



Summary

This is an A/U “what if” story set in the *True Blood* universe. What if Gran had helped Sookie to develop her telepathy, rather than encouraging her to hide it? What if Sookie had grown up calling her ability a “gift” rather than a “curse?” What if Sookie had sought out Eric’s help for a very different reason than trying to clear her brother’s name? (Romance, Drama)

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Beta:

Kleannhouse and her eagle eyes! Thank you so much for your wonderful work!

Artwork:

The title banner for this story and all the chapter banners were made by the incomparable Sephrenia!

Author's Note:

Extended italics indicate diary entries.

Award Nominations:

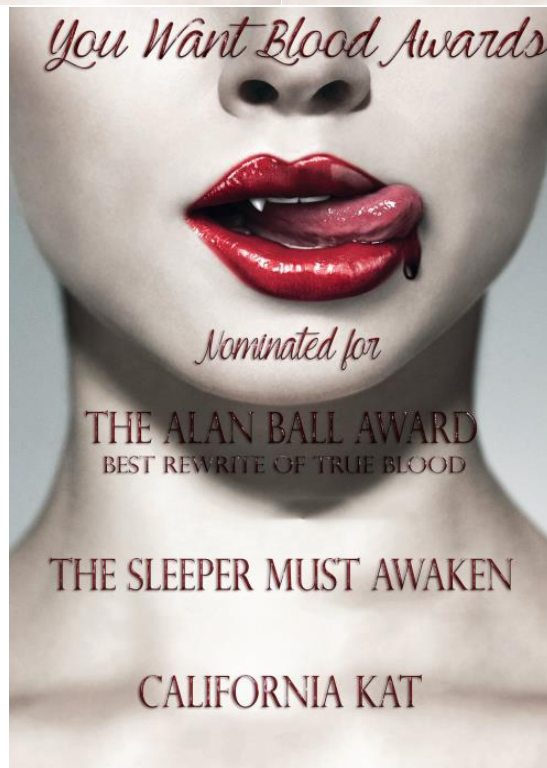


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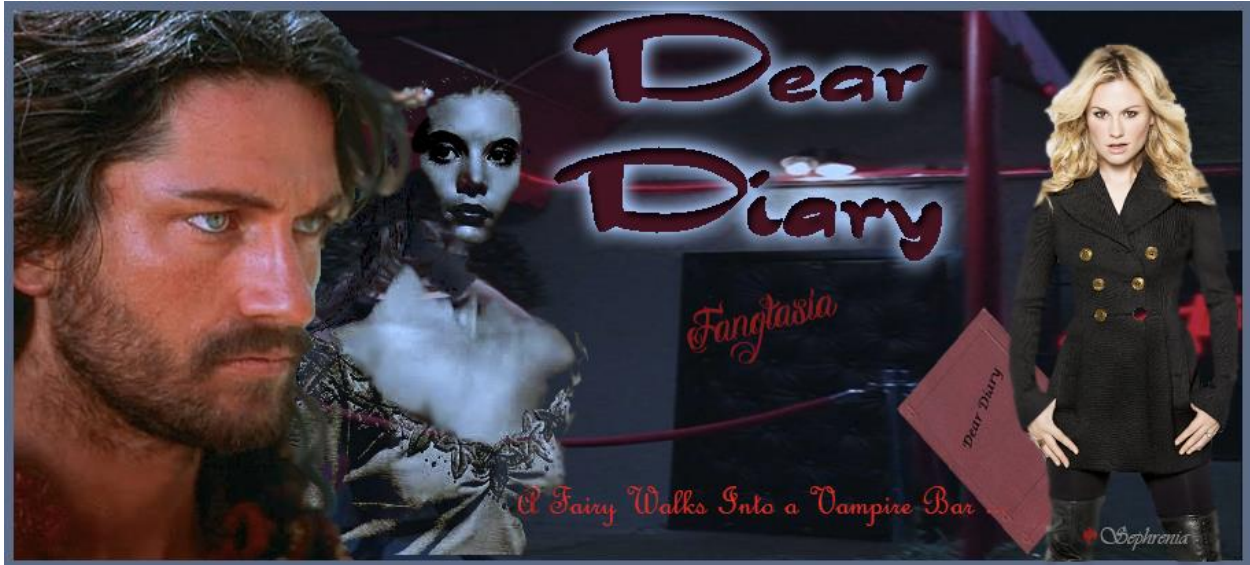
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“Without change, something sleeps inside us, and seldom awakens. The sleeper must awaken.”—Frank Herbert

Chapter 01: Dear Diary



June 14, 2004

A fairy walks into a vampire bar...

That sounds like the beginning of a bad joke—or maybe a horror movie—doesn't it?

Well—that's exactly what I was doing. I was walking into a vampire bar—in my best dress and with my scent amplified by magic.

From my count, twelve pair of vampire eyes were already locked onto me as I took my second and third steps into Fangtasia. Of course, that included the eyes of Pam, the vampire who had ID'ed me at the door.

Three days prior, I'd never even met a vampire, but now my fate lay in the hands of one of the vampires in the room.

How did I get here?

How had I gone from being relatively “safe” to inserting myself into the dragon’s lair in less than a week?

I suppose I walked into Fangtasia because I’ve been taught to take my fate into my own hands—to accept the world around me without letting myself be crushed by it.

Things weren’t always that way, however. There was a time when I was scared and broken—a time when I felt like I was a freak.

A time when I felt unwanted and unworthy.

But that had all changed one day when my grandmother gave me the best gift I’ve ever been given—a sounding board in the form of a notebook: a diary.

My first diary had been one of those Big Chief tablets—*not* a very politically correct name, now that I’m thinking about it. I still had that first book—full of my hopes and my dreams, as well as my fears—just as I still had all of the other notebooks I’d filled. They were stacked in a fireproof safe in the corner of my closet.

“Write down every thought you hear, baby girl. And write down every thought you have,” Gran had told me.

My first words into that first Big Chief tablet had been, “It’s my fault they died.”

I had been six years old when I wrote those words.

Thankfully, Gran didn’t stop with having me writing things down. At the end of every day, she would ask me if I wanted to share any of the things I’d written. Most nights I did.

She would also ask me if there was anything I was afraid to write down. Some nights there were such things. And I would tell them to her as well.

She would listen to me read my words and say my thoughts.

She would listen to anything I wanted to say to her.

And after I was done talking, she would always ask me the same question: “Do you wanna know what I think about all that, baby girl?”

I usually did.

When I was six, my mom and dad died in a flash flood. Their car got swept away while it was on a low water bridge.

At the time, their accident was called an “act of God.” Later, I learned that it was actually the act of two fairies who had happened across a *mostly* human who was in denial about being a fairy hybrid.

Knowing “why” my parents had died had not brought them back, however.

Before they were killed, Momma and Daddy had been fighting a lot: fighting and *not* making up. Most of their fights had been about me and what Momma called my “disability.” Momma wanted to pull me out of public school and home school me—so that no one would be around when I made my “mistakes,” as she called them.

Daddy liked to pretend that I was a perfect little princess and that there was nothing wrong with me beyond good “intuition.”

I now knew that one of my parents had been too extreme, and the other had been too blind. I now knew that *both* had been wrong, but neither could be blamed.

When I was a little girl, however, I didn't understand anything beyond the feeling of discord that I'd caused between them.

Momma took me to doctors in Shreveport on days that Daddy worked. A couple of them thought Momma was running some kind of scam. One of them thought that Momma should arrange for me to join the circus. Another of them thought that I was possessed by the devil and told Momma to get a priest to perform an exorcism on me. Luckily, instead of doing that, she called up Lettie Mae, Tara's Momma, and got the name of a local Voodoo witch.

Momma took me to see that witch—who called herself Miss Marie Laveau, the *Fourth*. I later learned that Marie Laveau—number one—was a renowned Voodoo witch who died in the 1880s. I don't know if Marie number four was her true decedent or not, but Miss Marie certainly “thought” she was.

Miss Marie had a “pet” water moccasin in a small aquarium. It slithered right over to where Miss Marie was holding me up to the glass. I looked at it, and it looked at me. It showed me its “cotton mouth.” I thought it was beautiful.

After my short “introduction” to the snake, Miss Marie told Momma that I couldn't be helped—that I was *cursed*. She asked Momma to take me away as quickly as possible.

Momma had been scared of Miss Marie—but even more scared of me—after that day.

The night Momma and Daddy had been killed, they'd just dropped me and Jason off at Gran's house. They were going to Monroe for a “date night”; truth be told, “an excuse to get away from Sookie” was a more accurate description of their night out.

I wrote about all of this in my diary—and a lot more too—in the shaky handwriting of a fearful six-year-old who was remembering things that I'd been keeping to myself because most of the adults around me hadn't wanted me to *be* who I really was.

They'd wanted me to be a *normal* human—but I wasn't one of those.

When I told Gran about Miss Marie, she told me that some hack Voodoo witch who kept such a beautiful snake trapped in a tiny cage wouldn't understand the first thing about what Gran called my "gift." She also told me that my Momma and Daddy had loved me—but that they were damned fools. She also told me that on my tenth birthday, she would tell me the story of how I'd come to be "special"—but that, until then, I would just had to take her word for it that I was.

I did believe her.

Gran didn't pull me from public schools like Momma had wanted to, but she *did* pull aside my new teachers at the beginning of each school year. She would invite my new teachers over for coffee and her famous pecan pie near the end of the summer—and she'd have a little "talk" with them. She always asked me to "make myself scarce," which meant that I should go to the little treehouse that she'd told me about on our property.

The treehouse was little more than a wooden platform with a slanting roof—really more like a lean-to than a house. It was only six feet or so off the ground, but I thought it was perfect. Since it was about a half mile from the house, I couldn't hear a single thought—except my own—when I was there.

Before I turned ten, I had no idea who'd built the place, but it truly was ideal. The wood never creaked or splintered or buckled under the sun or the rain or the wind. In fact, the treehouse always looked pristine, and anything I tacked to the trunk of the tree also stayed pristine.

When it was sunny, the little treehouse seemed to be able to read my mind—as if the very wood were telepathic like me. When I wanted to bask in the warming light, the roof seemed as if

it wasn't even there—even though I could see that it clearly was. When I felt like sitting in the shade, the roof provided cover. And—when it rained—the roof protected every single board from getting wet.

I'd often take my diary there, and sometimes I would write for hours.

As I said before, Gran would talk to my teachers each year once I'd made myself “scarce.” Much later, I learned that she was telling them that I could read minds and that they could either do their moral and *paid* duty to help me learn as best as they could—or she would yank me out of school.

Gran was the kind of person that people listened to—even if they didn't believe her. And, luckily, she always managed to get me into the most “understanding” teachers' classes.

In addition, Gran helped me to work on my shields—every single day. Also, instead of hiding my gift from Jason—as my parents had done—Gran had Jason help me learn how to stay out of people's minds.

For that reason, Jason became my ally, and I became his—at least in a manner of speaking. When he wanted to know that a girl “wanted” him for more than just his own “talent,” I would tell him. When he didn't care, I kept my mouth shut.

Gran would also invite her friends over for me to “practice” on. Most of them had no idea what I could do. Gran would never ask me what those people thought; in fact, she told me once that she didn't need to hear about people's thoughts unless those thoughts were important for *me* to tell her about.

The one exception had been when she requested that I “listen in” when she asked Maxine Fortenberry about the secret ingredient in her lemon bars. It turned out that it was Limoncello;



we'd all benefitted from that little secret many times over the years as Gran had perfected Maxine's recipe.

Of course, Gran would never showcase our nefariously-gotten knowledge. She would always hide any lemon bars she'd made if company came over.

Over the years, I have written about so many things—both good and bad—in my diaries. And Gran always listened. In fact—when needed—she would act or help me to act accordingly.

The Uncle Bartlett episode was particularly difficult on our family. One day, Uncle Bartlett had thought about how he wanted to sneak into my room to look at my underpants! He'd also thought about wanting to see me in *only* my underpants. After I'd told Gran about his sick thoughts, she'd ordered him never to come anywhere near any of us again. Then she'd called Aunt Linda; Uncle Bartlett had been putting up some new gutters on Aunt Linda's house. After that phone call, Gran had called the sheriff, and Uncle Bartlett had been arrested. A few days later, I'd found out why he'd been arrested; he'd been molesting my cousin, Hadley.

After that, Hadley spent a good deal of time in therapy, but—from her mind—I knew that she never really got over what Uncle Bartlett had done to her. Aunt Linda and Gran would try to help her, but all the progress that Hadley made was undone when Aunt Linda got sick with cancer.

Hadley and Aunt Linda moved in with Gran, Jason, and me for a while, but they went back home after Aunt Linda went into remission. Soon after Aunt Linda got sick again, Hadley ran away from home.

I'd heard Hadley's thoughts about running away the last time I'd seen her. And, of course, I'd talked those thoughts over with Gran.

Hadley had come to “visit” Gran’s house with the purpose of stealing money. I’d tried to talk Hadley out of it; I’d begged her to stay with us—to live with us again and to stop taking the drugs she’d already become addicted to. I told Gran of Hadley’s intention to steal her “stash” from the old cookie jar on the kitchen counter. Gran took out most of the money and then wrote Hadley a letter, telling her that we all loved her and that we wanted her with us.

Gran put the letter, a bus ticket home, and fifty dollars into the envelope. She also included the name and address of a rehab center for teenagers in Shreveport.

Just as I had heard her planning to do, Hadley did take all the money she could find. We haven’t heard from her since then; it’s been almost a decade now.

I have “heard” more than just the secrets of my family members over the years. Most of the time, I keep things to myself, but—sometimes—I’ve needed to tell people even beyond my grandmother.

Over the years, Gran has helped me with that too. Bud Dearborn, the Chief of Police in Bon Temps, is a friend of Gran’s, and she calls him whenever I’ve heard something that *he* needs to take care of.

When I was seven, I heard how Lettie Mae would beat up Tara. When I was nine, I overheard Mr. Martin, the owner of Bon Temps National Bank, thinking over his plan to steal from the retirement funds of several residents—including Gran. I’d heard other things over the years too, and I’d also learned to distinguish “mere thoughts” from “real crimes.”

So, behind the scenes, I’ve “helped” Sheriff Dearborn find out about and solve many cases of child abuse and spousal abuse. I’ve helped him find thieves and those guilty of assault. Most recently, I told him about Rene Lenier, who’d been thinking about how he’d killed his

sister because she'd been involved with a vampire. Rene had gotten a taste for killing too—and he'd been planning to kill other girls whom he thought had “defiled” themselves. He'd already targeted Maudette Pickens, whom he'd seen with bite marks on her neck. He'd just been waiting for an opportune time—a time which would have implicated Jason in the act!

Thankfully, Sheriff Dearborn had acted before Rene had. In fact, the sheriff always acted when he got information from me. Deep down, Sheriff Dearborn was a good man and appreciated the “help.” Of course, he always said that his information came from anonymous sources. And that was just fine by me.

When I turned ten years old, Gran threw a nice party for me and then sent Jason over to Hoyt Fortenberry's house for a sleepover.

It was then that she explained to me why I was a telepath and introduced me to my real grandfather—Fintan Brigant.

It turned out that I was an eighth fairy!

It also turned out that Fintan had been “helping” Gran “talk” to my teachers every year. Along with Gran, he would assess the teachers' “worthiness.” Then he'd use a kind of fairy glamour on them to make sure that they couldn't talk about my being a telepath to people outside of our family. He also made sure that they wouldn't remember him. Apparently, he'd done something similar to Jason and Tara and Sheriff Dearborn.

Fintan made clear that he'd not hidden my telepathy because he thought that I should be ashamed of it. In fact, he said that I should be proud of my lineage and my gifts. However, he cautioned me to keep my supernatural abilities hidden from the untrustworthy, who would want

to exploit me and my abilities. He advised that I always choose my confidants carefully—using my intellect *and* my instincts.

After my tenth birthday, I saw Fintan about two or three times a year. He'd come to my treehouse, which I found out he'd built and instilled with fairy magic in order to protect the space and to ensure that it was a true sanctuary for me. Each time he visited me, he would help me to develop my telepathy—both my ability to “hear” and my ability to shut out the thoughts of others.

As I'd gotten older, the most difficult thing for me had been coming to terms with the fact that Gran had cheated on my Grandpa Mitchell in order to have children. She'd also truly loved Fintan.

In fact, she'd loved her husband *and* her fairy lover equally.

I also learned that Fintan had used his magic to keep thoughts about himself and fairies in general from entering Gran's mind until I turned ten. After that, Gran's mind became more open to me. Though she'd not needed to, Gran apologized for not telling me certain things earlier. However, she'd wanted to wait until I was old enough to understand. I couldn't blame her for that.

Gran also told me that she'd talked to my dad about my being a telepath, but apparently Daddy had been in complete denial about who I was—and who *he* was. He'd thought that Gran was going senile.

Regardless, as soon as she'd been able, Gran had been very forthcoming about her past. She told me that Grandpa Mitchell had known about Fintan and had “looked the other way” because he, too, had wanted children. Gran told me that—out of respect for Grandpa Mitchell—

she'd refrained from "being with" Fintan intimately other than the two times that she'd conceived children with him.

And that fact held true even after Grandpa Mitchell died.

The older I got, the more the whole situation seemed tragic to me—especially since I could tell from Gran's mind how much she continued to love Fintan and I could tell from his mind how much he loved her back.

Three years ago, Fintan missed one of his normal visits; as soon as that happened, Gran called Fintan's best friend, a *mostly* demon named Desmond Cataliades.

Mr. C had immediately come to visit Gran and me and told us that Fintan had been killed by fairies who were rivals of my great-grandfather Niall. Of course, I knew all about Niall from Fintan's teachings. I also knew about vampires, Weres, shifters, and demons from my fairy grandfather.

After Fintan died—Gran and I knew *exactly* what to do, based on what Fintan had advised us. Fintan's magic had been keeping me and my spark concealed from Niall and other fairies, but that magic wouldn't last for long following his death.

Mr. C told us that Fintan had recast his protective magic each time he'd visited us. He also reported that he still *felt* Fintan's spell, but that it was fading.

Even as Gran and I had grieved for my grandfather and her former lover, we destroyed the nearby fairy portal in order to ensure that no one else could use it. Fintan had been instructed—by Niall—to demolish the portal years before; that's how he'd come to meet my grandmother in the first place. But Fintan had disobeyed orders; instead of destroying the portal,

he'd used his magic to cover its existence so that he could continue to see Gran and his "human" family.

It was Gran and I who completed Fintan's original assignment.

It wasn't that I didn't want to know my fairy family. If I could have done so safely, I would have. But it seemed impossible, given the amount of unrest in Faerie. A large faction of Niall's enemies wanted to destroy all hybrids, and Gran and I thought it best that I *not* let myself become a target.

And we had good reason for our concern too. According to Fintan, it had been enemy fairies who had killed my father and mother. They'd happened upon them by chance, and—being Water Fae—they had been able to manipulate that element to create the flash flood.

Fintan had hunted them down; made sure that they knew nothing of Adele, Linda, Hadley, Jason and me; and then killed them.

In an effort to continue to protect me, Fintan had left behind an amulet for me to wear if anything ever happened to him. It was designed to cover up my spark so that other fairies wouldn't be able to sense it. The only problem was that it couldn't last forever—and, apparently—I was going to be around for a *very* long time because I had the essential spark. Fintan had made clear that I would have a lifespan similar to his own.

He also made clear that once I began wearing the amulet, it would have enough magic for only a decade or so—after which time my "spark" would become "visible" to other fairies—if they were looking. It was because of this that Fintan had hoped to live for much longer—so that he could continue covering up my existence *and* so that he could help me to refine my fairy gifts.

But I'd figured a decade was better than nothing. And—who knew how things could change in ten years? Gran had advised me to continue practicing my fairy powers—my telepathy and what Fintan had called my “light.”

And I *did* continue practicing, but I worked on controlling my “light” only at my treehouse, which Fintan said would always conceal the presence of fairy magic.

With my light, I could now fire orbs of energy from my hands. And, according to Mr. C, those orbs would stun—or even kill—anyone who was threatening me.

So how does all of this help you to understand why I'm currently five steps inside of Fangtasia—Shreveport's premier vampire bar?

I don't suppose it does.

But maybe if you read my last two diary entries, you will understand why the clicking of twelve sets of fangs into place isn't making me run for the hills. Maybe, if you read on, you will understand why I am—even now—taking another step toward the throne on the other side of the room.

Toward a pair of crystalline blue eyes that have already captured me in a way that I cannot fathom.

Chapter 02: Smoke Gets in Your Eyes



June 12, 2004, 11:55 p.m.

Dear Diary,

Tonight I met my first vampire.

My feelings about him are mixed. On the one hand, Bill Compton interests me; as of right now, that interest is not romantic, but it's enough for me to want to get to know him a little better. Bill's handsome—at least when he's not skulking about—and I can't hear a peep out of his head.

Fintan didn't tell me that I wouldn't be able to “hear” vampires. Maybe he didn't know. Or maybe he had a different experience since he was half-fairy and

I'm only one-eighth. But—then again—he once told me that he and I had similar “sparks” and, therefore, gifts.

Maybe if I practiced, I could “hear” vampires with my telepathy.

But would I want to? It was kind of nice not being able to hear the thoughts of Bon Temps's newest resident.

Regardless—at least for now—Bill is silent to me. But because of that silence, I'd be foolish not to be suspicious of his intentions—especially regarding me.

I don't mean to sound big-headed, Diary. You know from pages and pages of my past writing, that I know I'm not “all that” to the men of Bon Temps. However, Bill seemed to zero in on me from the moment he walked into Merlotte's. I'm not gonna flatter myself by thinking that was because of my shining “personality.”

I mean—I know that some guys—and a few girls—find me attractive. That's clear enough from their heads. Of course, most of those thoughts center on my “rack” or ass. But sometimes there's a truly nice compliment to hear. For instance, Sid Matt Lancaster came in for a late lunch today, and he was thinking about how I'm almost as pretty as Gran was in her heyday. I've seen pictures of

her from then, and she was a hottie, so I gotta say that's one of the most flattering compliments I could ever get!

But there are other really pretty girls in town too, and several of them were in Merlotte's earlier tonight. Dawn was there—her butt cheeks practically hanging out of her short-shorts as always. Tara was there; she might not be to everyone's taste because of her fiery temper, but—at first sight—her beauty is undeniable. And then there was Georgie McAllister.

Diary, I'm not sure if I've ever told you about Georgie. She's nice enough, but we haven't ever been particular friends. Anyway, she was homecoming queen the year after I graduated from high school. And—it would be clear to any set of functioning eyes that she's as much of a “10” as Bo Derek ever was! In fact, I'm woman enough to admit that Georgie is a “superior” version of “me” looks-wise! She's got wavy blond hair, but hers is a lot silkier than my own—probably because (as her “thoughts” have told me) she brushes her hair for forty minutes every day! And she washes her hair with cold water! Eek! Diary, you and I both know that there are limits to what I'm willing to do for beauty.

Like me, Georgie's got brown eyes, but hers are more striking. Like me, she's got curves, but hers are on a taller frame. A lot of people stare at her boobs, which is also a curse of mine. But her "rack" is generally thought of as the best in town, and she wears clothes that accentuate her "assets." Unlike a lot of young women in town, I'm not jealous of Georgie. In fact, I'm grateful every time she comes into Merlotte's because she takes unwanted attention and thoughts away from me.

Diary, you know I hate being objectified by men who would prefer that I just keep my mouth shut and my thoughts to myself! Well—I'd rather those men never have such degrading thoughts about women in the first place!

