Summary
(This story was written for the 2015 story exchange organized by the Queen of Area Five) Eric was born into royalty—both human and Fae. However, because of his “defect,” telepathy, his parents abandon him. Years later, he finds himself in Louisiana, where he meets a beautiful vampiress named Sookie. ROLE REVERSAL. Eric/Sookie.
Role Reversal!! Sookie is an old and powerful vampire that runs a bar where she’s captivated by a beautiful young man from Sweden.

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SVM/TB Fic Exchange 2015
California Kat
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ERIC POV

I’m sure that I looked as nervous—and as inexperienced—as I felt as I parked my car and looked up at the Fangtasia sign. But I didn’t really care.

Actually, that was a lie; I did care. I cared about Adele Stackhouse. And that meant that I had to care about Jason Stackhouse’s fate too.

I took a deep breath as I walked to the end of the line that would lead me into the premier vampire club in the Southern United States. It was a long line, and—with every step I took toward the door—I felt my trepidation rising.

“Come on! Man up!” I said to myself, but then I immediately found myself wondering what it really meant to be a man. I’d certainly never had a father-figure to teach me. And I’d never had a girlfriend—let alone a wife—to learn with. Indeed, what I knew about manhood had been read from books and heard from heads—both male and female. And—honestly—there wasn’t a clear message of manhood at all—at least none that I’d been able to find.

I sighed. Actually, I realized, the central point wasn’t about whether or not I was a “man” at all; it was about whether or not I was a “person.”

A true person—someone who added something to the world.
I often doubted that I was such a being, for my whole life had been spent hiding who I was—and what I was.

I’d been born in Sweden 33 years before to extremely wealthy parents. Those parents, Stella and Johan, were Swedish royalty—literally. In fact, as brother to the king, my father was in line for the Swedish monarchy. My uncle, King Carl XVI Gustaf of Sweden, had three children. And, between those three, there were three additional heirs—making my father seventh in the line of succession. Officially, that made me number eight in line, but—of course—to have been that, I would have needed to have been formally recognized.

And still alive.

Which I wasn’t—at least, not officially.

I smiled wryly—bitterly. Actually, I had been “recognized”—at first. I’d been christened Erik Gustaf—named partly in honor of my uncle. My birth had been as celebrated as my cousin Victoria’s, for we were born within days of each other—with me being slightly older. Of course, since my uncle was the king, his issue immediately “leap-frogged” me in the line of succession. But that hadn’t lessened the celebration that the brothers—my uncle and my father—had shared in adding to their family.

Indeed, everything would have been perfect if I hadn’t fucked things up.

Not that I remembered doing it.

Not that I’d purposely done it.

According to the thoughts I’d been able to pick up related to my early years, almost as soon as I’d begun speaking, my “abnormality” had presented itself. I didn’t just speak sentences about loving mommy or daddy—or sentences about wanting pudding or ice cream. No. I spoke out the thoughts of those around me—which freaked out everyone!
Apparently, my “defect” couldn’t be hidden after I was approximately two years old. Already, too many people knew of it—or suspected it: my nannies, doctors who had tried to treat me, some of the servants, my parents, and—certainly—my uncle, the king.

In truth, I cannot remember much about those early days—just impressions really. When I later saw pictures of my parents, I recognized them as being a small part of my first few years. But that “part” hadn’t necessarily been good. I recalled the nature of their thoughts more than anything else. My mother disliked being around me, and my father felt as if I was his punishment for something.

I never found out what he felt he was being punished for.

By the time I was three years old, my parents were desperate to do “something” about me. They met in secret with the king and the head of his security force, a man named Appius Ocella. The four of them decided that my “abnormality” was a potential danger to the whole monarchy. After all, as I grew, I would have access to state and military secrets. Appius claimed that I might already know things that enemies could use against Sweden.

Instead of a confused child, looking for acceptance and love, Appius was able to paint me as some kind of terrorist toddler, who would babble out top-secret information faster than I could spill a box of blocks.

So—three months after my fourth birthday—I was “killed” off.

According to the newspaper articles I later read, I died of pneumonia.

The story hadn’t been difficult to sell. When I’d first displayed my abnormality, my parents had sequestered me from the outside world, proclaiming me “sickly.”

Not surprisingly, as a very young child, I didn’t understand much. All I knew was that I was being taken away from a room that had been full of toys to keep me “busy.” My mother and father
told me “goodbye,” even as their thoughts were hopeful that I was young enough to forget all about them.

In truth, it was difficult to remember them even then, for I saw them infrequently. In fact, I saw few people when I lived in my parents’ estate.

After I “died,” I was moved to the countryside, where I was “cared for” by a couple who were hired to make sure that I was fed and clothed. They were an older couple in their sixties and introduced themselves at Sven and Hanna.

Looking back, I think that my caretakers were hired for their coldness. Part of their job was not to speak to me. Another part was to spank me if I spoke to them. And they were paid well. Needless to say, I soon learned not to speak.

Of course, I could still hear Sven and Hannah’s thoughts. Sven had been in the military until he retired at age fifty five. He and Hannah—I later learned—were not naturally “cold.” They’d had three children of their own, but all three were killed in a bus accident when the eldest was only 16 years old. It was unsurprising that they had little love to offer to themselves or to others after that.

Once I “heard” about their past, I felt bad for them. Hannah made sure that I had wholesome food, and—though that was her job—I always tried to show my appreciation by eating every crumb, since I could not say my thanks out loud. And—as for Sven? Well, he preferred it when he didn’t have to see me since I reminded him a little of his youngest child. So I tried to stay out of his line of sight.

As would be expected, no pictures of me existed beyond my infancy; thus, my caretakers had no idea about who I really was, and they had been paid so much money that they honestly didn’t care.
Being so young, I wasn’t really sure of who I was either. All that I knew for certain was that I was the boy who was required to remain silent—though I would occasionally whisper out words when I knew I couldn’t be heard.

I did know a couple of things. I’d been “renamed” Eric Northman and had been dubbed an orphan. And—as I grew old enough to be more aware—that is who I believed myself to be.

When I was six years old, I had my first visitor in the countryside: Marnie Stonebrook.

By then I’d been fully conditioned not to speak, so I’d simply listened to the woman during most of her visit. She told me that she was there to cure me of my “mind deformity.” She added that I would be given rewards if I progressed in my “studies.”

From her head, I heard a longer story. Marnie was a psychologist; however, she also dabbled in the occult—not that I really understood either of those things back then. What I did understand was her recollection of a man named Appius Ocella hiring her. Marnie was what one would call a royal-phile, someone who was so interested in the royal family that she felt like she was a part of them. Appius convinced her that I’d been “afflicted” as a child and that, because of my “disability,” I was a danger to the king and everyone else in the royal family.

I recognized my parents’ faces in her head, too. They were agreeing with Appius.

Marnie felt honored that the monarchy was entrusting her with so important a task.

It seemed clear to me—even at such a young age—that she would have offered her services even if she’d not been paid.

But she had been paid—a lot.

For both her supposed skill-set and her discretion.

Not surprisingly, at our first meeting, part of her doubted that I had any ability at all.

However, I was promised toys beyond the few picture books and blocks I’d been given three years before if I demonstrated what I could do.
The only words I’d spoken in almost three years were whispers in my dark room as I made up stories for my picture books when I knew that my caretakers were sleeping. So—sounding like a stranger to myself because I’d not vocalized “normally” in so long—I proved my ability to Marnie by saying the names of items that were on the cards that she was looking at.

House.

Apple.

Book.

Fork.

Milk.

Cow.

Of course, some of the images were beyond me, but Marnie “helped” by thinking the words as she looked at the cards.

Thus, I was able to come up with words like “kitten” and “bicycle”—despite the fact that I’d never seen either.

Needless to say, Marnie was convinced that I did have an ability, and I received the toys—including a bicycle!

Over the next few weeks, Marnie encouraged me to speak to her, though I was still forbidden to speak with Sven and Hannah. Heck—in those early days—Marnie was something of a speech therapist to me since I’d done so little speaking for half of my young life!

She had told me that she needed to fully understand my “abnormality” in order to cure it, and I did everything she asked me to do as she conducted her “diagnostics.” Starved for attention, I wanted to please her. And the tasks she gave me—similar to the “picture game” we’d played that first day—offered me a kind of interaction I’d never known before.

Someone let me speak. Someone wanted to hear me.
Not surprisingly, I grew to “like” her very quickly, and I looked forward to our lessons.

However, I quickly learned that having something pleasant for a short while could be worse than never having it at all.

After her diagnostic tests were completed, Marnie began trying to “cure” me. And I soon learned that demonstrating my abilities would no longer please her.

It would enrage her.

It was a cruel lesson.

And she was a cruel teacher when I didn’t show signs of “improvement.”

Day after day, she would make me sit with my back to her. Sometimes she would speak things aloud. Sometimes she would just “think her words at me.”

My task was to tell her which one was occurring.

I had no ability to block thoughts from my mind at the time. Thus, needless to say, each answer I gave was a guess.

The toys that had been given to me were the first things to be taken away when I made mistakes. Then the meagre possessions I’d had before her arrival were confiscated.

And then my freedom.

Before her arrival into my life, I’d always been allowed to spend part of my days outside where there was a stream. I’d study the fish swimming. And I’d run along the banks of the stream. Unsurprisingly, my time outside was taken away from me on the day when I’d run out of possessions that Marnie could seize. I was sentenced to my bare room—even for meals.

After that, I learned that Marnie wasn’t above punishing me with ruler or belt when I mistook her spoken words for her thoughts.
And then—one day, right after a particularly painful lesson—I heard a thought that I know she’d not intended for me to hear. She’d had a conversation with Appius and my father. They’d agreed that—if I didn’t show progress soon—I would need to be “put down.”

Even with very little knowledge of the world, I understood the implications of her thought. And—though I had no happiness in my life to speak of—I wanted to live.

After that, I redoubled my efforts during my “lessons” with Marnie, trying to discover anything that would distinguish her thoughts from her spoken words. Looking back, I know that the difficulty came because she was literally projecting her thoughts at me, so they “sounded” as if they were being spoken aloud. And her mind was extremely disciplined, too. So it wasn’t as if she “thought” about whether she would be “speaking” or “thinking” before she did it.

My savior had been water—a little bit of water trapped in my ear following a bath. That trapped water had eventually led to me having an ear infection—one that wasn’t noticed by my cruel “teacher” and indifferent caretakers until I’d collapsed from a dangerously high fever.

Though the opportunity might have been perfect for me to be “done away with,” a doctor was sent for. The infection was bad enough that I lost partial hearing in the afflicted ear. But I was grateful to be ill, for Marnie disappeared from my life for several months as I recovered.

My doctor was a kind man, and—though I knew better than to speak to him—I heard in his thoughts that he felt sorry for me. Understandably, he thought that Sven and Hannah were my parents, and he marveled at the lack of care they seemed to have for my health. During his daily visits, he also noticed the lack of any kind of toys in my room. Given the fact that my caretakers seemed well-off, he wondered at this and asked them about it. They relayed merely that I was an unruly child and deserved no toys.

The next day, the doctor snuck me a small wooden puzzle game. Even without reading his thoughts, I knew that it needed to stay hidden. The object of the game was to maneuver one of the
pieces through the others until it was freed. If I was successful, the doctor would rearrange the pieces for me the next time he visited.

It was this game that first helped me to conceptualize the notion of having shields. I’d tried everything I could think of to distinguish Marnie’s thoughts from her words, but when those thoughts were projected, I simply couldn’t “feel” a difference. However, because of the puzzle game, I began to wonder if I could somehow block her thoughts from getting into my head to begin with. Then, I would hear only her spoken words.

I visualized the pieces of the wooden puzzle game in my own mind. And I practiced on my caretakers as I lay in bed, still recovering from my ear infection. And then—one day—something that I did worked! Oh—it didn’t work perfectly, but I could “hear” a difference. Thoughts that had been loud before were suddenly much less so, and those thoughts seemed to have an echo to them.

Of course, Marnie did come back. And her thoughts told me that I had only one week to show progress.

But I was ready for her—and ready to fight for my life.

I used the budding “shields” in my head to “win” the “games” that we played during my lessons. I won’t say that it wasn’t difficult to defeat her. The “blocks” I was using to try to keep her thoughts out weakened after a few hours of “treatment.” However—despite a blistering headache—I continued to hear a slight “echo” to her thoughts.

Marnie, of course, wasn’t satisfied; she continued to test me relentlessly for another month.

Eventually, she posited that my high fever had cured me—purged me of whatever affliction the devil had given to me. And she exited my life forever.

The last time I saw her, I read in her thoughts that she’d told Appius and my father that I was, indeed, cured. However, it had already been decided that it was too “inconvenient” for my
family to attempt to reclaim me, though—to my father’s credit—he did decide that I should be
allowed to have a “better life” after that.

Sven and Hannah were told that they could speak with me, though they were instructed to
immediately report to Appius if I did anything “abnormal.” I was also allowed toys and my outdoor
privileges were reinstated.

But—best of all—tutors were arranged for!

Though always careful to hide my abnormality by using my shields, I still managed to learn
quickly. Reading opened up the world to me. And mathematics helped me to understand ways that
I could make my shields even stronger. Science taught me about what I saw on my daily trips
outside. And I excelled at foreign languages because I could “hear” them and their translations in
the minds of my teachers if I concentrated hard enough.

As far as I could tell, none of my tutors knew who I really was, and that was fine by me.

Over the years, my studies became more complex, and I began to favor history above other
subjects. None of my tutors questioned my motives when I wanted to learn more about the history
of my own nation, including its current royal family.

Meanwhile, my own parents went on to have a daughter—Pamela. I didn’t know much
about her. But I assumed that she was “normal” because she was kept by them. I sometimes
imagined what it would be like to meet her, but I also knew that was not in the cards for me.

Eventually, my caretakers became more congenial to me—even calling me by name—
though they never treated me like family or anything. I was still their “job.” When I was seventeen,
part of that job became to teach me about “life skills.”

Hannah showed me how to cook a few simple dishes. I learned how to do my own laundry.
Of course, I already knew the basics of cleaning, for I’d been expected to keep my own room and
bathroom tidy for many years.
After that, Sven took me to the market and taught me how to use money to buy things for myself—my own clothing, my own food, etc. Not surprisingly, going to the market for the first time was a difficult experience. Luckily, Sven figured that my trepidation was caused because I was overwhelmed with seeing so many new people and things. Of course, my discomfort was actually from hearing so many thoughts. I’d become very good at keeping up my shields when there were only a few people nearby, but I’d never experienced having to keep out dozens of people’s thoughts all at once.

Thankfully, after a few more visits to the market, I was able to function more “normally.” And I used the trips to work on making my shields stronger.

I was given a manual about driving and then took a test before Sven actually taught me how to drive. After I took another test, I was given a license with the name “Eric Northman” on it.

I learned the purpose of these “life lessons” on the day that I turned eighteen. With a cordial goodbye, Hannah and Sven told me that they would be “retiring” and moving on. And that meant that I would be living on my own.

They’d already packed.

After they left, I couldn’t help but to be lost. Would I be expected to leave the home I’d grown up in? Who did the home belong to—if not my caretakers? Was the car outside mine to use? Who owned it? Was the money that was left on the kitchen counter by my caretakers mine to use?

