



Recompense

by Ten

RATING: NC-17

PAIRING: Jean/Olivia, René/Baby

SUMMARY: AU BV, René deals with sins of the past

SPOILERS: Post "Here in the Real World"; reading "Let Me Die in Your Arms" is helpful but not necessary

DISCLAIMER: All characters belong to the god that is Joss Whedon (all hail and bow low before him), and WB, UPN, Mutant Enemy and some other people, but not me. The Babyverse belongs to Ebony Silvers, who is the goddess of all things Baby.

DEDICATION: To Ebs, with love.

"I know you have no reason whatsoever to trust me after the things that were done to you and to Jean." René's voice cracked just a little at the mention of her human Jean that his alternate self had torn to pieces with his bare hands. He still carried that memory with him constantly; the slow-motion slideshow of his bloodied and mangled body never seemed to go away. Just when he thought he could go on, Olivia would lift an eyebrow or his own Jean would cock his head just so and it would all come rushing back again. The insane René from another dimension had consigned him to a living Hell filled with memories of hideous things he could never rectify, but with a clear memory of every violent act his other self had ever performed. Sometimes, even safely back in his own reality, he felt the sharp edge of insanity pulling his own reality away from him because of the intensity of the false memories.

Baby placed her hand lightly over René's, feeling his turmoil and guilt and taking over the conversation when it seemed he could not.

"But we are asking you to trust us anyway, Olivia. You've been with us for awhile, you've seen how we live and how different things are here in our reality from that awful place you and Jean were taken ...," she stopped, suddenly regretting she had mentioned Jean at all. Olivia's expression immediately shifted from guarded attention to something more dark and defensive.

It still made her cringe to hear any of these vampires speak of her Jean. It was like a sacrilege for them to even mention his name. She stifled an urge to rip Baby's tongue out of her head for such a trespass.

Easy saw what was going on and moved to sit next to her, placing his hand on her shoulder reassuringly. "Listen to them, Olivia. It doesn't hurt to listen. They are trying to make things better for you and Trey."

Almost on cue, the baby announced that he was awake, and Olivia got up to see to him. She stopped before she reached the bedroom door, her spine straight and rigid as she looked over her shoulder slightly, not really looking at anyone. "There is nothing they can ever do to make things better." Her voice held a mixture of pain, anger, and control, but it gave the impression that if pressed she would shatter into a thousand pieces. Without looking at any of them, she left the room to tend to her son.

Easy looked at Baby and René curiously. "I'm sorry. It's just too soon. No matter how different things are here, René, I can feel it all around her when you're in the room. She still sees the man who murdered her husband before her eyes."

Baby and René stood together and headed toward the stairs, René's self-recrimination evident. Baby spoke up. "This isn't going to happen. We'll have to try the other way." Baby embraced him and kissed his cheek. "We'll make the arrangements." They went to their room with the heavy step of disappointment.

Easy sighed and joined Olivia in the bedroom he had prepared for her and the baby. She sat quietly rocking while the child nursed at her breast. Her eyes were unfocused and she was very obviously lost in thought.

Easy crossed to her and placed a comforting hand on her shoulder. She immediately relaxed. There was just something about the priest that calmed her. She knew that he was a vampire, but she also knew he was an extraordinary vampire. To be made a bishop by the Pope himself, to be assigned the task of ministering to this odd assortment of demons, vampires, and humans, was an amazing and distinctive honor. His possession of holy relics, his demeanor, the peaceful countenance he presented as a priest, gave her the comfort of familiarity and trust that had allowed her to go with him and Cordelia to the plantation house just outside New Orleans. It had been decided, after lengthy and sometimes heated discussion, that this would be safer and more comfortable for her. The number of vampires constantly coming in and out of Rue Royale had made it impossible for her to relax, much less sleep.

Easy and Cordelia still appeared to be the only people Olivia felt unthreatened by, so if she spent time with anyone it was one or the other of them, and even then it was usually in mutual silence. She read a great deal, enjoying Spike's libraries at both houses to the point that she would actually speak to Spike about his books and collections, though she never allowed him to touch her. The entire household had become preoccupied with walking on eggshells around her in an effort to make her feel less threatened. It pretty much had the opposite effect. They had all breathed a collective sigh of relief when she had agreed to move out to the plantation house with Easy and Cordelia.

Jack came out now and then just to check up on things. Olivia didn't seem to have too much trouble with him. Her remark had been that if the FBI and the government trusted him, perhaps she could as well. However, she was never alone with him by her choice.

Easy knelt next to the rocking chair. "They only want to help, Olivia."

She sighed heavily. "I know, Father, but ... I just can't." She turned eyes still filled with the pain of loss on him. "You understand ... don't you?"

Easy nodded sadly. He understood all too well. He'd heard the story of what the evil René had done to her Jean more than once, not only from her, but also from René. After what she had seen, he couldn't really blame her. "Could you lock the door, please?" She chewed at her lower lip lightly. She hated to ask, but by now Easy knew the only way she would sleep with other vampires in the house would be with the door locked and Easy standing guard.

