



Dead But Not Forgotten: Stories from the World of Sookie Stackhouse

By Charlaine Harris, Toni L. P. Kelner

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Discover the strange, supernatural residents of Bon Temps, Louisiana, like never before in this collection of stories from the world of Sookie Stackhouse.

The #1 *New York Times* bestselling Sookie Stackhouse novels by Charlaine Harris spawned the hit TV show *True Blood* and captivated fans around the world—including other authors. Now this group of writers, specifically chosen by Charlaine, pays tribute to “the southern, mind-reading belle who gets mixed up in the world of vampires and magical creatures” (*The Kansas City Star*) with a collection of fifteen stories about your favorite residents of Bon Temps.

With contributions by
Rachel Caine
Dana Cameron
Bill Crider
MaryJanice Davidson
Leigh Evans
Christopher Golden
Nancy Holder
Miranda James
Jonathan Maberry
Jeffrey J. Mariotte
Seanan McGuire
Suzanne McLeod
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Editorial Review

Review

Praise for *Dead But Not Forgotten*

“A must-read...A great mix of funny and dark, this anthology will have readers and fans beyond excited.”—*Suspense Magazine*

“This wildly entertaining anthology features well-known authors delving into the lives of existing characters found in Charlaine Harris's Sookie Stackhouse novels...Crisp storytelling, sharp dialogue and great pacing are highlightsof what, for Sookie fans, will be an anthology to die for.”—*RT Book Reviews*

Praise for #1 *New York Times* bestselling author Charlaine Harris's Sookie Stackhouse novels

“It's the kind of book you look forward to reading before you go to bed, thinking you're only going to read one chapter, and then you end up reading seven.”—Alan Ball, executive producer of *True Blood*

“Vivid, subtle, and funny in her portrayal of southern life.”—*Entertainment Weekly*

“Charlaine Harris has vividly imagined telepathic barmaid Sookie Stackhouse and her small-town Louisiana milieu, where humans, vampires, shapeshifters, and other sentient critters live...Her mash-up of genres is delightful, taking elements from mysteries, horror stories, and romances.”—*Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*

“The series continues to be inventive and funny with an engaging, smart, and sexy heroine.”—*The Denver Post*

“Blending action, romance, and comedy, Harris has created a fully functioning world so very close to our own, except, of course, for the vamps and other supernatural creatures.”—*The Toronto Star*

About the Author

Charlaine Harris is the #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of the Sookie Stackhouse and Midnight, Texas, fantasy/mystery series and the Aurora Teagarden, Harper Connelly, and Lily Bard mystery series. Her books have inspired HBO's *True Blood*, NBC's *Midnight, Texas*, and the Aurora Teagarden movies for Hallmark Movies & Mysteries. She has lived in the South her entire life.

Toni L. P. Kelner writes the Family Skeleton Mysteries as Leigh Perry and, under her own name, is the author of the “Where Are They Now?” Mysteries and the Laura Fleming mystery series. She has won an Agatha Award and a *Romantic Times* Career Achievement Award, and has been nominated multiple times for the Anthony, the Macavity, and the Derringer awards.

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INTRODUCTION

CHARLAINE HARRIS

I have to admit I was dubious about this project when Steve Feldberg at Audible first proposed it. I thought it would be strange to see my characters from someone else's viewpoint, and I thought it would be embarrassing to invite other writers to jump into my characters. But as I mulled the idea over for a few weeks, it occurred to me that I had already seen my characters from another viewpoint, on *True Blood*. Maybe seeing them through another prism would be just as interesting.

Gradually, I began to see how much fun this project might be, especially with Toni L. P. Kelner, friend and coeditor on so many anthologies, riding shotgun. We made up a list of writers who had let me know they'd enjoyed the books. To my pleasure, they all seemed excited at the idea.

I have been delighted with the stories we received. Each one has provided me with a sort of affectionate good-bye to the world where I lived for so long, and the people I created to populate that world.

NOBODY'S BUSINESS

RACHEL CAINE

Rachel Caine was enthralled by Kevin and Kenya, the Bon Temps police officers who appear in most of the Sookie books. She wanted to see more of their personal lives and to find out exactly how they came to realize they were really made for each other. Here's Rachel's version of their vampire-imperiled courtship, which also involves swamp water, addicts, and other assorted romantic shenanigans.

Hoo boy, it was hot. Though saying it was hot in Bon Temps, Louisiana, was a little like saying water was wet; even this late in the season, well into what probably felt like fall in other parts of the country, it was a sticky, steamy day. Like most other days.

Kevin Pryor reached for the controls of the air-conditioning on the police cruiser, but before he could get to them, his partner, Kenya Jones, was already there, expertly adjusting the knobs to get just the right mix of dry and cold. She also got out a thermos full of cold water, wetted a small washcloth, and handed it to him.

"Are you saying I stink?" he asked her, and made quick use of it, swabbing his filthy, sweaty face, neck, and hands. Not much he could do about the shirt; it was going to be one of those challenges that might be too big for regular laundry, and his mother would give him a lecture about taking better care of his things even though he was a grown-ass man.

Kenya didn't quite smile. "I wouldn't say that." Which was her way of saying that she was too polite. In fact, he smelled like rot and swamp, because he'd had to bend over and fish out the rotting suitcase from the green, stagnant pond and open it up to be sure there wasn't anything unpleasant in it, like body parts. There hadn't been. Just somebody's sad mess of clothes and some papers too rotted away to read.

They'd gotten the call about a suitcase floating in the pond just an hour ago, and both of them had, without discussion, decided to put it at the top of their to-do list. Bon Temps was a sleepy little backwoods place, but it still had its more-than-fair share of meth-heads, criminals, losers, and killers.

Some of their killers were vampires.

He didn't like to think *all* vampires were killers, because some of the ones he'd met, like Bill Compton, generally seemed to be good people, wanting to live whatever kind of life they had without trouble, but he

understood that there was a spectrum in the undead, like there was in the living. Good and bad and shades between. One thing he'd learned early on as a cop: People were rarely on one side of the line or the other. Good people did bad things. Bad people did good things. You had to take it on a case-by-case basis.

"That was strange, wasn't it?" Kenya asked as she rewetted the washcloth and ran it over her exposed skin. He found himself watching that too closely, mind going blank, and had to blink and look away. Kenya was off-limits, obviously. First, she was his partner. Second, she was just about his polar opposite in every way—Amazon tall, rounded, built like Venus, if Venus could bench-press the weight of a grown man. And she was black, which didn't matter to him a hill of beans, but he knew it mattered in the landscape of Bon Temps society. Such as that was. It most certainly mattered to his mother. She didn't even like him riding with Kenya all day; after all, she was from a generation that had gotten all froth-mouthed over *those people* going to the same restrooms.

He loved his mother. He just didn't like her very much.

"You mean the suitcase?" he asked, dragging his mind back to the case—the *literal* case—they were working on. "Could have been some pissed-off boyfriend tossing his girl's clothes in the water during an argument. Or somebody's idea of recycling. No sign of foul play, at least. It's just junk."

