knew Bill and Sophie-Anne were off the streets, our days of unlocked doors and open windows overnight were over.

"So what's going on?" Eric asked once he had me in his lap on the couch.

"I just started thinking about how much better my life is with you in it, and how it's going to suck if you have to go." I rested my head on his shoulder.

"I'm not going anywhere, Sookie."

My head snapped up. "I'm not talking about you changing your mind and leaving me, Eric. I'm talking about the possibility that it might be court ordered for you to be elsewhere."

"Pam says it's doubtful that I'll end up serving any time for what happened." Eric said nervously.

"And since when is Pam a member of The Bar?" I glared at Eric, who just sighed heavily. "We *have* to talk about this, Eric. It's not just about us anymore, remember?"

"I know."

"So, come on." I urged.

"What do you want me to say, Sookie? I don't want to leave you. I want to be there for everything with this baby. I want to hear its heartbeat in the doctor's office, and I want to be holding your hand when we find out if it's a boy or a girl, assuming you want to know. I want to go to those breathing classes with you and fight over baby names. I want to have to go out at two in the morning to get you watermelon sherbert or a jar of black olives. I want to be there for you when the baby's born, and I want to be standing there to hear it cry for the first time. I want to see the look on *your* face when you see our child's face for the first time. I want all of those things, but there's nothing I can really do to control whether or not I get to be around for any of it."

"I hate this." My lip quivered and I started crying again.

"I hate it, too." He kissed the top of my head.

Thank God my brain filter was working because it was on the tip of my tongue to yell at him that this was all his own fault. I wasn't going to go there. He knew what he'd done, and he'd taken responsibility for it. What he was standing to lose was bad enough without me guilting him further just to make myself feel better, even though I knew he would gladly take it if it meant I'd stop crying.

"Can we go to bed now?" I asked after a few minutes.

"Of course." Eric kissed my head again, and before I could stand up on my own, he scooped me up and carried me upstairs.

My less than exciting new morning (and sometimes early evening) tradition didn't get the memo that it was a bank holiday, and therefore, more than welcome to take the day off. Thankfully I was able to slip out of bed and get downstairs before the real fun got started. I didn't want to wake Eric if I didn't have to. After getting myself cleaned up and cursing the surging hormones that were making me feel like death warmed over, I went to the kitchen to start on breakfast. I opened my first ever can of decaf coffee, and I swear a little part of me died for it.

I was tired all the time, and it wouldn't be long before I'd be hauling around bowling balls in my bra and a small turkey in my belly, and I was going to have to give up coffee? Not. Fair. To me, decaf didn't really count as coffee. I got to work chopping veggies while sausage browned in a skillet on the stove. I'd promised Eric I'd make the frittata he loved so much. I just hoped I'd be able to hold it down. I had just finished cracking eggs into a mixing bowl when he came downstairs.

"It's barely nine, lover. How long have you been up?" Eric stopped to kiss the to of my head.

"Since a little after seven. Our little alien friend needed my attention, apparently." I grumbled.

"I didn't hear you."

"That's because I came down here. I wanted to let you sleep." What I didn't say was that I wanted him to enjoy a large, comfy bed while he still could in case he lost that privilege in two days.

"You didn't have to do that."

"I know. I wanted to." I shrugged. "Besides, it's not like there's much you can do to help. I just sort of have to ride it out. One of us should be sleeping in late."

"Anything I can do to help? It smells great in here. Work me up out of a dead sleep." Eric grinned at me as he peered into the bowl of mixed veggies and sausage.

"Yeah, you could go ninja on those eggs for me." I handed him a whisk.

There was a knock at the door, and I figured it was Amelia coming by to check on me since I'd had a small meltdown the night before. Eric got to work on the eggs while I went to get the door. I pulled my robe tight around me, expecting a cold gust of air to hit when I let Amelia into the house. I was surprised to find it wasn't Amelia at the door after all.

"Happy New Year, Detective." I smiled at the middle aged man standing on my doorstep.

"Same to you, Miss Stackhouse." He nodded respectfully.

"Would you like to come in?" I stepped back to let him in the house.

"Yes, thank you." He looked grim. That couldn't be good.

"Can I take your coat, get you some coffee?" I asked.

The detective removed his coat and handed it over to me for hanging in the closet. Whatever he had come to say was obviously important if he was taking off his coat. He followed me into the kitchen, and it wasn't until we got back that I remembered Eric was only wearing a pair of pajama bottoms. He was definitely working his ninja magic on those eggs, and I had no doubt they would be light and fluffy by the time he was finished with them.

I cleared my throat to get Eric's attention. He turned toward me and stopped what he was doing when he saw I wasn't alone. "Detective, what brings you here?" Eric set down the bowl he was holding.

"Um, Eric, why don't you go put a shirt on while I get the detective some coffee?" I suggested.

"Oh, right." Eric offered a lazy grin and then disappeared through the dining room.

"Do you take cream and sugar, Detective?" I asked as I poured coffee for him.

"Black."

"You're a die hard." I smiled as I handed over the mug and gestured to the kitchen table. "Please have a seat."

"Thank you." He sipped from the mug, and sat down. "Decaf, huh?"

I nodded and didn't see any harm in telling the detective my situation. "I found out I'm...well, Eric and I are expecting."

The detective's face lit up. "That's wonderful. Congratulations."

"Thank you." I smiled in return. It was nice to see someone excited for us. "So, did you have any luck last night?"

The smile on the detective's face faded, and a chill ran through me. "I think it's best if I wait for Eric to rejoin us before I get into all of that."

Shit. Shit. Shit. "Of course." My own smile faltered, and I went back to finishing getting breakfast together.

"Okay, I'm here. What's the word, Detective?" Eric took the casserole dish full of eggs and veggies from me to put in the oven.

"Well, from all reports there were no sightings of Bill Compton at the bar, Eric's property or at Sophie-Anne's house. We've had officers doing regular checks of your block overnight. The local police here didn't report seeing anyone else on this property except for your neighbors, and Eric's brother. We've been closely monitoring Mr. Compton's cell phone and credit cards to see if we can't get a lead on where he's gone, but so far he's managed to not use any of those things. That could mean a few things. He could be working with a prepaid phone and cash. He could have false identification already in place, and could be living somewhere under an assumed name we have yet to find. Or, maybe he's dead." The detective took another drink of his coffee.

I looked to Eric for a second before saying, "I'm a little confused. I thought Sophie-Anne was the target of the investigation since she was the one driving the car."

"She was." Detective Twinings nodded.

"Was?" Eric said it before I got the chance.

"Miss LeClerq's body was found in the woods off of Forest Preserve Drive in River Grove." Detective Twinings said sullenly.

"Oh, Jesus." I gasped, and turned toward Eric.

"She's dead?"

"Best we can tell she'd been there for about a week. She was strangled." The detective informed us.

I felt another wave of nausea hit me, and without a word, I bolted from the room. Interesting how Lorena had hung herself and now Sophie-Anne had been strangled to death. There was nothing left in my stomach for me to lose, but that didn't stop my body from trying to turn itself inside out. Eric appeared behind me, doing all the things he usually did when I felt sick. I refused to let myself think about how much I was going to miss him if the court ordered him to serve jail time. If I started thinking about that, I would never stop gagging and retching.

It took a few minutes for my body to settle itself. I rinsed my mouth out with water and wiped my face before going back to the kitchen. Detective Twinings was waiting patiently at the table, taking in the décor of the room and sipping his coffee.

"I'm sorry. My body is not really my own right now." I apologized.

"Don't worry about it. My wife had a horrible time of things when she was expecting our first born, too."

"You told him?" Eric glared at me.

"Eric, there's a psycho on the loose who has a bit of a crush on me. I thought it might be useful for the detective know there was more than just my life at stake."

"Sorry." He apologized.

"Is there anything we can do to help?" I turned my attention to the detective.

"I don't want you to think I suspect you have anything to do with Miss LeClerq's death, but it would be good if you could come down to the station and file a statement just for the record so we have your alibis in place."

Eric and I looked at each other. "Does someone thing we're involved?" Eric asked.

"No. Those of us working this case, including the assistant district attorney, are convinced this is all Bill Compton's doing from the very beginning. We just don't have the necessary evidence to file charges. However, since everyone involved in the car accident survived, it would be easy for a defense attorney to claim you were working together to get revenge on Miss LeClerq, and you framed Mr. Compton to take the fall."

"Are you serious?" I almost shouted.

"It's amazing what a defense attorney will do to save his client."

"Unbelievable." I shook my head.

"Don't worry, Detective, we'll file whatever paperwork you need from us. My parents were in town for a week, and we were with them, my brother and my business partner, Pam, for Christmas. Sookie and I didn't even leave the house that day."

"I believe you. Like I said, this is just a formality." The detective stood up.

"Detective, can I ask you something?" I stepped away from Eric.

"Sure."

"Eric's sentencing is the day after tomorrow." I didn't look back at Eric when he made a noise of protest. "I was wondering what you think the odds are of him serving any time for what happened."

Detective Twinings ran a hand through his thinning hair and blew out a deep breath. "Truthfully, I don't know. Judge Brigant is a fair judge, and he tends to let the punishment fit the crime. Because Eric was very cooperative and has nothing more serious than a speeding ticket on his record, I'm inclined to think he'll be looking at a fine, anger management classes, probation and maybe some community service."

"So you don't think he'll end up in jail?" My eyes welled with tears while Eric's hands settled on my shoulders.

"No, I don't think he will, but that's up to Judge Brigant to decide."

"I understand." I wanted to believe that everyone was right, and that Eric was going to "get off easy" for what he'd done.

"Detective, if there's anything else we can do, please let us know." Eric said as we walked the officer to the door.

"I surely will. You two enjoy the holiday now." Detective Twinings slipped on his coat, and then he was gone.

Eric locked the door behind him. I was leaning against the wall with a dazed look on my face to match my mood. When was this shit going to end? I couldn't believe Sophie-Anne was dead. Not that I'd ever been a fan of hers in any capacity, but even when I was nursing my broken ribs did I wish death on her. It blew my mind that I ever could have thought Bill Compton was a nice guy. How could he seem so normal and be capable of such horrible things?

And why, if what Detective Twinings was insinuating was true, did he kill Sophie-Anne? Did she know too much? Had she outlived her usefulness? Or was it part of his plan to kill her all along? Was he the reason the car accident had happened in the first place? It was easy to think Sophie-Anne had done it because with me out of the way, she probably thought she'd get a shot at Eric. Maybe Bill had promised a way to make that happen for her. I wouldn't put it past him.

"He killed Lorena and the baby, didn't he?" I looked to Eric, who had pressed his lips together.

"Looks that way." Eric nodded slowly.

I slumped against the wall, my knees going a bit weak under me. "I can't believe this."

"It's going to be okay, Sookie." Eric came over and wrapped me in his arms.

"I don't know if it is, Eric." I hugged him back and just concentrated on breathing in his scent.

I knew as long as I had him with me, I'd be fine. But how much longer would I have him?

Oh hai, there! \*waves\* Dramatic? You betcha. What can I say? I thrive on a little drama. But hey, on a good note, we got some answers here. We know what the big bad is. The question is, how long will it take before that little weasel is found? Since I'm on such a roll with this story (seriously, the output has been EPIC, as of late), I'm offering teasers in exchange for reviews with this chapter. So click on that pretty blue button, and let me know what you think if you can't wait for a sneak peek at what's to come. BTW, it's Eric's sentencing. Happy Friday, baby birds! \*Snoopy dance\*

**Chapter 45: Long Way Down**

Baby birds, I am SO SORRY it took me so long to get this up for you! My damn modem went in the crapper and lame-o Comcast couldn't get a tech out here to give me a new one until today. How lame is that shizz? So my apologies to those of who you reviewed and never got your teaser. It was circumstances beyond my control. On the bright side, I was quite productive over the weekend and I am half way through chapter 48. Woot! Woot! Lots of fun stuff on the horizon.

A quick thanks to a wonderful twitter friend who provided some wonderful encouragement to me at about 2 Saturday morning when I was complaining about writing lemons. I've been told by a few in the last week that I make it look easy. I take that as a great compliment, because no matter how many I write, it's still something I struggle with. The temptation to go through my highlight reel and copy and paste something was beyond strong. But, you all deserve better than that. The story deserves better than that. And thanks to a shot in the arm from the new chapter of The Bitch and the Hellcat by **Zigster** Saturday morning, my motivation returned to me 100 fold. So you have the lovely ladies at twitter, and the brilliant mind of **Zigster** to thank for this chapter.

Chapter Forty-Five: Long Way Down

The night before my sentencing was spent with me mostly pacing the house. I'd managed to keep myself in bed long enough for Sookie to fall asleep, but I couldn't stay there next to her. I was worried all of my tossing and turning would wake her up, and she needed her rest. I hated that we were going through this. I tried to keep a positive outlook. Everyone who had an opinion about our situation said the same thing. Since I was a first time offender, I wasn't likely to have to spend any time in jail. I sincerely hoped Judge Brigant was in a merciful mood because I knew there was no way I'd be able to hold it together if Sookie lost it.

I got down on the living room floor and positioned myself so my head was underneath the Christmas tree. Johan and I used to do that all the time when we were kids. We'd lay there for hours watching the lights chase each other around the tree. We outgrew by the time we were about seven, but we always looked forward to it. We'd lay there speaking our own little twin language Mom could never understand, and just watch the lights. I got so absorbed in my memories that I didn't hear Sookie until she was laying down next to me.

"What are you doing up?" I reached for her hand.

"I was going to ask you the same thing." She laced her fingers with mine.

"I can't sleep, and I didn't want to keep you up. You need your rest."

"Yes, I do, but I need you more. Talk to me. Tell me what's going on in that head of yours."

"Nothing we haven't already talked about, or thought about a thousand times in the last few days."

Sookie sighed and said, "Eric, I'm as worried as you are, but it's out of our hands. You picking up insomnia isn't going to change anything, and if this is the last night we get to spend together for a while, I don't want to spend it on the living room floor waiting for sap to drop on my face."

I laughed quietly beside her. "You raise excellent points, Miss Stackhouse."

"I know. Can we please get up now?" Sookie asked as if she'd been laying on the floor for hours instead of minutes.

"Yeah, we can get up now." I got up first, and then offered a hand to pull her up.

She tucked herself into my side and we went back to bed together. I climbed into bed first so I didn't see it when Sookie stripped off her nightgown behind me. When I turned around, though, she was naked. It was definitely a better way to spend the night than laying under the tree. She climbed into bed beside me and pulled me on top of her. I could tell by the look in her eyes there were all sorts of things she wanted to say, but she didn't say any of them. We laid there just looking at each other for a little bit, and I wanted to make sure I had every line, spot or crease on her face memorized. I wanted something to focus on when I fell asleep at night on the chance I would be doing it alone.

"So are you just going to lay there, or are you going to kiss me?" Sookie poked me in the ribs.

We spent the rest of the night entangled in one another, our bodies giving life to all of the feelings and thoughts we were both experiencing, before finally drifting off a few hours later into a deep sleep. I was scheduled to appear in court at ten. The alarm went off at seven thirty, but Sookie's wakeup call came before that. Despite her protests, I followed her into the bathroom and rubbed her back while she vomited.

"Bet you won't miss this." Sookie tried to smile at me with a tear-stained face.

"Just you, lover." I kissed the corners of her mouth. Her breath caught in her throat, and I knew she was about to start crying for other reasons. "No more tears. It's out of our hands now, remember?"

Sookie steeled her will and nodded with determination. "No more tears."

"That's my girl. Now how about we get in the shower, and we can try out one of those drop the soap games I hear are all the rage in prison." I winked at her.

She looked positively horrified for a second before she dissolved into a fit of giggles. It never ceased to amaze me how strong she could be. Sookie was nothing if not a fighter. It dawned on me then that she would be okay without me. She might not be happy, and I knew it wasn't what she would choose for herself, but she would be okay. Out of nowhere she grabbed my face with both hands and looked deep into my eyes.

"Don't look at me like that." She commanded.

"Like what?"

"Like this is goodbye."

"It's not." I assured her.

"Damn right it's not." And with that, she pulled my face to hers and kissed me, morning sickness breath be damned.

I somehow got the water started for the shower before she pushed me to sit on the closed lid of the toilet. She straddled my lap while we waited for the water to warm up. I let my fingers graze her breasts, but any firmer pressure was a no-go for her. One hand moved around to her back to pull her closer, while the other slipped between her legs. Just as I had spent the night before memorizing the lines of her face, I was now trying to commit the sounds she made to memory. They were predictable, but wonderfully so.

She pressed her forehead to mine and sucked her bottom lip into her mouth as her breathing became more ragged. I could feel the thundering her of heart against my chest. I knew all the right places to touch her to make those moans louder, and her back arch further. She breathed my name against my lips before sinking her fingers into my hair, and tilting my head the way she wanted it so she could kiss me. Her hips bucked against my hand, trying to increase the friction she needed in order to find her release. Just when she got right to the edge, I pulled back.

"Why'd you stop?" Her eyes were frantic.

"Shower's ready." I winked at her.

She climbed off my lap and into the tub. I watched the steamy hot water roll down her body, matting her hair to her shoulders and back. I expected her to turn around to face me so I could pin her against the wall as I almost always did. I enjoyed the feeling of her body being wrapped around mine. I liked feeling her muscles twitch and tighten the closer she got to her finish. I liked her breath on my neck, and her voice in my ear. I liked feeling her heartbeat against my chest. She bent forward, bracing her hands against the wall as she offered herself to me.

Sliding inside her felt like a homecoming. My hands held her hips while my own moved slowly back and forth against her. I didn't want it to end too quickly. I tried not to think of this as the last time, but I knew we were both feeling it. I watched drops of water fall into her tan back as my thrusts shook her body. Her moans and whimpers kept at an even pace, and the tightening of her walls around me brought my hand around in front of her to rub her to release.

I pulled out of her and turned her around. Her eyes were wild, and without having to say anything, her arms slid up around my neck. I lifted her easily, her legs hitching up around my waist as her back hit a familiar spot against the wall. One arm circled her waist to hold her to me while the other braced against the cool tile wall. She slid down onto me, and the look of determination in her eyes was unexpected. Her feet pushed me deeper inside her while her hips rocked away from the wall to meet the thrust. She leaned forward and nibbled my bottom lip before sucking it into her mouth.

Our tongues battled for dominance in a kiss that was hungry and demanding. Just as I was starting to feel myself get light headed from a lack of oxygen, Sookie just barely broke the kiss. Her eyes met mine while her fingernails dug into my shoulders.

"Fuck me." She breathed against my mouth. I growled at her, making her giggle, and just like that any tone of mourning that had been hanging over us disappeared.

The simple sound of her laugh made everything feel better. I realized then that *that* was the sound I should be preserving for when life got dark. I figured the only sound that would ever trump that one would be the sound of our children laughing. Yes, I said children because I was sure there would be more than one. Not right away, but eventually. My mind drifted into the future, and I could so clearly see the two of us together, and I wondered if she was thinking those same thoughts as my body pounded itself against hers.

"Mmm, watch me." She moaned, her voice bringing me back to the present to watch one of her hands settle between us so she could bring herself to her next release.

The gasps and pants gave way to cries before becoming screams when she exploded. The fierce clenching of her walls around me was enough to make my knees buckle when I roared with my own orgasm. Her legs were locked around my waist, and I knew it would be a minute before she relaxed. I was reluctant to pull out of her but time was the enemy. Slowly, almost regretfully so, she slid down my body and went after the bottle of body wash she loved so much. It smelled like milk and honey and made her skin taste ridiculously good. I took the bottle from her and poured some of the soap in my hand before turning her around to lather up her back and shoulders.

"Be careful, or we'll be late for court." Sookie said over her shoulder.

"I promise to behave myself. I bent and kissed her neck on a spot I knew would make her squirm.

"Careful, Northman." She wiggled against me.

Damn if I didn't momentarily consider skipping court. Making love to Sookie in the shower for hours on end was far more appealing. Still, we managed to get our shit together and wash up. I went off to make us breakfast, even though she protested about eating. She figured if things didn't go our way, she was likely to make herself sick. I reminded her she had a baby inside her that needed her to eat and be healthy, and so for the sake of that child, she agreed to scrambled eggs and toast.

I was scrambling the eggs while Sookie was blow drying her hair when there was a knock at the front door. A peek out the kitchen window told me it was Pam and Johan outside. Amelia and Tray would be meeting us at the courthouse, along with several of the bar employees who had not only witnessed the fight I'd had with Bill, but also the night Bill had punched Johan the previous fall. Johan hadn't bothered to file charges at that point since he figured Bill was just some little piss ant who wouldn't do any damage. Oh, how things had changed since then.

I opened the front door for them but quickly went back to the stove. Pam's heels thundered against the floor as she walked into the kitchen. "Well, well, aren't you domestic this morning?"

"Enjoy it while you can, Pam." I said as I stirred the pan full of eggs.

"Smells good in here, bror." Johan helped himself to coffee.

"That's decaf." I warned him, earning me an arched eyebrow.

"Since when does Sookie drink decaf?" Fuck. Johan was well aware of Sookie's fits of rage if there was no coffee in the morning.

"It's just something she's trying out." I said weakly.

"I call bullshit, lillebror. Out with it." Johan gave me that 'I'm your twin so don't even think about bullshitting me' look, and I knew that if I didn't spill the beans, he'd go after Sookie.

"Can it wait until Sookie comes out of the bathroom?"

Johan looked me up and down before nodding his ascent. I glared over at Pam who was grinning at me. She knew. I knew she knew. How the hell did she know? Sure she was observant, but the look on her face didn't show any signs of surprise, suggesting she'd had time to get used to the idea.

"Did you two eat this morning?"

"We're going to brunch afterward. You and Sookie should join us." Pam suggested.

"Uh, assuming I'm able to walk out of the courthouse a free man, Sookie and I have other plans for how to spend the day." I plated up the eggs I'd made and poured a cup of coffee for Sookie as her footsteps came toward the kitchen.

"Good morning." She said cheerfully as she entered the room.

"What's with the decaf?" Johan wasn't wasting any time.

"The decaf?" Sookie could play a dumb blonde like nobody's business when she wanted to.

"The coffee." Johan gave her a pointed stare.

Sookie wasn't a good on-the-spot liar, but thankfully Pam was ready with a distraction. Sookie and I were definitely going to have to talk about this on the way to the courthouse. Pam started blathering on about finding footage from the security tapes of the night Bill punched Johan. She had turned copies over to my lawyer, although no one was sure what good they were going to do.

"Have the police come any closer to finding that bunny boiler?" Pam asked, effectively slamming the door shut on the coffee questions.

"Not that we know of. We've had cops patrolling around the house at regular intervals. They've been keeping an eye on Tray and Amelia's place, too, just to be on the safe side." Sookie answered.

"You know, you'd think Bill would want to keep Amelia alive since she's the only witness to the accident. She can definitively say she saw Sophie-Anne behind the wheel of the car. We know Bill and Sophie-Anne were together earlier that night, but we don't know if they stuck together after they were tossed out of the bar." Johan grabbed a piece of toast and covered it in blackberry jam Sookie's Gran had shipped up to us a few weeks before.

Sookie and I had developed a theory as to what had really happened, and neither of us were under the impression the accident was really an accident. Although, no one had ever really believed it was. Not that hit and runs didn't happen all the time, it was just too suspicious with Bill and Sookie turning up at the bar like they did. Because of her obsession with me, it made sense for Sophie-Anne to do what she'd done. Framing Lorena had been a stroke of genius, in all honesty. Lorena was a scorned woman who'd lost her husband to a woman that didn't want him. Of course, Lorena didn't know anything about that. All she knew was what Bill told her, and according to him, Sookie was the great love of his life. Bunny boiler indeed.

We continued to talk about everything that had happened, trading theories and ideas until we had to leave. Pam and Johan headed out first. I helped Sookie into her coat while she put on her shoes. I locked up the house behind us, and took one last look over my shoulder before heading toward her car. Her hand tugging me in a different direction stopped me.

"Let's take the Corvette." She winked at me.

"Are you sure?" I knew she hated riding in it in the winter, and the ground was slick with ice.

"Yeah. I know how much it means to you, and besides, Johan can drive it back if necessary."

"*Pam* can drive it back, and in the spring, I'm teaching you how to drive manually." I told her. I knew if I let Johan drive the car back he'd stop at the nearest vacant lot to do God knows what.

"You know, a Corvette isn't exactly a family car." Sookie pointed out once we were both sitting inside it.

"One thing at a time there, champ." I said as I pulled away from the curb. "For the record, there's no way in hell I'm driving a mini-van."

Sookie laughed and said, "I never said anything about a mini-van, but a two-seater isn't going to work."

"You want me to sell the Corvette?"

"I didn't say that either. I *do* like this car. It's just not going to be convenient for us as a family."

"I think we should table this discussion until after court." I looked over at her, and she reluctantly nodded her agreement. "So, when were you going to tell me you told Pam about the baby?"

"*She told you?*" Sookie just about screeched.

"Actually, *you* just did." I squeezed her knee. Sookie sputtered for a second before coming up with any sort of a response I could understand.

"I didn't mean to tell her. She figured it out on her own after what happened at Christmas, and she just caught me off guard at the bar when she brought it up and-"

"Sookie, it's okay."

"I'm sorry. I should have told you she knew. It just slipped my mind with everything else. I made her swear not to say anything to Johan."

"He'll figure it out sooner or later." I sighed.

"Well, with any luck, he won't have to, and we can tell him together." Sookie leaned over and rested her head on my shoulder.

I could feel Sookie's eyes trained on the back of my head while we waited for court to be called to order. When it was, everyone stood, and Judge Brigant came into the room. Bill Compton was nowhere to be seen. Since I'd already entered a guilty plea, the charges against me wouldn't be dropped. However, since Bill was wanted in connection with Sophie-Anne's death, it was likely the judge would go easy on me.

Judge Brigant took his seat and asked the prosecutor where Bill was. "Your Honor, the police have been searching for Mr. Compton. It appears as though he's gone missing."

"I heard." Judge Brigant didn't look happy, but then no one in the room did. After taking a deep breath, the judge looked right at me. "Mr. Northman, I reviewed all of the statements taken, along with the evidence entered by both attorney's. Do you wish to maintain your plea?"

The easy way out would have been to change my mind, and try to push the blame solely onto Bill. Part of me said I was crazy not to do just that, but I knew deep down my reasons for attacking him had very little to do with Bill. The fact that he was a total nut job. I might have taken a swing at him, but it would have ended there. I had gone above and beyond that, and for reasons that had nothing to do with the threat he posed to Sookie. Scarier still was the idea that if he had gotten his hands on her that night was he wouldn't have just hurt her, but our child as well. If he ever touched her again, I wasn't sure I'd be able to stop myself from going as far as Sookie had been afraid I would have gone that night.

"Yes, sir, I do." I nodded respectfully, which surprised the judge.

Judge Brigant looked to the prosecutor and said, "Mr. Lattesta, do the People have a recommendation on this case?"

"Your Honor, given the circumstances of this case, and the fact that Mr. Northman has strong ties to the community, we feel that the maximum fine, anger management and a year's probation is sufficient punishment." Mr. Lattesta said as he buttoned his suit jacket.

"I see. Mr. Northman, do you have anything to say before I give my sentence?"

I looked to Mr. Cataliades to my right, and then behind me to Sookie, who gave me an encouraging nod. I turned to face the judge. I didn't know quite how to phrase everything I'd learned in the last few weeks. I didn't think explaining my history with my dead sister and the budding romance between my brother and business partner would interest him. I didn't want to make excuses for what I'd done. I knew the judge wanted to hear I was sorry for what I'd done, but the only thing I was sorry for was the way Sookie had suffered because of it all. She ended up the biggest victim in all of this, and it wasn't fair to her. I shook my head slightly, keeping my eyes down.

Judge Brigant blew out a deep breath, and I looked up in time to see him rub his eyes. "Mr. Northman, please stand up." I did as he asked before he continued. "I've given this a lot of thought. Generally, when trying to reach a sentence, I attempt to see the situation from the defendant's point of view. After reviewing your statement, along with the tapes of the incident, I find myself a bit torn. Your record is spotless. You've been a role model to the community, as well as to untold thousands of young people due to your earlier days as an athlete. I can certainly sympathize with an instinct to protect what you love when you sense it's in danger. Given the recent discovery of Miss LeClerq's body, it would certainly seem Mr. Compton poses the greater threat to society. I'm inclined to agree with Mr. Lattesta's recommendation for sentencing."

I breathed a sigh of relief, and I heard a quiet sob escape Sookie from behind me. "Thank you, your Honor."

"I'm not finished yet." Judge Brigant leaned forward in his seat. "Start with what is right rather than what is acceptable. Franz Kafka said that once. In reviewing your case, I have come to realize you were following that train of thought. You did what you believed to be the proper thing in that moment. Simply by being on the property, Mr. Compton was trespassing. Still, by your own admission, your actions out of control. It is therefore, that this court accepts your plea of guilty and hereby sentences you to sixty days probation, a fine of $2,500.00, and 12 weeks of anger management classes. Court is adjourned." Judge Brigant slammed his gavel down.

"All rise." The bailiff called out as the judge stood to leave the room.

My knees nearly gave out under me. I looked to Mr. Cataliades. "Is that it? It's over?"

The lawyer grinned at me and said, "Yes, it's over. Congratulations, Mr. Northman."

I let out a breath I didn't know I was holding, and before I knew it, I had Sookie swept up in my arms. She was crying against my neck, squeezing me as tightly as she could. When she finally loosened her grip a little, I set her down so I could hug my twin and Pam. Never in my life had a felt such relief. My life wasn't over. Somewhere, someone was looking for me. I wanted to think maybe it was my sister working some magic as a guardian angel, but that seemed a little crazy.

"Let's get out o f here." Sookie tucked herself against me.

"Yes, please." I wrapped an arm around her shoulders as we started out of the courtroom.

To say my parents were relieved when I called them to tell them the news would be the understatement of the year. The fact that Mom didn't pass out was a bit shocking to me. For a minute, I thought I was going to lose her, she was sobbing so hard. Dad promised they'd call back later when Mom composed herself. Amelia was able to convince Sookie to put off our plans to go home and spend the rest of the day alone together long enough for the six of us to go have a celebratory drink together. We figured we might as well tell our four closest friends Sookie was pregnant at the same time.

We were headed down First Avenue, headed back toward Franklin Park from Maywood. Amelia, Tray, Pam and Johan had a head start, since Sookie and I had stayed behind to call my parents. A detour at North Avenue had me turning onto Thatcher, and driving into a wooded area. Sookie leaned over and pointed to turn-in for the woods.

"Turn there." She whispered in my ear, sending a chill up my spine.

I did what she asked, and parked the car at the far end of the empty lot. A thick line of trees kept us hidden from the road in front of us. We were definitely in a secluded spot. I didn't turn the car off since it was far too cold outside to be without heat for very long. Sookie took off her seatbelt and then peeled off her coat.

"What are you doing?" I had a feeling I knew what was coming, but I didn't want to be a presumptuous bastard.

"If memory serves, I made you a promise while we were in Louisiana." Sookie managed to climb into my lap before grabbing my hands and stashing them up her skirt.

"Lover, you're not wearing underwear." Instant hard-on. Holy hell.

"I know." She leaned forward and started to loosen my tie.

"You know, if this is how you reward me, I may have to get arrested more often." I groaned when my fingers got between her legs and felt how wet she was. Jesus, she'd planned this all out. I suddenly wished I had the engagement ring with me. What the fuck was I waiting for?

"Next time I won't be so nice." She nibbled on my neck and unzipped my pants, before teasingly stroking my erection.

"Good. I kind of like your dark side." I pulled her mouth to mine, and immediately sought entrance to it with my tongue, which she easily gave me.

Our tongues were still battling for dominance over one anothers when she lifted her hips and slid herself down onto me. She was hot and wet, and that feeling of being home filled me again. Her hips rocked against mine hard and fast. We were definitely kicking off our celebration with a bang. With both of us being so fired up, it didn't take long for us to find our release. Her hand slapped against the window when she came, her screams filling the car.

Sookie made the mistake of falling backward, and the horn sounded, scaring both of us. I pulled her forward, both of us laughing through our post-orgasmic haze. My eyes searched hers, and I cupped her face in my hands.

"Thank you."

"Oh, no, Mr. Northman, thank you." She leaned forward to kiss me.

"I didn't mean that." I said once she pulled back a little. "I meant for sticking with me, and for not running away when you could have."

"Well, I ran a little bit."

"No, you didn't. You took some time to decide what you wanted, and I don't know what the right words are to say so you know how happy I am that you came back to me. I love you, Sookie Stackhouse, and I love what's waiting for us in the future."

A tear slipped from her eye, and I caught it with my thumb. "I love you, too." She kissed me once more, and I was seriously thinking about a second round with her when my cell phone rang. She pulled back and said, "You should get that."

I dug my phone out of my jacket pocket. It was a number I didn't recognize, but I answered the call anyway. "Eric Northman."

Sookie, set on being a temptress, leaned forward and started nibbling on my neck again. Apparently she was interested in a second round herself.

"Mr. Northman, this is Stan Davis." It was the head of the board of education. "How are you today?"

"Fine, Mr. Davis. What can I do for you?" This was the call I had been waiting for. I knew there would be a hearing of some sort to determine whether or not I would be returning to my teaching position at the high school.

"It's been brought to our attention that you were recently charged with a violent offense. Today was your sentencing, if I'm not mistaken."

"No, sir, you're not."

"Have you seen the judge?"

"Yes, I have." I relayed my sentence to Mr. Davis.

"Mr. Northman, the board would like a closed session meeting with you tomorrow afternoon at one o'clock at the administration office. Can you make yourself available?"

"Yes, of course I can."

"Good. We'll see you then." Mr. Davis hung up before I could say goodbye.

"Who was that?" Sookie came up for air with that starry look in her eyes.

"That was the school board. They want to see me tomorrow." I put my phone back in my jacket.

Sookie straightened up, tension furrowing her brows. "Did they say anything?"

"Mr. Davis told me to be at the administration office tomorrow afternoon at one." I relayed to her. I could see the nerves settling in her eyes. "Sookie, it's going to be okay. Even if I don't get to go back to teaching, things are going to be okay. I have you. That's all I care about."

She nodded, but I could tell she wanted to argue. I was pulling her lips to mine when my phone rang again. Pam. We both sighed, knowing our time was up.

"We'll continue this later, lover. You have my word."

"Yes, we certainly will." She agreed before climbing off my lap, and sliding back into her own seat.

I watched as she produced a pair of lacy black panties from her purse and contorted her body to get them on. The only thing I could think of was how much I was going to enjoy tearing them off of her later.

Well, well, would you look at that? Lots of lemony goodness *and* some loose ends tied up. Is everyone happy with the sentence Eric got? I don't know enough about the legal profession to know if the charges against Eric should be dropped. I wanted to research it, but my stupid internet went down. It was suggested in just about every review I got that the charges should be dropped if Bill didn't appear. That made sense to me, but then I figured since Eric entered a guilty plea, that might be a factor in whether or not Bill showing up would matter. So, if anyone out there is in law enforcement and would care to educate me, I'd be happy to hear about it.

If you're really super nice to me, I might post double since I didn't get any hate mail for making you wait. Later baby birds!

**Chapter 46: Just Like Heaven**

Real quick before I forget, **kjwrit** and I posted the first chapter of our first collaborative story, What The Fae?. It's a crossover that drops SVM!Sookie in the TB!verse and TB!Sookie in the SVM!verse. I'm writing SVM!Sookie, and Kacy's writing TB!Sookie. For those that were confused, it's basically two stories in one. There are two Erics and two Sookies. They're in different dimensions. Anyone who watched Buffy will not be unfamiliar with the alternate realm concept. It's an interesting character study to see how these two very different Sookies react to the different worlds they've been dropped into. And for me, the fun part will be getting to play with what was the season finale of True Blood. Homegirl has a theory as to how we're going to get Amnesia!Eric next year, and I'll be rolling it out in this story. Boo for having to wait 9 months to find out if I'm right. We'll be posting one chapter a week, so if you haven't already, put us on author alert. We can be found under the pen name **MKayProductions**, or by going to either of our profile pages and looking at our favorite authors.

And now back to our regularly scheduled programming...

Chapter Forty-Six: Just Like Heaven

We were headed toward the bar when another round of morning sickness hit. Eric was able to pull over before a I redecorated the interior of the Corvette. He called Pam to tell her I wasn't feeling well, and we ended up going home. I got out of the dress I'd worn for court and put on a nightgown. I wasn't planning to leave the house again for the rest of the day.

Eric got out of his suit and then we curled up in bed to call my parents together to let them know the outcome of Eric's sentencing. Eric's hand settled on my stomach, stroking it gently as I talked to my Mom on speakerphone. I wanted to tell her I was pregnant. It was getting harder and harder to keep the knowledge to myself, and not telling my Mom was especially hard. I'd felt bad enough for lying to her while I was in Louisiana for Christmas. I'd had the chance to tell her my last night there, and I hadn't. The first person to know was Tara, and that was only because she was with me when I took the test.

I'd resolved that the next person to know would be Eric. I didn't want him to be fifth on a long list of people to tell. But now that he knew, we had plans to make. I knew my Mom would ask if having a baby meant Eric had asked me to marry him, and I wasn't prepared to go into the list of reasons why we were going to hold off on that. Mom wasn't terribly old fashioned when it came to things like this, but then again, it was never her daughter she was referencing when she talked about unwed mothers.

After assuring her we were doing well and we'd let her know what happened with the school board the next day, I left a voice mail for Jason to let him know what happened. By the time we finished making all of the necessary phone calls, it was lunchtime. Eric got up to let Jeter outside while I made us grilled cheese sandwiches and soup. We settled in the living room to eat and watch a movie together. It wasn't long after we finished eating that we fell asleep on the couch with Jeter sleeping on the floor in front of us.

I was woken up by leg cramps that I hoped were just a fluke, and not something caused by the pregnancy. It was difficult to even stand up, but it was worse when I stayed seated. I walked around the house for a little while. The creaking of floorboards in the old house woke Eric. I was looking right at him when his eyes opened.

"You okay?" He asked sleepily, rubbing his eyes as he stretched out on the couch.

"Leg cramps." I stopped near the big picture window in the living room and peered outside.

The sky had darkened, and all I could think was house grateful I was winter was already half over. It was just barely three o'clock, but the sky was already almost as dark as I would expect it to be at eight o'clock in the summer. I turned on the Christmas tree, knowing we would only have it for another day or two before we had to take it down. The house was going to look a little empty without it, and I was going to miss the smell of pine.

"So I've been meaning to ask you something." I said as I went back to the couch to sit down next to him.

"Shoot." He wrapped his arm around me to pull me closer.

"Why didn't you tell me about the plans you were making with Pam to take over the bar?"

"She told you about that?"

"It just sort of came up on New Year's Eve. I'm not really upset about it, but it's just weird that you haven't mentioned it."

"We've had other things on our minds that were more important than that."

"Okay, well, I think we should talk about it. If things don't work out with the school board tomorrow, is taking over the bar something you really want to do? I know it was important to you because it was important to Pam, but I never really got the feeling it was what you wanted your life to be." I curled my legs up under my nightgown to keep them warm.

"I honestly don't know, Sookie. The bar is a good business, and if I can have a reliable manager in place, it will keep me free most nights to be at home with you once the baby comes. I guess the bigger question is whether or not you're going to want to go back to work when the school year starts next fall."

"My gut says yes, but I don't think I'm going to know for sure until after the baby is born. I guess we should be planning for the possibility I might not. Is that going to be possible for us? Babies are expensive, and even though the house is paid off-"

"Your house is paid off?" Eric arched an eyebrow at me.

I sighed and said, "Copely bought both properties because he didn't want some weirdo sharing a common wall with Amelia. The deeds were originally in her name. When I moved in, she transferred ownership of my house to me. So essentially, Copely Carmichael bought me a house. I paid the property taxes and the utilities, but I didn't pay a dime for the house itself."

"Holy shit." Eric said under his breath.

"Yeah, exactly. Do you have any idea what the market value is on the house?"

Eric's brows furrowed together in thought. I assumed he was trying to crunch some numbers in his head. When he came up with a number that seemed about right to him, his eyes widened. "Damn."

"You can say that again. The houses weren't cheap. I don't know if he knows I'm listed as the property owner on the house, but he's got one hell of a surprise coming to him if he ever finds out." I couldn't help but laugh. "So if we're going to move into my house, then what do you want to do with this place? Do you want to sublet it, or do you want to sell it?"

"I don't know. Selling it would probably be best, but I don't know how easy that'll be with the market right now." Eric sighed.

"We have time to figure it out." I laced my fingers with his. "I was thinking maybe we'd move over spring break week. That way we'll be settled before I'm too big to do much of anything but complain."

"I won't need to bring much with me."

"Your bed." I grinned up at him, and he grinned right back.

"My bed, huh?"

"Yep, your bed. It's bigger, and I'm used to it now."

"We could sleep closer together in *your* bed." Eric wiggled his eyebrows at me.

"Eric, the only way we could sleep any closer together than we do now is if we were surgically attached." I laughed against his chest.

"Are you complaining?"

"Hell no." I shifted on the couch so my leg was slung over his like it was when I slept. "I like waking up in the middle of the night with your arm draped over me, or being able to feel your heartbeat on my back. It's comforting."

"Good." He kissed my forehead.

"Although, it's going to have to change when the baby comes."

"Lover, I imagine a lot of things will change when the baby comes."

"Does it scare you?"

"The unknown? Yeah, sure. I don't have tons of experience with babies myself, obviously, so this is going to be a learning on the job sort of deal for me."

"Well, I used to babysit all the time when I was younger, and then there was Hunter."

"So you're a baby expert then?"

"Hardly." I laughed quietly. "The good thing is, I work with plenty of women who've already been through it. Besides, what are the odds your Mom isn't going to be here every chance she gets to dote on the baby anyway?"

"I would be shocked if she didn't try to talk us into moving to California to be closer to them."

"Oh that could be fun!" I straddled his lap with a big grin on my face. He looked at me like I was insane. "Just think about it! We could live next door, or across the street. Your Mom could be there all the time, and-"

"And I could take a long walk into the ocean and just keep going." Eric finished for me.

"She's not that bad!"

"I'll remember that when you need a hearing aid after she damages your hearing when she finds out you're pregnant."

"You're terrible." I shook my head slowly.

"And you, my love, underestimate Stella Northman's desire to be a grandmother."

"You know, I'm kind of surprised she didn't say anything about the possibility of me being pregnant when I kept getting sick."

"Oh, I'm sure she talked Dad's ear off about it all the way to Christmas Eve mass. I bet she prayed on it, too."

"Eric, is it really so bad that she wants to have grandchildren? Don't you want that someday, too?"

"Sure I do, but I'm never going to pressure our kid into having a child of their own just to make me happy."

"Did you ever stop to think that maybe, just maybe, she wants you to have children because she knows how happy she was to have hers?"

I could tell by the look on his face he hadn't given that much thought. His large hand ran up my arm to the back of my neck and pulled me closer. Our noses were almost touching, and our eyes were set on one anothers. I was completely prepared to kiss him, but instead I found my nightgown being pulled up over my head.

"It's a little cold in here, you know?" I arched an eyebrow at Eric.

He ignored my complaint for the moment, and let his eyes focus on my stomach. "It's amazing to think there is a tiny person in there."

"I have to call my doctor in the morning and make an appointment. You want to come with me?"

"Of course."

"Good." I grabbed his hands and held them tightly. "I know this wasn't planned and the timing is all wrong, but I'm really exited about this, and to be perfectly honest, I don't think I'd be so okay with it if I weren't doing this with you."

"You know, I feel the same way." Eric grinned, and then pulled me in to kiss him.

Since the meeting was closed session, I couldn't go in to support Eric. I had no choice but to wait in the hall, and it felt like I'd been summoned to the principal's office for being a lookout while my best friend went to the bathroom to sneak a cigarette between classes. Whatever was decided in that room was going to change both of our lives. Not having him at school with me all day was going to suck, no doubt about it.

I kept checking my watch to see how much time ticked by, and it was moving insanely slow. It felt like I'd been sitting there for hours, when it had only been about twenty minutes. Eric seemed torn about whether or not he wanted to return to teaching. I know he loved coaching and he wanted the chance to see the season through. On the other hand, taking on the bar full-time was something I knew he was considering, at the very least, and if Pam was serious about moving to Sweden it was going to be a full-time job for Eric just like it was for her. Working two full-time jobs with a pregnant girlfriend and a psycho on the loose was more stress than any one person should have to take on all at one time.

There had been a last minute cancellation at my doctor's office, so we had a five o'clock appointment to find out what was what. I didn't have any reason to think the baby was unhealthy, although I was a bit worried that having taken birth control pills while I was pregnant may have done some harm. I'd tried to do some research on the internet, but there were conflicting reports from various sources on the subject. I trusted Dr. Ludwig to give me the bottom line. Mostly, I was excited about the prospect of hearing the baby's heartbeat.

I strained to hear anything that might give me an indication of what the board's decision might be. Obviously, the easiest thing would be if Eric was maybe suspended for a while, or was assigned to additional counseling. I knew he would do it, and without complaint, if they made it a requirement. Wanting him to remain a teacher was also a bit selfish on my part because I liked having him so close to me all the time. No matter how hard I tried, I couldn't hear a peep coming out of that room.