I figured that I would simply ask my tutors all of my questions, but they didn’t come that day. That night, after I went to bed, I heard a strange mind come near the house. Frightened and curious, I dropped my shields.

The man I heard had come to spy on me—to see what I would do. He’d been hired by Appius Ocella. The name that I’d not heard for many years gave me a chill.
Though I could hear the spy in my vicinity all the time after that, I never let on that I knew that he was there. I simply went on as best I could. I used the car to go to the market for food when I needed it. Learning by trial and error, I did my best to tend to the garden that Hannah had begun. I kept the house clean. And I read.

Though the money in the envelope had been a lot, I knew it wouldn’t last forever, so when I saw a help-wanted sign at the grocery store, I asked about the job. Soon, I was stocking shelves and cleaning the store at night. And I was earning money.

Still not knowing who owned the house or car I was using, I used most of the money I earned to rent a small apartment within walking distance of my workplace. I replaced the money I’d taken from the envelope and packed up my clothing and the books that I’d been given by the tutors who’d once instructed me. I left I note on the kitchen counter—next to the money—indicating where I could be found if someone came to claim the car or the books or even the clothing I wore. I didn’t know what else to say as a farewell to the house I’d spent most of my life in.

For a year after that, I worked as much and as hard as I could, even as I internally worked on my shields. However, to avoid making “mistakes,” I kept mostly to myself. Unsurprisingly, the people in the small town where I now lived thought that I was “odd” and “antisocial.” I couldn’t blame them; after all, their assessment was accurate.

I still “heard” the man who had been sent by Appius to spy on me, for he moved into the boarding house down the street from my own. I learned that his name was Franklin Mott; I also learned that he was extremely bored at his job. I couldn’t blame him. Following me around must have seemed monotonous at best. Eventually, I did try new things. I discovered the town’s modest library and visited it several times a week. And my shields eventually grew strong enough that I tried eating at one of the town’s restaurants.
It was there that I was first “flirted” with. One of the waitresses—a woman with abnormally red hair—shamelessly leered at me. I could see what she wanted me to do to her from her thoughts, and—as a nineteen-year-old virgin—I cannot say that I wasn’t tempted. However, when she brushed her hand against mine when she brought me my food, I discovered that my shields were not strong enough to contemplate being intimate with her.

Her thoughts crashed through my shields, and I could “hear” her insecurities through her lust. I could “hear” her need to “feel good” and to “escape” from her role as the mother of two children she’d never wanted to have. I could “hear” how she didn’t care anything about me—beyond the fact that she thought I was attractive. I could “hear” her hoping that my dick didn’t turn out to be a disappointment. Yes—as I listened to the redhead—I realized that I wasn’t anywhere near the point where I could even contemplate having sex.

Despite my “encounter” with the redhead, I still tried to insert myself more into the “real” world. I made a point to go out once a week—to a restaurant or to the local pub. I even tried to be a little more social, starting up conversations with the bar tender or the librarian.

As I got out more, I was surprised to find out that many women found me attractive, but—though my body may have wanted more—my mind couldn’t handle their thoughts.

However, as long as I wasn’t touched, I found that my shields were becoming stronger and stronger. Thus, I began contemplating what I might do with my life in the future. I’d loved studying, and I’d learned to use the computer at the library; since my expenses were few, I bought my own computer about six months after I left the country house. My landlord graciously showed me how to access the Internet from my room, and I discovered more of my world—and my options—each and every day.

I learned that there were actually ways that I could continue my education via online classes, which I intuited would be a good way to start. I soon realized, however, that I would need a credit
card to pay for things like the classes and my books, so I opened a bank account and got a credit card.

Indeed, with each little step I took, I felt like I could take another.

However, each step also seemed to add a challenge. Not having any kind of official school transcripts, I first had to sign up to take a test that would prove that I knew enough to have passed secondary school. The most challenging part was that I would have to travel to the nearest testing center, Östersund, a city with over 40,000 people, in order to take the test. The town I lived in had only about 700 residents, and I was scared of what being around more people would do to my shields.

Still—I knew I had to try. I spent weeks planning. I bought a bus ticket and arranged for a hotel room for three days prior to the test, hoping that I could use a few days to become acclimated to shielding from a lot of people. I arranged for time off from my job, and I went to the most crowded places in my town—practicing as much as I could.

Despite all these preparations, I felt out of my depth as soon as I boarded the bus for Östersund. Strangely, I was somewhat comforted to “hear” Franklin Mott board soon after me. His familiar mind followed me to my hotel and then throughout the town as I tried to strengthen my shields by holding out more and more people. Knowing that Franklin was watching, I had extra incentive to keep my expression calm, even when my shields buckled in the more crowded areas.

For the first two days that I was in Östersund, I pushed myself with practice and then crashed into bed each night with a splitting headache. The day before my test, I decided to rest, hoping for the best. However, as I walked into the testing center, I had reason to worry. I realized that my own preparations were very different from those of the other hundred or so people in the room. And—suddenly—I was worried about more than just keeping my shields up. The people in the room were studying from test preparation books, hoping to fit one or two last pieces of
knowledge into their heads. And that is when I realized that I didn’t really know whether I actually had enough knowledge to even take the test.

Let alone pass it.

I became even more nervous as I filled in the little circles of my scantron form. I was just glad that I was not asked for information like “parents’ names,” as I did my best to mark each item as instructed. It was clear that the others in the room were much more familiar with using such forms.

Once the test itself began, I learned just how difficult it was to concentrate on my own answers as I heard the other people in the room thinking about theirs. Were they right? Was I right? I did the best I could to concentrate on my own thoughts as I plodded through the test.

Still—I left the testing center with the worst headache of my life and only a slim hope that I’d passed, given the way that my thoughts had begun to swirl around those of the other testers by the end of the exam.

The next day, as I rode back to my little town, I comforted myself with the idea that—even if I could never qualify to take university classes—I could continue to study on my own by reading books or researching with my computer.

By the time I started my overnight shift, I was just grateful that the sleeping brains of those in my vicinity were not attacking my shields.

Two weeks later, I received my results from the test. Afraid, I kept the notification in my pocket for days until I finally compelled myself to open it.

The test required a score of 75% or above to pass.

I gasped when I saw that I had earned 94%!
I was celebrating by applying to a university which offered quite a few online classes when there was a knock at my door. Immediately, I dropped my shields in order to figure out who was there.

Appius Ocella.

“Just a moment, please,” I said, trying to sound natural. I stretched out my brain and found Franklin Mott nearby. He’d just met with Appius and had given him a report about my comings and goings. Nothing related to my disability was in the report, however.

I “listened” to my “guest,” hoping to hear his reason for being there as I approached the door, but his mind was focused upon the “squalor” that he felt I was living in.

I took a deep breath and opened the door.

“Eric Northman?” he asked in an official-sounding voice.

I nodded. “Yes. Can I help you?”

“I am an attorney,” he lied. “I need to speak with you.”

Keeping my expression neutral, I responded, “An attorney?”

His beady, dark eyes narrowed, studying everything about me. “Yes. I am here to discuss your estate.”

I frowned. “Estate?” I asked.

“May I come in?” he requested.

Intuiting that being compliant and feigning ignorance were needed to survive my encounter with Appius Ocella, I invited him into my apartment and gestured toward the rickety table that served as both my desk and the place where I ate.

“My name is Victor Madden,” he lied again as he sat down.

“Mr. Madden,” I nodded, taking the other seat.

Victor/Appius looked around my apartment, scrutinizing everything he found there.
I couldn’t help but to scrutinize, too.

The apartment had only two rooms, with its only door being to the bathroom. The furniture had come with the dwelling, and I’d not found any need to change things. There was a twin-sized bed in the corner, and next to that was a dresser, where my clothing was stored. Another “section” of the room boasted a small couch, which faced a cabinet where a television would have gone—if I’d had one. However, I did not. Instead, I had stacked books on the cabinet. My small kitchen included a stove with two burners and a narrow oven, but that was plenty big for me. I also had a small counter with a sink and a refrigerator. The only other thing in the small dwelling was the table we now sat at.

“Can I get you something to drink?” I asked, emulating what I knew other people did when they entertained guests.

“No,” he said with a bit of a sneer.

I waited for him to speak again for a full minute before I asked, “What can I do for you, Mr. Madden?”

“Why did you leave your home?” he asked pointedly. “Why did you move here?”

I decided that “mostly” honesty would likely work the best in the situation I was in.

“My caretakers left,” I shrugged. “I did not know whom the house belonged to, so—as soon as I had a job—I left,” I responded.

He tilted his head to study me even more intensely than before.

“Um—if you’re here for the car, it’s parked outside. I drove it only a few times,” I said under his scrutiny.

“The house belongs to you, and so does the car,” he said after almost another silence-filled minute.

I frowned. “How?”
His face was a blank, his eyes reptilian. “You were left an inheritance by a relative,” he said as he opened a briefcase and produced a file folder.

I couldn’t hide my surprise, though I figured that emotion was expected by Appius/Victor. “A relative?” I asked.

“A great-uncle,” he said evenly.

“Is he the reason why I had caretakers? The reason I had tutors?” I asked.

I didn’t feel the need to mention Marnie.

Appius/Victor nodded in confirmation before pushing the folder to me. “You have been left more than just the home and the vehicle,” he said.

I knew that he expected me to open the file, so I did. The difficult part of reading over the bullet points was that Appius was thinking directly toward me—hoping to make me react. He thought about how he’d wanted to kill me from the first moment he heard about me. He imagined several scenarios, including taking the gun currently in his jacket pocket and blowing my brains out. And then he thought about how pathetic he thought that I was—the pitiful man without any friends.

Even as his projected thoughts bombarded me, however, I kept looking at the papers in front of me. They outlined my ownership of the house I’d lived in for so long and the car that had been parked for a year. And they also told me that I was quite wealthy.

Again, I didn’t need to fake my surprise as I saw the amount of money I had been given.

“This can’t be right,” I said.

Appius/Victor said nothing aloud, even as his head told me that this was my parents’ way of easing their consciences. Appius had disapproved of my being given anything—except for that bullet to the head. And he was still looking for any indication that I was still “afflicted”—that I might still be a danger to the royal family.
However, he believed in Franklin Mott’s efficiency. And—honestly—he thought that I was too ignorant to be able to pull off hiding any ability I might still have. After so many years, I “heard” him accepting Marnie’s assessment that my near-death experience, which had included a very high fever, had eradicated any ability that I might have had.

I kept my eyes on the file in front of me.

“I cannot take this,” I said. “I didn’t even know him—my great-uncle.”

“He died when you were only an infant,” he said.

“Do you know anything of my parents?” I asked, knowing that if I didn’t enquire about the rest of my “family” he’d be suspicious.

“Your mother was a prostitute; she died when you were born,” he lied callously. “And your father is unknown. That is why the name of your great-uncle will not be made available to you; it is not Northman,” he added. “The rest of your blood relations want nothing to do with you.”

“Oh,” I said, feeling the sting of his words acutely.

“You should count yourself lucky that you had a relative who felt an obligation toward you.”

I didn’t need to hear his thoughts to bristle at his words.

“The money you have inherited has been moved to an account at the bank in this town,” he said derisively—as if being in such a rural community were distasteful to him. “The deed to the house and the car are in the folder,” he added, getting up. “All the information you need is in the file,” he smirked as he went to the door.

I stood and followed him.

I was glad that he didn’t offer to shake my hand before opening the door and leaving without another word.

Feeling numb, I walked back to the table. I read in the file that the inheritance had been “officially” mine since I turned eighteen. As promised, the file also contained the deeds to the
house and car. And there was more too. There was a birth certificate for “Eric Northman”—me.

My mother’s name was listed as Anna Northman. My father’s name was blank.

In addition, there was a school record inside of the file, indicating that I’d completed my educational requirements with distinction.

I closed my eyes. Of course, Appius would have known that I had applied to take the equivalency test. I was ignorant in many things, but I was also a mind reader and knew that Franklin Mott had monitored my Internet searches from the moment I’d first gotten a computer.

I shivered as I imagined Appius’s amusement in knowing that I was taking a test that I didn’t need to take. I sighed, knowing that every moment of my life following Marnie’s departure from it had all been a test—a test to determine whether I was still able to read thoughts.

I figured that the evidence that I’d passed his test was in front of me.

Of course, I was wrong. His tests were not over.

I shook my head to clear out the memory of Appius as I took a step forward in line. I was still about ten people away from the entrance of Fangtasia, and I heard several people in front of me complaining that they’d stopped letting people into the club because it was at capacity. I leaned against the building’s wall.

I was patient.

I’d have to be throughout my life.

I took a deep breath as I slipped back into my memories.

While taking as many classes as I could online, I had continued working for the grocer for three additional years. However, I began getting letters telling me that I needed to fulfill my mandatory military service to my country.
When I was 23, I applied to do just that. My tutors had taught me several languages, and I’d studied others online. Thus, I was made a translator in the military. As would be expected, basic training was difficult for me since the facility I trained in had a lot of people within a relatively small space, but my assignment turned out to be a godsend.

I was given a post in Berlin—since my two strongest foreign languages were German and English. Even though Berlin was certainly the largest city I’d ever been to, I had fewer problems controlling my shields there. No matter how well I spoke German, I still “thought” in Swedish. And my disability also needed time to “translate” the thoughts that I heard in the other languages I knew. And that afforded a degree of separation that was good for me.

My service lasted eighteen months, and I thought about staying in the army, but the university called to me. I felt confident enough to actually finish my degree in “proper” classes, following my time in Berlin—and, though it was difficult when I first got to Lund in southern Sweden, I soon built my shields to the point that I could hold out the thoughts of the other students at Lund University. There, I specialized in history—with an emphasis on the History of the Americas. I also honed my language skills and ended up being proficient in Latin, French, and Cantonese—in addition to being fluent in English and German.

I graduated when I was 28 years old, and I applied for a work visa to the United States.

I cannot say that I was surprised when my visa request was almost immediately approved. After all, I still “heard” Franklin Mott and other spies sent by Appius almost every day, so I knew that the king’s head of security was still interested in my life—even if my parents were not.

I ended up in Louisiana because of random chance: a finger put onto a map of the United States while my eyes were closed.
Not surprisingly, Bon Temps, with a population close to the first town I’d lived in, wasn’t on
the map. But it was still in the spot where my finger had landed. And the school there was looking
for someone to teach history and French.

I was hired.

Unsurprisingly, my request for U.S. citizenship two years before seemed to be on the
FastTrack.

Though I’d not heard any new spies since moving to Louisiana, I still wondered if Appius
Ocella was hurrying along my citizenship request, working behind the scenes to ensure that I was as
far away as possible from Sweden and my “real” family. I suppose that was his job, after all.

It certainly wasn’t my “blood” family which had caused me to venture to a vampire bar. But
it was still family that had compelled me to go there—the only family I’d ever truly had.

When I moved to Bon Temps, I rented a room from Adele Stackhouse, a widow who lived
on the outskirts of the community. In fact, I rented her entire upper floor. She was kind and
generous. And her mind matched her actions—except for the fact that there was quite a bit of
gossip swirling around in that mind. Adele loved to collect “dirt” on people. However, she wasn’t
one to let that gossip spill, especially not if it could hurt someone.

She just liked knowing things. I smirked to myself. If she could visit my brain, she would
know almost everything about the residents of the small town.