Kenya nodded. She was frowning a little bit, but there hadn't been anything in the suitcase that either of them could point to as something that shouldn't have been tossed out. If there had been ID or a passport or cash or jewelry, that'd be one thing, but an old, scarred Samsonite with one good latch filled with threadbare clothes . . . "All right," she said. "I'll write it up in case something comes up on it. I checked missing persons. We got three, but none of them would fit the clothes in that bag."

The clothes had been for a generously sized woman without much sense of style. Generic stuff, sun-faded from flapping on a laundry line. Which, now that Kevin followed that train of thought along the tracks, didn't exactly support the theory of a spat with a girlfriend. Women of that age, and that particular style, didn't generally go in for fiery domestic arguments. When those kinds of women had fights, they were quiet, full of resentment, and the parties involved rarely threw things into stagnant ponds out of spite.

"Maybe we ought to head back," Kenya said, and cracked open the window. "I am not going to be friendly all day long with that shirt."

It did stink pretty bad, and he could feel the sticky chill of it now that the A/C was drying the fabric, slimy against his chest. In this job, you tended to get accustomed to bad smells; a couple of bodies rotting in the hot Louisiana summer adjusted your nose real fast. But this was different.

"Right," he said, and put the cruiser in gear. "Back to the barn."

Nothing in Bon Temps was a long drive, unless you went out into the fringe communities, and that was mostly about the quality of the roads, not the distance. So in under five minutes they were back on what passed for the main drag. They passed Merlotte's, which looked like it had a decent midday crowd going. He found himself craving lunch all of a sudden, and he caught Kenya's longing glance in that direction, too. Last thing he wanted was to wear swamp stink into a restaurant, though. Shower, fresh shirt, and then lunch.

Of course, it never happened.

They were a block away from the station when Marie Sandeman came running out in the street towing her ragged little boy along behind her and waved them down as if she were bringing in a jet for a landing.

“You’re kidding,” Kenya said, and glowered at the woman. Marie was none too stable at the best of times, and this didn’t look like it was going to be one of her better days. She hadn’t combed her hair, and she probably hadn’t slept much, either, from the dark rings around her eyes and the pale, sweaty set of her face. Thin as a stick insect, so thin he could see her ribs under the crop top she was wearing. Her kid didn’t look much cleaner, but at least he was better fed. Kevin sincerely hoped that the broad, dark smear on the boy’s cheek was mud.

“You gotta help me!” Marie shouted, and pounded on the hood of the police car for emphasis.

“Oh hell, she did *not*,” Kenya said, and had her door open before Kevin could turn off the engine. “Marie Sandeman! Take your hands off the car!”

Marie held up her hand in a trembling pledge to be good as she stepped back. Kenya fixed her with a blank, intimidating stare as Kevin exited the vehicle and came around to the front of the car near Marie. Kenya held back. It was the normal way they approached someone like Marie. He’d made his peace with the fact that in their partnership, he was the *less* intimidating one.

“You gotta help me,” Marie repeated. Her little boy crumpled up a corner of his dirty, oversized Superman T-shirt and stuffed it in his mouth. His dark eyes were as wide as dinner plates. “He’s in my house!”

That changed things, and Kevin heard it in the tone of his partner’s voice as she said, “Who is, Marie?”

“My dealer—” Her brain must have caught up with her mouth, because she stopped midconfession (it would have been drugs) and looked sideways. Marie was a real bad liar. “His name’s Quentin. He won’t leave. He’s tearin’ shit up in there!”

“Is he high, Marie?” Kenya managed to sound warm and calm and strong all at the same time. Mostly, Kevin figured, it was for the boy’s benefit. They’d handled Marie so many times that kindness had generally gone out the window, along with Marie’s self-respect.

“Probably . . . ?”

Kenya nodded to Kevin and got back into the cruiser. He delayed long enough to say, “You go get yourself a soda or something, Marie. Don’t go home until we deal with this, all right?”

Marie might not be as smart as your average set of tools, but she understood an opening when she saw one. “Ain’t got no money,” she said, and took on a stubborn, defensive look. “Ain’t my fault, I had to run out of there so fast!”

Kenya didn’t so much as blink. Kevin sighed, pulled out his wallet, and gave Marie a five, which she snatched from his fingers with rabid eagerness.

She looked down at her little boy as she stuffed the cash in her pocket. “See? Cops ain’t always bad. Just mostly.”

Kevin shook his head and slammed the car door as Kenya flipped on the lights. No need for the siren. Marie didn’t live that far away, and there wasn’t any traffic to speak of between them and the destination.

“I already hate this day,” Kenya said. “You know we have to go in her house.”

“I know,” he said. “Bright side is, you won’t notice how bad my shirt stinks anymore.”

Marie's screen door was pretty useless, with a half-busted top hinge and most of the screen ripped into sharp-edged tatters. Old damage, rusty at the ends. Behind it, the front door hung wide open.

"Don't look good," Kenya said. "Left or right?"

"Left," Kevin said. She nodded, made a silent three-count, and eased into the darkness, going right. Kevin moved with her. They clicked their lights on within a second of each other.

It wasn't better than the last time he'd seen the place. The floor was choked with discarded clothes, broken toys, bottles . . . basically the worst footing in the world if they had to move fast. Kevin swept the corners with his flashlight, but there was no sign of an intruder, unless you counted the roaches scurrying to avoid the glare. The stench of old diapers and rotting trash made the swampy aroma from his shirt seem almost soothing.

It was also hotter than hell. He guessed Marie had forgotten to pay the electric bill again, or else couldn't afford to. What she *could* afford was meth, and he spotted some on the coffee table, right next to the open pack of fruit snacks her kid had probably been eating. Time to call social services again.

He heard the shuffling sound the same time Kenya did, and both their lights moved to pinpoint the doorway that led into the kitchen. Kenya moved like a tiger as she closed the distance from the other side, and despite the fact that this was damn dangerous, Kevin couldn't help admiring her. Moments like these, she was so beautiful it hurt. Not that he'd ever say so.

They paused on either side of the kitchen doorway, and Kenya gave him a nod, which was their sign that she'd let him go in first and low, while she covered high. They both moved their lights to converge, and pinned the intruder in place in the beams.

He wasn't exactly—right. Kevin took that in at a glance—the wide, wild, red-rimmed eyes; the matted long hair; the pallid face and red lips. Maybe he'd come to Marie's house looking to score.

He was holding a dead cat. That was why his lips were so red, and dripping.

"Jesus," Kenya said. She sounded disgusted. "Drop the cat and put your damn hands up."

He dropped the cat, all right, but it turned out that in his other hand he had a gun, and he used it. He shot wild; the bullet buried itself in the wall a good three feet to the right. Kevin fired back and heard Kenya do the same.

One of them must have hit him, because the junkie yelped and staggered back as he dropped his gun.

Kevin surged forward. "Down! Get down on the floor!" A fate worse than death, to lie on that floor, but his heart was ripping itself loose in adrenaline-fueled pounding, and he wasn't feeling particularly sympathetic.