When the silence got to be too much, I started pacing the room. All of the sitting and the silence were driving me crazy. I berated myself for not bringing a book to read, or for just waiting at home like Eric had suggested. I'd insisted on being there when he got done with the meeting, thinking I would at least be able to overhear what was happening. I was suddenly kicking myself for not staying home. I could have been finding ways to keep myself busy. The counters were in need of a good scrubbing. The kitchen windows needed cleaning. The living room needed to be vacuumed. I had a whole list of things in my head I could have been doing to keep my mind off of what was happening in the room to my right.

The door opened suddenly, and Eric was standing there with a blank expression on his face. No one followed him out of the room. He was holding a manila folder in his hands, and I ran over to him. He didn't say anything. He just wrapped his arms around me and kissed the top of my head. With no verbal or facial cues to go off of, I had no idea what had happened.

"So what's the verdict?" I looked up at him.

Eric released a deep breath and sagged against me a little bit. *Oh, this can't be good*, I thought to myself as he lead me toward the door. The second we were standing outside the building, he nearly knocked me over with the force of the kiss he laid on me. I felt myself being bent backwards, and I know I made some kind of noise that was muffled by his mouth on mine. Horns honked as people drove past us, but Eric didn't let up right away.

"What was that about?" I asked breathlessly when he finally stood me upright.

He handed me the folder he'd brought out from the meeting. "That is a copy of my letter of resignation."

"Your what?" My eyes widened as I scrambled to open the folder.

"It was already drafted for me when I walked in. I was given in the option of signing it and leaving quietly, or they could fire me in a more public arena and make an example out of me."

"You're serious?" I stared up at him, and he nodded. "So, what did you do?"

"Well, since I'm not going to be teaching anymore anyway, I decided I would resign. This way, if I ever decide I want to teach in another district, I won't have a termination on my record."

"So you quit?"

"Sookie, I was fired. They were just giving me an option of making it look like I wasn't."

I sighed and shook my head. "This is unbelievable."

"Lover, it's for the best, really. Yes, I'm disappointed I won't get to see my team through, but it's better than having to go through any public scandal that might result because I get fired. The last thing either of us needs is for newspapers to get a hold of this, and since this is a small town, it's entirely possible that would happen." Eric pointed out.

We really didn't need publicity. "Did they at least give you a reason?"

"You mean aside from the fact that I had a brief psychotic break and beat the hell out of a former teacher?"

"Yeah, a teacher who tried to kill three people, may have killed his wife and child, and is wanted in connection with the murder of your neighbor? And you did *not* have a psychotic break!"

Eric grinned at my enthusiasm and passion for the argument. "Sookie, the school is trying to cover its own ass. Having one loose cannon on staff was bad enough, but now they've got a convicted violent offender who is supposed to be a role model to young adults? It was never going to work. It sucks, but I can't blame them for doing what they think is best."

"But you're not a violent offender!" I argued with him, my blood boiling at the school for not even giving him a chance to explain himself before they leveled their punishment.

Eric grabbed my hands and held them tightly. "My criminal record says otherwise."

I sighed heavily and said, "This is all Bill's fault."

"He didn't have a gun to my head when I did what I did, Sookie. And I may have just reacted to what I saw that night, but I have to take responsibility for that. I have to deal with the fall out from it. That is a better example for me to set for the kids I was trying to teach. There are always consequences for your actions, and these kids will see it first hand." Eric was being remarkably calm about all of this.

I glared up at Eric and shoved the folder back at him. "You're being way too blasé about this."

"What am I supposed to do, Sookie? Should I throw a tantrum and *really* give them a reason to be assholes? It's not worth it. Besides, I think maybe in the long run, this is the right thing." Eric opened the passenger's side door of the car for me.

"So you're okay with this?" I looked up into Eric's eyes, and saw they were smiling.

"Sookie, the best thing I ever could have gotten from that job, I already have." He bent down to kiss me again.

"Very smooth, Mr. Northman." I whispered against his lips.

He smiled back at me and said, "There is one thing I'll miss."

"Oh?" I asked as I got into the car.

"There was this one teacher." He leaned over me as I put on my seat belt. "She had the silkiest blonde hair, and the most amazing blue eyes. She used to wear this beyond sexy pinstriped skirt and a pair of red shoes that I have always wanted to see up in the air while I fucked her."

I gasped slightly at his admission, my heartbeat tripling its pace. "Really?"

He nodded and said, "I had her once in the closet of the dance studio."

"Did you?" My eyes met his as I recalled the one time I'd let myself go that far on school grounds. I shouldn't have enjoyed it as much as I did.

He got so close to my ear, his lips grazed it. I whimpered quietly, feeling a sudden burst of lust pounding through my veins. All I wanted was for him to get in the car and take me home. We had a few hours before going to the doctor, and I knew just how I wanted to spend them.

"From the first time I saw her, I haven't been able to get her out of my head."

"Sounds like you might be in love with her."

"Oh, I am. She's the best thing that ever happened to me. I think she's ruined me for anyone else." His admission made me smile.

"If she were here right now, what would you say to her?" I forced my lip not to quiver, and I held back whatever tears were trying to pool in my eyes.

A devilishly glint rose up to claim Eric's eyes. "I would apologize for being such a bad boy lately. I really do need discipline. She was very good at giving me that."

My mind traveled back to what had happened that night after Eric and I had fucked in that closet. My body was immediately on fire and all I could say was, "Eric, get in the car."

"Yes, Miss Stackhouse." He nodded and did as he was told.

For the first time since the first night we slept together- still unbelievably to me, the night we met- Eric used a condom when we had sex that afternoon. Sex before a doctor's appointment like the one I had was probably a no-no, but my body wasn't taking no for an answer. It wasn't the first time I'd thought about it, but it struck me again how happy I would be to never get out of bed as long as Eric was in there with me.

"Why need to start playing the lotto." I whispered to him.

He laughed quietly and asked, "Why's that?"

"Because if we win, we can just live off of that and we'd never have to get out of bed." I grinned at him.

"I like the way you think." He rolled on top of me, and started going after round three.

"Eric, we can't. I have to shower and get ready for my appointment." I pouted. I really didn't want to get up.

"Then I'll have to be quick. I like a challenge." He winked at me. He rolled to the side to get another condom, and I took the opportunity to get out of bed. I should have known that wouldn't stop him. "Where are you going, lover? I'm not finished with you yet."

"I have to get ready." I grinned at him as I backed into the bathroom.

"You're ready." He said as he put on the condom.

I wanted to be stronger and tell him no, but that just wasn't going to happen. I started the shower all the same, and made a show of bending over to turn on the water. I heard Eric growl behind me, and the next thing I knew. I was bent over the vanity, and he was pounding into me from behind. I moaned and cursed with his thrusts, watching his eyes in the mirror while he watched mine. He whispered dirty things in my ear, punctuating certain thoughts with the thrust of his hips. It was naughty and sexy, and everything I liked about having sex with Eric.

My knees shook as I backed up to meet Eric's thrusts. He was going hard and deep, and I barely registered the soreness of my breasts as they bounced in time with his pounding. One of his large palms settled on my lower back while the other grabbed onto my shoulder. I held onto the vanity for dear life, grunting and moaning as I got closer and closer to the explosion set to go off inside me at any moment. The palm on my back slipped around to my front, and clever fingers dove between my thighs to gently pinch my clit, sending me rocketing out of my own body with an orgasm so fierce, my knees finally buckled.

Eric caught me, and seconds later, he was having his own explosion. We ended up on the bathroom floor, and I had no idea how the hell I was going to stand up. I couldn't feel a damn thing below my waist. We laid there panting, trying to remember how to speak. That little interlude was definitely going on the highlight reel, and there were plenty of moments I could think back to in a pinch that would get me going. But this one... well, damn.

"I can't get up." I said with a laugh.

"Me either." He admitted with a laugh of his own.

"I have to get in the shower." My heartbeat was finally starting to return to normal.

"I'll help you."

"No, you won't. You're going to take Jeter outside. You can shower when I get out." I turned and kissed his chest.

"You're so bossy." He teased.

"You love it." I managed to get myself up into a sitting position.

Eric sat up behind me and turned my face to his. "You know that teacher I was talking about earlier in the car?"

"I vaguely recall you mentioning some hussy."

Eric laughed and said, "You should know she doesn't compare to you."

I leaned back and kissed him. "You always had a way with words, Northman."

Hope I'm not annoying you guys with all the lemons. \*shifty eyes\* That's not a problem, is it? Sheesh, just wait until Sookie gets to the fourth month of her pregnancy. Eric better stock up on Gatorade and Power Bars. You guys rock mah socks. Thanks for reading, baby birds! xoxo

**Chapter 47: Heartbeats**

\*wipes brow in relief\* Thank God you guys aren't feeling over-citrused. I was starting to get a very PWP feeling about this, so I'm glad you're not seeing it that way. I also want to say a quick thanks to everyone who as read and/or commented on the first chapter of What The Fae. You guys are awesome, and I know **kjwrit** appreciates your feedback and encouragement as much as I do. We seriously love you, baby birds! And the fact that someone you left us SkarsPorn in your reviews? We were only kidding (not really) when we suggested that. But if you have the same unhealthy obsession with Skarsporn as we do, then follow us on twitter. We tweet it constantly.

Chapter Forty-Seven: Heartbeats

Sookie and I waited for the rapid pregnancy test to be done. The nurse had told us with a simple blood draw, they'd know in a matter of minutes if Sookie was definitely pregnant. It was a formality for her medical records. Sookie listed all of the symptoms she'd been having for the last couple of weeks, and the nurse nodded along as she wrote things down. After she took all of the vital information down, she left us alone in the exam room to wait for the doctor to appear.

I forgot how little of a woman Dr. Ludwig was until she walked into the room fifteen minutes later. "Sookie Stackhouse, it's good to see you more conscious."

"It's good to *be* more conscious." Sookie smiled, and reached for my hand.

"So, my nurse tells me you think you're pregnant."

"Well, three positive home pregnancy tests and about three weeks worth of morning sickness seem like pretty good evidence to support my claim." Sookie nodded and added, "Not to mention I haven't had my period since before the accident."

"All good indicators. We should have the results back any minute. In the meantime, why don't you lay back, and we'll get to the fun part." Dr. Ludwig snickered as she reached for a pair of gloves.

One glimpse at the tray of instruments Dr. Ludwig brought closer to the far end of the table was enough to have my eyes fixed on Sookie's for the duration of the exam. There was a knock at the door from the nurse before she slipped into the room. With a very Juno-like flair (Pam had insisted we watch the movie because of her crush on Jennifer Garner), the nurse prounounced, "Thundercats are go."

I took that to mean Sookie was, in fact, pregnant. She squeezed my hand and smiled up at me. My heart sped up and I couldn't recall ever being so excited and nervous at the same time. Finally, after being poked, prodded, measured and whatever else Dr. Ludwig did, she told Sookie she could get dressed, but leave her pants unzipped and her shirt pulled up. Sookie disappeared behind a little screened portion of the room to put her clothes back on, and then hopped up on the same exam table she'd been resting on for just about the last hour.

"So, we're going to take a quick look inside to see what we're dealing with, and I'll have a better idea of how far along you are." Dr. Ludwig explained as the nurse wheeled over a larger machine.

Clear goo was squirted onto Sookie's stomach and then spread around with a plastic wand connected to the machine I assumed was one of those sonogram/ultrasound deals. The screen came to life, and after sliding the wand around to find what she was looking for, Dr. Ludwig's eyes narrowed as she stared at the screen. I didn't know what the hell she was seeing, but from the way she was pointing, clicking and tapping away at her keyboard, she must have seen something that interested her.

"Okay, kids, here's what we've got." She turned the monitor so Sookie and I could see it better.

She pointed on the screen to show where Sookie's uterus was, and then the placenta attached to the side. I couldn't see it, but I took Dr. Ludwig's word for it that it was there. She pointed out the baby, which appeared to be little more than a bean. And then, there in the center of that bean was what looked like a flickering white light.

"That's the heartbeat." She tapped the screen right over the flicker.

"That's it?" Sookie squeaked out, her voice clogged with emotion.

"Yep, that's it. From all I can tell, you appear to be nine weeks in." Dr. Ludwig nodded before pushing a bunch of keys on the controls.

"Nine weeks?" Sookie was about as surprised as I was. We looked at each other with total shock on our faces.

"Is that a problem?"

"No." Sookie and I said simultaneously.

"It's just that... well, I thought I got pregnant because of the medication I was on after the accident, but that was only seven weeks ago."

"Were you two sexually involved prior to the accident?" Dr. Ludwig asked in a completely clinical way that didn't stop Sookie from blushing one bit.

"Yes." Sookie admitted.

"Well, there you go. It's rare, but it's possible to get pregnant on the pill. It's one one hundred percent effective, and if you're not using an alternate form of birth control, the likelihood is just a little bit higher." Dr. Ludwig explained.

Neither Sookie or I had given that much thought, although it seems we probably should have. Not that this changed anything as far as I was concerned. I was still excited about the baby. The doctor pushed another button, and all of a sudden the sound of galloping horses filled the room. Sookie gasped next to me, and it took a second to figure out it was the heartbeat I was hearing. It was the most amazing thing I'd ever heard. I fell into the chair that was behind me, which, by the way Dr. Ludwig grinned, I gathered was a common reaction for most fathers.

"Wow." Was all Sookie could muster, which was more than I could say. "Are you okay?" Her voice pulled me from the trance I was in.

I turned toward Sookie with what I was sure was a dumbstruck expression on my face and said, "I love you so much."

She nodded vigorously as tears slid down her face. She mouthed the same words right back to me, unable to find her own voice. While Dr. Ludwig printed the first pictures of our baby, we listened to the steady thundering of that teeny tiny heart working inside of Sookie. I decided right then and there that the next time I felt like asking her to marry me, that was exactly what I was going to do. I wasn't going to go through some elaborate set up to surprise her, and I wasn't going to pick some cheesy holiday. I was just going to wait for the moment when it felt right, and I was going to do it.

I kissed each of her knuckles, and shortly after that, the galloping sound disappeared. Dr. Ludwig handed Sookie the pictures she'd printed, and looking at anything else was next to impossible. I vaguely heard something about scheduling another appointment for the next month, and Sookie needed to start taking prenatal vitamins and be careful about her eating habits to make sure she gained weight.

"Don't worry, she'll eat." I said suddenly, getting a laugh out of the three women in the room.

Sookie glared at me and said, "I can take care of myself very well, thank you."

"Yes, and everyone loves a chubby baby." I smirked at her, earning me a small growl.

"I also wanted to remind you that stress should be kept to a minimum. I know about the problems you've had as a result of the accident since the whole thing was pretty big news in this area. I also know the police are looking for the man who killed the woman who caused your accident. Do yourselves a favor and lay low. There's a baby in there that needs you to put it first." Dr. Ludwig advised.

"Thank you, Dr. Ludwig." Sookie nodded her agreement.

From that moment on, it was my mission to make sure Sookie was as stress free as possible, and I would do whatever I had to to make sure it stayed that way. Dr. Ludwig and the nurse left the room so Sookie could finish getting dressed. She slipped on her little black flats, and then her coat before grabbing her purse. I took her hand as she hopped off the exam table, and we walked out to the receptionist area together so Sookie could make her next doctor's appointment.

"I think we need to call our parents." Sookie said once we were in the car.

"I think you're right." I agreed. "How are you feeling?"

"I feel great." Sookie stared down at the pictures in her hand, and trailed her fingers over the little bean floating inside her.

"Good."

Sookie inhaled sharply and said, "Oh, I have an idea! We could make copies of these pictures, frame them and then overnight them to our parents with notes to call us before they open them." The look I gave her must have been one she didn't approve of. "Eric, you know they're going to want to see pictures when they find out we have some. Hell, if what you've been saying about *your* Mom is true, we should just prep the guest room right now for her."

"Um, no. I love my mother, but no way in hell is she moving in with us. And trust me, she's going to get on your nerves. Just give it time." I warned her.

I already knew I was going to have to talk to Mom about limiting the number of times a day she called to check in. To some extent, I understood Sookie's point of view. Yes, it was nice that Mom got so enthused over things, and that she was so invested in making sure her kids were happy. On the other hand, it was bizarre how I could feel smothered from two thousand miles away.

"Well, I know it's early, but do you want to know what we're having? I feel like we've had enough surprises already. For once, it would be nice to plan something."

"I agree." I laced her fingers with mine when she reached for my hand. Just to tease her I said, "We can be surprised with the next one."

"Oh, very funny." She laughed before looking down at that picture again. "I might be biased, but I'm pretty sure this is the cutest bean ever."

I let Sookie have her way when it came to telling our parents we were pregnant. She overnighted them copies of the sonogram pictures in frames that said, "Our first grandchild." Technically for Sookie's parents, our baby would be the second born on her side of the family. Jason and Crystal were expecting their baby, in May. Ours was expected to make its grand entrance by the end of July. It was on my mind, but I didn't bring up the subject of marriage.

I wanted to talk to her about it again, but I figured it was better if we slowed down a little bit. Things were still hectic, and if Pam was really going to Sweden, they were only going to get crazier. Sookie was going back to work starting Monday morning. Pam and I were going to need to work out things for the bar. We were moving into Sookie's house. Not to mention, there was the small matter of Bill Compton still being on the loose.

We had a quiet dinner together before settling on the couch to watch a movie. Snow started falling right around the time Sookie's eyes drifted shut. I sat there for a while watching the flurries dance in the wind with the sounds of The Departed barely registering in the background. On the screen Mr. French was throwing firecrackers to disguise the sounds of gunfire, and all I could think about was how my life had gotten to where it was. A year ago I was just getting settled into this house after spending some time in Sweden with Johan.

I'd felt a bit lost for once, and spending some time with my brother had helped clear my head. My saving grace had been Pam calling me for help with the bar. It wasn't what I wanted, necessarily, so much as I would do anything to help her. I thought she had a great idea, and I needed something to focus my time on until I figured out my next step. When I heard that the local high school was looking for a new basketball coach, I figured I might as well throw my hat into the ring. I was positive my trump card was the March Madness win back in college. Without it, I probably would have been passed over for someone with more experience.

Truthfully, I wasn't as upset as I thought I would be about losing the job. Teaching had always been a fall back for me. It wasn't something I felt passionately about the way Sookie did. It was what she loved, and it wasn't until I looked down at the woman sleeping next to me on the couch that I realized I found the thing I felt most passionately about. She was it, and as long as I had her, that was all I cared about. The rest of it was just the cherry on the sundae.

When I felt myself starting to get sleepy, I turned off the movie. I carefully lifted Sookie off the couch and carried her back to the bedroom. She curled onto her side, and I carefully spooned up behind her. I heard Jeter walking around the house. Aside from the occasional sound of the heat kicking on, the house was silent. I rested my hand on Sookie's stomach, and her hand settled on mine, leading me to believe she wasn't as deep asleep as I'd thought she was.

I closed my eyes and breathed in the scent of her hair, and then I drifted away. I slept so soundly that night I woke up in the same position I fell asleep, only Sookie was sitting up against the headboard. Her hair was piled up on her head, and her reading glasses were perched on her nose. She peered over the top of the book she was reading and smiled at me.

"Well good morning, sleepyhead." She marked her page and set the book aside.

"What time is it?" I grumbled in a voice thick with sleep.

"Mmm, a little after ten. I was going to wake you sooner, but I figured you could probably use the sleep."

"How long have you been up?"

"Since the Bean gave me my wakeup call." Sookie scrunched up her face.

"You're awfully chipper for someone who spent their first waking minutes with their face in a toilet bowl."

Sookie shrugged and said, "It's a small price to pay when I think of all the things I have to be thankful for, and the most important of those things is looking at me right now."

"I didn't know you cared about Jeter that much." I teased, after glancing at the dog in the corner of the room.

She slapped playfully at my shoulder. "Well if that's the way you feel, maybe I should go snuggle with *him* on the couch." She started to move away, but I pulled her back.

"Oh, no you don't. You're staying right here." I pulled her into the curve of my body, and she settled in easily. I loved that she fit so well right next to me, like she had been built for it.

"So how much of The Departed did I see before it was lights out?" Sookie turned her head toward mine as much as she could.

"Uh, I think you conked out right before Leo was sent to prison." I kissed her shoulder.

"I'm such a lightweight these days."

"You're sleeping for two now."

"I guess." She sighed, and rolled onto her back. "I was going to make breakfast, but I was waiting for you to get up. Are you hungry?"

"Absolutely." I smiled, and leaned over to kiss her.

She started to get up, but I disappeared under the comforter. "What are you-" Her question cut off when I got between her legs and tugged off her panties. "Eric."

"You asked if I was hungry." My voice seemed to echo under the blankets. Without warning, since she couldn't see, my tongue darted out and licked up the slit of her folds.

She groaned loudly, and I could practically hear her eyes roll into the back of her head. "This wasn't what I had in mind."

"I can stop, if you want." I said before I started teasing her with my tongue.

"Don't you dare." I felt her relax, and then her hands found their way under the blanket to grab onto my hair. Breakfast was most definitely served.

Sookie was just regaining the use of her legs when her cell phone rang. She'd set the packages up for ten AM delivery, and Sookie had asked her mom to wait to call until her dad came home for lunch. Sookie looked at me with a blissed out expression on her face and asked me to get her phone. Maybe her limbs weren't functioning as well as I thought. I laughed, kissed her gently, and then leaned over her to retrieve her phone off the bedside table.

"Thank you." She said before opening the phone to take the call. "Hi, Mom! You're on speakerphone."

"Hi sweetheart. Who else is there?" Michelle asked.

"Just me, Michelle."

"Hi Eric! How are you guys? How'd things go with the school board yesterday?"

Sookie and I looked at each other. "Uh, Mom, did you get the package I sent?"

"Yep, got it right at ten."

"Did you open it?"

"Your instructions said to wait until your father got home. He should be here any minute. I just wanted to know about the school board meeting before we got to whatever is in this box you sent."

Sookie gestured for me to talk. "Well, I was given a choice. I could sign a letter of resignation they drafted for me, or I could let them fire me."

"Oh, honey, I'm so sorry." Michelle apologized.

"It's what I expected, so I wasn't too surprised about it."

"So what did you do?"

"He should have kicked Stan Davis in the balls and told him he could crumple up that letter and shove it right up his-"

"Sookie!" Michelle cut her off.

"It's bullshit, Mom!" Sookie was still pissed off on my behalf. It was adorable, but unnecessary.

"Eric, are you okay with this?" Michelle chose to ignore Sookie's outburst, which was probably the best course of action.

"He's fine with it! Didn't fight it at all." Sookie glared at me, all traces of her post-orgasmic haze completely gone.

"I don't see much point in fighting it. I don't want to be somewhere I'm not wanted, for starters. Pam is also thinking about moving to Sweden to live with my brother, and if that's the case, someone's going to have to take over the bar full-time." I explained to Michelle.

Just then we could hear Corbett come into the house, and Michelle asked us to hold on while she caught Corbett up on the school board situation. "Those sonsofbitches!" Corbett cussed on the other end of the line, and there was a look of vindication on Sookie's face.

I shook my head at her and flopped back onto my pillows. She rolled onto her side and rested her phone on my chest before cuddling up next to me, pulling the blanket up with her. Michelle and Corbett talked for a few more seconds before Michelle came back to the phone, and Corbett picked up an extension somewhere else in the house.

"Mom, we need to get you and Daddy a speakerphone so y'all can be in the same room when we call." Sookie told her mother.

"This works just fine. I'm on the cordless, so I can go sit in the living room with your Dad."

"Good, go do that. I want him to see what's inside that box when you do."

There was chatter on the other end of the line while Michelle opened the box we'd sent. "For Pete's sake, Sookie did you have to wrap it?"

"It's a present. Just open it." Sookie laughed.

"Corbett, I need your knife. Your daughter taped the box to high heaven." Michelle complained, getting a laugh out of everyone but her husband.

"She's about as bad as Johan, isn't she?" I looked down at Sookie, who just grinned.

"I heard that, Eric!" Michelle called out.

"He means it as a compliment, Mom."

We heard the shredding of paper, and then Michelle's scream of surprise and Corbett laughing. "Well, well, looks like my both of kids will have had shotgun weddings."

"Daddy!" Sookie admonished.

"Sookie Stackhouse are you pregnant?" Michelle asked.

"No, Shell, I'm sure that's just a lovely rendering of a stormy night." Corbett quipped.

"Yes, Mom, I'm pregnant. And I know you and Daddy are probably not so happy about Eric and me not being married but-"

"Oh hush with that." Corbett cut Sookie off. "We all know it's just a matter of time, unless you snuck a wedding invitation in here, too."

"No, we aren't getting married yet." I smiled down at Sookie, contemplating asking her right then and there with her parents on the phone, but decided against it.

"So when should we be expecting this little bundle?" Michelle asked.

"Doctor says by the end of July." Sookie confessed.

"The end of July?" There was obvious shock in Michelle's voice then, and it was obvious she was doing the math in her head.

To my knowledge, Michelle didn't know the full story of how Sookie and I got together, and I was pretty sure whatever opinion of me they might have would plummet a little if they knew I scandalized their one and only daughter within hours of meeting her. Add to that the fact that I'd knocked her up less than two months later, and I could understand why they might not be too happy with me, or for our situation.

"Are you happy?" Corbett asked us.

Sookie and I smiled at each other and she said, "Yes, Daddy, we are."

"Then that's all that matters." Michelle piped up, and it was obvious from the breaking in her voice that she was crying. Whether they were happy tears or not, I couldn't say.

"Mom, are you okay?"

"Fine, baby, just fine. Just caught off guard is all. That stomach bug you said you had when you were here, that was morning sickness, wasn't it?"

"I didn't know for sure then, but yes, it was." Sookie admitted.

Just then my cell rang on the other side of the bed, and Sookie picked up her phone so I could get mine. "Hi Mom."

"Honey, I just got the box you sent. Can I open it now?"

"Hang on a second, Sookie's on the phone with her parents." I told Mom, getting me an excited squeal that told me Mom had a pretty good idea she thought she knew what we were about to tell her.

We really needed to figure out a way to do conference calls. Sookie finished up her call with her Mom before we got into essentially the same conversation with *my* parents, only Mom did a hell of a lot more screaming than Michelle had done. I lost track of the number of times Dad told Mom to stifle herself while Jeter was barking excitedly in the corner.

"Oh, sweetheart, I'm so happy for you both!" Mom said when she finally settled down.

She asked a whole host of questions in a rapid fire succession, wanting to know absolutely everything we knew about the pregnancy so far. We told her all there was to tell, and then she started offering Sookie tips on dealing with nausea and swelling until Dad shushed her again.

"Stell, don't overwhelm the girl. How are you feeling, Toots? That son of mine taking good care of you?" Dad cut in.

"He's doing a wonderful job of taking care of me, sir." Sookie snuggled against me, and quietly kissed my chest. When she looked up at me, the expression on her face suggested she was also eluding to the activities just prior to the phone calls we'd received, and I had to bite back a laugh.

"So, when are you going to put a ring on this girl's finger?" Dad's question was more like a command, and it was issued to me.

"Oh, Tom, there's no rush for that." Mom said, which came as a shock to the system.

Everything went completely silent while all of us processed what had just come out of Mom's mouth. I had assumed she would start planning a bridal shower for the week before the baby shower. After a minute or two of silence, Mom finally spoke again.

"Did everyone faint?" Mom chuckled.

"You've been hounding this boy to propose to Sookie since the minute you found out about her way back in September." Dad reminded Mom as if we'd all forgotten, or maybe we'd made it all up in our own heads.

"They're having a baby together, Tom, it's not like they can get away from each other now. Rings or not, they're tied for life." Whoa. Whoa, this was *not* my mother, was it?

"I think I'd better take your Mom to the hospital. She may have had a stroke." Dad joked.

"Oh, Tom!" Mom said in frustration.

Sookie and I stayed quiet on our end, letting my parents verbally duke it out. It was actually rather amusing to see how the two of them had flip-flopped on the issue. I never, in a million years, would have seen that coming. Sookie eventually climbed over me and ran to the bathroom, the door slamming shut behind her. Seconds later the shower was running, but I could hear her gagging all the same.

"Shit. Mom, Dad, Sookie's not feeling well, so we'll call you later." I said quickly.

"Oh, you go take care of that girl. We love you, son." Mom said just as quick.

"We love you, too. Bye." I hung up and then bolted for the bathroom.

I knocked and opened the door to find Sookie perched on the vanity with a grin on her face. "I'm sorry. I just couldn't take anymore."

I slumped against the door jamb, my laughter joining in with Sookie's. "You know, this pregnancy may just have more perks than we ever could have imagined." I reached out a hand to her to help her down.

"The Bean is starving. Let's go eat." Sookie tugged me toward the kitchen when I tried to put us back in bed.

"The Bean, huh?"

"It's better than calling the baby 'it' for the next seven months."

"That's true." I watched as she pulled one of my t-shirts on.

She stopped to look in the mirror over the dresser and turned to the side. "You know what's scary? Someday I'm going to be too big to wear your clothes." She held the shirt away from her body in attempts to get an idea of what she might look like.

"You'll look great, lover."

Sookie made a disapproving moan. "Easy for you to say."

"Ooh, don't worry, Sookie. I'll remind you every chance I get of how good you look to me."

Sookie narrowed her eyes at me and shook her head slowly. "You're incorrigible."

"I prefer to think of it as passionate." I grabbed her and kissed her, letting my hand rest over the steady thudding of her heart. I smiled against her lips when I felt it speed up just a little.

"Yeah, that, too." She winked at me before pushing me out of our bedroom.

So there we have it, folks. The parents now know about the Bean \*giggles\* A plot bunny whacked me over the head something fierce the other day, so I started doing some writing on it. And you'll never believe it, but I actually wrote out an outline! Well, I wrote 8 chapters worth of outline, and that's about the half way point in the story. Maaaaaybe 3/4 of it. I don't know. I sent the first chapter to **kjwrit** for her opinion last night, and she loved it, so I'm sure y'all will, too. I'm going to hold off on posting until it's either completely written, or until HFT is finished. I don't know how many chapters are left, but I think it's safe to say things are winding down for our favorite lovers. It's okay if you get a little weepy. I'll be sorry to see them go. They've been good to me.

Anyway, I've started on chapter 48, but I don't know if I'll get to finish it tonight or not. It'll depend on the muses and the amount of Skarsporn the fanfic wife and I start trading. Once we get to texting... well, it's a marathon, not a sprint, let's just say that. Thanks for reading! xoxo

**Chapter 48: Simple Life**

God bless Mom's nursing books! Having the textbook on maternity nursing has come in quite handy as of late. Not to mention, I needed a little something fluffy to get rid of the SVU trauma from tonight. I love that show, but damn... I could *NEVER* do that job. I'd go all Stabler on every baby raper I came across. It was for that reason a career in social work got nixed. You can't take it personally, and I would.

Okay, onto the fluff (mostly)...

Chapter Forty-Eight: Simple Life

Six weeks later, I had gotten through the morning sickness phase of pregnancy, and was safely into my second trimester. I'd gone up two cup sizes, which was great for Eric, but a pain in the neck- literally- for me. I was back at work, and exhausted every day when I got home from work. I was cutting practices short, and actually napping during my free time third period. The sleepiness was worse than the morning sickness had ever been. I just couldn't seem to get my energy up. Most days when I got home from work, I ended up crashing on the couch for an hour or so.

Eric did everything he could to make things easier on me. He was in the process of transferring ownership of the bar over to himself, since Pam was leaving town officially on March 1st. Johan had gone back to Sweden to find a larger apartment for the two of them shortly after Eric was fired from his job. Yeah, yeah, he signed that letter of resignation, but he was fired. It was bullshit, as far as I was concerned, but there was nothing either of us could do about it.

Besides, he seemed a bit happier. I think he saw getting out of the school as a fresh start in a lot of ways, and I couldn't blame him for wanting one of those. The last year had been a series of unexpected events for both of us. I never would have thought I'd be pregnant and in a relationship with someone who wanted the same things I did. A year before I was just getting to the point where I was realizing things were never going to happen with Quinn like I wanted them to. I was starting to think I was destined to be alone.

Sounds crazy, I know, considering I haven't even reached my thirtieth birthday yet. It just seemed like every time I talked to my Mom she was telling me about another girl I grew up with who was engaged, married or having a baby. I knew it wasn't a competition, but it was just a reminder of what was missing in my life. In spite of it not being a race, I felt like I was at the back of the pack with no hope of ever catching up to anyone. It's interesting to me how I was so afraid of ending up alone, but I sort of fixed my life so that's exactly what ended up happening.

If Amelia wouldn't have insisted on going out the night I met Eric, I don't know that I'd be where I am now. I took a big risk that night doing what I did and I know I was lucky things worked out so well. Even with all of the craziness, I don't think I'd change much of anything. It all happens for a reason, right?

Telling everyone about the pregnancy was interesting in that no one was surprised. Apparently we weren't hiding it as well as we thought we were. Amelia had suspicions about it after the meltdown I'd had on New Year's Eve. Johan had known something was up because of the coffee. The only one who was remotely surprised was Tray, and since Amelia had been talking his ear off about the possibility, even he wasn't all that shocked.

They were all happy for us, which was a big relief. Our parents were excited about being grandparents, although I knew they were all wondering if we were serious when Eric and I said marriage was in our future. We'd talked about it more, and we decided it was better to focus on just getting settled. Between him taking over the bar, and moving into my house instead of his, we had enough on our plates. We needed to get organized and start planning for the baby that was coming.

We agreed we would be content to just go to a courthouse and do it there. We didn't need to have a big, fancy wedding. Neither of us came from big families, or had a huge guest list we needed to worry about including in the affair. Ideally, we would get married alone on a beach somewhere, but that wasn't going to happen. The soonest I would get any significant time off was after school was out, and by then I would be too pregnant to fly.

We figured the most important thing was that we were committed to one another. The wedding would be nothing more than a piece of paper for us, and we didn't really need that. Yet. I had no doubt the time would come when we would feel differently, and when it did, we'd act accordingly. I was actually thankful he didn't just run out and get a ring to put on my finger just because I was pregnant. I remembered how badly that had worked out for a few of the girls I'd grown up with.

There were quite a few who'd gotten themselves pregnant on prom night, and by the end of summer they were married and just starting their second trimesters. They hadn't even taken a single college course, and already they were worrying about mortgage payments and future orthodontist bills. I was thankful I'd been smart enough to avoid a lot of the pitfalls of being young and stupid. I'd focused on school instead of boys, with Quinn being the only exception to the rule.

Funny how I used to regret that entire relationship, and now I look back on it and I can be thankful for it. It lead me to where I am, and I'm exactly where I want to be. For all of the crazy things that have happened since Quinn and I went our separate ways, I have even more things to look forward to. Things I wouldn't have if I had stayed back in Louisiana instead of following him to Illinois. I hadn't even felt my baby move inside me yet, and already I was in love.

So, Eric and I settled into a new routine. We started having dinner with Amelia and Tray once a week. Tray was usually over for Sunday night football anyway since Eric had one of the most hi-tech televisions known to man hanging on our living room wall. I would go over to Amelia's to let the boys have their little He Man Woman Hater's Club meeting without me popping up to ask silly questions about the difference between a fumble and a down. The truth was, I knew damn well what the difference was (you don't grow up the sister of your high school's star quarterback without learning a few things), but I figured Eric and I needed a little space to do our own thing. I never bothered to tell him that usually Ame and I had the game on at her house, too.

Johan going back to Sweden was hard on everyone, and Pam was downright miserable without him. Their coupling was... well, it was unexpected and somehow predictable at the same time. For whatever reason, they just worked together. I knew Eric still had his reservations about the whole thing, but he was doing his best not to be his brother's keeper anymore. It was a hard habit to break, but Eric was doing his best to make sure he let Johan handle his own affairs.

To be perfectly honest, the only missing piece of the puzzle was figuring out where the hell Bill had disappeared to. Detective Twinings assured me they were searching. It didn't seem possible that Bill was that much of a criminal mastermind, but there was a lot about Bill Compton I didn't know. I tried not to think about him being on the loose. The search for Bill had intensified with the FBI getting involved since there was the likelihood Bill had gone across state lines, and was wanted in connection with several deaths. A second autopsy had been done on both Lorena and the baby.

It was discovered that while the baby had drowned as the coroner originally stated, Lorena hadn't exactly hung herself. After testing some of her tissue, it was discovered there was a paralyzing drug in her system that would have made it impossible for her to hang herself. Additionally, her body was searched and a puncture wound for the needle was found on her back, suggesting she had been attacked from behind. The suicide was just another clever framing job by whomever had killed her.

When it was discovered that Sophie-Anne had connections to someone in the medical field (a former lover), another search of her property was conducted. In her garage, hidden behind a bunch of auto mechanic equipment, they found a vial of the same drug used to paralyze Lorena before she was hung. It was suspected the drug had been kept at Sophie-Anne's because I was the next intended victim, but they couldn't prove that. What they could prove was that Bill's fingerprints were on the vial. With Bill on the run and the police watching the house constantly, I was careful about going out alone which was rare if I wasn't going to or from work.

The school's security was made aware that Bill wasn't allowed on school property. During the school day, doors to the outside were locked except for the main entrance where there was a security checkpoint. I had no choice but to trust they were keeping their eyes on things. Since I couldn't carry mace legally, I started carrying hairspray. I figured it would at least cause a nasty sting and blurred vision if I sprayed it in someone's eyes, and a small bottle was something believable that any woman might carry in her bag.

On Valentine's Day morning, Eric and I were in bed when my cell phone rang. Being that I was a stone's throw away from maybe one of the biggest orgasms I'd ever had, there was no way I was putting the breaks on to answer the phone. I cursed myself for not silencing the phone before going to sleep, or at least first thing when I woke up.

"Don't stop." I gasped against Eric's neck, and I was rewarded with my legs being pushed up closer to my chest so his thrusts reached deeper inside me. "Ohmygod!"

Eric growled something in Swedish in my ear, and I felt the first spasms of my orgasm start. Unfortunately, Eric's phone started ringing on the other side of the bed, distracting him from the pace he'd set. As of late, my hormones were off the charts, and the number of times I'd jumped Eric in the last week or so... well, he wasn't complaining, but it was extremely uncomfortable to be walking around in a perpetually aroused state. Eric got back on track, and when our phones rang simultaneously, I thought he was going to rip someone's head off.

"Ignore it and fuck me." I grabbed his face. I was hellbent on finishing what we started. Whoever it was could leave a message. I sincerely doubted it was *that* important. Or, rather, the *hormones* doubted it was that important.

As it turned out, ignoring two ringing phones wasn't easily done, but we gave it our best shot. A slight change in the angle at which Eric was pounding into me had him rubbing against my clit with each thrust of his hips, and I was right back to screaming/chanting. My fingernails dug into his shoulders, and my orgasm had me clawing his back. He hissed at the pain, and then his chest collapsed on mine with his own release. We laid there a panting, sweaty tangle of limbs, with Eric careful not to put too much weight on my stomach..

"Jesus, lover, you're going to kill me one day." Eric trailed a line of kisses along my collarbone until he reached my neck.

"What a way to go, though, huh?" I nipped at his neck.

He pulled out of me slowly, almost reluctantly, and then rolled to the side. His hand settled on my stomach where a little bump had started to make itself known the week before. The Bean was doing well. I'd had my most recent check up two days before, and according to Dr. Ludwig everything was right on schedule. Bean weighed about seven ounces, and Dr. Ludwig was able to get a picture of him or her waving at us during the ultrasound. By the next appointment Dr. Ludwig told us she'd be able to tell us the sex of the baby if we wanted to know, assuming Bean wanted to cooperate with us. She could find out by amniocentisis, but I really didn't want to have a giant needle stuck in my belly if I could avoid it.

So far Eric's palm was still bigger than my belly but I knew those days were numbered. So far I'd only gained ten pounds, and it felt like they were split 80/20 between my breasts and my chin. It was a good thing Eric was so thoroughly enjoying what pregnancy was doing to my body, because my hormones were more than happy to take on whatever he threw at me. I think we were both of the mindset that we better enjoy what little alone time we had left. In another year, we weren't going to be able to spend lazy days without ever getting out of bed for anything other than trips to the bathroom or food.

My cell phone started ringing again. I groaned loudly. "Can we change our numbers today?"

Eric chuckled beside me before reaching over to get the phone. "It's Amelia."

"Before nine on a Saturday? Must be an emergency." I rolled my eyes and took the phone. "Hey, Ame."

"Sweet Jesus, Sookie! Answer your phone when I call you!" Amelia lectured me like a mother waiting up for her baby girl to get home from a big date with the town bad boy.

I beamed right at Eric and said, "I was having really, *really* good sex."

Eric blushed. Deeply.I had to restrain myself from pinching his cheek, he was so cute.

"It's amazing it took you as long as it did to get pregnant." Amelia sounded utterly bored with me. "You two are going to end up like that weird family on TLC with 20 kids, or something, living on compound somewhere."

I laughed and said, "I'm sorry I didn't take your call, Ame."

"Yeah, yeah, yeah. You need to get your hormones under control, get out of bed and go turn on the news." Amelia advised.

"Why?"

"Just trust me. Call me back after you see it."

"What channel?"

"Take your pick. Bye."

"What's going on?" Eric asked after I hung up.

"Amelia says we need to turn on the news, like, yesterday." I sat up slowly, and gasped at the sight of my crazy sex hair.

Eric passed me the t-shirt he'd slept in. He'd started wearing clothes to bed only because my body was all whacked out when it came to temperature lately. One minute I was freezing cold and piling on layer after layer of clothing. The next I was sweating like I'd just come out of a sauna on the sun. I tended to run too warm, so I was keeping it a bit colder in the house than usual. Eric didn't complain since it was easier for him to adjust than it was for me. In a lot ways, I was being held hostage by the Bean. Whatever the baby needed it got, and I didn't get a single vote about it.

*Enjoy it while it lasts, kiddo*, I told the baby more than once.

Eric followed me out to the living room. He kissed the top of my head before continuing into the kitchen to get started on breakfast. I turned on the television and was immediately greeted by the sounds of Sports Center on ESPN. I rolled my eyes and changed the channel to the first station airing news I could find. It turned out Amelia was right, and just about every news channel was covering the same thing. News cameras were trained on a slightly rundown plantation house that looked like any number of houses one might come across near my hometown. Police in flack jackets and riot gear were stationed all over the place. Snipers were tucked into various positions on the property, and it was obvious whoever was barricaded inside the house was a threat.

Then ticker tape along the bottom of the screen started, and I gasped before falling back onto the couch. "Eric! Eric get in here!" I shouted from my place on the couch.

"What?" He came running into the room to see a horrified look on my face.

"Look!" I pointed to the television.

A picture of Bill Compton was up in the right hand corner of the screen. The ticker tape told me he had been spotted by a rental car company agent after flying into Shreveport under an assumed name. Bill had managed to make it to America's Most Wanted, which was news to me, and the agent just happened to be an avid watcher of the program. She'd immediately called the local FBI and forwarded all of the information to them she could, including security tapes. The rental car company had tracking devices installed on their cars that were impossible to remove without getting the car up on a rack.

Bill had been trailed to his great-grandmother's house in a small town not too far from Bon Temps. He was currently holding the poor old lady hostage, and unwilling to give himself up to police. The whole thing was just surreal. I didn't know what to think. There was a part of me that hoped all of this would be resolved with a well placed shot that would end Bill's life. The other part of me wanted to know why he'd done all of this. It couldn't have been as simple as him wanting what he couldn't have, and doing anything to make sure if he couldn't have it, no one would.

"Sweet Jesus." Eric sat down next to me and didn't move until the tea kettle screeched in the kitchen, making both of us nearly jump out of our skin.

Eric brought me a cup of tea before returning to the kitchen to really start making breakfast. I watched the coverage with wide eyes, and didn't move when my cell phone started ringing again in the bedroom. Whoever it was, I'd call them later. I was glued to the TV, which was not at all how I'd planned to spend my first Valentine's Day with Eric. I wasn't supposed to be watching TV, waiting to see if the psycho who had been making my life hell for almost the last four months was going to live or die. Yet, I couldn't make myself change the channel.

Eric brought out two plates a little while later. He'd made waffles that were accompanied with chocolate covered strawberries I hadn't even noticed were in the fridge. I smiled over at him, and accepted the bite of waffle he was offering to me.

"This is delicious." I said after swallowing.

"I'm glad you like it." He leaned over to kiss me, just as an explosion of noise came from the television.

I jumped again, and then turned toward the TV. There was all sorts of gunfire going off, along with the sounds of a woman screaming and shattering glass. I stared at the TV with a wide open mouth. My body slid to the edge of the sofa, my hands going to my belly in a somewhat protective way. I knew I wasn't in any sort of danger, but it was an instinct I found getting stronger and stronger the bigger my little bump got. Eric's hand settled on mine and it wasn't until then I realized my hands were shaking.

"Lover, you have to stay calm." Eric whispered in my ear, his free hand rubbing the small of my back.

"Do you think he's dead?" I whispered in return without taking my eyes from the TV.