"I understand, my child. Perhaps someday ..."

"Perhaps." She replied and stroked her son's head absently, finding a centering calm in the simple action.

René hung up the phone and turned to his lover. "He'll meet us here tomorrow night. I have a list of things to pick up before we go. He's none too happy about doing this, particularly without Spike's knowledge, but he understands the need. He was fond of Liv, too." He smiled sadly and stroked Baby's cheek. "You understand I have to do this."

Baby nodded in agreement. "You understand I'm coming with you."

René started to object, but the set of her jaw told him quickly that it would do him no good. "Okay, m'cher. We go tomorrow." He kissed her lightly. "Let's just hope Papa doesn't find out until it's too late."

Wes arrived at the door, books tucked under one arm and a bag of supplies in the other. Few words were spoken as they made preparations and checked to be sure they had everything they would need.

Easy saw to it that Olivia and the baby were napping. The day had been uneventful and he had been able to keep her from seeing any sign of the preparations. She was still tired from the birth, so it was not difficult to convince her to rest when the baby did.

He stepped out into the parlor, closing the door quietly behind him. Silence and anticipation hung in the air as Wes distributed talismans to each of them and assigned them a specific place around the mirror.

They formed a half-circle in front of a large, oval mirror, with Easy standing at the apex, their hands outstretched with their fingertips just touching. "The dimension was not difficult to ascertain," Wes said. "However, the time element is somewhat trickier." He nodded his head that he was ready and took one last look at his preparations. "Then let's away." The lilting chant of Latin began to fill the air.

Electricity crackled around them, reflecting in the mirror and filling the room with a blue radiance. Winds began to churn and swirl around them as if emanating from the mirror itself, creating an almost deafening noise. As Wes continued chanting, there was a final flash of blinding white and blue and three of them were left standing in complete silence in a poorly maintained replica of the room they had just been in. The room was dusty and musty and all the furniture and fixtures were covered with drapes and old sheets. It looked as if no one had been inside it for several years. Baby and René looked at each other and then at Wes. Easy was nowhere to be seen but presumably he was still standing at the apex in the "other" room, anchoring their travel.

Wesley checked his calculations. "Yes, this is it. Apparently there are quite a few differences here. We must be cautious not to disturb them too much." He turned to René. "Where to now?"

René nodded as he wrapped his arm around Baby and kissed her hair lightly. "Tulane."

Jean Claude DuValliere had just finished his last class. It had gone late, as he knew it would. This one always seemed to. Something about graduate students tended to turn the open discussions into a match of posturing and one-upsmanship. Sometimes it was amusing, tonight it wasn't. He was more than 30

minutes late meeting Olivia, and he'd noticed the further she got along in her pregnancy the less tolerance she had for self-indulgent grad students who kept him too late at class.

As he made his way to the parking lot he passed a trio of adults who looked oddly out of place and extraordinarily pale, a woman with unnaturally red hair, a man with dark hair who seemed more interested in his feet than in avoiding running into people on the sidewalk, and a third man who, Jean had to admit, was probably the most beautiful man he had ever seen in his life. The man's teal eyes caught Jean's for just a moment, making him clear his throat and hurry past them. He stored their info for later use as he began to fish in the pocket of his sport coat for his keys.

Fumbling with his briefcase and books at the same time, the keys crashed to the sidewalk, clinking an announcement of clumsiness. As he bent to pick them up, the redhead was already standing in front of him holding them.

"Your keys, monsieur." She had a pleasant voice and a friendly smile, but she had managed to position herself so that his path along the sidewalk was now blocked. Looking to his left and his right he found both of the men who had been with her. Jean began to fidget.

"Um, thank you, ma'am." He forced a smile.

"Jean?" Baby reached out a gentle hand to touch his arm. "Please, can you wait a moment?"

Jean froze and became visibly uncomfortable. "If you'll explain to me how you know my name." He was trying to puff up a little and look threatening, but he wasn't being very successful at it. He was too much the academician. "Or perhaps you can call my office and we can arrange to meet tomorrow. I'm late for an appointment." He tried to step past René, but the larger man stepped aside to block his path again. Jean was now seriously concerned and looked about the darkened campus for any sign of a security officer.

"Jean ... honestly, it's okay. You know us, well, you don't know us, but you should know us, and ..." Baby sighed; this was harder than she thought it would be. "Look," she tightened her grip on his arm, "You're in danger and we're here to see that ... Olivia is ..." She looked around to make sure no one was noticing them. "Olivia is waiting and ..."

Jean became almost aggressive. "Where is Olivia? Is she okay?" His eyes were flashing wildly. "What have you done with her??" An edge of panic had taken him over. These people knew way too much about him and about his wife and fear began to swell in his belly like soured milk. He was afraid he was about to be sick.

