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INTERVIEW WITH THE VAMPIRE

Book I of
The Vampire Chronicles

Anne Rice

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*For Stan Rice, Carole Malkin,
and Alice O'Brien Borchardt*

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and Alice O'Brien Borchardt*

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PART I

"I see . . ." said the vampire thoughtfully, and slowly he walked across the room towards the window. For a long time he stood there against the dim light from Divisadero Street and the passing beams of traffic. The boy could see the furnishings of the room more clearly now, the round oak table, the chairs. A wash basin hung on one wall with a mirror. He set his brief case on the table and waited. "But how much tape do you have with you?" asked the vampire, turning now so the boy could see his profile. "Enough for the story of a life?"

"Sure, if it's a good life. Sometimes I interview as many as three or four people a night if I'm lucky. But it has to be a good story. That's only fair, isn't it?"

"Admirably fair," the vampire answered. "I would like to tell you the story of my life, then. I would like to do that very much."

"Great," said the boy. And quickly he removed the small tape recorder from his brief case, making a check of the cassette and the batteries. "I'm really anxious to hear why you believe this, why you . . ."

"No," said the vampire abruptly. "We can't begin that way. Is your equipment ready?"

"Yes," said the boy.

"Then sit down. I'm going to turn on the overhead light."

"But I thought vampires didn't like light," said the boy. "If you think the dark adds to the atmosphere . . ." But then he stopped. The vampire was watching him with his back to the window. The boy could make out nothing of his face

now, and something about the still figure there distracted him. He started to say something again but he said nothing. And then he sighed with relief when the vampire moved towards the table and reached for the overhead cord.

At once the room was flooded with a harsh yellow light. And the boy, staring up at the vampire, could not repress a gasp. His fingers danced backwards on the table to grasp the edge. "Dear God!" he whispered, and then he gazed, speechless, at the vampire.

The vampire was utterly white and smooth, as if he were sculpted from bleached bone, and his face was as seemingly inanimate as a statue, except for two brilliant green eyes that looked down at the boy intently like flames in a skull. But then the vampire smiled almost wistfully, and the smooth white substance of his face moved with the infinitely flexible but minimal lines of a cartoon. "Do you see?" he asked softly.

The boy shuddered, lifting his hand as if to shield himself from a powerful light. His eyes moved slowly over the finely tailored black coat he'd only glimpsed in the bar, the long folds of the cape, the black silk tie knotted at the throat, and the gleam of the white collar that was as white as the vampire's flesh. He stared at the vampire's full black hair, the waves that were combed back over the tips of the ears, the curls that barely touched the edge of the white collar.

"Now, do you still want the interview?" the vampire asked.

The boy's mouth was open before the sound came out. He was nodding. Then he said, "Yes."

The vampire sat down slowly opposite him and, leaning forward, said gently, confidentially, "Don't be afraid. Just start the tape."

And then he reached out over the length of the table. The boy recoiled, sweat running down the sides of his face. The vampire clamped a hand on the boy's shoulder and said, "Believe me, I won't hurt you. I want this opportunity. It's more important to me than you can realize now. I want you

to begin." And he withdrew his hand and sat collected, waiting.

It took a moment for the boy to wipe his forehead and his hips with a handkerchief, to stammer that the microphone was in the machine, to press the button, to say that the machine was on.

"You weren't always a vampire, were you?" he began.

"No," answered the vampire. "I was a twenty-five-year-old man when I became a vampire, and the year was seventeen ninety-one."

The boy was startled by the preciseness of the date and he repeated it before he asked, "How did it come about?"

"There's a simple answer to that. I don't believe I want to give simple answers," said the vampire. "I think I want to tell the real story...."

"Yes," the boy said quickly. He was folding his handkerchief over and over and wiping his lips now with it again.

"There was a tragedy...." the vampire started. "It was my younger brother.... He died." And then he stopped, so that the boy cleared his throat and wiped at his face again before stuffing the handkerchief almost impatiently into his pocket.