"I don't know." His hand moved in soothing circles that made me relax. I slumped back against him, landing in that familiar spot so my head hit his chest. "I would be shocked if he makes it out of there alive."

"If he wanted to die, why not just kill himself?" I mumbled, thinking of all the lives he'd either destroyed, or attempted to destroy, on what I could only consider a suicide mission.

Eric took a deep breath and exhaled slowly before saying, "I'm thinking he was arrogant enough to think he wouldn't get caught. Let's face it, he got sloppy with Sophie-Anne. If it weren't for her, there probably would have only been circumstantial evidence surrounding the rest of it. He did a pretty good job of covering his bases."

"That is so... fucking creepy."

"Yes, it is." Eric rubbed my hands.

We watched as police stormed inside the house. There was no more gunfire, and the old woman who had been screaming just a few minutes before was brought out of the house, wrapped in a blanket. She was covered in blood, and crying so hard it looked like her body might break. I felt my eyes fill with tears for her. That poor woman.

"He's dead. He has to be dead." I looked away from the TV only to bury my face in Eric's side and hug him tightly.

"I think that's a pretty safe bet, lover." He kissed the top of my head.

"Police have confirmed that the stand off is over. The suspect was shot after he was spotted brandishing a firearm inside the home of his ninety-seven-year-old great-grandmother, Caroline Bellefleur. William T. Compton was wanted for questioning in connection with the suspicious deaths of his wife and infant son. He was also the prime suspect in the murder of Sophie-Anne LeClerq, who was named as the prime suspect in a hit and run accident in Franklin Park, Illinois that nearly took the lives of the three occupants in the car she hit. It is believed all of this started over an obsession the deceased had with an Illinois high school history teacher, Sookie Stackhouse, a former co-worker of Compton's, and a native of Bon Temps, Louisiana." The reporter explained for those just tuning in. My picture flashed on the screen, and I groaned.

"Oh how the hell did that get that?" I slumped further against Eric, knowing exactly how they got it.

The media had gotten a hold of a picture of me with my Poms squad from the previous year when the football team had made it to the state championship. I looked like I belonged on the squad, instead of leading it. In looking at the picture with the jaded eyes of someone who knew better, I started thinking maybe I had brought it all on myself. I was single, and looked like I was still in high school. What the hell was I thinking?

"It's a matter of public record." Eric said sympathetically.

"Can we turn this off now?"

"I thought you'd never ask." Eric reached for the remote and changed the channel to Cartoon Network instead. He sat up me up slowly before handing me my plate. "Bean's hungry, remember?"

I nodded, but looked toward him. "I thought you were going to feed me?"

"As you wish." He winked, and then held up another forkful of waffles for me.

I pushed Bill's suicide by cop from my mind, and got myself all prettied up for Pam's last hoorah at the bar. She had outdone herself with a couple's themed party. She had suggested costumes for it, but quickly nixed that idea when Eric threatened not to show up. He played along for Halloween because it was tradition, but there was no way in hell he was going to do it for Valentine's Day. Frankly, I was surprised Pam wanted to do anything for the holiday, considering her currently loved one was thousands of miles away.

I'd ordered a dress on-line for the party. It was my first maternity purchase, and I bought it because I knew I would have time to grow into it. Actually, I should say that as long as my boobs didn't get much bigger I'd be able to wear it again. It was a strapless, backless dress which was a pretty big gamble for me to take considering the recent expansion project my breasts had just finished. I pulled my hair into a low, side swooping ponytail so it hung over my shoulder. I'd noticed my hair was shinier and thicker lately, and my nails were stronger, too. Whether that was hormones or the vitamins I was taking everyday, I didn't know.

What I do know, is that when I stepped out of the bedroom dressed for the night, Eric looked like one of those cartoon wolves there the eyes pop out of its head, the tongue comes rolling out and you can see the heart throbbing dramatically out of its chest. I turned around slowly without him having to ask me to, and I was rewarded with the sharp intake of breath behind me. I stopped when I was facing him again and smiled nervously at him.

"You don't think it's too much, do you?" I fiddled with the skirt, looking down at the heels I was wearing. They were almost identical to the red ones he loved so much.

"You look beautiful." Eric stepped forward and kissed me gently, which I was surprised by. I was expecting to get backed up against the wall, or taken back to the bedroom.

"Thank you." I rested my hands on his chest, and looked him over.

Eric was dressed in a pair of dress pants and a red button down shirt. The shade of red he was wearing made his eyes seem a bit bluer than usual. There was just a hint of scruff on his jaw that tickled my face when he bent to kiss me again. I giggled against him as I pulled him closer. Bean was just starting to get in the way, but that didn't stop us.

"Whoa!" I pulled back suddenly when I felt the first significant movement inside my belly.

"What's wrong?" Eric asked in a sudden panic.

For the last couple of weeks I'd been feeling tiny flutters of movement, but nothing that could be felt from the outside. My hand went immediately to where I'd felt the kick, and it happened again. My eyes widened in shock, and I grabbed for Eric's hand.

"Do you feel that?" I asked, waiting for Bean to move again.

"Feel wha-" Then the baby kicked. "Was that? Did it..." I nodded vigorously.

"Bean moved." I laughed, putting my hand on top of Eric's unable to describe what it felt like from the inside.

"Wow." He was as stunned as I was, if not more so.

Suddenly any mixed emotions I was feeling about Bill's death completely evaporated. I had no business dwelling on the death of someone who had so little regard for life that he murdered anyone who got in his way, only to have his own life be taken so he could avoid the consequences of his actions. Bill Compton wasn't my concern. The only things that mattered were the baby kicking away inside me, growing stronger every day, and the wonderful man who was staring at my stomach with awe written all over his face.

I pushed myself up on my toes and kissed his neck since that was all I could reach without taking my hands off of his to pull him down. It occurred to me then I might be growing a giant inside me, but only time would tell about that. Eric wrapped an arm around me, holding me close to him while we just stood there tracking the movements of our baby. It was unbelievable. My smile renewed itself every time the baby moved.

"We should go." I finally said after a good ten minutes of feeling the baby kick.

"Probably." Eric reluctantly agreed.

"Don't worry, Bean will move again." I promised him.

"You know, people are going to start molesting your stomach, right?" Eric smirked at me. Such a random thought, but one I'd had myself a time or two.

"I know. I don't suppose we could get an electric fence for my belly, could we?" I joked.

"Probably not, but you could always grab their stomach right back and see how much they like a stranger touching them." Eric suggested.

"Um, yeah, I think I'll pass." I crinkled my nose at the thought of some of the people I'd have to touch if I went along with that idea. "Oh! I could go to the hardware store and get one of those 'no trespassing' signs to hang over my belly."

Eric laughed as he opened the door for me. "Be careful going down the steps. I salted them earlier while you were napping, but that was at three this afternoon."

I held onto the railing, but decided to wait for Eric just to be on the safe side. He locked up the house, and then took my other hand to walk down the steps with me. I decided right then and there that I wouldn't be wearing those big 'fuck me' shoes again until after I wasn't pregnant anymore, or at least until I didn't have to worry about icy conditions.

"Gah! I wish spring would hurry up and get here already. I'm sick of all this cold weather." I complained as I felt creaking in my knees that had never been there before.

"So am I. I was really looking forward to you in a bikini this summer." Eric's eyebrows wiggled at me.

"Play your cards right, and you might still get it." I winked at him as we walked to the car.

He opened the door for me to reveal a single white rose waiting for me on the seat. We had agreed not to bother getting each other gifts for the holiday. What I wanted most from Eric couldn't be bought in a store. If it could, he wouldn't be so special. I sniffed the rose as I lowered myself into the car. I also found out the hard way my choice of dresses and climbing in and out of a Corvette didn't quite go together. Eric slid into the car beside me, and not long after that, we were pulling into a parking space at the bar.

The party was already going. Pam was sporting her best sour puss behind the bar, looking like she'd been hired to shoot cupid if he made an appearance in her establishment. Amelia and Tray were on the dance floor already, and I waved when I spotted them. Eric took my coat and headed to the office to stash it away along with my purse. Pam set a Shirley Temple on the bar in front of me in a martini glass. For being a child's drink, she'd managed to make it look sophisticated.

"How are you, Pam?" I pushed myself up onto a stool.

"Miserable. Abso-fucking-lutely miserable." Pam muttered.

"You miss Johan?" It was rhetorical question, but Pam was glaring at me like I'd just said Valdemort in the middle of a Harry Potter convention.

"You heard about the bunny boiler?" That made us both even in the 'states the obvious' contest we seemed to have going. "I hate this holiday."

"I have good news." I beamed at her, which only further soured her expression. "Oh, come on, Pammy, cheer up."

"Don't call me Pammy." She groused at me.

I ignored her and proceeded to tell her about the baby kicking. Without asking she reached over the bar and put her hand on my belly to feel for herself. Eric chose that moment to come out of the office to see Pam molesting me.

"Jesus, Pam, just because my brother left doesn't mean you get to put the moves on my girl."

"Fuck you, Northman." Pam let me go and then stomped off. I glared at Eric and shook my head.

"What'd I do?"

"She already feels like shit, you know."

"I was just joking with her."

"Well, pick your moments." I nudged him gently.

"Let's dance." He reached for my hand.

"You should go talk to Pam. She's having a shitty day. I'm sure she could use some time with her best friend."

"It's Valentine's Day."

"Yes, but I'm a sure thing, and I don't need cheering up. Now go take care of your best friend. I'll be fine right here." I insisted, and shoved him toward Pam when he didn't go on his own.

I watched from across the bar as the two of them argued for a few minutes like the unofficial siblings they were, before Pam finally cracked a smile that left Eric scowling. I had no idea what had transpired between them, but whatever it was, Pam's bad mood seemed to vanish. Since she was doing better, Eric left her to her work behind the bar and came back to me.

"Now can we dance?" Eric reached for my hand again.

"Yes, now we can dance." I climbed off the stool and headed for the dance floor with Eric's hands on my shoulders.

The music changed to a slow Lifehouse song, and I snuggled myself against Eric. Our arms wrapped around each other as we swayed slowly to the music that was playing. I felt his chin rest on the top of my head. My eyes closed with the slow, steady movement, and I completely relaxed against him. I could feel his heartbeat under my cheek and it was steadily getting faster and faster.

"What's wrong?" I pulled my head back to look up at him.

He stopped moving, looked me right in the eyes and said, "Will you marry me?"

\*ducks out from hiding place\* Once again, I'm going to have to ask that you surrender all sharp objects and automatic weapons before I'll come out. We good? Good. \*steps out of hiding place\* I bet this wasn't the proposal y'all thought you'd get from Eric, but you'll get his perspective next chapter which may clear things up a bit. You'll also get Sookie's response. How fun would it be if she said no? \*dodges flying fruit and laughs nervously\* Geez, you guys have no sense of humor. What gives? Just remember, the bunny boiler is gone, so there's no need to worry about that anymore. I'll be posting again soon.

Oh, and if it's not too much trouble, it'd be super awesome if y'all could send your kindness and good thoughts in **TVGirlSVM**'s direction. She had a pretty big day today, and she needs all the love and good energy she can get. Here's hoping she'll be TVMommy soon.

\*retreats to hiding place\*

**Sookie's dress:** . ?product\_Id=255520023&MasterCategory\_Id=MC3

**Chapter 49: Hanging By A Moment**

Hey baby birds! Sorry for the delay. As most of you know, this site was epic fail for the last few days. I figured I'd wait until things got a little better before posting. So, hopefully this was worth waiting for. I did some planning the other night, and I think chapter 60 will probably be it for this story. So, let the countdown begin.

**Sookie's ring:** antique\_engagement\_

Chapter Forty-Nine: Hanging By A Moment

"Say that again." Sookie looked at me like I had six heads, two of which were breathing fire.

I couldn't blame her for being thrown off. I hadn't planned on proposing to her just then. Hell, I'd made it a point to tell myself any other day besides Valentine's Day would be just fine. April Fool's Day would be a better choice, but I somehow ended up letting the words slip before I could get my brain filter to function on a high enough level to stop them from escaping. Not that I didn't mean it, because I did, it just wasn't the way I'd planned. Although, I didn't even really have a plan. I figured it would just be a thing that I would do one day like it was no big deal. I know, I know, a proposal is supposed to be a big deal, but with Sookie and me it seemed like *everything* had been a big deal. I wanted a moment that was just about us without drama or some big build up to it. It was a rather simple question with an even more simple yes or no answer. Why drag it out?

"Eric." Sookie prompted, waving in my face slowly.

"Will you marry me?" I repeated a little louder, garnering the attention of those around us. *Way to keep it low key, you putz*, I berated myself.

"Office. Now." Sookie spun on her heel and marched toward the office at the back end of the bar.

Pam watched as Sookie stormed past her with me following behind. I may have had a slight case of tail between my legs, but I figured that was more than acceptable considering Sookie's answer had been a barking order to follow her instead of a resounding yes, followed by a kiss that belonged locked in a time capsule. Pam arched an eyebrow at me, but I only shrugged my shoulders in response. It definitely wasn't time to stop for a chat.

Sookie had to wait for me at the office door since there was a key code required in order to get in. I leaned down close to her and whispered, "6-2-8-0-5."

Sookie punched in the code and then threw the door open. "Eric, I thought we agreed we would wait to get married."

"We did."

"So then why are you proposing to me?"

I took a deep breath and asked, "Do you want to marry me?"

"You know I do! That's not what this is about."

"Sookie, I want to marry you. If I didn't, I wouldn't have asked. If you want to marry me, then I don't see what we're waiting for. We have a child coming, and you are the most important thing in the world to me. It's what we both want, so it just makes sense to do it." I reached for her hands, but she pulled them back.

"You were perfectly okay with waiting this morning. What changed?" Sookie knew me well, which was just another reason why I wanted to marry her.

I took a deep breath and said, "This morning while we were watching the news I started thinking about what it would be like if tomorrow was my last day on earth, because I'm sure Bill wasn't thinking about that when he got to Louisiana. Just being with you makes me happy, so please don't think I'm not happy right now with you. I just realized that if I had my way about it, I would spend my last day being married to you. We don't know when our last day is going to come, so if one day is all I ever get, I want it to be with you."

I knew she was trying not to cry, and she was failing miserably. Not that I could blame her since I felt tears stinging my own eyes. I wasn't asking her because I thought it was the right thing to do, or because we had a baby coming. It was all about her. It would be devastating for us both if we lost the baby, but as long as I had her, I knew I would survive it. As much as I would love our kids, Sookie was always going to come first. Our childrens' lives would be miserable if we, as their parents, transferred everything we had into caring for them. There still needed to be an 'us' at the nucleus of our family. Sookie and I are were it all begins, and I wanted her to understand that without her, there really wasn't a me anymore.

"I want it to be with you, too." Sookie nodded her agreement, her words hard to understand through her tears. "I just didn't want it to be for the wrong reasons." She sniffled as I crossed the room to hold her.

"Sookie, I love you. As far as I'm concerned, that's the only reason that matters." I kissed the top of her head. "And for what it's worth, I wanted to ask you before I knew anything about the baby. I bought a ring."

"You did?" Sookie looked up at me with wide, teary eyes.

"Yep, while you were in Louisiana. It's sized and everything. It's just chillin' waiting for a finger to be worn on." I flashed a smug grin at her that got me a small punch in the gut.

"No way! I've cleaned every inch of that house at least five times since then."

"I'm a ninja, remember?"

"Hmph." Sookie rolled her eyes at me.

"It's a beautiful ring." I teased, her eyes narrowing at me. "You sure you want to wear it?"

In spite of everything I'd just told her, she looked nervous when she asked, "Are you sure you want to give it to me?"

There were probably tons of things I could have said to convince her but instead, I held her face in my hands. I looked deep into those beautiful blue eyes of hers and kissed her with everything I had. I felt her melting against me, and the movement of her mouth against mine told me everything I wanted to know. When I released her, I pressed my forehead to hers. I wiped away her tears with my thumbs.

"Yes, I'll marry you." Sookie looked up at me with joy in her eyes.

I exhaled slowly. "Say it again."

"i love you, Eric. You could ask me every day for the rest of my life, and my answer would always be the same. Yes, I'll marry you." Her tone lightened up a little, happiness creeping into her voice.

I wiped her tears with my thumbs and gave her a kiss meant to not only seal a deal, but make a promise. She was the only one I'd ever kiss for the rest of my life, and I couldn't have been happier about it. I broke off the kiss suddenly and cursed under my breath.

"What? Second thoughts already?" Sookie teased.

"I told myself I wouldn't ask you on Valentine's Day because it's the cheesiest day of the year to propose to someone."

"It's just a day, Eric. In the grand scheme of things, it's just a day."

"It's a day when I made sure not to have the ring with me to discourage me from asking you."

"You've been walking around with an engagement ring in your pocket for almost two months?" Sookie's eyes widened.

"No, but I figured when I was sure I was going to do it I'd have the ring with me."

"So you give it to me when we get home. I'm not going anywhere." Sookie reached for my hand.

"I should have had a plan." I grumbled.

Sookie laughed softly and tugged me closer to her. "You really need to stop worrying about life being perfect." She wrapped her arms around me. "I love that you asked me the way you did. I'm glad you didn't trot us out to some fancy restaurant or try to hide the ring in a piece of cake. I wouldn't change any of it, and you shouldn't want to either."

She was right, of course. While we stood there, Bean started moving around again. Sookie put my fingertips where the tiny kicks were coming from. It amazed me how strong the baby was already. In just a few more weeks we would know if we were having a boy or a girl. Personally, I didn't care as long as the baby was healthy.

"We should get back out there." Sookie pulled back and looked up at me.

"We will." I held her a little tighter. "What was that song that was playing when we were dancing?"

"It's by Lifehouse. It's called 'Everything.' Why?" Sookie murmured against my chest.

"I was listening to the words. I realized you're that person for me. That's really why I asked you to marry me." I told her as the exact words that had struck me ran through my mind. *You calm the storms and you give me rest. You hold me in your hands. You won't let me fall. You still my heart and you take my breath away*. That was Sookie.

She nodded against me, issuing a small sniffle as she did so that let me know she was crying again. I hadn't realized we'd started swaying to a beat that wasn't really playing until she looked up at me with more tears in her eyes. Her small hand traveled over my chest and came to rest over a small wet spot created by her tears.

"Damn." She muttered, looking down where her hand was. "I think I ruined your shirt."

"It's worth it." I kissed the top of her head and kept on dancing.

We took our time getting out of the office. The quiet was nice. Pam was talking with Amelia and Tray at a table a little further away from the dance floor where the noise was a bit less. Sookie's fingers were laced with my mine as we walked through the crowd together. Tray was the first to notice us approaching.

"There you guys are! We were about to form a search party." He pulled out a chair for Sookie to sit.

I sat first and pulled her down on my lap. "We just needed a minute to ourselves."

"Just a minute, huh?" Amelia snarked, nudging Pam who was giving me a knowing look.

"It's not what you think." Sookie stuck her tongue out at Amelia.

"Are you sure? Every time I call you lately you're-"

"Amelia, zip it." Tray practically growled.

"Well they are." She argued in her own defense.

The newlyweds were going at it while Pam was looking back and forth between Sookie and I to see if she was right. Sookie leaned back against me, pulling my arm tighter around her. My palm settled on top of the Bean. I could feel little flutterings of movement under my hand. If it felt that amazing to me, I wondered what it felt like for Sookie.

"Hey, Al and Peggy, if you two could hold off on your very Bundy argument, I think Buttercup and Wesley over here have something to tell us." Pam stared at me.

"Wow, Pammy, that's a lot of pop culture references in one sentence." Sookie teased.

"It got their attention, and don't call me Pammy." Pam kicked Sookie under the table and winked at her.

"Pam, would you please not kick my fiance?" I said with a smug grin.

"Fiance?" Amelia's jaw dropped.

"That's right. I got a promotion from baby mama." Sookie giggled.

"Congratulations!" Tray leaned over to slap my shoulder.

"Thank you."

"Where's the ring?" Amelia shifted back and forth like it was going to make Sookie's ring magically appear.

"It's at home. Pam's seen it, though."

Sookie whipped around to look at me. "*Pam* got to see my engagement ring before me?"

"She was with me when I bought it." I shrugged.

"I also took it to be sized. It really is beautiful. I don't know why Eric let it sit in a box for almost eight weeks."

"Just waiting for the right time." I shifted on the chair when Sookie got up to hug Amelia.

"I'm so happy for you guys." Amelia had tears in her eyes. "I mean, it's such a sweet story. A nice case of mistaken identity and crazy hormones lead to what could have been the hottest one night stand of your lives. Instead, you two fell in love, got knocked up and now you're getting married."

Sookie looked over at Tray. "How much has she had to drink tonight?"

"I think she's drinking all of her drinks and yours too." Tray smirked.

"I am not drunk." Amelia insisted, even as she was swaying back to her seat.

She ended up in Tray's lap instead. Pam excused herself to go talk to one of the bar backs. Sookie and I sat there with Amelia and Tray until Amelia started to look a little on the green side. It was their cue to go home. Sookie and I went back to the dance floor for a little while, but she didn't last long. She was exhausted and her feet hurt. It had been a long day, and all of the roller coaster emotions didn't help. We made plans to have dinner with Pam on Monday night since the bar was closed.

"Hold up a second." Pam said as we started toward the door. "Look, I um... I want you both to know that I really am happy for you. I'm going to miss you."

Sookie and I looked at each other, neither of us expecting Pam's little outburst of emotion. But before either of us could comment back, Pam told us to get the fuck out of her bar. She's a good friend, that Pam. We both laughed and waved goodnight to Pam.

I slipped out of bed before the sun came up and went downstairs to the basement. I'd stashed the ring on top of the entertainment center down there, knowing the chances of Sookie finding it were slim to none. I felt around until I located the little velvet box, and smiled when I had it in my hand. The lid creaked when I opened the box just to make sure the ring was still inside. Even in the dim light from behind the bar, the ring sparkled. I snapped the box closed and started up the stairs.

With my eyes on my feet, I didn't see Sookie approaching me. The next thing I knew, we were slamming into each other. She screamed, apparently not expecting to bump into me. I reached out to steady her, but she ended up with her face in the sink. The morning sickness we'd thought was over had apparently come back for a last hoorah. I held her hair back for her while she threw up. I really hated seeing her suffer in any capacity, but this was especially hard to watch since there was nothing I could do but wait for it to be over.

When she was through, I pulled out a chair from the kitchen table and helped her into it. I got her a clean dish towel from one of the drawers and a glass of water to drink while I started the stove to make her some tea. It was strange not to have our house smelling of coffee first thing in the morning. As of late, we didn't even keep coffee in the house. The smell of it made Sookie nauseous. She also couldn't stand the taste of carrots. She did, however, seem to be having a rather torrid affair with peanut butter.

"What were you doing downstairs?" She asked.

"Oh, I uh, I went to get something." Lame, I know.

"Something?" She arched a very suspicious eyebrow at me.

I pulled the other chair around the table so it was in front of hers. I reached into the pocket of my flannel pants and retrieved the ring box. "This."

Sookie's eyes lit up when she realized what I was holding. "Is that what I think it is?"

I nodded and handed her the box. "You're absolutely sure you want it?"

She nodded her response and said, "Will you open it?"

I kept my eyes on hers as I opened the box for her. Her breath caught in her throat. Her eyes sparkled. Her bottom lip quivered. Then there were tears. Lots of them. I took the ring from the box and reached for her left hand. The ring slid onto her finger perfectly, and I kissed it.

"It looks good on you." I smiled at her.

She nodded vigorously, sniffling and wiping her face with her free hand. "It's beautiful, Eric. I love it." She raised her eyes to mine. "I love you."

"I love you, too." I leaned over to kiss her, but she dodged to the side at the last minute.

"Bean breath." She reminded me and then attacked every inch of my face with kisses, which was just fine with me.

"You should get back in bed. I'll finish getting your tea." I stroked her face gently, clearing away the last of the tears she hadn't gotten herself.

"Thanks, baby." She kissed me once more, and then disappeared from the kitchen.

By the time I got back to our bedroom with the tea, she was stretched out on our bed wearing her engagement ring and nothing else. Well, except a smile. I set the tea down on the table on her side of the bed before sitting down on the edge of the mattress.

"You know, if this is how you model jewelry I give you, I may have to do this more often." I smiled at her.

"Oh, no, see, this isn't a thank you for the pretty jewelry sex." Sookie pulled me closer to her.

"No?" My eyebrow arched.

"No." She stretched forward to kiss me, all traces of Bean breath gone. Minty freshness lingered on her tongue. "This is celebratory marrying the man of my dreams sex."

"I don't think I've ever had that kind before."

"You better not." She nibbled my bottom lip before sucking it into her mouth.

"So far I like it." I said when she released me.

"You ain't seen nothing yet." She winked, the pulled me completely on top of her.

I know this is a shorter chapter, but it was the right place to cut. I'm about to post chapter 2 of What The Fae?, so you'll have that. You'll also be happy to know I've started on a new story that I will start posting once HFT finishes. The first four chapters are currently in the very capable hands of **Northwoman**, being all beta'd and prettied up. I'm not going to start posting until I've finished writing the whole thing. It'll be much shorter than HFT, but I love it all the same. Who knew my obsession with 90s rock would finally find a creative outlet? Y'all sort of have **ARedheadThing** to thank for this on account of all the tweeting of music we do. She's my 90s soulmate. She's pretty awesome. Okay, I've rambled enough. Later, baby birds xoxo

**Chapter 50: Don't Go Away**

Chapter Fifty: Don't Go Away

To say our parents were excited about Eric proposing to me was an understatement. My parents had always been pretty open-minded and liberal when it came to things like children outside of wedlock but it didn't mean they didn't want me to marry Eric. We even made plans to have Mom and Dad come up and visit us in the spring. Eric and I had talked about going to Sweden for spring break, but that plan was put on hold. With Pam only getting there a few weeks before spring break was set to start, we figured they would probably need some time to adjust to living together.

Eric and I had Pam over for dinner as we planned the Monday after Valentine's Day. I mostly sat back and watched my fiance- it was still weird to call him that- and his best friend snipe at each other like brother and sister. I knew that even though Eric was as happy as he could be for Pam and Johan, he wasn't entirely thrilled about Pam leaving. He was doing his best to keep his mouth shut about it, though.

I was in the kitchen washing dishes after dinner that Monday night while Eric was outside with Jeter. Pam came and stood next to me while I loaded the dishes into the dishwasher. She folded her arms over her chest and stared right at me.

"What's up, Pam?"

"He doesn't want me to go." Pam seemed disappointed.

"Of course he doesn't. Your his best friend. His brother moving thousands of miles away was hard enough. Now you're going, too. He's not going to ask you to stay because he knows how much this means to you, but isn't it good that he's going to miss you?" I asked as I put the last piece of silverware into the basket.

"What's there to miss? He's got you. The baby will be here before either of you know it. It's not like I'm leaving him to fend for himself."

"Oh, come on, Pam. You mean to tell me you're not going to miss him?" I turned off the water and dried my hands on a dish towel. "You two have been best friends for almost fifteen years. That's nearly half of your lives. Don't tell me you aren't going to miss him."

Pam stayed silent. If I didn't know any better, I would assume it was because she didn't care. I tended to think it was because she didn't realize until it was too late just how much she *did* care. After nearly losing Amelia after the car accident, I could understand what the two of them were facing. It wasn't easy to be separated from someone you depend on.

"Have you two set a date yet?" Pam changed the subject to avoid me asking any further questions.

"Not yet. It's on our list of ever growing things to do." I leaned against the counter. "I do have a favor to ask of you, though."

"Now's not really a good time, Sookie." Pam teased.

"Oh, but I think you'll like this one. It involves a new dress." I smiled over at her. Pam perked up immediately. Mention of shopping, particularly for clothes, was a great way to get her attention.

"I'm listening." She said expectantly.

"I'd really like it if you'd be a bridesmaid. Eric is going to ask Johan to be his best man, and I imagine he'll be asking Tray to stand up as well. Amelia is going to be my matron of honor." I told Pam.

Pam looked at me with watery eyes, clearly surprised I was asking her. "I would love to. So long as you don't make me wear some tacky hunter green monstrosity. I prefer pink."

I laughed and said, "I can't promise you pink, since I don't know when we're going to actually get married, but I can give you my word there will be no hunter green monstrosities."

"And nothing with bows at the bustle, either." Pam shivered.

"Got it. No green, no bows." I nodded.

"Would it be too much to ask if you put Eric in a top hat and tails? *That* would be priceless." Pam snickered at the thought.

I had to admit, the idea of Eric in a top hat made me giggle. The idea of Eric, Johan and Tray all in top hats had me nearly doubled over with laughter. For some reason the 3 Stooges flashed in my head and I couldn't stop laughing. I had to excuse myself to the bathroom on account of it. Lately if a sneeze caught me off guard- or if I took too deep a breath- I had to go to the bathroom. By the time I was heading back toward the kitchen, I heard Pam and Eric picking on each other. I was going to miss that more than I'd realized.

"I should get going." Pam announced as I walked into the kitchen.

"So soon? It's not even nine." I found myself saying.

"I have things to take care of and I'm sure you two want some time alone. Don't worry, you'll see me again before I leave." Pam winked at me.

We were taking Pam to the airport, so of course we'd see her again, but I would have figured she'd stick around later than nine. I was fully prepared to relinquish my hold on Eric so he could spend as much time with Pam as they wanted before she left. I stood there next to Eric as Pam put on her coat, cursing the winter weather like it had just rolled into town. Eric stepped forward to open the door for Pam.

"I'll see you later." Pam said as she started out the door. "Thank you for dinner."

"You're welcome." I answered, thinking she'd make a wise crack of some kind, but she didn't. She just left.

Eric closed and locked the door. He looked troubled. His brows were furrowed together the way they often were when he was deep in thought about something. My hands settled on my stomach, almost cradling it the way they often seemed to do.

"Are you okay?" I asked Eric after a few minutes of silence.

"I'm not really sure how to answer that." Eric admitted.

I gave him a small smile and reached for his hand. "It's going to be okay, you know."

He nodded, took my hand and said, "Yeah, I know. It's just going to be weird without her around."

"I know." I squeezed his hand. "Let's go to bed."

"You go. I'm gonna go downstairs and go over some of the paperwork for the bar. I'll be up in a while." He leaned over and kissed me gently.

I stood there in the living room for a while before heading off to bed alone. Jeter followed me and curled up near the heat vent. I changed clothes, washed my face and brushed my teeth. I arranged my pillows the way I needed them lately to support the Bean while I slept. Only I didn't go right to sleep when I got in bed. I laid there for a while with my hand resting on my stomach. Bean was doing gymnastics and stretching its little arms and legs in every which direction. Little kicks and punches landed on my hand no matter where I let it rest.

I took a few deep breaths and tried to relax. I knew if I let the tension slip away, Bean would relax and I'd be able to get to sleep. I snuggled deeper under the blankets and let my eyes close. I stroked my stomach rhythmically, and in no time, I was out cold.

"So, Tray and I decided we want to start trying to have a baby." Amelia said casually over lunch one day while we were at work.

"Really?" I grinned at her and she nodded. "Ame, that's wonderful."

"It's about time. We've been talking about having a baby for a while now. It just seems like the right time."

"That's great."

"I'm just a little bit nervous." Amelia said before taking a bite of her salad.

"That's normal, though, right? I mean, I get nervous all the time and I'm already pregnant." I shrugged.

"But it's different for you, Sook. You and Eric didn't have to try, it just happened. What if the accident changed things for me? What if I can't have a baby?"

"Amelia..."

"We've been trying since I woke up, Sookie." Amelia explained with a pained look on her face.

"Well, that's only two months. That's not so bad. Think about all of the things that have to go exactly right in order for you to get pregnant. Besides, putting too much pressure on yourself jinxes the whole thing, I think. Just relax and let it happen. When the time is right for you guys, it will." I said as gently as I could.

"This is going the sound stupid, but I was hoping we'd be pregnant together. I suck at doing things alone." Amelia confessed.

"Ame, you're going to be a great Mom. You don't have to be pregnant the same time as me in order for that to be true."

"I know, but then our kids could be in the same class. We could volunteer to go on the same field trips and bake stuff together for bake sales..." She trailed off.

I giggled at the thought. "We could take turns car pooling."

"Exactly! Then one day our kids would grow up, fall in love and get married." She laughed right along with me.

"And if we both have sons?" I arched an eyebrow at her.

"Then we'll march in the Pride Parade." She nudged me under the table.

"Oh, yeah. I bet Tray would *love* that." I rolled my eyes.

Tray was a good guy but I had a feeling he would have a hard time accepting a gay son. Not that he would disown the boy, but it wouldn't be something he would easily welcome. Come to think of it, I wasn't sure Eric would be so okay with it either. The laughter between Amelia and I dried up, and we went back to focusing on our food.

"It's amazing how tiny you still are." Amelia shook her head as I dove into a brownie.

"Pffft." Was my astute response.

"You are! Yes, you've got a bump going but that's what's supposed to happen."

"Then explain to me why when I was watching Allie McBeal reruns the other day, the face bra idea sounded really, really good to me." I glared at Amelia.

"You're being ridiculous. You look great."

"I feel huge." I took a bite of my brownie, earning me a pointed stare from my friend.

"Your tits are epic." She said bluntly.

"Ame!" I looked around the faculty cafeteria to see if anyone heard her, my face burning bright red.

"They are!" She was staring right at my chest. "I hope mine get that big when I'm pregnant."

I laughed and said, "No, trust me, you don't."

"Easy for you to say. You always have plenty to cart around. Not all of us are that lucky." Amelia looked down at her own chest.

"You look good, Ame. You're proportioned."

"Yeah, well, I would gladly take disproportion."

"Okay, but the expansion project I have going on here also comes with spare chins and thicker ankles. My ass is bigger and I swear to God, even my fingers are fat lately." I looked down at my hand. I was afraid to leave my engagement ring on, as much as I loved it.

"That's just water." Amelia waved it off.

"I'll remember that when *you're* pregnant and bitching because you can't get in those size two pants of yours."

"Size four." She corrected and I threw a balled up napkin at her.

"Even on my smallest day, I couldn't fit in your clothes."

"That's because you have that curvy, Marilyn Monroe thing working for you. Trust me, you look good."

"Hmph." I finished off my brownie.

"So, about me getting pregnant." Amelia was back on that again. I loved her, I really did, but she could be so obsessive about things.

"What about it?" I sipped my apple juice, which wasn't really the best chaser for a brownie.

"What if I can't?" She looked at me with big eyes full of genuine anxiety.

"Ame, honey, there's always the possibility it may not happen. I wish I could tell you it's a sure thing and you'll be pregnant in no time, but it may not happen that way. If it doesn't, there are options. There's all kinds of fertility specialists out there these days, not to mention there are thousands of kids who need homes. You and Tray could adopt."

"But I want to be pregnant. It's supposed to be one of those God given rights, isn't it? It's what separates us from men- at least in part- and I don't know... I guess I just... I don't want Tray to think less of me if I can't have a baby."

"Amelia, that's crazy talk. Tray is upside down, inside out, ass backwards in love with you. Do you have any idea how miserable that man was while you were in a coma? Believe me when I tell you, his feelings for you will*not* change if you can't get pregnant. All this pressure you're putting on yourself isn't going to do you any favors. Just relax and let it happen." I advised her, knowing what I was saying was going in one ear and right out the other.

"You're right." She exhaled slowly.

I had no doubt whatsoever that in a month, we'd be having the same conversation.

The weekend before Pam left Eric and I started moving his things over to my house. Well, technically, Eric moved while I cleaned. He had Tray, Terry and some of the guys from the bar helping him out. We still had to decide what to do with Eric's house. He was seriously thinking about keeping it as a rental property, but we weren't sure how to deal with that. There was a whole lot that went into being a landlord we didn't know anything about and we didn't really have time to learn it all. Since we were going to have to pay property taxes on the place, we figured we might as well hold onto it a little longer while we decided what we were going to do.

The biggest challenge was getting Eric's mattress up the stairs. I never realized just how sharp of a turn it was from the stairway to the hall that led to the bedrooms until I had to watch someone try to bend a California king around the corner. It was a comedy of errors that left Eric beyond frustrated, and me fighting not to laugh hysterically behind him. I didn't want him to spend his first night in *our* house in the guest room or on the sofa because he was pissed off at me.

Eventually, the boys got the bed all set up and the furniture moved around where I wanted it. We ordered pizzas and ate together in the kitchen/living room area. Pam showed up just in time for dinner with all of her bags in tow. She dropped everything in the front room before grabbing a beer out of the fridge and taking a seat at the kitchen table next to Amelia.

"So, Pam, you all set for your trip?" Tray asked as he passed her.

"Yep, I'm good to go." Pam sipped her beer.

"We're leaving at 7:30, right?" I looked over at Pam.

"Barring some freak weather happening, you got it." Pam nodded.

The doorbell rang and Eric went to get the pizza. We ended up watching *Dumb and Dumber* while we ate. By the time the movie ended and everyone had their fill of pizza and beer, it was after ten. Amelia and Tray headed home, as did Terry. The guys from the bar had to be on their way as soon as they were done eating since it was Saturday night. Pam excused herself to go call Johan. Eric and I cleaned up the kitchen and waited for Pam to come back in before going up to bed.

"There's fresh sheets on the guest bed and there are clean towels under the bathroom sink across the hall from the guest bathroom whenever you want to shower." I told Pam.

"Thank you for letting me stay here tonight." Pam said appreciatively.

"Of course." I smiled at her. "You're family, Pam." She nodded with tears in her eyes and actually hugged me. It was weird to see Pam being so emotional. She looked over at Eric and I excused myself. "You two take your time. I'll be upstairs."

I got up to the bedroom and got ready for bed. I settled in my one usual side of the bed with one of my pregnancy books and my reading glasses on. I had my feet propped up on pillows. One minute I was reading about nursing and the next, I was off in Lala Land. Jeter growling in his sleep woke me up sometime around three in the morning. The lights were still on and I was alone in bed. I marked my page in the book and pushed myself out of bed. I could hear Eric and Pam talking downstairs. I thought about going down there but figured they didn't need me butting in on their conversation.

"I really think she's good for you, Eric." Pam slurred. Apparently there had been more drinks since I'd gone up to bed. "I've never seen you smile as much as you do now."

"You're drunk." Eric laughed.

"Yes, I am. But I'm not wrong. It's good that you're so crazy about each other because that's the way I feel about Johan." Pam admitted.

I groaned quietly, wondering just how awkward the conversation was going to get.

"I'm glad you're happy, Pam. It's a little weird, but it's good."

"Why is it weird?"

"Do I really need to give you a list of reasons why it's weird you're in love with my identical twin?"

"Pffffffffffffft." Pam laughed. "You might be twins, but you two are about as different as night and day. You know that. Besides, we both know *we* would never work as a couple."

"You got that right."

"You're too much of a perfectionist. You have to have everything in its proper place." Pam complained.

"And you'd rather make jokes than have a serious conversation about things." Eric retorted, although he didn't seem to be at all offended.

"I'm sorry I'm going to miss it." Pam suddenly sounded sad.

"Miss what?"

"All of it. The bar is going to be an even bigger success because of you. I'm going to miss watching your kid grow up. I always thought I'd get to be your kids' favorite aunt."

"You will be." Eric assured her.

"Well maybe someday you can be my kid's favorite uncle." She suggested.

Johan and Pam as parents. There's a thought I'd have to give more attention to when I had more brain power available to me.

"I'd like that." Eric said warmly.

I went back to bed a few seconds later, figuring I'd eavesdropped on them enough. Not long after that, I heard them coming up the stairs. Eric got Pam settled in the guest room and then closed the door behind him in our own bedroom. He exhaled slowly as he leaned against the door. I watched him pull off his clothes and go to the adjoining bathroom. I listened to the running water and flush of the toilet before the bathroom door opened quietly. I closed my eyes and waited to feel Eric's weight settle on the other side of the bed before sliding toward me.

As per usual, Eric spooned up behind me and rested his hand on my stomach. Bean wasn't moving, but that wasn't unusual for that time of the night. I put my hand on top of Eric's and stroked the back of it with my thumb. He kissed my shoulder and breathed in the scent of my hair.

"You awake?" He whispered.

"Yessir." I patted his hand. "Everything okay with Pam?"

"She'll probably be seriously hungover, but yeah, I think she's fine." Eric snuggled against me.

"Good. I'm glad you two got to spend some time alone together."

"Thank you for being cool about it."

I rolled over so we were face to face and I touched his cheek. "I meant it when I said she was family, Eric. There's a lot I don't know about Pam, but if she's family to you, then she's family to me. You don't need to thank me."

He kissed me gently, at first, but that quickly changed. I knew he was a little drunk and it was probably better if we just went to sleep. Unfortunately, my hormones were calling the shots and any chance for sex wasn't to be wasted. We had to be quiet since Pam was across the hall. Rather than sliding them off, Eric ripped my underwear before tossing them to the floor. With the Bean becoming more prominent between us, we had become a bit more adventuresome in sex positions. I rolled onto my side and Eric spooned behind me. He lifted my leg up onto his and entered me with one fluid thrust.

As good as it felt, it wasn't really the ideal position. He was big on eye contact and I was big on kissing. Still, the position got us what we both wanted, which was an orgasm we had to fight to keep quiet. Eric fell asleep shortly after that and I went to the bathroom to clean up a little. When I got back to bed he was rolled on his back, his mouth hanging open just a little bit. I snuggled up beside him, rested my head on his chest and let myself drift off.

Pam was dressed in a powder pink track suit with full makeup on and her hair done. She was one of the few people I knew who would bother to get the least bit fancy for such a long flight. She had a stop in New Jersey to make before catching her connecting flight to Stockholm where Johan would be meeting her. I'd endured a round of nausea and dry heaves on account of her morning coffee, but it was worth it. She and Eric had bantered like they always did over the breakfast of bagels and cream cheese we'd had before heading to the airport.

"Call us when you get there." I said as I hugged Pam goodbye.

"Call us when you get to Jersey." Eric corrected in a stern, fatherly tone.

"Yes sir." Pam saluted him like he was a drill sergeant.

I stepped back to let the two of them hug it out. "Take care of my brother, Vodkaknockers."

"I will. You take care of the Bean. Make sure Sookie eats. She's too skinny." Pam winked at me.

I scoffed, getting a small laugh out of them both before they let each other go. Eric stepped back and reached for me. I tucked myself into his side and we both watched as Pam walked into the airport where we couldn't follow. It was easier to say our goodbyes curbside than it was to park and whatnot, since we couldn't go very far without a boarding pass anyway.

"How long do you think it'll be before she comes back?" I looked up at Eric.

"She promised she'd be back for the birth, so at the most, another five months." Eric kissed the top of my head.

"You think it'll be sooner?"

"I guess that depends on when you're going to marry me, Miss Stackhouse." Eric walked me to the passenger's side of the car and opened the door for me.

I sighed as I got in. "Yeah, I guess we should figure that out, huh?"

Eric just winked at me and closed the door.

Whew! \*wipes brow\* I didn't think I was going to get this done tonight. I had more than half of it written before work this morning but then I started reading **Seastarr08's** Better Man, and I'm hooked. Seriously, if you haven't read that story yet, go do it. Well, after you review, go do it lol. Is anyone else excited for the new chapter of Halo Effect tomorrow? I'm such a geek for **MissusT's** stories. I drop everything to read her updates. That's another story you should be reading if you aren't already. \*looks in the mirror\* When the hell did I put my pimp hat on? \*takes off pimp hat\* I'm off to go read more of Better Man. Later baby birds xoxo

**s/5938401/1/Better\_Man**

**s/5771494/1/Halo\_Effect**

**Chapter 51: Name**

Chapter Fifty-One: Name

Hearing the Bean's heartbeat again was every bit as amazing as it was the first time. Sookie was stretched out on the exam table with one arm behind her head, watching the screen as Dr. Ludwig moved that wand around on Sookie's belly. The heartbeat was strong and steady, well within the average range for a fetus of the Bean's size. Bean's estimated weight was nineteen ounces. Everything looked good.

"So, you two want to know the sex of the baby, yes?" Dr. Ludwig asked.

Sookie and I looked at each other with a smile and Sookie said, "We've had enough surprises lately, so yes, we want to know."

Dr. Ludwig flicked her wrist a few times, trying to get a good angle on the Bean. "Well, it looks like the baby isn't- oops! There we go!" She punched a button on her keyboard to freeze the image.

"What?" Sookie lifted her head up.

"You see here?" Dr. Ludwig pointed to the screen at what appeared to be the baby's pelvic area.

"Yeah." Sookie and I said simultaneously.

"Notice what's not there?" Dr. Ludwig tilted her head back to look through the bi-focals of her lenses.

"It's a girl?" Sookie asked.

"Looks like it." Dr. Ludwig smiled over at us.

"A girl." Sookie beamed at me, and I bent down to kiss her.

"You're sure?" I asked Dr. Ludwig.

"There's always a chance of a misread, but I'm fairly certain we're looking at an innie." The doctor said before unfreezing the monitor.

The ultrasound was being put on a DVD so we could copy it and send it to our parents. More pictures were printed and I sat back and listened while Sookie asked Dr. Ludwig a whole bunch of questions I never would have thought to ask. It was an educational appointment, to say the least. Before we left we stopped at the desk to schedule Sookie's next visit, which wouldn't be until the end of April.