The wild man bared stained teeth at him and knocked Kevin out of his way as easily as if he were a blow-up toy. It felt like being hit by a sledgehammer in the chest, and Kevin was aware of leaving the ground, a second of motion, and then a hard, rattling impact against the solid bulk of the refrigerator.

Kenya let out a wordless yell and fired, but the man was damn fast as well as damn strong, and she missed him as he smashed through the cloudy back window of the kitchen, launching himself out to the straggly grass of the lawn. He was already at a dead run when Kevin staggered forward to look. He couldn't seem to get his lungs to work, and for a panicked second or two he thought his chest had been crushed . . . and then his paralyzed solar plexus let go, and he whooped in a hungry breath.

Kenya was right there, holding him up while he got his legs under him again. “You all right?” she asked, and he nodded without speaking and motioned her on. She gave him a doubting look but kicked open the back door and sprinted after the intruder, who had already vaulted the back fence.

Get it together, Kevin told himself, and stumbled through the mess of the living room out to the front yard, then to the cruiser. Once inside, he caught his breath and turned the key. It was as if gunning the engine started something inside him, too, and he snapped back into focus with a vengeance. Still shaking, but this time it was with pure, white-hot rage.

You’re not going anywhere, you fucker, he thought. He’d never say it out loud, because he’d been raised polite, but he meant every word.

He whipped the cruiser into a roaring turn and hit the sirens and lights, taking the next corner at a skid. Up ahead, Kenya was running hard and gaining on the intruder, who was just crossing the block up ahead. Kevin missed the man as he dodged and went sharply left up a narrow alley—too narrow for the cruiser. Kenya waved him on around, and he hit the gas again and took a left to run parallel with their fleeing cat-killer. It was a long block. His radio crackled as he took the turn to cut the man off, and he heard Kenya’s voice say, “Kevin, he’s got a truck, repeat, he’s in a—”

Too late.

Kevin saw the truck in a blur as it headed straight for the front quarter panel of the cruiser. The next second he was spinning, and the impact knocked him sideways. The cruiser jerked hard right and tipped, but didn’t quite topple over on its side, and then the truck pushed it out of the way and sped off, leaving a greasy smoke of burning tires behind it.

“Shit,” Kevin gasped, and let go of the wheel. “Shit!” He tried to steer away from the curb he’d landed against, but the cruiser made a grinding metal groan, and he heard the left front tire shred and pop. “Shit!”

It hurt to slam his hands down on the wheel, but he did it anyway.

Kenya yanked his door open from the outside—it took three tries—and looked him in the face. “You’re bleeding,” she said. Her voice sounded flat and professional, but there was a look in her eyes that said something different. She popped the trunk and got the first-aid kit. “Here, put some pressure on it.”

He didn’t realize how much he was bleeding until he glanced in the rearview mirror. There was a wide cut on his left temple, probably from broken glass, and a swath of red down his cheek. It had already dripped onto his shirt collar. “Guess this shirt’s done for sure,” he said, which seemed an odd thing to say when he thought about it, but he was a little disconnected. Too much, too fast. And twinges of pain were starting to make themselves felt, like sparks flying up from a fire.

While he fumbled a gauze pack out of the first-aid kit, Kenya was calling in on her shoulder radio, rattling off pursuit information and requesting an ambulance. She’d gotten the plate number of the truck, which was a damn good thing; Kevin had been too busy spinning to manage it. “We need a new car,” he said. “This one’s not going anywhere.”

“Only place you’re going is the hospital,” she told him. “Hush.”

“Did you just tell me to hush?”

“Hush,” she said again, and crouched down to eye level. She took the gauze from him and swabbed at the

blood on his face. “Just hush.”

He did.

He was still sitting on a table in the emergency room getting stitches when Kenya came back in with a fresh undershirt and uniform shirt she must have taken out of his locker. Once the doc had tied off all his knots and headed to the next crisis, Kevin stripped off the stained clothes and put on the new ones. Kenya watched him without comment. He could tell she was thinking of something else.

“Thanks,” he told her. She nodded, but she looked tense and guarded and clearly was arguing with herself about something.

Finally, she said, “He ditched the pickup about fifteen minutes ago at a truck stop on the way to Shreveport.”

“And?”

“And he killed a nineteen-year-old to steal his car. Word from the scene is he was headed west,” she said. Her shoulders slumped a little. “Kid got torn apart, Kevin. We should have got him.”

“Yeah,” he said, and swallowed. “Not your fault.”

“Not yours, either. I should have taken Marie more seriously from the get-go. We need to get her in a room and find out who he is, right now.”

“Yep.” Kevin slid off the table and tucked the crisp new uniform shirt into his pants. It still had sharp creases in it from his momma’s ironing, and it smelled of some scent she’d started adding to the laundry. She’d started out with lavender, but he’d talked her out of that; who takes a lavender-scented cop seriously? Not that spring-fresh was much better.

Kenya sniffed him as he moved past her. “Better than swamp water,” she said, and he laughed. Just a little. It died as Kenya’s radio crackled and spat out their call number. She unhooked it and answered.

“It’s Dearborn,” the voice on the other end said. “Where you at?”

When Bud Dearborn got on the line personally, it was almost never good news. “Hospital, sir,” Kenya said. “Kevin’s getting stitched up.”

“He okay?”

“Yes, sir, he’s fine.”

“Good. Alcee Beck questioned your witness, and he’s got a name for your guy: Quentin Glick. He’s got a good long record of assaults, possessions, robberies, the usual stuff. I’ll send it to your e-mail along with his mug shots.”

“Yes, sir,” she repeated. There was a line grooving into her forehead between her slowly flattening eyebrows. “We’re on our way in.”

“No, you’re not,” he said. “I need you two to go up to that truck stop and talk with the detectives out there. Shreveport’s none too happy that we sent them our problem, and they want everything you know.”

Kenya opened her mouth, and Kevin knew she was about to protest, so he quickly grabbed the mike from her

and said, “Yes, sir, on our way. Pryor out.”

Dearborn didn’t even bother to acknowledge. Yeah, he was pissed. Deserved to be, too.

Kevin pinned the mike back on Kenya’s shoulder. “Let’s go.”

The truck stop was still a busy crime scene, and the arrival of their cruiser and uniforms only added to the circus. The news crews focused on them briefly before deciding they weren’t as photogenic as the lumpy, bloody sheet under which the victim lay dead. Kevin and Kenya got looked over by the local detective and were ordered inside the truck stop Hardee’s to wait. It was three more long, boring hours, and dark had fallen, before someone walked in, ordered his own drink, and sat down across from the two of them.

He nodded and took out a notebook. The cup beside him steamed vapor into the air, but it had a funny smell that wasn’t coffee. That was when Kevin noticed that instead of the standard *REG* or *DECAF* boxes being checked on the side, someone had written in grease marker *B+*.

His gaze went back to the detective. Pale, thin, a coarse five-o’clock shadow. Long horsey face and big dark eyes under a mop of wavy black hair.

Not just pale after all. The detective was a vampire.

Kevin shot a look at his partner, but she’d already twigged to it, too; he saw it in the cautious, steady gaze she was leveling on the man.

