

Untitled

by Becky

Part 1

Helena tapped her perfectly manicured nails on the table. She didn't remember Stavros being so uncontrollable before. Had the years made her remember things that made it easier to live with his death?

She shook her head. She was being ridiculous. It was just a matter of letting him know who was in control.

And right now, it was better that he wasn't here. That would give her a chance to see how her other project was coming along. She had been neglecting it since her dear Stavros had come back to her.

She walked to the back of the room, accessing a control panel that no one would think to look for unless they knew it was there. At the touch of her fingers, the wall broke apart, allowing Helena to walk through. She sealed it back up, as a precaution.

There it was. It was almost complete. Soon, she would have another weapon at her disposal. It had taken a lot to pull this one off, but it would be so delicious to see the havoc she could wreak.

"Rest well, child," she crooned, touching the glass of the see-through capsule. "I shall return in a few days. I have to make sure your brother hasn't ruined any of my plans."

Helena left the room, unaware of the pair of green eyes that had opened and were watching her every move.

The wall became a wall again, closing in the secret room.

Stefan still couldn't remember how he'd gotten here, and it made him very uneasy. He knew he had to get out.

There was barely any room to move in the capsule, but it was enough. Pushing with all his strength, he began rocking side to side, gaining momentum.

In a matter of minutes, he was free, and only slightly hurt. He avoided stepping the glass that had shattered on the floor, and made his way to the clothes that his mother had been nice enough to leave for him. For whatever reason.

~*~

Part 2

"Are you sure you won't come with us?" Laura asked.

Amy nodded. "I'm sure. The hospital can't afford for me to leave, with everything that's going on."

"Yeah, I heard. Everyone's okay, right?"

"Yeah, but they're not the ones I'm worried about right now. Have you been sleeping, you have big circles under your eyes."

Laura faked indignation. "Thanks a lot!" She grew serious. "The truth is, I didn't sleep at all last night. I almost wish I had taken Scotty up on his offer --" Laura stopped as her sister's lips widened into a big smile.

"Oooh, don't stop now! What offer?"

Laura couldn't help but laugh. "None of your business. Shouldn't you be at work?"

"Okay, okay, I get the hint. But don't think that you're off the hook. I want to know *everything* when you come back."

The sisters walked to the door, still chuckling. They hugged tightly.

"Give me a call when you get there, okay?" Amy asked.

"Sure thing. Bye."

"Bye."

Laura closed the door, then turned and looked at the bags that were still only half-packed. She still had so much to do. And who knew how long it would take for her mother and Lulu to return from the last minute shopping?

She gave a yelp as a knock from the door nearly made her stumble. "Get with it, Laura. You're going to drive yourself insane." She cleared her throat and loudly asked, "Who is it?"

"Laura? It's Stefan."

Her body instantly reacted to the sound of his voice. It was very irritating not being able to control that.

"Cool and collected, Laura. And stop talking to yourself." She opened the door, ready to greet him with a courteous -- but nonchalant -- greeting. But before Laura had a chance to say or do anything, he had already taken her hand, a look of concern on his face.

"Laura, what are you doing here? What are your things doing here?"

Laura looked from his hand to his face, momentarily speechless. But only momentarily. "How did you know I was leaving?" her tone held a definite note of suspicion.

Stefan frowned, not liking the strange feeling he was getting from her. "Leaving the country house? Laura, I thought we had agreed that you weren't ready."

"The coun... huh?" Laura managed to say.

They looked at each other in silence, both trying to make sense of their conversation.

"Did you cut your hair?" they both suddenly asked.

Laura took her hand out of Stefan's hold. She didn't need this right now. "All right, I don't know what game you're trying to play, but--"

Laura's words were lost in her mouth as Stefan stepped closer, cupping her face with his hand.

"It's going to be all right," he said softly, smiling.