Hearing we were having a girl brought all sorts of images of my sister into my head. I wondered if our daughter would look anything like Annika did as a baby. It was a weird connection to make but I felt less weird about it when Sookie mentioned it first on the ride home. We hadn't talked names much since we didn't know what we were having.

"I think her middle name should be Anne." Sookie said out of nowhere.

"Anne?"

"Yeah. It's a pretty name and it would be a way of honoring your sister. I wish I could have met her." I smiled over at him. "Not to mention, it's both mine and Pam's middle name."

I hadn't even thought of that. "Good points. Anne it is."

"What about a first name? Do you have any names you like?"

"I used to like the name Sophia." I admitted, getting a laugh out of Sookie. "I think it's safe to say that's on the veto list."

"Uh, yeah, I think so."

"Haley's a pretty name."

"Haley...Haley..." She let the name roll around on her tongue. "I like it. We'll put it on the list of maybes."

"What about you?" I looked over at her.

"I'm a fan of the classics. You know, Grace, Audrey, Elizabeth... names like those."

I couldn't help but laugh at that. "As in Grace Kelly, Audrey Hepburn and Elizabeth Taylor?"

Sookie sputtered for a second before laughing as well. "I didn't even think of that."

"Uh huh." I arched an eyebrow at her.

"I swear I didn't! I happen to think those are classy, refined names." Sookie said defensively and I knew to change the subject before her hormones took control of the conversation.

Arguing with Sookie was pointless. I wasn't dealing with a rational woman lately. Those epic boobs of hers came with a price, and I sometimes think she was forced to trade some of her sanity for them. But I kept my mouth shut and just let her rant. It was the smartest way to emerge unscathed. I just had to remind myself that it wasn't necessarily *her* talking when she said some of the things she did. It was interesting to watch her bounce from one peak to another. She could go from furious to overjoyed to bawling her eyes out in a span of five minutes. It was dizzying. The worst part was, I was never sure which Sookie I was going to get.

I parked her car in the garage and followed her into the house. I took Jeter out to the backyard to let him run around for a while. He was certainly loving the backyard at the new house. We'd made it to spring. If we were lucky, there wouldn't be anymore snow, although flurries were known to fall in Chicago until April. We had plans to spruce up the backyard a little. Sookie wanted to plant flowers in window boxes that would hang around the deck railing. At first she had suggested rose bushes, but after doing some reading she realized we didn't really have the right yard for it. Not to mention, those took a lot of work, and since she was going to be pretty pregnant by the time they would really need her attention, it wasn't the right time to add them to our list of things to worry about.

Michelle was going to come up for a visit the following week to help Sookie get started on decorating the nursery, which would be across from our bedroom. I was fairly certain the baby would probably be spending most nights in our room for the first few weeks. Sookie was adamant about breast feeding for the first couple of months. She'd done all sorts of research already weighing the pros and cons of breastfeeding versus bottle feeding. She asked my opinion but I figured that was really up to her to decide, since the debate was really about custody of her breasts. Ultimately, I wanted whatever she was comfortable with and whatever was better for the baby.

Sookie and I had talked about the wedding some, trying to figure out a date. We couldn't decide if it was better to do it before the baby came or not. The immediate future wasn't really an option since she was still working and I was getting acclimated to being at the bar. We were in the process of getting into a new routine. Not to mention, it was important to both of us that Pam and Johan be there. They were still getting used to living together as well, so it wasn't the right time.

We were thinking maybe we'd wait until fall. By the Sookie wouldn't be pregnant anymore and things would be a little more settled. As soon as we got home from the doctor, Sookie went next door to show Amelia the ultrasound DVD. Tray promptly showed up a few minutes later looking slightly terrified. He'd told me the week before that he and Amelia were trying to get pregnant. They'd been at it for three months, and so far, had been unsuccessful.

"She's freaking out, man. I don't know what to tell her." Tray told me while we sat at the kitchen table with a couple of beers.

"It's only been a couple of months. I overheard Sookie and Amelia talking about it on the phone the other night and Sookie said if it doesn't happen in a year you might want to go see someone. Amelia just needs to chill." I told Tray.

"That's what I keep telling her, but she's used to getting her way thanks to that douchebag dad of hers. She's got a bit of a Type A personality when it comes to getting what she wants."

"Then it must be killing her that it's not something either one of you can control. Even the best fertility experts out there can't make her pregnant if she's not supposed to be."

Tray gave me a horrified look and said, "Man, whatever you do, don't say that in front of her."

Tray went on to tell me that it was frustrating to him not to be able to make this happen for her. It was obvious he would do anything for Amelia, and to watch her twist herself up over something that was completely in the hands of a higher power was painful for both of them. All the talk of babies gave way to talk of sons, which led to talks of sports. Before long, we were parked in front of the big plasma TV I'd brought with me from my house, watching ESPN and talking about the rapidly approaching opening day for baseball.

Sookie came home a while later to get started on dinner. Tray headed back to his place to check on Amelia, since Sookie said she hadn't looked so good when she left. The front door was barely shut when Sookie slumped down next to me on the couch, her hands holding her belly.

"What's wrong, lover?" I pulled her closer to me.

"I feel so bad for Ame. I keep telling her she needs to lighten up and just let nature take its course, but I don't think she knows how to do that." Sookie sighed, letting her head find the familiar niche where it fit so well on my chest. "I feel guilty for being so excited when she's so miserable. I don't want her to think I'm flaunting something she doesn't have."

"Sookie, I doubt she feels that way about you. Did you ever think she was flaunting her relationship with Tray when you weren't in the best place relationship wise?" I pointed out to her.

"But this is different. I had a choice. Amelia doesn't get a choice in this. Either it happens, or it doesn't. There isn't really anything anyone can do for her."

"So then you just be her friend and be prepared for a little resentment if things don't go her way. She'll get over it." I advised her.

Sookie sighed heavily and draped one of her arms over my stomach. We stayed that way for a little while before I helped her up so we could get dinner finished. We ate together at the kitchen table before I headed off to the bar for the night. I had some paperwork that needed to be done. I usually did it during the day, but I liked to be at the bar on weekends. I could jump in behind the bar if need be, and most people assumed I was part of security, given my size and the way I was dressed.

By the time I got home at just about three in the morning, Sookie was sound asleep. She was curled on her side, surrounded by pillows to give her the support she needed. I tried to be as quiet as I could when I got to our bedroom. I stripped off my clothes since they smelled like smoke and booze. I went down the hall to the guest bathroom to take a shower so I wouldn't wake her up. Jeter was sitting outside the bathroom door when I got through. I took him outside for a few minutes to let him do his business before finally getting up to bed at a little after four.

Sookie rolled over to face me with sleepy eyes. "Hey you." She muttered quietly.

"I'm sorry I woke you up." I stroked her cheek gently as her eyes drifted shut.

"You didn't. The Bean started doing an Irish jig on my bladder."

"Well, at least you're not puking."

Sookie snickered and said, "Thank goodness for small favors."

"You should go back to sleep."

"I will. How was your night?"

"Busy, but good. I can't wait until the manager is settled enough to run things without me being there." I leaned forward to kiss Sookie's forehead.

"Me, too. I hate going to sleep without you." She tried to move closer, and when that wasn't working so well, I closed the gap myself.

"I'm here now." I reached behind her and kneaded her back gently, getting me a grateful moan from her.

"You should do that more often." A faint smile played on her lips.

"Anytime you want." I kissed her again, but she was already gone.

A few minutes later, so was I.

"Eunice?" Sookie arched an eyebrow at me.

"Agatha?" I countered.

"Oooh! I got it!" She said with excitement on her face. "Babette!"

I cringed and then laughed. "That's bad."

"Thank you." She grinned.

"I think I have one worse." I asked after skimming the name book. "Limber."

Sookie burst out laughing and said, "Limber is not a name, it's a qualification for being a stripper."

I laughed right along with her, knowing there was no way in hell I would ever give my baby girl a stripper name. Food names were out, as were the names of any birth stone or luxury car. I looked down at the name book and read the definition of the name I'd suggested.

"It's is a Tiv name meaning joyful."

Sookie took the book from me, located the name and pointed. "See here? It's also Bad Mom for Daughter who dances on pole."

We were lost to another round of giggles when the doorbell rang. "I'll get it." I leaned over and kissed her.

I felt her eyes watching me as I left the living room where we'd been parked on the couch for the last hour or so, flipping through the baby name book. We figured if we could find a name we liked, we could start calling our daughter that. Although, truthfully, I kind of liked calling her Bean. I got to the front door and grinned when I saw who was on the other side.

"You aren't supposed to be here until tomorrow." I said once the door was opened.

"I wanted to surprise you." Michelle smiled right back at me, and accepted the hug I offered her. "I'm so happy to see you!"

"I'm happy to see you, too! Sookie! We've got company!" I called out.

I released Michelle just in time for Sookie to appear at the end of the hall. Her hands were stretched over her expanding belly, and Michelle's eyes filled with tears. Without a word, the two women rushed at each other. I stayed back while they cried over Sookie being pregnant and engaged. It was all happy tears and mother/daughter bonding stuff reminded me of the way Mom had been with Annika all those years ago. Whenever Annika reached one of those milestone moments, Mom always reverted to whatever age she was when she'd gone through it herself. It was interesting to watch.

It was different from the way Dad had treated Johan and I, where our achievements were met with stiff nods, firm handshakes and the occasional tight hug. We got words of encouragement from our father, along with some of his homespun wisdom. There was never, I repeat *never*, any squealing or crying like a couple of teenage girls at a Twilight movie. I remembered, very vaguely, the way Dad was with Annika. He'd worked a lot more back then, but I remembered the way he'd doted on her like she was the most perfect thing in the world. He looked at her like he would do anything to protect her. I knew he would do the same from Johan and me, but it was different when it came to his daughter.

I had no doubt I would be the same way when it came to our daughter. I didn't think I'd be one of those dads who tried to convince my baby girl that convent living was the way to go, but I would definitely be keeping an eye on those little punks who came around. And God bless any kid who mistook Johan for me. He would have absolutely no trouble scaring the piss out of some poor kid. Finally, being an identical twin was going to pay off.

We got Michelle settled in the guest room upstairs. She took a short nap while Sookie and I attempted to put together that bookshelf my parents had given Sookie for Christmas. I was going to have to ask Tray to help me bring it upstairs since it wasn't going to fit in the front room. Sookie, however, decided it would look great in the nursery. I could only hope we would be able to get it around the corner at the landing, or we were going to have to take it apart in some places.

When Michelle woke up she wrote out a grocery list for me so she could make Sookie a good southern dinner, proclaiming that Sookie needed to get some more meat on her bones. Sookie pouted at her mother and glared at the victorious smirk on my face. I left the house before her hormones could verbally castrate me. I got everything on Michelle's list, along with the few items Sookie called me to add. By the time I got back to the house Michelle had potatoes peeled and dough for a pie crust rolled out.

Sookie was heating oil in an old cast iron skillet that I was sure weighed about as much as she did. I found myself glaring at her, hoping she hadn't lifted the pan herself. Sookie gave me the most innocent look on the planet and said, "Mom got it out." She pushed herself up on her toes to kiss me hello.

Dinner was delicious. Kentucky Fried Chicken eat your heart out. Michelle was an amazing cook. I'd forgotten how good. Although, having dinner with them reminded me that I owed Sookie for her little prank at Thanksgiving. With all the crazy things that had happened since then, I'd completely forgotten about it. I would have to enlist Amelia's help in this, since she knew Sookie well enough to be able to really get her good. It seemed a bit odd to go to Sookie's best friend for help with a prank, but I knew all too well Amelia got her kicks tormenting Sookie from time to time. If she didn't, Sookie and I wouldn't have met the way we did.

The next day was one of the first really nice days we'd had in Chicago since the previous fall. Forecasters were calling for temperatures to get up to a whopping 62 degrees, which was damn near a heatwave for the end of March. Sookie and Michelle were going to go shopping for maternity clothes and to get started on nursery decorations, while my big plan was to get the yard straightened up so we could start planting the flowers Sookie wanted.

I was in the midst of pulling some weeds up in the back when my cell phone rang on the deck. I pushed myself up off the ground and got to my phone just before the call went to voice mail. I was surprised to see Terry Bellefleur's name on the display.

"Hey, Terry, how are ya?" I asked.

"Uh, not so great." The man sounded nervous.

"What's going on?"

"It's Quentin. He uh... he got himself arrested last night." Terry told me.

I sat down on one of the deck chairs and squeezed the bridge of my nose. "What was the charge?"

"Same thing you were up for. Apparently he got in a fight with his girlfriend and he hit her."

"Damn." I muttered. I didn't know what else to say. I knew Quentin had a bit of a temper, but I didn't think he would hit a woman. "I'm sorry to hear that, Terry."

"Listen, I was hoping you'd be willing to come talk to him when he gets released. He's been suspended from school for ten days to make sure to give the kids enough time to cool down before they have to be back in the same space. The girl's parents are pushing for expulsion. Quentin's got a big mouth, but he's never had so much as a detention on his record before this. We both know there's more to him than the ego and the bullshit he spouts off."

"I'm not really sure he'd listen to me, Terry. He didn't listen to me when I coached."

"He's scared, Eric. The truth is, he was asking for you. He knows you've been in his shoes. You wanted to be a role model to these boys. Well, here's your chance." Terry challenged.

I sighed and said, "Alright. Give Quentin my cell number. I'll see what I can do."

Forty-five minutes later I was pushing the lawn mower around the yard when Sookie and Michelle came back. Sookie looked completely wiped out. She didn't even show me what she bought before going upstairs to take a nap. I cut off the machine and sat down on the deck with Michelle, who'd brought out a glass of water for me.

"Thanks." I smiled at her as I sat.

"She always that tired?" Michelle jerked her head toward the house.

"It comes and goes. Some days she has a hard time staying awake and others she can't sleep at all. This pregnancy thing hasn't been too easy on her."

"It was like that for me when I was pregnant with Jason. Shoulda known that boy was trouble."

"Don't say that." I laughed, slightly horrified at the idea of my daughter turning out like Jason. He was a good guy, but that didn't mean I wanted my little Bean to be like him.

"You know, I have to say, I'm impressed you two are handling everything so well. Most couples would struggle with all of the things you two have been through together in such a short period of time. I think a lot of the reason why Sookie is dealing with all of this so well is because of you. If this sort of stuff had happened with Quinn, she would have moved home by now." Michelle smiled warmly at me.

"Well, anything worth having is worth fighting for, right? Honestly, Michelle, there isn't anything I wouldn't do for your daughter." I said seriously.

"I think you proved that with what happened with Bill." Michelle pressed her lips together in a very motherly fashion that let me know she was biting her tongue.

"If you have something to say, it's okay if you say it." I told her. I was actually interested in hearing her thoughts on the whole thing.

Michelle exhaled slowly and said, "While I understand you were trying to protect her, the best way for you to have done that would have been to just walk away. Things worked out for the best, but it would have been really easy for things to go the other way. What if you had ended up in jail and Bill came after her? I know you weren't thinking about that at the time, but with a baby coming, you have to be more considerate of those sorts of things when you act. You can't let your temper call the shots anymore, Eric."

"I know." I nodded my agreement. "Hopefully, I'll never be in a position like that again. But, if for some reason I am, I promise to make better choices."

"Good. Because Sookie might be okay without you, but that baby girl is another story. She has to come first."

"I know."

"I hope you do." Michelle drained the last of her water. "So, Eric, when, exactly, are you going to marry my daughter?"

I laughed quietly and said, "As soon as she'll let me."

Well, well, what'dya think about that? The Bean is a girl. I'm pretty sure I've got her name figured out, but I'm open to suggestions. Oh, and no offense to anyone with any of the names mentioned here that Eric and Sookie were joking about. It just blows my mind what some people will name their kids these days. Personally, I'm on Sookie's side of the name argument. Classic is the way to go, IMO. I can't believe the story is almost done! Gah! \*looks at outline & tears up a little\* I'm gonna miss these two. Peace out, girl scouts xoxo

**Chapter 52: True Love Way**

**Nursery Design:** images/2009/08/10/bedding\_PdV3B\_

Chapter Fifty-Two: True Love Way

I didn't want anything too girly in the nursery. I always cringed a bit when it looked like a baby girl's room had been hosed down with Pepto Bismal, and I wasn't about to do that to my daughter. Originally, I thought about going with a Dr. Seuss theme, but everything I found was a bit too colorful for me. I was a much bigger fan of milder earth tones. Then Mom mentioned The Velveteen Rabbit, and I knew what I was going to do. I didn't a little web research and ordered the crib I wanted on-line so it would be delivered to the house. We could wait to put that together.

Mom suggested I start registering for baby shower gifts. I hadn't even started thinking about that yet. Mom being around was a good thing. She got me thinking about all the things I needed to do that I hadn't even considered yet. By the time she was flying back home I had a whole list of things I needed to do. I told myself to take it all one step at a time and not to try and do it all at once. I would never feel like I was getting anywhere if I didn't slow down a little. I was just used to going full steam ahead. I probably would have kept at it if I wasn't so damn tired all the time.

Still, the visit had been good. It was nice to see Mom again. She promised she and Dad would come up in time for the birth. Jason and Crystal were about six weeks away from the birth of their baby. I wanted to go down for the shower, but I wasn't sure I'd be able to do that. It was scheduled for the weekend before finals and I couldn't take the chance of not being able to fly home for some reason. I also considered the possibility I may not want to go back to work after I had the baby.

Eric and I had crunched the numbers and we figured it would definitely be cheaper for me to stay home than it would be for us to put the baby in daycare. Neither of us were too crazy about the idea of letting a stranger raise our baby, and we couldn't afford to hire a nanny. Besides, I liked the idea of being at home. Even if it was just until the Bean was in school full-time, staying home might be nice. I liked the idea of being there for everything. Mom had always been there for Jason and me.

When Eric and I talked about the future and the possibility of more kids, we always talked with the assumption we'd have more. Of course, there was no way of knowing for sure if that would come to pass. We were planning for it, but there were no guarantees. I thought of Tray and Amelia and the struggles they were having. Eric and I had been lucky once, but this baby might be the only one we had. It that was the case, I wanted to be sure I made the most of it. In twenty years I didn't want to regret missing the opportunity I had to spend more time with our kid.

I was stretched out on the couch with my feet in Eric's lap when he turned to me with a troubled look on his face. "So there's something I've been meaning to talk to you about."

"What's that?" I wiggled my toes at him and pouted.

Smart boy that he was, he started rubbing my feet without me having to actually ask. "I got a phone call from Terry Bellefleur a few days ago. Turns out Quentin got arrested over the break."

"Oh my stars, what for?" I pushed myself up onto my elbows.

"Same thing I did. Apparently he hit his girlfriend."

"He what?" By no means would I say I was close with Quentin, but I thought I knew him well enough to know he wasn't capable of something like that. Then again, I'd thought the same thing of Eric. "Are they sure? I mean, it wasn't just the girlfriend saying that, was it?"

"I don't know. I'm guessing she's got to have witnesses or marks on her somewhere in order for him to have gotten arrested. I don't really know the whole story."

"I can't believe it. I know Quentin has an attitude, but I never would have thought he was violent." I shook my head in disbelief. "So why did Terry call you?"

"Well, Quentin's scared. He asked to speak to me."

"Wow."

"Yeah, that's what I thought, too."

"You're going to talk to him, right? I mean, you can help him with this."

"I don't really know what to say that won't sound hypocritical." Eric confessed.

"So don't lecture him. He's got his parents, his lawyer, the judge and just about everyone else telling him what a fuck up he is right now. If he's scared, I hope it's because he feels guilty for what he did and not because he's pissed he got caught. Try to be his friend. You've been in his shoes... well, sort of. Just let him know this doesn't have to define him for the rest of his life. It's just one moment, but it's an opportunity to learn to use better judgment." I advised with a faint smile.

"Maybe *you* should talk to him. You're better at this stuff than I am." Eric said as he continued to rub my foot.

"First of all, he asked for you. I'm guessing there are certain things he wants to say that he thinks you might understand that no one else would. Second of all, you're a very good listener, Eric. Maybe that's all he needs is someone to listen to him." I took my foot back and sat up slowly with Eric's help. I curled myself up next to him and put his hand on my stomach. "Besides, isn't there some silly sports analogy you can use?"

Eric laughed quietly and said, "Yeah, probably."

"You'll figure it out." I kissed his chest and closed my eyes.

"I hope so." He sighed and kissed the top of my head.

Two days later I was never more thankful for the bell ringing than I was at the end of fourth period. I'd had to pee for the last twenty minutes and I had seriously considered abandoning my class to use the bathroom. I hightailed it to the ladies' room near the dean's office, since it was the closest one to my classroom. I didn't even care that there were four girls smoking cigarettes near the windows. Of all the bathrooms to sneak cigarettes in, I always thought that was the worst one to pick. On a windy day, the butts went flying right past the dean's window.

There were two deans. Mr. Madden was the bigger hard ass of the two, and reminded me of the gym teacher in Beavis and Butthead. He barked at everyone in condescending tones and talked down to the kids. It was probably meant to be intimidating, but it ended up coming off in a cartoonish way that made him a laughing stock instead of someone to revered or respected. Then there was the other dean that everyone referred to as Bubba, since he was so mild mannered and often clueless to what was going on around him. The only thing he seemed to have going for him was at least the kids respected his authority because he wasn't a dick about it the way Madden was.

I took care of business and shot warning glances to the girls who were smoking. "I'm not going to write you up this time." I looked at their reflections in the mirror in front of me. "Just don't let me catch you in here again."

"Yes, Miss Stackhouse." The girls looked properly chastised, but I knew they'd be back the next period.

I stepped out of the bathroom and headed back to my classroom. I paused when I got to the staircase, feeling a bit lightheaded all of a sudden. Dr. Ludwig said that was normal because of the changes in my circulatory system to accommodate the baby. I took a few deep breaths and waited for my head to feel a bit less cloudy before going up the stairs. When I got back to my classroom, I promptly took a seat behind my desk and had a snack just to make sure it wasn't my blood sugar getting too low.

I felt better after I ate and enjoyed my next two classes before heading to meet Amelia in the faculty cafeteria for lunch. She was waiting for me in the doorway when I got to the top of the stairs. I was so busy looking at her that I didn't see the water bottle on the top step when I stepped down. The next thing I knew, I was falling through the air and trying my hardest not to land on my belly.

**Eric**

I was standing outside the high school talking to Terry when the ambulance pulled up. I had plans to meet with Quentin during his seventh period study hall. I understood why the kid was scared. He had every right to be. I wanted to help him since he'd asked me for it. I thought I was pretty well over what I'd been through, and maybe seeing it from the perspective of someone else who had been there might help him. On the other hand, the reason why he'd been arrested was different.

He'd hit his girlfriend, if the reports were right. Violence against women was a deal breaker in my book. It got me thinking about what I would do if some little bastard lost his temper and hit my daughter. She wasn't even born yet and the very thought of it made my blood boil. If what the police said was true, and the attack was unprovoked, I found it hard to be sympathetic to Quentin's situation, and I told Terry as much.

"We all know it's wrong to hit women. That's something we're taught from the time we're little kids. No matter how mean a girl is to you, you don't hit her." I said to Terry.

"I know." Terry agreed with a nod of his head. "I just figure he's young. He's got his whole life in front of him. He's at an age where this could easily change the path he's on. You and I both know he's got a lot of potential if he can just figure out how to channel it. I don't want to see him blow it all over one stupid mistake."

I sighed heavily, watching as a gurney was taken from the back of the ambulance. "What's going on over there?" I jutted my chin toward the paramedics running into the school.

Terry rubbed his eyes. "Probably a fight somewhere. Maybe a kid got sick."

"Sadly, I'm thinking it's probably option number one." I shook my head.

It amazed me how many fights happened in a single day over the stupidest of things. There were a lot of hormones running crazy in that building. I'd never given much thought to how volatile teenagers could be until I worked with him every day. The thing that was really crazy to me was how dangerous the girls were. When they snapped... damn. Guys will throw punches and beat each other to hell, but the girls somehow managed to turn into super heroes with the ability to put each other in death grips.

In just the few months I'd taught at the high school, I'd seen a fight go from the library up on the second floor, through the back hallway, down two flights of stairs and into the C-10 area where Sookie's classroom was before security could finally separate the girls. There were clumps of hair everywhere mixed with broken fake nails and pieces of clothing. The girls had scratched, punched, kicked and slapped each other into a fury that was almost impossible to stop. They both looked like hell while they waited for the police to come. More than once, they tried to resume the fight. It took six security guards to keep them separated from one another.

"Well, let's go in and see what's going on. We need to get you checked in at the front desk anyway." Terry clapped me on the back, and walked with me to the main entrance of the school.

A tiny woman by the name of Thalia was behind the desk. She looked up and smiled when Terry and I walked into the building. She was a total hard ass, and someone I wouldn't want to mess with. I'd seen her take down male students that were twice her size without so much as breaking a sweat. She couldn't have been so much as five feet tall. She used to joke all the time that she was quick like a ninja. We had that in common. She was bitchy to most people, but she and I got along just fine.

"Northman, there you are. Congratulations on knocking up Miss Stackhouse." She winked at me.

"Nice to see you, too, Thalia." I winked right back as I reached for a pen to sign myself in.

"What's with the ambulance?" Terry asked.

"Oh, uh, a teacher slipped on a water bottle that was on the steps by the faculty cafeteria and fell. Cracked her head on the wall on the way down." Thalia said with a wince.

I stood up straight. "Which teacher, Thal?" My gut was screaming at me that it was Sookie.

"You know, I don't know. Let me ask." She grabbed her radio, but it wasn't necessary.

"Eric!" Amelia screamed as the medical personnel was bringing the gurney around the corner.

My heart stopped beating when I saw Sookie stretched out on the gurney. She was knocked out cold and there was blood running down her beautiful face. I couldn't move. I kept telling my legs to work, but they just stayed locked right where they were. Panic didn't even begin to describe what was happening inside me. As the gurney came closer, I got a better look at her. Her clothes were messed up from where she'd fallen. There was a pulse-ox clip on her finger and there was a collar around her neck to keep her immobilized.

"Eric!" Amelia shouted again when the gurney started to pass me by.

All of a sudden, my legs started working again and I ran after the gurney. "What happened?"

"She was coming down the back stairwell to meet me for lunch. Some idiot dropped their water bottle on the steps. I don't think she saw it there when she went to step down. She slipped on the bottle and then she was flying through the air. She tried not to land on her stomach and ended up smacking her head on the handrail. Luckily, for her at least, she was sort of caught by one of the defensive linemen. She still hit the ground pretty hard, though." Amelia explained with tears in her eyes as Sookie was loaded into the back of the ambulance.

"Can I go with her?" I looked up at the paramedic.

"You family?"

"I'm her fiance and that baby's father." I stared at Sookie who had yet to come out of it.

"Yeah, get in." The paramedic nodded.

"Terry, tell Quentin I'm sorry. Ame, I'll call you when she wakes up." I said before getting into the back of the ambulance.

I didn't hear what Amelia was saying. All I cared about was the beeping of the monitor that told me how strong Sookie's heartbeat was. I sat on the bench beside the gurney and reached for her hand. I put leaned down to whisper in her ear, and put my free hand on her belly to see if I could feel the Bean moving around. I knew that's what Sookie would care the most about. A series of strong kicks to my palm had my eyes filling with tears.

"The Bean's okay, lover. Just open your eyes, and everything will be fine." I whispered to her before kissing her hand.

I kept waiting for a squeeze in response to let me know she was okay- that she was still in there with me- but I got nothing but movement from the baby. The fact that she was breathing on her own and her heartbeat was strong were both indicators she'd just been knocked out. I told myself she would be fine. She would wake up, and everything would be okay. While I was glad the baby was moving around, I was more concerned about Sookie. I didn't even want to think about what I would do if I lost her. I couldn't lose her.

We were taken back to Westlake Hospital. I called Dr. Ludwig, having found her number in Sookie's cell phone. Amelia had been able to run to Sookie's classroom to retrieve her purse before the paramedics took her out of the school. I let the nurse know Sookie had been in an accident and the nurse told me Dr. Ludwig would meet us at the hospital. I was able to give the treating emergency physician all the information available about Sookie's pregnancy so she could be taken for all sorts of scans and tests.

I heard mention of skull fractures and possible brain swelling. To say it was overwhelming would be an understatement. I as escorted to the waiting room by a kind nurse who promised to come get me when Sookie returned from her tests. I paced the waiting room nervously for as long as I could take it before I decided to call Johan. I needed to talk to someone.

"Lillebror, what's going on?" Johan sounded way too cheerful.

"Sookie's in the hospital." The words came tumbling out.

"Shit. What happened?" His cheerfulness changed to panic.

I had just finished telling him everything I knew when the kind nurse came out and gestured for me to follow her. "Johan, they're letting me back to see her. I'll call you when I have an update."

I followed the nurse down a familiar path. I felt myself slip back in time to the night of the accident. I thought of how scared I'd been that night only a few months before. It was slightly amazing to see how things had changed since then. I never would have guessed we would be engaged and expecting a baby at this point. What was even more amazing is that she was already pregnant when the accident happened and the baby had survived it. I couldn't let myself think about any of that for too long.

"Is she awake?" I asked the nurse.

"Not yet, but it's only a matter of time. The doctor will be in to see you in a minute." The nurse patted me gently once we were standing outside of the little curtained area that was Sookie's room.

I moved the curtain to the side and stepped into her space. Her forehead was stitched up where she was cut. There was still blood in her hair, but they'd cleaned off her face. I pulled a chair closer to her bed and sat down. I took her small hand in mine and kissed the back of it. My other hand rested on her stomach, once again feeling for movement inside her. I started to panic again just a little when I didn't feel anything, but then I remembered Sookie telling me the baby usually slept when she stayed still. The steady thumping of her heartbeat lulled the baby into a calmer state. I assumed that was the reason for the lack of movement, but a part of me was terrified it was something else.

Then I noticed the thing strapped to Sookie's belly. I followed the cords to what I assumed was a fetal monitor in the corner. The signals it was picking up looked to be just as strong as Sookie's own heartbeat. I breathed a sigh of relief and let myself relax a little bit. I leaned forward to kiss her stomach and for the first time in my life, hoped I'd get kicked in the mouth.

"Sookie, can you hear me?" I moved up closer to her ear, keeping one of my hands on her belly. I got no response. "You're going to be fine. The Bean's doing great. I just need you to open your eyes, love."

Still nothing. I stood up just enough so I could kiss the tip of her nose before sitting down again. I let go of her stomach and held one of her hands to my lips, hoping the feeling of my breath on her would somehow pull her from whatever in between she was stuck in. All I could was wait for Dr. Ludwig to appear to give me and update on Sookie's condition.

I felt like I was stuck in that same in between Sookie was, only there was a wall between us I couldn't break through. I hated waiting. I seriously wondered if sometimes doctors didn't draw it out just a little bit longer to make a person grateful for all the things they'd previously taken for granted. While I sat there waiting I came to the conclusion that I was hands down done waiting where Sookie was concerned. We had to start planning more and leaving things to chance less.

As if planning for ourselves wasn't reason enough, we needed to have one in place for the baby that was coming soon. Our laid-back, go with the flow approach to life was going to be our undoing if we didn't have some sort battle plan ready to go. We needed to stop fucking around and set a wedding date. That was the first thing we needed to do. Enough dragging our feet and making excuses for why it wasn't the right time. We wanted to be married. We needed to stop talking about it and just do it. If we kept waiting for the perfect time, it would never happen. I was pretty sure the same would be said for our daughter.

I closed my eyes for just a moment and of course, that was when Sookie woke up. "The first day of summer." She murmured.

"Lover, it's only April." I squeezed her hand.

"Marry me on the first day of summer." She closed her eyes, a faint smile on her face.

I laughed quietly and said, "I think that's a great idea."

**Sookie**

My little tumble down the stairs resulted in all sorts of things. First, there was the severe concussion I was diagnosed with. I'd cracked my head pretty hard on the way down. I was going to have a small scar on my forehead from the stitches it had taken to close me up. Eric jumped all over it and immediately started calling me Harry Potter. Jerk. I was kept overnight just to be sure there was no swelling in my brain. Aside from a nasty headache, I felt fine. That is, until I started having contractions later that night. They weren't serious, but it was enough for Dr. Ludwig to put me on medication to stop them. If my water broke, I was in big trouble. Since I wasn't quite twenty-two weeks along yet, it was way too early for the Bean to make her grand entrance.

When Dr. Ludwig was convinced I was okay, I was released from the hospital after a two night stay. It was also during this time that Dr. Ludwig noticed my elevated blood pressure. I was put on medications for it and told to stay off my feet as much as possible to prevent early labor. When I asked what that meant, exactly, Dr. Ludwig told me she wanted me on bed rest. I was both scared and pissed off at the same time. I hated sitting still for extended periods of time for what seemed to be no reason, but I wasn't willing to risk my baby's life because I had ants in my pants.

Since Eric and I had finally set a wedding date, we had to get started on the planning for it. There were tons of things that needed to be done, and I told myself I would start making a list of all those things as soon as I got home. On the way back to the house we stopped for lunch at Sonic. I'd been craving cherry limeade for the last week. I was almost immediately sorry for gulping it down like I did because I had to pee about three minutes later.

As soon as we got home, Eric was pushing me up the stairs. He'd been nothing but tense for the last three days. The look on his face when I woke up in the hospital was one I would never forget. I remembered thinking of the way he'd looked at me after the accident back in November. It was almost the same look, except more intense. There was so much more at stake for us now. Yes, we'd most definitely had feelings for each other then, but there was still a possibility for things to have turned out differently for us.

"I'm okay, Eric." I said once we were in our bedroom.

"I didn't say anything." His shoulders were squared, his brow furrowed.

"Your face is doing all the talking." I pointed at him. "I'm okay, really. Yes, I'm sore and I'm tired, but I'm okay. I'm not going anywhere."

"I'm going to hold you to that." He grabbed my hand and pulled me closer to him.

"Please do." I smiled up at him. "I need a shower."

"I was just thinking the same thing."

"Thanks." I pushed him playfully.

"That's not what I meant, but now that you mention it..."

"Jerk." I muttered as I started walking away. He laughed quietly behind me. I looked over my shoulder and asked, "Are you coming?"

"You sure that's a good idea? You're supposed to be on bed rest." He reminded me, as if I could forget.

"Consider it our last hoorah." I winked at him.

"Well, when you put it that way..." He followed me into the bathroom and closed the door behind us.

I know a lot of you are as sad as I am to say goodbye to this version of Eric and Sookie. Luckily, I'm not even going to give you the chance to miss me. If you follow me on twitter, then you've already had to chance to read this tease. For those of you who don't guzzle the twitterade, here's a taste of the first chapter of my new story Crash Into Me, which I will start posting when HFT is finished. It's currently being beta'd by the amazeballs**Northwoman**. Y'all also owe some peanut butter M&M's to **ARedheadThing** for all of the music tweeting we do. She's my 90s soulmate (don't worry, **Lubs**, I'm not steeling your female!) and I love her dearly.

"*Eric, if you'll put your tongue back in your head, this is my friend, Sookie Stackhouse. Sookie, this is my knucklehead of a boss, Eric Northman." Pam introduced us.*

*Sookie stuck out her small, tan hand for me to shake. Slowly, my own hand extended to take hers. When our hands met after what seemed like hours of reaching, I felt a shiver run through me I couldn't recall ever feeling with anyone else. There was a sudden brilliance in her bright blue eyes that told me she felt it, too. She was dressed in a tight pair of jeans and a plain white t-shirt that hugged her curves and left very little to the imagination. Even from where she was standing I could smell her, and it was a heavenly combination of vanilla and sunshine. Up until that moment I wasn't aware sunshine had a smell, but I decided it smelled like Sookie.*

"*I think he's had a stroke." Pam leaned over to toward Sookie's ear.*

*I glared at Pam without letting go of Sookie's hand. "I think Pam's about to be unemployed."*

"*Ooookay." Sookie looked a little uncomfortable so I reluctantly let go of her hand. "Eric, it's nice to meet you."*

"*Likewise."*

"*That's all you've got, Northman?" Pam challenged. I was going to kill her later.*

"*I seem to recall comments made just a few minutes ago in regards to how unavailable Sookie is." I smirked in Pam's direction.*

"*Pam, that's not true. Bill and I are over." Sookie said in a defiant tone.*

*At that point I figured either Sookie was unaware of my chronic flirting, or she was as interested in me as I was in her. Either way, I liked her. And finding out she was unattached made things even more interesting. Whoever this Bill guy was, he was a total asswagon for letting Sookie go. I told myself there was the possibility Sookie was a raging bitch who treated the men in her life like they were disposable. Maybe Bill was some poor schlub who fell into the clutches of the maneater standing in front of me.*

*Yeah, right. Sookie looked about as harmless as a girl scout. A girl scout with the body of Jessica Rabbit.*

**Chapter 53: 9 Months**

Super huge thanks to the twitter mommies who answered my questions about being preggers for this chapter, since I have yet to experience that myself. You ladies are awesome for sharing! I totes appreciate it!

**Bridesmaid dresses:** store/ModCloth/Womens/Dresses/Spun+Gold+Dress

**Pam's gag gown:** .

**Sookie's gown:** /collections/maternity-alice/the-astrea/

Chapter Fifty-Three: 9 Months

I was amazed by just how much I could get done from my house when it came to planning a wedding and setting up my daughter's bedroom. I did more shopping on-line than one person ever should. The hard part was picking a wedding dress without ever leaving the house. The second I saw mine, however, I knew it was the one. I ordered the dress, had it shipped to the house and then had a tailor come to do alterations for me. It was a maternity dress that would allow for my growing bump. Thankfully, my boobs had stopped growing, or there would have been real trouble.

The dress was made of organza and flowed beautifully. It had an empire waistline and a nice v-neck halter top neckline to it. There was intricate beading all through the dress. I was I love with it. I hid the dress next door with Amelia to keep Eric from seeing it. I know it's an old superstition, but given all the trouble we'd already had, it seemed worth it to abide by this one wives' tale. We didn't need any invitations to drama. We'd had more than our share.

Eric and I planned to get married in our backyard since we didn't want anything too big or fancy, and I couldn't be on my feet for too long. It was a small affair with just our immediate family and a few of our friends coming over. The guest list would be less than twenty-five people. My family was flying up from Louisiana. Eric's parents were coming in from California. Johan and Pam were flying in from Sweden. The plan was for Eric's family to stay at his place, since some of his furniture was still there.

My own family was going to be a bit more scattered. There wasn't really room in our house for guests. There was baby or wedding stuff everywhere. We were down to one spare bedroom, and the was supposed to be headquarters for us girls (Amelia, Pam and me) to get dressed the day of the wedding. Suits were hanging in there for Eric and Tray. While I was excited to meet my very first nephew, Caleb Corbett Stackhouse, I had enough trouble sleeping without a crying infant in the house.

Jason had teased it would be good practice for when the Bean came, but I failed to see the humor in it. I started wondering if there was a way to have my nephew there without his idiot father. Eric had laughed off my suggestion, only to realize I was only partially joking. There was a hotel not too far away, and we were able to get them discounted rates since there was a group of them. Mom, Dad, Jason, Crystal, Caleb, Gran, Hadley, Remy and Hunter were all flying up for the wedding. Tara wanted to come, but couldn't get away from work for it since it was the middle of the week.

For once, everything seemed to be falling into place. The only thing that sucked was being stuck in bed all day long. Eric did his best to keep me entertained when he was home and he never lost patience with me for all the bitching and moping I did. I hated being so sedentary. It wasn't my style. I was used to being on the go all the time. He helped me a great deal with getting the nursery all set up the way I wanted it. He reserved pretty much all commentary on the decorations I chose. I think he was just grateful I hadn't painted the room pink and gone with a cliché princess theme.

He hadn't said as much, but if the way he treated me was any indication, he was going to spoil that little girl rotten. She was going to have him wrapped around his little finger in a heartbeat. I have to admit, I was getting to the point where being pregnant was no longer fun. I just wanted it to be over. I still had about a month left to go before I expected anything to happen, but I was packed and ready just in case the Bean had other ideas. After much debate, Eric and I had finally settled on a name for our daughter. I was pre-registered at the hospital so all I had to do was show up when it was time to deliver.

I was going to do my best to go through labor drug-free, but I wasn't Superwoman. They didn't hand out prizes for a drug-free labor. Eric backed my decision, stating that since it was my body, it was my choice. I think reading the section of my pregnancy book about episiotomies really helped him understand my point of view.

I mostly felt bloated, swollen and gross. Finding a comfortable way to sit for an extended period of time was next to impossible. Sex was pretty much out of the question, even though my hormones would flair up from time to time. We would just be getting really into it when my sex drive would completely bottom out. I was running hot and cold in so many ways. I don't know how Eric was putting up with me. I couldn't stand to be around myself a lot of the time.

The highlight of all the wedding planning was finding a great decoy dress to tease Pam with. She had been so insistent that the bridesmaids dresses not be hideous that I couldn't resist taunting her with the worst dress I could find. I sent emails out to a bunch of my girlfriends, asking any of them if they had old dresses hanging in their closets they wouldn't mind parting with. Claudine, the captain of the cheerleading squad at the high school, just happened to have a dress that was absolutely perfect in the most God awful way.

Claudine was kind enough to bring the dress by so I could take pictures of it to email to Pam. Her response was epic. About ten minutes after I sent the email, my phone rang. I was laughing so hard I had to let the call go to voicemail. She didn't bother leaving a message, since the phone was ringing right away all over again.

"Hey, Pammy, you got my email?" I asked cheerfully.

"You have lost your fucking mind if you think I'm wearing that. It looks like Tinkerbell on acid!" Pam screeched at me from thousands of miles away. "You promised me no hideous monstrosities."

"I promised you no hunter green with bows." I reminded her.

"I know this is supposed to be your big day, but nowhere in the deal does it state you get to dress me up like a demented fairy." Pam hissed at me.

"It's just for the ceremony, Pam. We're having a garden wedding." I have no idea how I managed to get it out without laughing hysterically.

Eric had to leave the room so as not to ruin the whole thing. I could hear him all the way in the garage.

"Is that Eric? Put that fucker on the phone!" Pam shouted.

"Pam, he's just watching Caddyshack." I covered quickly.

"I don't care. Get him on the phone. Clearly you've lost your damn mind." Pam said angrily.

Thankfully, Amelia chose that moment to stop by. The doorbell rang and I said, "Oops, sorry, Pam. I've got company. I'll call you later." I blew kisses into the phone for added effect, and then hung up on her.

Eric got the door while I was doubled over- as much as I could be with my ginormous belly- laughing so hard I was crying. Eric had a few tears in his own eyes, and Amelia looked at us like we belonged in the looney bin. Once I showed her the pictures of the dress, she completely understood, and laughed along with us.

The real bridesmaids dresses were much better. Since we really were having a garden wedding on the first day of Summer, it seemed appropriate to go with yellow dresses. They were golden yellow, strapless and didn't quite hit the knee. They were rather casual, which fit right in with the tone of the rest of the wedding. Instead of the usual roses, we would be carrying daffodils and lilies. Eric's suit was white linen. He wasn't even going to be wearing a tie. The whole thing was very laid back.

Amelia and Tray were saints for volunteering to do a lot of the picking up and dropping off of our family members so they wouldn't have to take cabs to and from the airport. Eric was going to be picking up his parents himself since they'd never met Amelia or Tray. The two of them had still be out of town by the time Tom and Stella left. Stella had been a bit disappointed Eric and I weren't having a fancier wedding, but she didn't see why it was necessary. We figured the bigger deal we made of it, the higher the chances of something going wrong. We just wanted something simple.

Eric had settled into his place at the bar. He trusted the manager he'd hired to make sure things ran smoothly in his absence. He wouldn't be able to take time off, exactly, when the baby was born, but he would have more freedom to come and go from the bar as needed. He also finished up the court ordered anger management classes he had to take. His probation was up, and as far as everyone was concerned, the entire incident with Bill was behind us.

A diary Sophie Anne had been keeping revealed the reasons why she'd gotten involved with Bill. It turns out he'd been following me outside of work. He'd even been to my hometown over the previous summer while I was there. I thought back to how he knew of the birthmark on my hip, and I realized he must have seen me sunbathing on my parents' property. The thought of him standing in the woods doing God knows what while I just laid there all innocent and tuned out to the rest of the world made me sick to my stomach. Sophie Anne had actually been the one to approach Bill when she noticed him sitting outside Eric's house on more than one occasion.

Eric and I had never noticed Bill was there, but Sophie Anne did. It was their mutual obsession with a person they couldn't have that brought them together. Bill was unhappy in his marriage and wanted out. Sophie Anne just wanted Eric. We learned that Sophie Anne had slept with Johan on purpose, just to piss Eric off. She considered it a punishment. When he didn't fly off into the jealous rage she was hoping he would (delusional, much?), the plan to take me out of the equation started to come together.