“I’m Detective Wallace,” the man said. He had a faint accent, something East Coast, maybe. “You’re the ones who let him get away.”

Kevin kept his silence. So did Kenya. If Wallace felt at all disconcerted by that, or their stares, he didn’t show it, but then vampires weren’t long on empathy. Kevin had always gotten along with Bon Temps’s vampire celebrity, Bill Compton; he was a tolerant man by nature—live and let live. But there was something about Detective Wallace that raised the hackles on the back of his neck.

“What can you tell me about him?” Wallace asked. He tapped his pencil on the pad. It had chew marks. Kevin wondered if they were fang marks, technically.

“His name is Quentin Glick,” Kenya said. “He’s five eleven, about one fifty, greasy shoulder-length hair. He’s on something.”

“He’s on a lot of things,” Wallace said, “but in particular he’s on vampire blood. The drainers must have got their hands on something special, and we’re trying to track down everyone who bought it. This Glick’s the last, as far as we know.”

“We heard he tore somebody apart,” Kevin said. “That wasn’t literal, was it?”

Wallace shrugged, as if it weren’t any nevermind to him. “One arm, one leg. Kid died of blood loss and shock.”

The detective sounded disgusted by it, but Kevin had the feeling it wasn’t because of the loss of the boy’s life. More the waste of a good blood supply. “So this thing he’s on, it makes him stronger.” Kevin remembered the impact of what would have probably been a light shove from Glick that had sent him slamming into the refrigerator. He’d gotten off damn lucky.

“Faster, too,” Kenya said. “He ran like he was heading for the gold medal. Junkie usually has no stamina to speak of.”

That turned Kevin cold from the spine out, the idea that Kenya might have caught up with a man capable of ripping off limbs. He couldn’t help but imagine it, and a sick feeling welled up inside him that he didn’t want to properly identify.

“Do you know where he’s heading?” Kevin asked. The detective hadn’t taken any notes, and it looked to him as if the pencil and notebook were just props, there to make him look more normal. As the pencil’s untouched eraser tapped the paper, Kevin found himself focusing on the letters on the side: *The Bat’s Wing*. He’d never heard of it, but it sounded like the name of some vampire-themed bar, like Fangtasia in Shreveport.

“No idea,” Wallace said. He sounded bland and bored, and he took a deep gulp of his not-likely-to-be-coffee. “You ever met this Glick before?”

Kevin shook his head, but Kenya said, “Once. I booked him for aggravated assault years back. Just another drunk, back then. He had the two-beer answer.” Wallace gave her a questioning look. “Ask a drunk how much he’s had, he’ll always say two beers, even if he’s falling down. That was Glick. Mr. Two Beers.”

“He’s hit the big time now,” Wallace said. “What can you tell me about friends, associates, relatives?”

“Not too damn much. I looked into his files while we were waiting. He was pretty much a loner.”

“You discovered him in the house of a local in Bon Temps. What was he doing there?”

“Eating a cat,” Kevin said. “When he took the dead kid’s car, which way was he heading?”

“My information is he was headed south. Why?” Wallace asked. His eyes met Kevin’s, and there was something so darkly alien in them that it was hard not to break the stare. “Were you planning on going after him in hot pursuit?”

Yes, Kevin thought. “No, sir,” he said. “Just curious. Wanted to make sure he wasn’t going back to Bon Temps.”

“Doesn’t look like he is, so it’s none of your business from this point on,” Wallace said. “You can go. Thanks for the information.”

He snapped the notebook shut, chugged down the rest of his blood, and left them with the empty cup sitting on the table as he headed out.

A few seconds later came another detective, overweight, tired, and in a terrible mood. He didn’t bother to sit down, and he damn sure wasn’t a vampire. He barked rapid-fire questions at them about Glick, and after the first three, Kenya held up her hand. “We already answered all this,” she said. “Your Detective Wallace was in here first.”

That got her a weary, cold stare. “I don’t care who was in here or what you told him, you tell it again. Hell’s bells, you’re police, you understand how this works.”

They did. Kevin controlled his own frustration, but while he filled in his own answers, he was busy turning over things in his mind. *I don’t care who was in here*. That was a funny thing to say. The crime scene was busy, but not that busy.

When he started to ask a question, he got cut off by the Shreveport detective and told they could go. Again. Then the man was off, muttering under his breath.

Kenya let a few seconds go by before she said, “You get the feeling he and Wallace wanted us to turn around and go home?”

“I did.”

“You want to turn around and go home?”

“I don’t,” Kevin said. “I don’t even think Detective Wallace was police.”

Kenya looked blank for a second, but he knew her mind was racing. It was a pleasure to watch. “That’s why we just had to repeat everything,” she said. “So who was he?”

“I think he was sent here to find out what we knew—and if we knew something they thought we shouldn’t. Vampire business.”

She slowly nodded, turned her head, and looked out the window. No sign of Detective Wallace. He’d completely vanished from the scene. “Damn,” Kenya said softly. “I did not see that coming.”

“The Bat’s Wing,” Kevin said. “Have you ever heard of it? That was the name on the pencil he was using.”

“No.”

He pulled out his cell phone and Googled, and it was right there, top result. It was a vampire bar in Dallas. Close to Shreveport, by virtually no coincidence at all.

He put his phone back. “How do you feel about a road trip to Dallas?”

Kenya gave him a slow, deliberate smile. “Better get a couple of burgers for the road, and change clothes. I don’t expect we’re making this official.”

She’d switched their bags of civilian clothes, the ones they usually kept in the other (crashed) cruiser, into the new ride. That was what he liked best about Kenya, he thought.

Forward planning.

Kevin had been to Dallas before—he wasn’t some hillbilly—but it was a shock coming out of the relative peace of Bon Temps, or even Shreveport. You could see the glow on the horizon long before the city itself materialized, as if it were permanently on fire. Once the buildings began appearing, it was the neon-clad ones first. There was some new downtown hotel with a moving-screen exterior; it was showing random screensaver patterns of pulses and colors, and it was mesmerizing as he took the downtown exit.

“Turn right up here,” Kenya told him. If she was impressed by the lights and the traffic (which was considerable, though it was nearly midnight) she didn’t say so. “Well, this looks like Hipster Central.”

It did. The Bat’s Wing was in one of those derelict chic neighborhoods that ten years ago would have been crack houses and gang graffiti and today was devoted to herbal shops, stores that specialized in fancy hats, tea rooms, and—just up ahead—a tattoo parlor that no self-respecting biker would ever walk into. Kevin expected it got a brisk trade from sorority girls and soccer moms. Maybe stockbrokers.

The Bat's Wing was two doors down from the tattoo place, which was probably ideal for them both. It had generous parking that was nevertheless completely full, so Kevin eased the cruiser into an illegal space, because cops never ticketed cruisers even if they were out of their own jurisdiction, and no business ever dared tow them.

The building itself was a windowless black-painted cube with a painting of a bat flight in red silhouettes that started small at one corner and exploded into huge wings at the upper diagonal. The neon sign just had a bat silhouette that flapped its wings. Kevin could hear the pump of music through the walls.