Adele’s mind told me that she sensed that there was something “off” about me, but that had
never stopped her from being extremely kind. In fact, she’d attributed my “differences” to my being
“foreign,” and I’d encouraged that same interpretation in everyone I met in the small community.
Most everyone in Bon Temps looked at me with a smidgeon of distrust since I wasn’t “from there,”
but that that was fine by me. I didn’t want to be popular.
Indeed, I was happy just living with Adele and having a quiet life— with the emphasis on “quiet.” Hell—even our neighbors were ideal, given the fact that the dead in the graveyard next to her home didn’t think.

At least not in any language that I could hear.

Thank the gods.

Of course, the teeming minds of the teens I taught were difficult to keep out of my own mind at times; however, I managed. And the practice was good for my shields. I was already legendary among the students when it came to catching cheaters and being a good advocate for the students. I always let the school counselor, Halleigh Robinson, know if I’d “heard” anything that needed her immediate attention. She figured that I was just in tune with my students. Of course, I didn’t tell her that I’d heard about their troubles from their own heads.

As for the “normal” teen angst issues? If I “heard” them, I let them be. Frankly, it was mostly the “big” stuff that I couldn’t keep from penetrating my shields nowadays.

However, home was my refuge.

And it was a home—at least, that is how it felt thanks to Adele.

At the old farmhouse, I stored up the energy I would need for my workdays. And—with what time I had left after grading student work—I read, ran along the country roads to keep myself fit, or helped Adele with chores.

It was Adele’s grandson who had caused me to come to Fangtasia—which was obviously well out of my comfort zone. Though Jason didn’t like me much—since he could never get past the fact that I was a “foreigner” in his head, he had always been cordial to me for Adele’s sake. He’d even bit his tongue when she began to insist that I eat holiday dinners with them.

Of course, the fact that I didn’t try to steal women from the “town’s supply”—as Jason had first worried about when he’d seen me—had gone a long way toward earning his toleration, too.
I took a deep breath as I advanced a few places in Fangtasia’s line.

I caught the thoughts of the two young women checking out my ass from behind—as if they were projecting their minds right at me. Automatically, I bolstered my shields. I knew that I was attractive. Between the running that I did almost every day and the work I did for Adele, I knew that my body was well-toned. And I’d also lucked out in the genetics department—at least physically—for, though my father and mother had been keen to give me up, they’d offered me the best parts of themselves.

In fact, if anyone had ever cared to look closely enough at me—which few had—he or she would have noticed that I looked almost exactly like my father, with the exceptions being that I had slightly lighter hair and my mother’s eyes. In Sweden, I’d tried to be more-less invisible. And, luckily, in the United States, hardly anyone even knew what the king looked like—let alone his brother and sister-in-law.

But that didn’t stop many women and some men from cataloguing my features in their minds, though I always tried to block out their thoughts.

I wasn’t a virgin—thanks to Vera, whom I’d met in Germany—but I certainly wasn’t very experienced with sex either.

Vera was a decade older than I was, and she was originally from Russia—so that was the language in which she “thought.” It was a language I didn’t know.

She was one of the barmaids at the tavern I frequented in Berlin while I was stationed there, and she took a liking to me. One night—I drank more than I ought to have drunk and I went home with her. Sadly, for both of us, I came in the condom as she put it on me.

However, she decided that I deserved another chance to actually get inside of her the next morning.
She thought that I was “sweet” when I apologized for lasting only five minutes when she gave me a second chance. She spent a few months giving me more chances and taught me how to please her with my fingers and tongue. Eventually, however, she moved back to Moscow, which was likely a good thing. Though I still couldn’t understand her fully, I’d found myself learning Russian because I couldn’t tune her thoughts out when we touched.

I’d tried with one other woman—a young woman at university. Despite the fact that she wasn’t a “loud” broadcaster, I’d still “heard” her thoughts as I’d tried to “perform.” My inexperience and nervousness were certainly noted by her. It was humbling to “hear” her disappointment when I didn’t get her off during intercourse. I’d done my best to please her orally after that; however, she was still disappointed with me. She was already planning to tell her friends about the fact that the “bark” of my dick—as promised by my above normal size—was not matched by its “bite.”

After that encounter, I’d decided that masturbation was preferable to sex. After all, it just wasn’t possible for me to keep the thoughts of the woman out of my brain when I was touching her, and that made it almost impossible for me to get and maintain an erection.

My right hand had no thoughts at all—thankfully.

And it could cause me no shame when I didn’t please it back.

Now near my thirty-fourth birthday, I’d not had sex since I was 27 years old. Given the angst it had caused me, I didn’t miss the brief physical pleasure I’d gotten from it. And—as for emotional affection? Love? Well—it was safe to say that I didn’t miss it because I couldn’t remember ever having it.

At least not the romantic kind.

But I did know that I was loved now. Over the years, Adele had come to think of me as an honorary grandson. She appreciated every pass I made with the lawnmower and every weed I
pulled. She had no way of knowing, but I spent a lot of my free time studying how I could help her—whether it be by learning to change the oil in her car or figuring out how to fix a leaking faucet.

Yes. It was safe to say that I would do anything I could for her, and she needed my help. Or—at least—Jason did.

He had been implicated in two murders, and both of the murdered girls had been bitten by vampires, though the bites hadn’t been made on the nights of their slayings, and neither girl had been drained.

To me, that ruled out vampires.

However, the Bon Temps police had exactly two suspects. 1. Jason. 2. An unknown vampire.

I knew from Jason’s head that he was innocent of the girls’ deaths, though he’d certainly had sex with them.

I shook my head, wishing for the hundredth time for brain bleach so that I could remove Jason’s thoughts about the rough intercourse he’d had with one of the women in particular. Then again, there were so many things that I wished I could un-see. But brain bleach was a pipedream—just as a “normal” life was.

“Hi there, big boy,” a vampire leered at me as I finally found my way to the front of the line.

I took a deep breath and lowered my shields a little so that I could hear his thoughts.

I gasped.

He was a blank to me!
“Hello?” I said uncertainly as I looked at the vampire, trying to concentrate once more on “hearing” his thoughts.

Still a blank.

The vampire, a muscular, 6 feet tall, black male—who seemed to be glowing just a little bit, or maybe it was just all the glitter he was wearing—looked at me from foot to head. He whistled. “You’s is just my kinda drink o’ water.”

“Don’t you drink blood?” I asked, my voice trembling a little.

“Oh—you’s really is too cute for words!” the vampire chuckled as he wrapped his arm around mine and led me into the bar as if I’d agreed to be his date. Or his meal. Another vampire immediately took his place at the door. “My name’s Lafayette, and you’s looks like you could use a drink,” he leered.

“Um—what about the cover charge?” I asked.

“Oh—your money’s no good here,” he chuckled. “My mistress has taken a liking to your looks, but now that I’ve seen you up close, I thinks I’m gonna have to convince you to be mine instead.”

He tightened his arm around mine, and—though my long-sleeved shirt prevented our skin from touching directly—I was still shocked that I couldn’t “hear” him.

“Mistress?” I asked.

“Forget I said anything ‘bout her,” he leered. “I’ve decided that I’s is gonna keep you.”

In truth, I wasn’t really put off by Lafayette’s obvious flirting. Though I’d never been attracted to men, I figured that people had a right to pick who they liked—even if the people they
liked were of the same gender. Hell—I didn’t think that I had the right to judge anyone for their differences or their preferences.

And something about the vampire made me feel at ease; he seemed—for lack of a better word—“friendly.”

And I was curious about him—mostly because I couldn’t hear him.

His mind was a void.

And I liked it immediately.

“Please tells me that you’s here to gets drunk, lose yo’ motherfuckin’ mind, and experiments with others of your own kind,” he purred, as we approached the bar.

“Humans?” I asked, even as his hand came close to my own, though he still didn’t touch my flesh. I couldn’t help but to wonder what would happen if he did.

I stretched out my telepathy again and realized that the vampire’s touch—even over the cotton of my shirt—was somehow muffling many of the thoughts of the humans around me. I smiled at Lafayette; I couldn’t help myself.

Of course, that just encouraged his flirting.

“Men!” the vampire grinned in answer to my question as his fangs popped down and his hand brushed against mine for a second. I gasped, but that wasn’t because of the deadly teeth that had been presented to me.

“I can’t hear you,” I whispered.

“Men!” he said louder, clueless to the true meaning behind my words. “Don’t you wanna try one out? Ain’t it on your bucket list?” he ogled.

As he looked at me with a question in his eyes, I felt a little pressure on my head, but I still couldn’t hear him. “How ‘bout I show you the offices?” he asked.

“Um—no thanks,” I stammered out a response.
Looking a little surprised that I’d turned him down, he released my arm. To stop the bombardment of thoughts that immediately hit me, I quickly put my shields back up.

“Um—I’m sorry,” I said to him. “You’re handsome and all. But I’m not here to make a connection in that way.”

His surprise turned to amusement. “Then why is you here, tall, blond, and yummy? Is you lookin’ to be bitten?”

“No!” I answered quickly. “An—uh—acquaintance of mine is a suspect in two murder cases. Both of the women he’s been accused of killing had vampire bites on them. I was hoping to find out if any vampires here knew anything about them.”

Lafayette’s fangs jetted down—this time menacingly—and I heard a similar click from behind me.

“You think a vampire committed the murders?” he growled.

“No!” I gasped. I began to sweat as he zeroed in on my neck. “Neither victim was drained. I was just hoping to find out if there were other women who were targeted for being with vampires. I was thinking that the murders might have been done by someone who hated vampires—a member of one of those hate groups?” I said quickly, hoping that my fast response would buy me a few more seconds of life.

The vampire’s fangs disappeared as quickly as they’d dropped. “Well—that’s good. I’s woulda hated to damage you,” he said, leering at me as if he’d not just threatened me. “Tell me,” he added, “you ain’t from around these parts. Where is that delectable accent from?”

I could feel my cheeks blushing. “Um—I’m from Sweden originally,” I answered. “But I’ve been living in Bon Temps for several years now. And I’m almost a citizen,” I added—though I wasn’t sure that fact would mean much to a vampire.
“So is I!” he cackled. “I’s just needs the AVL to get the Vampire Equal Rights Amendment through, and I’ll be more citizen than I ever was when I was breathin’,” he added.

“You were a slave?” I rasped.

“3/5ths of a person—to be precise—‘cording to the law when I was turned,” he grinned.

“But—don’t let that fool ya. I is all man!”

He leered at me playfully, and I couldn’t stop my chuckle. Whether it was because I couldn’t “hear” him or because he seemed so comfortable with who he was—a stark contrast to me—I liked him, despite the fact that he’d threatened me only moments before.

“What’s your poison?” asked an impatient voice from behind me. I turned around to see a striking Native American vampire—and, by striking, I mean that he looked like he wanted to strike me.

“Beer. Anything you have on tap,” I responded, trying not to let my fear show in my voice.

“Not the domestic shit,” Lafayette said. “Or the lite shit. Gives him something good.”

The other vampire rolled his eyes before pouring my beer. Then Lafayette gestured for me to follow him to a table at the far end of the dance floor.

I took a long drink of my beer as soon as we got there, praying that the alcohol would steady my nerves as I started dropping my shields again.

Immediately, I “heard” a lot people who were thinking only of being bitten and fucked.

I also heard other voids in the room.

Other vampires! As I looked around, I noticed that they were “glowing” a little too.

“You is like a fish outta water,” Lafayette smirked, breaking me from my thoughts and interrupting my scanning.

I nodded in agreement.

“By the way, I never caught your name, sugar,” he said.
“Eric Northman,” I said, extending my hand and readying myself to lower all of my shields in order to try to hear him.

Unfortunately, Lafayette looked at my hand as if it held the plague.

“Sorry gorgeous,” he smirked, “vampires don’t care much for physical contact. Unless it matters,” he added suggestively.

“Um—oh,” I said, pulling my hand away. Internally, I was envious that I couldn’t simply adopt that stance about touching—at least when it came to non-vampires. “Sorry. You’re the first vampire I’ve met.”

“And you’s the first Viking I’ve ever seen up close,” he grinned.

“Viking?”

He nodded, his glittery eyelashes batting with each head bob. “Oh yeah! And rights now, I’m picturin’ you ravagin’ me.”

I choked a little on my drink as Lafayette sat back in his chair and laughed.

“You is cute, but you’s really don’t belong here, pretty Viking,” he chuckled as his eyes moved down to judge my clothing. By his slight frown, I could tell that it didn’t reach his standard of approval.

I looked down at my garments. I was wearing blue jeans and a long-sleeved, cream-colored Henley. Looking around, I noted that most of the people in the bar were in all black.

There was a lot of leather.

And collars.

“I guess I don’t,” I said with a frown. A vampire bar—I supposed—would have to be added to the list of places where I didn’t belong.

Not that there was a long list of places where I did belong.

“So—someone’s been killin’ women in your neck of the woods?” he drawled.
“Uh—yeah. My landlady’s grandson has been accused of killing them—since he’s had—uh—sex with both,” I returned, feeling myself blush.

“You really is too precious for words, Mr. Eric Northman. You sure I can’t tempt you to experiment with a little man-love?”

I blushed even more as Lafayette chortled.

“So—tells me—how is you gonna go about you’s investigation in our humble little bar?”

I stiffened. I didn’t figure that answering, “by reading all the minds here,” would work out well for me, even though I couldn’t read his. So I thought of my backup plan. “I have pictures of the girls,” I said. “I was hoping that someone would recognize them and could tell me if any suspicious humans had taken note of them with vampires,” I emphasized.

Lafayette tilted his head in curiosity. “Show them to me.”

I took the clippings of the young women that I’d taken from the newspaper out of my wallet and handed them to Lafayette.

I’d seen Maudette Pickens a few times—always at the gas station. At first, she’d seemed pleasant enough—though, like many, she’d inventoried my body as if I were a commodity. The last time I’d seen her, however, she’d wondered if I would be up for choking her during sex. After that, I’d made a point of going to a different gas station.

Dawn Green’s thoughts had been “worse” in some ways. I suppose that most heterosexual men would have bent over backwards for the dark-haired beauty. But Dawn’s inner musings were not nearly as lovely as her face. She had worked at Merlotte’s, Bon Temps’s local watering hole. I’d been in there only a few times—because, frankly, the owner of the place had made me uncomfortable because he seemed to always be staring at me.

And I’m quite sure he’d sniffed me a few times too.
However, I’d been there enough to hear what Dawn was really like. It wasn’t just that she thought about me sexually either. I was used to that from others and was always a little flattered by it. No. It was how she thought of most other people—as if they were lesser than she was because she happened to be pretty.

To me, that made her ugly. During the few times I was around her, I’d also “heard” her thinking about married men that she’d slept with—just to spite their wives.

But Jason had much less discerning tastes; he was bothered by neither Maudette’s fetishes nor Dawn’s mean-spiritedness.

And that’s why I was waiting with baited breath to hear whether Lafayette knew anything about either of the two murder victims.

“I’ve seen them both,” the vampire said before letting out a chuckle. “This one,” he pointed at Maudette, “tried to rub her nasty puss against anythang with fangs.” He winked at me. “She was desperate. But she,” he pointed to Dawn, “was actually fought over by a couple of my kind.” He grinned. “Course, I know how that feels.”