René sprang into action, taking the frightened man by the shoulders and forcing Jean to face him, those teal eyes trying to burn truth into every word he said. "Olivia's fine, m'frere, and in fact she some place safer than this. We need get you there, too, cher. It's not safe for you here anymore."

"Wha..." Jean was stunned as the two men grabbed him by the arms and directed him quickly toward the parking area. Wes tossed his head toward a security guard headed their way. Baby tossed him the keys and then fell back to do damage control.

"Where's your car, Jean?" Wes was commanding without being threatening as they moved quickly amongst the vehicles in the darkened lot.

"Just ... there," said Jean, indicating a lone SUV in the next row.

The trio of men headed toward the vehicle. René took the driver's seat, Wes put Jean behind the co-pilot seat then settled himself in the front next to René, the door still closing as they pulled out of the space. They stopped at the sidewalk to pick up Baby, who hopped in next to Jean, the unconscious form of the security guard scarcely visible amongst the shadows. They sped away into the night, René not quite sure where he was headed.

“Jean!” He barked into the back seat. “This place a maze. How we get to Rue Royale?”

Wes looked concerned, checking his maps, timelines, and a mystical looking orb which seemed to have a life of its own. “Bad idea, René. Rue Royale is rather crowded with the wrong kind of people right now. Is there someplace else we can take him for just a few hours? Keep him safe from ... what took him before?”

René sped around a corner, finally getting his bearings for home when Wes made the suggestion. He slammed on the brakes, turning the car 180 degrees and heading back the other way. “Yeah, Wes, I know a place. You come with us, yes?”

“No. Drop me near the Quarter, I need to set up a blockade to keep him from this dimension if possible.” René made a few more turns, as Wes began to mutter quietly, “Sure could use Claire about now.”

“Should we go get her?”

“I’ll find her. Here. Drop me here.”

René slammed on the brakes, Wes hopping out with his backpack full of supplies before the car had even stopped. He opened the door where Jean sat, pulled his switchblade from his pocket, opening it with a hiss-snicker. Jean pulled away as Wes reached in and cut off a lock of his hair, then slammed the door, tucking the hair in his pocket with the now-closed blade.

“We’ll meet you at Rue Royale just before sunrise. If we not there, Wes, you come back at sunset and sunrise till we meet up.”

Wes nodded. “Be careful.” He headed off alone as René sped southwest out of town toward Houma, the swamps and his old home stomping grounds.

Jean sat completely still for the next 30 minutes, afraid to move a muscle for fear someone might cut some other part of him off. The finesse and skill that the other man had shown snipping hair from his head with a switchblade, no less, had spooked him. He had been fairly cooperative and good-natured about all this, but now he felt he was in danger. And he was seriously worried about Olivia.

Baby leaned up behind René. “We need to get him somewhere safe for a few hours. You have something in mind?” She mindlessly stroked the left side of his neck with her fingertips. Jean could almost hear the driver purring.

René leaned into her touch. “Yah, cher. Place I used to hide out when Louis would go to pounding on me.”

Baby could tell from the pain-laced edge to his voice, that beating his younger brother wasn’t all Louis did and wasn’t all René hid from. She kissed the other side of his neck softly then sat back into the seat next to Jean.

His courage finally gathered, he faced Baby and asked about his fate. “Do ... do you mind telling me what’s going on, now? I mean, where are you taking me and where is my wife?”

Baby hadn’t realized until now how paralyzed with fear this Jean had been. She turned her golden eyes on him and touched his hand lightly. “I promise you, Olivia is fine and safe and healthy, and we’re trying to keep you that way as well.” She spent the next half hour trying to explain the unexplainable to him. Considering this was a normal Jean Claude DuValliere who had never heard of vampires or demons or dimensional travel, Baby thought he took it all rather well. She could tell from his expression that he didn’t believe a word of it, but it seemed to appease him that he had asked and they had attempted to give some kind of explanation.

“So, you’re vampires.” Baby nodded at Jean’s statement. “And that man earlier is a vampire.” She nodded again. “And in your world, I’m one too?”

“Yes, I know it sounds farfetched, but you really are very happy there. You are my son and René’s brother, and your father, Spike, is the Master of New Orleans, and ...”

“And we are all noble and don’t kill people for their blood, except in yet another dimension that has this evil version of him,” he indicated René, “and where we are both actually dead.” Baby nodded again, realizing just how ridiculous it all sounded.

“Well, if it isn’t the truth, it will sure make a great book one day.” He was surprisingly accepting for a man who was being driven into the swamplands of Louisiana by two total strangers late at night.

“And in your dimension ... where is my wife? Is she a vampire, too?”

“No.” Baby really didn’t want to go into that. It was too tragically complicated. She quickly changed the subject

As they went through Houma, René was silently grateful the streets weren’t very crowded. He wasn’t entirely sure if he’d run into someone he knew from this dimension and what danger that could cause. They stopped at a truck stop and Baby picked up a flashlight and a few other supplies, including some food for Jean.