Anyway—as I've told you many times in the past—I've experimented with raising my shields all the way in order to keep people's lustful and more disgusting thoughts out of my head. But then I'm reminded of Rene and how I might have missed his murderous plans if I had shut people's thoughts out all the time.

No—my comfort wouldn't have been worth Maudette's life! Plus—as you know, Diary—Fintan helped me to learn how to mostly "ignore" the thoughts of

others—keeping only enough attention on them to “catch” the things I need to catch.

And doing that has kept my headaches at bay.

Anyway—sorry to ramble, Diary. Let me get back to Bill Compton. As soon as the mysterious Mr. Compton walked into Merlotte’s, his eyes landed on me and pretty much stayed on me. He didn’t even check out Georgie or Tara or Dawn or Arlene—or Lafayette or Sam or Jason for that matter!

Well—let me tell you—the fact that he honed right in on me set the hairs on the back of my neck on end! After all, I could sense that Bill was “other.” Hell! I could even see a little glow around him that no one else seemed able to see!

Mr. C had made clear that my amulet from Fintan would protect me only from other fairies. Could Bill sense that I was “other?” Could he smell that I was different? Both Mr. C and Fintan had warned me that I might smell uncommonly sweet to vampires. Thankfully, I didn’t have enough fairy blood in me to potentially drive vampires into a crazed bloodlust—as Fintan had.

Despite all my misgivings about Bill, however, I’ll admit that I was excited to meet him. Not hearing his thoughts was something extremely cool to me! I ended

up bringing him a glass of wine so that he could have something in front of him.

When I set the glass down, we looked at each other, and I felt a sudden headache.

Had he been trying to glamour me? I figure that he must have been. After all, that was the most logical explanation, based upon the pressure in my head and the look of concentration and then surprise in his eyes.

If I would have known specifically what Bill was trying to get me to do, I might have gone along with it! LOL. I had a fleeting thought to cluck like a chicken—just in case that was the impulse Bill had introduced. But I refrained.

Instead, I just tried to carry on with my work and keep from looking into Bill's eyes again. Unfortunately—I'm pretty sure that he's figured out that I can't be glamouried. And Gran agrees with that theory. Even so, both Gran and I are relieved. Fintan wasn't sure if I could be glamouried or not. Fintan couldn't be glamouried, and—of course—full-blooded fairies can't be, but I'm only one-eighth fairy.

Anyway, after the attempted glamouring, I was certainly less inclined to “like” Bill.

You know my temper, Diary, and—frankly—I'm pissed off that he tried to control my thoughts within minutes of meeting me! And—as you can guess—Bill kept right on staring at me after our little encounter. And—yep—I was made uncomfortable by that attention.

I felt even more uncomfortable when the Rattrays came in.

Well—to make a long story short, Diary—I found out that the Rats have drained vampires in the past and wanted to steal Bill's blood! I tried to warn Bill, but it was almost as if he was in a hurry to leave with the Rats.

And then I had a moment of pure, undeniable idiocy; yep—I did something that even Gran thinks I deserve a Darwin Award for. Instead of asking Jason or Sam or anyone for help, I just ran outside to see if the Rats were still around. And—when I heard their thoughts about what they were doing to Bill—I still didn't get help! I ran to Jason's truck, got the chain out of it, and then went to face the Rats and to “save” Bill on my own.

Maybe Bill had managed to glamour me without my knowing it—because I certainly seemed to be acting without thinking!

My only defense for my stupidity is that I've never been in a position like that before, and I do have my "light" so I knew that I could handle myself with the Rats. It was only when I was in the middle of the confrontation with the Rats that I realized I didn't want to use my "light" because I didn't want Bill to know about it!

However, when I tried to beat myself up over my lack of forethought, Gran told me to let myself off the hook and to just be smarter in the future.

Luckily, my stupid move didn't end up getting me hurt. In fact, I saved Bill and drove the Rats away!

As Gran says, dumb luck is better than no luck!

Well—at least I was smart about one thing. I took the thin chain that had been holding Bill down, and I made ready to use it against the vampire if he tried to attack me to replenish his blood. He didn't, but he did say and do some creepy things.

I mean—really! He offered me his blood to sell or to use to get high! And he borderline threatened me by telling me that there were many places that a vampire could feed from—other than the ones I was protecting with the silver.

I'm shivering even now—and not in a good way—as I recall the disturbing way Bill looked toward my femoral artery when he mentioned those other places. Needless to say, I hightailed it back into Merlotte's.

After getting home from work tonight, the first thing I did was talk things over with Gran. She also called Sheriff Dearborn—to give him an “anonymous tip” about the Rattrays.

I just hope that the sheriff catches them before they can find another vampire to try to drain.

As always, Gran listened patiently as I talked over my thoughts with her; tonight, I also talked about Bill's lack of “hearable” thoughts. After she'd heard everything, Gran was just as wary of Bill as I had been.

Of course, in her mind, she was also wondering if Bill had been around during the Civil War period; however, her thoughts made clear that the need for me to be cautious was much more important than her curiosity about the vampire's background.

Have I mentioned how awesome Gran is?

Have I mentioned how unsure I am about Bill?

Over the years, Gran has taught me that first impressions are often unfair, and—in Bill’s defense—he had been surrounded in Merlotte’s by a lot of ignorant and prejudiced people. Maybe he stared at me so much because my face was the only friendly one he saw in Merlotte’s. Maybe his behavior only seemed creepy; maybe he’s not used to “socializing” with humans.

Of course, Gran has also taught me to listen to my gut when it sends me a strong impulse.

And my gut tells me to be cautious of Bill Compton—to withhold my trust until it is earned. And that’s exactly what I intend to do!

June 14, 2004, 3:00 a.m.

Dear Diary,

I don’t feel like myself tonight—or, more accurately, this morning. But maybe that’s to be expected. I almost died tonight. And I think I might be in love!

And those two facts were more than enough reason for me to wake up Gran when I got home from work (and from almost dying) tonight!

And now that I've talked to her, I'm writing down my thoughts for you, Diary. But I'm finding that writing them is just as difficult as trying to talk about them was.

My thoughts are spinning like innumerable spiders, each working on his or her own web. But those webs don't connect with one another, nor do they form discernable patterns. Worst of all, I feel as if my own thoughts are trying to ensnare me.

So I'll try to write down just the facts about what happened earlier tonight, instead of what I "feel" about those facts. That's what Gran asked me to do when I kept on rambling.

Just the facts.

Fact 1: Tonight had been a pretty normal shift at work—until Bill came into Merlotte's. For the second time, I felt pressure when he caught my eye. Glamour. The thought that he was trying to do that again pissed me off even more than before, and I had been tempted to give him a piece of my mind! But I'd refrained.

Fact 2: When it was time for my break, Bill asked me to sit with him, and I did—out of both courtesy and curiosity. Wasting no time, he asked me what I was. I told him that I was a waitress. Of course, I realized that Bill was fishing for information. He also asked me how I'd known that the Rattrays were attacking him the night before. I lied like a dog and told Bill that it was only by chance that I'd happened to be outside getting a breath of fresh air during the time when he was attacked. I told him that I'd heard a scuffle and had come to investigate.

Fact 3: When I was sitting with Bill and talking to him, I became more and more convinced that he could tell I was something “other”—just like Sam, the shifter who owns Merlotte’s, suspects that I am something “other” than human.

As I've written to you many times before, Diary, I've always kept a healthy distance from Sam. Oh—he's nice enough to me, but I have heard some not-so-nice thoughts about his past from his head. I believe in people getting second chances, and I think Sam deserves his, but I also know that he was a grifter in the past. Maybe I'm a bad person, but a “grifter shifter” is not the kind of person I want to have a close friendship with. And he's certainly not the kind of man I want to make “more” than a friend, though Sam—especially tonight—

demonstrated that he still carries something of a torch for me. He acted jealous of Bill—territorial even—and Bill seemed to like the fact that he had “won” my focus from Sam!

As if I even recognized the game that they were “playing”—which I didn’t!

As if I were a prize—which I’m not!

Men!

Anyway—it’s safe to say that I wasn’t feeling too impressed with either Sam or Bill earlier tonight.

Bill had seemed to want to know more about me—as if he could sense I had a secret. Again, I’d wondered if he could smell that I had fairy blood. However, just as disturbing—from what Bill had said and implied—I’d also begun to fear that he knew I was a telepath. But how could that be? Had Bill glamourised Jason or Tara in order to find out more about me? Could Bill’s glamour have counteracted Fintan’s “glamour,” which had prevented Jason and Tara from talking about my telepathy with anyone other than Gran and me for so many years?

Unfortunately, it no longer really matters if Bill suspected that I was a telepath earlier tonight. Nope that's not important now because of fact number 4. By the end of the night, I had told Bill that I was a telepath! I gave up that secret as if it were nothing, but I'll tell you more about that in a little while, Diary.

Until then, let's get back to earlier—when I was talking with Bill during my break.

Fact 5: Thinking about how Gran was interested in the Civil War period and wanting to distract Bill from his interest in me, I asked Bill if he'd been around during that time. It was then that I learned that not only had he been around, but also he'd fought in the war. In fact, there was a gravestone in the Bon Temps cemetery indicating that Bill had died in 1865. It had been assumed that he'd been killed during the Siege of Petersburg, one of the last major campaigns of the Civil War.

Being much more congenial than before, Bill had asked me when I was due to get off of work, and I'd told him eleven o'clock. He asked if we could continue our conversation after my shift ended. He even offered to return to my house

with me so that Gran could be a part of the conversation if she was still awake. I will admit to being excited that I could bring her the gift of “living history!”

In truth—by the end of our conversation, Bill had seemed more “human” than he’d been the night before. He seemed anxious to be accepted into the community, so I agreed to meet him after my shift.

Actually, Diary, I was excited to meet him! I’d decided that—at the very least—I should try to be Bill’s friend. And—like I told you yesterday—he is attractive when he’s not being creepy. I had even been considering saying “yes” to a date—if he asked for one.

Fact 6: Because of my excitement, I made sure that I was out of Merlotte’s right on time. But Bill wasn’t waiting for me where he said he would be, which was near the back door where the employees parked. I waited a few minutes and was just about to go back inside to get a soda when I felt pain.

And then more pain. And then more.

I went down, and I learned the true meaning of the phrase “being kicked when you’re down.” Because I was kicked. And kicked again.

I was in so much pain that I had to stop feeling it.

Sam—in canine form—appeared on the scene and tried to help me. Truth be told, I wish that he would have just come out with a baseball bat and the people still left in the bar; it would have been much more helpful!

And then—suddenly—Bill was there! The hero in the fairy tale. The knight in shining armor.

In a buzz of movement, both of the Rattrays were pulled off of me. And, the next thing I knew, Bill was carrying me deeper into the woods.

Why Bill didn't just take care of me in the back parking lot of Merlotte's is a question that I can ask now, but—at the time—I didn't think about it. The next real thought I had was that Bill was trying to give me his blood.

It was right about then that I wished that Fintan had told me all about the effects of vampire blood. But I imagine that my fairy grandfather hadn't foreseen me ever needing vampire blood. However, Fintan had told me the basics of how someone was turned. I know that a human has to be mostly drained of blood and then fed the blood of a vampire in order to be “made” vampire. Fintan had also told me that vampire blood could heal humans.

Plus, like everyone else who's watched the news since vampires came out of the coffin, I know a little about the effects of taking "V." I figured that I was—at the very least—gonna get "high" if I took Bill's blood. But I also knew that I'd already lost a lot of blood. I couldn't feel my legs, and the rest of my body seemed weak and tingly. As Bill had offered me his bloody wrist, I remember thinking that I didn't want to be turned into a vampire by a vampire I didn't really trust.

I remember—vaguely—asking Bill if taking his blood would turn me.

He'd told me that it wouldn't, so I had drunk from him before passing out.

I don't know how long I was unconscious, but I woke up to the sensation of Bill licking one of the nastier cuts on my forehead.

Strangely enough—considering how I felt just yesterday—I didn't find his actions creepy in the least.

I did feel a little high—probably from both the vampire blood and the fact that I was still alive after being so gravely hurt.

And, Diary, when I looked up into Bill's eyes, my heart had leapt! And my first thought was that I'd fallen in love with him! My second thought was that he truly was my knight in shining armor—my savior!

We talked for a little while. He told me that—because I had taken his blood—he would be able to sense if I was in danger again. He told me that he would be able to make sure I stayed safe from then on.

His words had made my heart soar.

And—before I'd even realized I was doing it—I was letting slip the fact that I'm a telepath. When I think about it now, I realize that he hadn't seemed surprised by that news.

But I wasn't really thinking at the time. I was just reacting to his presence and to all of the feelings webbing their way into my mind, heart, and body.

The moonlight had seemed so romantic as Bill had carried me to my car and made sure that I was okay to drive home. He said that he would have driven me, but he needed to see to the Rattrays. I remember nodding dumbly, as I enjoyed all of the wonderful feelings his mere proximity was eliciting in me.

He asked me if I worked tomorrow (later today), and when I told him that I didn't, he asked if he could “call on me” an hour after sundown. I remember nodding gleefully.

I had wanted to kiss him so badly that it almost hurt!

But the magical haze I was under seemed to erode a little when I got home. Gran was dozing in her recliner. And she certainly hadn't been expecting the sight that came into the living room: me—with blood-soaked clothing sticking to my body and a dreamy smile on my face.

After I'd cleaned up, she sat me onto the couch and listened to everything that had happened.

Then she hit me with facts 7, 8, 9 and 10—facts that made me recognize the potential danger of the web forming around my thoughts and feelings.

Fact 7: I had—with good reason—been wary of Bill before I was attacked. And I certainly hadn't been in love with him! I hadn't even been on my way to “love”; I'd been attracted to him, and I'd been considering the possibility of dating him—maybe. Those things didn't equate to love!

Fact 8: Bill had been late for our meeting outside of Merlotte's, and—if there was one thing Gran and I had learned about the other Supes in our lives, it was this: If they were late, they were probably dead.

Fact 9: It was only after taking Bill's blood that I felt myself to be in love with him.

Fact 10: Bill had tried to get me to take his blood the first night we'd met too!

Now—Gran didn't steal all my "hope" of love away. She did allow for that fact that a near-death experience could cause realizations and clarity to occur in an individual.

However, she helped me to understand that I'd gone from suspicious of the somewhat creepy vampire I'd met last night to enamored with the hero of tonight. And Gran had certainly been around long enough to know that the things that seemed too good to be true often were just that.

So—even as I'm writing this, Diary—I'm confused and scared. My emotions feel sticky: enticing and sweet, but also suffocating—like a perfume that is too strong. Are my feelings being affected by Bill's blood—or even controlled by it? Are they being caused by the "high" of taking V? Do I merely appreciate the fact that Bill saved my life? Or do I truly 'love' him? Finally—will I feel more like myself after the immediate effects of the vampire blood are gone?

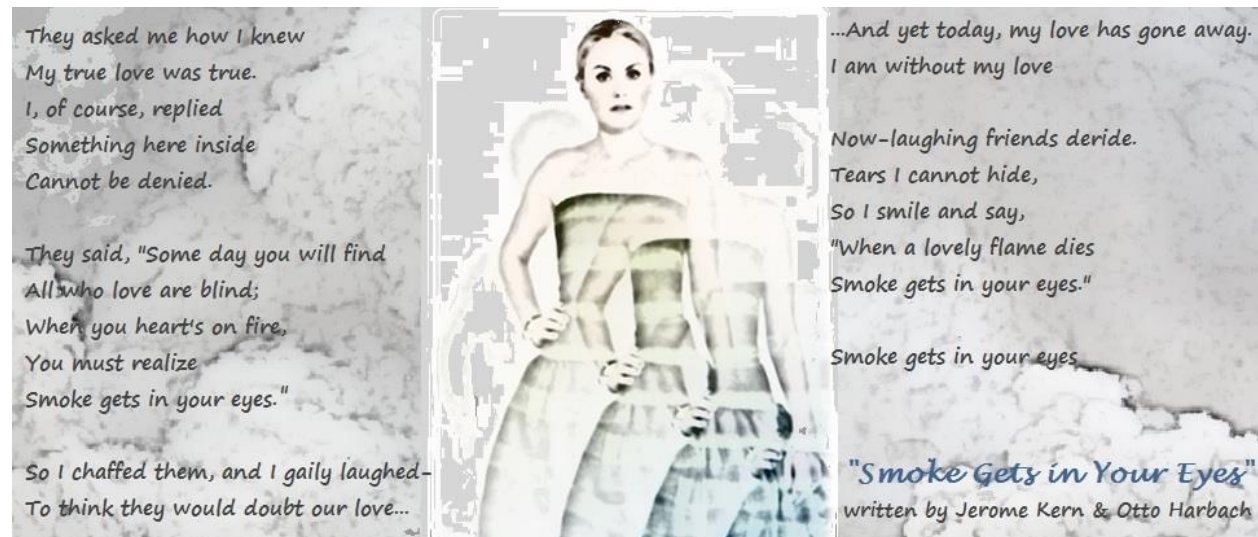
Gran decided to phone Mr. C after she and I talked. He said that he'll be here at about 11:00 a.m. later this morning. Maybe he can help me to answer my questions and to understand the effects of Bill's blood on my feelings.

I will also need Mr. C's counsel as I decide what to do about the fact that Bill now knows about my telepathy.

Bill had seemed so trustworthy—so heroic and good—after he'd saved my life. And—as I said, Diary—I told him about my telepathy without thought or hesitation. I'd simply wanted to share everything with him.

I can't help but to fear that I've screwed up—royally!

Chapter Inspiration



They asked me how I knew
My true love was true.
I, of course, replied
Something here inside
Cannot be denied.

They said, "Some day you will find
All who love are blind;
When you heart's on fire,
You must realize
Smoke gets in your eyes."

So I chaffed them, and I gaily laughed—
To think they would doubt our love...

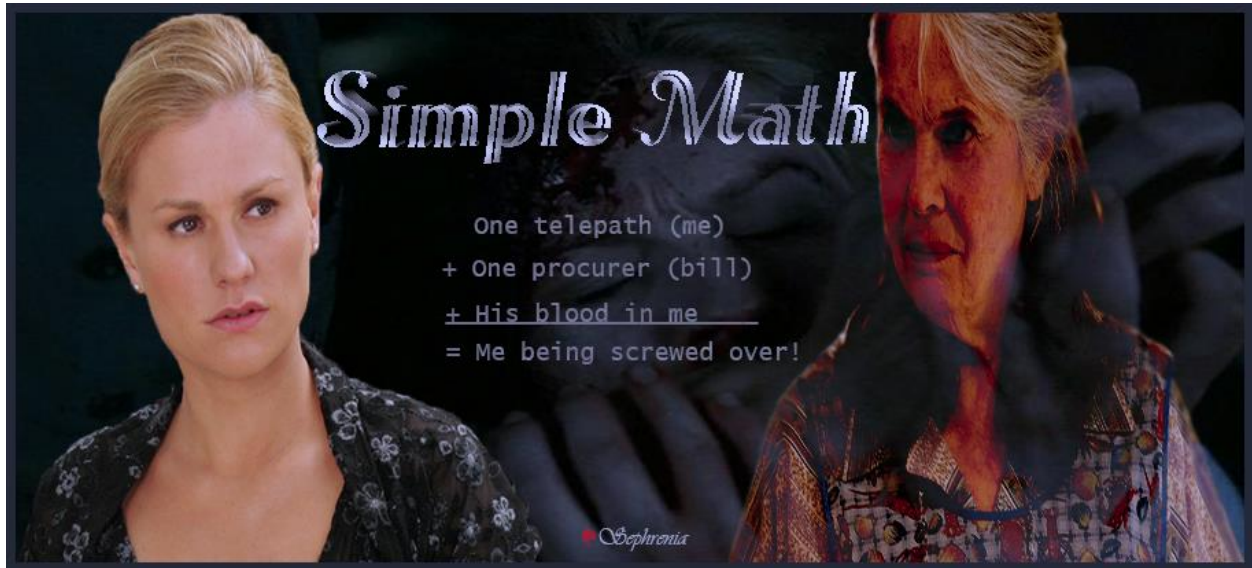
...And yet today, my love has gone away.
I am without my love

Now-laughing friends deride.
Tears I cannot hide,
So I smile and say,
"When a lovely flame dies
Smoke gets in your eyes."

Smoke gets in your eyes

"Smoke Gets in Your Eyes"
written by Jerome Kern & Otto Harbach

Chapter 03: Simple Math



June 14, 2004, continued, 3:00 p.m.

Dear Diary,

It turns out that I'm most definitely NOT in love. I'm being manipulated by vampire blood, and Gran is just about ready to march over to Bill Compton's house and torch it—after she finds his body and stakes him, of course.

In fact, if Mr. C wasn't still here, I imagine that's just what she'd be doing right now. I'm sure that's why he's decided to stay at the house with her.

Oh—it's clear that Mr. C wouldn't care one iota if Bill Compton were to meet his final death, whether that came at Gran's hands, my hands, or his own.

No—Mr. C simply wants Gran to “pause” while I make my choice about what to do next.

I last wrote in you just twelve hours ago, Diary—only half a day: one full turn of the wall clock. Yet so much has changed and has been made clear to me since Mr. C got here a little after 11:00 a.m. In fact, it’s difficult to know where to begin—let alone understand where things might end up.

I guess I’ll start by telling you about the vampire queen of Louisiana. Mr. C works for her. He told me that she’s not so bad of an employer, but he also added that she behaves like a spoiled, entitled child sometimes—especially with things that she regards as her “toys.” The combination of a bratty child and a vampire doesn’t seem to be a very “safe” one—at least not for someone caught in her crosshairs.

Sadly, I’m that someone right now.

After Gran called Mr. C last night—and asked him to come and see us—he went to what Queen Sophie-Anne Leclercq calls her “palace,” which is basically a huge old mansion in the French Quarter of New Orleans.

Mr. C had been planning to drop off some papers for her tonight, and since he hadn't known how long Gran and I would need him here, he had decided to deliver them to the queen before leaving New Orleans.

It seems that dumb luck continues to be on my side, Diary. And I'm more thankful for that than I can express!

Mr. C usually meets with Sophie-Anne in her office, but—since he arrived looking for a “walk-in” appointment, so to speak—he was sent to the queen's “sunroom.” Apparently the queen had decided to hold court in her “favorite place” because she was celebrating, and she wasn't shy about telling anyone who would listen all about her “triumph.”

And what was that triumph?

Well, Diary, apparently, the queen's most skillful procurer had just managed to confirm that there was—indeed—a telepath in the state. He had also confirmed that she couldn't hear vampire thoughts. And—best of all—he'd already managed to create a blood tie with said telepath.

The queen was atwitter with anticipation for her “newest toy.”

Well— $2+2$ does not equal 5 to Mr. C. And telepaths aren't exactly a dime a dozen, though between those with demon blood and those with fairy blood, they are more common than vampires know. Not surprisingly, Mr. C immediately suspected that I was the telepath of whom Sophie-Anne was celebrating her "acquisition." Add to that the fact that Gran had called Mr. C wanting his advice on the effects of vampire blood, and—voilà!—Mr. C solved the simple math problem that had been placed before him.

I had no problem solving it either.

One telepath (me) + one procurer (Bill) + his blood in me = me being screwed over!

Royally!

Mr. C, being a lawyer and a demon—and a general badass, from what I've been able to pick up on—"celebrated" with the queen and offered to work on a contract in order to secure her telepath's "employment."