“What were the vampires?” I asked hopefully.

Lafayette leaned toward me conspiratorially. “Sorry, pretty Viking. But what happens in Fangtasia stays in Fangtasia—least when it comes to vampires,” he said, batting his eyes. “Which is why—if you did decide to experiment a little—I’d never tell,” he added significantly.

I chuckled in response. For whatever reason—maybe foolishness—I didn’t feel that Lafayette was a threat to me. Or—maybe—I was just euphoric that I couldn’t “hear” him.

Plus, I found it ironic that a vampire was only the second person to treat me like I was a “normal” person. I certainly wasn’t going to “experiment” with Lafayette in the way he was suggesting, but I also wasn’t anxious to lose his company either.

At least, not until I saw her.
She seemed to float into the room, displaying a kind of elegance that would have signaled her otherworldliness even if I’d not been able to tell that she was a vampire just by the slight glow of her alabaster skin.

And I wasn’t the only one who noticed her.

It seemed as if every eye in the room—and every thought—was riveted toward her. In fact, the thoughts of those around me were so centered upon her that my shields couldn’t withstand the sheer focus of them. And—because of that—many thoughts “attacked” me all at once.

Oh, please, just let her look at me tonight.

I’d do anything for her.

She’s so beautiful.

I hope that she bites me.

Hurt me. Please.

Shit! Now that she’s here, I’ll never find a man who will just focus on me.

I wonder if she likes women.

Maybe I should have worn my hair up to entice her.

The things she can do with her tongue! Please let her pick me again.

My reaction to the onslaught of thoughts must have shown on my face.

“Hey, pretty Viking,” Lafayette said soothingly, “you okay?” He placed his hand on my shoulder.

Lafayette’s proximity—and the blankness of his thoughts—seemed to be exactly what I needed to reclaim my control, and I was able to put my shields back up.

“Uh—yeah,” I said with some embarrassment.

Lafayette patted my back and then chuckled once he saw that I was back to “normal.”

“Don’t worry yo’self none,” he grinned. “I can’t think of a person who doesn’t have a reaction to
Miss Sookie. All the men—‘cept those that want me, that is—are here hopin’ to get a little action from her. And there are lots of hopeful ladies here too—though she ain’t swung that way for a while now.”

“Sookie,” I whispered, my gaze locking back onto the blond beauty.

She was dressed all in black. Her leather skirt hugged her curves to perfection, and her toned legs were made even more amazing by the five-inch stilettos she wore. Her top was a bustier that offered the illusion that it could be seen through, and my eyes strained to find the breasts that caused that top to be more fucking alluring than any garment I’d ever seen. Over her top, she wore a black jacket. My eyes made their way up her long, porcelain-colored neck to her full, ruddy lips and then her brown eyes. Her blond hair was up and—though it was an odd thought, considering that she was a vampire—it reminded me of the sun.

Hell—given the way that everyone in the room seemed be orbiting around her in that moment—maybe she was the sun.

One of those “orbiters” was on his knees before her and was literally crawling toward where she’d sat down, which was upon an elegant throne placed atop a raised dais. He reached a quivering hand out and touched her leg. I gasped as Sookie kicked the man away from her without even raising her eyes from her phone.

He crashed about twenty feet away from her, his head bleeding from where her shoe had been.

Immediately, a female vampire crouched down next to him. I saw that her fangs were down as she hurried him toward the back of the club.

“Pathetic,” Lafayette said, rolling his eyes. I had a feeling that he was talking about the man’s actions.

“Is she—uh—a queen?” I asked, my eyes still fixed on Sookie.
Lafayette chuckled. “She’s certainly old enough to be one, but no.”

“Old?” I asked. I had no concept of vampire ages, but Sookie looked about 25 to me. Of course, Lafayette looked to be about the same age in human terms, and I already knew that he’d been alive long enough to have been a slave.

“She’s the oldest being in this club,” Lafayette said cheekily. “Hell—the oldest being in this state!” He leaned in conspiratorially. “Does the phrase Roman Empire mean anything to you?”

“Goddess,” I whispered.

Lafayette leaned back and laughed heartily. “Oh, boy, you’s got it as bad as all the rest!”

My breath caught in my throat as Sookie turned her eyes toward me.

She kept them there for a moment, and I felt a little nudging in my head again.

Maybe it was oxygen deprivation—since my lungs continued not to work properly—but I thought I saw a flash of surprise enter her eyes.

Lafayette chuckled. “Well—look at you, pretty Viking,” he grinned. “I don’t know whether to congratulate you or to ask if you’s Will is up to date.”

“Huh?” I asked dumbly, even as Sookie motioned in a come-hither gesture with one of her elegant fingers.

“My mistress is ready to see you,” Lafayette said, rising to his feet. “So I guess I’ll have to stop tryin’ to convince you to give beef a try.”

He gestured for me to stand, and I obeyed without protest.

Lafayette motioned for me to walk in front of him, and I heard him whistle from behind me.

“Damned shame! I coulda done some wicked, wicked things to a fine ass like that,” he muttered.

“But—no—my maker’s gotta be a selfish bitch.”
I heard Lafayette’s words, but couldn’t quite process them, nor could I quite process steady breaths. It seemed as if my higher brain functions weren’t quite working, though I was glad that my feet continued to walk toward the captivating vampiress.

“Lala,” she said, her smooth voice entrancing me even more, “who’s your friend.”

“That’s right. My friend,” he said petulantly as he walked onto the dais and stood next to Sookie.

“He’s yours?” she asked with amusement.

“Yes?” Lafayette said as if his answer were a question.

“So—are you his?” Sookie asked me significantly.

I could only shake my head. “No. We just met.”

“I’m very pleased to hear that,” she smiled, her fangs clicking downward. I found that I was more fascinated by them than frightened. She seemed to notice and leaned forward a little, giving me an even closer look at her deadly weapons. “So—do you have a name? Or should I make one up for you?”

“Viking,” Lafayette said wistfully.

“Eric,” I managed at the same time. “Eric Northman.”

She smiled even wider. “Eric Northman—sounds like a vampire name.”

“Vampire name?” I asked, glad that I’d found my breath and my voice.

“Mmmm,” she said, looking me up and down and licking her lips.

Okay—breath and voice both lost again.

“Older vampires have needed to change their names often throughout the years. It was quite the bother—really. After the revelation, many of us settled on a name that reflected our places of origin. For example, I became Sookie Vercelli.”
“The town in Northern Italy,” I said, my brain somehow managing to access my knowledge of geography.

She smiled. “Impressive. Most humans have no concept of where things are nowadays.

Sit,” she invited, pointing to a chair next to her.

I felt my feet taking me to the place she’d indicated. In truth, my whole body seemed to be singing as it got closer to hers.

One part in particular seemed anxious to sing a duet with her. And her eyes raking toward that part didn’t discourage “him” at all.

I shifted in the seat I’d just occupied.

“So—Mr. Northman,” she purred. “Or may I call you Eric?”

“Oh—here she goes,” Lafayette muttered from behind her.

“Eric’s fine,” I squeaked out, sounding like a preteen whose voice had yet to drop.

“So—what brings you to my club, Eric?” she asked.

I looked up at Lafayette uncertainly. He gave me a little nod, and I repeated my queries about Dawn and Maudette, explaining to Sookie that I was looking into the matter to help my landlady and her grandson when she seemed pissed off that I might have an interest in the girls themselves.

Or maybe I was just imagining that part.

As soon as I’d made my nervous and stutter-filled spiel—thanks to the beauty I was speaking to—Lafayette and Sookie exchanged a few words in a language that I assumed was an ancient dialect of Italian since it had some similarities to Latin and modern Italian. However, I couldn’t quite make out what they were speaking about. Lafayette nodded in agreement as Sookie turned back toward me.
“It is bad for both of our kinds when humans are killed simply for fraternizing with vampires,” she said in a measured tone. “Thus, I will look into this matter—personally.”

“Thank you,” I said gratefully.

“Now—I have a problem that you could help me with,” she leered, her eyes once again traveling toward my still-aroused cock. As long as it had been since “he” had seen action beyond my own hand, I was surprised that “he” hadn’t unzipped “himself” from my jeans.

“How can I help you?” I gulped, even as she reached out a hand to touch the top of my own.

Her flesh to mine.

On its own, my hand turned so that we were palm to palm, and then our fingers interlocked. I gasped as a bolt of what I could only describe as electricity jolted through me. I looked up to see her eyes staring at our hands; she, too, seemed affected by our touch.

But—then again—I wasn’t affected in one very profound way. I couldn’t hear anything from her—despite the direct and sustained touch.

As her eyes trailed upward to take hold of mine again, I held my breath.

“You are quite the surprise, Mr. Northman,” she said in a low voice.

“I am?” I practically whimpered.

“Yes. And I am rarely surprised,” she mused, almost as if to herself.

In that moment, I was surprised, too. At age 33, I was holding my first hand, for my cursed abnormality had prevented me from enjoying even the simplest kinds of connections. I’d always envied those who took touch for granted—always lamented that it “hurt” me when it was the thing that humans seemed to “need” the most in order to be happy.
Maybe I was a masochist. Maybe I just needed to be absolutely certain that I couldn’t hear her. Whatever the case, I dropped my shields completely, despite knowing that I’d be on the receiving end of a cacophony of thoughts from the humans in the bar.

But I wasn’t.

Not only could I not hear her, but I also couldn’t hear the specific thoughts of the humans in the room either! It was as if the void of her mind could protect me—take me into itself and shelter me. I’d felt some “protection” from Lafayette’s void, but it was nothing compared to what I felt now that I was touching Sookie.

I closed my eyes as my smile formed.

I felt safe.

I opened my eyes to find that Sookie was looking at me intensely.

She made me safe.

At this revelation, I let out a shaky, surprised breath, even as she squeezed my hand.

I figured that she was strong enough to easily break it, but the squeeze was gentle and made me feel warm all over, despite the fact that her flesh was cold.

“This is amazing,” I whispered, speaking about so many things at once.

The fact that I was holding a hand—like a “normal” person.

The fact that I was sitting with the most beautiful woman in the room.

The fact that I couldn’t hear her thoughts, despite the connection of our flesh.

The fact that I felt in complete control of my telepathy for the first time in my life.

It was this last thought which made me focus on a single human and seek out her thoughts.

I heard them loud and clear. She was imagining a threesome with both Sookie and me—

*vitidly* imagining it!
Immediately, I pulled myself from the woman’s thoughts, even as Sookie squeezed my hand again.

“What are you doing?” she asked as if trying to solve a mystery.

Speechless, I could only shake my head as I focused on another person, a man sitting at the bar.

For probably the hundredth time that night, I gasped. Only this time, it wasn’t out of surprise or amazement or even fear. It was out of concern—for her.

“What’s wrong?” Sookie asked.

“That man at the bar,” I whispered. “He’s an undercover cop. You are about to be raided.”

Her eyes narrowed. “How do you know that?”

“I just know,” I whimpered.

“Are you a cop, too?” Lafayette growled in a low tone.

I shook my head, praying that the vampires would believe me. “No.”

“It doesn’t matter. Nothing illegal is happening here,” Sookie said cautiously, her eyes glancing at the man at the bar.

I closed my eyes and let my mind drift around, hoping to confirm Sookie’s words—trying to tell myself that she knew what she was doing and probably dealt with the police all the time. I gasped yet again as I “heard” something that might harm her. “The man you kicked is being fed on in the women’s bathroom.”

Sookie’s eyes widened as she turned her gaze back toward me.

However, she composed herself quickly and then rose. “Come!” she said firmly, never dropping my hand. I had to move fast to keep up with her, despite my longer limbs. Lafayette was right behind us.
We were outside of the club within seconds. And, inconceivably to my brain, I was soon lifted into Sookie’s arms as if I weighed nothing. She looked at Lafayette. “Take care of it—before there is trouble if possible,” she ordered as I heard a distant siren.

Lafayette nodded, even as I felt myself moving even higher off the ground. A moment later, I realized that Sookie was flying.

“You fly!” I exclaimed.

“And you are Captain Obvious,” she intoned before increasing her speed, leaving me breathless.

She set us down a few minutes later in a back yard of a home that was so “suburban” that it looked as if it had been cut from a cookie-cutter.

“Come,” she ordered as I tried to find my balance without teetering.

Not knowing what else to do, I followed her into the house; she gestured that I should sit on a comfortable-looking couch in the living room we’d entered. She took a seat in a comfortable-looking leather chair facing the couch. Immediately, a cat jumped up onto the couch and began sniffing me.

Automatically, I reached out to pet the creature. As might be expected, I’d never had a pet growing up. However, Adele kept two cats, and I’d come to love the comfort and company they could offer.

I was especially grateful to the feline since she seemed to be the only comfort I was bound to get as Sookie studied me with penetrating dark eyes.

“She likes you,” Sookie commented after a few minutes of silence—except for the cat’s purring. “She hates Lafayette.”

“He said that you were his maker,” I commented, not knowing what else to say. “What does that mean?”
“Just what it seems to mean,” she responded. “I made him a vampire.”

“You—uh—killed him?” I stammered.

She sat forward, though—thankfully—she didn’t seem affronted by my accusation. “I offered him another kind of life because he was strong and brave—and deserved much better than the life he’d been given during his human time,” she responded evenly.

I nodded in understanding—acceptance.

“What are you, Eric?” she asked.

“A teacher,” I responded quietly.

“You are more than that,” she said confidently.

As she stared at me, I felt a pressure to my head that was well beyond anything that I’d felt before, and I placed my hand onto my temple and rubbed.

“For one thing, you cannot be glamour’d,” Sookie remarked. “And—for that alone—I should kill you,” she added emotionlessly.

My breath was taken away by fear rather than by her beauty in that moment, even as the cat meowed because I’d stopped petting it. Automatically, my hand returned to that task.

“I didn’t know,” I whimpered.

“Didn’t know what?” she asked.

“That I couldn’t be—uh—influenced by vampires.” Like everyone else, I’d heard rumors that vampires had the power to influence humans. “I’d never even met a vampire before Lafayette,” I added.

“How did you know about the raid?” she asked.

I took a deep breath. I knew that it was time to bite the proverbial bullet. I’d never uttered the words I was about to speak, for I had come to understand that the truth would get me killed.
But—sitting in front of Sookie—I was struck once again by the feeling of safety I had with her, despite the fact that she’d threatened my life only moments before.

“I can read thoughts,” I said in barely a whisper.

In the next moment, Sookie was next to me on the couch, and I had been turned to face her. My shirt collar was in her hands and her fangs were down. Her cat quickly fled.

Well—there went that buffer.

“Can you hear my thoughts?” she snarled.

“No,” I said quickly, my voice shaking and body trembling. “I can’t hear any vampires.”

Again, her eyes narrowed as if to gauge whether or not I was telling the truth. Those orbs glowed until the deep brown in them became almost caramel.

I was left to wonder what she’d been looking for as she retook her seat as quickly as she’d left it.

“What are you, Eric?” she asked yet again. “You smell divine, so much so that I want to fuck you right on that couch before I drink your cum and your blood.”

My eyes widened and my cheeks flamed. And, though I’d been scared for my life moments before, my dick hadn’t gotten that memo; indeed, “he” was ready to comply with her request.


Would she kill me? Would she shun me? Or would she deny ever even knowing me—as my parents had long ago.

