

In Dreams

by Becky

The front door squeaked timidly as Laura's shadowy figure emerged into the darkness, illuminated only by the moon. The sound of her footsteps barely echoed in that still Texas night.

She had awoken at midnight, just as she had that same day for the past three years. She had slid out of bed, making sure not to bother the slumbering form of her husband. Lucky was sleeping peacefully, she had checked.

She walked down the stairs of the porch, and kept walking until she found a place surrounded by darkness, where the moonlight couldn't creep in and invade her private space.

She closed her eyes, the blackness overwhelming her sight for a few moments until the clear picture of her baby formed.

The searing pain coursed through every part of her body. She would have doubled over if she weren't sitting. The ache was almost unbearable. But it was the least she should endure, and she bore it. Her baby deserved no less.

The tears fell in waves, but she didn't notice them. Her hands traveled to her flat belly, the place that had once cradled her firstborn, kept him safe and nourished him, until he was ready to come out.

And when he had, she thought she would never love someone as much as she loved him when the doctor had put him in her arms.

Her son.

He had looked up at her through his big newborn eyes that would eventually darken.

It had all been worth it, in that one perfect moment.

She went through each second she had spent with him, reliving it again as if it were the first time. Time hadn't faded the memories as it usually did; it had only made them stronger. They were the only thing she had, and she held onto them fiercely.

She could still feel his chubby hand grabbing her finger, his greedy mouth searching for her breast, his inquisitive eyes piercing her soul.

I'm yours, he said, in a voice that she had invented from the infant gurgling that still echoed in her ears.

She would never get to hear his first words. She would never know the joy of seeing him take his first step.

Her baby pulled at her sad thoughts, bringing her back to him. Making up for all those days that she kept him hidden away in the most secret place of her being.

He was a big boy now, the way she imagined he would look now.

And they created new memories, mother and son. They could go wherever they wanted. The whole world was theirs, and everything was simple. No threats, no recrimination, no broken promises, no death.

They built sandcastles on the beach, his little toes wriggling in the sand... he blew out the candles on his birthday cake... she put the bandaid on his skinned knee, and wiped the tears away...

The sound of the rooster shattered the fragile world Laura had created, and her son's smiling face faded away. Her hand reached out to hold on to him, but there was only air.

~*~

Stefan held the little boy in his arms, gently wiping the tears away, the soft sobbing breaking his heart. The small hands clung to him, his head buried in the comforting embrace of the man he called Uncle.

He had dreamt of her again. He expected it now; it was his birthday, and it had happened every year since...

But it didn't make it any easier, not even after nearly four years of silence. Not one word. If hope was hard for him to let go of, it had to be impossible for a small child.

Nikolas' crying subsided, and Stefan tipped his head to look at him. He smiled, "Do you know where we are going to celebrate your day of birth?"

The boy shook his head.

"Normandy," Stefan said, his voice quiet, as if he were letting Nikolas in on a big secret that was theirs alone.

The faintest smile appeared on his son's face. "Why?" he asked.

"It's a surprise," Stefan said. "You need to sleep a few more hours, and then we shall go."

Nikolas laid back down on his bed. Stefan snuggled him into the covers, cupping his face, and placing a small kiss on his forehead. "I love you, Nikolas." The boy closed his eyes, safe in the knowledge that his Uncle wouldn't leave him. It was only a few minutes until he was asleep. Stefan turned off the light emanating from the lamp, and sat there, the small hand resting on his larger one.

Nikolas looked around the darkness. She would come again; he just had to wait.

-

~The End~