It seemed that the queen didn't think she'd need a contract—given the fact that her procurer's assignment called for him to seduce the telepath and secure her the "old-fashioned way": with blood, lies, and manipulation.

Fantastic for me—right?

Have you heard of Renfield, Diary?

Anyway—Mr. C played it cool, and stuck around the palace, “partying” and keeping his ears open. Before dawn, he’d figured out that the queen had learned about me from the one missing link that none of us—not me, not Fintan, and not Gran—had considered when it came to keeping my secret: Hadley.

It seems that Hadley is now the queen’s favored pet, and it also seems that “loose lips really do sink ships”—mine!

Mr. C also shared the “fantastic” news that every vampire in the sunroom—including Sophie-Anne’s children, her guards, and other “courtesans”—were also now privy to the fact that there was a telepath in the state. Bill Compton’s name came up several times, so there was no doubt that he was the procurer in the “newsflash.” Plus, Hadley was openly celebrated as the original source of the information. And those things meant that all of the vampires in that room would be capable of tracking me down.

What joy is mine—NOT!

And there was more “good” news too. The queen suspected that there was Fae blood in my family—based on the way Hadley tasted. Sophie-Anne didn’t bother to keep that theory a secret either!

Indiscreet bitch!

I really shouldn’t make judgments about someone I’ve never met, but I’m pretty sure that Sophie-Anne and I are not destined to be BFFs.

At least, according to the “buzz” among the courtesans, Sophie-Anne’s theory that there is fairy blood in Hadley’s family—and, therefore, mine—is not actually believed. Apparently, Sophie-Anne offers out Hadley left and right, and—though all of the vampires at court agree that Hadley is sweeter than normal—none of them believe her to be Fae.

That’s mostly because of the queen’s child: her favorite child, Andre. Apparently, Andre, whose palate is renowned for being more “talented” than most, cannot say definitively that Hadley is part fairy. According to Mr. C, that is because Hadley lacks the essential spark.

So, Diary—at least for the moment—the secret of my true lineage might still be salvageable.

However, that doesn't solve my most immediate problem.

The queen wants me to be her "court telepath." According to Mr. C, she wants me to move into her palace and "be seen" every night. Officially, she hasn't decided—yet—if she is going to "share" me like she shares Hadley, but it was clear to me from Mr. C's purposely vague comments that it won't be long before I become a "court bicycle."

And how does the queen plan to get me to go along with all of this? Well—apparently—Bill is going to continue exchanging blood with me until we have a permanent bond. And, with his blood, he will be able to influence me—making me think that I'm choosing to love him, to marry him, and to move to court with him. Once I'm there, Sophie-Anne will likely have him use the bond to influence me to "explore the sensual side of life."

Yep—all that pretty much sounds like unpaid prostitution and slavery to me too, Diary.

Bill is counting on my ignorance, but I've got a newsflash of my own! I'm NOT ignorant. And I won't become his Renfield! I'd rather die!

But, even knowing this, I feel that web inside of me—the web that Bill’s blood is still trying to spin. When I think about how I felt about Bill after I took his blood—how my emotions continue to “want” to feel about him even as I write this entry—I get nauseated.

That web is doing its damndest to convince me that I love Bill, even though I know I don’t! I can only imagine that I would have been quickly entangled into Bill’s lies if I were still ignorant.

But Gran wouldn’t let me stay ignorant. Mr. C wouldn’t let me stay ignorant. Even you wouldn’t let me stay ignorant, Diary.

Now all I have to do is to choose the best way to fight. Thankfully—I still have quite a few options that can get me out of this mess.

But, before I tell you about those options and ask for your help in choosing one, Diary, I need to tell you more about vampire blood—as well as ties and bonds and vampire “law.”

There is an unescapable fact; last night, Bill took my blood, and I took his. According to Mr. C, that means we are “tied” by vampire law. So here is the 4-1-1 on ties.

Number 1: Since Bill and I had an exchange—meaning that we took blood from each other at roughly the same time (me—out of necessity—and him—because he’s a prick!), I am now considered “Bill’s property” according to the vampire world! His “pet!” Most vampires won’t give a damn about the fact that I never agreed to Bill’s “claim.” Apparently, agreement on the part of the human isn’t a requirement!

Yep—I’m definitely nauseated again!

Number 2: Obviously, Bill has the ability to manipulate my emotions with his blood. And he started to do that the moment he had his blood in me!

Number 3: A human will become more sexually attracted to any vampire who gives him or her blood; moreover, a human will have explicit and sexual dreams about said vampire.

Numbers 2 and 3 explain my “love” for Bill—and my desire to kiss him only minutes after almost being beaten to a bloody pulp!

And that thought had been what had made me lose my breakfast a few hours ago!

I still hadn't attempted to eat lunch. I was just happy that I'd been too wired to sleep last night. The last thing I wanted was to dream about Bill in a sexual way—not when the things he was doing to me were already akin to rape in my eyes.

Number 4: When he's awake, Bill will be able to sense my emotions.

Number 5: Bill will be able to track me with his blood.

See—Diary? That's why I don't think I can keep down lunch. Thinking about the fact that Bill will be able to track me is already enough to give me dry heaves!

Things were not made any easier when Gran, Mr. C, and I came to several inarguable conclusions.

Clearly, Bill had set things up with the Rattrays—during both of the last two nights!

Even while I'd been marveling at the wonderful silence of his mind, Bill had likely been “thinking” things at me—trying to see if I'd react. Once he was certain that my telepathy didn't work on him, he had tried to glamour me in order to get me under his control. Most likely, he would have glamour'd me to take his blood.

But I didn't "cooperate"; thus, he'd had to go with Plan B. And the Rattrays were convenient and expendable accomplices due to their own questionable pasts.

Clearly, Bill had aimed to get me to take his blood after the Rattrays had "attacked" him. According to Mr. C, Bill probably thought that I would greatly desire the prized "gift" of his blood. However, I'd failed to "cooperate" again when I didn't accept the vials of Bill's blood already taken by the Rats.

So Bill had glamoured them to come after me last night, which is probably why I hadn't heard their thoughts before they attacked. Most likely, Bill had glamoured them so that they wouldn't have the ability to "think" for themselves. Maybe he'd even glamoured the Rats to stay at his home all day so that he'd be sure to have their "help" in hurting me. It would have been appropriate—the Rats having a slumber party with the chief rat!

And then Bill had watched and waited until I was near death. And then he'd "rescued" me.

I wanted to hurl again, but my stomach was now well-past empty.

So—here I am, Diary. I've come to my treehouse in order to absorb the sun and—hopefully—a little of my grandfather's wisdom. Gran and Mr. C have already shared their own opinions, but, ultimately, I know that it is up to me to decide what to do next.

So, Diary, here are my choices.

First, I could kill Bill and then run away. Actually, I wouldn't even have to be the one to “end” the vampire; Mr. C has volunteered to “flex his fighting muscles.” And, certainly, killing Bill would take care of the problem of the blood tie, but not the root problem. It's too late to put that Genie back into the bottle, so—if I don't want to belong to Sophie-Anne—I will have to leave Louisiana, probably forever. Of course, if Gran and Jason stay behind, they might become targets for the queen. She could kidnap them and “punish” them in order to try to draw me back.

Expectedly, without hesitation, Gran had offered to come with me, and I know that Jason would come too. And—knowing I have their support means the world to me! But I don't want to steal their lives from them if I don't have to. I

don't want to become a "fugitive" because of a queen's obsessive desire to have me as a toy!

Still—Mr. C says that he could have us out of here and somewhere safe before the morning. He'd arrange for us to have new identities and new jobs. Ever a woman of strength and fortitude, Gran told me that my safety and Jason's safety were a lot more important than the wood and nails of the farmhouse. And I know that Jason would be able to find happiness anywhere we went. That's just the way he is.

LOL. He'd probably be happy to have a "new colony" of women to "conquer."

And it isn't as if waitress jobs are impossible to find. And—thanks to Fintan—there is plenty of money available to us, even if it took us some time to get established in a new place.

My second option is to kill Bill and then to "come out" to the entire Supe world as a fairy/telepath.

As I've written to you before, Diary, Mr. C is my Supe godfather, and he told me that he will publically take me under his wing—and his protection. But I'll

have to move to New Orleans with him so that he can keep me guarded full-time.

And—if I move in with him—I likely won't be able to be a waitress anymore.

I know that prospect would be welcome to some people, but I like being a waitress—even if some people look down on me because they see it as a second-class job.

As if!

That just proves their own ignorance. The important thing is that I'm happy doing my job. I like using my gift to anticipate the needs of my customers. When I do that, they literally get “happier,” which is usually their motivation for coming to a restaurant to start with! They want a “break” from life, and I can help them achieve that. Of course, there are those who come to a bar to get drunk for the wrong reasons or far too often, but I've used my gift to help them too!

A subtle word to Andy Bellefleur got him out of his doldrums before he let alcohol take over his life. And—when I heard that Holly “liked” him and that he “liked” her—it was easy to create an opportunity where they could “act” on that

mutual interest if they chose to. And now they are getting married! And, more importantly, they are happy!

An offhand comment to Jane Bodehouse's son got him thinking about how much pain his mom must have been feeling because she'd lost her husband, mother, and sister in just over a year. Well—he made a point to have her over more often and eventually convinced her to talk to a therapist. Now Jane, Marvin, Jane's daughter-in-law, and her four grandkids all come into Merlotte's about twice a week. And—when Jane does come into the bar without them—she's never alone, and she no longer thinks about how booze is the only thing that can get rid of her pain.

And I can't even tell you how many times I've done little things to make sure that people didn't drive once they'd had too much to drink.

I don't fashion myself as the "people police." And I definitely don't see myself as a saint. In the end, people need to make their own decisions, but I've found that people are often missing an important piece of information that could have helped them make better choices. And—if I can give them that—then I consider my telepathy to be a wonderful gift indeed!

Anyway, Diary, you know that these things are only some of the reasons why I love being a waitress. You know that I also love the activity, the way that the shift seems to fly by once things get busy, the “turnover” of the crowd so that there is an influx of new minds every hour or two, and the camaraderie that forms among the staff. You know that I also love being able to leave my job where it belongs—rather than “bringing my work home.” Heck—the only thing that I might bring home is a pair of sore feet if I’ve worked a double shift.

But a foot soak and a book solve that problem.

You know that I’ve tried to take correspondence classes online, but you also know that it just didn’t work for me, Diary. I love to read and to learn, but I’m not enthused about being told what to read and what to learn.

Fintan did a wonderful thing for us all when he made sure that we had enough money to not have to worry about bills, food costs, etc. And—because of him—I’ve been able to choose a job that makes me happy. And I’ve been able to slip a bit extra into the communal tip jar for the waitresses who count on their tips for the basic staples more than I have to.

So—Diary—I'm pretty sure that moving to New Orleans and publically becoming Mr. C's ward would mean that I could no longer work at my chosen profession. I'm sure he would find things for me to do; maybe I could even learn to work with him and do some paralegal type work or something, and I'm sure that would be rewarding in its own way. But it just isn't my first choice.

Plus, even though Mr. C is trying to shut me out of some parts of his head, I get the impression that the queen would be very angry with him if she found out that he's the one who "stole" her telepath.

And I don't want Mr. C to get hurt.

Speaking of people getting hurt—when I questioned whether every option I had would include killing Bill, Mr. C had laughed heartily, and had told me that the world would be a better place with one less rat in it. Maybe that's true, Diary, but part of me knows that Bill's not ultimately to blame for my troubles. He's simply a "yes-man" to Sophie-Anne—a lackey following orders.

Mr. C said that there was an alternative to killing Bill. I could try to have the tie removed by magic. But, again, that wouldn't solve the problem of the

queen knowing about me, and apparently my chances of surviving a severing spell were only fifty-fifty if Bill didn't "cooperate."

I doubted he would.

So, even if I went that route to try to save Bill's life out of a sense of altruism, I'd still have to leave Bon Temps—and either assume a new identity or go live with Mr. C.

The only difference would be that Bill's blood wouldn't be on my hands.

Another of my options involves "dancing with the devil." In other words, I could pick a stronger vampire than Bill to tie myself to. That tie would—apparently—override the one I had with Bill and null his claim on me.

Both very good things!

While there were many vampires stronger than Bill in Louisiana, only two were viable options for me. Mr. C said there were more options out-of-state, but I didn't need to hear about those.

If I decided to leave Louisiana, I knew that I'd be choosing option 1—killing Bill and getting the hell out of Dodge!

My first viable vampire option is Queen Sophie-Anne herself! Mr. C said that he and I could try to control the situation with her by proposing a contract.

I had decided against that option before he'd even finished his first sentence!

My second vampire option is Eric Northman, Sheriff of Area 5 and star of the vampire calendar which had been hanging in my treehouse since January 1. Dawn had given me a copy as a Christmas gift. And—in my treehouse, at least—it was still January because that was Eric's month.

Oh, Diary—you've had to endure hearing about all of my crushes, haven't you?

You've had to tolerate my John Stamos phase, my Freddy Prinze, Jr. attraction, my Leo DiCaprio love, and my continued Johnny Depp fascination.

And I'm still sorry about that month I was into James Van Der Beek. In my defense, I did soon realize that Joshua Jackson was superior.

Anyway, I've tried to keep my Eric Northman fantasies to myself, but I will admit that I've ended up getting lost in his blue eyes more than once—when I'd intended to write in you.

LOL. I'm sorry if you see that as cheating, Diary.

But I defy even you—you who are made out of paper and staples—to not be enamored by those eyes.

So—yes—I'm a fangirl of Eric Northman's. But I'm not a fang-girl, and I'm definitely no fangbanger.

Anyway, as I was trying not to blush in front of Gran and Mr. C, Mr. C told me a little about Eric Northman—the vampire beyond the calendar picture I've memorized every line from.

Eric, as I already wrote, is the Sheriff of Area 5, which includes Bon Temps. Given that, the queen should have told him about me, and, according to Mr. C, Eric should have been the one to “secure” me. However, the queen had triumphantly crowed to Mr. C that she'd bypassed Eric because she feared that he might try to claim me for himself.

At a thousand years old, Eric, it seems, is the oldest vampire resident of Louisiana. He's known for being a savvy businessman and a fair—if sometimes brutal—sheriff. According to Mr. C, there are quite a few old, strong, and wise vampires living in the area because they like the way Eric runs things. Mr. C made clear that this, more than anything else, is a sign of Eric's effectiveness as a leader.

Simply put, the stronger the vampire, the less he or she is willing to become the subordinate of someone unworthy, and vampires must swear fealty to a sheriff in order to settle in his or her area. Many extremely powerful vampires had sworn fealty to the Sheriff of Area 5.

But there is a lot more that makes Eric seem like a good choice for me—and I'm not just referring to his abs—though I'm pretty sure I wrote a sonnet to them in a previous entry. Or maybe it was a limerick. Yes—definitely a limerick!

There once were some abs sent from heaven,

The number of packs was six—maybe seven,

I worshipped away.

And my heart—it did sway,

Till I

Sorry, Diary, I can't remember the rest of the poem. I think I got stuck on the rhymes—or the abs.

Anyway, Eric is—or was—a Viking. And he is known for keeping his word once it is given. And he's also well-known for his loyalty and his prowess, which is

why no other monarchs have dared to mess with Louisiana since Eric swore fealty to Sophie-Anne.

Mr. C told me that he respects Eric a lot more than the queen and that the only reason why Eric isn't a monarch is because he doesn't want to be one.

Apparently Eric likes a "simpler" life, a life where he is mostly independent and doesn't have to deal with a lot of political machinations—aka bullshit.

I couldn't agree with Eric's preferences more at this moment!

In addition, Mr. C told me that Eric is pleasant to be around. He also praised Eric's "wicked" sense of humor.

Finally, Mr. C told me what he knew about Eric's maker, which was quite a lot, actually. Godric is two-thousand-year-old! Like Eric, Godric has earned great respect during his long life. He's a sheriff in Texas, and—similar to his progeny—he is happy to stay in "middle management" as long as he can run his area independently.

The rest of what Mr. C knows about Godric was told to me while Gran was in the bathroom. According to Mr. C, Fintan and Godric had been periodically

“involved” for hundreds of years, though they kept that involvement a secret from most people. In fact, only Mr. C and Eric knew about the relationship.

Mr. C, who knew Fintan better than anyone, told me that my grandfather loved Godric deeply—probably more than he ever loved anyone else. But a vampire and a half-fairy in Fintan’s position couldn’t “share” their lives full-time, so they’d had to settle for brief secret encounters—followed by years and years of nothing.

Mr. C assured me that my grandfather’s love for Godric had never interfered with his love for Gran, but he knew that—out of respect—Fintan had never discussed his other lovers with Gran, and that’s why he’d waited until she was out of the room to tell me about it.

I was once again struck by the solitude of Fintan’s life; he had tasted so much love, but had never been able to luxuriate in it. I know he’d wanted more for me.

Among the possessions that Fintan left behind with Mr. C to give to me when I came of age—which is age 27 for a fairy, by the way—is a dagger.

According to Mr. C, the dagger was given to Fintan by Godric to symbolize their love.

Thinking that Eric was the best option for me, Mr. C had brought the dagger with him. In fact, I'm looking at it right now, Diary.

It looks ancient, though it could obviously still kill. However, despite its lethality, the word that comes to my mind as I look at it is "beautiful."

In fact, the dagger is startlingly beautiful. Its handle is blue—a similar shade to Eric's eyes—if the photo in the calendar is an accurate representation. There's a pattern etched into the blue of the handle, just as there seems to be a pattern in Eric's eyes—almost as if every pigment in his irises had been dancing when the picture was taken.

Markings that look like ancient runes decorate part of the steel blade of the dagger. I can't help but to wonder what they say. Mr. C didn't know for sure, but he told me that he recognized the rune for one word: love.

Love—the emotion I both feel and definitely don't feel for Bill Compton.

So—what do you think I should do, diary?

Should I run? Or should I go live with Mr. C and accept a very changed life? Or should I trade in one blood tie for another? And could I trust Eric not to misuse that tie?

I know what I want to do. I want to stay close to Bon Temps. I want my brother and grandmother to keep the lives they are content with. I want to continue working as a waitress. I want to know that an overindulged queen can't swoop in and hurt me or the ones I love. And I don't want to be anyone's toy!

But—to stay here—I will have to choose Eric.

But—if I choose him, what danger will he be placed in? I hate the thought of pain filling Eric Northman's eyes. I may not know the vampire himself, but I do know that I want his eyes to stay alit and dancing.

And I certainly don't want to be the cause of any strife for him.

Mr. C told me that Eric would be fine no matter what my choice was—that he was older and better connected than his queen and that Sophie-Anne needed to keep him happy in order to keep her queendom stable. But I felt the need to make sure before I started making choices that would affect his life as much as mine.

After all, I would basically be asking him to protect me from Sophie-Anne and any other threats, and that might not be an easy task.

Plus, would he even agree? Mr. C seems to think he would—in exchange for the periodic use of my telepathy and a little of my blood now and then. But I need to ask more questions and get more answers before I make my choice. And Eric needs to be afforded the same right!

So—Diary—I guess I have decided. I still have no idea where I'll be in a week, but I know my next step: meeting Eric.

So here I am—ten feet away from a vampire who is more beautiful than even his drool-worthy picture captured. Here I am—ten small steps away from the vampire who is going to help me decide my future.

Here I am at the cusp of choice—his and mine.

Chapter 04: The Twinflower



Sookie POV

“Well, aren’t you sweet,” came Eric Northman’s resonant voice.

I was feeling anything but sweet as he looked me up and down—and then back up again.

“I honestly don’t know,” I responded.

His eyebrow arched in question and amusement.

“I’ve never actually tasted myself,” I added nervously.

He smirked. “Did you come to Fangtasia to be tasted?”

I couldn’t help but to chuckle out of nervousness—and a little amusement of my own.

Mr. C had been right. There was a certain kind of humor about Eric Northman—charming and wry. And there was more; he seemed to have a *joie de vivre* emanating from his very pores.

“Unfortunately, I’ve already been tasted,” I said significantly, my own smile fading at that memory.

“What a pity—for me,” he commented.

“Trust me; the pity is all *mine*,” I returned.

“Oh?” he asked, leaning forward a little.

I nodded. “Can we speak somewhere private?” I asked.

He looked a little surprised, but still nodded in agreement.

“Do you mind if I bring a friend?” I asked.

His eyebrow shot up again. “Is she anything like you?”

I chuckled. “Not even close. *He*’s waiting by the back door,” I added in barely a whisper.

“Are you trying to entrap me?” Eric asked somewhat playfully.

“Yes. I think I am,” I said honestly.

Eric POV

She had my full attention from the moment she walked into Fangtasia.

She was wearing a dress that had no business being in a vampire bar. And she walked straight toward me from the door—as if I were her beacon.

Her scent was unlike any other human’s that I’d ever encountered, and from the looks of every other vampire in the room, it was the same for them.

But how could that be? She smelled like a field full of *linnea*, the twinflower, which had grown wild near my home—my human home. I closed my eyes for a second and recalled with complete clarity the moment I awoke as a vampire. The first scent that had hit me was *linnea*—so much more aromatic and *poignant* than I’d been able to discern with my human senses.



That scent—*her* scent—was engulfing me now, even more than it had then.

In addition to her scent, there seemed to be a “light” about her—almost a glow. Her skin was darkened ivory as if she’d lain in the sun all day. My fangs clicked down.

I don’t think I would have been able to stop myself from speaking to her—from smiling at her—even if I would have tried.

My cock was hard by the time she walked across Fangtasia—to *me*—and harder by the end of our short conversation.

But, strangely enough, my first instinct wasn’t to fuck her or to feed from her.

My first instinct was to claim her and to keep her. And that instinct came from somewhere deep inside of me that had never been stirred—not even when I made Pam. I

intended to call Godric about it the first chance I got. It would give me a good excuse to reach out to him anyway.

After she requested to meet with me privately, I led the woman through the employees' only door and down the hall toward the back entrance of the club. Actually, that wasn't quite accurate. I didn't lead her. She walked next to me for the most part, looking up at me as I looked down at her because of our height difference.

And when she stopped walking, I stopped too. It turns out that she was sizing me up—quite literally.

“I thought people—even Vikings—were shorter a thousand years ago,” she commented with a half-smirk, half-smile.

I chuckled. For some reason, I wasn't surprised that she knew things about my origins. However, of all the things I thought she might say to me, that hadn't been one of them.

“You're right—at least partially. In fact, there are many stereotypes about Vikings; supposedly we were all tall, blonde, brutish marauders, wearing horned helmets and *always* pillaging—in one form or another,” I added flirtatiously.

“And those stereotypes are wrong?” she asked with twinkling eyes and a rosy blush on her cheeks.

“Well—*one* of them is.” I paused dramatically. “The people of the North were not especially tall. Around 5'8” was the average height among the men of my geographic region when I was a human.”

“So you stood out even then?” she asked coyly.

“Not so much—I’m afraid,” I grinned. “All of the men in my family were tall. My father was my height—but broader, as was my uncle. For many generations, my male progenitors had sought taller women to marry.”

“And you? Did you marry a tall woman?” she laughed.

I couldn’t help but to laugh with her. There was something about her that seemed to ‘lift’ me—for lack of a better word.

“The woman I married was a few inches shorter than you are; she was an average height for women of my time.” I smirked. “My father would have been disappointed in my choice.”

Her smile faded. “*Would* have been?”