"It's not painful, is it?" he asked timidly.

"Does it seem so?" asked the vampire. "No." He shook his head. "It's simply that I've only told this story to one other person. And that was so long ago. No, it's not painful...."

"We were living in Louisiana then. We'd received a land grant and settled two indigo plantations on the Mississippi very near New Orleans...."

"Ah, that's the accent...." the boy said softly.

For a moment the vampire stared blankly. "I have an accent?" He began to laugh.

And the boy, flustered, answered quickly. "I noticed it in the bar when I asked you what you did for a living. It's just a slight sharpness to the consonants, that's all. I never guessed it was French."

"It's all right," the vampire assured him. "I'm not as

shocked as I pretend to be. It's only that I forget it from time to time. But let me go on. . . ."

"Please . . ." said the boy.

"I was talking about the plantations. They had a great deal to do with it, really, my becoming a vampire. But I'll come to that. Our life there was both luxurious and primitive. And we ourselves found it extremely attractive. You see, we lived far better there than we could have ever lived in France. Perhaps the sheer wilderness of Louisiana only made it seem so, but seeming so, it was. I remember the imported furniture that cluttered the house." The vampire smiled. "And the harpsichord; that was lovely. My sister used to play it. On summer evenings, she would sit at the keys with her back to the open French windows. And I can still remember that thin, rapid music and the vision of the swamp rising beyond her, the moss-hung cypresses floating against the sky. And there were the sounds of the swamp, a chorus of creatures, the cry of the birds. I think we loved it. It made the rosewood furniture all the more precious, the music more delicate and desirable. Even when the wisentia tore the shutters off the attic windows and worked its tendrils right into the whitewashed brick in less than a year. . . . Yes, we loved it. All except my brother. I don't think I ever heard him complain of anything, but I knew how he felt. My father was dead then, and I was head of the family and I had to defend him constantly from my mother and sister. They wanted to take him visiting, and to New Orleans for parties, but he hated these things. I think he stopped going altogether before he was twelve. Prayer was what mattered to him, prayer and his leatherbound lives of the saints.

"Finally I built him an oratory removed from the house, and he began to spend most of every day there and often the early evening. It was ironic, really. He was so different from us, so different from everyone, and I was so regular! There was nothing extraordinary about me whatsoever." The vampire smiled.

"Sometimes in the evening I would go out to him and find him in the garden near the oratory, sitting absolutely

composed on a stone bench there, and I'd tell him my troubles, the difficulties I had with the slaves, how I distrusted the overseer or the weather or my brokers . . . all the problems that made up the length and breadth of my existence. And he would listen, making only a few comments, always sympathetic, so that when I left him I had the distinct impression he had solved everything for me. I didn't think I could deny him anything, and I vowed that no matter how it would break my heart to lose him, he could enter the priesthood when the time came. Of course, I was wrong." The vampire stopped.

For a moment the boy only gazed at him and then he started as if awakened from deep thought, and he floundered, as if he could not find the right words. "Ah . . . he didn't want to be a priest?" the boy asked. The vampire studied him as if trying to discern the meaning of his expression. Then he said:

"I meant that I was wrong about myself, about my not denying him anything." His eyes moved over the far wall and fixed on the panes of the window. "He began to see visions."

"Real visions?" the boy asked, but again there was hesitation, as if he were thinking of something else.

"I didn't think so," the vampire answered. "It happened when he was fifteen. He was very handsome then. He had the smoothest skin and the largest blue eyes. He was robust, not thin as I am now and was then . . . but his eyes . . . it was as if when I looked into his eyes I was standing alone on the edge of the world . . . on a windswept ocean beach. There was nothing but the soft roar of the waves. Well," he said, his eyes still fixed on the window panes, "he began to see visions. He only hinted at this at first, and he stopped taking his meals altogether. He lived in the oratory. At any hour of day or night, I could find him on the bare flagstones kneeling before the altar. And the oratory itself was neglected. He stopped tending the candles or changing the altar cloths or even sweeping out the leaves. One night I became really alarmed when I stood in the rose arbor watching him for one solid hour, during which he never