"Expensive crowd in there," Kenya said, nodding toward the cars; she was right, the lot was full of shine and polish, and every single vehicle cost at least three times their annual salary, probably more. Still, he thought she'd fit right in. Kenya's civilian clothes included a close-fitting pair of jeans that hugged her curves and a tight black shirt under a leather jacket. She looked hot and dangerous.

There were no clothes in the world that could make Kevin look buff and chiseled, but he'd done all right. As usual, all eyes would be on Kenya, and that was good. People tended to underestimate him, and it made it much easier to watch her back. He just blended into the woodwork in a place like this. He'd be lucky if people didn't try to order drinks from him.

"Kevin." Kenya's tone was calm and level, but it had some weight to it, and he blinked and focused on her. "You sure you want to do this?"

"That asshole back at Hardee's knew something," he said. "I figure it's something we ought to know if we plan to catch Glick before he does worse than he already did. I know it's not our jurisdiction . . ."

"He rammed you with a truck," she said calmly. "That makes it my jurisdiction. And you're right. I don't figure the Dallas police would put this at the top of their to-do list; they got plenty of bad stuff going on around here."

"It's weird. I can get past Glick killing a person. I just can't get past him killing that cat."

"You saw Marie's house. That cat could have died of embarrassment." She smiled, and looked ten years younger. He couldn't help but grin back. "If the vampires are trying to cover something up, then we're the only ones who know about it right now. Plus, we drove a long way for nothing if we don't at least get a drink."

He made a grand after-you gesture, and she straightened her jacket and headed on in.

It was probably wrong to admit, even to himself, that watching her back was purely a pleasure.

Kevin had been to the vampire bar Fangtasia before, but he hadn't liked the place much, and it had made him feel worse about vampires, too. Fangtasia had seemed like a cross between a cheap B-movie set and a butcher shop. He'd had the uncomfortable feeling that everybody in it with a pulse was looked on as cuts of meat. He hadn't stayed long, and he'd lied to his mother about where he'd been.

The Bat's Wing made Fangtasia look both better and worse. It was bigger, louder, glossier, and packed with people, but it seemed . . . soulless, in ways even the smaller vampire bar hadn't. If Fangtasia was a butcher shop, this place was a slaughterhouse, moving cows through with ruthless efficiency from farm to plate. Women dressed in skimpy, tight dresses tottered around on heels that ought to come with warning labels, and the men with them were either aging, balding, and wealthy, or gym-obsessed and cruising for a sugar momma.

And then there were the vampires.

They didn't mingle as much as the Fangtasia regulars did; a few glided through the crowd untouched, icy and perfect, but most were sitting in what was obviously a special section, roped off from the general public and guarded by two linebacker-sized human guards with experience in looking tough. More vampires there than he'd expected, but then Dallas was a big city. It only made sense that their community was just as big.

There was no mistaking who was in charge, although he wasn't at all what Kevin had expected. The man sitting in the concentric circle of vampires looked like a poster of a nerd, from the cheap sports shirt and khaki high-waisted pants to the tape fixing one side of his Buddy Holly glasses. It wasn't that the nerd sat higher than the others, but it just seemed that way; it might have been the way the others aligned themselves, half turned toward him, half away to watch the room. He was the hub at the center of the deadly, glittering wheel.

Kenya stopped at an empty stand-up table and signaled to a thinly dressed cocktail waitress; she ordered a Coke, and Kevin got a beer, because he felt like at least one of them ought to look as if they were here to party.

Then he felt like an idiot when Kenya openly ogled a passing vampire who must've been born of Asian heritage in his human life. The vampire noticed and gave her a bare nod, which was apparently how they expressed approval around here. Kevin heard jealous murmurs from a couple of women near him.

"What?" Kenya asked as their drinks were delivered, and he realized he was staring at her. "Got to fit in, right?"

"Right," he said, and looked around for a woman to admire. He couldn't find one who intrigued him half as much as the woman sipping her Coke across from him, dark eyes lively and darting from one threat to another around them.

He saw her fix on something behind him, and whatever it was, it got her unwavering attention. Her hand slid away from her drink and under her jacket, and he almost turned before she made a sign, just a little one, to stay where he was. She gave him a sudden, bright smile and leaned in close to whisper in his ear.

"Glick's here. He's right behind you."

"Shit," Kevin whispered back. "I should have brought my gun!" They'd discussed it but decided it was too big a risk to come strapped into a vampire club in a strange town. Vampires took their personal security damn seriously.

She nodded and laughed as if he'd said something hilarious, and *dammit* if he couldn't help but notice how warm her cheek was as it brushed against his, and how soft. "I've got my baton," she said. "Get in front of him and I'll take him down from behind."

He would have probably agreed to pretty much anything just then, and as he pushed away from the table and walked at an angle to cut across Glick's path, it occurred to him he was about to put himself empty-handed in front of a man who'd ripped the limbs off somebody just a few hours before.

He was also, coincidentally, heading straight for the guards who were blocking the entrance to the velvet-roped vampire section. They might have PhDs in flexing and intimidation, but they weren't stupid; he got their attention instantly. What was worse, though, was what was happening behind the rope . . . because all that vampire focus lasered right in on him. It was like being impaled on an icicle.

The nerd king's pale blue eyes suddenly glowed an even colder arctic green, and Kevin shuddered because however much the costume tried to make the vampire look human and inoffensive, those eyes gave him away. What was underneath was ancient and completely ruthless.

Spotting Glick coming for him was actually kind of a relief.

The greasy, blood-spotted wild man howled, though it was drowned out in the relentless sound of the techno song that started up; the beat hammered through Kevin's bones and made him feel as if he were about to shatter. Kenya was moving, but someone was in her way—a woman in skyscraper heels, made earthquake-unsteady by the drink in her hand.

Glick was almost on him. In the flash of the swirling lights, his eyes looked solid crimson, as if they were bleeding right out of his head.

Kevin swept a full champagne bottle out of a sweating ice bucket on a rich man's table, dumping cold water all over a woman's lap, and slammed it into Glick's temple like a wrecking ball. It should have put him down. Hell, it probably should have killed him.

All it did was set him back on his heels, dazed, and make him stumble.

That was enough time for Kenya to come up behind him, snap out her extendable riot baton, and deliver surgical strikes to the bends of his knees. Strong or not, Glick went down, and Kevin hit him again with the champagne bottle. He only realized once Glick was lying still that Dom Perignon was foaming out in jets all over him, and the rich man was yelling his guts out, and the woman was shrieking about her dress, and somehow over all that chaos the nerd stood up and said one soft, precise sentence.

“Close it.”

There was an instant reaction, all over the bar—not from the patrons, who were still jerk-dancing and drinking their livers away, but from the vampires. They all stood up and *moved*—flowing over the velvet ropes as if gravity were just a suggestion. There were yelps of alarm from patrons, and suddenly the music cut off, leaving an aftermath of yelled, trailed-off conversations and confusion.

The vampires began shoving people toward the exits. There was resistance at first, and then willing flight, because one look at them showed that the vampires weren't playing.