“He died before I married,” I responded. Why I was telling her such information was beyond me; a sudden thought struck me.

“Are you a witch?” I asked her.

“No—a *waitress*,” she responded as she gestured toward the back door.

I may have already been somewhat besotted by the beautiful girl that seemed to be tugging at my very soul, but I was still a thousand-year-old warrior, and I used my vampiric senses to tell me what was beyond the door.

“A demon?” I asked when I picked up the faint scent of brimstone.

She nodded.

“Mr. Cataliades—the queen’s lawyer,” I remarked when the scent registered in my memories. The demon had obviously used magic to cover his scent to a certain extent, but I could tell who it was all the same.

“My lawyer too,” the girl said.

I wanted to ask her what her name was, but I decided to save that question and the many others I had for when we were in the soundproof confines of my office. To make that happen as quickly as possible, I opened the door.

The rotund semi-demon nodded first to the girl and then to me. Then he followed both of us to my office. Once I closed the door, I gestured toward the two chairs in front of my desk.

“Refreshments?” I asked them.

Both of my guests shook their heads, but the girl looked up at me and said, “No thanks. Maybe later?”

I winked and then took my seat behind my large desk.

“What’s your name?” I asked, no longer able to hold in my desire for that piece of information.

“Sorry,” she said. “I would have told you out there, but” She stopped midsentence.

“You did not do a good job of being discreet *other* than that,” I chuckled. “Your scent is quite captivating; it’s like” It was my turn to stop midsentence.

“Her scent needed to be amplified tonight—in order to entice you,” the demon said, “*and* to cover the presence of another’s blood.”

I leaned forward, choosing—for the moment—to deal with only the first part of the lawyer’s statement. “Amplified? *Not* changed?”

“Why?” Mr. Cataliades asked. “What does she smell like to you?”

The girl looked at me with curiosity in her eyes.

“Like time stopped and then rewound a thousand years. Like home,” I responded honestly.

The girl smiled almost shyly and stretched out her hand across the desk. “I’m Sookie. Sookie Stackhouse.”

“Vampires don’t shake hands,” I said, even though I’d already taken her hand into mine. Her touch elicited a tingling sensation in my fingers that traveled through my body as if it were hell-bent on restarting my unmoving heart.

“*Clearly*,” Sookie responded with a smirk as she squeezed my hand a little. Her expression turned to a frown, however, as she turned her hand over so that her palm was up.

“Take a whiff,” she instructed.

I bent forward and inhaled deeply, expecting more of the ambrosia from before. Sadly, Sookie’s beautiful scent was tainted by another. I sat up straight again, and, though I loosened my grip, I didn’t let go of her hand.

“I recognize this scent,” I said, trying to keep my voice neutral.

“You know Bill Compton?” she asked.

I nodded. “Regrettably. I believe he is the queen’s procurer—or errand boy.”

Her eyebrow shot up in amusement. “Well—I’d like to make him her whipping boy if I can.”

Seemingly reluctantly, she pulled her hand from mine. Something about the hesitancy of her action tugged at the corners of my lips, even more than her sharp words against Compton had.

She settled back comfortably into her chair.

“So—why have you had Compton’s blood?”

Sookie looked at Mr. Cataliades and then back at me. “Because the queen sent him to procure me for her.” Her tone clearly reflected her anger. “Instead of just asking me if I would

use my telepathy to aid her and offering me a contract—like a fucking grown-up—she decided that it would be better to have her minion arrange for me to be beaten up and then seduce me by using his blood.” She shook her head. “Bill manipulated me into taking his blood, and then he took mine.”

My eyebrow rose. “I’ve known a few telepaths, and all have been fairies or demons.”

“I’m one-eighth fairy,” she said.

For some reason, I wasn’t surprised by her candor—probably because my own instincts called for me to be open with her as well.

“Can you hear my thoughts?” I asked. “My maker once told me that some strong fairies can occasionally pick up on vampire thoughts.”

“I haven’t heard a vampire’s thoughts yet, but I haven’t tried very hard either,” she reported.

“Try,” I told her, sitting forward a little, “with me.”

She closed her eyes, and a look of intense concentration came over her face.

“You’ve got three underage kids sitting at your bar—all girls and all dressed in black. One of them has blue hair. There’s also an undercover cop here—just looking for a reason to signal for a raid. He was told by his vampire-hating, Fellowship of the Sun-member boss to invent a reason if he didn’t find a legitimate crime happening here by 1:00 a.m. He’s wearing a tattered Shreveport-Bossier Captains baseball cap and a studded collar.”

She shook her head. “Weird combination,” she commented.

I chuckled.

She went on. “Almost all of the humans in your bar are thinking about having sex with vampires—but *you* are the one they’re fantasizing about the most. The majority of them are

trying to figure out how to best approach you when you return to your throne; a few of them have more,” she paused, “arrogant thoughts.”

“Arrogant?”

“Yes—they feel superior to the others because you’ve—uh—*had* them before. They are certain that you will want a repeat encounter with them.”

Sookie took a deep breath even as her face flushed a beautiful shade of red, which enthralled me even more than her fascinating report of the thoughts she was hearing.

She continued, “There are a couple of Weres in the bar; one of them just turned 21 today. I used to not get as much from Weres, but my boss is a shifter, so I’ve had the chance to practice. I have to concentrate a little more with them, however.”

“What are the Weres thinking?” I asked.

“They’re here on a dare from an older member of their pack. The birthday boy wants to stay out of trouble, but his friend is trying to figure out a good pickup line to use with Pam. He’s stuck between ‘Don’t worry; I won’t impale you...with a stake’ and ‘Is there room for two in your coffin?’”

I chuckled. “I haven’t heard those before.”

“He got them off of a website.” She took another deep breath. “I sense eleven voids out there. Those are the vampires. I pick y’all up as a little pocket of silence.”

“You cannot hear them?” I asked.

“No—none of them.”

“Must be nice,” I commented, “to have that relief.”

“I was naïve enough to think so until *not* hearing Bill put me into a situation where he got his blood into me,” she said, her eyes opening.

She was giving me a funny look.

“What is it?” I asked.

“Snakes. When I really tried to listen to *your* mind, it was as if I was in a den of snakes.

A lot of impressions all at once, gliding through your mind like snakes.”

“What am I thinking?” I asked.

“You’re thinking too many things—all at once—for me to get a handle on a particular thought,” she responded. “There’s too much there; it’s like I’m looking into a huge snake pit from above, and I can see all the movement, but I can’t make out an individual snake.”

I closed my eyes and focused my thoughts. I let fade the attention I’d been giving to my businesses, my sheriff duties, Godric, and a variety of other things that had been skimming around the ocean of my mind. I fixed my thoughts onto only the woman in front of me.

“I can hear you,” she whispered, even as she took my hand in hers, probably so that she could amplify her reception. “You want me for yourself, but you hate the idea of anyone owning me. You want to bite me and take my blood, but you don’t want to hurt me. You want to remove every cell of Bill’s blood from my body and then put your own in its place, but you don’t want to control me. You want to have sex with me, but you can tell I’m a virgin, and you fear you might hurt me. You want to mark me over and over again, but you don’t want to blemish my skin. You want to chain me up in a room in order to keep me all to yourself” She stopped midsentence.

I relaxed and let my thoughts swirl around freely once more. I opened my eyes to find that she was opening hers. I studied her in silence for a few moments; unafraid, she studied me right back. She kept ahold of my hand.

“You are right,” I said, finally breaking the silence. “I want you—badly; I’ve wanted you from the second you walked into my bar. And I *would* contemplate chaining you to my side; however, I would never do that. Do you want to guess why? Or can you hear it from my thoughts.”

She closed her eyes, but reopened them after only a few seconds. “I can’t hear anything clearly anymore, and I don’t want to guess.” She squeezed my hand. “I want you to tell me,” she ordered somewhat brazenly.

“I would not desire to break the woman I see before me—not for the world,” I responded, my tone sounding more passionate and raw than I’d heard it in a while—maybe a century or two. Or maybe longer. Maybe ever.

She smiled a little. “That’s good to hear.”

“I *am* greatly drawn to you: your scent, your body, your blood, your virginity, your conversation, your wit,” I said. “I want all of those things—*only* for myself.”

“You’re a selfish being?” she asked, as she slipped her fingers from mine and sat back again.

I nodded. “*Very*. Tell me—are you a nun?”

She chuckled at the question and shook her head. “No.”

“Then—if you don’t mind my asking—how is it that you are still a virgin. You are what? Twenty-four? Twenty-five?”

“Twenty-five,” Sookie said with a blush, even as Mr. Cataliades continued to simply look into space—not really focusing on anything, except, perhaps, the advertisement for TrueBlood that was behind my desk—just as he’d been doing for the past ten minutes.

I posited that he was currently fulfilling the role of “ornamental chaperone” as Sookie and I got acquainted. In fact, I had the distinct impression that I was being interviewed by Sookie.

“It is odd that you are still a virgin, given the fact that a vampire has claimed you,” I commented.

She sneered. “Bill has tried to take enough from me already—including my self-determination and choices. Luckily, I didn’t give him anything other than a couple of hours of misguided affection before Mr. C helped me to understand what Bill’s blood was trying to do to corrupt my feelings.”

I smiled a little. “It is good to have allies who will tell us the truth when we cannot see it on our own.”

“Do you have people like that?” she asked.

I nodded. “A few.”

She smiled. “I’m glad.”

“So,” I said, somewhat playfully, “if you are not planning to become a nun, how is it that you are untouched? You are too beautiful not to have been sought after, Sookie Stackhouse.”

She blushed, so I pushed her a little. “Tell me—are you the kind of girl who wishes to wait until marriage before having intercourse?”

“Did you wait until your wedding—to the short girl?” she asked teasingly.

“No,” I chuckled. “I had no patience—then.”

She bit her lip. “But you’ve learned how to be—patient?”

My cock reacted to her flirting as well as that little bite to her lip. “In some things,” I chuckled.

Sookie smiled at me. “To answer your question, I’m neither a nun nor a saint.” She winked. “In fact, you should see the calendar I’ve been lusting over since January.”

“Oh?” I asked.

“Did they airbrush them? Your abs.”

“Wanna see for yourself?” I challenged.

“Maybe later,” she giggled. “Nice sheet, by the way,” she continued teasing. “Egyptian cotton?”

“Eight hundred thread count,” I chuckled.

“Not satin? Or silk?” she asked.

“Too cliché.”

“Did you pick the color?”

“They say white makes things look bigger.”

“Do you need help,” she asked with another bite to her lips, “looking bigger?”

“Not right now,” I answered innocently. “Wanna see for yourself?”

“Maybe later.” She laughed and then took a deep breath before deciding to satisfy my curiosity. “To answer your question—I’m still a virgin because I haven’t found someone I want to have sex with,” she said honestly, though her slight blush was back. She bit her lip again. “I can keep out the thoughts of humans if I want to, but that takes a lot of effort if there’s touching involved.”

“And you never found someone worth that effort?”

She shook her head. “No. To be honest—before any of my past dating relationships could move to more intimate levels, I’ve always heard something from my dates’ heads that gave me *pause*.”

“Like a den of snakes in a brain? Or thoughts about enslavement, marking, draining, etc.?”

She smirked. “No—*much* worse,” she said with mock seriousness.

“Really?”

“Yes—it’s *truly* disturbing what some guys think about when they’re on dates with me.”

I leaned forward in my seat a little. I felt my eyebrow arching in question. “Do tell.”

“Well—often—a guy will wish that he was with someone else—even as he works *really* hard to make me think that he wants to be only with me. Truthfully,” she said, lowering her voice conspiratorially, “I sometimes get the feeling that a guy doesn’t care about me at all—that he only wants to get into my pants.”

“No!” I said with mock surprise.

“Oh yes,” she replied impishly. “Or sometimes a guy will wish I could be different in some major way.”

“Bigger boobs?” I asked with a smirk.

“Usually fewer thoughts,” she returned sarcastically.

I chuckled.

“Or,” she continued, “a guy might be trying to hide something—but I always hear all about it.”

“What would guys these days be trying to hide? Thoughts of torture? Plans of how to hide the carcasses of rivals?”

She laughed. “Nothing so gallant. No—they will try to hide a secret girlfriend, an addiction to chewing tobacco, a strange fetish for pens that have run out of ink.”

“Pens that have run out of ink?” I couldn’t help but ask.

“You don’t want to know,” she said flatly.

“I think I do,” I chuckled.

“You *don’t*. Trust me,” she said more forcefully.

I leaned back in my chair. “I think I will trust you—on this matter.”

We were silent for a moment, sizing each other up once again. I was enjoying the encounter more than I should have based on how little I knew about her—and based upon the fact that there was a demon lawyer in the room who had yet to indicate his major role in the evening’s agenda.

Not to mention the fact that she’d been claimed by another.

“I agree with you,” I finally said.

“About what?”

“Bill Compton. You are *definitely* too good for him. But I don’t see what I can do about him. Unfortunately, staking vampires I find annoying isn’t legal. Moreover, Bill is a resident of New Orleans, and Area 1 is not in my purview—even if it does contain beauty beyond compare,” I added, looking at her pointedly.

She blushed again. “Then it is a good thing I’m not a resident of Area 1. I am from Bon Temps, Mr. Northman.”

I smiled. “*My* area. And, please, call me Eric.”

She smiled back. “Okay, Eric. I also have other news for you. About a month ago, old Jessie *Compton* passed away in Bon Temps, and his property was taken over by his only *living* relative.”

“Bill Compton,” I sneered.

She nodded. “Yes.”

“Am I to take it that Mr. Compton has not checked in with you?” Mr. Cataliades asked, popping into the conversation as if he’d always been a part of it.

“He has not,” I responded, wondering if Sookie could see the vicious glee in my eyes. I hadn’t had the opportunity to torture a weasel in a long time.

“How long do new vampire residents or visitors have before they must check in with you?” the demon asked.

“They are to check in on their first full night in my area *and* send paperwork preceding their arrival if they wish to settle here,” I informed.

“And Mr. Compton has not?” Cataliades asked with mock surprise.

“No. It must have slipped his mind,” I answered.

“Too much other stuff to do,” Sookie said bitterly.

“Obviously.”

“Can his oversight earn Mr. Compton a little *silver* treatment?” Sookie asked.

“Blood thirsty, min lilla ormtjusare?” I asked, not quite able to catch myself before saying the odd endearment.

She smiled a little, even as her eyebrow rose in silent questioning at what I’d said. She didn’t ask—at least not for the moment.

“It’s only fair that I want a little of Bill’s blood to be spilled, considering what he did to me,” she commented.

“Then consider it done,” I said, pulling out my phone and texting Pam.

“Sadly—and I do mean *sadly*—I cannot torture him and keep him in silver indefinitely,” I said after hitting the send button. “And—even more regrettably—Compton’s blood inside of you indicates that he’s made a claim on you.”

“But he has poached in your area,” the demon lawyer reminded.

“Yes, but he was sent by the queen. It is unwise of Sophie-Anne to alienate me, but the only recourse I have at this time is to file a grievance, and that will not help you. The queen will be required to pay me a fine,” I paused and observed Sookie closely, “based on your *perceived* worth.”

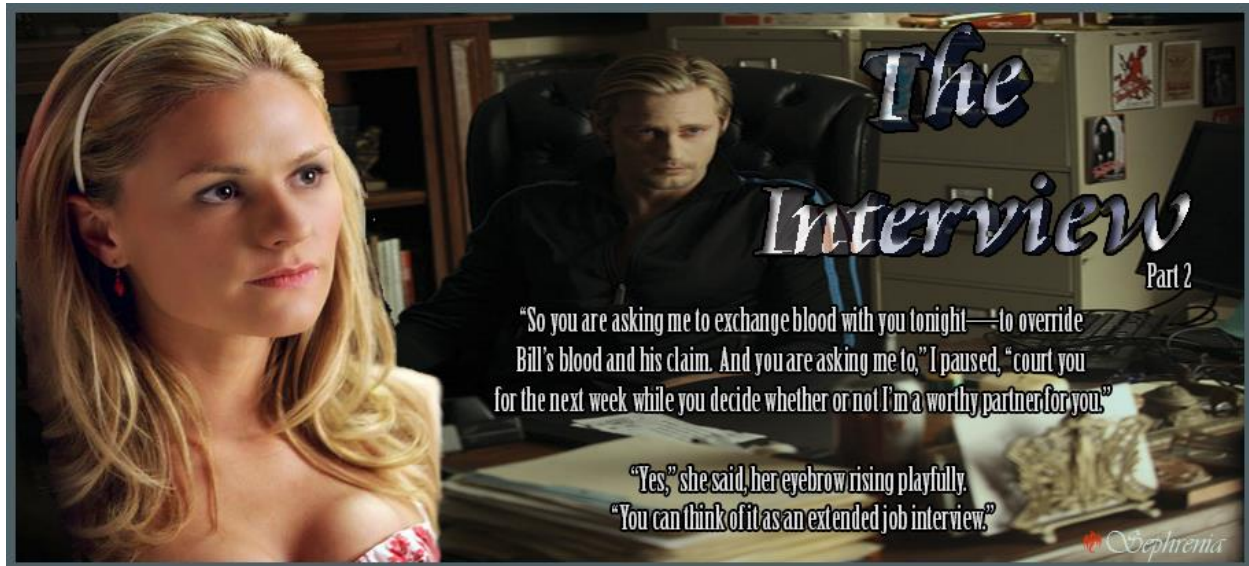
She took a deep breath, and I could see fear and anger battling in her eyes; the anger won and then was met with resolution. I smiled a little. Sookie was a warrior at heart.

It was even more of a pity—for the both of us—that she was tied to such an unworthy asshole.

Sookie took another deep breath and glanced at the demon lawyer before looking back at me.

“Then I have a proposal for you,” she said.

Chapter 05: The Interview, Part 1



Sookie POV

“Then I have a proposal for you.”

As soon as the words were out of my mouth, I regretted them in a way that I hadn’t anticipated. Oh—it wasn’t that I didn’t want Eric Northman to “claim” me. With every second I was in his company, I found myself wanting that more and more—and not just because it was convenient or smart.

No—I felt pause because I knew that my proposal would surely endanger him, and the truth was that I didn’t want to jeopardize him—not in any way.

Yes—it was safe to say that I liked him—*very* much.

There was a kind of openness about Eric—a playfulness that would have attracted me whether he was a human, Were, fairy, demon, vampire, or any combination thereof. His eyes sparkled as he spoke with me, crackling with his various emotions. I could tell that he was a

vampire who didn't enjoy playing petty games, though I imagined he could strategize with the best of them. There was a kind of vulnerability about him too—an openness that I intuited not very many had seen. That directness and sincerity made me want to open up to him in return. He wasn't reticent about letting his guard down in front of me—or, by extension, Mr. C—and I found that fact extremely appealing. He was certain of himself, unapologetic about who he was or what he wanted.

And he wanted me. His mind had told me that very clearly! However, the *many* ways in which he wanted me floored me. The strength of his passion had seemed immediate and almost lethal. And I had no doubt that Eric could be quite deadly when he wanted to be. After all, the snake attacked when something fucked with it.

And—added to all of my other concerns—it was becoming more and more difficult for me to ignore Eric's inquiries about my sex life, as well as the way that his desire-laden thoughts had moved into my mind like molten lava.

In short—I wanted him too. *Badly.*

In the sexual experience department, he and I couldn't have been more different. I had seen the memories of a cross-section of the humans—women and men—that he'd had sex with and fed from.

In their minds, Eric was idealized. But I could see more than they let themselves see. There had been a kind of cold, perfunctory staccato to Eric's movements during his sexual encounters with the humans in the bar. The subtle and almost unbearably tender movements of the vampire who had stroked my fingers with his own were nothing like the behavior the fangbangers recalled. Moreover—in their memories—Eric's eyes were devoid of passion. There had been pleasure in his eyes, but no *burning*. Even as he'd fed from them, his eyes

hadn't conveyed "hunger"—not the kind that I was witnessing even now as he looked at me with questions in his eyes—so many questions that I didn't think I could ever answer them all.

Maybe it was just wishful thinking on my part, but I couldn't help but to theorize that the myriad of humans in the buffet that was Fangtasia bored Eric.

Yes—when it came to sexual experience, I knew that I was the complete opposite of Eric Northman. I hadn't been exaggerating when I'd told him that the men I'd been interested in pursuing intimate relationships with had all turned me off with their thoughts. Hell—I'd had only three proper kisses. And I'd only been able to tolerate even the innocuous JB du Rone's thoughts long enough to get my boob touched once.

Tara had suggested that I get drunk and pick up a nameless man in a bar in another town—someone that I could screw and then never see again. Tara thought that I should just “get my first time over with”—so that sex wouldn't seem like such a big deal to me.

But what was wrong with my making it a big deal?

In truth, I *wanted* to have sex—badly. However, it was the *intimacy* of the act that I truly craved—the touching of body, mind, and spirit. Maybe I wanted too much, but Gran and Fintan hadn't raised someone who was afraid of asking for the stars—even when she saw only clouds.

Though I didn't generally dwell in anyone's thoughts about their sexual acts—I knew that most people had never found what I craved, at least not in an act of sex. Most people had sex because they were looking for intimacy. Gran had told me once that I should consider waiting to have sex until *after* I'd already found intimacy.

So I'd chosen to wait.

I suppose—in the end—I liked the “feeling” of Gran's memories about the intimacy she'd shared with Grandpa Mitchell and Fintan a lot more than the “feeling” of other people's

ultimate disappointment after most of their sexual encounters. And that's why I had become quite adept at bringing myself physical pleasure—thank you very much!

However, as I looked at Eric, I couldn't help but to want to trade in my hand and my vibrator for something else—him. *All of him!*

Perhaps I was just star-struck because I'd been lusting for "calendar Eric" for months, but I couldn't help but to think that Eric was just the kind of man with whom I would like to try to build a relationship. He was astonishingly clever and devilishly funny. He was successful and driven, direct and playful. And—dear God in heaven—was he beautiful!

And he seemed as attracted to me as I was to him—maybe even more so. Of course, part of that probably had to do with the fact that Mr. C had given me a potion so that my scent would be amped up and, therefore, hide Bill's scent so that no other vampire would smell Bill's blood in me.

The potion, which would wear off in a couple of hours, was also working to "muddle" Bill's tie to me so that he couldn't easily track me. To make sure that Bill didn't try to use coercion to try to find me, Jason and Gran were currently hiding out with one of Mr. C's demon friends in Shreveport. And, to ensure that Bill didn't contact the queen once he realized he couldn't get to me, Mr. C and I had decided to give Eric a temptation he couldn't resist: the prospect of "having some fun" with Bill. I figured that Bill would be getting acquainted with Pam quite soon. And—though I didn't know her personally—it was easy to tell that she'd be up for the challenge of keeping Bill "subdued" or screaming; I didn't really care which at this point.

I sighed. If things didn't go well with Eric, Plan B was to ask the Viking to let Bill go after he'd given Bill a brief "lesson" in the rules of Area 5. Then Bill would follow the tie to me, and—with help from Mr. C and his friends—I'd kill him. I felt a little bad about that, but Bill

had made his own bed, and a witch's spell was just as likely to kill me as to break the tie. I just wasn't willing to risk that for someone like Bill.

It had been Fintan's teaching that had helped me to understand that I would have to operate according to Supe standards of "justice" if I ever found myself in the Supe world. My fairy grandfather had grinned at me as he'd told me that I had four options when it came to dealing with "Supe shit": 1.) I could follow the rules and give myself a better chance of living; 2.) I could break the rules without forethought and likely be killed; 3.) I could hide the fact that I was breaking the rules by staying under the radar; or 4.) I could try to change the rules—though that meant I'd have to put myself into the vulnerable position of being able to effect change.