“I knew a psychic once,” she responded, surprising me with the coldness in her tone. “He was more, and so are you,” she mused. “And—if you don’t tell me—I might just have to kill those whom you came to Fangtasia to aid.

“Adele,” I whispered. “No. Please!”
“Then, tell me what you are,” she said sternly.

Before I knew it, I was spilling the fact that I was “dead” just like her—at least, officially. I relayed the secret of my lineage and the identities of my natural parents—if those who abandoned a child could be called “natural.”

Trying not to taking any unneeded breaths, I quickly told her about how I’d been raised among strangers and “cured” by the cruel Marnie Stonebrook. I told her about my tutors and about how my caretakers had left on the day I’d turned 18. I told her about how I’d worked to start my own life after that. I told her about how I’d been “paid off” by Appius Ocella. I told her about how I’d gotten control of my shields and then served in the army before going to university. I told her about how I moved to the United States. I told her about my job and about Adele and her kindness. And I begged her not to kill the only person who had ever treated me like I was a person too.

I was panting when I finished.

“I believe that you do not know what you are,” she commented softly, her eyes softening too. She moved to the couch next to me once more. “I am sorry. But I had to know whether you were a danger to me and mine.”

“I’m not,” I promised.

She smiled as she took my hand. Inexplicably, I immediately went back to feeling safe with her.

“You needn’t worry,” she said. “I will not harm the human you care about.”

“Thank you,” I said.

“I never would have—you know,” she offered. “I am many things, but the killer of innocents isn’t one of them.”

I nodded, somehow trusting her despite hardly knowing her.

“I would like to make you mine, Eric Northman,” she said in a low, penetrating tone.
“Yours?” I stammered.


“Choose?”

“Yes. I am attracted to you,” she said without shame or shyness, “in a way that I’ve seldom been attracted to another. No—in a way that I’ve never been attracted to another. You smell divine, and I’m sure that everything about you tastes even better than your scent,” she grinned suggestively.

“I am not ashamed to admit that I want your body and your blood—as well as the use of your gift. I would pay you for any work that you did for me in that arena, however.” She tilted her head and looked down at our joined hands. “And then there is this—connection that I feel to you. I cannot explain it, but I have lived long enough not to disregard it. In addition, you have proven yourself to be brave and loyal to the one person in your life who has deserved your regard. You are intelligent, and I believe that I will enjoy speaking with you. Oh—and my cat likes you,” she added with a smirk.

“Yours?” I asked. Admittedly, I was still “stuck” on her earlier statement, even as I was trying to process her litany of the reasons why she wanted me.

“Mmmm,” she sounded in both affirmation and desire. The vibration of her voice made my cock strain against my jeans once again.

I shifted on the couch as she gave me a knowing look.

“Yes. You would be my human. That means that no other Supernatural could touch you without my permission,” she clarified.

“Why would any other vampires want me?” I asked.

She scoffed and rolled her eyes. “Not just vampires,” she smirked. “And as for the why?” She leaned forward and inhaled deeply, sending shivers down my spine—the pleasurable kind.

“I really smell that different? From normal?” I asked.

She smiled. “You smell like the sun.”

“And you look like it,” I said before I could stop myself.

She chuckled. “Then we are a pair.”

“Wait—you said not just vampires? What did you mean?” I asked, once again shifting in my seat.

“Hmmm.” She was thoughtful for a moment. “Bon Temps is the home of a shifter; if I had to guess, I would say that he already has an eye on you.”

“Shifter?” I asked.

She nodded her head almost indulgently. “Sam Merlotte. He is two-natured.”

I cringed at his name.

“I see you know who he is,” she grinned wickedly. “He smelled like a mutt when he checked into my area. Tell me—has he tried to mark you? Pee on you?”

I frowned and shivered in disgust at the thought, even as my brain tried to catch up with the meaning behind her words. “Dog?”

“Yes. Merlotte can shift into various animals, and I’m certain—based upon your reaction—that he’s taken a whiff or two of you. At the very least,” she smirked. “There are others creatures of two-natures in Area 5, too—a group of werepanthers in Hotshot and a very organized Were pack. Werewolves,” she clarified. “Mostly in the Shreveport area. And some lone wolves, too. But again, if you were mine, you wouldn’t need to worry about such things.”

“Werewolves?”

“There are also some fairies in the Monroe area—but one of my rules for Area 5 is that no vampires get anywhere near them.”
“Fairies?” I asked, realizing that I’d not been able to speak a complete sentence in a while. She nodded. “Yes. Fairies and vampires have a very difficult time coexisting,” she leered, “unless the fairies have the power to cover their scents.” She chuckled. “You smell extraordinary, Eric. But the scent of a full-blooded fairy is like cat-nip—laced with crack and sunshine—to a vampire. And their blood intoxicates vampires,” she added almost wistfully.

“Fairies?” I repeated.

“There are also other kinds of creatures that poke their noses in and out of this world. Demons. Britlingens. Elves.” She sneered. “Just last week, I had to deal with a Maenad. Luckily, she was old school when it came to her tribute.”

“Tribute?” I muttered, still trying to reconcile myself to the fact that vampires were not the only so-called mythological creatures who were real.

“A bull.” She winked. “You should have heard Lafayette complaining about how the smell of the beast ruined his Armani.”

I closed my eyes and took a deep breath.

When I opened them, her face was within inches of my own, and she was looking hungrily at my lips.

“Become mine, Eric,” she said huskily. “I promise that you will not regret it.”

“And I’d be—what? Your sex toy? Your blood bag? A fangbanger?” I asked, trying to sound a little indignant, even as my cock continued to try to be heard on the topic.

“His” opinion was as obvious as the bulge “he” was making in my pants.

Sookie seemed to be considering something for a moment as she leaned back in her seat.

“Vampires aren’t known for emotions or things like fidelity, Eric. We rarely have anything resembling relationships—unless our makers and children are counted. And many of those relationships are about nothing more than power and force,” she added bitterly.
In her eyes, I could see pain flash like a bolt of lightning.

“Your maker?” I asked, guessing the source of her inner storm.

“Dead,” she said calmly. “I arranged for him to be staked,” she added, looking at me with scrutiny—gauging my reaction to her cold words.

“I suppose he deserved it then,” I said, my jaw clenching.

“He deserved centuries of torture and pain,” she returned.

I flinched as she continued to watch me.

However, my eyes didn’t leave hers. Her brown orbs showed me both strength and vulnerability. They showed me a kind of history that no book could—or should—ever convey. In that moment, I somehow knew that she’d never looked at anyone the way that she was looking at me.

She was trusting me.

“But you didn’t deserve to feel his pain with him,” I said softly.

“You know about the fact that the children of vampires can feel what their makers feel?” she asked.

“I’m not sure I know anything about vampires at all,” I responded quietly—honestly. “And I’m happy about that,” I sighed, pointing to my head. “But I will admit to reading some articles on the Internet before I came to Fangtasia.”

She chuckled, though her eyes still held much pain. “Much of what is written is ridiculous, but it is true that I would have felt my maker’s pain if I had arranged for him to be punished for all of his many sins.” She shrugged. “It was almost worth it, but—in the end—I love myself more than I hated him.”

I found myself reaching out across the space between us in order to take her hand.
I didn’t do it to comfort her. The strength radiating from her unbroken spirit clearly conveyed that she didn’t need my comfort.

I didn’t even do it to convey my awe of her—though I was awestruck.

I did it because I’d missed having her hand in mine.

“I think I would like to invest my time in getting to know you,” she said, her smile softening.

“I’d like that,” I said honestly.

“Then you will become mine?” she asked.

Was that hope in her eyes?

“I don’t know. I’m sorry,” I quickly added.

She squeezed my hand.

“No matter. You soon will,” she smirked confidently. “Meanwhile, as I said before, I will help you with the mystery that brought you to Fangtasia tonight.”

“How?” I asked curiously.

“You have a unique gift, Eric, but—if I am correct—someone must be thinking of his or her sins for you to hear them. Correct?”

I nodded in confirmation.

She pointed to her nose. “Many vampires rise with gifts. I have two: the ability to fly and this.”

“Your nose?” I asked cluelessly, even as I remembered what it had felt like to be in her arms—literally—as she’d flown us to her home.

She giggled, looking suddenly much younger. “A keen sense of smell. Vampires all have heightened senses, and those get better with age; however, even as a newborn, my nose could pick up scents that even my maker’s could not. I will go to the scenes of the crimes. And—even though
time has passed—I will be able to discern the common scents between the two scenes.” She smiled at me. “Then I will sniff out those scents and you will listen to our suspects.”

I frowned. “But—like you said—I’ve tried listening already.”

“True, but I will drop fang or maybe even kiss you,” she purred, leaning toward me again. “So—if the killer hates my kind and/or hates humans who have encounters with my kind, then he will likely not be able to prevent himself from thinking about the other killings.”

I thought for a moment and then nodded. Her plan was sound—especially the kissing part. I felt my cheeks redden at that thought.

She squeezed my hand, reminding me again that there was an “electric” force between us as we touched.

“You feel this too,” she stated, looking down at our interlocked fingers.

I nodded in agreement.

“I’ve never felt anything like it,” she shared. Given her age, that was an almost overwhelming thought.

“Me neither,” I whispered. “But—then again—touching was always,” I paused, “a daunting proposition for me. Before tonight.”

She tilted her head slightly to the side. “I suppose it would have been.”

“Touching you is,” I paused looking for an adequate word, “amazing.”

She chuckled. “I’m flattered.”

“It’s not even just the electricity,” I said, my brain-mouth connection suddenly not having any kind of filter. “Yours is the first hand I’ve held. And—not having to worry about hearing your thoughts is,” I paused again, “amazing.” I frowned, knowing that I was repeating myself, but the adjectives I knew—from every language I knew—didn’t seem superlative enough. “Not to mention that—when you touched me at Fangtasia—it blocked out other thoughts, even when I completely
relaxed my shields.” I shook my head, awestruck as I remembered the feeling. “It was as if I could use your void to stay in complete control!” I finished excitedly.

“Void?” she asked.

“Your mind. I cannot hear you, but I can feel you there.”

“Can you feel other vampires?” she asked.

I nodded. “Yes. But your void is biggest—strongest. Maybe because of your age?”

She shrugged. “Maybe.”

We sat silently for almost a minute, just looking at each other.

“I think you and I could be good together, Eric,” she said solemnly.

“As long as you quit scaring me—or threatening Adele,” I muttered.

She smiled widely. “Okay—then. I promise. So—about your being mine then?” she asked somewhat jokingly.

“How long does mine last?” I asked in return.

She seemed to be contemplating for a moment. “Until one or both of us decide to end our association,” she said. “I could, perhaps, force you to stay mine indefinitely with my blood after we exchange. But I promise you that I will not. You are too much fun to keep on a leash.”


She shook her head as if amused by the words I was focusing upon. “When you agree to be mine, I will feed from you, and you will take my blood. That will create a tie between us. That blood tie will identify you as mine. Generally, with a tie in place, a vampire can influence a human with his or her blood.”

“You could control me?”

“I don’t know,” she said contemplatively. “When I asked what you were before, it was because I have the feeling that you are much more than human—a theory that I could, perhaps,
confirm if I drank from you,” she said, licking her lips. “And, if my hypothesis about what you are is correct, then controlling you would be difficult or impossible.” She shrugged. “It may surprise you, but—despite my age—I have never taken a human as mine before because I have never wanted a puppet or a sycophant as a human companion. But I find that I want you,” she said intensely. “But your choice is what I am interested in.”

“But—uh—I barely know you. You barely know me,” I stammered.

“I thought we’d already established that we will remedy that—with a little time,” she said confidently—arrogantly.

I suppose she had the right to be arrogant. Not only was she spot on about my interest in her—hell, I was already 90% sure that being hers would be a very good thing—but also she’d survived long enough to have earned any haughtiness she had. Lafayette had indicated that she’d been born—as a human—sometime during the Roman Empire. That would make her much more than a millennium old—perhaps even more than two millennia. It was clear to me that she would be a storehouse of history. It was also undeniable that I was physically attracted to her. And, amazingly enough—given all my blushes, gasps, and stammers—I could tell that the feeling was mutual, though I worried that I would inevitably disappoint her with my inexperience.

“What if you choose to discard me—when you tire of me?” I asked with a frown, not able to hide my self-doubt.

She studied me again. “I very well may tire of you.”

I inhaled deeply at her words.

“I won’t lie to you, Eric” she said, “but I cannot guarantee that I will be able to tell you whole truths either.” She shrugged. “Humans believe that the vampire world is an open book, but—so far—they have been allowed to read only the first chapter. Tonight, I have let you in on
some information beyond that; however, my function in the vampire world requires that I remain discreet about certain things.”

“Function?” I asked.

She nodded. “I am a sheriff—the Sheriff of Area 5, which encompasses Northern Louisiana. There is a queen in this state—a queen who would foam at the mouth to get her hands on you if she ever learned of you. And—trust me—unlike me, she is not known for giving choices.”

“Are you trying to scare me?” I asked.

She frowned and shook her head. “Warn—yes. Scare—no. How you’ve not already been claimed by a supernatural is beyond me. However, it is clearly my good fortune that Merlotte had to have been neutered at some point in the past.”

I cringed.

“You are also lucky that Lafayette knew that I desired you before you even walked into my club; otherwise, the twelve other vampires in Fangtasia would have been on you like vipers on a mouse.”

My eyes widened.

“Yes. You smell that good, Eric,” she smirked. “But don’t worry. I am old and have much control.”

I frowned. “You want me just for my blood?”

Her brow arched. “I thought that we’d already established that I want you for many reasons. And I thought that we’d also established that you ought not to sell yourself short.”

I took a breath. “Old habits.”

She nodded indulgently. “It wasn’t your scent that made me first notice you,” she admitted after a few moments of silence. “You caught my eye when I drove into the parking lot of Fangtasia. Waiting in line, you seemed lost—probably inside of that past you told me about.”
“You pitied me?” I asked.

“No,” she shook her head. “I recognized you. You might have been lost, Eric, but there was still purpose in your eyes. I watched on the security feed as you fought your uncertainty and a little bit of fear before entering Fangtasia. I saw Lafayette scare you a few times as well—but you still treated him more like a,” she paused, “human than a monster.”

“I know what it’s like to be treated like a monster,” I commented.

“All the more reason to treat others that way,” she returned. “But you didn’t. You know—I stood in the shadows waiting to go to my throne—watching over you. I listened to your exchange with Lafayette. I enjoyed your wit and you lack of discomfort with his advances—though it was clear that you were straight.”

I frowned even more deeply. “Hey—he tried to glamour me! Didn’t he? That’s the pressure I felt in my head—wasn’t it? Would he have,” I blushed, “taken advantage?”

She giggled, her voice musical. “No. Don’t worry. He enjoys a challenge as much as I do. He’s never needed glamour to get a man into his bed; like maker, like child,” she added with a wink.

My blush fired back into place.

“It wasn’t a coincidence that my child was at the door when you entered. It wasn’t a coincidence that he escorted you once you were in the club. He was supposed to glamour you to come back to my office without asking any questions.” She smirked. “When he failed, I felt it. So I took my throne to check you out for myself.” She looked me up and down as she squeezed my hand again.

I was sure that my blush deepened to an impossible red.

“What do you want to fuck me?” she asked bluntly.