moved from his knees and never once lowered his arms, which he held outstretched in the form of a cross. The slaves all thought he was mad." The vampire raised his eyebrows in wonder. "I was convinced that he was only . . . overzealous. That in his love for God, he had perhaps gone too far. Then he told me about the visions. Both St. Dominic and the Blessed Virgin Mary had come to him in the oratory. They had told him he was to sell all our property in Louisiana, everything we owned, and use the money to do God's work in France. My brother was to be a great religious leader, to return the country to its former fervor, to turn the tide against atheism and the Revolution. Of course, he had no money of his own. I was to sell the plantations and our town houses in New Orleans and give the money to him."

Again the vampire stopped. And the boy sat motionless regarding him, astonished. "Ah . . . excuse me," he whispered. "What did you say? Did you sell the plantations?" "No," said the vampire, his face calm as if he had been from the start. "I laughed at him. And he . . . he became incensed. He insisted his command came from the Virgin herself. Who was I to disregard it? Who indeed?" he asked softly, as if he were thinking of this again. "Who indeed? And the more he tried to convince me, the more I laughed. It was nonsense, I told him, the product of an immature and even morbid mind. The oratory was a mistake, I said to him; I would have it torn down at once. He would go to school in New Orleans and get such inane notions out of his head. I don't remember all that I said. But I remember the feeling. Behind all this contemptuous dismissal on my part was a smoldering anger and a disappointment. I was bitterly disappointed. I didn't believe him at all."

"But that's understandable," said the boy quickly when the vampire paused, his expression of astonishment softening. "I mean, would anyone have believed him?"

"Is it so understandable?" The vampire looked at the boy. "I think perhaps it was vicious egotism. Let me explain. I loved my brother, as I told you, and at times I believed him to be a living saint. I encouraged him in his

prayer and meditations, as I said, and I was willing to give him up to the priesthood. And if someone had told me of a saint in Arles or Lourdes who saw visions, I would have believed it. I was a Catholic; I believed in saints. I lit tapers before their statues in churches; I knew their pictures, their symbols, their names. But I didn't, couldn't believe my brother. Not only did I not believe he saw visions, I couldn't entertain the notion for a moment. Now, why? Because he was my brother. Holy he might be, peculiar most definitely; but Francis of Assisi, no. Not my brother. No brother of mine could be such. That is egotism. Do you see?"

The boy thought about it before he answered and then he nodded and said that yes, he thought that he did.

"Perhaps he saw the visions," said the vampire.

"Then you . . . you don't claim to know . . . now . . . whether he did or not?"

"No, but I do know that he never wavered in his conviction for a second. That I know now and knew then the night he left my room crazed and grieved. He never wavered for an instant. And within minutes, he was dead."

"How?" the boy asked.

"He simply walked out of the French doors onto the gallery and stood for a moment at the head of the brick stairs. And then he fell. He was dead when I reached the bottom, his neck broken." The vampire shook his head in consternation, but his face was still serene.

"Did you see him fall?" asked the boy. "Did he lose his footing?"

"No, but two of the servants saw it happen. They said that he had looked up as if he had just seen something in the air. Then his entire body moved forward as if being swept by a wind. One of them said he was about to say something when he fell. I thought that he was about to say something too, but it was at that moment I turned away from the window. My back was turned when I heard the noise." He glanced at the tape recorder. "I could not forgive myself. I felt responsible for his death," he said. "And everyone else seemed to think I was responsible also."

"But how could they? You said they saw him fall!"