She had no choice but to stare into his green eyes, eyes that she could almost swear were reflecting... love? No, not love. Certainly not for her. He loved someone else, he had told her that himself just a few days ago.

That thought was enough to disenchant the moment. She moved his hand from her face, and walked into the living room, turning back to face him when there was enough distance between them to make her pulse return to normal. "I know that. Once Lucky is fully out of Helena's grasp, things will be less touch-and-go."

Stefan felt his stomach twist as he heard Laura's words. Gods, had she actually spoken about Lucky as if he were alive?

"Laura," his voice was gentle, "Lucky is dead."

Laura stood perfectly still. Her voice was eerily calm. "No, he is not."

"Laura..." She was looking at him, but he could see she was slipping into denial. He stepped closer to her, careful not to upset her further.

"He is not dead. Lucky is not dead." It was almost like a chant.

"I'm sorry, Laura..."

Laura's voice was still soft. "I can't do this again. I can't."

"Mom?">

Lucky frowned at the picture before him. "Are you all right?" He glared suspiciously at Stefan, who stood uncharacteristically and completely dumbfounded.

"L-lucky?" Laura whispered tentatively, afraid that if she spoke too loudly he would disappear. He didn't. "Lucky!"

Before Lucky knew it, the breath was being squeezed out of him, his mother holding him so tightly he thought she might break something.

"Oh my God, Lucky, I thought--" Laura stopped, and swirled around.

Stefan was still shell-shocked, the burning accusation and hurt in Laura's eyes just one thing more that was turning this day into possibly the worst one of his life.

"GET OUT!" Laura screamed. "GET OUT, YOU BASTARD!"

Disoriented, Stefan was shoved out the door, the door slammed in his face. He stood there for a minute, regaining his balance.

What the HELL was going on?

~*~

Part 3

"What was that all about?" Lucky demanded to know.

Laura's voice was tight. "Nothing. I just wanted to see you before I left." She forced a smile.

Lucky didn't buy it. "Mom, you nearly break my ribs and then you practically drag Stefan outside. It's something!"

"I'm just a little stressed out. C-can you go upstairs and get me Lulu's nightlight? I don't want to forget it."

Lucky hesitated, but relented. "Sure, Mom."

Laura sat on the couch, the relief and anger making her shake in their intensity. A flood of tears fell down her face, her breathing came in gulps.

She wiped the tears away, and got up as she heard Lucky coming back, using everything she had to control herself.

Lucky's face was serious as he handed the Powerpuff Girls nightlight to his mother. "Are you sure you're okay?"

"I will be. This trip is going to do me a lot of good. I just want to make sure you're careful."

That seemed to relax Lucky, and he nodded. "I will."

Good," Laura said.

"I'll let you finish packing," Lucky said, still uncertain if he should leave her. "Unless you want me to stay. I can."

"I think I can handle packing on my own." Laura hugged him. "I love you so much, Lucky."

"I love you, too, Mom. Everything's going to be okay."

Laura nodded. "I'll see you soon."

"Have fun. Give Lulu a hug for me."

"I sure will."

Laura walked him to the door, locking it after he had gone.

She sunk to the floor, and cried.

~*~

Stavros walked through the kitchen door, a red rose in his hand. His eyes fell upon his beloved Lasha on the floor, obviously in pain.

She was his wife. He would find a way to comfort her.

~*~

Stefan couldn't stop looking at the picture. Ever since Laura had shown him the one of her, Stavros, and baby Nikolas, he had had the need to have this physical proof in his hand. Proof that he and Laura had shared something on that Island.

Something that had meant something. To the both of them.

He sighed. Why did he do this to himself? He put the picture down on his desk, upside down.

He had moved on. Laura was in the past, where he should have left her since that fateful day when she had left him. And Nikolas.

It was Chloe whom he loved now. Chloe, who was helping him become a better man. Chloe, who promised to give him something real, and lasting.

Yes, he loved her.

Why, then, was he having such a hard time convincing his heart of that?