The whole thing was rather insane. The fatal flaw in their plan was that Eric wasn't driving the car that night. The thought was, if we got in an accident, I would blame Eric for any injuries I might have suffered. We would break up, thereby leaving ourselves open for the taking. Bill would swoop in to play the hero for me, and Sophie Anne would nurse Eric back to health. It was a plan of sheer insanity that hadn't worked out the way they'd hoped. The whole thing was an epic failure, and had completely backfired on them. Still, the ball was already in motion, since they'd framed Lorena for the job.

The diary revealed how Lorena and the baby had died, and it was awful. It was Sophie who had drowned Bill's son. He was too busy drugging, then hanging his wife, but Sophie had done it on Bill's order. He'd been convinced that this would spark sympathy in me. He was counting on my appearance at the funerals, where he would somehow seduce me away from Eric. When that failed as well, the last ditch effort was him and Sophie showing up at the bar.

When Eric getting arrested wasn't enough to break us up, Bill snapped. The last entry in Sophie Anne's journal was one in which she actually sounded scared. Scared for not only her own life, but for those who stood in Bill's way. She called him a psycho, which was a big deal coming from someone who wasn't exactly mentally stable. She speculated on her own death, and wrote about how she was trying to stay away from Bill.

Apparently, she hadn't been successful. Her body was found eight days after the last entry in the journal. The whole thing was disturbing. I didn't know what to think. Bill's family had reached out in the aftermath to apologize to me for all I'd been through on account of him. I had no ill will toward them. They weren't to blame for the choices Bill made. Being a more prominent family in the south, he'd certainly done his share to embarrass them, which it was assumed that was part of what drove him to do what he did. His family had never approved of his marriage with Lorena. They thought she was trashy, and had leeched onto him in hopes of someday inheriting whatever Bill might receive when his great grandmother passed on.

I was at home alone a week before the wedding. Eric was over at his old house dropping off groceries for his family since they would be arriving the following day. He was airing out the house a little bit and getting it cleaned up since no one had really been in there since April. I was putting together little center pieces for the tables we'd rented for the backyard. Dinner was being catered and delivered, despite Mom's offer to cook. It was sweet of her to offer, but I wanted her to enjoy herself and not be chained to a stove all day.

The doorbell rang, and I slowly pushed myself off the couch and waddled- yes, waddled- to the front door. I was expecting it to be the flowers I'd ordered. Instead, it was Quinn. I certainly wasn't expecting him. I hadn't seen him in months. He'd called after Bill was killed, but I never called him back. I didn't see much point in talking to him anymore. I was with Eric. I was happy. I didn't need more drama in my life, and I knew Quinn would bring it.

"What are you doing here?" I tried not to sound too bitchy when I opened the door, but my hormones took offense to Quinn's uninvited appearance at my house.

"I heard a rumor you're getting married next week." Quinn came right out with it, which I appreciated.

"I am. I'm also having a baby next month."

"I see that." He looked at me sadly.

"Don't do that, Quinn. You had your chance. You had *years* to have what I have with Eric, and you blew it. If you're here to try and talk me out of marrying him, you're wasting your time *and* mine."

"No, that's not why I'm here." He said quickly. "I came here to apologize. I know it's late, but I want you to know I'm sorry. I should have done things better. I should have treated you better. You deserve that. And I'm sorry I lost you, but I'm happy you found someone who can give you the things you want. You deserve that, too."

To say I was surprised would be an understatement. "Thank you."

"All I ever wanted was for you to be happy, Sookie. If you believe nothing else, believe that."

I nodded, my eyes moving beyond Quinn to the red Corvette turning into the driveway. "You should go. Take care of yourself, Quinn."

He looked a bit confused until he turned to see Eric getting out of the car rather quickly. "I was just leaving." Queen said as Eric approached.

"Don't come back." Eric said in a very protective sort of way that might have pissed me off under other circumstances.

"I really do wish you the best, Sookie." Quinn gave me a sad smile before heading toward his truck.

"What did he want?" Eric asked once Quinn was driving away.

"He came to apologize for being such a bastard." My eyes swung up to Eric's.

"About time." Eric kissed the top of my head, then closed the door behind us.

I was elated to see all four parents getting along so well. After Eric and I had announced our engagement, our mothers insisted on having one another's phone numbers so they could get to know each other. The two of them got along like gangbusters, even if Mom did say on more than one occasion that Stella could be a bit tiring with all of her planning and enthusiasm. I was learning to take it all in stride. When my hormones started to get the better of me, I would simply fake morning sickness and either hand the phone off to Eric, or hang up, depending on whether or not he was home at the time.

I knew Stella meant well. I did my best to remind myself of that when she got on my nerves. She was only trying to help. Still, even from two thousand miles away, she could be overbearing sometimes. I refused, however, to admit Eric was right. It was for his own safety that he didn't get the chance to say, "I told you so." He probably wouldn't have survived it.

Little Caleb was an absolutely doll. He was almost two months old. He weighed just over fourteen pounds, and had the biggest, most curious blue eyes I'd ever seen. His hair was dark like Crystal's, and he had Dad's nose. His little fingers reached out to grasp at anything he could, especially Mom's earrings. You'd think she'd know better than to bother with hoops large enough for an infant to grab onto. Stella fawned all over the baby with watery eyes that told Eric and I we were going to have a hell of a time getting her back on the plane after the Bean was born.

We didn't really bother with the traditional rehearsal dinner. Eric and I weren't separating for the night on the chance I went into early labor. I didn't want to have to wait for him to drive all the way to Itasca from Franklin Park to come pick me up in the middle of the night. Stella warned us we were jinxing ourselves, but I was willing to take the risk. With all of the things that could potentially go wrong, I would feel safer with Eric right next to me.

The second Pam and Johan arrived at the house, Pam was staring daggers at me. "So help me God, Jiggles, there is no way I'm wearing that Tinkerbell on acid costume you picked out."

Apparently, Pam hadn't forgotten about the joke. I grinned right at her and reached into the coat closet where as keeping the dress. "But Pam, it has a corset!" I held the dress out to her.

"Get that thing away from me before your child doesn't have a mother."

"Pam!" Johan tugged on her hand.

Watching Pam twist herself up so much over a dress was fun. *Enjoying* watching Pam twist herself up so much over a dress was mean. Very, very mean. I wasn't the least bit sorry. Amelia was in on the joke, since she and I were the only ones who knew what the real bridesmaids dresses looked like. Besides, I needed her to help me sell that fugly thing as the real deal. Based on the shade of red Pam was turning, I knew we had her snowed.

She stomped away from me and down the hall. I hugged Johan, who immediately bent down to talk to his niece. He said something in Swedish that made Eric laugh. I elbowed him in the ribs in attempts to get him to tell me what Johan was saying, but Eric wouldn't give it up. If I didn't feel like a beached whale, I probably would have attempted to seduce it out of him. Somehow, it was hard to feel sexy with ankles the size of grapefruits and a chin that felt like it was slapping against my freakishly large breasts every time I opened my mouth.

Did I mention I was sick of being pregnant?

I parked myself in a deck chair out back. The men gathered around the grill to drink beer and talk about whatever the hell it is men talk about, while I found myself drowning in an estrogen ocean. Pam was still fuming at the other end of the table. The looks she kept shooting between me and Stella made me wonder if maybe she wasn't just a little bit jealous of how easily Stella had taken to me. Pam was always saying what a snooty bitch Stella was, but I didn't get that vibe from her at all. I figured there was just bad blood between them on account of... well, to be honest, I wasn't really sure what the reason was anymore.

At first I'd thought maybe it was because Stella thought Pam was too flighty and just playing with both of her sons' emotions. To my knowledge Pam had never been anything but a loyal friend to Eric. What she chose to do with Johan was between two consenting adults. I had to figure her moving to Sweden would mean a long-term commitment was somewhere in the cards for them. Not everyone moved as quickly as Eric and I did. I figured there had to be something more to Stella's resentment, but it wasn't my place to ask.

While we ate we went over the plans for the following day. The caterers would be coming in the early afternoon to set up for dinner. Amelia had arranged for her friend Tonya to come to the house to do hair and makeup for all of us girls. She would be coming around the same time as the caterers. Amelia and Pam were picking up the flowers rather than waiting on them to be delivered. The men were going to finish setting up the backyard, including an archway Mom had designed for us where Eric and I were going to get married toward the back end of the yard.

If everything went just right, Eric and I would be married by sunset the following night. There were lots of variables to consider in all of our planning, the least predictable of which was the weather. So far the forecast was for sunny skies and temperatures in the low eighties with moderate humidity. Of course, since this was Chicago it was entirely possible clouds could come rolling in at any time and unleash whatever fury they had pent up.

After dinner Tom and Stella headed back to Eric's house to get some sleep. My parents went back to the hotel with Crystal and Caleb. Jason stuck around along with Amelia, Tray, Pam and Johan to watch The Hangover. The last thing I remembered was rambling about a wolf pack before I passed out. The next thing I knew my arms were wrapped around Eric's neck and he was carrying me upstairs.

"I can walk." I muttered.

"Don't be silly." He kissed my forehead.

"I'm too heavy."

"Does it feel like I'm going to drop you?" He arched an eyebrow at me.

Damn, he was stronger than I thought. I'd gained more than thirty pounds with my pregnancy, although I'd been assured by several women that thirty pounds was nothing. Eric did set me down on my feet when we got to the landing. He put his arm around my shoulders and I leaned against him as we walked the last few feet to the bedroom. I peeled off the tiny sundress I was wearing and tossed it into the hamper. I caught my reflection in the mirror, and my hands went to my belly. I looked down to see a tiny hand press up against my skin.

"Eric, look." I whispered, afraid if I spoke too loud it would go away.

"Wow." He whispered in return when he saw what I was seeing. "Is that her hand?"

I nodded, wanting to touch it, but not wanting it to disappear like I knew it would if I did. We watched her little hand slide back and forth under my skin. It was moments like those when I remembered to be amazed by what my body was doing instead of complaining about it. Really, I'd lost my patience not just because my body wasn't my own anymore, but because I was dying to meet the little person I was housing. I was so curious to see what she would inherit from Eric and me, and what would be innately her own. I wondered if she would take steps two at a time the way Eric often did. I wondered if she would be a coffee junkie like I was before I got pregnant. There were so many possibilities and I was more than ready to find out who our daughter was going to be.

The hormones chose that particular moment to take over, and before I knew it I was weeping for no reason. Eric held me tight against him, letting me cry it out. He'd learned it was rarely worth it to ask why I was crying since I usually didn't have an answer. Thankfully, the crying jag didn't last as long as some of them had. I got a nightgown out of the dresser while Eric went to the bathroom to brush his teeth and do whatever else he needed to do.

Not long after that, Eric and I were snuggled in bed together as much as we could be. My collection of pillows had only increased over the last couple of weeks. It was almost impossible to find a comfortable position to lay in for too long, but I did the best I could. I told Eric a few weeks before if he wanted to sleep in the other room, I wouldn't blame him. I was up and down all night long because it seemed like as soon as I got comfortable, I had to pee.

I got settled and Eric slid up behind me. His hand rested on my stomach where the Bean's feet were. She kicked his hand with one foot and my ribs with the other. Eric kissed the side of my neck and tucked some of my hair back.

"You realize that exactly nine months ago today, the best thing that ever happened to me walked into my life?" Eric smiled against my skin.

It was cheesy as hell, but I felt the same way. It hadn't even dawned on me that we were getting married on our nine month anniversary. "And in another month, we'll be parents." I sighed, reaching to entwine my fingers with his.

"It's a good thing we don't scare easily." He squeezed my hand.

"Are you scared?" I turned my head as much as I could.

Eric pushed himself up on his elbow and looked down at me. "Absolutely not. Do you want to know why?" I nodded and he continued. "I'm not scared because I know that whatever happens, we're in it together. As long as I have you, that's all that matters." He picked up my hand and kissed it.

I kissed his hand in return and then held it to my chest as I drifted off to sleep.

Okay, so the wedding was supposed to happen in this chapter. Obviously, the muses weren't quite ready for that. Aren't you all just totally bummed you're going to get another chapter? I know you're all sitting there thinking, "Damn, can't this bitch just finish this thing already?" \*snickers\* Anyway... the next chapter may see multiple POVs. I haven't decided how I want to write the wedding yet. We'll see what happens. Later baby birds!

**Chapter 54: I Bet You Look Good On The Dance Floor**

Hey baby birds! Sorry for the heinous delay with this. I really wanted to get the entire wedding into one chapter, but it just wasn't going to work out that way. Sooo...try not to be too upset, but it looks like there'll be another chapter. Ugh. Seriously, this is effing up my filing system. But that's not really your problem, now is it? Anyway...I'll just my piehole and let you get to the good stuff. Enjoy.

Chapter Fifty Four: I Bet You Look Good On The Dance Floor

**Eric**

I slipped out of bed without waking Sookie, was a small miracle in itself. She was a light sleeper lately on account of our daughter doing underwater aerobics in her belly at all hours of the day. I really did feel badly for her. Seeing her so miserable much of the time made it hard to be mad at her. I knew she was as much of a hostage to her body as I was at that point. Anything she asked me to do, I just did. I didn't bother questioning it because I knew we would end up fighting. It was completely irrational, and she had about as many answers as I did.

I pulled on a pair of basketball shorts and a t-shirt. I could already hear Tray down in the yard. I really wanted to surprise Sookie with what we had planned, and I was hoping she'd stay in bed a while longer. We had everything all planned out and ready to go. It was just a matter of getting everything in place. Amelia was in on what we were doing since it required Tray to make adjustments to the picket fence that divided our yards. Jeter followed me out of the house and into the hard.

"There you are!" Tray breathed a sigh of relief.

"Sorry. I had to wait until Sookie was out cold, and that's a rare thing these days." I said as I made my way toward the fence.

"I keep telling Ame to pay close attention to what Sookie's going through."

Amelia and Tray still weren't pregnant, and I knew Amelia's constant fretting over it was starting to drive Tray crazy. He blamed himself for not being able to give Amelia what she wanted when he'd always been able to the past. This was different than anything else they'd ever done before. Frankly, I understood why they were worried. I also understood why it was hard for Amelia to be around Sookie sometimes. Amelia did a pretty good job of putting up a brave face, I'll give her that. There were times when I'd see the two of them sitting at the table on the deck. Sookie would be laughing down at her belly, and Amelia would get this sad, longing look in her eyes.

"You two will get there when the time is right." I told Tray.

"That's what I keep telling Ame, but she's convinced the time isn't ever going to be right." Tray sighed the sigh of a man who felt like he'd done nothing but let his woman down over and over again. It wasn't pretty.

We got down to business after that. The tables for the small reception we were having were already put in place. The catering tables would be put up on our deck. We moved our deck table over to Tray and Amelia's side where a small bar was going. Tray and I had convinced Sookie and Amelia weeks ago that it made sense to put a gateway in the fence between the two properties, since we were sure Sookie and Amelia would be coming and going from one house to the other after the baby was born. Not to mention, Tray and Amelia were fairly used to Jeter jumping the fence to get at whatever squirrels or chipmunks might be in their yard. So long as we cleaned up any mess Jeter might leave behind, they didn't mind.

The biggest job we had was getting all of the twinkle lights strung up. We moved as quickly as we could, making sure to wrap the lights around the pickets of the fence that had already been decorated with some sheer white and yellow material I couldn't name if my life depended on it, even though Sookie had used the word about a million times in the last six weeks. Once we got the fence done, we went on the trees and bushes to decorate them as well. Then we had tiki torches that Amelia had wrapped with shiny yellow ribbon that matched the color of the dresses. I hadn't seen the dresses, but she assured me they were beautiful.

I liked that Sookie had chosen yellow. It was a bright color, and it reminded me of her. It was sunshine, after all, and it seemed fitting since we were getting married on the first day of summer. Sookie had once told me the first day of summer was her favorite day of the year. I was pretty sure that day was going to have to jockey for position in light of all the things happening in our lives.

The easiest part of all of this planning had been the decision to write our own vows. Not that traditional vows weren't nice, but there were things I wanted to say to her that weren't really covered in those vows. I wasn't so concerned with whether she would obey me or stick with me through thick and thin. Sookie had long ago proven she had a mind of her own and would do what she wanted, regardless of whether I was on board with her or not. She had also proven she would, in fact, stand by me when things got shitty. I had proven the same to her after the accident.

There was nowhere in the world I wanted to go without her right there next to me, and I wanted that to be known to everyone. Mostly, I wanted to be sure *she* knew it. I did a little research and spent an afternoon out at the drive-in where we'd had our second date. It was quiet out there and it brought back memories. Some of them were a little on the dirty side, but it had been a good night. I wrote down all of the things I wanted to say. I'd been keeping the piece of paper in the glove compartment of the Comet ever since.

It took a little over two hours to get everything exactly where we wanted it. Then the real fun began. The ceremony was taking place in our yard. With Tray and Amelia's permission, I ordered a small canopy for Tray and I to put up in their yard. After putting that up in what I figured had to be record time, I set about installing the portable dance floor I'd rented. I didn't know how much dancing Sookie was going to want to do, but it was her wedding. I figured we were guaranteed at least one dance together, and I was pretty sure she'd want to dance with her father. I knew it would take some fancy footwork to get out of a dance with Mom, not that I would even try. Arguing with her would be more deadly than arguing with Sookie.

When all was said and done, it was maybe an hour before sunrise. I called Jeter to come back into the house with me. He followed me up the steps and continued on to the bedroom, while I went to the bathroom to take a shower. Getting into bed with Sookie while I was all sweaty and gross wouldn't go over well for either one of us. I showered quickly and towel dried my hair. We had agreed we would sleep in as late as we wanted to since it was going to be a long day for both of us. I got into bed beside her, shocked that I didn't wake her up.

I could see the Bean kicking away in her stomach, and I watched tiny feet press against the inside of her skin. If I wasn't sure it would wake Sookie up, I would have reached out to tickle that tiny foot. The amount of time I spent zoned out wondering what our daughter was going to look like was way more than I anticipated. But there were times when I'd catch Sookie with a distant look in her eyes and a smile on her face, and I knew she was thinking the same things I was.

Rather than putting my hand on Sookie's stomach and waking her, I gently picked up her hand and laced my fingers with hers. I squeezed my palm to hers gently before closing my eyes. She squeezed back, whether she meant to or not, and then I drifted off to sleep.

**Sookie**

The Bean doing her morning jumping routine on the trampoline that was my bladder had me rolling out of bed much earlier than I wanted to. I waddled to the bathroom, surprised to find I wasn't feeling the usual pain or pressure in my poor ankles. I brushed my teeth and hair, and stopped at the bedroom windows to look up at the sky for a moment. The sun was high in the sky, and there wasn't a cloud to be seen. I said a silent prayer in hopes the weather would hold out for us.

I tried to keep my mind empty of all the things I needed to do. I still had plenty of time before I needed to get out of bed and get going. I wanted to just relax and keep myself as stress-free as possible. I was just a few days shy of my thirty-seventh week. After that, the baby would be considered full-term and I could go into labor at any point. Of course, the longer we could keep her in (I hated Dr. Ludwig a little for reminding me of this), the better off it would be. I seriously wondered what the fuck doctors were thinking when they told hormonal pregnant women things like that.

I eased back into bed and curled on my right side for a little while. It wasn't the preferred way for me to lay down, but my left side was numb and laying on my back was murder. Not only did it hurt like a bitch, but the chances of throwing up were much higher. A few minutes on my right side wouldn't kill me. I stared at Eric's sleeping form next to me and smiled.

God, he was so beautiful. My eyes welled up at the idea of waking up next to that face every day for the rest of my life. I felt like such a sap. I let it go because it was my wedding day, and I was extremely pregnant. Being emotional was to be expected. I moved closer to Eric and kissed the corners of his mouth. His lips twitched up into a smile that made my heart stop.

"Good morning, wife."

"We're not married yet." I whispered in response.

"It's just a piece of paper, remember?" His hand felt around for mine.

"Oh, trust me, it's more than that." I grabbed his hand and squeezed.

"Did you sleep okay?" Eric's eyes were still closed.

"Yes, actually, I did. I only woke up once last night. Were you downstairs, or something?" I asked, since Eric hadn't been in bed next to me.

"Oh, uh, yeah. I had trouble falling asleep so I went downstairs to read for a while." Something in his voice told me he was bullshitting me.

"You went downstairs to read?"

"Yeah." He was *definitely* full of shit. His eyes finally opened to see me staring right at him with eyes full of suspicion. "What?"

"Do you really want to start our marriage with a lie?" I narrowed my eyes at him.

Eric sighed and said, "Fine. I was trying to surprise you."

"Eric, I think I've had enough surprises." I drummed my fingers on my mountain of a baby bump.

He groaned as he sat up, wincing at one pain or another. What the hell was he doing last night after I went to bed? He came around to my side of the bed and took my hand. He led me downstairs and toward the back of the house.

"Close your eyes." He instructed.

I played along only because it seemed that whatever he was up to, he'd gone to a lot of trouble to keep it a secret from me. I might hate surprises, but he clearly took some sort of joy in them. That was reason enough for me to shut my piehole. Eric guided me by my shoulders around the back of the couch, toward the patio door. He stepped around in front of me to open the french door, then slide the screen open. He resumed his position behind me, pushing me out onto the deck.

The sun was shining brightly, and the warmth of it felt good. I turned my face upward to catch a few rays before Eric told me to stop. I stood there for a moment, enjoying the warmth of the sunlight on my face. I listened to him move around and make a few adjustments.

"Okay, open your eyes." He said almost nervously.

I righted my head and slowly opened my eyes. I looked at him first, and then around the yard. My mouth fell open in complete shock. It was so beautiful. There were twinkle lights strung up everywhere. A canopy was in the Tray and Amelia's yard, and when I saw the dance floor underneath, I started to tear up a little.

"You did all this?" I gasped, staggering toward him slowly as the tears started.

"Lover, don't cry." He reached for me to hold me close, but it was too late. I was already sobbing. "Do you hate it?"

"What?" I jerked my head back. "No, Eric, it's... it's wonderful. Thank you. I had no idea you planned all this. It's lovely." I pushed myself up on my toes as much as I could to kiss him.

He was more than willing to kiss me back, and wiped my tears from my cheeks. "I'm glad you like it."

"I don't like it. I love it." I corrected him, squeezing him tightly.

A rush passed through me I hadn't felt in weeks, and the only thing I could think of in that moment was dragging Eric inside and having my way with him. That probably broke all sorts of pre-wedding superstitions or something, but I wasn't too worried about that. Besides, if a quickie would help me relax and make Eric happy at the same time, it was more than worth it in my book.

"Come inside." I started pulling him toward the house.

"There's more I wanted to show you." He started to tug me back.

My eyes narrowed. I looked him dead in the eyes and said, "Eric, for the first time in three weeks, I'm horny. Fuck me."

You'd think I smacked him over the head with a two by four the way he looked at me, but before I knew I was being pulled into the house. Fuck me, indeed.

**Amelia**

I was pulled from a lovely dream that consisted of Tray and I getting frisky on a tropical beach somewhere by the shrieks of my best friend having one hell of an orgasm next door. I liked having Sookie so close. I *didn't* like having to listen to her scream her way through sex with her baby daddy. I was tempted to pound on the wall to let them know to keep it down. Instead, I got out of bed. Let them have their fun.

Tray was out cold next to me, but that wasn't surprising. He could sleep through an atomic bomb being dropped on his head. Talk about sleeping the sleep of the dead. I envied him for that. I kissed his forehead before going to the bathroom to take care of business. I didn't get in the shower since I planned on getting a little myself before I had to start getting ready for the wedding.

I went downstairs and started up my laptop before going on to the kitchen to start the coffee. I looked at the calendar hanging on the inside of one of the cabinets, and blew out a slow breath. I had to wait another nine days before I could take a pregnancy test. Not that I wasn't having fun trying to get pregnant, but I was starting to really worry that nothing was happening.

I'd already been to see my doctor about it to make sure there were no residual injuries from the accident that might be preventing it from happening. My doctor told me to just relax, just like everyone else did, and let it happen. I was pissed I had to pay for that kind of advise. I was trying to relax, but this was something I thought I needed to be proactive about. If it was true that Tray and I had fertility problems, then we needed to figure out what we were going to do.

I'd looked into the costs of doing in vitro, but that was awfully expensive. The really shitty part was that I was almost thinking about apologizing to my father just to get back in his good graces. If I mentioned a grandchild, he would give me the money. Of course, he would probably try to talk me into using a donor instead of Tray. I nixed the idea immediately. It was pathetic of me to even consider it. I didn't want my child to grow up thinking they owed their life to my father the way I had for so long.

I should have kicked him out of my life a long time ago. I didn't want to think maybe my inability to get pregnant was God's way of telling me I wasn't meant to be a mother, or that my genes weren't meant to be passed on to the next generation. My brain was going in all sorts of crazy directions in attempts to explain my failure. That's what it was, no matter what Tray or anyone else said. Every month I was letting us down.

I should clarify by saying that Tray never made me feel that way. He never looked at me like it was my fault, and I knew he didn't love me any less because of it. In a lot of ways, I knew it was all in my head. Still, it didn't make not being pregnant any easier.

Even worse was seeing Sookie. It's not that I wasn't happy for her, because I was. I was beyond thrilled. After everything the girl has been through, she deserves to be happy. Eric has been so good for her. He healed a wound in her heart that I'm not sure anyone else could have healed. He adores her, which was obvious from the second he laid eyes on her.

I stood there in the kitchen laughing to myself as I poured my coffee, wondering if the two of them would ever figure out they'd been set up. I'd met Pam the month before when Tray and I had gone there randomly one night. I saw Eric talking to Pam, and from how close they were, I thought they were dating. When I went to the bar to get a drink, Pam happened to be the one manning the bar. I'd asked about Eric, curious to know if he was attached to her.

I believe my exact words were, "Your husband is sex on a stick."

Pam had thrown her head back and cackled at my assumption before telling me I was much more her taste than Eric. "He has a thing for busty blondes." Pam had informed me.

Immediately Sookie's face came to mind, and the rest was history. They fell for it, tequila, lime and salt. They had absolutely no reason to think Pam and I had played match maker. Maybe it was better to keep it between us.

I took my coffee into the office and sat down in front of my computer. It was nice to not have stacks of papers waiting to be graded, or worksheets that needed to be drafted. I didn't rely on textbooks to create my homework for me. I used them as a guide but that was all. The work issued with the teacher's guide rarely covered the things that were most important. Besides, the language could be a bit confusing at times. I was more concerned with my students understanding what they were learning, rather than spewing text at me.

I opened the document I'd started that contained my toast for the wedding later. I wasn't very good at public speaking, so rather than trying to come up with something profound to say to a group of people who were already very aware of all the things Sookie and Eric had been through over the last few months. So instead, I went looking for a poem to read, and what I found was something by William Shakespeare that seemed only too fitting for the two of them.

***Sonnet 116***

*Let me not to the marriage of true minds  
Admit impediments. Love is not love  
Which alters when it alteration finds,  
Or bends with the remover to remove:  
O no! it is an ever-fixed mark  
That looks on tempests and is never shaken;  
It is the star to every wandering bark,  
Whose worth's unknown, although his height be taken.  
Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks  
Within his bending sickle's compass come:  
Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,  
But bears it out even to the edge of doom.  
If this be error and upon me proved,  
I never writ, nor no man ever loved.*

The second I read it, I had tears in my eyes. It was perfect. I added a few personal touches to my speech at the end, and then saved the document. The clock on the laptop told me it was almost noon. It was time to start getting ready. We had a long night ahead of us.

I'll get cracking on the next chapter ASAP. I'm a bit busy right now with WTF (I really need to finish chapter 5 and get that over to **kjwrit**). I am also trying my hand at the beta thing for the "A New Chapter" contest that is going on. I'm working with two authors so far, and I need to devote some of my time to helping them with their work. So just be patient, and I promise the wedding will be worth waiting for.

I've also started posting a little story called "Holding Back the Years" that was originally going to be a one shot for the "I Write the Songs" contest. Only the idea was too big to confine to 12,000 words. Hence, homegirl started a new multi-chapter story. There are 5 chapters posted so far, and I'll be posting the 6th tonight. There may or may not be some zesty lemon flavor in that chapter, btw.

Anyway... thank you for being patient. I appreciate it. Y'all rock my socks! Oh, and if you leave me a review, be kind enough to tell me who you'd like to see a guest perspective from during the wedding chapter. Majority rules, so I'll tally the votes sometime on Sunday. I figure it's the least I can do since you guys are so awesomesauce and I suck at review response. Later, bb birds \*smooches\*

**Chapter 55: We Are Man and Wife**

Well, fanfiction's servers are down right now so I can't see who's POV was the fan favorite. Therefore, I'm giving you both Pam and Johan in this chapter. This chapter kicked my ass, like whoa! Hope it was worth waiting for.

**The Backyard:**

Okay, so it would be something similar to what's in that picture, minus the brick retention wall thing. I'm seeing them as more the white picket fence type, no? Vampire!Eric would appreciate the retention wall more lol.

And because I'm a great big whore when it comes to music, here's a lovely playlist to set the mood. **ARedheadThing** will be proud of me.

**HFT Wedding Playlist:** playlist/20761502987

And, finally, a special thanks to **Slacker Dee** for her amazeballs feedback and the beta bonus work she did on her read thru of this earlier. Any remaining mistakes here are all mine.

Chapter Fifty-Five: We Are Man and Wife

**Pam**

I was going to kill whomever was responsible for the heinous design I was being forced into. I was also going to insist Sookie be induced to stop the insanity. I seriously considered "accidentally" setting that hideous Tinkerbell on Acid dress she was wanted me to wear on fire. Honestly, I knew Sookie's sense of style was questionable, but even *she* had to know just how wrong the dress was.

"Pam, are you dressed yet?" Amelia called from the other side of the bathroom door.

"Fuck you!" Was my quick response.

"Come on, Pam, it's not so bad. And really, when you think about it, it could be worse." Amelia insisted.

I flung the door open, expecting to see Amelia dressed in the same God awful tutu-corset combo as me, but instead, she was dressed in a lovely ruffled golden dress that I would have shanked someone for at the moment. While it wasn't exactly my taste, it was lightyears better than the dress I was mentally torching, at the moment.

"What the fuck are you wearing?" I demanded.

"Oh, this is my dress. What do you think?"

"I think if you don't trade with me, you're never going to find out what it's like to bring a life into this world." I threatened her.

"Pam, no death threats on my wedding day!" Sookie called from down the hall.

I grabbed the hanger holding the bane of my existence, and marched down the hall to where Sookie was being primped. "I would rather go naked. How's that?"

"No nudity, either."

I snickered and said, "I bet Eric's going to love tonight."

"Oh, Eric already got him some." Amelia offered, causing Sookie to turn bright pink.

"Oh, relax, Sook, it's not like we don't know you and Eric have been bumping uglies." Amelia teased.

"Pam, I promised you no hunter green monstrosities with bows. Do you see any hunter green or bows?" Sookie stared at the dress with a serious expression on her face.

I was just about to answer her when Amelia said, "Oh, wait! Pam, you don't have the best part of your outfit!" She disappeared into the nursery across the hall.

"I swear to God if there are wings to go with this, I'll have Johan moon everyone in the middle of the ceremony!" He would do it, too, if I told him to.

Sookie just giggled, apparently not taking me seriously. Although, I suppose she had a right not to. Johan would have serious hell to face, and Eric would be the least of his worries. Mother Northman, as she was insisting I call her now, would never forgive him. As much as I like revenge, I had no interest in raising the ire of that woman. Eric I could handle, but Mother Northman was another story.

"Here." Amelia handed me a dress bag. "I'll take the dress."

I handed her the hanger I was already holding and yanked up the plastic sheathing to reveal a second dress identical to Amelia's. I stared at Amelia, then Sookie, both of them fighting not to laugh. I knew what reaction they wanted, and just to appease the very large pregnant woman, I gave in.

"I hate you both." I said coolly before turning on my heel and going back to the bathroom to change.

"Oh, come on, Pammy, where's your sense of humor?" Sookie called after me.

"Don't call me Pammy!" I shouted, then locked myself in the bathroom.

I was going to get her for this.

**Johan**

I chuckled as Pam vented her frustrations over the stunt Sookie and Amelia had pulled. Eric was laughing much louder in the background, which only pissed Pam off more. She shrieked in my ear, threatening Eric with the possibility of his child being an only child. He just shook his head and kept laughing.

"Don't you think you're overreacting, Pam? You're not wearing the dress, so just relax, get ready and get yourself together." I advised her in a gentle voice.

She huffed a few times before saying, "I'm going to get her for this."

"I'm sure you will." I had no doubt Pam wouldn't forget this anytime soon. "Now go get ready. Time's running out."

"Yeah, yeah. Tell Eric's it's not too late to make a run for it."

"You're on speakerphone, Pam."

"Your point?"

"The only direction I'm running is toward Sookie." Eric called out from his seat.

"I've never seen someone so pussy whipped." Pam said with a chuckle, just as Mom came downstairs.

Her nose turned up with distaste, but she managed to keep her commentary to herself. "Pam, I have to go. I'll see you soon."

"I'll keep a car running just in case." She said, then disconnected.

"I don't know what either of you boys see in her." Mom shook her head.

"Can we not have this fight today?" Eric asked without looking away from his computer. He'd stolen Sookie's iPod to put together a playlist for the wedding, since he figured the parents wouldn't appreciate Tool or System of a Down in the middle of the reception.

"Who's fighting? I'm just making an observation." Mom said innocently.

"Sounds more like a judgment to me." Eric spoke up.

I really didn't want to get into this either, but if push came to shove...

"She's crass, vulgar and rude. She's not exactly the kind of woman a mother dreams will marry her son." Mom folded her arms on her chest.

"Maybe she's not," I started forcefully before Eric got the chance. I loved my mother, but I'd just about had it with her bashing Pam every chance she got. More to the point, I was tired of seeing Pam so upset over it, even if she wouldn't admit it. "But I'm not exactly the kind of guy most mothers hope their daughters will marry. I'm irresponsible, immature and every bit as vulgar as Pam is. What you don't get to see about her, Mom, is that she's also very generous and loyal to the people she cares about. She's smart and she works hard for everything she has. And whether or not you want to see it, she has a big heart. She's just very selective about who she lets into it. Sound like anyone else you know?" I jerked my head toward Eric.

"Johan, I..." Mom looked a bit stunned by my outburst, since I was usually more likely to placate her than I was to argue.

"You don't have to like Pam, Mom, but you do have to respect her." I said firmly, earning me a smile of support from my twin.

Mom huffed, turned on her heel and stomped up the steps. She yelled in Swedish at Dad when she passed him, and then a door slammed upstairs. It was going to be a long fucking night if that was her attitude.

**Sookie**

I didn't want to jinx myself, but everything was perfect. Pam had given the reaction I'd expected her to. As an added bonus, she griped about the yellow dress as well. I just rolled my eyes and refused to let it bother me. I fought hard against the hormones that were threatening to rise up and toss her out my bedroom window.

I sat patiently while my hair was styled elaborately. A thread of crystals was being woven through my hair so it would sparkle in the fading light. My makeup was a little heavier than normal, but that was mostly because I hadn't been able to spend as much time outside as I would have liked. Stupid bedrest orders. The trickiest part of getting ready was having to stop every ten minutes or so, so I could go pee. Not that I wasn't enjoying my pregnancy most of the time, but the frequent urge to pee was something I could live without.

I had just been zipped into my dress when the Bean starting kicking up a storm. It felt like she was using my kidney as a soccer ball. I gasped, and reached for the edge of the dresser to steady myself. Amelia put a concerned hand on my shoulder.

"Whoa, everything okay in there, Mama?" She asked with humor.

I took a few deep breaths, pressed a hand to my lower back and stood up slowly. "She's just beating me up, that's all."

Amelia bent down further, put her hands on my belly and said, "Listen here, little missy. Today is a very big day, and we can't have your Mom grimacing in all of her pictures. So how about you go easy on her, and when this is all over, she'll treat you to an entire pint of that chocolate mint cookie ice cream you love so much?"

I had to laugh at Amelia's tactics. Although maybe there was something to her madness, because the Bean chilled out. I was able to finish getting ready in peace. Mom arrived not long after the caterers finished setting up out back, and took it upon herself to photograph just about every square inch of the house and yard. Every time I turned around there was a camera in my face, and while *I* didn't mind, the hormones did.

"Mom, I'm going to say this as nicely as I can." I smiled pleasantly at her as I put my hand over hers. "Get that camera out of my face before I make you swallow it."

"Sookie!" Daddy admonished.

"Oh, it isn't her talking, Corbett, it's the hormones." Mom shrugged it off. "I'll keep the camera out of your face. For now." Mom promised.

"Thank you."

That little outburst aside, everything went okay. Mostly, I was anxious to see Eric. He'd left about an hour after the best sex we'd had in months. I was surprised to find the hormonal rush I'd felt earlier hadn't really worn off. I just hoped it would last, and I wouldn't be passed out before I could get him to scratch my itch, so to speak.

I spent my time going over my vows and making sure everything was set up in its exact, right place. Eric and Tray had done an amazing job with the yards. I put Jason in charge of making sure all of the candles and lights were lit just before the ceremony started, since he was dancing around like a puppy, begging for something to do. Crystal didn't say a whole heck of a lot. She mostly stayed out of the way and took care of Caleb.

It surprised me that I didn't feel the slightest bit nervous. I always thought I would. I mean, not in the 'I have doubts about this' way, but more because I was worried I'd screw things up in the middle of the ceremony. I thought I'd be worried about tripping on my dress or, God forbid, pulling a Ross Gellar, and saying the wrong name in my vows. Oy, what a clusterfuck *that* would be. Although, really, how many people does that *actually*happen to? Not to mention, there was no way in hell I could ever mistake Eric for Quinn. I shivered at the mere thought of it.

But then I heard Eric's voice, and my heart started pounding. All those nerves I'd been waiting for came rushing at me, and for the first time ever, I worried maybe he might change his mind. It happened all the time, didn't it? You think getting married is what you want, but then you have this glimpse of your future and before you know it, you're running like your life depends on it. Eric wasn't just signing himself over to me, but to the Bean. That's a lot of commitment to make over the course of a ten minute ceremony. What if he changed his mind?

I felt a panic attack start to set in. Deep down I knew I was being ridiculous for panicking like I was. I knew he loved me, and he was excited about the Bean. Amelia went to get Eric to see if he could calm me down, but I didn't want that. I didn't want him to know I was freaking out, or that I doubted him. I could deal with this on my own. I locked myself in the bathroom to prove it.

I took big, deep breaths and steadied myself on the vanity. I was just getting back to normal breathing when there was a knock on the door. "Who is it?"

"It's me, lilla syster." Johan. If you didn't know any better, you'd think it was Eric. My heart started again when I realized I was able to tell the difference from one twin to another, just by hearing his voice.

"Come in." I said after unlatching the lock.

"Wow." He smiled at me once the door was open. "Sookie, you look beautiful."

"I look like a Thanksgiving Day float, but thank you."

"Nonsense." Johan held out a small box. "Eric asked me to bring you this."

Ah, yes, the exchanging of gifts. I'd tried to talk him out of this, but he had insisted we keep this tradition. I'd sent Pam out with his- a mjolnir on a braided silver chain- a while ago. I opened the box to find a pair pearl of earrings that he'd somehow managed to match perfectly to my dress. They were the same shade of white, and sparkled more than I thought pearls could. They were beautiful.

"Oh," I gasped at them and tried not to tear up. The last thing I needed was more threats to my makeup. "They're beautiful. Tell him I said thank you." I smiled over at Johan.

"I will." He nodded, and lingered in the doorway as I put them on. "Listen, Sookie, not that you need my approval, but I think this is a good thing. You're good for each other. He's a different person when you aren't around. He was miserable when you were in Louisiana for those few days, and even before that... with the car accident... well, I've never seen him such a wreck over anything. You two are lucky you found each other."

"Thank you, Johan." I squeezed his hand, and wasn't the least bit surprised when he yanked me forward and hugged me. If I wasn't such a sea cow, he probably would have swung me around for a minute.

The Bean decided to make herself known again, in that moment, and started kicking up a storm. She probably thought it was Eric. She'd been good about 'performing' whenever her Daddy was around lately. Johan pulled back, a scared look on his face like he was worried he'd done something to upset the baby.

"Johan, it's fine. She kicks all the time." I assured him.

"Can I?" He held his large hand out so it was hovering over my stomach. It was nice to hear someone ask for a change.

"Of course." I smiled at him.

He put his hand on my stomach to feel his niece move, and smiled broadly when one of her tiny limbs smacked right against his palm. "She's strong."

"You have no idea." I laughed. Music started to play outside, and I craned my head to look out the window. It was almost sunset. I took a deep breath, and said, "Well, I guess it's time to go promote Eric from baby daddy to husband."

Johan laughed and said, "He's looking forward to it."

**Eric**

I stood at the archway in the yard, my eyes drifting over to the kitchen windows every few seconds to watch for Amelia's signal that we were good to go. I watched Mom take her seat in the front row with Dad at her side. She hadn't said much since Johan stood up for Pam earlier in the afternoon. She absolutely refused to look Johan in the eye, and the only thing I could be grateful for about the whole thing was that I wasn't a pawn caught between them. So far Dad had done an impeccable job of running interference.

Jason escorted Michelle to her seat, and then sat down himself between his mother and Crystal. Little Caleb was in the tiniest suit I'd ever seen. The poor kid looked miserable. Tray made his way closer to the archway with a big grin on his face.

"Man, you're gonna lose your shit when you see Sookie." He clapped me on my shoulder.

"Thanks for the warning." I shook my head.

My eyes were trained on the kitchen window while my hand reached into my pocket to make sure I had my vows there just in case. I was pretty sure I had them memorized, but there always the possibility my brain would decide to go on vacation when I needed it. Yeah, I could probably wing it, but I didn't want to end up quoting lyrics to a bad 80's power ballad, and making an ass of myself.

And then Amelia appeared, her thumb crooked skyward with a sparkling smile on her face. Johan appeared moments later at my side. He leaned over and whispered, "She loves you. She's ready."

I nodded, suddenly feeling like I had the Jesse White Tumblers working a new routine in my stomach. Music began to play through the speakers that we'd placed around the yard the day before. Pam was the first to walk out of the house with a bundle of sunflowers in her hands. I was amazed to see her eyes watering. There was my Pam, my best friend for the last thirteen years, on the verge of Pam was crying, I was fucked. It took a big deal to bring Pam down. Fuck me.

Amelia came next, carrying the same flowers. She beamed at Tray the whole way, but gave me a reassuring wink when she got to her place. The music changed, and everyone stood up. My heart leapt up into my throat. Corbett appeared in the doorway first, and I took a deep breath to steady myself. My eyes closed for just a moment, and when I opened them, Sookie was there.

I felt like someone dropped a Buick on my chest for all the air I was able to suck in. Gorgeous didn't even come close to describing how beautiful she was as she walked toward me. I kept my eyes on hers, and the way she was looking at me wonder why the hell we had put this off for so long. We were such fools. I knew it for so long... she was the one. She was it. She was the whole world to me, and my stupid ass had let all this time slip away.

When she got to where I was standing, it took all the control I had not to pull her close and kiss her. She kissed her father's cheek before she was handed off to me. Corbett smiled at me, clapped me on the shoulder and then went to take his seat. Sookie and I clasped our hands together, music continuing to play softly as the ceremony began.

No one interrupted. No one objected to our union. I heard the clicking of cameras behind us and saw the flashes as the light started to dwindle. The longer the ceremony went on, the more obvious the twinkle lights and flickers of the candles became. I stole glances over at Sookie, and she was always looking right back at me. And then, it was our turn to do the talking.

We turned to face one another. Her eyes were filled with tears, and I knew I was going to be in deep shit when she started crying. It was inevitable. She would have cried anyway, but the boost of pregnancy hormones weren't doing either of us any favors. Her hands were shaking just as much as mine where, and that gave me some sort of comfort. It was good to know I wasn't the only one shaken up.

I took a deep breath, looking deep into her eyes and squeezing her palms to mine. She smiled at me, and I relaxed. Amazing how that's all it took for the world to slow down. All I needed was her smile.

One more deep breath filled my lungs and then I began. "I don't know what I did to deserve you, but I don't ask too many questions because I can't think of a life that doesn't include you." I let go of one of her hands, and put my palm on her ever expanding belly. She smiled down at my hand before letting her eyes find mine again. "I'd like to think that if we're still here, and still as devoted to each other as we have been from the beginning after all the things we've been through in such a short amount of time, that means we are where we're supposed to be. Everything about the world feels better when you're next to me." The small sob that escaped her was my undoing, and I felt a tear slide down my cheek. She reached up and wiped it away. God, I loved her. "Your smile makes everything better, and I don't know if you'll ever really know just how much I love you. I don't think there are words for it. Napoleon Bonaparte once said, 'As for me, to love you alone, to make you happy, to do nothing which would contradict your wishes, this is my destiny and the meaning of my life.' All I want in this world, Sookie, is to love you and make you happy, so that's what I'm going to do for the rest of my life. I love you."

The hand that was still holding mine squeezed it tightly, her thumb rubbing the back of my hand soothingly. Seriously, what the fuck did I do to deserve her? I was a lucky son of a bitch. She took a few deep breaths and then put her hand over the top of mine as it rested on her belly. Our daughter kicked, but not in that crazy Lord of the Dance way she sometimes did that had Sookie doubled over doing breathing exercises.