I couldn't help but to wonder if Fintan had tried to do the fourth so that he would no longer have to do the third. I couldn't help but to wonder if that's why he'd been killed.

"I think that there are many thoughts swirling in your mind, Sookie, and I am no mind-reader," Eric said, breaking me from those thoughts. He was looking at me with intense contemplation, and he sat forward a little. "But from your eyes, I can tell that you are questioning something," he added. "Is it me?"

I shook my head. "No," I answered quickly. "As I said, I have a proposal for you, but I'm finding that I like you a little too much to want to broach it."

Eric nodded and sat back. "I believe I like you a little too much too, considering that I know very few *facts* about you," he said, emphasizing the word "facts."

I gasped. Eric's implication wasn't difficult for me to pick up on. He was suggesting that he "knew" some things about me instinctively. I felt the same way about him, which was why his snarly, snaky mind hadn't frightened me. After all, I'd grown up in the country, and I knew that snakes were good for the land and the ecosystem. For example, they helped get rid of

the vermin. Most snakes weren't even poisonous! And the ones that were acted in self-defense or in defense of their territories, usually striking only those whom they perceived as threats or those who had foolishly riled them.

In fact, I still sometimes wondered about the water moccasin in the Voodoo witch's aquarium. Oh—it didn't matter if it had any real magical powers or not. It didn't even matter to me that it had “pronounced” that I was cursed beyond help. What mattered to me was that it was trapped in that tiny glass cage. Even when I was a child, I'd wanted to let it out.

“You're getting lost in your thoughts again,” Eric observed.

“I am.”

“What are you thinking about?” he asked.

I smirked. “Snakes.”

He chuckled. “What do you think about them? Do you find them sneaky and dangerous?”

“Not really,” I answered. “I think they're graceful and clever.”

He smiled, and I could tell that it was genuine. “When I was about ten years old, I was picking björnbärs for my mother.”

“Björnbärs?” I asked, trying to copy his pronunciation—and failing miserably.

“Blackberries,” he smiled. “My favorite.”

“Mine too,” I responded with a frown.

“Why does that make you sad, Sookie?” he asked.

“You can no longer eat them.”

His smile turned warmer—somehow more significant. “I no longer need them for nourishment, and my ability to take in their flavor through their scent grew exponentially when I became a vampire. I still enjoy them—now more than ever. Just—in a different way.”

As I let his words sink in, I realized that the smile had returned to my lips. “So—uh—what happened when you were picking blackberries for your mother?”

“I came across a *vipera berus*—known as the common European adder now. It was the only poisonous snake native to the area I was from.”



“What did you do?” I asked.

“I went about my work, though I kept an eye out for it. My mother had taught me not to antagonize such snakes; she had told me that I needed to respect their domain.”

“A good lesson,” I said.

“Yes. Unfortunately, a group of older boys had not learned that lesson. They were what you might call bullies. When they came to pick on me, they saw the snake and turned their interest to it.”

I sat forward, enthralled by Eric's story. "What did they do?"

"They picked up sticks and moved to kill the snake." Eric shook his head. "I knew better; I knew that the snake might be there to test their honor—and mine."

"Test your honor?" I asked.

He nodded. "Yes. To disrespect and threaten such a creature was foolhardy and showed a weakness of character. The bullies demonstrated their lack of deference for a creature that was simply taking in the sun and coexisting in peace."

"How was *your* honor tested?" I asked.

"I could have run; I could have celebrated the fact that the boys had chosen the snake as the target of their aggression, instead of me."

"But you didn't," I stated, knowing that to be true already.

The next thing I knew, Eric's large boot was up on the arm of my chair, and he was pulling up his left jean leg. He twisted his leg until I could see a small pair of marks. I reached out to run my fingers over them. The scars themselves felt like two tiny dimples in his skin, which was otherwise smooth and cool. I let my fingers appreciate the softness of the fine blonde hairs covering his flesh before I pulled my hand away. When I looked up at him, his fangs were down—looking quite ready to leave little scars of their own.

Unconcerned, Mr. C seemed to be pondering the file cabinets.

"Your touch has a very *immediate* effect upon me, Sookie," Eric said in a gruff tone.

My eyes—seemingly of their own accord—shifted to Eric's crotch area to look for any other effects my touch might have had. The bulge I saw made me gulp.

I heard Eric's fangs retract as he chuckled again. He lowered his jeans leg and retook his seat before I could register that he was moving.



“So the snake struck you,” I said with a little stammer.

He nodded. “I stepped between the boys and the snake; I was intent to fight them so that they would leave the snake alone.”

“But it struck you instead,” I observed.

“Yes. A final test for them *and* for me.”

“How?”

“They ran away when I went down. They neither helped me, nor did they tell others what had happened.”

“Did you tell on them?”

He shook his head. “No. But I remembered. It wasn’t long before I overtook them in strength, and I shamed them many times in the sparring ring. Later, when I became king, I showed them no favor or trust, for they had demonstrated that they deserved neither.”

“What was *your* final test—with the snake?” I asked.

He smiled and shrugged a little. “I survived. I slowed the venom by tying a strip of my tunic above the wound. Then, I rubbed the fang marks with the juice of a healing herb my grandmother had taught me about. Then, I made my way home—about two miles. Doctored by my mother, my grandmother, and the wise woman in the village, I lived through the fever caused by the venom.”

“Wise woman?” I asked.

“Women of her ilk have been called many things over the years: healers, nurses, witches.” His eyes were sparkling with life. “In my village, we called her wise—*fróðr*.”

I smiled. “I like that.”

Eric sat forward a little. “When I recovered from the venom, I went back to the place where I was bitten and saw the snake again.”

“How do you know it was the same one?” I asked.

“The same way I know *every* snake that lives within my head.”

We looked at each other in silence for a moment before we both laughed.

“Why did you go see the snake again?” I asked.

“I wanted to tell it that I bore it no ill will and that I understood its reason for striking at me—and not the other boys.”

My heart jumped a little at his words, and I looked at Mr. C with uncertainty. He was looking at me knowingly.

“You no longer wish to tell me your proposal,” Eric said perceptively.

“No—what I propose would be dangerous for you,” I said, looking back at him.

“You are afraid that if you ask me to protect you from the bully, I may be struck by the snake?” he queried.

“Yes. Something like that,” I said.

“Make your proposal to me, Sookie Stackhouse,” he said quietly—gently. “I should, at least, be presented with the test—should I not?”

I took a deep breath and nodded in affirmation. “First you should know that my name is actually Sookie Brigant, but it would be best if that name doesn’t get out.”

Eric’s eyes narrowed. “I knew a Brigant once.”

“Fintan is her grandfather,” Mr. C said.

“Fintan, the son of Niall?” Eric asked to clarify.

“Yes,” Mr. C said.

“Fintan saved my maker’s life—and more. Whatever you need, I will give you,” Eric said to me passionately.

“I don’t want you helping me out of obligation,” I breathed.

He leaned forward a little. “Why do *you* think I should be helping you?”

“Mutual benefit,” I said, even as Mr. C pulled the contract out of his briefcase and slid it toward Eric.

Chapter 06: The Interview, Part 2



Eric POV

I looked at the demon. “You have heard the story of Fintan and my maker?” I asked.

He nodded in confirmation. His eyes looked saddened, and I could tell that he missed his friend greatly.

“Do you know it?” I asked Sookie.

“No—but I’d like to,” she said in a whisper.

I nodded and began speaking, letting my memories fill me.

“When I was only fifty years old—as a vampire, that is—Godric and I were employed by the vampire king of Ireland, a gruff fellow by the name of Corbmac.

“Corbmac had a treaty with a group of Fae, who lived in the south of the country—near Cork. Corbmac was wiser than he was greedy, and he knew that warring with the Fae was foolhardy. So, in exchange for Corbmac’s keeping his vampires from hunting them, the fairies

gave Corbmac any criminals that they had sentenced to death; thus, the king occasionally got to enjoy a fairy “treat” without risking his kingdom or subjects to do it.

“Clear boundaries were set up between the vampires and the fairies. Trade agreements were made. Exchanges of knowledge were given. The treaty had held for centuries—even before Godric and I arrived in Ireland.

“Sensing my maker’s age and control, Corbmac asked Godric to guard one of the borders of the Fae territory. Godric agreed, for he wanted to use the opportunity to teach me control—the hard way.”

I smiled wryly at Sookie as I continued, “For many years, I was forced to squelch my desire to hunt the creatures that smelled divine—even from afar. But—Godric had been right to teach me. My ability to control my impulses developed quickly. Over the years, I have realized the efficacy of Godric’s training methods, and I have *learned* how to be grateful for them.”

“Learned?” Sookie asked.

I chuckled ruefully. “Yes—but it took a while. At the time, of course, it had seemed like torture not to hunt.”

She smiled and—answering to an impulse I couldn’t determine the source of—I reached out and took her greeting hand as I continued the story: “When Godric and I had been in place for about ten years, Corbmac’s child, Hilde, betrayed her king and maker; she glamoured her human lover to stake Corbmac and installed herself as ruler. Godric decided that he and I would not serve such a queen.

“However, before we left the area, Godric felt the need to warn the fairies, specifically a young half-fae, whom he had met several times for purposes of trade.”

“Fintan,” Sookie whispered.

“Yes. Unfortunately, we were too late to prevent Hilde’s attack, but Godric and I joined the Fae warriors—though Godric had to issue *several* commands to me so that I didn’t suddenly change sides and go for the fairy blood rather than Hilde’s forces.

“That night, I learned that makers’ commands truly were stronger than any other impulse,” I added drolly.

She chuckled.

I went on. “As Corbmac had foreseen, the fairies were not to be trifled with, and Hilde’s forces were driven back. The vampires who did capture fairies gorged themselves and became drunk on Fae blood, making them easier targets for the other fairies to eliminate.

“Godric and I fought right next to Fintan all night, and—when dawn was near—Fintan showed us a place where we could rest safely. Even as the other fairies used the day to find the hastily buried bodies of their remaining foes, Fintan watched over Godric and myself. However, one of the stronger fairies decided that even the vampires who had been helping them needed to be killed. He tried to end Godric and me during our day-death.”

Sookie squeezed my hand almost possessively. “But Fintan stopped him?”

I nodded and gave her a gentle squeeze in return. “When Godric and I awoke, we found Fintan injured; the fairy who had fought him had been mortally wounded. My maker gave me a reward for my years of control: I got to drain what was left of that fairy’s blood.”

My cock throbbed as Sookie grinned almost devilishly.

I grinned back. “After that, I was—indeed—drunk, so Godric commanded me to stay seated and still until I was in control once more. Meanwhile, he tended to Fintan’s wounds and gave Fintan his own blood so that he would heal.

“Fintan became a little “high” on my maker’s blood, and—the next thing I knew—he and Godric were passionately kissing. That day the foundation of a long-term love affair was forged between my maker and Fintan.”

I looked closely at Sookie. “You have obviously inherited Fintan’s warrior mentality and his tolerance.” I tilted my head a little. “As well as his cheekbones.”

She giggled.

Reluctantly, I extracted my hand from hers as I picked up the document the demon had placed onto the desk. There was a lot of information to take in, but I read it quickly.

After I was done, I set it down and looked back at Sookie. She was biting her bottom lip a little.

I found that her nervous tic turned me on more than words could say.

“You wish for me to override Bill Compton’s claim by creating a tie with you,” I commented.

She nodded. “Yes.”

“How would I explain that breach of protocol?”

“Easy. Sookie came into Fangtasia tonight and her scent entranced you,” the demon stated flatly. “All vampires here can attest to how enticing she was. And all can attest that she requested a private audience with you. By the end of your encounter with her, you had claimed her and she had accepted your claim—choosing you over a younger vampire.”

“I will *not* have Sookie perceived as a fangbanger looking to trade up!” I stormed, surprising myself with my fervor.

Sookie jumped a little at my raised voice but quickly composed herself.

Mr. Cataliades smiled. “Sookie doesn’t care how she is perceived.”

I looked at her in question.

“I don’t. What matters to me is what is *true*,” she said.

“Compton?” I asked.

“Your claim would negate his,” the demon said. “In fact, your blood would literally eradicate his—would it not?”

I nodded. “Yes,” I said. “Since there has been only one tie made between Bill and Sookie, even a few drops of my blood would find and easily destroy all of Bill’s blood within a few days of being in Sookie’s bloodstream.”

Sookie sighed with relief.

“You would still have *my* blood in you, Sookie,” I said to her. “All of the things Bill could do, I could do to an even greater effect. I would be able to track you. I would be able to feel your emotions—and even affect them. I could influence you to dream of me. I could compel you to *want* me.”

She smiled a little. “You forget. I already saw into your mind.”

I shook my head a little. “And you are not afraid of me?” I asked, finding her lack of fear both surprising and fascinating.

She shrugged. “I have a feeling that anyone who is your enemy should fear you *very* much. But you’ve not given me a reason to be afraid of you; otherwise, we would have never shown you that,” she said, gesturing toward the contract. “In truth, I’m glad you would be able to track me; I figure that if we do decide to do this, I’d call you if I was in trouble anyway. So your being able to feel my emotions and track me would just expedite things.”

“You do not worry that I will know what you are feeling?”

“I’m a telepath,” she said with a light laugh. “I’ve been in and out of heads my whole life. I’m not afraid of you being in and out of my feelings.”

I sat forward. “I *could* influence them.”

She tilted her head a little. “What could you do—make me attracted to you?” She chuckled. “I hate to burst your bubble, cowboy, but I’m afraid it would be difficult to make me feel any *more* attracted to you than I already am, but feel free to try.”

I laughed heartily.

Sookie shrugged. “Don’t get me wrong—your thoughts *were* scary to me in some ways, Eric. You’re a Supe, and I’ve been living mostly in the human world. Therefore, I know you think a little differently about the world than I do. But, since I was ten, I’ve known that my world would one day tip toward yours. And I think you could help me find my place in the supernatural world—*if* you’re willing.”

“And Compton?” I asked again.

“Obviously, I don’t think he would be good at helping me find my place,” she deadpanned. She took a deep breath. “I don’t like thinking about anyone dying. But if you think Bill is a problem, then we’ll do what we have to do.”

I sat forward in my chair. “I could kill him for you; that would solve the problem of the tie *without* your needing to form one with me,” I said.

She nodded. “Thank you. But that wouldn’t help with the fact that the queen knows all about me. I’d still have to run away.”

I smirked. “And you aren’t one to run?”

“Not when there’s a better option,” she returned, looking at me a little hopefully.

I gave Sookie a little smile and then looked back at Cataliades. “You are Sophie-Anne’s lawyer and have been around her more than I have been. What will she do if I claim Sookie?”

“If she is wise, she will *forget* that she ever knew about Sookie’s gifts and order her minions to do the same. The queen *should* have told you about Sookie since she is a resident in your area. Sophie-Anne did not, so you had no way of knowing about her ultimate plans for Sookie,” Mr. Cataliades said. “After all,” the demon smirked, “you can’t read her mind.”

I chuckled. “The queen might find it suspicious that I put her minion, Bill Compton, into silver the same night I claimed Sookie as my own,” I observed.

Sookie chimed in with a well-rehearsed speech. “I *had* intended to meet Bill at my house an hour after sundown tonight, but I went shopping in Shreveport for a new dress for my date, and I was running late. That’s when I decided that I would come to Fangtasia—as a surprise for Bill! I figured that I could call him once I was here. Then we could hang out for a while so that he could meet other vampires. After all, he *is* new to the area, and this is the closest vampire bar to Bon Temps. Plus, I wanted to show Bill that I accepted the fact that he is a vampire,” she added with a smirk.

“That’s magnanimous of you,” I intoned.

“I think so.” She smiled impishly. “Bill has no idea that I’m aware of his duplicity *or* his job for the queen. He didn’t tell me about vampire blood ties or anything else. It’s certainly not my fault that I was more attracted to you once I got here. After all,” she added with a smirk that made my cock twitch yet again, “you’re Mr. January himself and—frankly—Bill’s a little creepy with his nineteenth century sideburns and broody disposition.”

I chuckled.

“And how was I to know that my *innocent* mention of Bill would lead to his getting into trouble since he didn’t check in with you?” she went on.

“In fact,” Mr. Cataliades added in a professional-sounding tone, “it stands to reason—from a legal standpoint—that Bill’s lack of proper protocol factored into your decision to claim Sookie, for it would serve as a punishment to Bill and a warning to other newcomers to follow the rules. Your claiming of Miss Stackhouse seems to be above board and reasonable—no matter how I look at it.”

I looked from Mr. Cataliades to Sookie.

“Even in the best case scenario, the queen will still want the use of your telepathy,” I said cautiously, making sure that Sookie understood that my claiming of her might not be the end of her troubles.

“I know,” she sighed. “But Sophie-Anne will have to work through you. And, because of that, she’ll request my services only when she has good reason.”

“And—for your wellbeing—I will have to limit the time you can spend working for her,” I smirked.

She smiled a little. “Yes—as you know—using my telepathy tires me greatly.”

I nodded with mock solemnity. “Yes. That much is clear. You are obviously greatly taxed—so much so that I am worried that you will fall over at any minute.”

She winked. “I appreciate your concern. Reading that *one* human *really* tired me out.”

I couldn’t help but to smile at her. She was a clever one—that was for sure. Since she couldn’t keep her gift a secret, she intended to “spin it”—with the help of Mr. Cataliades and myself. That “rebranding” had been spelled out clearly in the contract she was proposing to me.

It turned out that the demon was Sookie's godfather, and he was going to "recognize" Sookie, Hadley, and Jason as distant cousins—so that people would assume they had demon blood and *not* fairy blood. Cataliades would claim that he'd had no idea of the kinship until he met *Hadley* and caught a whiff of her scent.

Demons, of course, were not known for being especially alluring to vampires—given their brimstone "aftertaste"; however, some human-demon hybrids were, in fact, thought to be "sweeter" than normal humans—once the brimstone was adequately diluted from the blood.

I marveled at the way Sookie's proposal had been so well thought out and couldn't help but to see the mosaic mind of Sookie behind a lot of it—though I was sure that the demon had advised her.

I shook my head a little as I continued to marvel at the nuances of Sookie's plan. The presence of demon blood would also account for Sookie's telepathy; though the ability to read thoughts was an uncommon gift among the Dae, it wasn't unheard of.

And—conveniently—gifts worked very differently for fairies and demons. For a fairy, the strength of a gift was tied to the strength of the spark, which was totally independent of the ratio of human to fairy blood in an individual. For a demon, the strength of the gift was interdependent on the amount of Dae blood in the system.

Thus, no one would question the notion that Sookie's telepathy was weak—once the queen was convinced that Dae blood had caused it. And, not knowing otherwise, Compton couldn't contradict the claim that Sookie's gift was weak; in fact, anything he said would only substantiate it.

"So," I said, "if I were to claim you, I would have access to your telepathy—within reason, of course. And I would also have access to your blood?"

“Within reason, of course,” she said coyly.

I chuckled, but then sobered. “The queen knows me, Sookie. She knows that I would *not* claim you without ‘claiming’ you in other ways too.”

She took a deep breath and nodded. “I know.” She took another deep breath. “That’s one of the reasons for the weeklong ‘courtship’ period.”

“Ah—yes,” I said, leaning back in my chair and threading my fingers together before placing my hands behind my head. “You want to audition me.”

“And you should audition me too,” she returned quickly, “so that you can be sure you even want to make a permanent arrangement with me. As the contract says, there are other factors that you need to consider.”

“Like the potential threat of Niall Brigant’s enemies?”

She nodded. “Yes.”

I leaned forward. “Just so that we understand each other clearly,” I leered, “if we decide to make our arrangement permanent, then your virginity will become a thing of the past. And I *don’t* take by force.”

“Then you’ll just have to seduce me, Mr. Northman,” she said with a bite to her lip. “I could do worse for my first time,” she added, trying to sound neutral, though the flush of her cheeks and the scent of her arousal told me differently.

I leaned forward a little more. “If the demon was not here, I might be tempted to begin the seduction now, Miss Brigant.”

“Oh—you’ve managed pretty well so far,” she said coyly.

I chuckled and adjusted myself in a very obvious way. “So have you, *min lilla ormtjusare*.”

“What does that mean?” she asked, even as her cheeks flushed pink. “You said it before too.”

“It means my little snake charmer,” I smirked as I adjusted my cock again.

She gulped loudly and moved the subject to “safer” matters.

“So—uh—I figure that we have about a week before the queen starts asking questions about Bill and you have to let him out of the silver—right?” Sookie asked.

I nodded. “That is a reasonable timeframe.”

“Well—during that week—we can get to know each other. If we decide to—uh—work together after that, then we can do it with our eyes wide open.” She took a deep breath. “If we don’t, then I expect you to let me go—just like the contract stipulates.”

“So that you can change your identity and escape Sophie-Anne’s clutches.”

She nodded. “Yes.”

“And what of Compton then?” I asked.

“We’ll have to go with Plan B. As soon as you release him, Bill would have to be killed,” Sookie sighed.

Mr. Cataliades piped in, speaking directly to me. “We’ll make sure that you are not implicated in Bill’s death. Sophie-Anne need never know that you and Sookie exchanged blood. And—eventually—the tie between you and Sookie would just wear off.”

I found that I didn’t like the sound of that. I gave the demon lawyer a slight snarl, causing him to chuckle and recommence his contemplation of the filing cabinets.

I turned back to Sookie, who was smirking at both Mr. Cataliades and myself.

“So I am Plan A?” I asked Sookie.

“Definitely,” she said.

I glanced at the contract. “So you are asking me to exchange blood with you *tonight*—in order to immediately override Bill’s blood and his claim. And you are asking me to,” I paused, “*court* you for the next week while you decide whether or not I’m a worthy partner for you.”

“Yes,” she said, her eyebrow rising playfully. “You can think of it as an extended job interview—for both of us.”

I couldn’t hold in my laughter. The fairy hybrid in front of me was certainly audacious!

“So—if we pass the interview stage—we would then complete a blood bond. You know that would be permanent—correct?”

“Yes.”

I nodded at her confirmation. “And after we formed this bond, I would officially register you as ‘mine’ with my queen and with the supernatural council.”

“Yes. And, at the same time, you and I would file a separate contract which spells out that I’m your telepath and also outlines the limits of my gift,” she said with a wink.

“And then Mr. Cataliades would make his announcement that he is related to your family.”

“Yes,” Sookie confirmed, “as soon as his people adequately plant a demon into my family tree—that is.”

“And I will provide you and your grandmother and your brother with my protection,” I said.

“Yes, but Mr. C would help with the expense if you want.”

I shook my head. “That wouldn’t be necessary.”

She smiled a little.

I tapped the contract with my fingers. “According to this, after we bonded, I would have to let you live an independent life—*mostly* apart from me—if you so choose—except, of course, for when your telepathy was in use.”

Her smile had faded. “Yes—if that’s what I wanted,” she said quietly, almost regretfully.

“And there would be limits on how often I could drink from you.”

She nodded in confirmation.

“What if *I* wanted more from you than this?”

She leaned forward. “The contract is clear,” she answered, looking at me with emotion-filled eyes and biting her lip. “What you just outlined is the bare minimum. If we *both* wanted more, then we could have it.” She took a breath. “Especially after meeting you, I truly hope you want more, Eric. I truly hope that we will want the same things,” she said sincerely. “But I need to,” she paused, “protect myself.”