The door to his study opened, and suddenly things were much more complicated.

~*~

Part 4

The two Stefan's met at the center of the room, quietly appraising each other.

"The likeness is remarkable," they both spoke.

They fell silent once more.

"I--"

Stefan watched as the man who had just walked through the door placed his hand over his chest, his jaw tightening, clearly in pain. The other hand rose to his mouth, as he had a coughing fit.

A few minutes passed before the man seemed to recover, dabbing the drops of blood on his lips with a handkerchief.

"What is the date?" the man asked.

"It is the 20th of July, 2001," Stefan answered.

"2001," the other Stefan echoed. "Do you have a way of verifying that?"

Stefan stepped to the side, and pointed to the phone.

A quick call was enough to confirm the other Stefan's suspicion. Hanging up the phone, he looked at his own image. "Congratulations. It seems I am the clone. And apparently, not a very good one."

"A clone?"

"I awoke today. Born today, it seems. Only I have retained memories up until 1999." He paused, now talking more to himself. "Which is why Laura reacted so strangely to my presence. I talked of the country house, told her Lucky was dead..." He remembered that he wasn't alone.

The real Stefan stood silently, staring at this physical reminder of the man he had once been.

1999. It seemed a lifetime ago.

He took himself away from the past; there were more important things at hand. "Helena?" he asked, though it seemed to him the answer was obvious.

The clone nodded. "She will not know I am missing for a few days." He winced as another wave of pain hit him, this one less severe. "Although, I don't think it will matter by then."

"Perhaps there are specialists that would be able --"

The other Stefan shook his head. "We have to go see Laura. I saw her scarcely half an hour ago, and our reunion, so to speak, was less than ideal." He regarded the man in front of him, in a way his future self. "But even from the beginning, she seemed disconcerted by my... show of affection."

"Things have changed between myself and Laura," Stefan stated impassively, not caring to elaborate on the

why.

"I see. Even so, she was incredibly upset after my visit, and with good reason. Do you want her to think the worst of you?"

Stefan almost laughed at that, but couldn't quite bring himself to. He had been this man once, hopeful about his future with Laura. And whatever tentative truce Laura and himself had managed to gain in the present was not something he wanted lost.

"No," he answered. "Let's go."

~*~

Part 5

Stefan stood outside Laura's door, not particularly looking forward to what was about to happen. He knocked on the door. A full minute passed, and still no answer. He knocked again.

"Who is it?" a weary voice called out, unmistakably Laura's.

"It's Stefan."

There was a long pause. She was probably waiting for him to leave. He stood patiently, waiting for some sort of acknowledgement.

Finally, Laura opened the door a crack, her face taut. "Go to Hell," she said, stiffly.

He tried to catch her gaze, but she was avoiding eye contact. He talked anyway. "Laura, allow me to explain. This will sound incredible, but the man that you saw today was not I."

"Right," Laura cut in. "Not you. Next thing you'll tell me is that it was a clone."

"Actually--"

The door was unceremoniously slammed in his face.

Sighing, Stefan turned to leave, but stopped. This was not something that could wait. Pushing down his innate good manners, he turned the knob. The door opened, and he entered the house.

~*~

Part 6

It was as if someone had taken one of his nightmares and brought it to reality.

The smiling face of his dead brother, with one arm wrapped around the woman he loved, holding her tightly against him.

And a gleaming knife at her throat.

"Hello, brother," Stavros grinned, his smile almost wolfish. "Close the door, will you?"

Stefan did so, never taking his eyes off Laura.

"Surprised to see me?" Stavros asked. "Of course you are. You never were very bright." Stavros stopped

talking as he realized no one was paying attention to him. Stefan and Laura's eyes were locked together, almost as if they were silently communicating.

He pressed the knife closer to Laura's throat, just enough to elicit a choked sound from her, causing Stefan's eyes to cut sharply to Stavros.