"I remember the first thing I thought when I saw you. Hello gorgeous." She confessed with a hint of a blush, while everyone laughed quietly. "And now I get to wake up next to you everyday. Who would have thought it with the way we started?" She squeezed my hand again. I definitely didn't think we'd be here, and I know she didn't either, but we were both happy as hell for it. "In keeping with the theme of quoting great people, Jane Austen once said, 'It's not time or opportunity that is to determine intimacy- it is dispostion alone. Seven years would be insufficient to make some people acquainted with each other, and seven days are more than enough for others.' Everything between us happened so fast, and it amazes me every day how easily we just fit into each others lives. There was never any doubt about whether you were the one for me. Everyone here knows what a crazy couple of months its been, and the fact that neither of us gave up..." She trailed off, pausing to take a few deep breaths. She looked down at her belly, and pressed my palm firmer against her. "I was never afraid to show you all of me, and you will never know how much it means to me that you did the same. I can see your heart every time you look at me, and God, I love you so much for sharing it with me, Eric. For the rest of my life, it's you and me."

Take make her laugh, I turned to the Justice officiating and asked, "Can I kiss her yet?"

Even the Justice laughed along with everyone else and said, "Almost."

The traditional vows about taking each other for richer or poorer, in sickness and in health until death parted us were repeated by each of us. It felt good to slide her wedding ring on her finger, and even though I probably wasn't supposed to, I lifted her hand to my lips and kissed it. I was surprised when she did the same once my ring was on a few seconds later. Camera flashes were going to blind us both by the end of the night, no doubt.

"By the power vested in me by the state of Illinois, I now pronounce you husband and wife. Eric, you may kiss your bride." The Justice smiled at us.

Sookie and I took our first steps toward each other as husband and wife. She reached for my face as I reached for hers, and our lips met easily in a rhythm we'd long since perfected. I bowed my forehead to hers and whispered I loved her before kissing her bottom lip. She choked back a sob, stroking the sides of my face with her thumbs. The Bean between us kicked me right in the gut, almost as if she was telling us to knock it off.

Our hands joined together again, and we turned to face our family and friends. They all clapped loudly, hooting and hollering for us before we were swarmed. Without ever letting go of her hand, I gave a one armed hug to every person I encountered. It was a small party, but it was exactly what we wanted. And there was no crazy Bill or Sophie-Anne popping up to ruin it, or create some sort of crazy drama. It was perfect.

I turned to look at Sookie, who looked over her shoulder at me like she knew I was watching her. I smiled, kissed her hand and said, "Come on, wife, let's dance."

She nodded her assent, then followed me through the yard to the other side. It was party time.

**Sookie**

Try as I might, I couldn't take my eyes off of Eric for more than a few seconds. Our choice of first songs probably shocked a few people, given Eric's staunch objection to country music, but when I told him to listen to the words of the wong, he agreed it was perfect for us. So, for our first dance as husband and wife, we swayed slowly to Shania Twain's "Forever and For Always."

Eric and his mother, who was even bigger mess than I was, danced to Lynyrd Skynyrd's "Simple Man," which I thought was a great choice. Most people would probably turn their nose up at such a selection, but it was fitting. Daddy had chosen the song we chose to, and it wasn't that God awful Butterfly Kisses song. I hated that song with a passion, and Daddy knew it. "You Are the Sunshine of My Life" played while we danced.

"You know I'll still shoot him in the face if he hurts you, right?" Daddy reminded me as we danced, and I couldn't help laughing.

"Daddy, don't make me laugh. Your granddaughter will decide I need a potty break if you do." I warned him.

"You made a good choice with him, Sookie. It's obvious to everyone here how much that man loves you, and I can see you love him just as much." Daddy spoke quietly against my ear.

"I never had a choice, Daddy." I said in ernest.

It dawned on me then that I didn't. I was drawn to him from the second I saw him. While it was true I had no way of knowing things would go the way they did, I'd known he was special. Every opportunity I'd been given to run away from Eric, I'd only run *to* him. That spoke volumes, in my opinion. When I thought about how much I loved him, my heart hurt. It was too much, and somehow not enough. It was the best kind of contradiction.

I took a break after my dance with Daddy to go potty and get something to eat. I'd been too busy to eat much of anything all day, and I suddenly realized I was starving. I opened the bathroom door to see Eric standing there casually, waiting for me.

"Hey." I smiled up at him. He was my husband. My smile got bigger.

"I meant to tell you sooner, but you look beautiful, my lover." He bent to kiss me, and it was one of those toe curling kisses that made me forget the rest of the world.

"If I weren't starving, I'd say we should forget everything else and just go up to bed." I winked at me.

He gave a small growl and said, "Not too tired?"

"Oh, trust me, you're getting lucky later." I pulled him close to kiss him again.

"I found 'em!" Amelia called from the end of the hallway. "Will you two quit it with the kissy face so we can eat?"

Eric and I both growled at Amelia, who just laughed at us. I kissed Eric's chin and said, "Later."

"Yes, wife." He put his hands on my hips and rubbed against me in a torturous way, and them pushed me toward the back of the house.

"I'll get you for that." I said over my shoulder.

"Promise?" He dipped to kiss my neck.

I shivered, but kept walking. He was going to be the death of me, I was sure of it. I looked at the clock over the stove on our way out, and wondered how long I had to wait before I started claiming pregnancy was draining me of my energy so I could get Eric upstairs, and all to myself.

For the first time ever, I was thanking God for my crazy pregnancy hormones.

Yeah, so I know you're probably thinking, "Hey! Mama Bird, where the fuck are my crazy wedding lemons?" The answer to that question is next chapter. I promise. There'll be lots of 'em. I swear. It may take me a few days to write the chapter since the muses can sometimes be fickle when it comes to lemons, but I swear, I'm going to get cracking on it soon.

For all the other music whores out there, I give you these little gems I put together. can be a little unpredictable with which links work, and which don't, so if you check out the links below, you can download these playlists to stash in your own library. Just a little gift from me to you for being so amazeballs \*naked Viking hugs\*

**Wedding Mix pt. 1**

We Are Man and Wife by Michelle Featherstone

Forever and For Always by Shania Twain

Have You Ever Really Loved A Woman by Bryan Adams

No One by Alicia Keys

Life After You by Daughtry

Ain't Nobody by Chaka Khan

Cherry Lane by Ryan Adams

Everything by Lifehouse

I'm Yours by Jason Mraz

Starlight by Muse

Stand By Me by Ben E. King

Whatever It Is by Zac Brown Band

**file/der0uy**

**Wedding Mix pt. 2**

Yellow by Coldplay

Never Tear Us Apart by INXS

Amazed by Lonestar

You and Me by Lifehouse

Chasing Cars by Snow Patrol

Echo by Incubus

Signed, Sealed, Delivered, I'm Yours by Stevie Wonder

Crush by Dave Matthews Band

Whistle For the Choir by The Fratellis

Right Here In My Arms by H.I.M.

Breathe by Faith Hill

Love Will Keep Us Alive by The Eagles

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**file/5l8psj**

**Chapter 56: Sex on Fire**

For those of you who have been missing lemons in this story, I hope this chapter helps make up for it. I'm not sure how many chapters are left, but I think it's less than five. Prepare yourselves, baby birds.

Chapter Fifty-Six: Sex On Fire

By the time everyone finally got the hint that I was done for the night, I was in quite a state. After the little interlude in the hallway, the looks Eric and I exchanged were smoldering. All I could think about was sex. I'd gone much longer than three weeks without in the past, but it was the longest I'd gone while with Eric. And it wasn't until him that I understood just how sexual I could be.

"Get me out of this dress." I ordered the second we were safely locked in the house alone.

The blaze of Eric's eyes made me throb. He looked unbelievably sexy in his summer suit, the top three buttons of his shirt already undone to reveal a peek his tan, chiseled chest.

"All night long," he stepped closer to me with a predatory look in his eyes that had my heart hammering wildly in my chest. "I imagined fucking you in that dress."

*Oh, God. Yes please. Do it now.*

He began to gather up the material of my skirt. The look on his face was priceless when he went to get rid of my panties, only to find out I wasn't wearing any.

"Did you marry me without underwear?" He arched an eyebrow at me.

I tugged him closer by the waistband of his pants. "I ditched them during my last potty break. They were soaking wet from thinking about you fucking me all night."

His hand slipped between my legs and we both groaned. His lips ghosted near my ear, his breath warm on my neck as he began stroking my clit.

"So wet for me, wife." I loved it when he called me that. His fingers slid inside me. My hips reacted immediately.

"Deeper." I groaned as he stroked.

His mouth moved to mine while I started to unbutton his pants. He stroked my core and my clit at the same time, while his tongue battled mine. I hot his pants open and pushed down his thighs just enough. I grabbed his very hard length that stood tall and proud at full attention, and did a little stroking of my own.

"Eric," I gasped against his lips. "I need you inside me." I was so close.

He removed his fingers and I whimpered. I took his hand and guided his wet fingers to my mouth to suck them clean. He growled and hustled me around to the other side of the couch. He kept me facing the patio doors so my back was to him. I heard his pants fall to the floor, and my heart hammered wildly in my chest.

"On your knees, lover." He demanded, his voice husky with desire. I loved that tone.

I climbed on the couch, and turned toward the armrest so he could follow behind me. I bent over it, bracing myself on the blush arm of the sofa. He lifted the abundant material of my skirt and bunched it up over my hips. He teased my clit with the head of his erection until I was begging him to fuck me. He entered me hard, filling me with one smooth thrust of his hips in a way that only Eric could. I cried out, them moaned, when I felt him gyrate a little.

"Oh, fuck." I muttered as he pulled out completely, only to slam back into me.

He continued on that way for a little while, and it drove us both crazy. I was just about to complain that I wanted him to go faster, when he grabbed onto my hips and began to pound into me fast and hard. I screamed a little with every thrust, my ass backing up to meet him. One hand let go of my hips to teach around and rub my clit. My walls clamped down hard, my first orgasm setting me on fire.

He slowed his thrusts, not wanting to come yet. I was still panting and moaning when the pounding started again. He pulled me upright and back a little so I was sitting on his thighs. I turned my head to kiss him. His tongue battled mine for dominance, and his fingers started to work my clit again so we would come together.

"Eric, oh, God! Oh, fuck me!" I screamed, and he somehow managed to thrust harder.

It was my undoing, and I came violently, shaking and scraping his neck and thighs with my fingernails. He pumped into me twice more and then roared with his own orgasm releasing deep inside me.

"Holy fuck, lover." He sucked on my neck. "Fuck, I love you."

"I love you, too." I wiggled against him, and he groaned.

"You'll make me hard again." He warned.

"Good." I breathed as he growled in my ear. "I love with when you growl at me."

He did it again, and it sent a ripple of lust through me. I wondered if I would ever get tired of him. In fifty years was I still going to feel the same throb in my chest when I looked at him? I was excited to find out. Slowly I regained the use of my legs and he helped me to my feet. He left his pants right where they were, and I'm sure if anyone happened to look in on us at that moment, we probably looked pretty odd.

He'd unzipped my dress and was in the process of removing it when I decided I wanted to go upstairs. So my dress was hanging open, and Eric didn't have any pants on. What a pair we were. Once we got up to our bedroom he gently removed my dress so all I had to do was step out of it. I went to put it on its satin padded hanger while he went to work removing my bra. I was really starting to detest bras. No matter what style I wore, I was never comfortable anymore.

"Babe, will you turn the air conditioning up?" I pouted at him.

I felt so bad for him. Half the time he was freezing because I had hot flashes like crazy. One minute I was sweating bullets and bitching up a storm because I was so cold, and the next I was tempted to flip the thermostat the other way. He kissed my temple and went to the end of the hall to adjust the temperature for me. I figured we would generate enough body heat to make up the difference.

I went into the bathroom to get cleaned up just a little bit, and of course, to take a potty break. I walked back into the bedroom to find Eric removing his shirt and tossing it into the hamper. I walked over to our bed and climbed in on what was usually Eric's side. I wanted to be able to look at his face, and I couldn't from my side of the bed if I was going to lay on my left side like I was supposed to.

Eric didn't question it, but then I was pretty sure all he cared about was getting in bed with me. Getting in bed naked was even better. The second he was next to me, I pulled him close and kissed him sweetly.

"What was that for?" His fingers trailed up and down my arm.

"For being so great. You've put up with all of my craziness and you don't complain when I'm being the world's biggest bitch. And because I love you."

He kissed me back in much the same way and slid closer to me. "You know what I miss?" He asked in a gentle tone.

"Hmm?" My eyes closed lightly. I definitely wasn't done with him yet, but I needed a nap. I had been out of bed for most of the day, and after that couch sex, I was pretty wiped out.

"Watching you writhe underneath me when I fuck you." He whispered against my neck.

My lady bits perked right up, while the rest of me was begging for just an hour of shut eye before trying to go another round with him. I moaned when his hand moved between my legs again. His mouth latched onto one of my breasts, teasing me mercilessly in both places.

"Eric..." I wanted to tell him I was tired, but I couldn't.

Before I knew it he pulled one of my legs up so my knee was resting up near his hip, and he entered me again. It wasn't the best position, but it was the closest I was going to get to being on my back, and I didn't have the energy to get on top of him. He moved in and out of me slowly, our eyes locked on one anothers the whole time. We kissed lazily, touching each other gently. For the moment, crazy wedding night fucking was out the window, and we were just enjoying each other.

And then the hormones took a nose dive, and I started weeping. Eric froze, a panicked look on his face. "Did I hurt you?"

I shook my head and swallowed the lump in my throat. "No, no." I remembered the last time I broke down like that during sex, and it lead to a week in Louisiana. "I'm crying because I'm happy and pregnant and I love you so fucking much."

He kissed me again, and started moving his hips slowly. I wanted to get closer to him, and from the way he looked at me, it was like he wanted to just crawl inside me. And damn, in the moment, if it were possible, I would have let him.

When we were both sated a short while later, I quickly fell asleep with my head on his pillow and his hand on my belly. I woke up a while later when another potty break was needed, and a craving for peanut butter hit me like a freight train. I got out of bed to go to the bathroom, then slipped on my robe and headed downstairs to appease the Bean.

I sliced up an apple and plopped a spoonful of peanut butter on a paper plate so I could dip. I looked at the small pile of gifts and cards on the dining room table. The backyard looked pretty good, considering how many people had been in it for most of the night. A few of the neighbors had dropped by, and it was nice to know we were settling into the neighborhood. We were making friends. We were building a life together.

I breathed a sigh of relief and said a small prayer to whatever higher power might be listening, thanking them for bringing me Eric and our daughter, and letting us have just one day where nothing went wrong. It was perfect. I found our digital camera on the buffet table, and powered it up to look through the pictures. Mom had taken way more than I ever could have needed, but she got quite a few good shots. I would have to upload them onto my laptop in the next few days.

Eric had arranged to take a week off of work. We were going to finish up the last few things for the nursery, including putting the crib together (finally!), and just spend some alone time together. Our days of doing what we wanted, when we wanted, were numbered. Pretty soon our lives were going to revolve around the baby. A part of me worried maybe it was too much too fast, but I knew we would make it work. There had been so many obstacles set in front of us already, and so far, they had only made us a stronger couple. We faced things together. Adversity was old hat.

Not that I wanted to tempt the fates into giving us something else to overcome, but I wasn't really afraid of losing Eric. I dipped another apple slice in peanut butter and munched on it slowly. The Bean was sound asleep. The house was still. Even Jeter was snoring in his own way near the fireplace. The only other sound I heard was the occasional airplane flying overhead, or a police siren in the distance. We heard them often since we lived off of a rather busy street. All in all, it was peaceful.

I put my plate in the trash, washed my hands, got a glass of water and headed back upstairs to my husband. I smiled to myself when I realized what I'd called him in my head. My husband. Eric was my husband.

I came to a conclusion the next morning while Eric and I were attempting to shower together, that as soon as I was medically cleared to have sex after the baby was born, the first thing I wanted was to fuck my husband up against the shower wall. I missed being able to do that, and I told Eric as much while he washed my back for me.

Eric then proceeded to give me a list of things he missed being able to do, each one more dirty than the last, and by the time he was done with his litany of dirty words, I wanted to jump him. Stupid pregnancy wouldn't let me do that, either. I told myself I only had a few weeks to go. But then we would be sex-free for a while.

In the meantime, we would take every opportunity we could. As long as I was feeling frisky, I decided to just go with it. God only knew when the hormones would decide sex was the worst thing on the planet. Our first full day as a married couple was spent mostly in bed, with me popping up between rounds to go to the bathroom. Eric brought all of our meals up to bed and refused to let me help him cook or clean up afterward.

"You're still supposed to be on bed rest, remember? I've got this, wife." The sex in his voice when he called me his wife was insane.

I giggled, then groaned, at the idea that I might end up pregnant again in less than a year if we continued our trend of not being able to keep our hands off each other. We were going to need to talk about future children and what sort of time table we were thinking about. With Eric being a few years older than me, I wondered if it was a big deal to him to have more kids right away. I knew I wanted to have at least one more baby- if we were lucky enough to get pregnant a second time- but I wasn't sure when I wanted to do it. I figured that was probably a discussion best kept for after the Bean made her entrance into the world.

When Eric came back after lunch he had the camera and my laptop in his hands so we could look at the pictures from the wedding. As annoying as it may have been to have that camera trail me around for the better part of the day once Eric left, Mom had done a great job documenting everything about the day. Thanks to her, I would always know that they caterer's crew leader's name was Carlos. Yep, Mom brought her A game.

Eric put the ones we wanted to print into a separate folder on the laptop so we could burn them onto a disc later. Once we got all of the pictures we were going to get from anyone- there had to be at least a dozen digital cameras snapping away- we would burn CDs and mail them out to our family and friends of the best pictures. Eric thought it was a little silly to bother with a photo album, but I wanted tangible memories of our wedding. Maybe it was old fashioned, but it was what I wanted.

He took note of the pregnancy hormones about to rise up against him, and he quickly changed the subject. He did the best thing he could have at the moment, and that was divert my energy toward sex. He was certainly taking advantage of my new-found sex drive as much as I was. I was sore in the right places, and for the best reasons. I considered our first day as a married couple to be very successful.

Eric's mouth on my breast woke me on our second day as a married couple. I smirked at the idea of him getting jealous of the baby having dibs on his favorite parts of me for a while, but I said nothing. In fact, I didn't even most right away. I knew if I did he would stop what he was doing, and I didn't want him to.

But then his mouth was gone and my eyes opened to see him staring at the little hand sticking up out of my stomach. He didn't noticed that I'd opened my eyes, he was staring so intensely. He reached out just one finger and stroked that little hand. The expression on his face just about broke my heart. I watched the flutter of the little hand and felt it move under my sky. It was an amazing feeling.

Eric leaned down to kiss the tiny palm and whispered, "I can't wait to meet you."

My waterworks started over his whispered declaration, and damn it if I didn't fall in love with him all over again. He looked up at me with an expression on his face that let me know he hadn't intended for me to hear him. Then he looked troubled because I was crying. Happy tears or not, he hated it when I cried. He diverted me from my tears by letting his fingers slip between my legs and I parted my thighs for him so he'd have better access. Our eyes stayed glued on one another as he touched me.

Flames of lust licked up from deep inside me, and it didn't take long before I was hovering on the edge, waiting for Eric to curl his fingers inside me and send me flying. His fingers had just curled when his phone rang on the other side of the bed. I groaned and panted through my orgasm while he gently kissed my breasts and neck. God, he was amazing.

"Are you going to get that?" I inhaled deeply, watching as he withdrew his fingers from between my legs, and licked them clean.

"Nope." He kneaded my hip gently, his erection resting against my thigh.

"Then turn the ringer off. It's distracting." I winked at him.

While he rolled to the other side of the bed to make the ringing stop, I switched up my position so I was on all fours with pillows piled under my belly for support. I heard Eric's phone snap shut, and when he turned around, he growled to see me positioned like I was. It might sound boring, but I missed being able to get on my back. I liked feeling his weight on top of me. I missed looking into his eyes and being able to pull him closer, or deeper. There was a lack of connection when we made love the way we were about to, but there weren't a whole lot of options with my belly being so big.

Long fingers trailed down my spine. Eric's thumbs massaged my lower back as he got behind me just right. I grabbed onto the slats of the headboard, and squirmed a little when I felt him teasing my entrance. I looked back over my shoulder at him, watching him look where we were about to be joined. I pushed myself back a little so that just the tip of him was inside me. His eyes found mine and he advanced just an inch at a time, moving very slowly until he was all the way in.

He pulled out just as slowly and his thumbs began massaging my back again. His thrusts were slow and gentle, and I have to say, I missed being able to go at it hard and fast. Slow and gentle was nice, and it definitely had its place, but the teasing of it drove me mad. One of the many things I loved about Eric was that he always knew what I needed, and just how to give it to me. So before I could complain, he upped his pace. It wasn't as fast or demanding as it was on the couch two days before, but that was fine by me.

The headboard still knocked against the wall, and I hoped Amelia and Tray were deep asleep. Then again, I'd been awakened a time or two by the noise they made next door. It was just a hazard of sharing a wall. The only downside was that they were night owls, whereas Eric and I were early risers. We were big fans of morning sex, and had it quite often.

The pillows underneath me shifted with the increased pace of Eric's thrusts so that my extremely sensitive nipples were dragging back and forth against the 900 thread-count pillowcases. It was a stimulant I wasn't expecting, and when Eric reached around to rub my clit, I cried out. I felt some of his weight press against my back, and then his lips were on my neck and shoulders. It was too much. I tried to hold it off, but my orgasm won the battle.

I wanted to drop down, but I couldn't. Instead, Eric pulled out of me entirely and helped me get on my side. He lifted my leg up onto his, and entered me again. I turned my head as far as I could so I could kiss him. The strokes of his tongue against mine countered what was happening between my legs. His fingers were alternating between rubbing and gently pinching my clit, and his efforts redoubled when I felt him swell inside me.

I pulled my mouth away from his, steadily chanting his name over and over until a bright light burst behind my eyes. My arm shot up to hold onto the back of his neck as I rode the waves of pleasure. He pressed kisses to my neck and the side of my face. His hand settled on my stomach, feeling for the Bean's little hands and feet.

We continued on like that for most of the day. I managed to convince Eric to let me out of bed long enough for me to go downstairs, have breakfast and take a walk. While I was getting my heart rate up from the all the sex we were having, it wasn't quite the same work out as it used to be, and I was starting to cramp up from being in bed for so long.

So, Eric put Jeter on a leash, something we rarely had to do, and we went for a walk. I got a little weepy when it dawned on me we would be pushing a stroller pretty soon. Eric reached for my hand as we walked and suggested we take walks together more often.

"I'd like that." I smiled up at him and paused so he could kiss me.

We walked for almost a half an hour before Eric started to get worried I was overdoing it, and insisted we head back to the house. It was fine by me, since I was starting to get tired. We got back to the house to find Tom and Stella waiting for us in the front yard, talking to Amelia and Tray. Jeter starting barking up a storm when he realized we had company, and started pulling Eric closer to the house.

"Oh, there you are!" Stella waved in our direction.

"What are they doing here?" I asked through clenched teeth.

"I have no idea." Eric kissed the side of my head.

Our parents had agreed to give us a few days alone together before they started bombarding us with pictures, questions, plans and whatever else they had in store for us. My parents were staying for another four days, and the Northmans were staying for a week. Tom gave us an apologetic nod, while Stella was groping my belly as soon as she was close enough to reach it.

"Mom, what are you doing here? We had a deal, remember?" Eric reminded his mother.

"I know, sweetheart, I know. It's just, well, your father and I got to talking last night..." Stella trailed off, looking over her shoulder at Tom, who looked like he would rather be having testicle removed than have this conversation.

"And?" Eric prompted.

"Well, we-"

"*You*." Tom corrected, getting him one of those glares from Stella.

"Fine. *I* was thinking about what you could do with your empty house. It's not such a good economy right now, so selling it would probably be difficult." Eric and I stared at Stella with matching blank expressions while we waited for her to get to the point.

"Yes, Mom, we know. That's why we haven't put the house on the market yet."

"Well don't." Stella ordered.

Eric and I looked at each other, and I had a terrible feeling I knew what my new mother-in-law was about to say.

"We weren't planning to. At least not for a while." Eric clearly hadn't figured it out yet.

I tried not to wince beside him. I liked Stella, I really did. I just wasn't sure I was going to be able to maintain that if she only lived a few miles away. It was one thing when she was in California and we could easily fib our way out of things. It was another when she could drop by, claiming to be in the neighborhood.

"What if your father and I moved in there?" Stella asked with a big grin on her face. Eric's jaw dropped. Tom closed his eyes and shook his head.

Stella looked to me for an answer, and before I could stop myself, I said, "You're going to love Chicago."

Sooooooo what do you think about them apples? How long do you think Sookie and Stella are going to continue to get along if the Northmans move into Eric's old house? Oy. Speaking of fruit, I hope the lemons were juicy enough for you. For those of you jonesin' for more of my work, I posted two one shots in the past week. "Thinking of You" is my entry for the I Write the Songs Contest. "Ten Years Gone" is a one shot I wrote for**TVGirlSVM** in exchange for her generous donation to the Support Stacie auctions from earlier this year. I also have a new story called "Holding Back the Years" that has 8 (I think) chapters up for reading. Gosh, I'm a busy girl lol. And contrary to what **Chanel Addict** has suggested, I'm not actually a typewriter. I also updated "Interview With a Vampire" last night, so there's that as well. Lots to choose from, baby birds. And if none of that strikes your fancy, I strongly recommend **kjwrit's** "The Northman Identity." Is my fanfic wife a talented writer, or what? Okay, done jabbering. Time to go work one of my 2236826 works in progress ;)

**Chapter 57: The Female of the Species**

Okay, so I mapped out the rest of this story. We're looking at two more legit chapters, and then an epilogue, which will bring this story to an even 60 chapters. Gah! What a wild ride it's been. Thanks for sticking with me through it, baby birds!

Chapter Fifty-Seven: The Female of the Species

I stood on the front lawn with my mouth hanging open, shocked not only at my mother's proposal, but at Sookie's apparent encouragement. Did my wife really just agree to Mom's crazy ass plan? I breathed a sigh of relief when I saw Sookie's crazy emergency smile crack her face almost in half. Her southern manners wouldn't allow for her to tell Mom she was being ludicrous. I looked over at Dad for some sort of inkling as to whether or not Mom was serious. Mostly, my old man looked helpless.

I had no doubt this was all Mom's idea. Furthermore, I'm sure Dad tried to talk her out of it, but Mom had a way of steamrolling right over anything that got in her path when she wanted something badly enough. Her tenacity was probably one of a very few things I had inherited.

"Mom, Sookie and I need some time to think about it. Why don't we talk it over after the baby comes?" I suggested after she gave me a look that implied she was waiting for my answer.

She scoffed at the idea and said, "But the whole point is to be settled in before this precious baby girl gets here."

"Stella, they just got hitched." Dad attempted to reason with her.

"Hush, Tom." Mom waved him off, clearly not interested in hearing his opinion. "Eric, this is our grandchild we're talking about."

I glanced over at Sookie who looked extremely uncomfortable all of a sudden. "If y'all will excuse me, I need to get back inside. Doctor's orders." She was going to play the bed rest card *now*? I'd get her for it later. Sookie offered weak goodbyes, then left me standing there alone with my parents on the lawn.

"Is she alright?" Mom fretted as Sookie waddled into the house.

"Just tired, Mom. She's not sleeping well." I said casually.

Dad chuckled knowingly and said, "Stella, let's go. We've intruded enough."

Mom looked like she was going to stick around to argue her case, but I cut her off before she could get herself worked into a froth. "We'll talk about it later, Mom."

She huffed and said, "Fine. Fine. Go take care of your wife. We'll see you for dinner in a few days."

I nodded my agreement and returned the hug I was offered. Dad gave me an apologetic look and clapped me on the back before following Mom over to the Comet. I made sure Mom and Dad were gone before going into the house. Amelia and Tray had made themselves scarce when Mom officially went off the deep end and made her proposal. Even worse, Sookie seemed to have gone insane right along with her. I really hoped I hadn't imagined seeing that crazy smile on her face, or we were going to have our first fight as a married couple.

While it was great that Sookie got along so well with my parents, I worried that wouldn't continue if they moved closer to us. I was plagued with images of Mom popping in unannounced whenever she wanted, effectively driving both Sookie and I crazy. I found my wife in bed, wearing nothing by one of my t-shirts and a pair of underwear. I suddenly forgot what I was even pissed off about. Sex claimed my brain, and thinking about that was a hell of a lot better than worrying. Sookie apparently felt the same way. Once we were sated, sweaty and more relaxed, reality began to creep back in.

"I don't want your parents to move here." Sookie said in a defiant tone that made me want to pin her underneath me and kiss her until she couldn't breathe.

"Then why did you..." I trailed off, knowing she knew what I was asking.

"What was I supposed to say, Eric? Was I supposed to look at your Mom and tell her the only way she was moving into that house was over my pregnant, dead body? I like your Mom, but I don't know if her being so close will be good for our marriage, or *her* lifespan." Sookie was pouting. It was adorable.

"I don't know what to tell her." I sighed. I didn't want to hurt Mom's feelings.

"How about you tell her that if she moves here, it's going to make your wife less likely to fuck you, thereby decreasing her chances are more grandchildren?" Sookie suggested in a very serious tone, but somehow still managed to make me laugh. An arched eyebrow let me know she wasn't kidding.

We talked about it for a while. Neither of a us were all together thrilled with Mom's plan. However, we knew we couldn't stop them from moving, and at least if they were living in my old house, we would always know exactly where they were. Not to mention, we wouldn't have to worry about extended overnight visits, and we would have a babysitter whenever we wanted one. We would just need to set some serious ground rules.

Over the next few days we finished up the nursery. Sookie washed all of the laundry that had piled up for the Bean, and she wasn't even born yet. More than once I saw her getting teary eyed when folded the tiny clothes. I didn't bother to ask her why she was getting upset because chances were, she didn't rightfully know. We wrote up thank you notes for the wedding gifts we'd received, and deposited the checks that had been tucked in cards into a special savings account so we could take a proper honeymoon after the Bean was born, and lift got a little more settled.

We met with our parents for dinner the night before the Stackhouses had to fly back to Louisiana. Mom asked if Sookie and I had reached a decision about the house, and I told her we were still discussing it. Mom looked like she was going to whine over it when Michelle got her attention instead. I was getting frustrated with my mother's unwillingness to just chill the fuck out. I suppose I understood her need to plan things out, but at the same time, Sookie and I had other things to worry about. We had a baby coming in just a few weeks. The arrival of our daughter took bigger precedence to us than whether or not we should let my parents move into my house.

Sookie being able to play the pregnancy card was great. No one questioned her when she said she wasn't feeling well, and after Mom had leaned over to ask for the third time about the house, Sookie announced that she was feeling a bit nauseous, and wanted to lay down. Mom looked properly abashed, and a little like she'd been slapped in the face. I wanted to feel badly for her but she'd brought it on herself.

We hugged Corbett and Michelle goodbye, thanking them for everything they'd done for us. We promised to keep them updated on the pregnancy, and call if Sookie went into labor. They were planning on flying up again after the Bean was born. I found myself wishing they were the set of parents that wanted to move closer. They were much more laid back than my own parents were.

"I'm gonna miss you, Mom." Sookie got all emotional, crying quietly as she hugged her mother.

I noted the sadness in my own mother's eyes as she watched Sookie with Michelle. The image of Mom hugging Annika for the last time flashed in my mind. Suddenly, it all made sense for me why Mom wanted to move closer to us. She really did see Sookie like a daughter. She didn't get to do the wedding and baby thing with Annika. She was using Sookie as a stand-in.

I didn't know if I should be sympathetic, or nip the behavior in the bud. Sookie already had a mother. I figured it was Sookie's choice how to deal with it. I would support whatever decision she made. When we got home that night, she put in a movie. We sat on the couch together and I rubbed her feet while she munched on peanut butter and apple slices.

My eyes met hers, and I saw genuine happiness in her eyes. I smiled at her, hoping my own happiness was just as easy to see. Her foot wiggled in my lap, a silent urging to keep rubbing. I laughed quietly, and got back to work. She put another apple slice in her mouth, moaning in delight at the contrasting flavors and smacking her lips together thanks to the peanut butter. It struck me how peaceful we were- how comfortable. It was safe. It was home.

I really wasn't looking forward to going back to work. I hated the idea of leaving Sookie alone. For the last month of her pregnancy she would be seeing Dr. Ludwig once a week to monitor the baby. We'd made it to thirty-seven weeks, which, according to Dr. Ludwig, meant she could go at any time. The Bean had turned and dropped so her little head was cradled in Sookie's pelvis, which meant labor could start at any time.

The knowledge that we were just waiting from this point out made it hard to think about much else. I was distracted and fumbling all over myself to make sure Sookie was as comfortable as she could possibly get. I did my best to anticipate her needs, and I think it got to the point where she was thoroughly annoyed with me. Who was I kidding? I was annoying myself.

"Eric, baby, I love you, but if you don't get the fuck out of this house real soon, you're not going to make it to the delivery room." Sookie threatened me one afternoon.

I apologized but didn't bother to explain my reasons for hovering. She knew I was worried about her. I tried not to think about the statistics I'd stumbled on at one point while researching childbirth on the internet. I wanted to know what to expect, aside from a lot of yelling, screaming and cussing at me for knocking her up in the first place. What I wasn't prepared for were the statistics of how many things could potentially go wrong during a birth, and even worse, that I could lose her. She could bleed out, and that would be it.

I didn't want to think that way. We'd already been through so much. I didn't want to think that whatever high power was out there would take my wife from me, and a mother from her child. I knew I could be a single parent if I had to, but I didn't want to. I was looking forward to watching Sookie be a mother to our daughter. I wanted to see her rock our daughter to sleep and braid her hair. I wanted to watch Sookie read bedtime stories and take the Bean trick or treating. There were billions of moments I wanted to witness that I could completely lose if just one little thing went wrong.

So I was understandably wound tight, but I didn't want to add to what was stressing Sookie out. She had enough on her mind. I did as she asked, and took myself back to work. Amelia promised to check in on her and call me if anything was wrong. I didn't care if Sookie had a leg cramp. I wanted to know everything. Amelia did as I asked, and texted me periodically to keep me posted on how Sookie was doing.

I waited until about the time I knew Sookie would be trying to get some sleep before calling her. She answered the phone in a sleepy voice that let me know I was too late. I silently cursed myself for waking her up. Sleep was a precious commodity at that point, and one Sookie had a hard time getting her hands on.

"Hey sweetie." She said in such a way I was sure she hadn't even opened her eyes.

"I'm sorry I woke you up." I apologized.

"No, it's okay. I miss you." She admitted, and I was happy to hear it. "How's work?"

"Busy. It's been a busy night. How're you doing?"

"I'm okay. I think I had a contraction earlier." She confessed, and I was immediately pissed at Amelia for not telling me about it.

"You did? When?" I sputtered in a bit of a panic.

She giggled- although I couldn't for the life of me figure out what was funny- and told me it was normal. "It was just one, babe. There was no reason to sound the alarm. I'm fine. The Bean is sleeping. Everything's good. Now I'm just waiting for you to come home to me."

"I'll be there as soon as I can, lover." I wanted to be in bed next to her more than anything. I wanted to pull her close to me and rest my palm on her stomach while she slept. I told myself I'd get it to have it soon enough.

We talked for a little while longer. She told me about the movie she'd watched with Amelia. It sounded boring as hell to me. Some Swedish movie with subtitles about a soccer player and his girlfriend. Although I didn't mistake the hint of lust that crept into her voice when she described the soccer player. Not that I was jealous, or anything, but I decided I'd have to look it up on-line later. She described a particularly hot scene that took place in the kitchen, and I wondered if maybe that wasn't an idea I should squirrel away for later when she wasn't pregnant anymore.

More and more I was thinking about the future. We hadn't talked about how many kids we wanted to have, but I hoped she would be willing to have at least one more. Having grown up with a twin, I knew how much my life would have sucked without a sibling around. While Sookie and Jason weren't particularly close, I tended to think she felt the same way. It was a conversation we needed to have, but was probably best left for after the Bean was born. I didn't want her to think I was pressuring her into being barefoot and pregnant. We had enough on our plate already.

I got home that night to find her curled on her side, sound asleep. I went to the bathroom to take a shower to get the bar stink off of me before getting into bed behind her. Just like I'd wanted to, I spooned up behind her and rested my hand on her stomach. She made a little noise, but didn't acknowledge my presence. I kissed her neck gently and let sleep pull me under.

"So, I've been thinking about your parents moving here." Sookie told me one morning while we ate breakfast before her doctor's appointment.

She was three days past her due date. She was sick to death of being pregnant, and anxious as all get out to have her body back to herself. If I thought she was uncomfortable a month ago, it was nothing in comparison to her current state. There was concern that if she didn't go into labor in the next few days she was going to have to be induced. The Bean, while not very heavy by all estimations, was long. Sookie had taken to calling her Beanstalk instead.

"Oh yeah?" I spooned another bite of cereal into my mouth.

"I thought a lot about what you said with your Mom and Annika." Sookie paused, her hand absently stroking her belly. "I can't be Annika for her. I already have a Mom."

I nodded my agreement. "It's okay, Sookie. She'll understand."

Sookie looked disappointed with herself, which I hated it. It wasn't up to her to heal a wound that had been festering for so long. Mom should have gone for therapy and dealt with all of it a little better than she did. I wasn't convinced Dad was okay with the loss either, but I was pretty sure it was a mistake to lock Annika away somewhere deep in their memories. Talking about her was what kept her with us. No amount of pretending she had never existed was going to erase the imprint she left behind.

"I want to help her, though. And even if I can't be the person she needs me to be, maybe being closer to the baby will help. Maybe she just wants to feel needed again, you know? So I guess if we can do that for her, then we should. Besides, it would be nice to have at least one set of grandparents around. It would be nice to have family close by." Sookie had clearly given this a lot of thought. "Not to mention, your Dad would be on our side. He'd come collect her if he had to."

That was true. I was worried Dad didn't really want to move, though. He didn't seem too enthused over the idea of leaving California. He'd finally put down some roots, and I think he wasn't too keen on the idea of ripping everything out and moving half way across the country. Then again, one look at our daughter might completely change his mind.

I wouldn't be the least bit surprised if she didn't have him wrapped around his finger immediately. He'd always been a sucker for Annika, no matter how much trouble she got into. And hell, he put up with Mom and all of her antics. The man could be hard as nails, but he was a great big softy for the women in his life. Even Sookie hadn't been able to escape his charm.

"Let me talk it over with Dad and see how he feels about all of this. If it's what he wants, too, then I'll extend the offer to them." I told her.

"Are you sure? I mean, it's your house, so-"

"It's *our* house, Sookie. No matter who lives there, that house is where we got our start. It's always going to mean something special to me. And to be honest, I kind of like the idea of not letting it go." I confessed to her.

Her eyes filled with tears again. Fucking hormones were going to kill us both.

I took our bowls to the sink to rinse them out and put them in the dishwasher while Sookie went in search of the only pair of shoes she could wear that didn't pinch her feet. She was standing at the front door when I heard her make a noise I'd never heard before. I dropped the bowls into the sink and ran toward the front of the house. She was doubled over, clutching her stomach and doing her breathing exercises.

"Sookie, what's wrong?" I put my hand on her shoulder.

"Contraction." She gasped and grabbed for my hand. She squeezed it hard and said, "I think this is it."

\*claps hands & jumps up and down\* The Bean is coming! The Bean is coming! Who else is excited about this? Next chapter we get to meet Baby Girl Northman \*squeeeeee\* And no, her name is not officially Bean haha.

For those in need of a lemony pick me up, check out **kjwrit's** most recent addition (aptly named "Goal") to her awesomesauce collection of one shot's called "Men In Uniform." Yours truly makes an appearance as my six-year-old self. I even have a crush on Coach Northman. My fanfic wifey is the bestest of the best, isn't she?

**Goal:**s/6019280/15/Men\_In\_Uniform

I really want to finish up this story before I update any of my others. If anyone has a request for a one shot they'd like to see in the "After School Specials," let me know in reviews or by PMs, I'll see what I can do. I still owe you guys Pam & Johan in New York ;)

Oooooh, and if you're not reading it already, I highly recommend **drumbjo's** Stockholm Syndrome. The story is awesome, and very different from anything else on FFN right now, at least in my opinion. I love it. I light up like a Christmas tree every time I see an update.

**Stockholm Syndrome:** s/6284318/1/Stockholm\_Syndrome

**Chapter 58: Baby Mine**

For those of you who asked if the "Swedish soccer movie" I mentioned in the last chapter is real, it is. It's called "Om Sara," and as soon as I can find it on DVD, I'm going to disappear (after whisking fanfic wife off to a private island so we can obsess together, of course). From what I've seen of it on youtube, it's an excellent movie. Very sad, though, which means it's perfect for me. I love a tragic love story, and Om Sara seems to be full of it. So, if you want to check it out for yourselves, please do. Askars + soccer uniform/kitchen sex= all kinds of win.

Oh, and thanks to fanfic wife extraordinaire **kjwrit** for giving this one once over. Not only did she fix a few of my boo boos, but she checked all the childbirth stuff I included here since Mama Bird ain't birthed no babies of the living, breathing kind.

Chapter Fifty-Eight: Baby Mine

I was completely serious when I suggested we name our daughter after the doctor who came in to give me my epidural. Dr. Flood was a kind, older man with a warm smile and a genuine interest in seeing his patients being more comfortable. I squeaked when I saw the size of the needle that was about to be shoved in my spine, but Eric was right there in front of me. I was clutching his shoulders as best I could, given how freakishly tall he was. He mumbled in Swedish to appease me.

When all was said and done I was feeling a little better, and by the time the medication took effect, I was pretty sure I was in love with Dr. Flood. From the look on his face, I knew he was used to hearing laboring women singing his praises all the time. While grateful to see me in less pain, I knew Eric was less than thrilled with all of the fawning I was doing over the doctor.

It was strange how I'd been anticipating going into labor at any time, but when it happened, it felt like it snuck up on me. One minute I was getting my shoes on and the next, I was doubled over in pain. Eric being the dependable type that he is snapped into action. He got my bag that was packed and ready to go. It had been chilling in the coat closet for weeks just waiting to be used.

He held my hand the whole way to the hospital. While I got settled in he made phone calls to our parents to let them know all systems might be go. At my last appointment, Dr. Ludwig had said I had already started dilating, and was probably experiencing contractions without even knowing it. She must have been right because I didn't feel a damn thing until that first wave of pain in the foyer. I was hooked up to a fetal monitor and examined. Once it was determined that I had dilated another centimeter and my contractions were coming at regular intervals, I was officially admitted to the maternity floor.

I'd read that it could be days before I actually gave birth, but I was hoping the Bean wouldn't take that long to come out. I waited as long as I could stand it before asking for pain medication. I wanted to try and hold off on drugs, but the pain was just too much. I was exhausted already, and if I didn't want to end up having a c-section, I needed to get some sleep. So, Dr. Flood was called in to give me an epidural.

I relaxed onto my left side. Eric resumed his position behind me and got right back to work rubbing my back, careful not to mess with the tubes that had been taped back there. I don't know how long he continued to massage me for before the drugs relaxed me enough to let me get some sleep. I fell into a crazy dream in which Eric was squished into a cheerleading uniform- complete with pom poms- cheering me on from the side of the room while I gave birth. It was unsettling to say the least. My husband was dead sexy, but not in a pleated skirt.

I woke up panting for air, and was beyond relieved to see him stretched out in a chair that was a little too small for someone of his size. Better yet, he was snoring softly and he was wearing the same pair of faded jeans and a Pinkerton t-shirt. His hair had grown out a few inches since he'd cut it before Christmas. It would probably be another couple of months before it got back to where it was when we first met, but I realized I really liked the shorter cut. I smiled at him appreciatively and slowly pushed myself upright into a sitting position.

"Eric." I whispered as I tried to swing my legs off the bed. Of course, he didn't hear me. He was a heavy sleeper. "Eric, honey, wake up." I said a little louder.

His eyes fluttered open and his head rolled toward me. As soon as it registered that I was trying to stand up, he bolted out of his chair and was at my bedside. "Whoa, where are you going?"

"Um, well, first I have to pee. Second, I want to walk for a while." I braced myself on the firm muscles of his chest and let him grasp my elbows to help me up. "Damn fetal monitor." I grumbled when I remembered I was hooked up to the machine.

"Are you sure that's a good idea? Shouldn't you get some more sleep?" Eric looked concerned.

"Eric, it's fine. The walking will help speed things along, and I promise I won't overdo it. Now will you get the I.V. pole for me?" I pointed to the stainless steel pole with all of the lovely bags of liquids hanging off it. I pushed the call button on the bed to summon my nurse.

"Yes, of course." He kissed the top of my head.

The nurse that had been assigned to me was a sweet woman in her early forties. She had very cheerful demeanor and answered every question under the sun that I could come up with. I liked her quite a bit. She came into the room wearing Tinkerbell scrubs and a beaming smile that set me at ease.