“Do you think a mere piece of paper would be enough to protect you from me if I decided to take *more* than you are offering?” I asked with a hint of threat in my tone.

The demon didn’t react.

“I *know* it would be enough—if *you* signed it,” Sookie said confidently. “Hell—at this point—I would probably just take your word for it.”

“You trust me?” I asked, somewhat surprised.

She chuckled. “Yeah—you have good references.”

I couldn’t help but to chuckle as well.

“And then there’s this,” she added, as she took a bundle from her purse and opened it up to reveal a dagger I recognized very well.”

If I had still been human, I would have gasped.

Deliberately, she put the item down on my desk between us. We both regarded it silently for a moment.

“Do you know what the runes mean?” she asked as she lightly traced one of the figures on the handle.

I nodded. “Yes.” I touched the tip of the dagger, though I did not press my finger against it enough to draw blood. “Godric showed me this dagger many years ago—before he gave it to your kinsman as a symbol of his love and his pledge.”

“His pledge?”

“A pledging is the vampire version of marriage,” I informed. “If you had handed me this dagger and I had accepted it and brought it to my lips, we would now be married in my world. Did your advisor not tell you that?” I asked, gesturing toward the demon.

Cataliades grunted and a smirk formed on his lips, but he continued to look at the filing cabinet.

“Not exactly. He just said that I should be careful to *not* hand the dagger directly to you,” Sookie said with a grin.

I chuckled. “Wise lawyer. I *might* have tried to take advantage.”

Cataliades grunted again and rolled his eyes.

“Will you tell me—what the runes mean?” Sookie asked after another moment of silence had passed between us.

I pointed to the symbols on the blade. “These are a prayer asking the gods to keep all enemies away from the one who carries this dagger.”

“And these?”

I moved my fingers so that they were touching hers on the handle. For a moment, we traced the runes together. “These speak of love.”

“Tell me what they say?” she half-asked and half-ordered.

I gently entwined her fingers with mine so that I could guide them over the runes as I translated them: *“The night came when it was more painful to deny my love than to give you my heart.”*



“That’s beautiful,” Sookie whispered.

Again, we were silent for a moment.

When I spoke, it was softly. “Godric had this dagger forged by demons. He carved and etched the runes himself. It took him many nights to complete them. Then he had the dagger blessed by a powerful witch.”

“How long ago did he give it to Fintan?”

“Almost eight hundred years ago,” I answered.

Sookie gasped a little. “So all that time? They were married for all that time?”

“Yes—theirs was a long union, but I know my maker wishes it had been longer.”

Sookie wiped away a tear and smiled a little. “I know that Supes have different ideas about marriage and sex and fidelity, but thinking of my grandfather marrying your maker hundreds of years before he hooked up with my grandmother is a little freaky.”

Recognizing that she was trying to lighten the mood a little, I smiled back at her. “Many different experiences come with length of life, *min lilla ormtjusare*. But—as for your mention of fidelity—I believe that Godric and Fintan would have stayed faithful to one another if they could have lived together.”

“But that wasn’t possible,” she said sadly.

“No,” I returned. “It would have been too dangerous—for both of them.”

She looked up at me with bright eyes. “I wish I’d been brave enough to come here—to meet you—when I first knew of you, but my grandfather cautioned me that vampires would be extra attracted to my scent. And I don’t have the ability he had.”

“To hide his scent,” I said, remembering how Fintan had been able to do just that—at least, when he wasn’t bleeding.

“Did you ever—um—get intimate with my grandfather?” she asked, turning beet red.

“No,” I responded with a light chuckle. “Godric was quite selfish with Fintan. Most of their time together was spent alone—though something of a friendship developed between your grandfather and me over the years.”

“Good,” Sookie said, letting out a sigh of relief. “Thinking about you having sex with Fintan would have been a little too weird—I think.”

I chuckled a little louder.

“I would like to call Godric—to tell him about all of this,” I requested after a few moments.

“You want to seek his advice before you decide what to do about my proposal?” she asked.

“No. I have already decided what I want to do. I just think it would be nice to introduce you to Godric—because you are Fintan’s granddaughter, and he lives on in you. Godric was quite distraught when he learned of Fintan’s death. In truth, he has not been the same since,” I finished quietly, already counting on Sookie’s discretion, just as I knew I could count on the discretion of Mr. Cataliades. Not only was the demon known for his ability to keep the secrets of his clients, but he had also been a friend to Fintan.

“Oh—well—that’s fine,” Sookie smiled. “I’d like to meet him—Godric. And he should have this,” she added, looking at the dagger.

I smiled at her, content that we were still tracing the runes on the dagger handle together.

“Wait!” she said, stopping the movement of our fingers. “You’ve decided?”

I nodded.

“What did you decide?” she asked tentatively.

“I *want* to claim you as my own,” I responded.

“But the queen may target you! And what about Niall’s enemies?” Sookie said as if she were trying to talk me out of my decision.

“You worry about me?” I asked her, a little surprised that she seemed so sincerely concerned about my safety.

“Yes,” she responded quickly.

“What will you do if I don’t claim you?” I asked.

“Well—I’ll have to ask you to let Bill loose so that he can track me down tonight. We’d kill him, and then I’d go into hiding—and start a new life—with my grandmother and brother,” she said a little sadly.

“I do not like the idea of your leaving my area now that I know you are a resident,” I said.

Her smile for me was slow-forming and warm; it lit up the whole room.

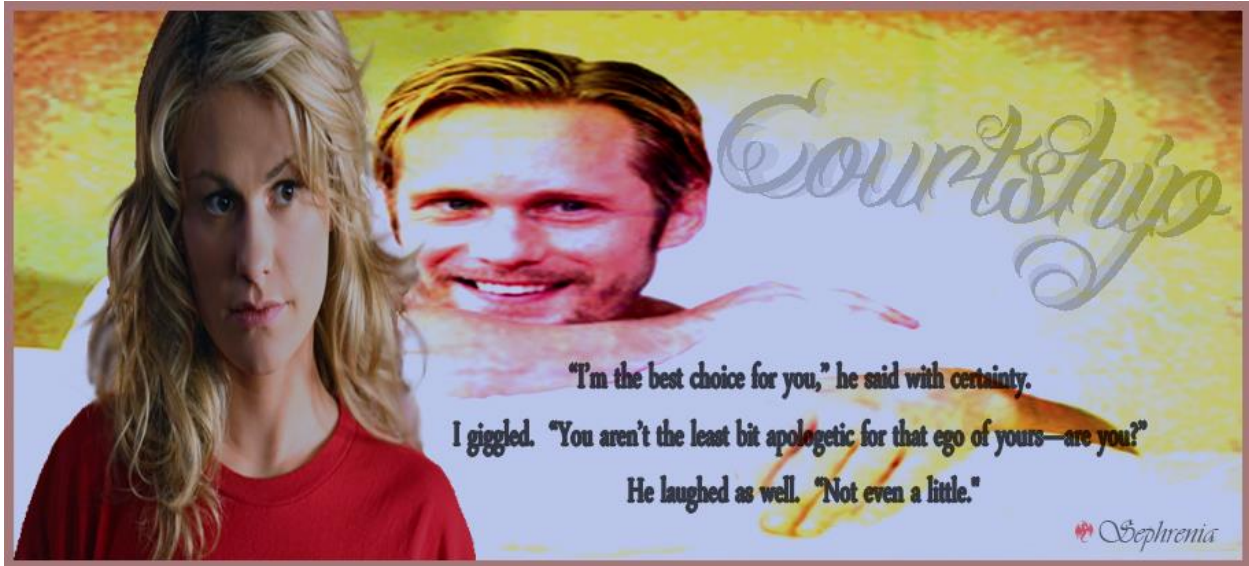
“Is that why you’re agreeing to claim me?” she asked.

“That is merely one of the reasons,” I responded truthfully.

“So—uh—we’ll exchange blood and then—uh—start our trial week?” she asked biting her alluring lip again.

I nodded, knowing already that I would require much less than a week to be certain that I wanted to keep Sookie by my side—permanently. In fact, I didn’t require another second.

Chapter 07: Courtship



“Thou and I are too wise to woo peaceably.”

—William Shakespeare

June 15, 2004, 4:00 p.m., Shreveport

Dear Diary,

It's difficult to believe that yesterday at this time I didn't even know Eric Northman. I would think that I was dreaming if I hadn't already pinched myself—several times—just to be sure.

It hasn't taken me long at all to figure out several things about Eric. One is that he really does have great bed linens. Another is that he's quite the planner.

And another is that he's a man who—once he makes a decision—acts upon it quickly.

Our week together is going to be “interesting”—to say the least! Hopefully it will be the first of many.

Eric suggested that we should make a vacation out of our “courtship,” and I was agreeable. So we'll be heading to the Dallas area after sundown. There—we'll stay in one of Godric's residences and keep a low profile for a week while we get to know each other. I'll also get to meet Godric. As a bonus—even if Sophie-Anne somehow found out about Eric and my agreement—there was no way she would act while we're in Godric's territory.

I'll admit that I listened—and held back giggles—as Eric called his queen and lied like a dog, telling her that he'd been “summoned” for a visit by his maker. Eric then asked for Sophie-Anne's “permission” to leave his area for a week or two.

Since Eric had put the call on speaker phone, I got to hear how Sophie-Anne practically leapt at the chance of getting Eric out of the picture for a while;

she was probably thinking that his absence would make Bill's "project" easier to complete.

Bitch.

Off-handedly, Eric had mentioned that he was taking a new and "delicious morsel" along with him for his visit. When Eric had winked at me, I'd barely stifled a giggle, though—thankfully—I'd already had a wadded up T-shirt over my mouth, so that my breathing wouldn't have to be explained to Sophie-Anne.

By the time Eric had hung up the phone, Pam was knocking. She seemed surprised when she saw Mr. C and, perhaps, even more surprised when she saw that I was fully clothed. She reported that Bill was safely stowed in a silver-lined coffin in one of Eric's warehouses. She pouted a little when Eric told her that she wouldn't be able to "play" with Bill while Eric and I were out of town. She was only to tell Bill that his incarceration was punishment for his failure to check in and then leave him encased in the coffin until further notice.

Despite her obvious fondness for torture, I think that Pam and I are going to get along just fine. She seemed a bit wary of me at first, but seeing the dagger

and hearing some hastily-spoken words in Swedish—or, perhaps, it was Old Norse—from Eric was enough to content any doubts she had about me.

Thankfully.

I can tell that I don't want Pam as an enemy. I can also tell that Eric cares for her, so I truly hope that we got along.

After he and I signed our preliminary contract, Eric insisted upon doing several things before he and I took off for our “trial period”/vacation.

First, he saw to Gran and Jason's safety by arranging for them to go on a vacation of their own! When he asked what they would like to do, I suggested a tour of Civil War battlefields that Gran had always wanted to go on. And—as for Jason—I asked that he get a couple of days “off” from the touring so that he could go fishing or something. Eric called his day-man, Bobby, to make arrangements. From the sounds of things, both Jason and Gran would be getting their dream vacations, and I knew that Jason would be good company for Gran. When it came to stuff like that, he always had been attentive to her. Nonetheless, Eric was sending a Were named Alcide to accompany them during the day and a vampire

named Indira to watch over them at night. I appreciated the fact that Eric was already watching over my family.

After Eric had called the queen and had arranged for my family's vacation, he'd also arranged for our lodging for the night. We'd planned to stay with Mr. C in a house he kept in Shreveport, but Eric arranged for us all to stay at the luxury hotel he owned. I didn't protest the move, especially once he said that he would arrange for Gran, Jason, and me to have a spa day. I'd opted out because I knew I couldn't fully relax if I had to keep up my shields to keep out the thoughts of whomever was touching me. But I knew that Gran would love it, and she definitely deserved to be pampered after all she'd gone through the last day or so. And Jason too! He kept it under wraps, but Jason enjoyed a good pedicure more than just about anything in the world.

Those arrangements made, Mr. C had said his goodbyes to me and had promised that he'd go give Gran an update and make sure that she and Jason were settled into the hotel and that they met their new guards.

After Mr. C had left, Eric and I had been alone for the first time since we'd talked briefly in the hallway. But—just like all the moments that have passed

between us so far—that one wasn't awkward. Eric asked me if I would stay with him as he tried to phone Godric. That word, "tried," had pulled at my heart. I could tell that Eric was nervous about speaking with his maker; I could guess that Godric hadn't answered some of Eric's calls in the past. So, of course, I had stayed. I'd been honored that he'd asked me. I'd wanted to give him my support.

I'd needed to.

After he'd dialed, he put the call on speaker—another act of trust on Eric's part. Another pull to my heart.

Eric had seemed relieved when his maker answered and even more relieved when Godric said that he was willing to host us. In fact, Eric's features had relaxed exponentially during the short call. He'd not mentioned who I was to Fintan; news like that would be better told in person. However he had said that he was bringing a woman with whom he was considering forming a bond. Godric has sounded intrigued—interested. And a smile had eased onto Eric's face.

After the call was over, Eric had walked straight over to where I was sitting and kneeled down in front of me. Then, without a word, he'd given me the best kiss I'd ever had.

I'm pretty sure that it was the best kiss that anyone has ever had!

Oh, Diary, I'm trying to be practical—to pause and analyze my feelings. I'm trying not to get swept away. After all, Gran has instilled practicality into me. Fintan too. And Mr. C as well.

But I'm pretty sure I fell in love with my second vampire in as many nights when I first locked eyes with Eric.

However, the “feeling” of being in love with the different vampires couldn't be more different!

With Bill, I knew that something was wrong—off—even as his blood had tried to fool me. I had felt as if I were surrounded by a web and would become trapped if I made one wrong move. Thankfully, the people who loved me—including myself—didn't let me move toward Bill's web.

And with Eric? Well—I was feeling something for him before I took his blood—and not just lust either! And—perhaps, most importantly—no warning bells regarding Eric had gone off in my head during our long and revealing talk. On the contrary, my instincts told me that Eric was going to change my life—in a very good way.

Diary, the feelings that I already have for Eric seem older than just a few hours. They seem older than a few weeks, a few years, or a few decades. They seem older than even I am—but how can that be?

When I went to Gran's room to chat with her a little while ago, she said that it sounded as if I'd met my match. But how can I know that? How can I trust that I'm not just experiencing a "crush." After all, I'm not exactly an expert in romantic relationships.

Gran reminded me that she still has crushes on Grandpa Mitchell and Fintan—even after all these years.

Let me tell it to you straight, Diary. There is something between Eric and me that makes my heart soar. Is it his looks? I won't lie and say that's not a part of it. But it's a lot more than that. Eric makes me smile and laugh more than I can ever remember doing before. I felt safe with him—even when his words seemed borderline threatening. I want to know him more. I want to reveal myself to him more.

In short—I want every part of him; I want to give him every part of me. And I feel this in a “possessive” way that Gran says reminds her of how Fintan was sometimes. She says that it is the Supe in me—wishing to mark her territory.

Do I really see Eric as my territory? As mine? Already? All I know is that even as I write these questions, I can feel my “light” stirring. And—from deep inside—I know the answers to them. I want to scream those answers!

Yes! He is mine! Eric Northman is mine! He has and always will be mine! Hell—if I were a dog (sorry Sam), I’d probably pee on him. LOL.

Still—I’m wary of the suddenness of everything. Maybe that’s the “human” part of me doubting the existence of “magic.”

Gran once told me of the moment she met Fintan. She’d been hanging up laundry, and—suddenly—she’d seen him at the tree line. She told me that her heart had managed to drop to the ground and soar into the heavens all at the same time.

Fintan, who didn’t change at all in appearance during the years that Gran knew him, was certainly a “dish,” as Gran called him. Thus, it didn’t surprise me

at all that humans, vampires, and fairies—male and female—had been attracted to him.

However, when Gran lets herself think about Fintan, her memories of him are always filled with a lot more than physical attraction. In fact, her feelings for him had adapted, changed, and amplified over the years, and they were still growing—even though he was gone. And, every time she pictures him, she still feels giddy.

Similarly, Gran's memories of Grandpa Mitchell are filled with a myriad of emotions—longing, deep affection, and comfort. She feels giddy every time she thinks of him too.

But there's something sad in Gran's memories of Fintan and Grandpa Mitchell too. She loves them both—equally—thus, she doesn't believe that either of them was her “true” match. I think that, melded together, they would have been the perfect man for her. And I can't help but to wish that both were still in her life.

Could Eric—just him, only him—be the perfect man for me?

Or could he at least be the perfect man to be my “first” lover?

After seeing him up close, I was—at the very least—certain about my answer to the second question: “YES—PLEASE!”

And—by close up—did I mention that I am leaning against the headboard of the same bed where he is “sleeping” even as I write?

Maybe I should have opened with that—huh?

So why am I in Eric’s bed? Well—funnily enough—it never seemed to be a question between us that I would be here. Once we got to the hotel, I simply followed him to his suite. I’d wanted to stay with him—to keep talking to him, to keep spending time with him. There was a guest bedroom in his suite, and I knew that I could have stayed there. But I hadn’t wanted to. I hadn’t needed to.

But let me rewind the story a bit for you diary.

Before we even left Eric’s office at Fangtasia, he “claimed” me with his blood! The experience was both wonderful and so very “tantalizing.”

As I said, following his phone call to Godric, Eric kissed me. After that, he backed away a little until he was resting on his knees in front of where I sat. Then, he bit into his wrist and held it up for me. His eyes had been a storm of

passion that seemed to be a thousand years in the making. Without hesitating, I'd offered him my own wrist, even as I took a deep breath and drank from him.

This I know for sure: Eric and my blood exchange was the most sensual experience of my life—at least so far. But—gauging from the look in Eric's eyes after the exchange was over—that won't be the case for long.

And that prospect—frankly—makes me tingle in some very “happy” places.

Just like after I'd drunk Bill's blood, I'd felt a little drunk from ingesting a little piece of Eric; however, I'd also felt more “alive” than I ever had. I'd wanted more of everything that was Eric, but at the same time, I'd been happy with everything I had in that moment.

Eric had seemed to feel the same way.

After his wound had closed, Eric licked and healed the fang marks I'd barely felt being made. Then he picked me up and sat me on his lap on the couch, where we “cuddled” together quietly for several minutes before Eric went back into planning mode.

Those quiet minutes had been perfect—just what we'd both needed to slow down the world after it had sped up so much for us both.

And what about Bill? Well, it seems that even a small dose of Eric—both the vampire himself and his blood—has been enough to get rid of Bill. I am glad that Bill's blood will be completely eradicated from my body soon enough. Meanwhile, it is enough that he can't affect my feelings anymore.

And let me tell you, Diary, I am happy to feel like “myself” again. Oh—I suppose that Eric's ancient blood could be making me even more enamored with him—if that's even possible!

But one of the clauses of Eric and my contract is that he won't purposely try to influence me with his blood. And I truly believe that he won't.

So how did I go from the couch at Fangtasia to Eric's bed in his hotel suite? Well, Diary, the truth is that we stayed up all night and talked—mostly.

I used to get a bit jealous of the girls who would be thinking of similar nights with guys or girls—nights when they would talk about anything and everything with the person they were “crushing” on.

Now, I have no reason to be jealous anymore—no reason at all.

I'd had such a night with a thousand-year-old, hotter-than-sin, deeper-than-imaginable Viking vampire! I would never have reason to "complain" about missing out again!

Eric and I talked about our jobs. He told me about his place in vampire politics—and how he both liked it and hated it. We talked about how he was getting bored with being on "display" at Fangtasia. We talked about the fact that I liked being a waitress—a job that some found to be too "simple." I'd known a lot of waitresses who'd wanted something different—something "more"—and I respected that and them. But I was happy doing little things to help others. I told Eric about some of the people I'd helped—like Andy and Jane Bodehouse and Arlene and lots of semi-inebriated people who'd spent time at Merlotte's.

We talked about our parents and how they had been murdered—mine by the water fae and his by a mysterious vampire who controlled a group of tattooed werewolves.

We talked about Godric and Fintan and Gran.

We talked about history and art.

We talked about literature and movies.

We talked about music and favorite television shows.

I told him about my treehouse and my diaries.

We talked about my telepathy and his ability to glamour, and how we might use those gifts to complement each other.

I showed him my "light" gift.

In turn, he took me flying.

And the next thing I knew we were laughing about the possibility of him dive-bombing enemies as I shot them with my light from his back! He suggested that he could commission a "Sookie-pack" to be invented so that he could "wear" me without his maneuverability being affected. Of course, even as we were laughing, I could tell that he was already planning who might be our first victim.

Bill perhaps?

Sometime—late into the night (or early into the morning—depending on one's perspective)—he proposed that I work for him at Fangtasia. He said that I could continue being a waitress if I wanted—though he also offered to teach me how to bartend, which sounded fun too. He said it might just be the perfect job

for me—since I enjoyed anticipating needs and I seemed to be a part-time counselor as it was.

I'd laughed at that remark—though I was also considering his suggestion quite a bit.

Diary, we talked for hours and hours, yet I am certain that we've barely scratched the surface of the things we could say to each other.

We also laughed a lot. He told me about Pam, and I told him about some of the strangest thoughts I'd ever "overheard." And sometime during the night, I discovered that a vampire could be ticklish.

When we weren't talking or laughing, we were kissing and touching each other—though Eric didn't push things too far.

I know that—after our weeklong "courtship"—Eric and I will have a lot to decide. First, we'll need to figure out whether or not to go through with forming a permanent bond, which is really the only way for Eric to solidify his claim on me. Otherwise, the queen could pull rank—so to speak.

Of course, even if we bond, we'll have to decide if we want to carry on with a romantic relationship. I am already pretty sure what my preference is gonna be. And I'm almost as sure about his preference too.

The contract allows for anything or almost nothing between us—as long as we both agree to the parameters and as long as a true and equal partnership is maintained between us. In other words—if we have a romantic relationship, it will need to be on terms we're both okay with.

We talked about that a little last night too—when I admitted to him that I was already starting to “fall” for him. I asked if he could be faithful, and he told me that he wouldn't have any trouble staying monogamous to me—as long as we were both content. And he promised that—if we ever did run into troubles in the future—we would talk it out. He also assured me that he would not betray me with infidelity. He said that there might come a day when one or both of us decided to end a romantic relationship—but that we would respect each other enough to be upfront about that.

I know that I could not expect anything more than that from anyone—human, Were, fairy, demon, or vampire.

So—in one fell swoop—Eric had allayed my biggest fear. I'd worried that he would tire of me and begin seeing others behind my back—eventually breaking my heart. But knowing Eric even a little, I now realize that he wouldn't feel the need to hide it if he wanted to end things between us. He would simply tell me, and we would deal with it.

Speaking of monogamy and long-term relationships, I told Eric that I am gonna have a very long life—or, at least I hope I will. I also told him about my amulet and how it should hide me from other fairies for a while. Hopefully, our plan to convince the vampires in Sophie-Anne's court that I'm part demon will work to protect me for even longer. However, I know that the fairies will find me sooner or later.

I just can't help but to wonder if Eric will decide that I'm more trouble than I'm worth.

Sookie POV

“I won't,” came Eric's voice from next to me.

Startled, I jumped a little. “You're awake before sunset.”

“And *you* talk out loud when you’re writing,” he winked. “Have you eaten? I smell only coffee.”

I nodded. “Yeah—I went to Gran’s room and we had a late lunch together.” I grinned. “She’s impressed with you—you know. And I’m not just talking about the spa day you arranged for her.”