Nobody laid a hand on Kevin, or Kenya, or the man lying between them. Kenya still held her baton but he knew she wouldn't use it; there wouldn't be any point. Fighting a vampire under those circumstances was an instant ticket to the morgue.

The Bat's Wing was cleared out in what seemed like seconds, and probably was; the humans were swept out like trash by the vampires' broom, and the doors slammed and locked behind them. Without the music, and with the harsh overheads flipped on, the place looked—as all bars did—cheap and pathetically stained. Tables were littered with glasses, full and empty. Some people had even left behind coats and purses. It reminded Kevin of a disaster area, as if a random shooter had come in to pop off a few rounds and the occupants had run for cover.

He even saw one of those seven-inch high-heel shoes lying abandoned on the floor. Add in some broken glass and blood and it could have been on the six o'clock news.

When he looked up, the nerd king was standing right in front of him, and Kevin had to work to control a

flinch. The man moved without a sound, an eerie inhumanity that he either cultivated or just didn't mind displaying. Hard to say which one was worse.

"Name," the vampire said. He had his crew arranged around them now, though Kevin hadn't heard any orders given; maybe they communicated like ants, through some kind of chemicals. He and Kenya were really, really alone.

"Kenya Jones," Kenya said, and gave the vampire an unexpected smile as she collapsed her baton and put it away. "This is Kevin Pryor, my partner."

The cold stare—fading back to blue now, rather than green—transferred to her, and somehow she kept smiling. Kevin didn't imagine it was easy. "What makes you think you can come in here and do this?" Now that he'd spoken more than two words, it became clear he had a faint trace of an accent—something muted and lost in time. Whatever it was, it didn't fit his computer-geek disguise.

Kevin said, "We're with the Bon Temps Police Department, sir. In pursuit of a murder suspect." He pointed at the man on the carpet. "That's him."

There was an indefinable shift in the vampire, though Kevin couldn't have named what changed; maybe it was just a fraction of a rise in an eyebrow. "Bon Temps. Louisiana. Area Five. Did Sheriff Northman send you here?"

"Our boss is Sheriff Bud Dearborn, sir," Kenya said. "He knows where we are."

"Your pursuit of your murder suspect is curiously backward, since you preceded him to this club," the nerd king said. "My name is Stan Davis. I am the sheriff of Area Six. You are operating within my realm, and my establishment, without authorization from the sheriff of Area Five. I believe you would call that operating outside your jurisdiction." His gaze flicked down for a half second to the man lying between them. "Leave him."

"Can't do that, sir," Kenya said. "He's our prisoner."

"Do you doubt for a moment that you can all disappear?" said another vampire, a female one, bone white, with a feral light in her eyes. She licked her very red lips. "Let me take them."

"I don't want trouble with Area Five, Rachel," Davis said. "Police officers are easy to kill but hard to explain."

Though Rachel didn't actually pout—her features weren't expressive enough—Kevin got the sense of something like a toddler's tantrum, but bottled up tight and a whole lot more homicidal.

At their feet, Quentin Glick twitched and groaned. Kenya reached behind her back under her jacket—a move that made all the vampires tense up again—and came out with a pair of handcuffs that she clicked on the man's wrists to pin him facedown.

That was when Kevin spotted the vampire they'd talked to at Hardee's. He was standing off to the side, half-hidden in shadows, but he was clearly part of the group, or he wouldn't still be in the room. Stan Davis's agent?

Kevin nodded toward him. "He wanted to find out what we knew about Mr. Glick, here. Which means you wanted to know about him, Mr. Davis. Were you expecting him?"

Silence. Stan Davis's stare was unnervingly precise, like an ice pick. "You need to walk away now and leave him to me," he said.

"Sir, Glick needs to face justice," Kenya said. "He killed a boy in Louisiana."

Rachel laughed. It was a sound like hail on glass. "So?"

"There are matters you have no place in," Davis said. "Go home. I said dead police officers were hard to explain. Not impossible."

That was an order, and there didn't seem to be much of a way to argue about it. Glick had gone still, and maybe he'd actually passed out again. Hard to tell under that mess of stringy hair.

Kevin exchanged a look with Kenya—silent partner communication, the kind of calculations and responses they did in crisis situations when there wasn't time or strategic space to talk out loud. *Go?* he asked her, with a quirk of his eyebrows. He read the shift of her weight to her forward foot. *Stay.*

Well, crap.

Before he could start trying to negotiate their staying alive, the situation changed for all of them, because Quentin Glick wasn't unconscious after all.

It ought to have been impossible for anyone to snap those cuffs at that angle, but a single roll of Glick's shoulders and his hands were loose. Glick must have broken his own bones to pull his hands free of the restraints. Before Kevin could process that fact, the man was up, all teeth and crazy eyes and blood leaking down his face, and it was pretty clear that the sheriff of Area Six had decided that maybe the easiest way to handle this was to let Glick go mad-dog on them and then clear up the mess once it was over. The vampires were fast enough to have intervened, but none of them moved a muscle.

Kevin had one chance, and he took it, slamming his forehead hard into the man's nose. It slowed Glick down, at least, and Kevin backed out of the way, grabbing up his old friend the champagne bottle.

Glick whirled. A human couldn't move that fast, *shouldn't*, but he did, and before Kenya could finish snapping out her riot baton again, he had her clutched in both hands, one at her throat, one on the side of her head. Perfect leverage to snap her neck. Sickeningly, the broken bones in his hands were sticking out, one breaking the skin in a red-filmed white spear, but the pain wasn't stopping him.

Kenya went very still. Kevin came to a halt, bottle trembling in his hand and ice forming around his fast-beating heart. *No. No, no . . .* He carefully set the bottle down and spread his empty hands. "Let her go," he said. "Please."

"Don't you beg," Kenya said. "Don't do it, Kevin."

Glick snarled. If there was anything human left in him, anything rational, it was buried too deep to reach. Kevin felt a surge of rage and hopelessness, because there was nothing he could do, *nothing*; Kenya was going to die and he was going to have to watch it happen and he couldn't. He just couldn't.

Glick began backing away, dragging Kevin's partner with him. She was letting her weight sag, hoping to pull him off balance, but whatever was fueling him was letting him pull her along like she was a rag doll.

Kevin followed, keeping the distance constant between them. The vampires moved out of Glick's way as he backed toward the door.

“Open it,” Stan Davis said. One of the vampires entered a code on the keypad next to the exit and hit the metal panic bar, and it sagged open to the night and a deserted parking lot; the patrons must have taken the hint to get *way* the hell out of Dodge. No sign of police, either.

Glick backed away through the door, grinning at Kevin through bloody teeth. It wasn’t imagination; his eyes weren’t just bloodshot, they were bloody. *Bleeding*. He was crying blood. He was hemorrhaging from his ears, too.

“My advice is to let him go,” Davis said from behind them. None of the vampires had moved again, and Davis’s tone seemed calm and disinterested. “Don’t throw your life away, Mr. Pryor. She is a lost cause.”