As they got closer to Bayou Terrebonne, René told Baby to check their supplies one more time. He paused at a familiar clearing, stopping the car in anticipation of getting out but noticing the surroundings were a bit different. His usual well-hidden footpath was now a dirt road. He was sure this was the right place, though. He shrugged, warned the others to be on their toes, and they got out of the car.

Baby tossed the flashlight to Jean Claude but asked him not to use it unless absolutely necessary. She and René had no difficulty seeing in almost no light, but she knew if there were an emergency, Jean had to get out of there on his own. The swamplands of Louisiana could be so murky and dark that you couldn’t see your hand in front of your face. No problem for a vampire. A much bigger problem for humans. He’d be food for the indigenous animal life without a flashlight to find his way out.

A mile or so down the road they could see light up ahead. René pulled Jean and Baby closer to him.

“This was an old hunting cabin in our world. Gator poachers used it mostly. I used to come here and hide out for days at a time when Louis was on a tear. There wasn’t any electricity and no road, so this is different. You two stay close.”

As they reached the end of the dirt road, there was indeed what looked like a hunting shack. It was dilapidated, with some broken windows and an old tub out front of it that seemed to be leaning up against the chassis of an old Chevy. René breathed a sigh of relief. At least that much was right. Except for the Chevy.

Just past the shack though was a small wood cabin with smoke coming out of the chimney and the flicker of firelight in the windows. There was a neatly trimmed, dirt sidewalk leading up to the door and wildflowers growing in tubs near the front porch. There was a small fence around the periphery of the yard and a gate, which stood open. Near the gate was a mailbox. It looked homemade and had writing on the side that René couldn’t quite make out. Around the side of the house was an old pick up with similar writing on it and what looked like a picture of an alligator.

Just as they crept nearer to check things out, the front door opened and noise from inside the house spilled out into the yard, disturbing the usual night sounds of the bayou. The three intruders slipped out of sight behind a moss-covered tree. Two small boys came tumbling out the door, screaming and scratching with

fists and feet flying all over the place. They rolled across the grass, two identical ebony-haired boys, until one of them grabbed a handful of the other's hair and pulled.

A shout came from of the silhouettes in the doorway, a tall man and a smaller, roundish woman who was obviously very pregnant. The woman was shouting. "Jean Louis Beaumont! You know you are not allowed to pull hair when you two are tusslin'! You let go o' your brother right now or I'm gettin' a switch!" The woman's voice was both threatening and jovial, as if this were a usually ignored threat. Her voice was also eerily familiar.

"Beaumont?" Baby whispered to René. He hadn't taken his eyes off the doorway, completely captivated by the scene in front of him. A high-pitched squeal came from inside the house as a small girl pushed between the couple in the doorway, running out into the yard and jumping on top of two boys.

"Abby ... " The tall man had a drawl that dripped from his lips like cold molasses. He was almost impossible to understand. "Don't go lettin' her wrestle with the boys."

"And why not?" The woman put her hands on her hips, apparently trying to intimidate the much larger man. "If she's goin' to be huntin' and fishin' with her brothers she might as well get used to whoppin' on 'em too." The man knew better than to argue and slipped his arm around her waist, pulling her in close for a kiss.

The three children froze in their tracks and watched their parents, a chorus of fake kissing sounds filling the damp night air.

"All right, you three," their mother all but scolded. "Git in here and wash up for dinner." The two parted to let the children through, a waterfall of firelight pouring onto their two faces. Their eyes gazed into one another, visible even from outside the yard, one set teal, one set yellow-gold.

Jean Claude gasped and looked at the couple next to him. "It's ... it's you." His forehead was wrinkled in confusion as he stared from one pair to the other.

René and Baby looked at each other with the same love and adoration as the man and woman in the doorway. Baby's eyes flashed at René, "He's right. It is us." Before she could even finish the last word, René captured her mouth in a kiss that made Jean look away in embarrassment.

In the stillness of the bayou, their lips tangled and searched one another, tasting and devouring the other and a desire that seemed unquenchable. Their hands began to roam over shoulders and arms, lips pressed to lips, then necks, then lips again. René lowered Baby down onto the wet grass and lay down next to her, his free hand beginning to trace the curves of her body, caressing her stomach and breasts and tweaking the nipples that were just beginning to harden.

Jean shifted uncomfortably. It was dark, but it wasn't that dark. "Ummm ... " he started to interrupt, when without warning a hound dog poked its nose between René and Baby, sniffing at them oddly, but not barking. Jean laughed, covering his mouth with his hands quickly to stifle it. The disruptions were more than a gentle reminder that they weren't alone and this wasn't their Jean.

They looked over at him apologetically, and he grinned back. "Okay, if I needed any further convincing, you've managed to do it. Any hound dog that doesn't bark at strangers ... well ... there's got to be something odd going on. I don't understand any of this, but it's turning out to be quite a ride." He was grinning ear to ear.