"That's better," Stavros said. "I don't know why I didn't see it before. You always were a little too preoccupied with my wife."

"I'm not your wife," Laura spat.

Stefan tensed as Stavros lowered his mouth near Laura's ear.

"You were mine in every way that mattered," Stavros murmured. "Don't you remember all those nights we spent together in our bed? The bed where we created Nikolas?"

Laura bit back another acid reply. Feeling Stavros' breath on her neck was making her ill. And still, looking at Stefan gave her the same sense of security that she had found all those years ago.

She had to remind herself of what had happened, what he had done. And not just today. She was on her own now.

Stavros was disappointed in her silence. "I seem to recall you having more spirit when you were younger, Lasha."

"I was reckless," Laura replied calmly. "I have more to live for now."

Stefan saw Stavros' face darken. He had always had the same expression on his face when they were younger.

Just before he was about to do something malicious.

"Is that so?" Stavros voice rose with each word. "Well, my dear, I'm afraid you won't get to enjoy any of it much longer."

"Now!" Stefan shouted, as the knife pierced Laura's skin.

The next sound was a gunshot, mingling in with Stefan's order and Laura's scream of pain.

Stavros would never know what happened. The impact came in a nanosecond, shattering his skull. The knife fell onto the floor, while the hand holding Laura gripped tighter, still claiming her as his. Stavros' quickly weakening figure weighed on Laura, and pushed them both onto the floor, the blood from his head dripping onto her hair, and staining her shirt.

Stefan watched as his clone buckled in pain, and gripped the table next to him, gun still in hand.

Stefan's first priority was Laura, who was now buried under Stavros' body. He didn't know how deep Stavros had managed to cut her, and he couldn't keep his hands from shaking as he rolled his brother's body off of her.

"Laura?" his voice was filled with worry as he kept Laura's head immobile with one hand, while the other took her shoulder and slowly rolled her over onto her back.

The whole right side of her face had blood. On her neck there was a darker maroon showing where wound was. It didn't appear to be deep, or serious.

"Laura?" he repeated. He wiped the blood that was pooling at the hollow of her right eye.

"Stefan?" Laura's eyes fluttered open, blinking a few times.

Stefan couldn't help himself. "Laura, Laura," he repeated, as he hugged her close to him. Laura's hands immediately clung to Stefan.

Stefan's clone watched their tight embrace. An odd mix of relief, envy, and happiness washed over him.

Laura turned her head, her arms still holding Stefan. "What happened?" Her voice trailed off as she looked beyond Stavros' body and saw Stefan.

Only it wasn't. It couldn't be.

She could only watch as he walked over, with effort, and kneeled in front of Stavros' body, taking his pulse. "He's dead." He shut his eyes, and did the sign of the cross, though why he did it, he didn't quite know. He got up, and walked around his dead brother's body.

He looked at Laura, who was looking from one Stefan to the other. He could tell his brother wasn't quite sure how to react to Stavros' death, either. And Laura...

She let go of Stefan and stood up. He did the same, and stayed in place while she backed away a few steps.

"Explain."

~*~

Conclusion

The Stefans looked at each other, each giving each other the chance to speak.

"This is your time," Stefan's clone told the real Stefan. "You will probably explain things better to her than I."

"She's no less complicated than she was two years ago," Stefan informed his clone.

"She wouldn't be Laura otherwise," Stefan's clone noted.

"So true," Stefan nodded.

"Would you two NOT talk about me like I'm not here?" Laura said in a testy voice. She was starting to believe this was really all just a horrible nightmare.

"Our apologies," Stefan's clone stated, though there was faint smile on his face. "I suppose the most important fact to know is that I am a clone, created by Helena." Laura's eyebrow arched suspiciously at the mention of the hated woman's name, but she said nothing, so he continued, "The last day I recall is Friday, June 18th," he paused, knowing this would be the most difficult thing to grasp. "1999."