Yes and please—I thought.

“Uh—um. I—uh,” I gasped.
I was clearly not having my finest moment when it came to speaking.

“Are you a virgin?” she asked without judgment or embarrassment—as if she were commenting on the weather. “Is that why you hesitate in becoming mine?”

I cringed and my cheeks became even hotter. “No,” I whimpered. “But I’m not exactly very experienced either.”

“Because of your gift?”

I scoffed. “Curse.”

She nodded. “I suppose you would think of it that way.”

There was another minute of silence between us, thankfully giving my flesh the chance to become a more “human” color again.

“I know the vampire queen of Sweden,” she said, her tone now icy. “Would you like for your parents to be killed? A human king would be more difficult to slay, but I could probably swing the death of your uncle, too.”

“No!” I yelled out.

“But they abandoned you,” she said, her expression tinged with confusion.

“They were scared of me!” I returned. “I remember that much about them.”

“They were weak,” she corrected.

I shook my head. “They were normal!”

She squeezed my hand again, once again making me cognizant of the fact that I was still holding hers. After a lifetime of not touching anyone, pulling away from her seeming unthinkable, despite the fact that she was threatening to murder my parents.

I looked into Sookie’s eyes and realized that she was actually offering me yet another choice: revenge or forgiveness. Or—maybe something different from forgiveness. Maybe just the knowledge that I now held their lives in my hands, just as they’d always held mine in theirs.
I realized something else too. I was—already, probably, inexplicably, mysteriously, magnificently—in love with her. The evidence of it pounded in my heart.

It seemed that “love at first sight” wasn’t just a storybook fantasy.

“You love them,” she whispered. “You love your parents?” she asked.

I wondered if she could see my love for her in my eyes too. She seemed to see everything else.

I felt myself nodding before I verbalized my answer. “Yes.”

A soft smile framed her face. “Choose me, Eric,” she said enticingly. “You’ve nothing to lose. At best, we will be good together. And—at worst—we will have fun together for a while. And then you can choose to end our acquaintance.”

“What about my heart?” I found myself asking, even though I hadn’t intended to vocalize my fear. Yes—I knew that societal ideas about masculinity should have made my decision easy. After all, Sookie had clearly inferred that we’d fuck if I chose her. And wasn’t that what “real men” did? Make conquests? I shook my head. It was I who was worried about “feelings”—not Sookie.

I could imagine a man like Jason Stackhouse calling me a “pussy” for considering the consequences of having my heart broken—or even admitting to having a heart at all. Similarly, Jason would likely ask for my “man card” and suggest that I’d lost my “balls.”

But I’d read enough male minds to know that those kinds of sentiments were defense mechanisms. The strongest—and happiest—men I’d ever “heard” in my life were the ones who allowed themselves to feel and who were unashamed of their feelings.

I just wasn’t sure if I was that strong—yet.

Sookie’s other hand came up to stroke my cheek. I leaned into her confident touch and tried to take strength from her confident eyes. “Do you think I will break your heart, Eric?”

“I think you could,” I confessed.
“After all that you have experienced—after being abandoned by your family—you still have a heart to break,” she said, her voice sounding a little awestruck.

I didn’t answer, intuiting that my pounding heart was doing it for me.

“I will try not to hurt you,” Sookie said, leaning toward me a little. “Trust me.”

Taking a leap of faith, I closed the small distance between us and kissed her.

It was the first kiss I’d had where I could totally relax.

It was the first kiss I’d had where there were fangs present, too. But I discovered that I didn’t mind that at all as the kiss deepened and my tongue began to explore her mouth and those fangs.

She moaned.

And then her phone buzzed, signaling the breaking of our kiss.

When she removed the ringing devise from her bustier, I was the one moaning.

She gave me a knowing look as she answered. “Lafayette.”

Their conversation began in English, and—from her end of the conversation—I gathered that Lafayette had managed to get the feeding vampiress and the “injured man” out of Fangtasia before the police found them. However, Sookie and Lafayette’s conversation soon shifted to the ancient language I’d heard before, even as she tensed up and gripped my hand harder—almost uncomfortably so.

But I wasn’t about to let go of her.

Though I knew Latin, which was clearly related to the language she was speaking, I caught only a snippet of their conversation.

Something about a queen.

Something about me.

Something about a man named Bill Compton.
When Sookie hung up, she gave me a wry smile.

“Someone must have noticed you. Other than me, of course. And before tonight.”

“What do you mean?” I asked.

“The queen’s procurer has just taken up residence in Bon Temps—tonight. He hasn’t checked in yet—as protocol dictates he should have, but my spies in New Orleans are very efficient.”

“Procurer?” I asked.

She nodded. “I bet you can guess what he’s come to procure in your little town.”

“But—how would he even know about me?” I asked with trepidation. “No one knows I’m still a telepath—no one but you.”

“I won’t take that as an accusation,” she said with amusement.

“I didn’t mean it as one,” I said honestly.

She shrugged. “Perhaps Appius Ocella is looking for insurance that you will never be a problem again,” she speculated. “I’m sure that he has kept track of you. Or—maybe—Merlotte told somebody about the sweet-smelling man who moved to his town. He has quite a few questionable associations. I wouldn’t be surprised to learn that one of them is the queen.”

I sat dumbstruck for a moment.

Sookie sighed deeply, a sound that didn’t seem right from a vampire. “Would you like help getting away? I could aid you in assuming a new identity and going somewhere that very few vampires would ever find appealing.”

I scoffed. “Like the North Pole?”

“No,” she said with a grin. “For half of the year, such a place would be quite appealing.”

“Longer days,” I said ruefully.

“Yes. It is places along the equator that get the least amount of traffic from my kind and most other supernaturals as well. Or islands. For instance, I know that Kauai currently has only one
vampire resident, and she’s sworn off human contact. Plus, the two-natured don’t tend to constrict themselves to islands either.”

“Kauai, Hawaii?” I asked.

She smiled. “You really do know your geography, Mr. Northman. Would you like to go there? To escape the political mess you are likely to find yourself in if you stay here?”

“Political mess?” I asked.

She nodded. “Yes. If Sophie-Anne knows about you and has sent Bill Compton—who is a real douchebag, by the way—then she is also trying to poach in Area 5. Thus, I will be forced to use either passive aggressive or aggressive aggressive tactics to put her back into her place and to remind her that the throne of this state remains hers only because I don’t fucking want it!” she finished with a growl.

I took a deep breath. “What if I become yours? Now?”

She growled even louder, but her eyes became lustful as opposed to angry. “Then I’d get to be much more passive aggressive than aggressive aggressive. You’d be under my protection, and Sophie-Anne wouldn’t dare to cross me. Meanwhile, I’d do a little investigative work to find out how she knows about you. If it was the shifter or another supernatural who simply had the delight of smelling you and wanted to gain the queen’s favor, then the matter will likely be dropped quickly. Sophie-Anne would have to recognize that you’ve been claimed by her better, and she will likely bow out gracefully.”

“Likely?”

“If she doesn’t, I’ll kill her and make Lafayette be the king,” she chuckled darkly.

I chuckled as well. “I think he’d like that too much.”

She nodded in agreement.

“I’m sorry,” I sighed. “I’m causing you trouble.”
She laughed, the sound literally lifting my spirits. “Oh—Mr. Northman, if you had any idea how bored I was before I spotted you, you would know that your apology isn’t necessary.” She winked at me. “Plus, I love trouble.”

“What if your queen found out from Appius? That could bring you a lot of trouble—from more than just vampires—if you try to protect me.”

She narrowed her eyes. “Do not worry about that, Eric. Once you are mine, all threats against you will be dealt with.”

Given the intensity in her eyes, I believed her. “Then make me yours, Sookie.”

Her answering growl sent vibrations through my entire body.

“You are sure? There will be no turning back,” she said seriously.

I didn’t want to move back. I wanted to move forward.
TEN YEARS LATER

I was forty-three years old, but as I looked in the mirror, I could see very few changes in my appearance from the time that I had first taken Sookie’s blood ten years before.

From the time that I’d agreed to be hers.

As I left our bathroom, which hadn’t even had a toilet the first time I’d visited her at her home almost a decade before, I couldn’t help but to marvel at the direction my life had taken.

But the thing I marveled at the most was the woman “sleeping” in the large bed in front of me. I can admit—looking back—that I was an “incomplete” person before I met her. Oh—I’d eked out a life for myself. I had a job that I was good at and liked. And I’d even lucked into a “family” with Adele. However, before Sookie, there were a litany of things I’d accepted that I would never have: the intimacy of uninhibited touch, a helpmeet to share my life with, and a partner willing to support me.

And love.

Sookie gave me all of those things—and so much more!

Unfortunately, the world around us hadn’t always been kind.

As I lay down next to Sookie, I glanced at the clock. It would be an hour before she woke up, and—though she’d encouraged me, given the occasion, to spend as much time in the sun as I could—I found myself wanting to be close to her.

Moreover, I found myself in the mood to reflect upon our life together thus far.
The first night we met, I was certain that I’d fallen in love with her. Lafayette liked to tease me—telling me that I’d actually fallen for Sookie’s sexy outfit, which he’d picked out, of course. However, I’d never doubted my initial feelings for her—feelings that grew with each passing night.

The intensity of our first blood exchange that first night had been something that neither of us were prepared for. Not surprisingly, before that night, I had been unaware of most of the effects of vampire blood, though Sookie did explain them to me before our exchange.

The only hesitation I’d had was in hearing that she might be able to influence my emotions with her blood, but—when she promised me that she wouldn’t do that—I believed her. And she’d never betrayed my trust.

What she could have never prepared me for was the ambrosial taste of her blood when it hit my tongue. It was as if all of my taste buds were being massaged by it—as if every perfect taste in the world were being fed to me. And when she bit into me to complete the exchange, we both became animalistic with our need for each other.

That night, I learned to appreciate Sookie’s strength as she ripped our clothing from our bodies. I also learned that taking her blood took away any shyness that I had. Maybe it was because we were both a little “high” on one another, but I felt like a fucking sex god as I made her cum again and again with my tongue and fingers. And between her blood and her exquisite body, my cock was up to the challenge of pleasing her several times.

Of course, “he” had been storing up “his” energy for most of my adult life.

It was close to dawn before Sookie and I were done with each other that first night, and she’d had to stay at Fangtasia after she’d flown me back to my car only minutes before the sun rose.

Adele had given me an indulgent look as I’d dragged myself into the house at 6:00 a.m.—in an ill-fitting pair of Lafayette’s sweatpants and a Fangtasia T-shirt no less.

Because my own clothes had become shreds on Sookie’s living room floor.
Adele had put coffee in front of me and had—as always—proven to be a wonderful mixture of old-fashioned and delightfully modern when she managed to tell me that I ought not to be “catting” around, but that she was happy that I looked so “pleased with myself.”

It was also that morning that I finally found the courage to tell Adele that I was a telepath, something that I'd wanted to do for a while. In fact, not telling her had been making me feel guilty, so much so that I'd briefly discussed my guilt with Sookie the night before—between rounds of sex.

Recovery time, apparently, was also “talking” time for me.

Who knew?

Sookie supported my decision to trust Adele with the caveat that she glamour her not to be able to speak of my “gift”—the word Sookie that used to refer to my telepathy from the beginning.

Adele used the same word when I told her I could read thoughts. “What a gift!” she’d exclaimed.

I shouldn’t have been surprised that she took the news in stride, never looking at me or thinking about me any differently than she had before. In fact, if anything, she was happy to be able to fill in the blanks about me in her head. She’d simply shrugged and nodded, “I knew you were a special young man when I first saw you.” And then she made us pancakes. And then she insisted that I start calling her “Gran.”

As a history buff herself, Gran was keen to meet Sookie, and once I told her that “my” vampire would be coming over that very night, Gran was in a frenzy. In fact, we spent the day cleaning the already-clean house from top to bottom. However, when Sookie told Gran that she’d been in the South during the Civil War era and that she’d actually “turned” a slave, I thought that Gran was going to completely lose it. I chuckled as I recalled the way that Sookie charmed Gran; part of me knew that she was doing it for me—because she knew how much Gran meant to me. However, it was also clear that Sookie enjoyed Gran’s company.
A few hours after Sookie’s arrival that night, Bill Compton had shown up on Gran’s
doorstep. I smirked as I recalled his surprise at finding Area 5’s sheriff chatting over tea and
TrueBlood with the landlady of his target. Of course, his real surprise came when he took a whiff of
me. It was clear from his fangs slamming down that my scent appealed to him. However, it was
also clear that he could tell that I was Sookie’s, a fact which caused him to regroup, but—
unfortunately for me—not to give up.

I found out how far Bill would go to get his own blood in me about a week after I’d become
Sookie’s.

Whether it was at the queen’s behest or because of his own desire to taste my blood, Bill
arranged for me to be beaten within an inch of my life by drainers in the area. Unfortunately, he’d
already managed to lick up some of my blood and to force a few drops of his blood down my throat
by the time Sookie got to me. To say that she was angry would be an understatement.

To say that she was possessive when it came to me would be an even bigger one.

Bill tried to sell the story that he had heard me being attacked and was merely “saving” me
since he recognized me as belonging to his sheriff.

My vampire wasn’t foolish or gullible, however. And neither was I.

As soon as Sookie gave me enough of her blood so that I could speak, I told her that Bill
had paid the drainers—with his own blood—to attack me.

I knew that for sure—since I’d been listening to their thoughts as they’d relentlessly kicked
my ribs.

And that was when I was fully introduced to Sookie’s “dark side.” A moment after Sookie
heard my words, she literally ripped Bill Compton’s head from his shoulders. Then she came back
to me as if she were a vicious dog and I was the bone she was planning to keep from all other
canines. Her eyes alit with her bloodlust, she gave me more blood and then picked me up into her arms before flying us to her home.

She was panting when we got there—although she obviously didn’t need to breathe. She quite literally thrummed with energy as she stripped me and then bathed me. Then she carried me to her bed, still behaving more like an animal than a “human.”

Not that she was human.

She touched every inch of me, making sure that all of my wounds had healed. And then her lust built—right along with mine—as she kissed every inch that she’d touched.

Then she straddled me, taking me fully into her body with one movement.

She rode me slowly—carefully.

That night, she made love to me as if assuring herself that I was okay, even as I tried to reassure her with my words and to calm her with my touch.

When she lay in my arms afterwards, she asked me if she’d scared me. She asked me if I wanted out of our arrangement.

I suppose that I should have been scared—seeing the effects of bloodlust upon her and understanding for the first time what being hers really entailed.

But I found that I couldn’t be frightened of her. And I found that I couldn’t even blame her for her murderous rage at Bill Compton.

And the last thing I wanted was to not be hers anymore.

I cringed as I thought about Bill Compton now—not because he’d had me harmed, but because of the handful of dreams I’d had with him in them once his blood was in me. I hadn’t minded—not at all—that Sookie’s blood would make her the star in my dreams. After all, I figured she’d be the star regardless. However, having Bill creep into a few before his blood had been adequately expunged from my body was disconcerting—to say the least!
Thankfully, “dream Sookie” always came to my rescue—just as the real one had. However, even having Bill leer at me in the dreams was fucking gross! I was just grateful that the most “dream Bill” had ever managed to do was to rub my arm before Sookie arrived to yank his appendages off and then to fuck me into oblivion.