René scratched the dog behind the ears then told him to "git on" while Baby straightened herself back up again. She would have blushed at Jean if she could. She tried to distract instead.

"Are you tired, Jean? Do you want to rest a little before we go back to town and meet up with Wes again?"

He involuntarily yawned, then spoke around it. "Apparently so. Back to the car or--?" He tossed his head toward the hunting shed.

"The car, I think," said René. He smiled at Baby, "I don't want to risk intruding on them." He looked longingly at the little house. "In fact, let's get back to town anyway, Jean can sleep in the car."

The three of them brushed themselves off and walked silently back up the dirt road, Baby and René leaving behind them a life that they could never have, but both of them overwhelmed with the knowledge and peace that somewhere they did have that life together.

Back in New Orleans, there was a knock at the door of an old row house. There were signs and advertisements in all the windows, most of them proclaiming the wisdom and future-seeing powers of "Miss Claire, the All-Seeing." Wesley Wyndham-Pryce stood stoically at the threshold, hopeful that the story he was about to tell this total stranger had enough believability to it that he could enlist her help.

A young black woman answered the door. Her face held a sad loneliness that Wes didn't remember of their Claire, but she still had that vibrant aura around her. She was playing the part of a Jamaican fortune teller, but Wes knew better. She was born in New Orleans. He'd use that if he had to.

"I need your help," he said earnestly. With no more explanation than that, she invited a vampire into her home.

An hour later Jean's RV pulled in at Rue Royale. The place looked deserted and abandoned, a sad commentary on what had happened to this part of town without the Pride's presence. They got out and pushed and entered through the open French doors, the few panes of glass that remained too moldy and murky to see through.

Inside what would have been Spike's study were Wes and a slightly younger version of Mama Claire. Baby and René resisted their first impulse, which was to embrace her, but Wes waved them off.

"You're early," Baby said to Wes with concern.

"It was necessary," said Wes, obviously in a hurry to get going. "I need a second for this spell, and Claire here has agreed to help us and understands that very little about the story I told her can be proven. She's agreed to help us anyway." He looked at Jean. "Did anyone fill you in?"

Jean shook his head.

"It's just as well, you'd probably object. Baby, can you take him in the other room for a few minutes?" The study was already prepared. "René I need you here."

Fifteen minutes later Baby and Jean returned to find the room even more in a shambles with René and Claire on the floor, Wes braced against the wall, and an exact duplicate of Jean Claude DuValliere lying unconscious on the dilapidated desk.

Jean stared, then looked at Wes, finally finding his voice. "I don't want to know, do I?"

"No," Wes said emphatically. "What time is it?"

"Just after midnight," Jean responded automatically.

"You and René get him to the car quickly, we're running out of time. I cut this a day closer than I intended to."

"Oh shit," muttered Baby as she helped René up off the floor.

Jean stared at his duplicate in awe. "You're right, I would object. What are we doing with"

"I'm sorry, Jean, we just don't have time. Help René get him into the car, and I promise you in an hour everything will make sense. We have to go NOW!" Wes was emphatic and didn't even breathe between the instructions he barked to everyone.

He finished by thanking Claire and giving her all the talismans and relics he'd brought for this part of the spell, keeping the things they needed to return to their dimension.

She smiled appreciatively and called after him. "I tell you, Wesley Wyndham-Pryce. You have change notink. Dis is how it s'pose t'be. Yo take care now." She vanished out the back door as the last door of the SUV slammed shut.

Back at Tulane, Olivia was near-frantic looking for Jean. She'd already tried his classroom, office, the library, the history museum, all his usual haunts, and she'd found nothing. No sign of him at all. Her last effort before calling the police was going to be the late night coffee house just off campus. He sometimes went there with a student who was having difficulty or just needed to talk to someone. Usually he called if he was going to be this late, and that is what bothered her most.

She was tired. She was only about 5 months pregnant, but running around like this was taking its toll on her. She needed to sit down. She crashed through the doors of the coffee shop and went straight to their usual booth. She almost fell over with relief. There he was sitting at their table, his head resting on his arms. He looked like he was asleep.

Olivia squatted next to him. "Jean? Honey? Are you asleep?" She shook him a little. "Jean?" She looked around for a waitress to get some help when the front door of the coffee shop shattered in an explosion of blue light that looked like a vortex. A tiny, wizened old man with greenish skin and pink hair came through, with what looked like soldiers wearing reptilian type costumes. They began knocking people unconscious and throwing them back through the vortex, spreading out throughout the café taking everyone in sight. She felt cold hands on her arms as she was dragged away and saw a creature smash Jean across the back of the head. The last thing she remembered was hearing herself scream.