“She enjoyed it?” Eric asked, genuinely interested.

“Yeah.”

“I am glad; I will arrange for similar days for her—during the times when Jason is on vacation,” he paused and smirked, “from their vacation.”

I giggled. “Do you want me to order you something from room service? A TrueBlood?”

“That depends,” he leered.

“On what?” I asked, suddenly feeling a little breathless.

“On whether you want to do our second exchange tonight. I would like to do it if you are amenable. And I would like to do it *properly*,” he added, licking his lips a little.

“Properly?” I asked with a gulp.

“Yes.”

“What does that mean?” I asked, biting my bottom lip.

He groaned a little, his eyes focusing on my mouth for a moment. “That means that I want to be inside of you when we next exchange blood.”

Unintentionally, I bit my lip a little harder. “Oh. I thought we were going to Dallas tonight,” I said, panting a little.

“Godric is sending his private plane, but it won’t be at the airfield for three hours. And—we can leave whenever we want.” His eyebrow arched. “You’re biting your lip. Why are you nervous, Sookie?”

“Um—I figured that we’d be waiting to exchange blood again—and other stuff—until the end of our week together. I guess I’m just surprised that you’re already suggesting we—uh—go to the next step.” I took a deep breath. “*Properly.*”

“I do not need a week to make up my mind. I want to complete a bond with you,” he said with certainty. “And—as you are learning—once I make up my mind, I act.”

“But your life will change with me in it. I could endanger you.”

“We went over this last night,” he reminded.

“I know, but I thought you might need time—to consider all your options.”

“Do you believe in fate, *min lilla ormtjusare*?”

“Yes,” I answered quickly.

“So do I,” he said with a smile. “The connection between Godric and Fintan—and their connections to you and to me—I don’t think those things are accidental.”

“Do you think fate traps us?” I asked.

“Like a spider traps its prey?”

“Yes,” I whispered. I’d not told Eric that Bill’s blood had felt like a spider’s web as it had tried to manipulate my feelings. Sometimes, I could swear that he could read my mind—and see my fears.

“No,” he said. “I don’t think fate is out to ensnare us. It is too powerful for that. I think that it already has our stories woven.”

“So we have no choice?” I asked with a shiver.

“We can choose to snag the tapestry fate has woven,” he said, “to fuck it up. Or we can choose to enjoy the picture.”

I chuckled.

He went on. “I think that—if we are careful enough and vigilant enough—we will recognize the gifts that fate brings to us.”

“And accept them,” I said, thinking of the moment Gran had put my first diary into my hands.

“Yes,” he agreed as he took my hand, thread his fingers with mine, and lifted our entwined appendages.

“*This* is a gift. Do you not feel it? The heat? The energy? The connection between us?”

I nodded. “Yes. I feel it.”

He smiled his most beautiful smile. It was relaxed, free, and open. He’d told me that he’d not smiled like that in years—until I’d walked into his life.

“I know that my life may change with you in it. It has already changed, and I like it,” he winked. “But I’m not a fool either. I will do what it takes to keep your enemies from hurting you, me, and the others who owe me fealty. I will punish them—kill them with my own bare hands if I can—because I like the feeling of my enemies’ blood running through my fingers.”

I gasped.

“I am vampire,” he said, looking into my eyes as if he were looking for acceptance.

“And I’m okay with that,” I said after a moment.

He smiled a little. “You need to recognize that being around me will likely make your life more dangerous too. Our lots will be together—so to speak,” he cautioned.

“And you’d be willing to accept that togetherness indefinitely? I mean—Fintan was almost a thousand years old, and he said I had just as strong of a spark as he did.”

“I actually quite like the idea of you being around a long time. And, perhaps, one day, I will turn you so that I can keep you even longer.”

“Greedy,” I giggled.

“Yes—very,” he agreed, stretching out lazily. He put one arm behind his head. His other hand stayed locked with mine.

He’d taken his shirt off—or I’d taken it off—sometime the night before, and as the sheet slipped down his torso, I momentarily became fixated on his amazing abs.

When I was finally able to look back up to his eyes, they were not leering at me or celebrating my attraction of him. On the contrary, his eyes were closed, and his face was more peaceful than I’d seen it before—even when he’d been sleeping.

He spoke in a whisper, almost as if he were in a trance. “Your attraction for me—your affection—is like fireflies lighting up all around my blood. I can see your feelings for me in your blood. They’re growing.”

He opened his eyes. “I can also feel that you are a little afraid of those feelings.”

“I am,” I admitted and then took a deep breath. “Do you think love can happen at first sight?”

“Lust? Yes. Curiosity? Yes. Attraction? Yes.”

“I felt all of those things for you when I first saw you,” I disclosed.

“You were not alone in those feelings,” he responded sincerely.

“I felt something else too,” I whispered.

He brought my hand up to his lips. I let the motion draw me closer to him, though I was still sitting.

“What did you feel?” he asked.

“A kind of *understanding*—as soon as ours eyes locked. I’ve never felt anything like that before.”

“Do you think it was love?” he asked, truly curious.

“What does my blood tell you?” I responded, meeting his question with one of my own.

He shrugged. “I’m not sure. I haven’t often given my blood to others. Pam has had it—of course. Godric too. And an enemy—a Were—but she didn’t live long after she had it.”

“Really? Only three—in a thousand years?” I asked, truly surprised.

“The blood is sacred,” Eric said.

“Yet you gave it to me?” I questioned, hearing the awe in my tone. “After knowing me for only a couple of hours?”

He kissed my hand again, turning the palm upward his time. He inhaled deeply. “It is *my* scent that mingles with yours now.” He smiled. “It smells good.”

“Like *linnea*? The flower you told me about last night?”

“Yes—and like me too,” he responded impishly.

“What do *you* smell like?” I asked.

He shook his head a little. “In all of my days, that is a question I’ve never been asked.”

I giggled. “Well—it’s good that I can surprise you a little.”

He smiled softly. “It is very good.”

“So? What do you smell like?” I asked again.

“Can you tell me?” he responded, lifting up our hands.

“I can try,” I said as I picked up his hand and put a kiss onto his palm.

He seemed to purr a little as I inhaled deeply. Almost unwittingly, I opened my mind to his. Once again, I heard the snakes swirling.

“Are you trying to cheat?” He asked with amusement in his tone. “Are you trying to steal the thought from my head?”

“Shhh, I’m trying to concentrate,” I said, pretending to scold him as I breathed him in again.

He smelled pure and fresh—so much so that there was almost no odor to him at all. The closest thing I could come up with was snow.

“Snow?” I asked aloud.

He chuckled. “Close. But no.”

I inhaled again, and this time I picked up something slightly more distinctive. “Rain?” I asked.

He sighed and gave me another one of his beautiful smiles. “Godric told me once that I smelled like a waterfall near the source of the Nile.”

“Do you?” I asked, figuring he’d been to the place in order to see for himself.

He shrugged. “I don’t think so, but some waterfall somewhere? Yes. I just haven’t found it yet.”

I giggled and couldn’t help but to kiss his palm again. “You’re weird.”

He chuckled. “Me? *You* are the one who asked me to tell you what I smelled like.”

“Well—you have a stronger sense of smell,” I defended with another giggle, even as I attacked his ticklish spot. In turn, he attacked mine, and it was several minutes before either of us admitted defeat.

For a while after that, we lay stretched out—looking at each other, but neither touching nor speaking.

“You are right,” he finally said. “There was a kind of understanding forged between us when our eyes first met. You were lovely and unafraid, and I knew right away that you would change my life. Maybe that is as close to love at first sight as anyone can get.”

“Maybe,” I said.

“I do know one thing,” he said, grinning almost boyishly.

“What’s that?” I asked.

“I like feeling the fireflies—in your blood.”

I giggled. “Do you feel them too? In *your* blood?”

“Yes. They are off-putting, but yes.”

“Off-putting?”

“Rattling,” he said with a smirk.

“Don’t you like being rattled?” I asked coyly.

He chuckled. “Every once in a while, I *need* to be rattled. I have a feeling that you will be good for that.”

I smiled at him. I liked the idea of rattling him.

“You came up with your week-long ‘courtship/job interview/trial period’ idea for me—did you not? So that I could back out if I wanted?” he asked.

“And for me too,” I answered honestly. “I wanted to be sure before I acted. I wanted to make the best choice for my family and me.”

“*I’m* the best choice for you,” he said with certainty.

I giggled. “You aren’t the least bit apologetic for that ego of yours—are you?”

He laughed as well. “Not even a little. So?”

“So—let’s do it,” I said.

“You are certain?” he asked.

“Yes. We haven’t known each other for long, but I’m sure.”

“And will we be exchanging blood properly?” he asked.

“Yes. *Properly.*”

Chapter 08: Fireflies



“Love makes your soul crawl out from its hiding place.”—Zora Neale Hurston

Eric POV

“Relax, lover,” I said. Sookie’s shoulders were so drawn up with tension that they were almost touching her ears.

“I don’t think I can,” she stammered.

“You’re biting your lip,” I smiled a little. It was her “tell.” And it was the most alluring thing I’d ever seen.

Her eyebrow arched. That was another “tell.” It meant that she was about to say something that was bound to make my dick even harder. My body went through the physical process of holding a breath I didn’t need.

“Then—you bite it,” she ordered, her tone both coy and challenging.

I chuckled at her brazenness. “Don’t mind if I do,” I said as I sat up. I didn’t go right in for the kiss, however. Instead, I brought my hands up slowly to cup her cheeks.

Her expression softened as she melted into my touch. Her shoulders relaxed and her lips twitched upward to form a small contented smile. Her eyes focused on mine, and I saw myself in her chocolate-colored orbs.

Did I love her already? If I didn’t, I was sure fucking close. I hadn’t experienced the kind of unrelenting attraction I now felt for anyone else. What I’d experienced with Godric came closest, but he was my maker, and that pull had been different. My blood had compelled me to please him and to prove my devotion. My blood inside of Sookie certainly called to me—and I did want to please her and to prove myself to her—but I had felt a connection to her even before we’d shared blood.

“It is important for you to know that you can stop me at any time with a simple word,” I said.

“What word?” she asked, her eyebrow arching again.

“‘Stop’ will do it,” I said with a smile that turned into a smirk. “‘*Don’t stop*’ will have the opposite effect.”

She giggled, but then her eyebrows drew together into a frown. “But won’t that” She stopped midsentence.

“What?”

“Won’t that give you—um? Humans call it ‘blue balls’ in their heads,” she said, managing to say the slang phrase almost daintily.

I chuckled heartily. “Yes, but I’d heal quickly. I am a vampire, after all.”

“Okay—then,” she said, unconsciously biting that errant lip again. This time, I couldn’t resist it.

I leaned in and kissed her, taking her bottom lip between my own lips and giving it a little tug with my blunt teeth. She moaned into the movement and wrapped her arms around my neck, pulling me to her.

When we’d kissed the first few times the night before, I could sense Sookie’s hesitation—not because she didn’t want to kiss me. No—the “fireflies” of her blood had been sparkling something fierce as we’d kissed. Her hesitation had clearly come from inexperience.

But—during my long life—I’d found that *good* kissing didn’t take a lot of study. In fact, I hadn’t actually kissed a lot of women or men during my life. It was almost too intimate of an act to share with the ordinary meal or fuck. Truth be told, I had to stretch my mind to recall the last person I’d kissed before my lips had longed to touch Sookie’s. It was about a decade prior and had involved a lost bet with Pam; the experience had taught me to *never* make a bet involving kissing with my child again!

However, despite her obvious inexperience with kissing, Sookie had been a fast learner—or maybe it was just that she was a fast learner “about me.” Perhaps, it was that sense of *understanding* that she’d mentioned between us—that seemingly instinctual knowledge. The “why” of things didn’t much matter to me. What mattered was that Sookie made me soar higher with a simple kiss than I’d ever soared in flight.

“Eric,” she groaned out my name as I moved my kisses down her throat so that she could catch her breath. I’d given her one of my T-shirts to sleep in the night before, and it quickly began to interfere with my plans to trail kisses over her collarbones.

Unacceptable!

As her hands explored my bare shoulders, I let mine drift to the bottom hem of her T-shirt and slowly pulled the garment upward. I leaned back a little and caught her eyes to make sure that there was no uncertainty in them.

I saw desire and longing, as well as a touch of nervousness, but I saw no hesitation. So I pulled up the shirt a little more. Her arms went up above her head to help me in my efforts, and in the next moment I was looking at her bare breasts, which I'd only had the pleasure of caressing through the material of the T-shirt during our "make-out" session the night before.

"Beautiful," I said, eliciting a blush from her that traveled from her cheeks all the way down to her breasts, which made them even more tempting.

Slowly—gently—I reached to caress them; she arched into me.

"Amazing," I whispered, marveling at both the fact that her breasts fit perfectly into the molds of my hands and the fact that she curved into my touch as if she needed it as much as I wanted to give it.

I leaned forward and kissed the top of one of her breasts lightly before planting other kisses in a trail to her nipple, which I took into my mouth and suckled gently.

"Eric," she moaned. "*Don't stop.*"

I chuckled at Sookie's sauciness even as I was driving her crazy. As I took her other nipple into my mouth, I wondered if I ever could stop.

I thought not.

My vampiric instincts and my body screamed at me to take Sookie immediately—to seek my own release as I claimed her body and her blood—but I kept up my slow progress of exploration, both for Sookie and for myself. I wanted to catalogue everything about the experience—every sound that was sighed from her lips; every pressure on my flesh from her

ever-seeking fingers; every nuance of her taste on my tongue; every gradation of the scent of her rising arousal; every flutter of her eyes, which seemed to want both to stay open in order to look at me and to close tightly so that she could withstand her pleasure.

I couldn't help but to marvel—as I recognized so much “newness” about the experience—that I was “making love” to this woman, who was now lain on the bed and writhing for my touch as if she'd been waiting for it for a millennium.

Had I been waiting for her for as long? Had I been looking for her without even knowing it?

I felt almost as if it were my first time to be intimate as well. I'd experienced many—many—carnal pleasures; however, had I ever truly made *love* to a woman before? Made love *with* a woman?

Had I ever shared the kind of intimacy I was now experiencing with Sookie?

No.

My woman—*MINE*—mewled as I moved my kisses lower: to the plane of her belly, to the swell of her hips, over her rushing femoral artery. I wanted to bite her there, but I refrained. I had already decided that my next bite would not come until she was taking my blood.

My instincts had insisted upon this kind of exchange—this equality—between Sookie and myself even before I'd seen the contract drawn up by the demon lawyer. And it seemed as if that desire to maintain equilibrium between us applied even to blood sharing.

So be it.

Again—I didn't need to search for an answer for “why” I felt this way—especially not when that answer was so simple—so apparent. Why did I want mutuality with Sookie—instead of dominance?

I just *did*.

“Eric,” she gasped, as I removed her panties and left a path of kisses from her outer thigh to the center of her arousal. In the future, I knew that I would tease her—drive her crazy with arousal for hours before I finally gave her release—but, for now, I wanted to give her pleasure freely. I didn’t want her to think that I was withholding anything from her.

I did not know what Sookie’s fantasies were for her “first time.” In the modern era, I knew—mostly from Pam—that women tended to “romanticize” the loss of their virginites. In my day, it was not the same. But that didn’t matter; I wanted to give Sookie anything she might have dreamed of—and more.

Perhaps my motives centered on an unselfish impulse, but I realized with every kiss and lick of her womanhood that I was a lucky, lucky bastard. Her scent and her flavor were equally tempting—irresistible.

As I dragged the flat of my tongue from her opening to her clit, she shivered, squirmed, and gasped. I could tell that she was trying to be still—trying to let me have my way with her body without interfering by moving too much—so I placed a hand firmly on her hip to steady her—and maybe myself too.

I was pleased when her fingers laced into the strands of my hair. I knew that she would soon learn to guide me with those fingers. She would soon learn to order me with her sounds, her hands, and her legs; every little twitch of her body would soon “tell” me exactly what she wanted. However, until then, we were both learning what she liked—together.

I circled the fingers of my other hand around her lower lips, even as my tongue settled over her clit. She tensed a little as I pushed one of my fingers into her slightly. It was not long before it met with her maidenhead. It was rare these days to find a woman of Sookie’s age

whose hymen was still completely intact. The main reason for this was that penetrative masturbation had become less of a taboo issue for women. Pam had told me that something called the “rabbit” was responsible.

Frankly, I had thought that the double standard between men and women as far as masturbation went was unfair even during my human days. What did I expect my wife to do while I was at sea for months? Pine for me in steely, cold silence? Hell no! In fact, I’d brought my human wife a rudimentary “toy” from what was now Denmark after a particularly “enlightening” raid. The toy was made of smooth wood, but—from the smile on Aude’s face—I think it did the *job* when I was not around.

Knowing Sookie as I’d come to in so little time, I figured that she’d made the decision to leave her hymen intact deliberately—thoughtfully. And I wanted to honor her wishes about the taking of it. Thus, I stopped my movements for a moment and caught her eyes.

“Your maidenhead is intact, lover,” I said quietly. “If I continue to prepare you for me as I had planned, it will be broken by my fingers. However, if you want for me to take it in the traditional way, I will.”

Sookie bit her bottom lip nervously. “I don’t know. I never—um—broke it when I”

“When you brought yourself pleasure,” I said, completing her thought for her.

She nodded. “I figured I’d wait—uh”

“For me,” I smirked a little.

She smiled at me fondly. “Yes, Mr. Ego. I was waiting for you.”

I could feel my lips curving into a sincere smile. “So? Now that I am here, how would you like me to proceed, *min lilla ormtjusare*? Fingers or cock?”

She flamed red and chuckled at my brazenness. I knew she’d soon get used to it.

“What do you think is the best way?” she asked, putting herself into my hands—quite literally. I couldn’t help but to love the fact that she was willing to trust me with such an intimate choice.

“The way that brings you less pain,” I responded. I was not a man who needed to bring any woman—least of all *this* woman—more pain due to a misguided desire to penetrate her maidenhead with my cock.

She smiled at me. “Well—I’ve very much liked the way you’ve done things so far,” she said, caressing my hair. “Keep doing what you were doing—okay?”

“Yes ma’am,” I nodded and placed a gentle kiss upon her inner thigh—followed by another and then another and then another.

It wasn’t long before she was writhing as before. As she neared her orgasm because of the attentions of my tongue to her clit, I slightly entered her entrance again—first with one finger and then a second, and then I waited until she was at the height of her rapture before I broke through her hymen. She gasped as her pain mixed with her pleasure, but I soon had her mewling in only pleasure again as I slowly stroked her core with my fingers and found her G-spot. As with the rest of her body, it seemed ready to be touched by me—and *reactive* to my touch. Soon Sookie had fallen over the edge a second time. I closed my eyes and moaned in gratitude as I tasted her release, which was mixed with a little of the blood from her maidenhead.

De-fucking-licious!

Even as I enjoyed myself immensely at the sweet center of my new lover, I made sure that my attentions amped up her arousal again before kissing my way up her body.

My cock, seemingly of its own accord, nudged her clit and then her lower lips as I kissed Sookie with everything that I had—everything that I was—trying to show her just how much this moment meant to me as well.

“You will feel a little pressure, lover.”

“I think I like your other nickname for me better, and it seems more appropriate right now,” she said, her eyebrow arching.

I almost came right then and there.

“Min lilla ormtjusare,” I chuckled. “You are *definitely* my little snake charmer right now.”

She giggled. “I’m ready,” she said, holding on tightly to my shoulders.

Her brown eyes literally bore into my blue orbs as I entered her slowly. Through the tie, I felt for every flicker of distress, and I adjusted my movements to make sure she stayed as comfortable as possible as I pushed further into her body. When I was fully sheathed, I stopped for a moment and closed my eyes, enjoying the feeling of her walls pulsing all around me.

With years of practice, a vampire hones his or her mind to think many things at once. Just becoming a vampire leads to more suppleness of the mind. All the little flaws in the body are “fixed” by the magic that comes with our makers’ blood. Every neuron seems to fire more efficiently—and much faster.

My ability to think many things did not stop as I enjoyed the most perfect sensation my body had ever experienced. If anything, my thoughts traveled even more rapidly through my mind.

My first thoughts were these: Keep her. Keep her by your side. Keep her safe. Keep her happy.

Keep her!

As I began to move in and out of Sookie, stoking our shared fire and hastening what I knew would be a shared release, I thought about the time when I'd learned Greek—of all things.

But the memory was quite relevant.

After all, the Greeks had many words for “love”—maybe even enough words.

Agápē or *ἀγάπη* meant unconditional love, a “spiritual love” associated with selflessness and sacrifice.

Érōs or *ἔρως* was physical love—passionate, sensual, all-consuming, and sexual.

Philia or *φιλία* referred to love stemming from the mind. It related to friendship and mutual affection based on reason and intellect.

Storgē or *στοργή* was generally associated with familial love; it was the kind of affection that developed because of shared lives.

As I made sure that the tip of my cock stroked her G-spot perfectly with each thrust, I remembered reading about two other kinds of love—also based on Greek concepts: *ludus* and *pragma*. *Ludus* referred to a playful kind of love. It was often negatively associated with the phrase, “playing the field.” However, in its pure sense, it meant to love with joy and friskiness. *Pragma* referred to long-standing love, the kind that endured over time and could not be shaken.

Even as my mind whirled with these thoughts and remembrances, my body felt as if it had been lit from the inside out.

Fireflies.

Without withdrawing from the heaven of Sookie's body, I quickly repositioned us so that I was sitting against the headboard and she was astride me.

The movement caught her off guard a little and her eyebrow rose.

I growled, but I held myself together—*barely*. I didn't want to come until I was taking her blood and she was taking me. I didn't want to explode until she was exploding with me.

"I've always wanted to try this position," she purred.

"Before I am done with you—you will be an expert at *every* position, min lilla ormtjusare."

She moaned as I thrust upward. Soon, we were both soaring again. I reached toward the nightstand and took hold of the dagger that Godric had given to Fintan. For some reason the object seemed charged with magic—holy even. But—again—I didn't ask *why*.

The *why* didn't matter.

I asked Sookie the question that *did* matter.

"Will you take my blood, Sookie Brigant?"

Without hesitation, she took the small weapon from my hands.

"From where?" she asked.

"It doesn't matter," I groaned as her core tightened around me. "*All* of my blood is now yours, Sookie—every drop!"

She stopped moving for a moment, and I followed the tear that rose into and then fell from her eye. I caught it with my thumb and brought it to my lips.

I would remember it always.

"Thank you," she said as she leaned forward and kissed me gently. We began to move together again as she seemed to take an inventory of the places she might cut me. As soon as her eyes registered her choice, she looked back into mine.

"Will you take my blood, Eiríkr Ulfrikson?" she asked, calling me by the name I'd told her had been my first.

“Yes,” I answered gruffly.

She smiled even as her core rippled around my cock. “Together?”

I nodded and stretched forward, waiting for her to cut. She took a deep breath and then dragged the point of the dagger over my pectoral muscle right above my unbeating heart. She leaned in and latched on as my fangs penetrated her neck.

It was in that moment that I knew that I loved Sookie. I didn’t ask “when” I had fallen in love with her. I did not ask “why” I loved her. I simply basked in the feeling as I basked in her taking pleasure in my blood and in my body. She cried out as her release overtook her and then bit down on my wound, taking in even more of me.

I came harder than I ever had.

And I felt a paradise of riches.

Sookie was breathing hard as I nicked my tongue and healed her bite wounds, even though the infusion of my blood in her would have done the job. It didn’t matter. I wanted the wounds healed sooner, rather than later. I didn’t even want the “itch” of them to bother her.