Yes. It was safe to say that I appreciated “dream Sookie’s” efforts every night I dreamed about her!

After the Bill Compton situation, a lot of things seemed to happen very quickly.

Just as she’d said she would, Sookie used her uncanny sense of smell to pinpoint several suspects for Maudette’s and Dawn’s murders. And I helped by using my telepathy to “read” them. The killer turned out to be a man name Rene Lenier, who worked with Jason and had heard about Maudette’s and Dawn’s bites from him. Jason was, of course, ignorant of his friend’s sick and twisted “alter ego.”

Sookie had glamoured the criminal to turn himself in and confess everything.

Adele, whom we’d told about the plan since she’d been so worried about Jason and I’d been so worried about her heart, had been grateful to Sookie and me to the point of tears. After that night, she insisted Sookie call her “Gran,” too.

Thinking about Gran, I reached toward my nightstand, picked up my cellphone, and dialed her number. Years before, Sookie and I had asked her to move in with us; however, she preferred to stay in her home. We found time to visit her at least once a week—for Sunday dinners—but I still called her every day, just to make sure she was okay.

“How is my sweet boy?” she answered.

“Fine, Gran,” I smiled at her greeting. Though over eighty now, she was still going strong—despite a few health issues with her heart. I knew that Lafayette and Sookie had both offered to turn
her, but she’d refused them, chastising them for not finding her when she was younger and beautiful.

However, to me, there was only one person more beautiful than Gran, and she was with me in the bed.

I hated the thought that we would all lose Gran one day, and I was hoping that she might change her mind about becoming a vampire. But—so far—she was unrelenting.

“So—what have you been up to today?” I asked her, putting aside my melancholy thought.

She scoffed. “You may tell my granddaughter that the doctor she keeps sending needs to learn some manners!”

I chuckled. “What did Doctor Ludwig do this time?” I asked her, even as I shook my head at the fact that Gran called Sookie—a 1700-year-old vampiress—her “granddaughter.” Gran’s logic was that since she was my wife, Sookie was also her granddaughter.

“She told me that I needed to take it easy now that the summer’s here, and she’s unwilling to appreciate my crabgrass problems! As if I haven’t already survived 81 Louisiana summers!”

I sighed. “Gran, it’s been in the 90’s all week. And humid as hell. Please, don’t tell me that you’ve been out pulling weeds in this weather.”

She scoffed. “And why wouldn’t I? They are not gonna pull themselves, and I’m more fit than most fiddles my age!”

I couldn’t help but to smile and to shake my head. I knew that Lafayette had been sneaking Gran a little of his blood now and then, for—though Gran didn’t want to become a vampire—she certainly didn’t want her joints to ache so much either.

“Did Lafayette give you a booster when he visited you?” I asked knowingly.

“Maybe,” she answered. I could hear the smile in her voice.
Lafayette had long ago been granted the honor of being Adele’s third “grandson.” And everyone got a kick out of his relentless flirting with Jason—despite the fact that the “first” Stackhouse grandson had settled down nine years before with a good woman who had helped Jason give Adele three great-grandchildren.

Strangely enough, I was actually partially responsible for Jason’s marriage. As I’d expected, the Bon Temps school board wasn’t that happy to learn that I was “dating” a vampire—once it became public knowledge that Sookie and I were together.

I found out later that it was Sam Merlotte who riled things up with the woman he was sleeping with at the time—a teacher named Luna Garza. He told Luna that I was being glamoured to tell my students that being bitten was “fun,” and—since she had a daughter in the school—Luna was naturally concerned.

Of course, being bitten was fun, but I certainly hadn’t shared my experiences with my students!

Halleigh Robinson, the school counselor, had heard about an emergency school board meeting that had been called to deal with the situation of my being “glamoured” and had driven to Adele’s to tell me about it. It had been a Sunday evening, so she’d interrupted the “Sunday supper” that Adele always insisted upon hosting. Only two weeks after I met Sookie, she and Lafayette had become a fixture at them—with each of them “eating” a TrueBlood like a trooper just because they liked Adele so much.

Though Halleigh was five years older than Jason, the two had already known each other; after all, Bon Temps was a small town. But Halleigh had never been interested in him, given his “lose” reputation. However, that Sunday night, something obviously shifted between them. And—within a week—Halleigh and Jason were an exclusive couple. Within six months, they were engaged. A year later, they welcomed their first child into the world, a girl they named after Adele.
Jason surprised me by changing so quickly, but I suppose I shouldn’t have been shocked. After all, I knew how a good woman could hook a man. Sookie had certainly hooked me!

Hook. Line. And. Sinker.

Predictably, given the nature of small, extremely Conservative towns, I was asked either to give up Sookie or to quit my job at the school. However, the school board couldn’t fire me outright because there was no proof that I’d done anything wrong. Stubbornly, I stayed on until my citizenship was finalized fourteen months later, though a “monitor” was put into my classes to make sure I wasn’t filling my students’ minds with “vampire love.”

“Speaking of you visiting . . . ,” Gran started, breaking me from my memories. “When will I get to see you again?”

“Sookie says a month,” I sighed. “But I’ll be able to call you every night.”

“You’d better,” she said. “Are you ready? Excited?”


“That’s all I’ve ever wanted for you,” she said sincerely.

I smiled.

“I love you, Gran,” I said.

“I love you too, sweet boy,” she returned. “Now—I’ve got to get back to the kitchen. Jason and Halleigh are bringing the kids over after church tomorrow, and I’ve got two pies in the oven. By the way—did you get the one I sent home for you with Lafayette?” she asked.

I chuckled. “I finished it off about an hour ago,” I smiled. “It was delicious, but—then again—you know that pecan is my favorite.”

“I’m glad you liked it,” she said, her voice a mixture of happiness and melancholy. “I’ll see you soon,” she added with a snuffle.

“Soon,” I agreed as she hung up.
I closed my eyes, extremely grateful that Gran was even still with us. Sophie-Anne Leclerq had not given up so easily when it came to her getting her hands on me. And that had almost cost Adele her life.

After Sookie killed Bill Compton, she was made to face the magister, who doled out what he thought of as “justice” to vampires who *supposedly* committed crimes. Of course, Bill Compton had committed a blood offense against Sookie’s claimed human—me. So she’d had every right to kill the motherfucker. However, Sophie-Anne had bribed the magister to hold a “trial”—actually, a week-long spectacle—in New Orleans, though the matter could have been dealt with via phone call, given Sookie’s status and age. To add to the drama of the “trial,” Sophie-Anne had arranged for Lorena, Bill’s maker, to be present. I learned that, despite the justifiable kill, Sookie still had to pay a fine to Lorena, something that she had been ready to do without the magister compelling her.

Sookie had thought—correctly—that Sophie-Anne would use her absence as an opportunity to kidnap me. But neither of us knew the level to which the queen would stoop in order to accomplish her goal.

That level turned out to be pretty damned low!

Both Sookie and I wanted to keep Gran safe from whatever machinations Sophie-Anne might be up to, so Adele went to stay with Jason for a while. Sookie assigned a vampire to protect them at night and Weres to watch over them during the day—just as Lafayette and a Were named Tray Dawson were to watch over me while Sookie was gone.

That is when Sam Merlotte became even more of a problem. Apparently, he owed the queen money, so when she called him to find out what he knew about me, he spilled his guts. Obviously, he didn’t know a lot; however, he knew enough to tell the queen about my affection for Adele. Sophie-Anne intended to use Gran in order to manipulate me to publically renounce
Sookie’s claim on me. Then, the queen planned to claim me for herself and force me to bond with her child, Andre.

So instead of coming after me directly while Sookie was enduring her week-long “trial,” Sophie-Anne sent a large force of vampires to Jason’s home—where Merlotte had told her that Adele was staying.

The vampire tasked with watching over Adele and Jason, Longshadow, proved an untrustworthy turncoat and simply handed Gran over to Andre before glamouring Jason to think he’d actually put up a fight. Then Adele was made to call me. I was told that if I didn’t hand myself over, Gran would be tortured and killed. A demonstration of that torture was offered in the form of a loud strike and the sound of a breaking bone, followed by Gran’s cries of pain.

Sookie and my blood tie had been very strong from the beginning, and—by the time Adele was kidnapped—we’d bonded, making our tie permanent. Thus, even from a distance, Sookie had felt my distress. Telling the magister to go fuck himself, she’d left the farce of a trial she’d been forced to endure. And—for good measure—she’d killed Lorena on her way out when the bitch had tried to stop her from leaving.

But that didn’t compare to the hell she unleashed upon Sophie-Anne once she learned that Andre had kidnapped Gran. Sookie called upon all of the vampires in her retinue and allies from Texas and Mississippi including the kings of both states. However, the first vampire whom she called as she hurried back to Area 5 was an ancient named Thalia.

Thalia was what could only be described as a malcontent, and few would allow her to stay in their areas because they were intimidated by her. But not Sookie. Sookie left Thalia in peace, and—in exchange—Thalia was loyal to her and came immediately on the very few occasions when Sookie would call upon her.
Even as Lafayette drove me to the site Andre insisted upon for the “human exchange,” Thalia stealthily took position. And—as soon as Lafayette had Adele—Thalia attacked. To say that there was a bloodbath would be an understatement. I simply ducked my head and waited for the ancient warrior’s rampage to be over. By the time Sookie arrived, only one vampire sent by Sophie-Anne was left alive, and he was in chains.

Andre.

Sookie called Sophie-Anne and let her listen to her child's begging and screaming before she mercilessly ended him. And—then—in the most ominous voice I’d ever heard from anyone, Sookie told the queen that she would be coming for her next.

After dealing with Longshadow because of his treachery, Sookie took Gran, Jason, and me to one of her hidden safe houses and then apologized profusely to Gran for not adequately protecting her before.

I couldn’t help but to smile as I recalled Gran telling Sookie to “hush,” or else she’d make her go outside and “pick her switch.”

I smiled even wider as I remembered Jason solemnly telling my 1700-year-old vampiress that she did “not wanna get a switchin’ from Gran.”

Even Thalia had laughed at that.

Trusting no others with our safety, Sookie had left both Thalia and Lafayette to watch over us. By then, Lafayette had already given Gran some of his blood to heal her broken cheekbone, bruises, and scratches. I’d hated that Gran had been hurt like that because of me, but when I apologized, Gran threatened me with a “switch pickin’” too.

So I quit apologizing too, though I still felt some guilt.

The only thing that kept me sane until I saw Sookie again—three nights later—was being able to feel her life force through our bond.
Still, I worried about her—though Thalia told me that there was no need to waste the energy. It turned out that Thalia was right.

Sookie had several spies positioned around Louisiana, so she knew that the queen was not popular. Over-taxing her subjects and over-spending on her own lavish lifestyle had been Sophie-Anne’s biggest errors, for they had created an atmosphere of discontent, which had been brewing in the state for decades. Sookie capitalized on that discontent and used her spies in order to gather the vampires who would be willing to fight on her side.

In the end, not many of Louisiana’s vampires stayed loyal to Sophie-Anne, and she was easily defeated.

It was when Sookie “questioned” the former queen under extreme duress that she discovered why Sophie-Anne had been so obsessed with getting her hands on me.

The ultimate bad penny had resurfaced.

Appius Ocella.

In addition to telling Sophie-Anne that I was part-Fae and likely telepathic, he’d also offered her a large sum of money to make sure that I would never be a problem for the Swedish monarchy. As if I’d ever been a problem before!

However—most disturbingly—Appius told Sophie-Anne that, once I was her prisoner, he would deliver another fairy hybrid to her—this one definitely a telepath. Following Sophie-Anne’s confession and subsequent “true” death, my bonded and I went to Sweden to deal with Appius and to figure out who the other promised fairy hybrid was.

There, Sookie and I lay in wait for Appius. And—after we caught him alone and unawares—Sookie glamoured him.
We learned that, in addition to making parts of my own life miserable, Appius had spent years trying to find out why I was born with my “defect.” This desire only increased when one of the king’s children had a child with the same “flaw.”

After the second instance of “defect” in my “family,” Appius redoubled his efforts to find out where the abnormality was coming from. Ironically, it was a very old vampire who helped him to uncover the fact that my family had fairy blood—royal Fae blood, in fact. As it turned out, I was 1/8 fairy, and my paternal grandmother, Hilde, was the halfling daughter of the Prince of the Water Fae.

The real irony was that—when Hilde had married my grandfather—their whole relationship had been called a “fairy tale” by the Press. Supposedly, my grandmother was an orphan, but “true love” couldn’t be denied when she met my grandfather, who was the heir to the throne at the time. The Press called Hilde the “Swedish Cinderella.”

In actuality, Hilde was the abandoned daughter of Breandan Brigant and a human woman who had died giving birth to her. At the time, Breandan was at war with his half-brother Niall of the Sky Far. Breandan purported to be against fairies mating with humans, and he even advocated that all hybrids be killed. Obviously, he’d not followed his own directives when it came to his daughter, however. Using magic, he had inhibited Hilde’s spark from maturing and kept her ignorant of her lineage, but he’d made sure that she was well taken care of.

Neither my father nor his brother had inherited “obvious” fairy traits. However, they were both uncommonly charming, and—undeniably—they’d used that natural charm for the betterment of Sweden. Seeing that his own grandchildren didn’t possess a spark, Breandan had apparently decided that his little “mistake” with the human woman who had borne Hilde had been adequately covered up. He didn’t count on the fact that the Fae spark could skip a generation—or even two.

Thus, he hadn’t known that I was born with a spark that also made me a telepath.
And so was another child—Hunter.

Initially, at least, the king seemed perfectly willing to do with his own grandson what he’d once done to his nephew. The “defective” child was sent to live in the country as soon as he showed signs of “deformity.” As with me—his death had been faked. And—as with me—his own parents had agreed that he had to go.

However, after learning why the “flaw” had occurred, Appius convinced the king that better options existed, and the king gave Appius carte blanche to deal with the problem—as long as there was no killing involved.

I guess there was one line my uncle’s conscience wouldn’t allow him to cross.

Thanks to the vampire who’d told him all about Hilde’s true lineage, Appius also knew that fairies were enticing to vampires. Moreover, he’d learned that their “gifts” didn’t just disappear—and that they most certainly couldn’t be burned out by a fever. Speculating that I’d managed to cover up my “defect” and becoming angry with himself for being fooled, Appius decided that the best way to deal with me—and Hunter—would be to throw us to the wolves so to speak.

Given his high level of knowledge because of his position in the government, Appius knew about vampire kings and queens. He also knew that the monarch in Sweden was known for being extremely honorable and scrupulous.

On the other hand, he learned that Sophie-Anne Leclercq was the opposite of that. His plan was to get her to deal with the potential problem that I created before handing Hunter over to her as well. It was believed that glamour could erase my knowledge of who I was, for—though full-blooded fairies couldn’t be glamoured—Appius had learned that one-quarter fairies could. He’d tested that out on his own king—with the help of his vampire friend!

After Sophie-Anne had me and had erased my memory of who I really was, he didn’t care what happened to me—though his desire to see me “punished” for fooling him for so many years
made him hope that my life would be miserable. He hoped that Sophie-Anne would use me as a blood-slave and that she’d exploit my “defect” until I was driven mad. And—as long as she agreed not to kill me—he would have fulfilled the one requirement put forth by his king.