Fuck you, Kevin thought furiously. He hardly ever cursed, not out loud, but he wanted to yell it loud and rip the vampire’s head off in that moment. Nice idea. Impossible, but nice.

He took another step as Glick dragged Kenya over the threshold and past the swing of the door.

“Now,” Davis said, which seemed completely out of context, until the vampire who’d opened the door slammed it shut in Kevin’s face and cut him off from Kenya and Glick. Kevin threw himself forward against the bar, but it gave only a little before a cold, inhumanly strong hand closed around the collar of his shirt and yanked him backward. Next thing he knew, he was pinned against a hard, chilly vampire body with an iron rod of a forearm across his throat to hold him still as Stan Davis glided up to face him.

“Son of a bitch,” Kevin spat, and tried to slip free. He might as well have been trying to bend stone. “Let me go!”

“If I do that, you’ll only needlessly sacrifice yourself,” Davis said. “Calm yourself. If you want to see her alive again, you need to think before you act.”

“Then *help me!*”

“I will,” said the sheriff of Area Six. “For a price.”

Once again, Kevin found himself sitting in a booth across from the vampire who called himself Detective Wallace. The difference this time was that next to Wallace was Stan Davis, and Stan’s vampires were ranged around the room in easy striking distance.

“He’s going to kill her,” Kevin said. Every nerve in his body was on fire with the need to *do something*, to charge out that door and find Glick. “I’ll give you what you want. Just help me get her back.”

The silence stretched on. He might have been sitting across from two mannequins, except for the reaction in his gut to their presence. Finally, Wallace (if that was even his name) said, “You should have just let it alone. We knew he was heading for us. We’d have taken care of him.”

“You know what’s going on with him?”

Wallace shrugged. It was such a tiny gesture that it hardly even registered as a ripple, but it conveyed the exact level of disinterest he must have felt. “He got his hands on something he shouldn’t have. We knew he’d come here for another hit when he started coming down.”

“What the hell is it?”

Silence, again. Finally, Davis said, “I thought you wished to bargain for the woman.”

As if he owned her. Kevin took a few seconds to calm himself before he said, “All right. What do you want?”

“A favor,” Stan Davis said. “It would seem having eyes in Area Five might benefit me. I don’t trust Sheriff Northman.”

“You want me to spy on *vampires*? On Eric Northman? How am I supposed to do that?”

“How you accomplish it is not my concern. That is what I want, or your partner dies.” There was something in Davis’s cold eyes that might have been amusement. “I think you have some attachment to her beyond only professional loyalty.”

Kevin hated that the vampires could see it in him. But he also knew that the seconds were ticking away, and he remembered Glick’s bloody mouth, that limp cat in his hands. Remembered the dead teenager lying on the concrete of the dirty parking lot, covered with a sheet.

He hated that a whole lot more.

“All right,” he said. “If I see something you need to know, I’ll tell you.”

“No,” Davis said. “You will tell me everything. Everything that Sheriff Northman does. I expect monthly reports.”

Kevin realized he was clenching his hands so hard that his fingernails were gouging half-moons in his palms. “Fine, I’ll find a way,” he said.

“One thing. If you promise and do not deliver, I will kill you and your partner. It will not be quick.”

This time, he had to swallow a mouthful of bile to get the words out. “I said yes. Now *help me*.”

Davis sat back and glanced at Wallace. That was apparently all the authority that was needed, because Wallace slid out of the booth, crooked a finger, and three vampires answered his summons. They headed for the door.

Kevin got up.

“Where do you think you’re going?” This time, Davis definitely sounded amused. Cat-with-a-wounded-mouse amused.

“I’m going with them,” he said. “If she dies, there’s no deal, and I’ll make it my personal mission in life to make you sorry.” He meant it. It suddenly came into focus for him that what he felt for Kenya wasn’t just a casual thing, wasn’t just attraction or simple lust or infatuation. It was something strong, and whether she felt it didn’t matter. He loved her, and he was going to see that she was all right.

He’d surprised Davis, just a little bit, which probably didn’t happen too often. “All right,” he said. “I’ll expect my payment once we save her. Don’t disappoint me, Officer Pryor.”

Stan went back to sitting in silence, staring at nothing, surrounded by his vampires.

Kevin knew, with a sick feeling in his stomach, that he’d just made a deal with a devil, but he’d have dealt with Old Scratch himself to save Kenya. She might hate him for it.

He could live with that.

The area outside the club was silent except for the constant hum of traffic in the distance. Wallace was waiting in the parking lot, under the weak glow of a security light, and as Kevin came out, Wallace moved off, expecting him to follow. There was no sign of the other vampires who'd exited.

Kevin headed straight for the Bon Temps squad car, unlocked it, and strapped on his service weapon. He released the shotgun from its locked mount and took it, too. It felt better, being armed.

Kevin expected that they'd move toward the street, but he and Wallace went the opposite direction, behind the club where the rusting steel Dumpsters huddled in a row. They were up against a chain-link fence, which had been ripped open and wrenched aside. Kevin looked down. Hard to tell in the poor lighting, but he thought he saw a splash of fresh blood on the pavement. He supposed Glick would be easy to track for vampires, thanks to all the hemorrhaging.

"Is he dying?" Kevin asked. Wallace didn't seem to hear the question. "You said he got his hands on something he shouldn't. Was it a drug?"

"None of your business," Wallace said. "Quiet."

He slipped through the broken chain link like mist. Kevin had more trouble managing it and got himself scratched up in the process, but he wasn't concerned with a few dings. There were gouges in the ground on the other side of the fence, as if Kenya had fought to slow Glick down. He saw the impression of her heels.

More blood. It was still wet and glistening in the moonlight.

A dog barked somewhere in the distance, lonely and hopeless, and Wallace paused again, then set off to the east. This area was an urban jungle—twisted old live oaks, tangles of thorn bushes and trash trees. A possum, its grayish white fur matted with debris, peered at them blindly before ambling away. Kevin had no idea what kind of dangerous vermin Dallas might harbor; blundering around in the woods of Bon Temps was a sure way to get snake bit, or have a snapping turtle take a hunk out of you. He didn't imagine Wallace cared much, so he let the vampire break the trail, careful to follow exactly in his steps.

They broke through into another open area. It had once been some kind of brick building, but nature had long since shown it who was boss, and the remains were a couple of barely standing walls and a cracked concrete floor. Vandals had taken everything else and left a generous deposit of trash behind—condoms, needles, crack vials, bottles, fast-food bags.

In the corner between those two remaining walls stood Quentin Glick. He had Kenya in a bone-breaking hold against him, and she was definitely the worse for wear; Kevin saw rips in her jacket and jeans from the fence, blood running down the side of her face, and she was holding one of her hands at an odd angle. But she was alive, and she was *angry*. It crackled off her in waves.

When she spotted Kevin, her eyes widened and then squeezed shut for a moment. When she opened them she said, "Damn you, Pryor. Get the hell out of here."

"Not happening," he said. "You hang in there."