Outside the coffee house, Wes, Baby, René, and Jean Claude DuValliere sat in silence and watched as the place almost burst into flames. It had taken all Baby's strength to keep Jean inside: he wanted to get out, he wanted to help, he couldn't just sit there and watch these people die. Baby had assured him that if he did, he and Olivia and their unborn child would die. He had frozen in that moment and watched helplessly. He didn't understand any of this. He didn't understand how they knew this was going to happen, how they knew Olivia was pregnant, how they knew any of this. He sat in stunned agony and waited for them to tell him what he was to do next.

Spike, Jack, and Jean sat worriedly in the parlor of the old plantation house. Easy had been standing in this trance-like state for what seemed like hours. Olivia had found him like that and called for help. Not one of them was willing to disturb him and risk wrath or eternal damnation from the priest. He obviously was doing something important.

Olivia had gone back to her room, tried to sleep, tried not to worry, and mostly just fussed over the baby. She did anything she could to take her mind off the priest's condition. Calling a room full of vampires for

help was probably not her best idea, so she stayed in her room and hoped that Father Sinclair would wake from his disturbing daze before the others decided to eat her and her baby. She was beginning to trust all the things she had heard and seen about this unique “family,” especially Spike, the apparent leader, and Jack, the FBI agent. Still, she had moments of doubt and panic, and when that happened she just found it more comfortable in her room, sometimes with the door locked.

In the parlor, Spike could no longer sit still and began looking through reference books scattered around the room. Obviously there had been some research before this happened, and the fact that Baby and René appeared to be missing added to Spike’s sense of apprehension. Research material and missing vampires were rarely a good thing. There seemed to be no consistent theme amongst the books, nothing pointing to a specific demon or spell or religious ritual, so he just thumbed through things, looking for any hint of a clue. He was liking this less and less.

Jack was almost as restless as Spike; his missing sire was a source of great concern for him. He could still feel her, but it was murky and cloudy, so he wasn’t sure if she was blocking him or in real difficulty. He explored Easy’s positioning and stance, his expression and closed eyes, and the odd hum that seemed to emanate from him. He got nothing, no real answers or hints. He stopped short of touching him for fear he would somehow trigger a negative reaction. Apparently, they all had that fear.

Jean was wandering aimlessly around the house, looking in unopened rooms and closets, and looking out windows. He returned to the parlor, breaking the unnoticed silence of the house. “Did anyone else notice that Wes’s Bentley is parked around back?”

“What?” Spike was immediately on his feet and headed to the back door, Jack and Jean right behind him. At the back door they stopped, each one trying to process the why and wherefore Wes’s car would be there at all. A moment later they were all headed out the back door toward the Rolls, looking in the windows, looking underneath, seeing if the doors were unlocked, etc.

Spike opened the driver’s door and climbed in, looking around for the keys and trying to see who had been in the car. He caught Wes’s scent, but only a faint echo of Drusilla’s.

“He came alone.”

The other two nodded.

“Did anyone see any sign of Wes anywhere else?” Jean began to wander in the yard a bit, hoping to find some clue of Wes’s whereabouts. The only conclusion anyone could come to was that possibly he was with Baby and René, wherever that was.

Spike began looking in the glove box and under the seats, Jack thoroughly examined the back seat then went to check the truck. It wouldn’t open, so Jack began to fiddle with it in hopes of picking the lock.

“I wouldn’t do that if I were you, Jack.” A stuffy, English voice boomed out into the night. All three men froze and looked back at the house to see Wes standing in the doorway, his arms crossed, and not looking very happy with them.

“Wes!” Jack immediately stopped what he was doing and headed toward the house again, Spike and Jean meeting him there. “Where the Hell did you come from?”

The mage lifted an eyebrow at Jack, a silent scolding for mucking about with his car, and turned to go back inside. Spike, Jean, and Jack were all asking questions at the same time.

“If you’ll all come in, we’ll explain everything,” Wes muttered impatiently.

The three kept talking and asking questions until they reached the parlor, then they stopped in their tracks and stared open-mouthed at the scene in front of them. Baby was bent over the divan, René next to her. Easy was leaning against the arm and they were all fussing over someone.

"They were out back breaking into my car," Wes said with a small note of irritation to his voice. The others turned toward him, smiles breaking across their features at seeing their lovers and father and sons.

Spike spoke up first. "René, Baby, where the Hell have you been?" He tried to sound angry, but he was so grateful to see them safe and sound it wasn't a very convincing anger.

René stepped aside, a look of contentment in his eyes. "Fixing things, Papa."

The others stepped aside to reveal the figure behind them ... a very flustered, very ruffled, very human Jean Claude DuValliere.

Silence hung in the room for a full minute before everyone began talking at once, one group giving individual explanations, the other asking individual questions, and the entire room exploding in a symphony of noise. No one could hear or understand anyone else. It was as if the room exploded into a cacophony of questions and confusion.

The chaos was broken by a baby's cry. The racket had woken up Trey, and the infant's wail was enough to cut through the arguing, disorder, and misunderstanding of what had been going on.

Easy groaned. "Oh, she is NOT going to be happy with us. He's been a pistol the last few days."