And—as for Hunter’s fate? Appius really could care less.

“Dad!” yelled a voice from outside the room, even as I heard a knock on the door.

I smiled. “Come on in, buddy!”

Hunter, now a precocious twelve-year-old with an active imagination and a love of horses, burst into the room. He was always a fount of energy following a nap.

He bounced up onto the king-sized bed. Of course, Sookie didn’t stir.

“Will Mom be up soon?” Hunter asked. “I wanna show her how I can do a backflip in the pool.”

I smiled at the boy who’d become my son in every way that mattered. He wasn’t known for his patience.

“She’ll be up in another half an hour,” I told him. “Have you packed to go to Uncle Jason’s yet?” I asked.

“Mostly,” he shrugged.

“And have you done your homework?”

He rolled his eyes. “Miss Hamby gives me too much,” he frowned.

I chuckled. “Then why do you always seem to finish it so quickly?”

“Cause it’s mostly easy,” he answered with a shrug.

I couldn’t help but to smile proudly. Hunter, unlike me, had been encouraged to use his telepathy, though he knew to keep it a secret outside of the “family.” I’d taught him about shields from the time when he was very young, and he had great control over what he had always been taught to think of as a “gift.”
Early on, Sookie and I had decided that tutors would be preferable to Hunter’s attending public school, though he did have several friends his own age—quite a few of them from the local Were pack.

Unlike me, his subjects of preference weren’t literature, history, and languages, though he earned top marks in them. Hunter liked science and math. I smiled to myself, knowing that he’d gotten his love of logic and precision from his mother—from Sookie.

My bonded had not balked for a moment when I told her that I wanted to take responsibility for Hunter after she’d glamoured Appius to take us to him. In fact, she’d embraced being his mother.

After the takeover, Sookie should have—by all rights—become the queen of Louisiana. However, that position had never been one that she’d wanted. On the contrary, she craved a quiet life.

A life of intimacy and family.

Just like I had always craved.

I’d wondered for a little while about whether Sookie would really go through with her “threat” to make Lafayette the state’s king, but she told me that he was too young. However, she’d called in a favor that was almost a millennium old. Her vampire brother, Godric, was a sheriff in Texas and owed her for “taking care of” their maker.

Sookie convinced him to take on the role of King of Louisiana. And Godric seemed to thrive in the role. During the last decade, he’d become a well-respected monarch, and his fairness and frugality drew many vampires to Louisiana. And no other vampire had done more for vampire-human relations.

Hunter called him “Uncle G.”
Of course, Lafayette was also thought of as an uncle by Hunter—with his nickname being “Uncle Lala.” Hunter’s tutor, Jessica Hamby, a smart young woman who’d impressed me with both her degree and her courage in overcoming her abusive childhood, was also a favorite of Hunter’s, though he did complain about his homework—no matter how much he got.

Or didn’t get.

“Daddy?” Hunter said, interrupting my musings.

“Yes?” I answered.

“When will I get to become a vampire?”

I chuckled. That wasn’t the first time Hunter had asked that question.

“One day, when you are an adult, you will get to decide what you want to be,” I responded.

“But—until then—you should be happy about what and who you are.”

He nodded in acceptance. “Okay.”

“Go finish packing, and start your homework,” I said, ruffling his hair a little. “Uncle Lala will be taking you to Uncle Jason’s not long after sundown.”

“But I get to stay with Gran some, too—while you and Mom are on vacation—right?” he asked.


He smiled and leapt off of the bed before running out of the room. I sighed. A few years before, I would have gotten a hug from him before he left, but he had “outgrown” getting hugs from me, though Sookie was still able to get them out of him on occasion. I smiled down at my bonded and wife. She was quite huggable—though I’d never say that when someone else could hear it.

God knows, Lafayette already teased us enough.
I chuckled as Hunter ran back into the room since he’d forgotten to close my and Sookie’s door.

“Sorry, Dad!” he yelled as he slammed the door behind him this time.

Hunter had been well-trained. Though he was welcome in Sookie and my room, he had three rules: 1.) always knock; 2.) never listen to my thoughts when the door was closed; 3.) accept the fact that his mom and dad needed a lot of “alone time.”

Luckily, we had an obedient and understanding child.

*And a happy one.*

That was what was most important to me.

I closed my eyes and remembered the first moment I’d seen Hunter.

He was barely two years old at the time. Like me, he’d been put into the care of people who were paid not to speak with him—to basically ignore him.

However, he had not yet been broken—not as I had once been.

Needless to say, Sookie and I took Hunter. She glamoured his caretakers to forget all about him and their task. And then she glamoured Appius to get into his car, drive to his home, and use his own gun to kill himself.

I’d watched her glamour him silently, and a small part of me had wanted to tell her to stop. But Appius had done enough damage as it was. And—in truth—I was relieved that he was going to die. And I also knew that Sookie was showing a lot of restraint. She’d wanted to torture him.

After Appius was gone, I had called my father using his phone. The threat of my coming forward with Hunter in tow convinced the man who had given me half of my DNA to meet with me in secret.

I almost wept at his coldness when he saw me. But I did not cry. I didn’t want to give the bastard such power over me.
One thing that I knew above everything else when I met him, however, was that I was nothing like him. As I held Hunter, a boy I’d only known for a few hours, close to me, I knew that I would never give him up—no matter what occurred.

On the contrary, my parents were both weak and selfish creatures, and I vowed to never regret not having a relationship with them after that day.

Who needed people like that in their lives?

In exchange for my silence, I demanded that my father contact me if another telepath was born into the family. I warned him that he would be watched and that he and the king would be killed if they didn’t comply with my one request. Sookie, of course, showed adequate fang to scare him to the point that he’d pissed his pants.

It was a small consolation—but a consolation, nonetheless.

I also informed my father that I would be taking Hunter with me and that I’d better not have any problems doing. A few forged documents later and Hunter was “Hunter Northman,” my son.

No one in our “blood family” had tried to make contact with Hunter or me since then. But—then again—I hadn’t expected any contact.

Not unless another me or another Hunter was born.

And then I’d better goddamned hear from them! And—if I did not—I would let Sookie do her worst on the whole fucking lot of them!

I took a breath and calmed myself down. Sookie had a spy in my uncle’s inner circle now. So I knew that we would know about any new telepaths immediately, even if my father decided to betray me—again—by trying to keep them a secret.

I wouldn’t put it past him. After all, I’d learned that fairies were—by nature—a duplicitous race. They were also opportunistic.
After Sookie and I returned to Louisiana with Hunter, we worried about whether or not
Breandan might become a problem. After all, at least one vampire knew the truth about his human
progeny—the one who had told Appius all about Hilde. Unfortunately, that vampire had also
glamoured his name from Appius’s head.

In the end, Sookie and I decided that the safest course of action would be to contact Niall
Brigant, whom Sookie had fought with during a war that occurred a thousand years before I was
born.

Yep—being with a vampire who looked even younger than I did was sometimes a humbling
experience!

Once Niall Brigant learned about the existence of hybrids sired by his half-brother—he used
blackmail to force Breandan into forging a peace treaty among the Fae. I didn’t know all of the
details of the treaty—I didn’t want to know them—but I did know that Sookie was at the signing of
that accord, and she told both brothers that if anyone in my bloodline were touched, she would
personally wage war on fairies until every one of them was dead.

From all indications, they believed her.

My bonded, unsurprisingly, still wanted to kill my uncle, as well as my parents and Hunter’s
parents, but I didn’t have the heart to condone those acts—though I’d almost relented in the case of
Hunter’s parents.

How anyone could give up that beautiful, perfect child was fucking beyond me!

I growled.

“You’re upset,” Sookie commented as she stirred next to me.

“Just thinking about what I’ll let you do to certain people in Sweden if they don’t tell us
about other little Hunters,” I said.
She smiled up at me. “Don’t worry. My spy is deeply entrenched, so—if there is even a hint of a child as special as Hunter or you—I will grab him or her up right away. I do like collecting telepathic fairies, after all.”

I chuckled. Sookie had rarely asked me to use my gift for her, though I volunteered it as much as she would let me. In fact, she was so secretive about what Hunter and I could do that even Godric didn’t know. Not that we didn’t trust him. We had just decided not to let that cat out of the bag until Hunter was old enough to decide what he wanted with his life.

The only humans who knew about us were Jessica, Gran, and Jason—all of whom were glamoured not to say a word about our “gift.” Tray Dawson, the head of our day guards, also knew—but only so that he would listen to me immediately if I ever warned him of danger. Of course—all the Weres in our employ thought that Hunter and I smelled good, and that was why Sookie let it be known among them that we had a little fairy blood in us.

As it turned out, knowing that, the Weres were actually deterred from being interested in us—at least in a “claiming” sort of way—since fairies were known to bring trouble with them. And I kept a good eye and “ear” on our guards—to make sure that they were loyal to us.

Among vampires, two others knew beyond Sookie: Lafayette, of course, and Rasul, one of Sookie’s previous spies in New Orleans and Sookie’s eldest child—a fact which she’d managed to keep a secret for centuries. Rasul had taken over Merlotte’s after Sam Merlotte disappeared.

I’d never asked Sookie about the details of Merlotte’s death, but I did know that—as soon as his name had come up during her interrogation of Sophie-Anne—it was a forgone conclusion that he wouldn’t last long.

And he didn’t.
Surprisingly, Rasul had been accepted in Bon Temps rather quickly, probably because he was personable and because Adele decided to make him her fourth grandson. Sookie and I were just comforted by the fact that he kept an eye on the Stackhouses for us.

“Are you still sure?” Sookie asked me, her expression serious.

“More than ever,” I smiled at her.

She smiled. “So—where’s our little monkey.”

Hunter had earned that nickname, given the places we would find him in. In truth, I just thought he enjoyed it when his mother had to fly him down from some of his more intricate and high-up “hiding places.”

“Finishing packing and starting his homework,” I smiled at her.

She nodded and moved so that she was on top of me. With a child in the house, we didn’t sleep naked—as we might have liked to—but Sookie was wearing only one of my T-shirts, and she was as sexy as hell.

I groaned as she kissed me and then rolled off of me.

“I’m gonna take a shower,” she giggled. “Lafayette will be up soon.”

I sighed with desire, but I let her go without a protest, knowing that we had set plans for the night—plans which I didn’t want to break.

An hour later, Sookie and I waved goodbye to Hunter and his Uncle Lala before we engaged our home’s security system and walked hand-in-hand into the living room.

Sookie gave me a look of utter love.

“I know what you are giving up,” she whispered.

I knew that too. And I wasn’t going to insult her intelligence by telling her that I didn’t regret some of those things.
“You aren’t aging that quickly,” she reminded. “Between your Fae blood and my blood, you will look and feel young for a while yet.”


“But you used to . . . .”

“I used to be scared,” I said, interrupting her. And that was true. When we’d first discussed the possibility of my being turned one day, I’d been vehemently opposed to it, especially after we’d “adopted” Hunter. But—over the years—I’d come to realize two clear truths. First, one lifetime with Sookie would not be enough. And—more importantly—giving “us” up wouldn’t have been fair to her. It had taken me longer to realize those things than I wished it would have since I’d caused my bonded a lot of unnecessary angst over the years, but I’d eventually seen the light.

“We could wait—until Hunter is grown up,” she said, biting her bottom lip. She did that only on the very rare occasions when she was actually anxious.

I was pretty sure that no one else had ever seen it.

“I know,” I said. Indeed, I had thought about waiting. I knew that I would miss the possibility of daylight with our son, but—like me—he was mostly nocturnal now anyway.

As Water Fae, he and I were truly “fish” in certain ways, gaining strength from our time in the pool or the lake near our home or—when we went on vacation—in one ocean or another. However, it did not matter if we swam when the sun was out or when the moon was rising. In fact, in many ways, the night called to both Hunter and me—for that was when the moon would make her waves in the water, waves which sometimes only he and I could feel.

Yes—nights were preferable for my son and me. Fewer thoughts being projected as humans slept. Vampires that we could “relax” in. The majority of our family being awake.

For those reasons, I had little doubt that—once he was an adult—Hunter would join his mother and me as creatures of the night.
I just regretted that it had taken me so long to make that decision for myself.

“This is the right time,” I told my bonded and wife with certainty.

“Are you worried that you might change your mind if we wait?” she asked, her eyes narrowed and studying me carefully.

“No,” I said immediately, not wanting her to worry about that possibility. “It’s just that—as soon as I knew that you’d have no regrets about losing my warm blood and body—I knew that I was ready.”

Sookie shook her head fondly. “Always thinking about me first. Or Hunter.”

I nodded to confirm the truth of her words.

“Okay then,” she said with a smile, accepting that my final decision was the right one for all of us.

Of course, we’d already discussed my turning many, many times.

So everything that could be said had been.

Hunter was now old enough to understand what was going on, and he certainly accepted that his mother was a vampire. His reaction to Sookie and me telling him that I was going to be turned was simple: “’bout time, Mom and Dad.”

Adele, too, had been supportive, telling me that I needed to seize my time with Sookie since—vampire or not—everyone could die when least expected. Adele knew that very well. After all, she’d lost her husband and her son and daughter-in-law—all within a few months of one another.

Suddenly—thankfully—Sookie’s look became mischievous. She stood up. “Hop up!” she said, holding out her arms.

I chuckled. One of the few things that I’d not quite gotten used to was the fact that Sookie could pick me up as easily as she could pick up Hunter.
I let her hoist me into her arms bridal style.

I could only imagine the humorous sight we made.

But, then again, Sookie and I were anything but conventional.

Once we were in our bedroom, the time for questions was over. We made love without words, our bodies having become so in sync over the years that they had refined their own language together.

And—then—she bit.

I let myself enjoy it—at least at first.

But Sookie had been right. Everyone fought for life.

Even someone ready for “death.”

I kicked against our bed as she kept drinking my blood.

I vaguely registered that she was caressing my hair in comfort.

During the last moments of my life, so many questions and doubts plagued me—just as Sookie said they might.

Was I doing Hunter a disservice by being changed before he was an adult?

Would I even become a vampire? After all, a fairy hybrid had likely never attempted such a thing before.

Would I retain my telepathy?

Would I be able to “hear” vampires?

Would Sookie still love me as much once I was cold-blooded?

Would she still be able to feed from me for sustenance?

And what about me? What would being a vampire “feel” like?

Would I be able to control my urges?
Sookie and I had planned on at least a month of relative seclusion—a “vacation”—so that I could adapt.

But what if I couldn’t gain control?

What if I harmed Gran?

Hunter?

“Drink,” Sookie’s voice came from above me as I found my thoughts teetering between consciousness and unconsciousness.

I trusted her voice, so I drank.

As always, her blood tasted like heaven itself. And I wondered for a moment if I was on my way there.

But I saw no white light.

I saw only darkness as death took me.

But that darkness was like one of Gran’s old afghans. It might not have been the most stylish thing in the world (Gran had to work with the materials she could afford, after all—until she got a wealthy “grandson,” that is), but it was warm and smelled of love and home.

Sookie and I had several of them placed around our own home. And Hunter curled up with one every night.

And that was how I died as a human—and it wasn’t from fucking pneumonia!

It was by choice.

Wrapped up in love.

Thinking of Gran.

And Hunter.

And Sookie.

And home.
And love.

And that was how I rose as a vampire as well.

THE END.