"Got nothing else to do," she said, but there was something in her eyes, her face that made him go tense and still inside. *She's going to move*, he thought, and he dreaded it so hard it felt like a knife turning in his guts. She'd accepted her own death. She just wanted to make sure Glick got what was coming to him.

Jesus, he had no time. Wallace wasn't moving; there were other vampires here, too, crouched in the shadows, watching, but they weren't going in to save Kenya. It was as if they were waiting for some signal.

When it came, it was invisible to human eyes; maybe it was Stan Davis and his telepathy again. They all *moved*, white flashes in the starlight, vicious and deadly. Kenya was already twisting violently against Glick's broken hands, and the shotgun Kevin held wasn't going to work because she was in the line of the spread; before he even completed the thought, he was releasing the shotgun, and as it began to fall toward the ground, as the vampires closed in on Glick, as Kenya completed her turn, it felt as if everything ticked slower . . . slower . . . slower . . . except that his hand was moving in regular time, flashing toward the holster and closing and drawing with the same fluid motion he'd practiced all those hours at the range and *snap* the shot hit his senses at the same time the shock traveled up his arm and a black hole opened between Glick's bloody, rabid eyes.

By the time Wallace seized Glick, he was already dead, and Kenya was falling forward to the ground.

Kevin let out a wordless yell and lunged for her, went down on his knees amid the crack vials and needles and condoms and didn't give a good goddamn about any of that as he reached out to roll her over. *Don't be dead, don't be dead, don't be . . .*

"Nice shot," Kenya said. She sounded almost normal, but he felt the vibration under her skin, the tremors of adrenaline and the aftershocks of terror.

He didn't even think about it. He just grabbed her and pulled her into his arms. It didn't feel like embracing a partner. It felt more like coming home.

"She's alive," Wallace said from behind them. "You owe Stan."

"The hell I do," Kevin said. "I shot him before you even touched him. Stan owes *me*."

There was a moment of silence, of chill and whispering danger, and then Wallace shrugged. "I guess that would be between the two of you. Good luck with that conversation."

The moment was over. Kenya's muscles were starting to tense, the animal comfort of their embrace passing, and he let her go before she had to reject him by pulling away. They didn't meet each other's eyes, but he saw that she was smiling. It looked a little shaky, but genuine enough that she felt like she needed to turn her head to hide it.

He didn't offer to help her up, and she wouldn't have accepted it. They just climbed separately to their feet, and Kenya retrieved the shotgun from where he'd dropped it as he holstered his sidearm.

When he looked up, the vampires were gone. Glick was gone, too. They'd carried his body off, and Kevin expected it wouldn't ever be seen again. The official *Wanted* posters would go up in Shreveport, and that dead young man's family would never have the comfort of closure, but at least Glick was done.

He expected to feel something after shooting a man in the head, but all he felt at the moment was a dull, ringing emptiness and a distant relief.

"Kevin?" Kenya was watching him. "We need to get out of here."

It had been a hell of a long day, and the thought of getting the hell away from Dallas, from Stan Davis and the oppressive sense of being watched, made him say, "Let's get back home."

They spent the drive not talking, but also not really feeling the need to talk; he pulled over at a rest stop along the way and got out the first-aid kit to clean up her cuts so they wouldn't get infected. Her wrist wasn't broken, just sprained, and he wrapped it tight. She let him do it, a concession of vulnerability that wasn't like Kenya Jones at all. *As long as we don't say anything*, he thought. *As long as we don't face it, maybe it can seem like a real thing*. Because he knew it couldn't be. His family would never accept her. Hers would never accept him. And then there was the working-together problem. There were rules and all.

But he knew what he felt, and she knew, and when he put the last bandage on, he met her eyes and sat back on his heels. Held the stare.

She leaned forward and without a single word kissed him.

It was sweet and warm and made his heart stop with longing, and he knew he didn't respond the way he wanted but he was too shocked, and it was over too fast, and then Kenya was buckling herself back into her seat and staring straight ahead out the car window. All he could do was stand up, clear his throat, and put away the first-aid kit before climbing back behind the wheel of the cruiser.

The silence continued, but after a while, after another mile or two of asphalt burning away under the tires, he found he was holding her bandaged hand in his, and the pressure of her fingers, light and strong and constant, soothed some ache inside him he didn't know he had.

They made it into Bon Temps just as dawn was warming the horizon a light pink.

"You never did get to take a shower," Kenya said. "You still smell like swamp water."

"You rolled around in crack house trash," he said. "I'm not judging."

"Guess we need to check in at the station and report back to Bud about what happened."

"Do we?" He looked over at her, and her eyebrows rose. "What the hell are we going to say? That I shot a fugitive outside our jurisdiction?"

She didn't have an answer for that. She just put her head back against the headrest and sighed. "You know what the worst thing is?"

"I couldn't even guess."

"We still don't know who threw that damn suitcase in the swamp. I'm not going to sleep until I figure that out."

He laughed, and he couldn't stop laughing, and he had to pull the car over because it hurt so bad and so good, and for the first time in a long time he heard Kenya laughing without restraint, and she never let go of his hand. Never once.

What are we going to say?

Not a damn thing, he thought. *Not a damn thing. Because it's nobody's damn business.*

TYGER, TYGER

CHRISTOPHER GOLDEN

Christopher Golden's story "Tyger, Tyger" begins a few months after the final Sookie novel. Quinn, my favorite weretiger, is having a very bad day, which promises to get much, much worse.

Quinn watched the speedometer, kept the needle pinned at the limit, and tried to stop his hands from gripping the steering wheel too tightly. He had punched in a classical station on his satellite radio that played mostly baroque music, a secret pleasure. He liked all sorts of music but prided himself on maintaining an even temperament, and when stress or anger threatened to get the better of him, the beautiful strings of some of those baroque arrangements soothed him.

Soothed the savage, he thought, with an expression that was half snarl and half grin. If someone else had said that to him, he would've been offended, but he had to be honest with himself. He was a full-blooded weretiger, after all. In the right circumstances, he had savagery to spare.

His cell phone rang. He'd stuck it into the console between the seats but had forgotten that it was linked into the car via Bluetooth, and now the number showed up on the little screen at the center of the dashboard. Quinn made his living as an event planner and the caller was a client.

He tightened his fingers on the wheel, knuckles going white as he waited for the ringing to cease. When it had, he reached into the console and plucked out the phone, then tried gamely to keep his eyes on the road as he powered it off and tossed it onto the seat beside him. No clients today.

Quinn steadied himself, then glanced down to see that he'd let the car creep up to nearly eighty miles per hour when the speed limit was sixty-five. As he eased off the pedal and the speedometer needle dipped, he spotted the nose of a Louisiana state police car ahead, half-hidden behind the supporting column of an overpass.

"Stay right there, my friend," Quinn said as he drove past the police car, checking his speedometer again.

Sixty-eight miles per hour. The cop stayed on the side of the road. *Good for you*, Quinn thought. *Good for both of us*.

Not that he was in the habit of starting fights with police officers, but if there was ever going to be a day when it would be easy to rile the tiger in him, it would be today.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

David Bolds:

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Melinda Brown:

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Lorene Williamson:

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