René smiled a little and signaled Jean up from the sofa. "I'm betting we might be forgiven ... under the circumstances."

When Jean realized they were talking about Olivia and that the cry came from his child, he shoved past everyone in the way and ran to the door. He threw the door open to see Olivia's back, her head snapping around to see who had intruded into her room without knocking. She was rocking the child in her arms and whispering softly to it. He stood there transfixed, unable to speak. She was alive and safe. They had told him she was, but considering the strange happenings and the very strange people involved, he hadn't really hoped it was true. He had suspected all along that it might be some elaborate kidnapping scheme, though he had no idea what anyone would gain from kidnapping him or Olivia.

Olivia turned around fully and faced him, an expression of confusion on her soft features. Something wasn't right but she couldn't place it, and as more of the vampires filed into the room, she began to panic a little and backed up closer and closer to the bed until she backed into it.

Then she saw Jean enter the doorway, the monster right behind him. These two always made her bristle a little, but she looked back to the closer Jean again, visibly confused. He was already here, how could he just be coming in through the door? She looked between them, noticing the differences, trying to figure out what was going on. In the doorway, René had put his hands on Jean's shoulders. It still made her cringe, but she had become accustomed to the two of them touching so much. His Jean was immaculately dressed in expensive, tailored clothes, his hair cropped short, and he wore jewelry. He had the confident stance of a successful businessman, he absolutely oozed with it.

Then she looked at the Jean closer to her. He was disheveled, his sport coat and slacks were wrinkled and didn't fit very well. His hair was longish, beginning to curl on the ends, and he was tan. She looked at his hand. The only jewelry he wore was a wedding ring. The wedding ring she had thought was lost in that awful place. The wedding ring she had given him.

Her mouth dropped open in realization and her balance wavered, making her sit down abruptly on the edge of the bed. She was breathing heavily, her eyes unable to part from Jean, who had rushed to her the moment she seemed unstable. He was kneeling at her feet, his hands on her knees, and his eyes unwilling

to look away from her. Baby slipped in and took the infant, holding him protectively in her arms as the two lovers tried to understand what had happened. Olivia's fingers played in Jean's hair, his fingertips traced patterns on her knees. They didn't say a word, they simply stared at one another in stunned silence as huge, silent tears ran down Olivia's face.

Spike cleared his throat uncomfortably, causing Wes to speak up and try to explain things. "It is her Jean, the Jean René thought he killed in the other dimension." He let that information settle before continuing. "Baby and René had talked to me about the possibility of reuniting them. We had enough information about when Morderer brought them over and through some of Olivia's belongings we were able to trace where she came from as well. We wanted to take her to him, but" He trailed off, not wanting to mention that Olivia had refused to go anywhere with Baby and René. "So, we brought him to her. It worked out better this way anyway. This way Morderer had no idea Jean was gone missing, nor would he ever be able to track them down in their dimension." A hint of a proud smile crossed his features. They'd managed a quite difficult task and it had all worked out perfectly. He had reason to be proud.

"Then who did René kill? We all still remember it, it must have happened." Jean looked at Wes then up to René, his expression a mixture of love and confusion.

"An empty duplicate, a mindless clone," Wes continued. "I conjured him up with the help of the Claire from that dimension. Quite an interesting woman, I must admit." He smiled to himself for a moment, then came back to the story. "We headed Jean off at the university and replaced him with the clone at the spot we knew he would be taken by Morderer. He was an exact duplicate, but he couldn't function very well. He had no real mind to speak of, no ability to speak or ..."

Olivia came back to life. "Then ... then ... that was not my Jean who he murdered?" She was confused but hopeful.

"No, my dear. He was but an empty, unfeeling shell. Any screams he made were in shock, not pain. I'll wager he never spoke to you and probably didn't recognize you either."

She shook her head slowly. She hadn't even realized it until that moment. Jean hadn't spoken to her, he'd hardly touched her once they had been brought to the other dimension. She thought his head had been injured by the demon who hit him. Her eyes grew brighter as she looked down at him. He rose to her, taking her face in his hands and pressed his lips softly to hers. He was hers. He was her Jean. There was no mistaking that kiss. This was not some clone, not some cold, confusing vampire. Hers. He was hers. She threw her arms around his neck and cried openly, wetting his face with her tears but not allowing their lips to separate for fear he would vanish entirely.

Jean watched them, taking René's hand in his and squeezing it tightly. "Did you do this for me?" His eyes never deviated from the couple.

"I did it for you both, cher. For you all." René wrapped his arms around his Jean Claude and pulled his lover's back into his chest as they both stood and watched the other Jean and Olivia.

The baby stirred, letting out a tiny squeal of discontent. Olivia's lips pulled from Jean's, though her eyes never did. She became lost in them again until Jean placed his hand on her cheek. "The baby. Are ... are you okay?"