"How are you feeling, Sookie?" She rounded the bed.

"I really, really have to pee, and then I was thinking I might take a walk." I told her.

She nodded like I'd just come up with the best plan ever. She disconnected me from the fetal monitor and let Eric lead me to the bathroom.

"You've got it from here, right?" Eric smiled down at me.

I giggled and said, "Yes, Eric, I've got it from here."

I took care of business and made sure to avoid the mirrors. I was rather positive I looked like hell. I'd already spent a few hours writhing around in pain before getting my epidural. I never realized pain made a person sweat so much, but I certainly had. My hair was a little on the matted side, like I'd just had a week's worth of wild and crazy sex in just a few hours. I tried to tame my sex hair from hell, but it was no use. Besides, I figured I wouldn't be the first pregnant woman to have a bad hair day.

"Here, I thought you might want to put this on." Eric held out a mini robe I'd gotten just for the hospital.

"Oh, yes, thank you." I smiled as I reached for the robe.

"Here, let me help." Anne suggested when I realized I had tubes and things coming out of me. She disconnected the tubing from where the line had been started on the back of my hand so I could get my arm through the sleeve, and then she reconnected the medications. "So, you're going to try walking, huh?" Anne smiled at me.

"Yeah, I want to get her out as soon as possible."

"Well, Dr. Ludwig will probably get you started on pitocin soon so we have a little more regularity with your contractions. Eric, are you going to walk with her?" Anne looked over at Eric, who nodded vigorously. "Good. That's good. Well, I'll be at the nurse's desk if you need anything."

"Thank you, Anne." Eric and I chorused back at her as she walked out of my room.

I held onto the I.V. pole with one hand, and Eric with the other as we walked the halls of the ward. I wasn't the only expectant mother out for a stroll. We stopped at the nursery for a moment to look at the other babies. My eyes welled up with the thought that it wouldn't be long before our daughter was going to be in that room with the others.

"Why are you shaking? Are you okay?" Eric asked suddenly.

I was as tucked into his side as I could get, and nodded my head against his chest. "I'm a little scared." I confessed.

"Of what?" He whispered gently.

I took a deep, wavering breath and said, "What if I'm not good at being a Mom?"

"Sookie, you're a great Mom." He hugged me closer.

He was so sweet to me. A tear leaked from my eye and rolled down my cheek before it was absorbed into his t-shirt. "Things could go wrong, Eric."

"You're going to be fine. The Bean is going to be great. She's going to be healthy and beautiful, and you're going to be the best Mom you can be." He encouraged with a kiss to the top of my head.

"I'm afraid of the pain."

He tilted my chin up and said, "If there was a way for me to take it for you, you know I would."

I nodded and wrapped my other arm around his waist as much as I could with my massive belly in the way. We stood there in front of the nursery holding each other for a while before we started moving again. We walked laps around the ward until I was summoned back to my room to be examined again. I was up to six centimeters. I was given more medication to speed things up a little. My water hadn't broken yet.

I was hungry, but couldn't eat anything in case there were complications and had to be taken in for a c-section. Those damn ice chips did little to appease me. Thankfully, Amelia and Tray showed up a short time later to keep us entertained. Amelia and Tray brought Eric a change of clothes and promised us Jeter was doing fine.

They stayed until Anne came in to tell us it was time for them to go. She was also going home for the night, but would be back the next morning. She left me in the care of another nurse named Sandra who was quick with a joke and was just as friendly as Anne. Since my water hadn't broken yet, they popped the bag and upped my dose of pitocin to move things along. It was gross to feel the rush of water leaking between my legs, but I knew it was a necessary evil to get the Bean out. I got some sleep after that. The chair Eric had been sleeping in earlier could be converted into a bed. I was woken up for an exam about forty-five minutes after I fell asleep.

Eric looked ridiculous in that chair. I reached for my cell phone and snapped a picture. His legs were hanging off the foot rest at the knee. I really was married to a giant. I couldn't stop laughing. That is, until Sandra informed me I had jumped from seven centimeters to nine. My heart thudded in my chest, all of my fears about giving birth rushing to the surface. I wanted Eric to be awake. I wanted my Mom to be there to hold my hand and tell me everything was okay.

She was on her way. She and Dad were catching the first flight they could to Chicago. Amelia had promised to pick them up from the airport for us. I was really hoping they would get to the hospital in time, but the way things were going, it was possible they might miss it. I tried to keep myself calm, but I started hyperventilating.

"Eric." I croaked out between gasps for air. When calling his name didn't work, I whipped an empty Styrofoam cup at his head. It bounced off his temple, but it was enough to bring him back to consciousness.

"What?" He bolted forward. "Is it time?" He noticed the fact that I was crying again and dragged a chair closer to the bed. "What's wrong, lover?"

I just grabbed a fistful of his t-shirt and pulled him closer. He stroked my hair gently, doing anything he could think of to get me to calm down. He was whispering to me in Swedish which always seemed to calm me. I had no idea what he was saying, but the cadence of his voice was enough to get my attention and force me to focus on something other than what was going on in my own mind.

I wanted him to climb into bed with me. I moved over as much as I could and patted the mattress behind me. Eric did what I wanted, and squeezed himself into bed with me. I felt his thumb rubbing slow circles in the small of my back and I sighed contentedly. I was starting to feel pressure in my pelvis like I needed to push. My tears slowed, then stopped. I closed my eyes and fell into that blissful purgatory of being somewhere between asleep and awake, making sure to keep my breathing deep and even. I had just completely relaxed when Sandra came back to check me again.

"Well, well, it looks like we might have a baby soon." She smiled up at me. "Ten centimeters. It's time to start pushing."

I quickly learned there was no room for modesty in childbirth. My legs were wide open and being pushed up toward my chest while I grunted and groaned as I pushed my daughter out of my body. It was completely undignified. I squeezed Eric and Sandra's hands as I worked. I was sweating profusely, even with Eric mopping my forehead with a cool rag and feeding me all the ice chips I could eat between pushes.

"She's never coming out!" I wailed after I'd been at it for a half an hour.

"You're doing great, Sookie." Sandra smiled at me. I wanted to hit her.

"Can't I just have the surgery?" I whined, panting for air.

"I can see the head, Sookie. It's almost out." Dr. Ludwig told me. "Do you want to see?"

"No!" I shouted immediately. Eric moved down the bed a little and I saw his eyes widen. "What? What's wrong?"

"Nothing." His face snapped back to normal, but his eyes looked a little haunted.

"Don't lie to me, Eric Northman!" I glared at him.

"I can see her. She's coming." He picked up my hand and kissed it just as another contraction ripped through me.

Oh, yeah, my epidural was wearing off. I no longer wanted to name my daughter after Dr. Flood. I screamed with the pain. Sandra's eyes were trained on the fetal monitor, watching the Bean's heart rate and the lines that were jumping up and down on the print out.

"Okay, deep breath and push." Sandra squeezed my hand.

I sucked in a deep breath and pushed as hard as I could. It felt like absolutely nothing was happening. My eyes were screwed shut. Eric was rubbing circles on the back of my hand and telling me how good I was doing. I wanted to hit him, too.

I pushed and pushed and felt like I was getting nowhere, when Dr. Ludwig informed me my daughter was crowning. The next thing I knew my hand was on something warm and wet. I opened my eyes to find out Sandra had put my hand between my legs. I was touching the top of my baby's head. My heart thudded in my chest in a way that felt like it might burst. I gasped for air and looked at Eric, who was just staring with wonder.

"She's almost here, Sookie. You can do this." Sandra patted my arm.

"She's got blond hair, Sookie." Eric said without taking his eyes off of the head that was slowly coming out of my body.

It was a surreal moment, I'll tell you that. I did everything Dr. Ludwig told me to, including not pushing once the head was out. I'd never wanted to push more, and she told me to stop. I wanted to kick her right in the face. I panted through the burning pain while she cleaned out the baby's nose and throat to make sure she didn't suck anything into her lungs besides oxygen. She gave me the okay to push, and told me to look down.

Eric was crying. He was manly about it, but he was crying. I felt his hand shaking as I gave the last push to bring the Bean fully into the world. The most beautiful thing I'd ever heard filled my ears when she cried for the first time. Dr. Ludwig put her on my chest and I'm pretty sure my heart exploded entirely. There she was. After nine months of imagining what she would look like, she was right there in front of me.

"It's a girl!" Sandra announced with a big smile on her face, like we didn't already know.

I gasped as I stared down at her little face. She definitely had hair, although how anyone could tell with all of the blood and goo on her, I have no idea. Her cheeks were chubby and bright red. Her head was a little misshapen from its squeeze through my pelvis. Her tiny fingers fanned out, then formed a fist with the ins and outs of her breaths. Her legs extended fully in an almost hesitant kind of way. She was long.

"She's a giant." I laughed when I looked up at Eric.

He just nodded, unable to find words. Sandra rubbed the baby with a blanket to get her cleaned off a little more while I let her wrap an entire fist around my index finger. She was so small, even if she was long. I couldn't believe she was there.

"Hi, sweet girl." I smiled into her gray-blue eyes and she stared right back at me.

Her wailing slowed down to more uncomfortable cries. I cooed at her, hoping it would ease her a little. A hat was put on her head, covering her golden hair. It was thick and surprisingly long. Dark eyelashes framed her eyes and she had my nose. She had Eric's lips and chin. She was beautiful.

Love at first sight is what it was. I looked up at Eric and said, "What is it with you Northmans and the ability to get anyone to fall in love with you at first sight?"

Eric grinned broadly and said, "That's why she's going to be a nun when she grows up."

I burst out laughing and gently stroked our daughter's tiny hand. Sandra took her from me a moment later so she could be weighed and measured. Eric followed the baby while I had the unpleasant task of delivering the afterbirth. What a gross process that was, let me tell you.

"Do you have a name for this little beauty?" Sandra asked.

Eric turned to look at me questioningly. We'd decided on a name long ago. I nodded to him and he said, "Haley Anne Northman."

The best part was, she looked like a Haley. She was seven pounds, three ounces. She was also twenty-two inches long. I sent Eric with her when she was taken to the nursery to be examined by her pediatrician while Dr. Ludwig started working on my aftercare. I was completely exhausted, and yet, all I wanted was to hold my baby. Unfortunately, my body didn't agree, and I was sound asleep before they brought Haley back to me.

My eyes fluttered open to see Eric sitting in that same ridiculous chair with our daughter cradled safely in his arms. She yawned for the first time that I'd ever seen, and I had to bite my lip to keep from making any noise. I just wanted to watch Eric with her for a few minutes. Her little fist was wrapped around one of his fingers the same as she'd done with me when she was first born.

Eric was speaking to her in Swedish so I didn't know what he was saying, but she looked at him with the same rapt attention I would. Her blue-gray eyes stared at his face like she was trying to remember if she'd seen him before. He bowed his head to give her a kiss, and my waterworks started all over again.

"She's got you wrapped already, doesn't she?" I teased with a smile.

"She's my princess, and I will kill anyone who hurts her." Eric said in a very baby talk sort of tone that made me laugh.

"You're going to spoil her rotten." I sighed.

"Yes." He was completely serious. He stood up without taking his eyes off of her. He brought her over to me and carefully laid her on my chest. "She has your nose."

"I noticed." I smiled down at Haley and stroked her cheek. "She has your chin."

"And my Dad's hairline." He joked, making both of us laugh.

There was a knock at the door before it cracked open. Mom's face appeared, and I immediately burst into tears. She hustled across the room and carefully leaned down to hug me before looking at her granddaughter.

"Baby, she's beautiful." Mom kissed my forehead and then Haley's. "Hello, little girl. I'm your Gran."

Hearing Mom call herself that somehow made all of this real. Dad and Eric hugged before Eric stepped out of the way so Daddy could hug me and fawn all over Haley. I handed her over to him and he snuggled her close. Mom and Dad stood together at the foot of my bed making faces and cooing at Haley while Eric sat on the edge of my bed so I could lean against him. Gran and Pop Pop were making complete fools of themselves solely for Haley's amusement.

"Where are your parents?" I looked up to Eric.

"They'll be flying out tomorrow." He kissed my head.

"Have you told them about the house?"

"No. I figured I'd wait until they got here." He snaked an arm around my shoulders.

I snuggled against him and breathed deep. He smelled like himself, but also like Haley. It was my new favorite blend. "I love you a lot, you know that, right?"

"I know. Me, too." He kissed my head again.

After a meeting with a lactation consultant named Nicole I started breastfeeding, which was just weird. I stared down at Haley while she fed, and stroked her cheek when she started to nod off. She was what Anne called a natural, and had no trouble latching on the way some infants did. Amelia and Tray stopped in to visit, bringing flowers and balloons with them, along with breakfast from my favorite diner. I was starving like no other, and breastfeeding was only going to keep me hungry.

A third nurse by the name of Dee walked me through Haley's first bath. Haley wasn't at all happy with the process, but I couldn't really blame her for it. She was cold and wet, which was the exact opposite of what anyone wanted to be. I swaddled her as quickly as possible once the bath was over, and hugged her to my chest. Her little ear settled over my heart, and she quieted down in no time. Eric had been filling out some paperwork down the hall while I was giving Haley her bath. He came back into the room just as Dee was cleaning things up.

"We're one step closer to getting out of here." Eric announced when he walked into the room.

"Good. I can't wait to go home." I laid Haley down to get her in a diaper.

Dee turned around and immediately sputtered. "Oh, hello." She blushed bright red.

"Hi." Eric smiled at her, and I swear her knees went a little weak. I couldn't help but giggle.

"Well, I uh... if you don't have any other questions..."

"I think I've got it. Thank you." I smiled at her.

"No problem." She was staring right at Eric, who was staring down at Haley.

I started to snap Haley into a onesie, but looked up just in time to see Dee pause at the door to stare blatantly at my husband's ass. I stifled a giggle and continued to dress my daughter. Once Dee was gone I burst out laughing.

"What?"

"That nurse was just staring at your ass like it was a last meal." I made faces at Haley.

"And that's funny?" Eric seemed a bit offended I wasn't flying off into a jealous rage.

"It is to me. No way in the world is she ever going to have you, and I know it."

"Oh yeah?" Eric arched an eyebrow at me.

"Yeah. Because I'd kill her for touching you, then I'd kill you for letting her and the prettiest baby girl in the whole wide world wouldn't like it if I had to kill her daddy, now would she? No she wouldn't." I tickled Haley's tummy. "No, she wouldn't."

I knew it was too soon for her to smile, but I hoped for it all the same. We finished dressing her, and then Eric held her while I got myself cleaned up and ready to go. Anne came in with my discharge papers so I could sign myself out of the hospital. Eric handed Haley back to me and gathered up my bags and things to take down to the car so we could go home.

I signed the last of the paperwork and lowered myself into a wheelchair with Haley in my arms. She was sleeping peacefully, her little cheeks making a sucking movement as she slept. I couldn't stop staring down at her as I was rolled through the hospital to the front door where Eric was waiting with the car. He took Haley from me and buckled her into her car seat. We said our goodbyes to Anne and thanked her for all of her help before Eric helped me into the backseat.

"So, Mom, are you ready to go home?" Eric asked once he was in the driver's seat.

"Yes, Daddy, I think I am." I smiled down at Haley, then blew a kiss at Eric in the rear-view mirror as the car started to pull away from the hospital.

They're parents! Can you believe it? After what feels like forever, the Bean is finally on the loose! I hope a few of my friends don't mind having made special appearances in this story. It's just my way of saying thanks for being such great cheerleaders throughout this story. Only one more regular chapter left \*wipes tears\* I can't believe it's almost over.

**Chapter 59: Taking You Home**

Bet you all thought I forgot about this. Seriously, blame Eric. I needed him for this chapter, but all he could do was sit and coo at Haley in Swedish. Not. Helpful. Finally, he decided to use his big boy words today, and this is what came out. This is the THIRD version of this chapter. I'm still not 100% happy with it, but it is what it is. I hope y'all like it all the same. There's still the epilogue to come, but this is the last regular chapter of Hot For Teacher. Thanks to everyone who as read, reviewed, tweeted, alerted, favorited, PMed or otherwise had something to do with this story. I love you all!

Chapter Fifty-Nine: Taking You Home

Just when I thought my wife couldn't be more amazing, I watched her bring our daughter into the world. She was so tiny, our little Bean. She was bloody, squirming and screaming- Haley, I mean- and I was in love with her immediately. I had wondered how I would feel when she finally came out, and I was stunned by how overwhelming it was. All of a sudden this tiny person I had been trying to imagine for the last nine months had a face, and a personality all her own.

Once they got her cleaned off, I was convinced she was the most beautiful baby ever brought into the world, second only to her mother. I went with her to the nursery to be examined by her doctor. All of the little tests they ran came back with good results. She was given a perfect bill of health for a newborn, and was brought back to Sookie's room.

Sookie looked exhausted even in her sleep. Her head was rolled to the side, her hands resting on her still rather pregnant looking stomach. They don't show you that in movies. In movies, a woman gives birth and magically goes back to being a size two. It wasn't like that for Sookie at all. She still looked beautiful, though. I was left alone with the baby. Sandra reminded me where the call button was if I needed anything.

I planned to let Sookie sleep for as long as possible before she had to be woken up to feed the baby. I'd tried to talk her into bottle feeding, if only because I didn't want her to wear herself out breastfeeding at all hours of the day. I lifted the tiny bundle that was my daughter, and she fit easily into my hands. She snorted and wiggled some, but her eyes remained closed.

I sat down in the chair that wasn't meant for a man of my size, and just stared at my daughter. Beautiful. I shifted her in my arms so I was cradling her, then began to unwrap her slightly. Her little hands emerged, and mittens had been put on her to keep her from scratching her perfect little face all to hell. I pulled one of those mittens off to examine her hands.

She grabbed my finger immediately and opened her eyes. I cooed at her in Swedish, telling her how lucky she was to have the best mother in the world. She just snorted and sucked her cheeks. Her tiny tongue popped out of her mouth, then disappeared just as quickly. She was curled in a tiny ball, not yet used to having all the room she could ever want to stretch out in.

I paid attention to every little noise she made, wanting to memorize them all. I stood and located the digital camera Sookie had packed. For once the fluorescent lights in the room were a bonus, since it meant using the flash less. I didn't want to blind my baby. I'd read they could detect light, but I'm sure it was still rather dark for the first nine months of her life.

I spoke Swedish to her again, telling her the story of how I met her mother. "If this ever happens to you, little girl, you run the other way."

Her little tongue appeared again. Her mother would be proud of her for that, even if it was an involuntary reflex. I was still talking to her when I heard Sookie crying in her bed. I turned to face her, relieved only slightly when I saw she was smiling. It dawned on me then that I was going to have to put up with two crying women. I wasn't looking forward to that.

Sookie teased me for being so enamored with Haley, but how could I not be? Wasn't my job, as a father, to think my daughter was the most beautiful creature to walk the earth since her mother was born? I slowly got up from my chair and handed Haley over to Sookie, who gasped and looked up at me with the same expression of awe I'd had when I first saw her.

We were in the midst of deciding who Haley looked more like when Michelle and Corbett came in. After exchanging hugs and hellos, I sat next to Sookie while we watched her parents make fools of themselves in attempts to get a smile out of Haley. She wasn't even six hours old yet. We were a long way from smiles on purpose, but it was still fun to watch them try.

My own parents couldn't get a flight out of California until the following day due to some bad weather on their end. Not only were my parents going to meet their first grandchild, but I planned to tell them about the decision Sookie and I had come to in regards to them living in my old house. Truthfully, I liked the idea of them being around. I'd had some time to consider it, and since I'd never had grandparents around regularly as a kid, I thought it would be nice for Haley to have that.

I knew Sookie and her Gran had been close as kids, and I wanted that for Haley. There was much for her to learn from her grandparents, and I knew my Dad was going to melt the second he laid eyes on her. If Sookie thought I was a threat to Haley's future social life, Dad was even worse. I was curious to see what my parents would be like as grandparents. I had no doubt Mom would spoil Haley every chance she got, which was something Sookie and I wanted to curb. We had a few rules we planned to put in place for the sake of our sanity.

We weren't used to having parents close by, and I didn't want Mom steamrolling everyone. I appreciated her energy and wanting to be involved in our lives, but we didn't need to be monitored. We were adults and perfectly capable of taking care of ourselves, and our daughter. Getting Mom to accept the rules was going to be the tough part. Hopefully, she would understand where we were coming from, but I was prepared for her to get hyper defensive.

Michel;e and Corbett stayed until Anne came in on shift change, and told them it was time to go. She fawned over Haley for a few minutes herself before letting us know a lactation consultant would be coming down to talk to Sookie about breastfeeding. I didn't know such a job existed. Sookie fell asleep shortly after her parents left, leaving me to sit up with Haley. I was tired myself, but I couldn't stop staring at my daughter. My daughter... it still sounded foreign to me, but it felt good to say.

The next morning Sookie was in the midst of feeding Haley when Amelia and Tray came in with breakfast for us. Amelia almost immediately burst into tears while holding Haley. They stayed for a while, cooing over the baby and asking Sookie how she was doing. But then a woman by the name of Dee stopped in to teach Sookie how to give Haley a bath. While they went over that, I started on the paperwork to have Sookie released from the hospital.

It amazed me that less than twenty-four hours had passed since she'd given birth, and already she was being sent home. I knew she was anxious to get back to familiar surroundings and the comfort of her own bed. If her mom wasn't in town, I doubt she would have been quite so eager. I wanted to get them home and settled before I had to pick up my parents from the airport.

When I came back to the room, Dee and Sookie were just finishing up and getting Haley dressed to go home. She was wearing the smallest sundress I'd ever seen, and Sookie was swaddling her so tight she looked like a little pink burrito. A few minutes later, Anne came in with the discharge papers for Sookie to sign herself out of the hospital. I grabbed her bags and headed down to get the car. I sat behind the wheel in front of the main entrance of the hospital, waiting for Sookie to appear.

When she did, she was looking down at Haley making faces. What was it about infants that made perfectly sane adults act like they were missing copious amounts of brain cells? I got out of the car and took Haley from Sookie so I could get her buckled into her car seat for her first ride. I helped Sookie into the car as well, and thanked Anne for all of her help. Sookie and Anne actually hugged before I closed her into the car.

I got in the driver's seat and looked at Sookie in the review mirror. "So, Mom, are you ready to go home?"

She was looking down at a sleeping Haley and said, "Yes, Daddy, I think I am." She smiled up at me, catching my reflection in the mirror and blowing a kiss at me.

The drive home was short. The trains were cooperating with us for a change. We got back to find the front yard decorated with a whole slew of pink storks, and a sign letting the neighbors know that Haley Anne had come into the world the day before. There was definitely no mistaking there was a new baby in the house. Jeter was at the front door, barking hysterically before we even got up to the house. Corbett held onto his collar to keep Jeter from knocking Sookie over when she stepped through the door.

She set Haley's car seat down on the bench by the door, and released the restraints on the seat. Carefully, she lifted Haley out and cradled her as she hugged each of her parents before going further into the house. I went straight upstairs with Sookie's bags. I came downstairs to find that Michelle had all of the little things ready to go that we would need for Haley at a moment's notice. There was a stack of diapers, burp rags and spare onesies just waiting to be used. A box of wipes was on the lower level of the coffee table.

Sookie handed Haley off to her Mom so she could go upstairs and shower. "Eric, will you help me up the stairs?"

"Of course." I smiled at her.

We walked up the stairs together with me behind Sookie just in case. She'd tried to explain the pain she was in, but I knew there was no way I could ever really understand it. When I told Sookie she was a superhero, she just rolled her eyes at me. She was moving slowly, but I expected it would be that way for a few days. I couldn't even imagine pushing a human being out of... well, yeah. No, I couldn't do it, and I'm man enough to admit it.

I stayed in the bathroom with her while she showered, but I didn't get in with her. I wanted to, believe me, but she wasn't medically allowed to celebrate the way I wanted to for at least another six weeks. Some of the reading I'd done on the subject likened childbirth to an explosion going off inside her. That didn't sound at all pleasant, and I had absolutely no intention of disrupting her healing. We talked while she got cleaned up.

The water turned off suddenly, and she reached out for a towel without pulling back the shower curtain. When she finally pulled the curtain back she held out her hand to me so I could help her out of the tub. I knew she hated asking for help.

"Sorry. I'll be okay in a few days, I hope."

"Sookie, you just expelled a human being from your body. Helping you out of the tub, up the stairs or into bed is not a big deal." I kissed her wet hair.

"I just hate being dependent on everyone." She grumbled while grabbing for a second towel to dry her hair.

"I know you do, and I love that you're so independent, but it's okay to ask for help right now. Haley needs you to be healthy and strong for her, so if that means you have to lean on me more than usual, I am way beyond okay with that." I assured her.

She smiled faintly at me and then combed through her hair. A look at my watch told me it was about time to leave to go pick up my parents. I left her upstairs while she was getting dressed.

"Do you want me to bring anything back for you?" I asked her.

She thought about it for a moment and then said, "New Starr."

"You got it." I winked, and then headed off to get my parents.

I came back a few hours later with three big bags of food and my parents in tow. The car had barely stopped when Mom was popping out of the backseat to get in the house. By the time Dad and I caught up with her, she was already snuggling Haley. That poor baby didn't stand a chance.

"For heaven's sake, Stella, don't squeeze her so hard." Dad teased.

"Oh, hush, Tom!" Mom swatted at him blindly. "She's perfect! Aren't you just the cutest little girl in the whole world?"

The baby talk was damn close to nauseating. At least I had enough dignity to do it in Swedish so no one knew what the hell I was saying. Mom, on the other hand, openly gushed over her first grandchild. It took a while before she was willing to pass Haley over to Dad, and even then it was only after she made him wash his hands. Twice.

"Come here, Tootsie, Papa's got you." Dad said as he took Haley from Mom. "Well, you've got quite a grip on you, don'tcha? That's good. Means you'll throw a solid right cross when you're older."

I couldn't help but laugh while Mom chided him. We all sat down to dinner together with Haley in her little swinging bassinet a few feet away. Sookie had to bail on the middle of dinner to feed the baby, but gave strict orders to leave her plate right where it was. We sat and talked for a bit after dinner, but Sookie and I were both exhausted, and we knew our first night with an infant in the house was going to be interesting.

My parents took the Comet and headed back to the house in Franklin Park. Corbett and Michelle were staying in the guest room for the duration. Sookie and I headed up to bed just after eight. She went to brush her teeth while I sat with Haley. Her big blue-gray eyes were wide open, taking in her surroundings. It amazed me how alert she was. She looked at me like she'd seen me before, but couldn't remember where. It was fun to watch all of the little faces she made.

Her arms and legs flailed a little in the tiny pink sleeper she was wearing. Her legs were long and she stretched them almost hesitantly. When I lifted her up, her legs immediately curled up toward her chest. She tucked herself into the little ball she was used to being, and settled easily on my chest. She couldn't hold her head up yet, but I knew it would be a few weeks before she could.

Sookie came back from the bathroom and settled onto her side of the bed. There was plenty of space between us, and I lay Haley down in that space. We smiled down at our daughter, making faces and talking to her. Her little head turned back and forth, depending on who was talking.

"I'm surprised your Mom isn't hiding out in our bushes." Sookie joked.

"I put a muscle relaxer in her drink." I joked right back.

Sookie giggled and tickled Haley's stomach. "Your Nana's not so bad. And if she ever gets on your nerves, you go tell Papa Tom, and he'll get her off your back."

"You've got Papa wrapped around your finger there, Haley." I smiled down at her.

"You know, this kid already has more nicknames in twenty-four hours than I've had in my whole life." Sookie smoothed back Haley's hair.

It was thick, blonde and stood straight up for the most part. She absolutely despised pacifiers. Wouldn't take one if her life depended on it, not for lack of the nurses trying to get her to take it. Sookie and I merely shrugged it off and figured it was one less habit we'd have to break her of later on. Potty training would be difficult enough without trying to get her to give up a pacifier, too.

Sookie fell asleep a short time later. I changed Haley's diaper (I really don't know what all the fuss is about there) and then put her in the portable crib we'd set up in our room for her. We figured it would be easier to have her right there than to have to go across the hall every time she woke up. Once she was sleeping more than two or three hours at a time, we'd put her in her own room.

I turned off the light, and got back into bed next to Sookie. She turned onto her other side, and I curled myself around her. It seemed like I had just gone to sleep when Haley started crying.

*Let's get ready to rumble*, I thought. I started to get up, but Sookie patted my shoulder. "I got her, Eric."

I wish I could say I stayed up to make sure everything was okay, but sleep pulled me right back under. I couldn't tell you what happened. For all I know, a dancing bear came in the room and spent an hour singing Wayne Newton songs and doing Rockette style high kicks. I honestly have no idea.

The next few days passed in much the same way as our first day home. Friends and family dropped by. Sookie and I talked to Mom and Dad about them moving to Chicago on their last night in town. We were having dinner together at our house. Haley was sound asleep in her swing, and Sookie was giving me a run for my money on who could eat more. It was actually rather entertaining.

I cleared my throat and said, "Sookie and I have talked about you two moving here, and we decided we don't have a problem with you moving into the house so long as we can agree on a few ground rules." I looked at my mother, knowing she was the one most likely to cause a problem.

"Let's hear it." Dad said before taking another bite of his steak.

"Well, for starters, you need to call before coming over." I continued to stare at Mom.

"Of course we would call first." Mom looked offended, but we all knew better.

"And you can't bring presents every single time you come by. We know Haley's your granddaughter, and we appreciate your generosity toward her, but she needs only so many stuffed animals and dresses." Sookie chimed in.

Mom looked like she might protest, but there was a small pile of gifts from her and Dad alone. It seemed everywhere she went, Mom found something she thought was just "too darling to pass up." There were enough stuffed animals to fill Noah's Ark, and the pile was only going to get bigger with Mom and Dad living close by.

"That sounds fair." Dad nodded.

"If we ask you to go home, that means time's up."

"Oh, Eric, now you're just being ridiculous." Mom laughed, although she was the only one.

"No offense, Mom, but you have a hard time knowing when enough is enough, and we want to be very clear about things. We want you to be around, but we don't want to be smothered. We're adults."

Mom glared at me for a moment and said, "Eric, what makes you think I don't respect the fact that you're an adult? Did I suggest you move back home when you got into trouble with the police? Have I ever told you what to do with your life, outside of marrying Sookie? No. You're a smart man. I know you're a husband and a father, and I am so proud of you for taking those steps in life. Your father and I don't want to move here because we think you two aren't capable of handling that sweet baby on your own. We want to be here because you're our son, and family should stick together." Mom wiped her mouth and set down her fork.

I felt bad for a minute, but I wasn't going to back down on any of the "demands" Sookie and I were making in regards to them moving here. I knew if we didn't put all of this out there beforehand, Mom would try to come in and take over.

"And one more thing." I hated that this was all directed at Mom.

"What now?" She sighed heavily.

"I know Pam isn't your favorite person. You have your reasons for not liking her, and that's fine. I'm not going to try and change your mind. I will, however, ask that you don't speak badly about her in front of Haley. Your issues with her don't have to be Haley's." I knew we were a long way off before we had to worry about Haley's thoughts being tainted by the words of others, but the time would come before we knew it. Not to mention, I just didn't want to hear it.

Mom looked at me with glassy eyes before agreeing she would keep her opinions to herself in Haley's presence. I really wished I could understand what her problem was. I just didn't get it. I would have figured that Johan being happy with Pam would be reason enough for her to lighten up, but apparently it wasn't. Fortunately Haley woke up early from her nap, and Mom took her so Sookie could finish eating.

A little bonding time with the baby quickly rectified Mom's sour mood. The rest of their visit was peaceful. They came by in the morning to return the Comet so I could take them to the airport. They were going to put the house on the market in California as soon as they got back. They were hoping to be settled into the Franklin Park house before Halloween, but wouldn't move here until the other house had sold. Dad wanted to talk about a rental agreement, but I told him we could figure that out later on once they were settled into the house.

"I thought you'd say that." Dad smirked at me, then pressed a small piece of paper into my hand. "That's for your daughter's college fund."

I looked down at the check he'd given me. I could have tried to give it back, but he would have just given it to Sookie instead, and she while she would think it was over-the-top, she had been raised not to turn away a gift. I got back from taking Mom and Dad to the airport to find out Sookie had gotten a call from Pam while I was gone.

"They're going to fly in in a few weeks. Something came up with a contract job for Johan in Milan and he couldn't get out of it. I told them they could stay here, or at the Franklin Park house since." Sookie told me.

Pam had sold her condo, which only cemented her decision about moving across the pond. I missed her sometimes, I can't lie about that. But I also missed my brother. I hoped if they ever decided to be a more conventional couple that they would come back to the States to get married and raise their kids. The idea of a pregnant Pam sent me into a fit of laughter that Sookie quickly joined when I told her what I was imagining.

"Can you imagine..." Sookie gasped for air between giggles. "Pam will be coordinating headbands with her hospital gown."

I laughed harder because it was true. Only Pam would be worried about something like that. Sookie went upstairs to take a nap, leaving me to tend to Haley alone. I sat with her on the couch and turned on ESPN. If it's possible, my eight-day-old daughter looked bored out of her mind.

"Just like your mother." I chuckled and kissed her little head.

I was forced to take Haley upstairs two hours later when she decided she couldn't wait anymore to eat. Sookie was already sitting up in bed, waiting for Haley when I walked into the room. Haley latched on immediately and Sookie sent me on a mission to get her some iced tea and apple slices. I brought her what she asked for and threw in a load of laundry. I was chopping veggies for stir-fry for dinner when Sookie and Haley came downstairs.

"How's the weather outside?" Sookie asked.

"Warm, but not unbearable." I said as I sliced through a red pepper.

"I was thinking of going for a walk with the baby. You want to leash up Jeter and come with?" She asked.

"Sure. Just let me get finished up here." I said over my shoulder.

Sookie put Haley in her swing and then came to help me prep veggies. In no time flat, the veggies were prepped and ready for later. I got steak strips marinading in a Ziploc and Sookie got Haley ready to go. Jeter was surprisingly cooperative about being leashed, considering her was used to running free in the yard without it. I got the stroller out of the trunk of Sookie's car while she locked up the house.

We walked for a while at a slow pace since Sookie was still having trouble getting around. I knew she was feeling better, but it still sucked to know she was having any sort of discomfort, especially since there wasn't much I could do to help her with it. Haley slept through the walk, but that was fine by us. Sookie steered the stroller with one hand and held my hand with the other.

We walked up to the house just as Amelia and Tray were getting out of their car. Amelia was in an exceptionally good mood and just about pounced on Sookie as soon as she was close enough. Sookie stood perfectly still, patting Amelia gently on the back.

"Ame, I need air here." Sookie finally said.

"Sorry, sorry, I'm just...ohhh, I'm excited." She fanned her face and thrust a piece of paper at Sookie.

I looked over Sookie's shoulder and immediately recognized what I was looking at. "Well, well, it's about time." I smiled at them.

Sookie gasped and then threw her arms around Amelia. "How far along are you?"

"Nine weeks." Amelia was damn near impossible to understand. "Our kids won't be in the same class, but if I have a boy they can still get married."

Amelia and Sookie both laughed, leaving Tray and I to roll our eyes. I took Jeter off his leash, and he immediately went running over to Tray, who was more than willing to get down on the ground and wrestle with the giant dog. I went inside to get one of Jeter's balls to throw around while Sookie and Amelia talked about pregnancy stuff. When Haley woke up, Sookie went up to the porch to feed her with a blanket draped over her chest for privacy.

We stayed outside until Sookie proclaimed she was starving and we needed to get started on dinner. Jeter followed me toward the garage. I caught my reflection in the sparkling window of the Comet, and had to stop and laugh. A year ago I never would have imagined I'd be pushing a baby stroller and getting ready to make my wife dinner. Crazy how things worked out.

I folded up the stroller and put it back in the trunk of the car. Sookie was in the middle of changing Haley's diaper when I walked in. She'd put the veggies and steak on the counter for me. I took the dirty diaper off the sofa and put it in the garbage. I washed my hands and smiled over at Sookie, who was blowing raspberries on Haley's stomach. There was no laughter yet, but it was only a matter of time. Haley did, however, get a handful of Sookie's hair and yank for all she was worth.

"Ouch!" Sookie reached to gently untangle our daughter's fingers from her hair.

"Good to know she'll be able to take on heavyweights and still be able to scrap when she needs to." I leaned over the couch.

"Haha. Just wait until it's *your* hair she's yanking on." Sookie narrowed her eyes at me, but then her eyes lit up. "Maybe I should cut my hair."

I must have made a face of disapproval at her suggestion, because she laughed and told me to relax.

Sookie squeezed my hand when the nurse gave Haley her first shot. Our daughter screamed her little lungs out, her face turning bright red and tears squeezing out of her scared blue eyes. If it killed me to see Sookie cry, it was even worse to see Haley so upset. I wanted to deck the nurse for causing her any sort of pain, but I knew it was necessary. It was over in a matter of seconds, but it felt like hours. As soon as Haley's little legs were bandaged, Sookie picked her up and started to comfort her.

We were told we could give her some baby Tylenol and that would help with any discomfort Haley might feel in the aftermath. We were also warned she would probably sleep for most of the afternoon as a result of the shots she'd been given. I honestly think the shots were more painful for Sookie than they were for Haley.

On the ride home we had the radio on quietly. Haley was zonked out in the backseat. Sookie was sitting beside me, holding my hand. The song changed, and Sookie smiled over at me with a curious look on her face.

"What?" I asked her.

"You don't remember, do you?"

"Remember what?"

"This song."

"Should I?" It was some fluffy pop number I would expect to hear at the bar, but wouldn't be caught dead with in my personal collection.

"It's *LoveGame* by Lady Gaga. It was playing the first time I saw you." Sookie smirked at me.

I paused to listen to the words for a minute. *I'm on a mission, and it involves some heavy touchin' yeah. You've indicated your interest, I'm educated in sex, yes. And now I want it bad, want it bad.*Yep, that about sums up the way things were the night we met. I couldn't help but turn to her and wiggle my eyebrows.

Sookie laughed, then peered over her seat to check on Haley, who was still out like a light. She picked up my hand and kissed it. "And to think, all of this started with a Screaming Orgasm."

Indeed.

Okay, so I'm going to sort of put this out there and let the reviewers choose. How far into the future do you want this epilogue? Do you want a year? Do you want five years? Or maybe just six months? You tell me, and I'll see what I can do. I imagine I'll probably include one shots now and again whenever the mood strikes, but they'll go in the "After School Specials." Once again, thank you, thank you, thank you for being so kick ass and loving these two crazy kids as much as I do. Now who wants to hold the baby? \*snuggles Haley\*

**Chapter 60: The Future Is A Masterpiece**

Okay, so I won't take up too much of your time here. I'll let you get to the main event, then see you at the bottom. I do, however, have to thank **scribeninja, chanel addict and slacker dee** for being amazeballs prereaders and making sure I got this right. You ladies rock my socks.

Chapter Sixty: The Future Is A Masterpiece

*Five Years Later*

"Mommy, watch me!" Haley shouted from the monkey bars.

I was pushing Nicholas and Connor on the swings. Haley was very good at climbing and hanging, but I attributed that to having a near giant for a father. I glanced at my watch and sighed with disappointment. Eric was late. Again.

I was getting sick of this.

I was tired of making excuses to the kids about why Daddy didn't come to the park, the library, the zoo or anywhere else we went. I hated the disappointment on their faces whenever he overslept, or missed an outing because he 'just stopped by the bar real quick,' and ended up doing paperwork that kept him there for hours. I felt like the bad guy.

I felt like a single mother more often than not. I knew Eric was working so hard for "us," but the kids didn't understand it. All they knew was Daddy wasn't there. I could handle him pulling away from me, at first, but not from them. They didn't understand it anymore than they deserved it.

I watched Haley traverse the monkey bars, and shouted my praise to her. Nicholas and Connor were two weeks past their third birthday. Nicholas was the bruiser of the family. He had a temper on him that only Eric ever seemed to be able to diffuse easily. He had also inherited his father's athletic reflexes and skills. Connor was my little comedian. He was constantly doing the silliest things just to make everyone laugh or smile. Stella said it was like having a clone of Johan when he was Connor's age. I wasn't the least bit surprised to hear it. The two of them balanced each other out nicely.

Haley, my baby girl, she was the perfect blend of Eric and me. She was fiercely protective of her little brothers and very opinionated. She inherited Eric's love for a good snuggle, and I often woke up to find her in our bed, curled up next to her father. She had him wrapped around her little finger.

"Daddy!" Haley dropped from the monkey bars and ran to Eric, who was walking up behind me.

"You're late." I growled at him through a clenched jaw.

"Forgot to set the alarm." No apology, just excuses. For the sake of the kids, we slapped on our happy faces and had our picnic lunch.

Haley was spending the night at her friend Kacy's house. The boys were going to Amelia and Tray's. They got along well with Charlie, the little boy who would never be my son-in-law, much to Amelia's dismay. Haley and Charlie didn't get along. At all. Charlie thought Haley was too bossy- which she sometimes was. Haley thought Charlie was a dork- although, I have *no* idea where she heard that word.

Still, a house without kids gave me hope that Eric and I could talk. This had to stop. I was tired of feeling like I did. I loved him. Desperately. I didn't feel like myself with the rift between us. I missed him, but was too angry to really let him in. I got resentful. It was time to put a stop to it. It was either fix it, or start looking for divorce lawyers, and I really didn't want that.

Eric played with the kids after we ate. The four of them chased a soccer ball around the open field while I sat on the sidelines and watched. For a little while things felt normal again. I laughed along with them when Connor tried to bounce the ball off his head the way Eric did.

Inevitably, Eric's cell phone rang. It was Sarah, the bar manager. I groaned, knowing playtime was over. Eric came to answer his phone. "I'll make it quick," he said. Famous last words.

I listened to Eric's side of the conversation. Apparently there was a mix up with some dates and the beer vendor hadn't shown up. No beer, no business.

"I have to go." Eric said after he hung up.

"Yeah, I heard. At least say goodbye to the kids first. They won't be home later." I sighed heavily.

"It's not like I planned this, Sookie." Eric's sigh matched my own.

I ignored him and called the kids over. "Daddy has to go. There was a mix up at work."

"Noooooo!" Three voices chorused back and my heart broke.

Haley, my little voice of reason, said, "Can't Sarah fix it?"

I was wondering the same thing.

Eric apologized and promised to make it up to the kids later. He was in their debt big time. I hated that I almost wished he wouldn't have come at all. Then I wouldn't be left to answer questions I didn't have answers to. He hugged and kissed the kids goodbye. He didn't say anything to me before he walked off. Sadly, that was nothing new.

I was in a mood for the rest of the afternoon. Haley was picked up by Kacy's mom at 4:00. I dropped the boys off at Amelia's a short time later. She had offered to take them for the night so Eric and I could talk. I didn't have the heart to tell her Eric was at work. I put on my best fake smile and talked up an evening I knew wasn't going to happen.

On the drive home, I cranked up my iPod to listen to less than kid friendly music. A Staind song came up on my shuffle, and I nearly broke down at a red light. *You just refuse to bend, so I keep bending 'til I break.* The words hit me hard. That's what my life had become. I made excuses, ran interference and I covered for Eric. I was party to his absenteeism. I was part of the problem.

But I didn't want to be. I wanted *our* life back. I wanted us together, united and head over heels in love with each other. I wanted to be the couple we once were that made people gag because we were so sweet to each other. I tried to figure out how it had come to this point. Where did we go wrong?

I parked in the garage and was greeted by Jeter in the laundry room. It was strange to come home to an empty house. There were no cartoons on in the background, no kids screaming or laughing. I dropped my purse on the kitchen counter and tried to decide what to do with myself. The house was clean. There was only silence. I moved to the living room and sat down on the couch. I watched the sky get increasingly darker though the patio doors that led out onto the deck.

We'd moved into a new house shortly before Nicholas and Connor's first birthday. There simply wasn't enough space for two adults, three kids and a dog the size of a pony. Our new house had a full basement, a living room, front room, dining room, kitchen, screened in patio, four bedrooms, two and a half bathrooms and a laundry room. It was the perfect house for our family. I loved our house. I loved it more when it wasn't so dark and silent.

Darkness filled the empty space around me, but I didn't move. I sat there in the dark, thinking about all of the things that had gone wrong in my marriage. I thought, briefly, that maybe Eric was having an affair. Really, it added up when I put together the circumstantial evidence. He worked in a bar. He was the sexiest man I'd ever seen. He wasn't having sex with me, and I knew his sexual appetite better than anyone. If he wasn't fucking me, there had to be someone. I thought maybe it was Sarah for a moment, but quickly rejected the whole theory.

Eric was a lot of things, but a cheater wasn't one of them. Eric had always been straight with me about things, whether it was good, bad or ugly, he always told me the truth. He had made a promise to me long ago that if he ever lost interest in our relationship, or if he met someone else, that he would tell me the truth. I promised him I would do the same. We had made that promise at a point when we couldn't imagine being with someone else, but Eric always kept his promises.

Or he had up until recently. Maybe it was just me he didn't love anymore. It was the not knowing that was killing me. When the garage door started to go up, I didn't move either. I stayed right where I was, even though Jeter took off like a shot, and was fidgeting anxiously at the garage door. I heard Eric greet our dog more affectionately than he had greeted me in months.