She shivered on top of me, feeling an aftershock of pleasure from her orgasm.

She stayed still for a moment—we both did—as she caught her breath and I tried to catch hold of all of the “fireflies” that seemed to be zigzagging in her body and in mine as our blood commingled and then melded.

Her eyes stayed locked into mine as if she were reading them—and me. I was content to let her see into the very center of my being. And she didn’t look away.

“I love you,” she said with conviction—stubbornness even.

“I love you as well,” I responded.

Her eyebrow twitched upward, and so did my cock, which was still inside of her. I was now certain that the two—her eyebrow, my cock—were connected by a string I couldn't see.

“How do you know?” she asked. She didn't seem skeptical—just curious.

“Because—while we were making love, I thought about every meaning I know for the word, ‘love,’ and I feel them *all* for you.”

She smiled. “Tell them to me?” she asked.

“There is *agápē* love,” I said.

“I've heard of that kind in church,” she said.

“Yes—it is love from the spirit—unconditional and selfless. I know I feel this because I would put your needs above my own. I am a selfish creature, but I *will* shield your body with mine through any trouble. I *will* make you happy, even if it leads me to damnation.”

She sniffled. “Tell me more?”

“The second kind of love I know of is *érōs*,” I said even as I thrust my body upward, making her moan. “I know I feel this because I have an unremitting and an all-consuming desire for your body. To fuck it. To bite it. To mark it.”

She gripped my shoulders as I established a slow rhythm. “More,” she gasped.

“*Ludus* is a kind of love that is characterized by play,” I said, even as I swirled my hips and moved my hand to tease her clit with my fingers. “I know that I feel this kind of love for you because I wish to tease you unrelentingly. And I wish to keep you laughing,” I added with another upward thrust and an exaggerated eyebrow waggle.

She giggled. “More?”

“Then there is *philía*. Aristotle described it as love from the mind. I know that I love you like this because I want to have a partnership with you—lifetimes full of mutual respect and

give-and-take. I want to be challenged by you. And I want to challenge you. I want to experience the world with you—the history of it and the future of it.”

She wiped away another tear and began to move her body in concert with mine.

“More?” she asked.

“There is *storgē*. It is the kind of affection most associated with the concept of family. I know that I feel this kind of love for you because I want to be your family, Sookie Brigant. I want to share in your burdens and your triumphs. I want to know what it is like to spend *all* days with you.”

More tears fell from her eyes. “Is there more?” she asked, even as her walls fluttered around my cock.

“One more. It is called *pragma*,” I said, groaning a little as my own release neared.

“*Pragma*?”

“It is long-standing love. It grows over the years as understanding grows among two people. I know that I feel the beginning of this kind of love for you because of something you said earlier.”

“Something I said?”

I nodded. “Yes. When our eyes first met, it was this kind of love—*understanding*—that began. It is a paradox that this is the love I felt for you at first sight, since it is usually thought of as the kind of love that builds and thrives with time. But I don’t question that it is there—*already* there—and strong inside of me. I do not care ‘why’ it formed. All I know is that it *will* grow even larger throughout time.”

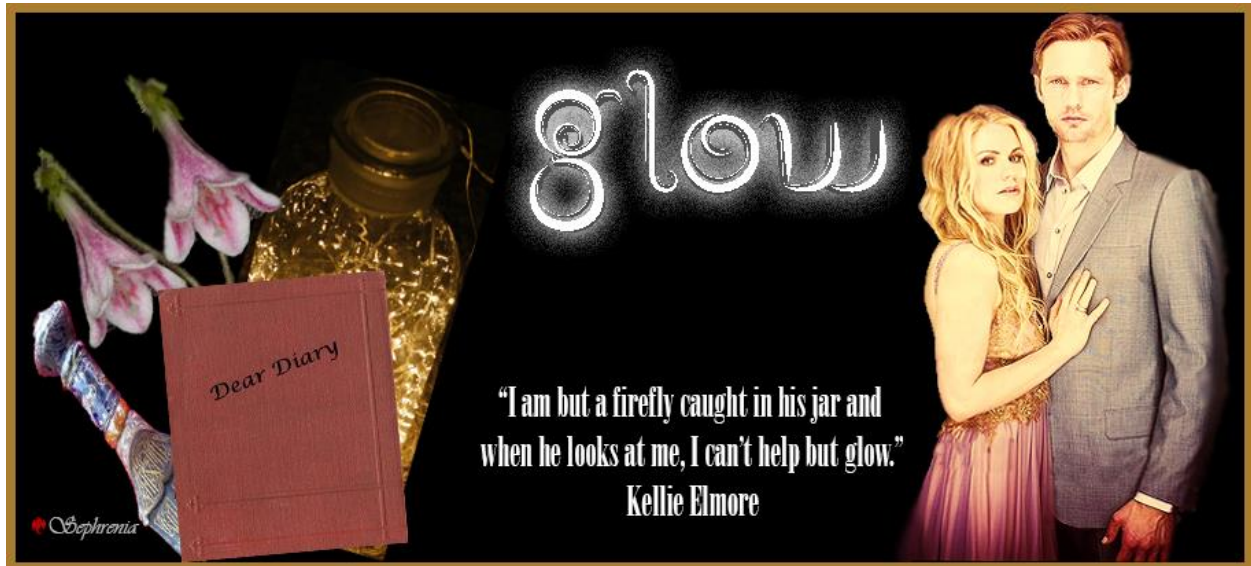
Tears were streaming down her cheeks now, and I found that I didn't like to see her crying—even though I “felt” through our twice-formed tie that she was happy and almost in awe of my words.

Still—I wanted her tears gone, so I wiped them with my thumbs, stopped talking, and showed her my love with my body.

Soon her eyes were dry and she was screaming my name.

That was better.

Epilogue: Glow



“I am but a firefly caught in his jar and when he looks at me, I can’t help but glow.”—Kellie Elmore

June 14, 2005

Dear Diary,

It's been only a year since I met Eric—and a year and two days since I met my first vampire. So much has changed.

One of those things is you! I've finally decided to use a laptop for “you.” And—I have to say that this might just turn out to be a good idea. I type faster than I write anyway, so I can say more to you this way.

I know that I've been writing about the changes happening in my life as they've come, but I want to put them here—to record them in my “new” diary.

I was happy enough a year ago. I was content with my job, and I felt loved by my family and friends. However, my happiness seems to grow exponentially as each sun sets—as Eric rises.

Eric—my bonded, my partner, my mate.

My soon-to-be husband.

Tonight we will be married and pledged in the place where our eyes first locked. Pam has managed to make Fangtasia look elegant and romantic—though I would be content to marry Eric in an alleyway. But Pam had fun making all of the arrangements, and Eric and I had fun teasing her.

I hear Godric in the “guestroom” even now. Older than Eric by a thousand years, he can rise much earlier.

When I first met Godric, he was sad in a way that nearly broke my heart. And as soon as Eric and I completed our bond, I could sense just how much Godric's anguish broke Eric's heart as well. But Godric's spirits seemed to enliven

as he spent more time with Eric and as he let himself talk about—and grieve for—
Fintan.

Fate.

It was fate that connected Eric and me—just as it had connected Fintan
and Godric so many years ago. And—if my being around helps Godric to feel
closer to Fintan’s spirit, then all I have to say is this: Fucking A!

Strangely enough, it is Gran who has seemed best able to get Godric to
return to what Eric calls his “old self.” For a two thousand-year-old vampire,
however, “old” is a relative term.

As odd as it may sound, Godric and Gran have been able to share their grief
about losing Fintan in a way that goes beyond age or “species” or gender. Both
loved—and still love—Fintan with all of their hearts, though neither of them had
been able to share Fintan’s life as they’d wanted.

Speaking of Godric—tonight will also be his two-month anniversary as the
king of Louisiana and Mississippi.

Yet another change.

When she'd been told of it, Sophie-Anne had seemingly "accepted" Eric's claim of me, but she'd continued to try to find ways to "get" me. Those ways had included trying to get Eric in trouble with the Authority by having him sell V for her. She'd also aligned herself with Russell Edgington, who ended up being the vampire who'd been responsible for Eric's family being killed!

Bill Compton had inadvertently given us that information when he and his maker had shown up at Fangtasia with several tattooed Weres one night. Bill had decided—after almost a year—that he was offended because Eric had taken me from him.

Asshole!

I'm guessing that Bill's sudden courage came with the fact that he'd aligned himself with a three-thousand-year-old monarch.

Eric had been happy to find a reason to end the annoying Civil War vet, though he did arrange for Gran to "question" him before he staked him. Poor Bill—for nights, he had answered every question that Gran had thrown at him about the Civil War. Bill had hoped that he'd receive mercy. In the end, he did. Eric ended him quickly.

Lorena's end was slow and satisfying, according to Pam and Thalia. I just counted myself lucky that I wasn't that particular duo's victim.

As for Russell? Well—he had no idea that Eric carried a grudge until right before he met his final death. Between Godric and Eric and—I'm proud to say—ME, Russell was taken out in a surprise attack, as was Sophie-Anne.

Eric and I worked together to kill the Mississippi monarch. I shot him with my light and Eric staked the motherfucker. Though we had experimented with our “dive-bombing” in other situations, we dealt with Russell on solid ground. Eric had needed to look his foe in the eyes as he'd ended him.

Meanwhile, Godric had the pleasure of killing Sophie-Anne and her children. Later, he told Gran that the fighting had invigorated him.

With his new lease on life firmly in place, Godric agreed to be a king for the first time in his existence. Gran, I believe, calls herself his “social secretary” and is currently fielding “courtship calls” from several states. Both Eric and I hope that Godric finds someone with whom he can establish some kind of intimacy.

What else should I catalogue about the last year? Well—there were other job changes in addition to Godric's.

Jason quit his job with the road crew about nine months ago. He's become a sheriff in Bon Temps and is dating Tara. About damned time! Tara has been in love with my brother since she and I were fourteen years old! And Jason has been "waiting" to date her until his "wild oats were sown." Happily, he and Tara seem to be really content with one another.

As you know, Diary, I quit my job as a waitress at Merlotte's, and I've been working with Eric at Fangtasia. As he promised, he taught me all about bartending, and that's what I do at the club—four nights a week. And I love it—especially now that Chow has replaced Longshadow.

Chow keeps me laughing all night long. He calls me the "counselor" and we share snide remarks about the fangbangers who try to entice Eric. Of course, Clancy is now on "throne duty," but that doesn't stop Eric from getting propositioned several times a night.

It's just taken some people a while to learn that Eric is most definitely "off the market." He is mine!

One of those desperate fangbangers tried to stab me in the ladies' room. Of course, I heard her plans, and she ended up running right into Pam when she attempted to follow me.

Of course, we've had other issues too. A few Fellowship of the Sun fanatics have come into the bar—trying to cause mischief—but between my telepathy and Eric's glamouring, we've managed to trace them back to their leaders. The last I heard, Steve Newlin was probably going to get life in prison for crimes against vampires.

My fairy relatives have also found me, and I've established relationships with Claudine and Niall, though both Eric and I are wary of the latter. Claudine has opened her mind to me, and I know I can trust her. Niall—on the other hand—clearly has his own motives for doing everything, which is why Eric is always there when I meet with him.

As for Niall's enemies? Well—we've found a few witches who have helped to strengthen my amulet so that it automatically "stuns" fairies with bad intentions against me. And let's just say that Eric and I have enjoyed several mornings

frolicking in the lake in the sunlight after he's drained a fairy with designs to hurt me.

Maybe it makes me a horrible person, but I hope more fairies come—because Eric is beautiful in the sunlight.

Well, Diary, I think that's gonna be it for me for now. Pam has ordered that I leave Eric's side before he awakens so that my amorous vampire doesn't make me late for our own wedding. Of course, what Pam doesn't know is that I'm just as likely to be responsible for our tardiness, and I don't intend to leave our room until I get a proper "good evening" from my mate.

Nope. I think that I'll run a bath and see if I can talk my vampire into consummating the marriage before the wedding.

I'll let you know how it goes later. Meanwhile, I'm going to get myself wet and wait for the fireflies to swarm me.

Godric POV

"Oh no—you're not," I said from the doorway.

"Shit!" Sookie exclaimed, as she blushed a fierce red and closed the lid of her laptop guiltily. "I was talking aloud while I was writing again—wasn't I?"

I chuckled. “Já, dóttir mín. And, if I allow you to go through with your wicked plans, then Pam will stake me.”

Sookie rolled your eyes. “You aren’t afraid of Pam—are you? You’re her king,” she reminded.

I chuckled again and shook my head. Sookie was now a constant source of joy in my life. She was so much like my beloved Finn—from the way her chin would jut out in defiance to the glint that would overtake her brown eyes when she was amused by something.

Finn truly did live on in her, and—even more wonderful—she’d brought intense joy to my child’s life as well.

“Okay,” I said, “I will admit that I am more concerned about worrying Adele than angering Pam.” I tilted my head a little. “Adele will likely be arriving at Fangtasia soon—correct? And she plans to help your childhood friend Tara prepare you for the wedding—if I am not mistaken.”

Sookie deflated a little, and I could tell that I’d convinced her to leave for Fangtasia now, rather than to try to steal a few minutes with my child before she left.

She gave me a mock glare, but got up, pulled her robe around her almost defiantly, and went into the closet she shared with my child. She emerged moments later in a T-shirt, yoga pants, and flip-flops. I marveled at the way clothing went through cycles. I was just glad that men were no longer expected to wear “tights” anymore. Whether they were called “yoga pants” or “tights” or “hose,” I had no interest in such constrictions any longer.

Sookie gave my child a look of longing.

“I will make sure he gets to the church on time,” I said with a smirk.

She grinned at me. “Fangtasia isn’t exactly a church.”

I shrugged. “Tonight—it will be the most sacred place in my state.”

She sniffled. “I wish he were here.”

I knew of whom she spoke: my Finn.

“Fairies believe that they dwell in the Summerlands after they die. If he is there, then he is watching over us even now,” I said, hoping that was true.

“That’s a nice thought,” Sookie said with a smile.

“He would be proud of you.”

“I don’t know where I’d be today if it weren’t for Fintan and my Gran helping me to see my telepathy as a gift.” She glanced at Eric. “I don’t think I would have him.”

I smiled. “Then I am even more thankful for your grandmother and,” I paused, “your grandfather.”

Sookie glanced toward the nightstand. I knew what was there already. I could smell the metal of the dagger I had once given Finn. I could smell our blood on it—as well as Sookie’s and Eric’s blood.

“You’re sure that we can use it for our pledging?” she asked.

I smiled at her. “It is yours now—yours and Eric’s. And that is what Fintan would have wanted too.” I sighed. “His blood is yours, and my blood is Eric’s. It is *right* that you two have the dagger.”

She smiled. “I’m glad you’re here with us, Godric.”

“As am I,” I said.

And I *was* glad. A year ago, I’d been looking for a way to end my existence—looking for a final way to atone for the many lives I had taken over the years.

Now I was a king of two states. And I'd realized that I had *many* reasons to stay in this world. Two of them were in front of me: my beloved child and his beloved chosen one.

"You should be on your way before he awakens," I said.

Sookie, once again, looked at my child longingly and then looked back at me.

"Tell him that I can't wait to see him?" she asked.

"I'm sure he will feel the same way," I said as she kissed my cheek before leaving the room.

I could hear her movements as she went upstairs and greeted her guard; I tracked the noise of her vehicle until she was out of the neighborhood.

I sighed as I looked at my child. Eric had always been better equipped at surviving a long life than I. He had the ability to adapt—to change—to find things in the world that gave him a reason for being.

But his greatest "reason" was the woman whom he was to marry that night. I knew that just as surely as I'd known that Finn had been my greatest "reason" to live. But he was not my only one—not any more.

I just hoped that my child would never lose her. They were already lucky—blessed. While Finn and I had been forced to hide our love and spend decade upon decade apart from one another, Eric and Sookie would be able to dwell *together*.

"Godric," came Eric's voice as he awoke.

"Your beloved has instructed me to make sure that you are on time for your wedding," I told him.

Eric smirked. "I suspected that she would be here when I awoke.

I chuckled. “She almost was. Now prepare yourself. You are to be married and pledged tonight.”

My child looked almost giddy as he rose from Sookie and his bed. He hurried toward the bathroom, and—within moments—he was in the shower.

I chuckled again. I could tell from Eric and my bond that he was excited and a bit nervous: the standard groom.

I turned and went to my room to finish readying myself. I snuck a peek at the lone picture I had of Finn. I stroked his beautiful face with my finger. I felt—somewhere deep inside—that he was happy that I’d found the strength to carry on with my life without him.

“I love you,” I whispered to the picture, hoping that somehow—somehow—my beloved himself would hear me.

I smiled. Finn had been an unabashed science fiction fan—with his favorite human author being Frank Herbert, who’d written the *Dune* stories. I enjoyed science fiction because it was a kind of preview of the world to come, so Finn and I had shared many hours reading together.

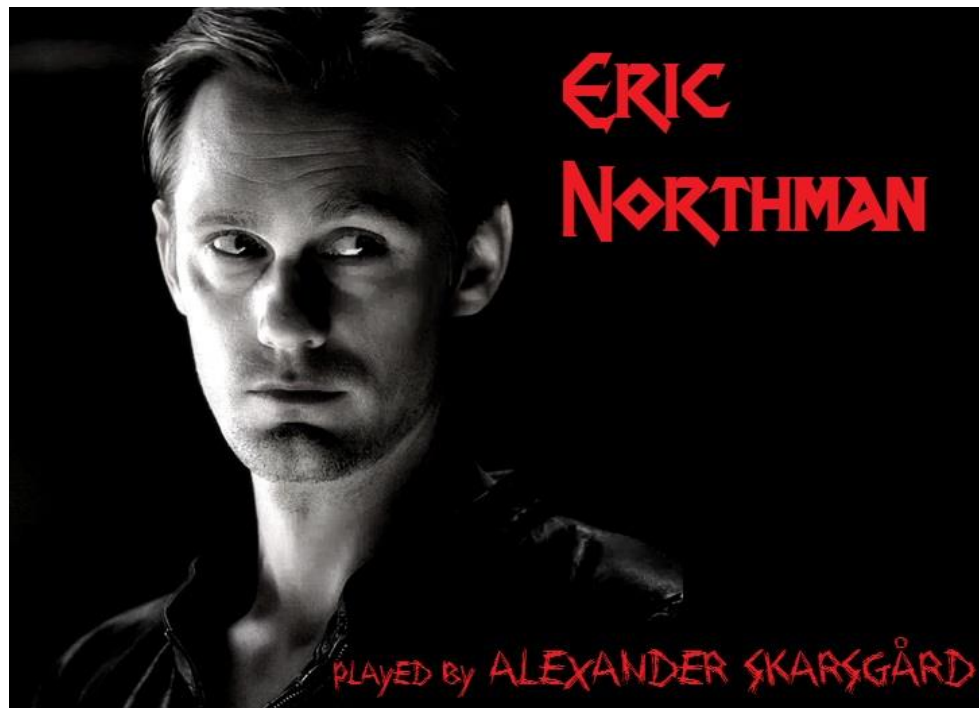
I couldn’t help but to recall a quote by Herbert: “Without change, something sleeps inside us, and seldom awakens. The sleeper must awaken.”

“Thank you, my love,” I said to Finn’s picture before I put it back into my bag. My beloved’s granddaughter had come into my child’s life. She’d changed him and—by extension—me.

I was awake again.

The End.

The Cast





*Adele Hale
Stackhouse*



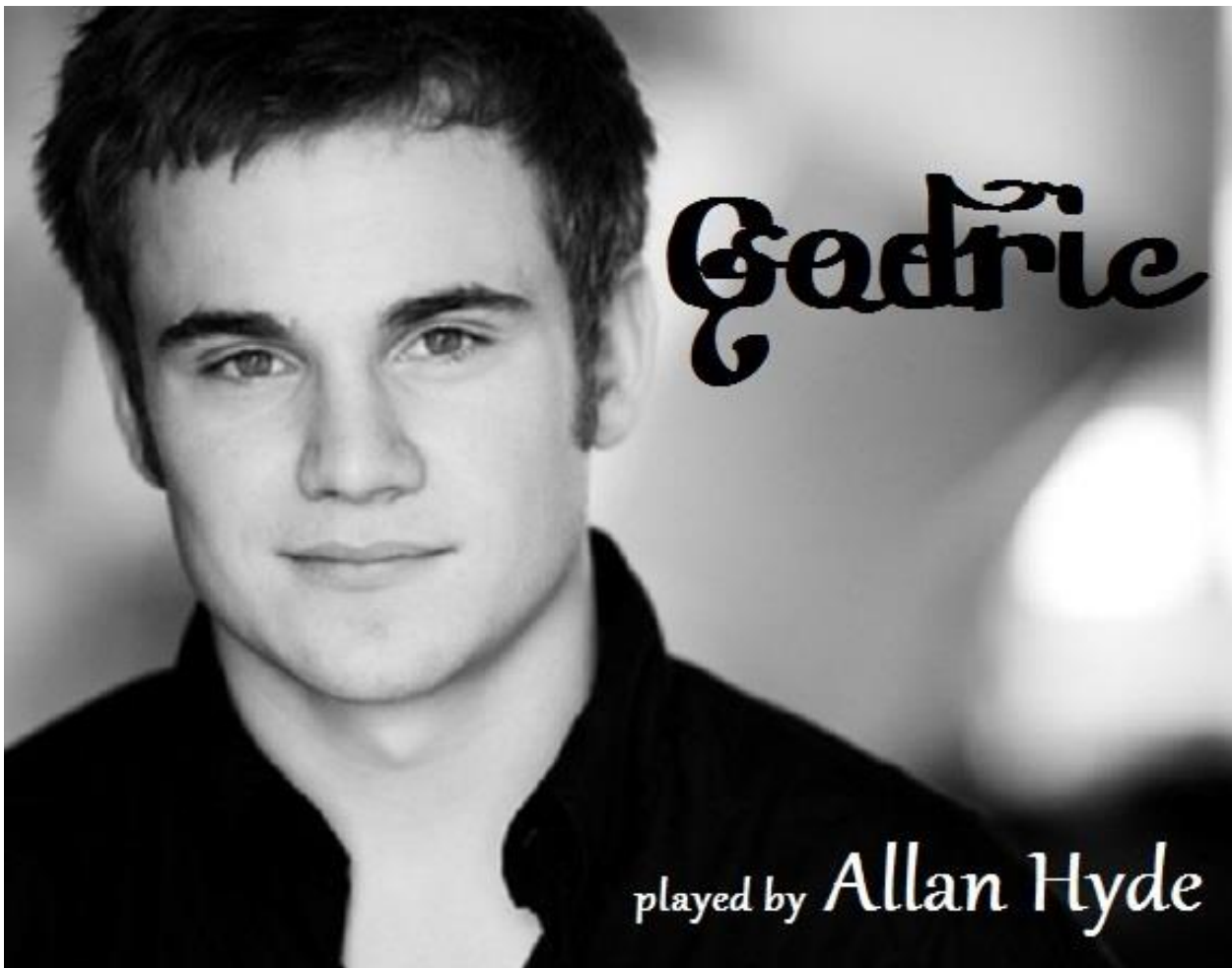
Gran

played by *Lois Smith*



*Fintan
Brigant*

(Gerard Butler)





Bill Compton

played by **Stephen Moyer**



Desmond Cataliades

Mr. C

(Oliver Platt)