She understood what he meant. She assured him the birth had gone well, the baby was growing normally and was very healthy and usually very happy, even in these unusual circumstances. She turned toward Baby, holding her arms out for her child. Once he was safely in his mother's arms again, he settled almost immediately, and she turned toward her husband, placing the child into his arms. Jean's eyes filled with unshed tears of happiness.

“You have a son.” She smiled at him. “Jean Claude DuValliere, III. We call him Trey.” She stroked the baby’s head as her eyes sought out Jean’s once again, and the world melted away. Nothing existed in this moment outside the three of them.

Jean leaned back into René, as much for support as for comfort. The tears in his eyes did not remain unshed. They fell down his cheeks unchecked. It was a moment he wanted, a moment he had wanted to have with his own Olivia but was never allowed, and he suddenly wondered at how different their lives and loves would have been. He had no son, but he had René, and Spike, and Baby, and their extended family, and his life was so full of love, save that one thing. A son. And now, even though he would not get to live that life, a part of him burst with joy inside to know that somewhere he did have this life and that in some small way he had managed to contribute to it.

René seemed to feel his turmoil, his heartbreak, and his happiness, and held him tighter, whispering sweet words in his ear and nuzzling his neck affectionately. “They are happy, m’frere. We be happy for them, too, eh?”

Jean turned in his arms and pressed his lips to his husband’s, holding him there for a long moment as the others began to quietly leave the room to give Jean and Olivia some privacy.

When all had left save the two of them, they turned and watched the couple and their child for a few minutes more, clinging to each other tightly and wanting to capture this moment for all of them to savor and remember. Then they turned and left the room, closing the door behind them, leaving the husband and wife and child to find their new life together as a family.

“He’s beautiful, you would be so proud. I know I was.” Jean smiled as he continued to tell the story of Olivia and Jean and their marriage in the other dimension. He talked of how René had gone back and changed things to make sure they kept that life and somehow managed to erase the stain of murdering his brother, a stain that another René living another, more horrible life, had made. He explained how Easy had called in some favors on the West Coast and had gotten a post for the human Jean at the University of San Diego, a lovely, private, Catholic university that overlooked the Pacific Ocean. The position came with a comfortable salary for he and his wife and son, so that they could have a happy, sun-filled life far away from vampires and darkness and even the nightmarish memory of murder. Identity issues had been resolved through Jack’s contacts, protective spells were cast to insure that Morderer could never have detected what they had done, and Jean and Olivia were already happily settled into a lovely old house in Point Loma, not too far from the beach, a belated wedding gift from Spike and the family.

“His name is Jean Claude DuValliere, III, Livie. They named him for his father. For me. Our son.” He smiled as a warm breeze swept through the cemetery, leaving behind the faintest whisper of the scent of roses that only he would notice. “We had it all, my love. All those things you wanted and never even asked for ... a home, a marriage, a child. It’s a beautiful dream that they are getting to live now.”

He stood and said his quiet goodbyes, then turned to go. “They promised to send pictures.” He sighed. “I’ll bring some with me next time.” He kissed his fingers and placed them lightly on the cool marble of her headstone. “I love you.”

He walked away alone and in silence, keeping with him the sweet memory of the man and woman kissing and touching one another in the bedroom of the old plantation house. They had been so much like he and his own Olivia had been, so loving, so affectionate, living a dream that few ever get to see, much less touch. He smiled to himself, suddenly thinking how very much Olivia would have enjoyed the irony of it all.

Baby and René walked hand-in-hand through the murky swamps of the bayou near Houma. They had left just after dusk and arrived quickly to the spot René wanted desperately to find again. They made their way along the hidden trail, pushing brambles and vines out of their way and heading deeper into the virgin land.

When they reached the shack, it was exactly how René had remembered it: small, run-down, shattered glass, the worm-eaten wood that was ready to fall down with the next aggressive breeze. Next to it there was no little cottage, no children playing, no fence, no mailbox. It was the shack he had escaped to, it was no longer the place where he and Baby had a home together.

Holding tightly to each other's hands, they walked to the spot where the house had been in the other dimension, they stood in what would have been the doorway and looked out into the yard trying to see the same view that the others would have seen, their children playing, their home warm and welcoming. They could almost see it before them, a tempting reminder of what their other selves had.

René made a silent promise to himself. One day he would build that house for her, a house where they could escape to and be just them, a place no one would know about but them ... them and a far-away Jean Claude who, as he had stood with them, never really understood what it meant to them. Seeing the happy family they had elsewhere had been worth the difficulty they'd had in pulling off the magicks, of bringing Wes in on it, of the complexities in the difficult spells involved. It had been worth Spike's anger that they had tried such a thing without him and risked the family being exposed in their own dimension. It had been worth all the risks to see them there living happily and simply with their children in a home which didn't even exist here.

Baby turned toward René and captured his lips with her own, the two of them sinking to the ground and entangling in one another as they had done a hundred times. This time it was different. This time it was the two of them lying in the echo of their other life. And on the dark, damp earth of the bayou, they made love in the shadow of the home they never had.

The End