"1999..." Laura repeated as she fell back into her memory. It wasn't hard to remember that year. She had spent some of her happiest times during that year. And some of the most painful. What he said fit in perfectly with what had happened earlier that day. His appearance, the way he acted towards her, the way he looked at her... as if he still loved her.

She shook her head, not yet willing to go there. "This can't... It's not possible," she stated firmly in the face of irrefutable evidence.

"You're right," Stefan said dryly. "It would be like saying Stavros has come back to life."

Laura glared at him, not finding his sarcasm amusing. "I'm just finding this day a little hard to take, can you

blame me?"

"It's been difficult for all of us, Laura."

Laura's face softened as she realized how true his words were. She might have been relieved to hear Stavros declared dead -- again. But Stefan -- both of them, it seemed -- had lost their brother the same day they had known he was alive.

It was hard not to sympathize. Impossible, really. "I'm sorry," she said sincerely, suddenly wanting to take him into her arms and comfort him. But she forced herself to stay in place.

Stefan nodded, accepting her kindness.

Their moment of peace was interrupted as Stefan's clone uttered a grunt of pain. His legs gave out and he fell to his knees, his meditating methods proving useless at this point.

Laura was immediately at his side, kneeling down, the palm of her hand rubbing his back in small circles. "We need to get him to the hospital," she said, her voice urgent.

"There is no point," Stefan's clone answered, taking large swallows of air.

Laura moved him so his head was cradled in her lap, almost as if he were a child. She could feel his erratic heartbeat under her palm. "What do you mean? You're in pain..."

"I'm dying," he told her.

"What?" Laura stared up at the real Stefan, her eyes seeking confirmation. Or rather, the opposite.

But he nodded, his face unreadable.

"We're just supposed to do nothing?"

Stefan didn't answer, and Laura grew angry, her feelings of helplessness and confusion reacting against his seemingly blasé acceptance of what was happening.

"How can you just stand there?" she accused.

Stefan's clone was able to raise his arm long enough to touch her chin, turning her head so she was facing him again. "It's not his fault," he told her gently.

Laura's shoulders slumped, the misplaced anger seeping out of her weary body. "I know," she whispered.

Stefan's clone closely watched Laura's troubled blue irises swirl, and spoke a question that took everyone by surprise, including himself.

"Do you love him?"

Laura froze for a second, but recovered, ignoring the tightening in her stomach. She looked away from his questioning gaze, but she could still feel four intense green eyes staring at her. "He doesn't love me," she stated, making her tone sound neutral. As if she didn't care one way or another.

Stefan's clone sighed. She still didn't understand how deep she was in him, in them. "I could never..." He took a deep breath, lessening the pain only for a second. "Change so much... that I would stop... loving you," he stated with certainty.

Laura shook her head, tears pooling at the bottom of her eyes. "You don't know what's happened... so much has happened..."

"Do you love him?" he repeated. Maybe it was the fact that he was dying and would never have the chance to ask her again, but it was suddenly very important to him to know.

Laura looked at him. Stefan. As he had been before she had told him "I love you", before they had made love...

Before it had all fallen apart, again.

But the question wasn't what had happened. The question was did she love him? Stefan, as he was now. After all the good, and the bad. The comfort, the lies. The love, the coldness.

The tears escaped her eyes and slid down her cheeks as she relived each moment in her mind.

She had denied her love for him countless times. To him, to Luke, to everyone. Sometimes even to herself.

But why lie now? To speak the truth, if only in this space in time. Even if she never uttered the words again.

She nodded, still deep in her own thoughts.

Her voice came out soft. "I love him..." She looked down, her face completely exposed. "And I love you."

He had never heard more beautiful words. His breath began to come in small, short spurts. His eyes grew heavy, his sight blurring, her face fading.

And he stopped breathing.

Stefan watched himself die, cradled in her arms.

It wasn't him. And yet it was.

And she mourned. For many things.

And he with her.

~The End~