He walked into the family room. "Sookie?" He was behind me and he turned the lights on.

"Do you still love me, Eric?" I almost mumbled the question. I was terrified that he might say no. I didn't know what I would do if he did.

He sighed and said, "You know I do."

"How would I know? You never say so. You're never here. You're body is, but *you* aren't. Is it because of me? Do you want out of this?"

"Sookie..."

"Just tell me if it's too much, Eric. If you're going to break my heart, that's one thing, but the kids..." I trailed off when I started to cry. I couldn't think about the kids right then or I would completely fall apart.

He came around and sat on the coffee table in front of me. "Sookie, I don't want out. I love you. I love our children."

"Then why do I feel like a burden to you, Eric? I used to feel like your partner. Now it's like I'm just this weight around your neck. I hate feeling this way! I hate that our house is empty, and instead of fucking on this couch, I'm crying on it and wondering if my marriage is over! And I don't know what to do about it, Eric. I don't know how to fix it." I wiped my eyes and cheeks.

He wasn't saying anything, which didn't help. The silence got too loud. I couldn't take anymore.

"Maybe we should separate for a while." I suggested.

"What?" That got his attention. "Sookie, separating is not what I want. Don't you get it yet? Everything I do is for you and the kids. Don't you think I hate missing out on the fun stuff? I would love to be able to just turn my back on work and go play, but I can't."

"That's bullshit, Eric. You're the boss. You can leave whenever the fuck you want, and we both know it. You choose the bar. You choose it every time that goddamn phone rings and you go running." I got up and headed for the kitchen with Eric hot on my heels.

"It's my bar, Sookie!"

"It doesn't have to be!" I shouted back as I got myself a glass of wine and quickly drained it.

"So this is about the bar?"

"It's about you! You've changed! The Eric I fell in love with took responsibility for all of his mistakes and shortcomings. He didn't break promises. He didn't make excuses or try to placate me with shiny new promises he had no intention of keeping. Not only did he *tell* me he loved me, he *showed* me. What happened to you, Eric? Where did you go?"

"I'm not the only one who changed."

I threw my wine glass in the sink, the sound of shattering glass making quite an impression on him. I was so close to losing it completely.

"Stop doing that! This is about you! I know I'm not perfect. I've made mistakes. I'm tired of feeling like this, Eric. I'm tired of seeing our kids so disappointed all the time because you're not there. They miss you. *I miss you*. Do you miss us, Eric?" I stared at him.

He crossed the room in two quick strides and held my face in his hands. His eyes were intense and blazing as he looked at me. There was heat there in his eyes that I hadn't seen in a long time. My heart sped up and I had to force my knees not to go weak under the weight of his stare.

"Every second of every day. I think about you all the time. I wonder where you are or what you're doing, or if you miss me, too. We shut down, Sookie. We let the world get in the way. I miss you. I love you. I don't want to lose you," he told me.

I believed him. It was all there in his eyes. I knew those eyes. I knew when they were lying. There was nothing but insistence there. He needed me to believe him as much I needed hear the words he'd just said.

"I love you, Eric." I whispered. It felt good to say it.

His lips crashed down on mine in a kiss that was as frantic as it was passionate. Our mouths moved expertly against one another, and yet, in an exploratory way. It had been so long since we'd exchanged anything more than a peck with each other. Sex in our relationship was non-existent. The last time we'd had sex was on Valentine's Day, and it was the worst sex we'd ever had. I'd faked an orgasm for the first- and only- time, and I'm fairly certain Eric knew I was faking. He knew my body too well not to know.

My heart and head just weren't into it that night. My body wanted it, but the rest of me was somewhere else. I was thinking about treats for Haley's kindergarten class and papers I needed to grade when I was done folding laundry and putting away stray toys. So I faked my orgasm. After that, Eric stopped trying.

But there would be no faking it that night. I reached into Eric's pocket and retrieved his phone. I broke our kiss and turned his phone off. He pulled my t-shirt off and put me up on the counter. Our lips met again in that same frenzied way, each of us trying to devour the other. Piece by piece, our clothes came off.

His mouth moved along my jaw and down my neck, stopping at the spot under my ear that always drove me crazy. From there he moved to my breasts, teasing them both with his mouth and fingers until I was tugging on his hair to get his lips back on mine. It had been more than three months since we'd had sex last, and I didn't really want to do it on the kitchen counter.

"Bedroom." I said between kisses.

Before I was a mother, I would have done it right there without a second thought, but I'd changed. Eric was right about that. He scooped me up off the counter and in record time, I was being dumped on our bed. Eric crawled up next to me and we picked up where we'd left off downstairs, only now his fingers were at work between my legs.

"Eric, later." I pulled him on top of me. "I need you inside me. Now."

He growled at my admission, and I almost came right there. I needed to hear that sound. I missed that sound. His eyes met mine. My hand moved between us to guide him inside me. I was so beyond ready for him. I missed him in ways I hadn't even realized until just then. He slid into me with the littlest bit of resistance from my body. I wasn't used to him anymore, and the thought brought fresh tears to my eyes.

"Did I hurt you?" He kissed my cheeks so sweetly. It was such a loaded question he'd asked, but I knew what he meant.

"No." I wrapped my legs around his waist to pull him closer and deeper inside me. I kissed him with everything I had when he looked doubtful. "I love you, Eric."

I rocked my hips and squeezed him from the inside. He groaned and then started moving. His thrusts were slow at first, savoring the feeling of being joined like we were. Having him inside me again felt so good. Guilt overcame me for turning him away, and then faking pleasure when I didn't. His thrusts became faster and more powerful. His fingers laced with mine and pinned my hands on either side of my head.

I kissed whatever skin my lips could reach while he whispered over and over again that he loved me. Hearing him say it in such a desperate fashion woke something inside me that had been lying dormant for far too long. He muttered something in Swedish, and it was my undoing. I cried out as my orgasm started. My walls spasmed, then clamped down. He only thrusted into me harder, and I screamed his name at the intensity of it all.

The orgasm, his voice in my ear, the weight of my love for him- it was all too much. It completely overwhelmed me. With one last thrust of his hips against mine, he swelled and released deep inside me with a roar of his own. His body fell on mine, and I didn't know if I wanted to laugh or cry from how free I felt right then.

So, instead, I kissed him. I wrapped my arms around him, holding him to me, and kissed him until I had to pull away to breathe. When he rolled to the side, he tucked me against him and kissed my hair. We were a sweaty, trembling mess of limbs. I felt fan-fucking-tastic.

"You didn't fake that, did you?" He asked a bit nervously, and I winced.

"No, and I'm sorry I did before. I shouldn't have done that. It wasn't fair to either of us." I turned over and climbed on top of him. "I promise I won't ever do that again."

"Good." He looked up into my eyes and ran his fingers through the tangles in my hair. "And I'm sorry I let work become a bigger priority than you and the kids. I'll make changes."

"What kind of changes?"

"The kind that will put me behind the scenes again. The bar isn't worth losing my family over. I can't lose you, Sookie."

"I can't lose you either. I don't want to raise our kids alone." My bottom lip quivered at the thought, and Eric stretched forward to kiss me.

"That's *never* going to happen. We'll fix this, Sookie," he promised me.

I stayed there on top of him, the two of us kissing lazily until he grabbed my hips and lifted me up high enough for him to slide inside me again, which was how we spent the rest of the night.

**Eric**

I woke up to Sookie's lips wrapped around my cock and her tangled mop of hair teasing my thighs. Part of me worried the night before was just a dream, but there she was, waking me up in a way she hadn't since before the boys learned how to climb out of their cribs. We'd spent the night talking out our problems in between rounds of very powerful- and very needed- sex. I knew it wasn't going to be fixed immediately, but it was a start.

The first steps in the new chapter of our life together. I knew I'd been neglecting her and the kids. It wasn't on purpose. There was just so much going on, and I had wrongfully assumed that being in love was enough to keep us going. Communication about anything other than the kids shut down. The affection dried up. The fire went out.

Hearing her suggest we separate was a jolt to my system. That wasn't what I wanted. I tried my best to explain it to her. I'd done a shit job of showing it, but Sookie was my world. I couldn't even begin to describe how much I loved her. I was pissed at myself for giving her a reason to doubt me- for doubting *us*.

I had promised her I would make her happy, and I had broken that promise. I resolved to change that. Every day, from that point on, she would know I loved her more than anything. Our kids were amazing, and of course I loved them, but Sookie would always come first. She had to.

If she was happy, our children would be happy. I wanted to be an example to our sons, and set an impossibly high standard for our daughter. In short, I wanted to stop being a shit husband, and be the man my family deserved.

Sookie humming around my cock got my attention and brought me back to the present. "Morning, lover." It felt good to call her that again.

She released me from her mouth and said, "I missed you calling me that."

I pushed her onto her back and kissed my way down her body until I was between her thighs. "I missed the way you taste."

I licked her glistening slit and rejoiced a bit when she shivered. I spread her open with my thumbs and blew cool air on her clit before flicking my tongue against it. Her hips bucked to try for more friction. I held her down gently, and started the dance we both did so well.

In no time at all, she was gasping for air and demanding I be inside her. Her taste on my tongue was heaven and I couldn't believe we'd gone so long without this. Her tugs on my hair became more insistent, and the pleading look in her eyes was hard to resist. I abandoned my post and moved up her body again.

She surprised me by turning over. Her ass brushed against my cock. Her hips raised to me in offering. I took my position behind her and pulled her up on her knees. I slid into her easily, and my thrusts were immediately frantic, and maybe a little possessive. Sookie was such a beautifully amazing woman, and she was mine.

She was mine, and I nearly gave her away out of my own stupidity. She turned her face to look at me over her shoulder, and I had to kiss her. I pulled her up so she was sitting on my thighs. Her face stayed turned and I kissed her deeply. Her hand found mine and guided it around to her front, her fingers staying on mine while I rubbed her clit.

The back of her head landed on my shoulder when she came, but I wasn't anywhere near done yet. I wanted the feelings swirling between us to last forever. Telling her I loved her seemed too simple, but I couldn't stop saying it.

"Jag trodde jag förlade dig." I whispered, my voice cracking some with emotion. "Det finns inget liv för mig utan dig."

She cried out and gasped my name as her second orgasm began to build. I pulled out of her and put her on her back. I hooked her legs over my arms and entered her again at an angle that had my cock stroking her clit with every thrust.

"Oh, God, Eric, I love you!" She shouted while clawing at my back.

We finished violently, and at the same time, a short time later. I collapsed on top of her, feathering kisses on her face and neck until I had to pull out of her. I fell to the side and tucked her against me. Before I knew it, we were both asleep again.

In the days that followed, I took a leave of absence from the bar. My first order of business was to call Pam. She and Johan were still living in Stockholm, but were thinking about moving back to the States. Johan wanted kids, and Pam was far less opposed to the idea than she once was.

"Pam, we have to talk about the bar. I want out. I'm offering you first dibs on primary ownership." I got right to the point.

"Hello to you, too, brother-in-law. I'm fine, thanks for asking. Good thing Sookie's in charge of teaching your children manners." She snorted.

"I'm sorry, Pam, how are you this morning?" I rolled my eyes.

"Pregnant." She said.

"What?" My jaw about hit the floor.

"With child. Knocked up. Bun in the oven. Preggers. There's a pea in the pod. Up the spout. In the family way. On stork watch. Shopping for two-"

"Just two?" I smirked.

"Asshole." She muttered. "Well, congratulate me already. You're going to be blood related to me now."

"Hopefully the kid will have Johan's sense of humor." I said dryly.

"As long as it has my fashion sense, I don't care." Pam said simply.

"So when is this bundle of joy making its grand entrance?"

"Christmas, can you believe it? My baby is going to pop out like the second coming." Pam had to be rolling her eyes.

"How precious." I shook my head.

"So about the bar..." She asked a bunch of questions about the bar, wanting all sorts of financial stats I didn't have in front of me at the moment.

I promised to email her everything when I got back into the office the following week. I congratulated her on the baby, but she just 'yeah, yeahed' me like she hadn't berated me nearly an hour before for skipping over the congratulations. I was a bit surprised, but I was happy for them. They were happy together. I didn't like to put too much thought into it, but I had somewhat reconciled with myself that the first part of their relationship had been like foreplay for them. They got off on challenging each other and testing limits. It wasn't for me, but that's why I was married to someone like Sookie, and not to Pam.

It got to the point where the kids got sick of having me around the house, I think. My parents usually watched the boys during the day since I was sleeping and Sookie was still teaching at the high school. Mom took Haley to school in the afternoon, but I picked her up most days. We had a little time alone before Sookie got home with the boys. I would start dinner while Sookie did homework with Haley. Yes, my five-year-old had homework.

Some nights we ate together and some nights I just grabbed something on my way into work, depending on how busy we were going to be that night. The bar really was doing very well. Our reputation had grown, and we were still doing the under age nights Sookie had suggested when we first started dating. The space next to the bar had become available, and I was thinking about expanding again. But that was something I would have to think about after I got things straight with my marriage and my family.

Things steadily improved. I shifted some things around at work, and scaled back my hours significantly. I was only working Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday. I turned over control of weekends to Sarah, and hired a second manager to back me up on the nights I was there. On Mondays I would go in and do some paperwork and double check inventory to make sure the order forms were going out correctly. I'd ended up firing my head bartender for the goof on the order that pulled me away from my family. It wasn't the first big fuck up, and I was tired of dealing with incompetence. I promoted another bartender to take his place.

Things started to smooth out. Pam and Johan announced the pregnancy to everyone, along with their decision to move back to the States. Pam also opted to buy back into the bar, thereby taking some of the weight off my shoulders. Johan was going to pick up ownership as well, and when I mentioned my ideas of expansion, Johan actually had an idea of his own. He wanted to turn the space next door into a diner.

Perfect. Our drunks could go next door and sober up.

I couldn't complain, though. Things between Sookie and I got better. We had a standing date night every Friday, which was made possible because Haley and Kacy were inseparable and Kacy's parents didn't mind having Haley around. The boys went to Amelia's one Friday, and stayed with my parents the next. Once Pam got back into town, we would be shifting schedules again, and I would only be working during the day.

The question then became what to do with all of my free time? I started thinking about teaching again, only I was thinking about maybe working with younger kids. I found out a position was opening up at Haley's school on account of the current gym teacher retiring. So, when I went to pick her up from school one day, I stopped by the office to speak with the principal about what they needed from me in order to apply. Having a child already attending the school wasn't a problem. In fact, it seemed to be to my benefit.

I updated my resume and emailed it to the address the principal had provided to me. I was in the process of trying to teach Haley how to crossover dribble in the driveway when Sookie came home. It was Friday, and it was my parents' night to watch the boys. Kacy's mom would be coming by on her way home from work to pick up Haley. I was very much looking forward to a night alone with my wife. I hadn't told her yet about my intention to get back into teaching, but I was sure she'd be happy about it.

Sookie jumped out of her SUV and ran straight into the house without so much as a word to either of us, which wasn't like her at all. Haley looked up at me with eyes so much like her mother's. She was worried.

"What's wrong with Mommy? Did you fight like before?" Haley had a memory like a steel trap.

"No, dotter, we didn't fight." I assured her.

"Are you sure? Sometimes you can be a röhvhål." She cursed at me in Swedish with such innocence in her eyes, I couldn't be mad at her.

"Where did you hear that word?" I asked her. I knew who she heard it from.

"My Pammy." She giggled. "Is it a bad word?"

"Yes, it's a very bad word. I don't want to hear you say that anymore."

"Okay." She shrugged. "What word did I say?"

"Don't worry about it. Just don't use it anymore." I said sternly, but not too harsh.

"Don't have a cow, man." My daughter watched The Simpsons with me whenever I was home.

I wanted to go inside and check on Sookie, but I didn't want to worry Haley, and I knew if I went inside there was no way she was going to just sit and watch TV while Sookie and I talked. She was going to want to be involved in the conversation, and if something was wrong, Sookie would have to lie. She hated lying to the kids- we both did.

Thankfully, Kacy's mom pulled up a short time later. Haley ran to the porch to get her overnight bag. She kissed me goodbye and got in the backseat of the car. I waved to Kacy's mom and stepped closer when she motioned for me to.

"Would you be able to pick her up in the morning? I have a dentist appointment at noon, and I have to be out the door by ten thirty."

"Sure, not a problem. Thanks for having her overnight."

"Oh, it's no trouble at all. She always tells Kacy to say please and thank you before I get a chance to."

I laughed and said, "I'll pass on the thanks to my wife. She's the manners police in our house."

"That's just being a good mom. You two enjoy your night." She waved, and then backed out of the driveway.

I picked up the basketball and headed inside. Sookie was upstairs in our bathroom with the door locked and the shower running. Her clothes were strewn around the room and her purse was nearly overturned on our bed. I wanted to pop the lock and let myself in, but if she'd locked the door, it meant she wanted privacy. So, I stretched out on our bed to wait for her.

The water turned off a few minutes later, and shortly after that, the door opened. Sookie came out of the bathroom in her nightgown with damp hair. Clearly date night wasn't going to be what I thought. She looked a little on the pale side. I sat up quickly, worried that something was definitely wrong with her.

"Jesus, Sookie, what's wrong?"

"Stomach flu or food poisoning, I'm not sure which. I've been sick as a dog since just after lunch this afternoon." She crawled into bed.

"Can I get you anything?" I rubbed her back gently.

"A less sensitive gag reflex would be awesome."

Tell me about it.

"How about some ginger ale and saltines?"

"Sounds perfect."

I kissed her temple and went downstairs to get what I'd offered her, only to realize we didn't have ginger ale in the house. I got her a glass of water and the crackers. She snacked on crackers without complaining about any crumbs that got on the sheets. She sipped water carefully to make sure it was all going to stay down. No such luck, of course, and the remainder of the night was spent dashing back and forth from the bathroom to throw up.

I felt terrible for her. I ran to the grocery store to pick up some ginger ale, Gatorade and some stomach medicine but I'm not sure any of it really helped. I picked up Haley the next morning, and she took over nursing duties for me while I went to get the boys. We stopped by the house long enough for me to check on Sookie. She was pale, exhausted and still throwing up. I decided to keep the kids out of the house on the chance she had the stomach flu and not food poisoning.

Not to mention, she'd never get any rest with three kids running around the house. I took them to the park and played with them until they all complained they were hungry. We went to McDonald's nearby since there was a Playland attached. The three of them chowed down their happy meals, then got lost in the giant pit of balls. I let them play for close to an hour before I told them it was time to go. All three of them looked exhausted, and it was still early enough that they could take a nap without it messing up their bedtime.

As soon as we got home, I declared it quiet time. Everyone had to go upstairs to their bed until Mommy or Daddy came to get them. They complained, but did as they were told. I heated up some chicken soup for Sookie on the chance that she wanted to try to eat something. By the time I got upstairs, all three kids were out cold in their own beds. I brought in the soup to find Sookie passed out as well. There was a note on the nightstand telling me she was feeling better, but to let her sleep.

I kicked off my shoes and got in bed next to her. She turned onto her other side and snuggled against my chest, draping an arm over me. I hugged her close, but not too tight, and then let sleep pull me under as well. I woke to the feeling of someone staring at me, and found out it was three someones. Our kids were kneeling at the end of the bed.

"About time you woke up." Haley rolled her eyes.

"I told you they weren't dead!" Nicholas was too loud, as usual, and slugged Connor.

"No hitting, Nicky." I reminded him in a whisper. "And be quiet. Mommy's still sleeping."

"We want to go outside." Connor informed me.

"Okay. I'll be downstairs in a minute. Go get your shoes on." I told them.

The three of them were a blur of motion. It was like watching the Marx brothers try to get out the bedroom door all at once. Haley won on account of being a girl, and promptly reminding them that ladies always went first. It made me proud to see her stand up for herself. I pitied the fool that ever thought he might boss her around. It was never going to happen.

"I'm starving." Sookie whispered next to me.

"I made you soup before, but you were sleeping."

"No soup."She grumbled and then looked up at me."I need real food. I ate an apple while you were out with the kids. It didn't give me any trouble."

I kissed her forehead and said, "That's good. I'm glad you're feeling better."

"I am. How about I order the pizza while you go supervise the little rascals?" She suggested.

"Sounds like a plan to me." I slipped out of bed and put my shoes back on.

Sookie sat up slowly, rubbed her eyes and groaned when she saw how crazy her hair was. She mumbled something about looking like shit, but I wisely kept my mouth shut. Instead, I headed downstairs to look after the kids. Sookie came down a while later, her hair tamed back into a ponytail and dressed in a pair of yoga pants that made her ass look amazing. If she was up to it, we'd be locking our bedroom door later.

The pizza arrived an hour later, much to the excitement of our kids. We got them set up in the sunroom with their dinner so they could watch their beloved Spongebob while they ate. Sookie and I sat at the table together, talking about what the next week was going to be like for us. It was Sookie's last week of teaching. Haley's kindergarten graduation was the week after that. We were planning to have her graduation party the week after that. Then the there was Sookie's birthday shortly after that. I'd planned a trip for us that would be kid-free, but it was a surprise.

Pam and Johan would be coming in the middle of the month, in time for Haley's sixth birthday. We had also planned a trip up to Michigan with Amelia and Tray for the summer that would have us staying in a rental house on the beach. We had a busy couple of months coming up. I was looking forward to it all.

We played games with the kids for a while after dinner until Nicholas started to yawn. He was always the guide by which we knew to send the kids up to get ready for bed. All three of them needed baths before bedtime. I took the boys into the guest bathroom upstairs and supervised their bath time, while Sookie took Haley to our bathroom to shower. Haley had very abruptly decided at the age of four that she was too big for baths because "that's what the babies did," and she wasn't a baby. Her first shower had been a bit disastrous. She wasn't prepared for the constant rush of water in her face, and she'd choked a bit. She was doing much better with it, but one of us still supervised the activity just in case.

The boys splashed and played until I brought out the shampoo and washed their hair. After that they started to gather up their bath toys and put them in the netted sack we kept them in under the sink. I pulled them out of the tub one at a time to dry them off. It was always a battle over who was going to get out of the tub last. That night was no different.

"I'm the big brother, so you go first." Nicholas ordered.

"But it's *your* turn." Connor insisted.

"Nuh uh! You got to stay in longer last time." Nicholas whined.

"You realize I could just pick up both up by your necks, right?" I flexed my hands at them, and they laughed at me. The truth was, I could probably pick them both up with one hand if I gripped them right, but that was neither here nor there.

They continued to argue over it, and I just leaned against the sink watching them rationalize the whole thing. It was fascinating to see them together sometimes. It very much reminded me of Johan and myself. Nicholas might have been the older twin, but Connor- for all of his goofing and silliness- was the more reliable twin. Nicholas was more likely to give me shifty eyes and try to push blame onto one of his siblings when he did something wrong.

"Nicholas Corbett, it's your turn to get out first." Sookie settle the argument as she walked past the bathroom with Haley on her hip. She winked at me while Connor stuck his tongue out at Nicholas.

"No fair, Mom!" Nicholas pouted.

"I'm going to count to three, and you better be out of that tub or no bedtime story." Sookie threatened.

She was a hard ass, but she had to be. These kids would walk all over her if given half a chance. Nicholas pouted, but climbed out of the tub before Sookie got to two. I dried him off and sent him across the hall to dress himself while I got Connor dry. Haley's hair was braided and she was wearing a cute little purple nightgown with blue flowers on it. Her head rested on Sookie's shoulder, and for a moment, she looked much younger than her five years. She got like that when she was tired.

"Daddy will you tuck me in?" Haley yawned and batted her eyelashes at me.

As if I would ever say no. "Of course, dotter." I reached for her and Sookie handed her off to me.

I kissed Sookie's forehead, and then went to the end of the hall where Haley's room was. We had given Haley a choice when we moved into the new house about what she wanted her room to look like. She had made her Pammy proud by choosing pink. The walls were the color of bubble gum and there were pictures of angels on her walls. Where she got this fascination with angels from, I'll never know. I assume it had something to do with her grandparents taking her to church when she was there on the weekends. Sookie and I had decided to let the kids decide for themselves what their religious affiliation would be once they were old enough to choose for themselves.

Haley got into bed easily, and snuggled under her covers. My baby girl was a snuggler. If I was sitting on the couch downstairs, chances were she was curled up in my lap, or snuggled next to me. It was like having a lap cat that talked. We had a short conversation in Swedish. She was doing very well with speaking both languages. Nicholas spoke it when he got angry. Connor was the only one who seemed to be having trouble grasping it, and he sometimes spoke in an English/Swedish hybrid that confused the hell out of his teachers.

"I'm teaching Kacy Swedish." Haley said with pride.

"Are you?" I smiled at her.

"Yep. It's like our own secret language from all the other kids. You know, like how Nicky and Connor have their language?"

Ah, yes, the twin speak. No one knew what the hell they were saying except for the two of them. Mom told me it was normal, that Johan and I had had our own language as kids. I didn't remember any of it, but she insisted we would sit together making sounds she didn't understand, but made perfect sense to the two of us. I wondered if it felt different for Haley to be an only child, in that sense. It seemed so, since she was hellbent on making Kacy her twin.

"Yes, I know. Just no teaching Kacy the bad words until you're at least fifteen, okay?" I stroked her little cheek and she giggled.

"I promise." She held out her pinky to me, her ultimate promise extended.

I hooked my finger with hers and said, "That's my girl. Jag äsklar dig, min dotter."

" Jag äsklar dig, min far." She held her arms up to me for a hug, which I eagerly gave her. I kissed her hair, pulled her blankets up around her and turned off her lights.

I left her door cracked just a little, knowing she would be sound asleep until one of the twins woke her up in the morning. My little girl slept like the dead, just like me. I stood in her door for a while and just watched her. I could hear Sookie down the hall, reading a chapter of Harry Potter to the boys. She was so animated about it, doing different voices for different characters. Her British accent left something to be desired, but the boys didn't really know the difference.

I stayed out of sight and let her finish her chapter. By the time she finished, both boys had their eyes closed. I stepped into the room and watched her adjust their covers. She whispered that she loved them in Swedish, which was something I never noticed she did before. She kissed each of them and then smiled when she saw me standing behind her, just observing her. She really was a great mother to our kids.

She hung back while I told them I loved them as well, and kissed their heads. Sookie came and stood beside me with her head resting on my arm and her arms around my waist. We stood there quietly, watching the boys as they slept. I stood there as long as she wanted to, then followed her when she'd had enough. I waited for her in the hall while she went in to give Haley a kiss goodnight.

We walked down the hall together, and it was Sookie that locked our bedroom door. She stripped off her clothes and headed for the shower. She tossed a look over her shoulder at me that let me know my presence was definitely welcome, if not mandatory. I wiggled my eyebrows at her, and quickly followed.

**Sookie**

I couldn't get the smile off my face. Things had changed so much since that fight Eric and I finally had in our kitchen a few months before. There were still kinks to work out, but we were transitioning into a much better situation. Having Pam and Johan back in town helped a great deal. Haley was exceptionally excited to have her Pammy around. The two of them had always jabbered on and on during our Skype conversations. It was cute to watch them speak broken Swedish to each other. The boys were significantly less impressed with Pam, but they *loved* Uncle Johan. He was a big kid, just like them.

"Mommy, look what Johan gave me!" Connor came running into the kitchen where I was putting the finishing touches on dinner for the kids.

My three-year-old was wearing a pair of suspenders with little clown faces on them. I shook my head and stared at Johan as he walked into the room. "Did you really think that was necessary?"

"I think they look dashing." Johan held out his fist to Connor, who bumped it without hesitating.

"I think they look dashing, too." Connor had no idea what he was talking about.

"As long as you like them, baby." I knelt down to give him a hug.

"You should get going before Pam starts calling." Johan advised.

"Yeah, I guess I should. Okay, well, all the important stuff is on the fridge. You have all the numbers in case you need to call us." I said.

"Eh, don't worry about it. I'm just going to give them ice cream for dinner and then let them jump up and down on your bed until they exhaust themselves." He winked at me so I knew he was kidding.

"Mmhmm. Just remember, you've got a kid of your own coming, and payback's a bitch."

"Mommy, you said a bad word." Haley said in a sing-song voice from the kitchen table.

"Yes, I did. I'm sorry. Will you keep an eye on Uncle Johan and the boys for me?" I asked her.

"I'll try. I can always call my Pammy if they get too nuts."

"You wouldn't!" Johan gasped dramatically. Haley's response was to stick out her tongue. "You spend too much with your Pammy!"

Johan hauled her little body out of the chair and held her up over his head, tickling and shaking her until she was laughing so hard she was bright red and threatening to tinkle on him. He let her down reluctantly after fining her two kisses for her threat. She paid him, then took off running to find her brothers. I had no doubt Nicholas was going to give Johan a hard time for the rest of the night now because he had been "mean" to Haley.

"Good luck." I smirked, then grabbed my bags.

Eric had no idea what was about to happen. He thought I was at a summer seminar class. I was planning to start on my master's degree in the fall, but I was thinking I might have to hold back for a bit on that. I'd made reservations for us at a hotel. I'd even gotten Pam in on things. She called Eric in a completely faked panic, telling him the bartender had called in sick and she needed him to cover for a few hours until another one could get there at ten. He had tried to convince her to call in anyone else, since I was supposed to be at class and their parents were out of town for the weekend.

Eric had reluctantly agreed to go. I told him I was fine with it. I'd take the kids to Amelia's for a few hours, and one of us could pick them up on the way home. I'd assured Eric I wasn't mad, then sent him on his way. With Eric gone, Johan had come by a short time later to watch the kids for the night. It was good practice for when he and Pam had a child of their own. I figured all three of our kids would equal the trouble they'd have with just their one, between Johan's sense of mischief and Pam's smart mouth.

I put the bags I'd packed in the back of the SUV and climbed into the driver's seat. I plugged in my iPod and listened to the mix Eric had made years ago for our wedding. We'd been married six years, two months and four days. It was the seventh anniversary of the day we met. It was amazing to me to think of how far we'd come, and to think, I hadn't even wanted to stay for breakfast the morning after we slept together.

I drove to the bar with a smile on my face, dressed in the very same outfit I'd been wearing the night we met. I parked the SUV next to Eric's car. He'd given up the Corvette as his regular ride. It just wasn't practical for a man with three kids. He would never drive the SUV around all the time like I did, but his Audi made much more sense. It still only accommodated two car seats, but if he had to take all three kids somewhere, he took the SUV.

I slid out of the car and strutted my stuff across the parking lot. Chow waved me in when he saw me. A line was already forming outside the bar. It had taken on much more of a club-like atmosphere in the last two years. Profits had increased, so Eric couldn't really complain. I slithered around the bar, not wanting him to see me right away. Thankfully, he was busy when I walked in, or he probably would have spotted me.

I blended myself into the crowd, but managed to catch Pam's attention. It was strange to see her with a belly. She was five months pregnant, but had started showing at about nine weeks because she was so thin. As far as pregnant women went, she was adorable. Unlike me, she had managed to keep the bulk of her weight gain strictly at her stomach. There would be no chubby ankles or double chins for Pamela Ravenscroft-Northman. No sir.

She got Eric's attention for me, and had him searching the crowd. I ducked behind a tall man, and I heard him tell Pam she was out of her mind. I couldn't help but smile as I got closer and closer to the bar, listening to the two of them bicker like they always did. I waited until Eric was good and frustrated with Pam before making my presence known. He'd get me for this later, but I was counting on it. I had good news I wanted to share. I could only hope Eric felt the same way.

I banged on the bar and waited for him to turn and notice me. "I'll be with you in a minute." He said over his shoulder. I banged some more.

I watched every muscle in Eric's back tense up. I saw the flex of his forearms. The temper our son had inherited had clearly come from his father. I bit back a smile as I continued to bang on the bar. Eric finally lost patience and turned around, prepared to let the irritating customer have it. When he saw it was me, he narrowed his eyes.

"What can I get you?" He pressed his palms on the bar.

I fidgeted with my necklace, making sure to flash my rings at him. "How about a Screaming Orgasm?"

His smile became a smirk and he said, "Doesn't your husband take care of that for you?"

I leaned forward and gestured for him to do the same. "Very well, but what girl doesn't need a good stiff one now and then?" I *may* have licked his ear.

He cleared his throat, obviously down for playing along with me. "I think I could help you with that."

I looked him up and down and said, "I'm sure you could."

Sweet Mary, the smirk on his face...I wanted to lick the corner of his mouth. He was wearing tight black jeans and an even tighter black t-shirt. I couldn't wait to get him alone. He made me my shot, but then I had to figure out how I was going to get away with not drinking it. Pregnancy and alcohol don't mix.

"Something wrong with your drink?" He asked when I hesitated.

"No, I'm sure it's great. I was just hoping for an actual screaming orgasm." I pouted.

He leaned close again and said, "I get off in an hour."

"That's what she said." I smirked at him.

"Indeed." He winked. On cue, the other bartender appeared, and tapped Eric on the shoulder. "Well, would you look at that. Looks like I'm getting off now."

"What about your wife?" I nodded to his left hand. "Is she okay with you taking home strange women?"

"Probably as okay as your husband would be with you taking home a strange man." He said without missing a beat.

"Touche. Good thing I have a hotel room. Are you interested?"

"Lead the way." He smiled at me.

We didn't say a word to Pam, just met at the end of the bar. He stepped out and laid a kiss on me that had my toes curling immediately.

"Were you serious about the hotel?" He put some of my hair behind my ears.

"Oh, yes." I smiled up at him.

"Good." Without warning he put me over his shoulder, and walked out of the bar.

**Eric**

We fell back on the bed together, a mess of frenzied limbs and lips. She'd woken me up two days ago with a good morning blow job I had yet to reciprocate for, and I planned on paying her back, in full and with interest. I knew she was on the same page as me when she didn't complain that I ripped her panties off.

I wasted no time burying my face between her thighs. Her back arched and a primal moan escaped her. Her fingers threaded in my hair, alternately tugging and pushing while my mouth made itself busy. I savored her sweetness on my tongue, my fingers easily gliding inside her to stroke the spot I knew so well. I held her hips down and went at her relentlessly until she was begging for release.

"Eric, please..." She pleaded, her voice breathless and demanded all at once.

She whimpered when I removed my fingers and started to kiss my way up her body. She was writhing under me, and I was surprised when she turned over onto her stomach. I grabbed her hips and lifted her up. She smiled at me over her shoulder and wiggled her ass at me. Under other circumstances, I would have teased her some more, but I knew we'd both had enough of that. I did, however, manage to surprise her when I slapped her ass.

We both groaned when I pushed inside her in one swift thrust. I watched her hands curl against the sheets. I could hear the scratching of it. She was so hot, wet and tight, my favorite combination, and when she spread her knees a little farther apart, I was able to get just a little bit deeper inside of her. She moaned when I pulled out, and then met my thrust when I pushed in again.

A fast and hard pace was set after that with my hands on her hips and both of us desperate to finish. I reached around and rubbed her clit in furious circles until her core started its spasms, squeezing and releasing my cock until I had to slow down. I didn't want to be finished yet. I knew we had more than enough time to go again, but I wanted this to last just a little longer.

Without giving her time to recover, I pulled out and flipped her onto her back. I watched the bounced of her amazing breasts as she landed. She expected me to enter her again, but instead I traveled back down her body. She gasped when my lips fastened around her clit. Her hips shot up off the bed, her feet firmly planted against the mattress. She was still sensitive from her orgasm, and it didn't take long before I had her right back on the edge.

And I kept her there. I kept her there until I knew she was about to lose her mind. She came almost immediately when I entered her again. Her orgasm was violent and I would bear marks from it on my back for a few days, but it would be worth it. Her face when she came was beyond beautiful, and the knowledge that I was the only one who got to see that face only made me want to see it again.

I got to see it a third time, and it was enough to take me down with her. For a moment, I thought she'd passed out, she got so still and quiet. I'd never fucked her into unconsciousness before, and I wasn't sure that was something I'd be proud of if I ever did it. Maybe before she was a mom, but it was different now. Her eyes fluttered open and she stared up at me.

"God, I love you." She pulled my mouth to hers and we lay there kissing lazily while we came down from our high.

After Sookie was sure she had full use of her legs (really powerful orgasms always left her unable to walk for a few minutes), we got in the shower together to clean up. It wasn't about sex at that point, but about taking care of each other. We got clean and put on pajamas. I had drawstring pants on and she was wearing one of my old concert tees- Pearl Jam, to be exact, and she looked fuckhot in it. It didn't escape me that she hadn't bothered to put panties on. My wife knew me well.

We ordered some room service, both of us feeling a little peckish after rather energetic sex. Sookie reached into the one of the overnight bags she'd packed, and produced a small wrapped package that she handed over to me.

"What's this for?"

"Did you forget what today is?" She climbed into my lap.

"Fuck your husband brainless day?" I joked.

She rocked her hips against me, and there was an instant reaction from my cock. Knowing she was on top of me, in one of my favorite shirts and she wasn't wearing panties made it hard not to just pin her under me and keep her there until we both passed out from exhaustion.

"Perhaps it is, but I was thinking along different lines."

"Pity." I leaned forward and kissed her hard.

She pulled back first, and tapped the box. "Open it."

"Aren't you going to tell me what today is?"

She smiled and said, "Seven years ago today, where were you?"

I grinned, immediately remembering. How had I forgotten? "So it *is* fuck your husband senseless day."

She laughed and said, "Yes, I guess so. Amelia suggested we call it our fuckaversary."

He laughed with me. "That Amelia."

Indeed.

"So, open your present."

"It's naked pictures of you, isn't it?" I teased, and Sookie slapped my arm.

"Never. Gonna. Happen."

It was worth trying. I tore the paper off the box, then opened it. I removed the lid from the box and pulled back the tissue paper to reveal my present. Inside was a lovely picture frame with a sonogram photo inside. Holy shit.

"Sookie?" I looked up at her.

She was smiling and there were tears in her eyes. "I found out last week. I was going to tell you sooner, but I wanted to surprise you, and I didn't want the kids running in and out of the room. I know we didn't plan it, but-"

I cut her off with a kiss. Planned or unplanned, it was okay. "I love you."

"You're okay? We're okay?"

"Yes, of course we're okay. I know things are a little crazy right now, but I think it's always going to be like this. We'll get through it like we always do." I promised her.

She breathed a sigh of relief. "I'm sorry, it's not like I thought this was a deal breaker. I just didn't want you to be upset or disappointed."

"Lover, there is nothing disappointing about this. It's wonderful." I assured her. No, we hadn't planned on another child, but we hadn't planned for Haley either. It would be okay. "What about you. Are *you* okay with this?"

She nodded excitedly, biting her bottom lip. "Yes, I'm okay with this. But I think this needs to be the last one. I think four is enough."

"Sure it is. We'll have enough for a basketball team." I joked, and got slapped again.

We talked about this new baby, and I learned she was due on Valentine's Day the following year. It seemed she'd gotten pregnant the night of our big fight in the kitchen. What was it with us and makeup sex that seemed to knock her up? Crazy.

We ate our snack and settled in to watch a movie. We ended up making love again before going to sleep, and then again in the shower before we left in the morning. It would probably be a while before we got more than a quickie. We had started using our shower the way we had before Haley was born. We got home to find Johan looking rather exhausted, and ready to get home to Pam.

"I don't know how you do it." Johan shook his head.

"We're a team." I kissed the back of Sookie's hand.

"I'm getting snipped after the baby comes." Johan was being serious. I had no doubt he'd follow through on that.

"Well, I'm going to get out of here before I have a child crawling on me. I'll see you guys later." Johan saluted, then shouted a goodbye to the kids.

The three of them were out in the backyard. Kacy was out there, along with the a little boy from across the street I'd seen before, but couldn't remember his name. When the kids saw us, they came running over to hug us.

At five-years-old, my daughter said four words I was sure I wouldn't be hearing for at least another twenty years, "Daddy, I'm getting married."

"You are?"

Haley's little blonde head bobbed up and down. "Yep. His name is Alex."

I crouched down in front of her and asked, "Don't you think you're a little young to be getting married, min dotter?"

She giggled and said, "You're silly, Daddy." Then she ran off to go play with her friends, taking her brothers with her.

I looked over at Sookie and asked, "Do you know this Alex kid?"

She rolled her eyes, pointed to the little boy that wasn't ours and said, "It's not a legal marriage, Eric."

I narrowed my eyes at her. "You didn't answer my question."

She sighed and hugged me before pushing up on her toes to kiss me. "He's a very nice boy. He shares his blocks with her and holds her place in line."

"Sounds like she picked a winner." I smiled.

"Like her mother." Sookie grinned, then kissed me again.

Since we stood there on the deck together, arms wrapped around each other and the kiss deepened. Of course, we didn't get very far when one of our sons whined.

"Ewwwww! Nicky, they're kissing again!"

Sookie and I laughed into each others mouths, but pulled apart. "Wait here, lover, I have some munchkins that need the silly shaken out of them." I wiggled my eyebrows at her.

She gasped with wide eyes and said, "Uh oh! You're all in big trouble now!"

I growled loudly, then took off chasing the kids around the yard. Before I knew I was covered in kids, with Sookie laughing hysterically from the deck. She rubbed her belly, and I winked at her, before turning my attention back to the kids.

A little while later, the kids were playing together while Sookie and I were in the kitchen. My back was a bit sore from inadvertently being kicked and stepped on in the course of our rough housing. Connor broke away from the pack and into the house.

"Mommy, can I have juice?" He retrieved his own little cup from the lower level cabinets were we kept them.

"Yes, you can." Sookie smiled down and watched Connor run to the fridge to get the apple juice out. He handed it to me and I poured some into his cup.

"Thanks, Dad." Connor grinned, sipped his juice, then headed for the sunroom.

"Guess what?" Sookie asked with a twinkle in her eyes once we were alone again.

I let my hand slide up her leg, under her skirt. "Damn, you're wearing panties."

She slapped my chest playfully and said, "I'm a Mom now. My commando days are long over."

"That's not entirely true. I seem to remember a date night last fall..." I trailed off, getting a giggle from her. She'd surprised me when she came home without any of our kids.

"Well, it just so happens that I scheduled the boys for a play date with Charlie." Sookie's eyes were sparkling as she talked. This was a very good sign. "And Haley is spending another night at Kacy's."

"Don't toy with me, lover." I practically growled at her.

"I would never." We didn't joke about a night without the kids. We loved them dearly, and enjoyed being parents, but it was nice to have some quiet time without the kids underfoot.

"Does this mean I get to have you all to myself?" I nuzzled her neck.

"If you play your cards right." She squeezed my ass.

Then I really did growl at her. She giggled and kissed me back when my lips met hers. The rest of the night went rather smoothly. The kids had their baths, and didn't put up much of a fight when we put them in bed. Sookie came down after she finished tucking Haley in for the night to find me sitting on the couch watching the History channel. She grabbed the remote out of my hand and dropped it on the couch. She parked herself in my lap, and didn't hesitate to attack me.

We were going at it like teenagers on the couch, when we heard little footsteps overhead. Sookie pulled back, but I just went to work on her neck, refusing to give up until I heard footsteps smacking against the tile of the entryway. My hands were on her breasts, teasing and cupping them while she listened with her keen mother's ear to make sure we weren't going to be interrupted for a glass of water, a nightmare or another bedtime story. The toilet flushed overhead. There were more little footsteps, and then silence.

Her lips immediately returned to mine. She kissed me passionately while her hips rocked against mine. You'd think we hadn't had sex in a year, and not in less than twelve hours. Still, I missed her.

"Let's go upstairs." She whispered against my lips.

"Carry me?"

"Sure." I scooped her up.

Her head settled on my shoulder and her warm breath fell on my neck. She let her fingers toy with the ends of my hair, and I kissed her forehead as I walked up the steps with her cradled in my arms. I set her down in bed when I got to our room at the end of the hall. She slid back toward the headboard with a shy smile on her face.

"What?" I quirked an eyebrow at her.

"Nothing. I love you, is all. I don't say that enough. Kids and work and a million other things get in the way and I shouldn't let it." She suggested.

"Are you unhappy, Sookie?" I got nervous all of a sudden. I thought things were getting better, but if she wasn't so sure, then I needed to step up my game.

"No, of course not." She scrambled to the edge of the bed. "Eric, I love our life. I love that we have such a well choreographed routine, and that I can count on you to pick up the slack when I'm having a bad day. I love the way you are with our kids, and how even when I know you're exhausted, you don't turn them away." Her lip started to tremble and tears filled her eyes. "And I love that you put up with me when I'm close to losing it. You...you're everything. I couldn't do this without you. I just want you to know that because I've never said it, and I should."

I stepped closer to her, and tucked some of hair behind her ear. She leaned into my hand and I tilted her face up to kiss her. My other hand came up and cradled her face while I kissed her. When I pulled back I pressed my forehead to hers. Our eyes met and then I spoke.

"You know I'm not going anywhere, Sookie. We have bad days, but we get through them together. To tell the truth, if I was ever going to run away, I'd take you with me." I admitted, and she giggled.

"I love you." She said again.

"I love you, too." I kissed her once more.

"Show me?"

"Always." I smiled at her, then peeled off her shirt.

**-The End-**