"It wasn't a direct accusation. They simply knew that something had passed between us that was unpleasant. That we had argued minutes before the fall. The servants had heard us, my mother had heard us. My mother would not stop asking me what had happened and why my brother, who was so quiet, had been shouting. Then my sister joined in, and of course I refused to say. I was so bitterly shocked and miserable that I had no patience with anyone, only the vague determination they would not know about his 'visions.' They would not know that he had become, finally, not a saint, but only a . . . fanatic. My sister went to bed rather than face the funeral, and my mother told everyone in the parish that something horrible had happened in my room which I would not reveal; and even the police questioned me, on the word of my own mother. Finally the priest came to see me and demanded to know what had gone on. I told no one. It was only a discussion, I said. I was not on the gallery when he fell, I protested, and they all stared at me as if I'd killed him. And I felt that I'd killed him. I sat in the parlor beside his coffin for two days thinking, I have killed him. I stared at his face until spots appeared before my eyes and I nearly fainted. The back of his skull had been shattered on the pavement, and his head had the wrong shape on the pillow. I forced myself to stare at it, to study it simply because I could hardly endure the pain and the smell of decay, and I was tempted over and over to try to open his eyes. All these were mad thoughts, mad impulses. The main thought was this: I had laughed at him; I had not believed him; I had not been kind to him. He had fallen because of me."

"This really happened, didn't it?" the boy whispered. "You're telling me something . . . that's true."

"Yes," said the vampire, looking at him without surprise. "I want to go on telling you." But as his eyes passed over the boy and returned to the window, he showed only faint interest in the boy, who seemed engaged in some silent inner struggle.

"But you said you didn't know about the visions, that you, a vampire . . . didn't know for certain whether . . ."

"I want to take things in order," said the vampire, "I want to go on telling you things as they happened. No, I don't know about the visions. To this day." And again he waited until the boy said:

"Yes, please, please go on."

"Well, I wanted to sell the plantations. I never wanted to see the house or the oratory again. I leased them finally to an agency which would work them for me and manage things so I need never go there, and I moved my mother and sister to one of the town houses in New Orleans. Of course, I did not escape my brother for a moment. I could think of nothing but his body rotting in the ground. He was buried in the St. Louis cemetery in New Orleans, and I did everything to avoid passing those gates; but still I thought of him constantly. Drunk or sober, I saw his body rotting in the coffin, and I couldn't bear it. Over and over I dreamed that he was at the head of the steps and I was holding his arm, talking kindly to him, urging him back into the bedroom, telling him gently that I did believe him, that he must pray for me to have faith. Meantime, the slaves on Pointe du Lac (that was my plantation) had begun to talk of seeing his ghost on the gallery, and the overseer couldn't keep order. People in society asked my sister offensive questions about the whole incident, and she became an hysteric. She wasn't really an hysteric. She simply thought she ought to react that way, so she did. I drank all the time and was at home as little as possible. I lived like a man who wanted to die but who had no courage to do it himself. I walked black streets and alleys alone; I passed out in cabarets. I backed out of two duels more from apathy than cowardice and truly wished to be murdered. And then I was attacked. It might have been anyone—and my invitation was open to sailors, thieves, maniacs, anyone. But it was a vampire. He caught me just a few steps from my door one night and left me for dead, or so I thought."

"You mean . . . he sucked your blood?" the boy asked.

"Yes," the vampire laughed. "He sucked my blood. That is the way it's done."

"But you lived," said the young man. "You said he left you for dead?"

"Well, he drained me almost to the point of death, which was for him sufficient. I was put to bed as soon as I was found, confused and really unaware of what had happened to me. I suppose I thought that drink had finally caused a stroke. I expected to die now and had no interest in eating or drinking or talking to the doctor. My mother sent for the priest. I was feverish by then and I told the priest everything, all about my brother's visions and what I had done. I remember I clung to his arm, making him swear over and over he would tell no one. 'I know I didn't kill him,' I said to the priest finally. 'It's that I cannot live now that he's dead. Not after the way I treated him.'

"That's ridiculous," he answered me. "Of course you can live. There's nothing wrong with you but self-indulgence. Your mother needs you, not to mention your sister. And as for this brother of yours, he was possessed of the devil." I was so stunned when he said this I couldn't protest. The devil made the visions, he went on to explain. The devil was rampant. The entire country of France was under the influence of the devil, and the Revolution had been his greatest triumph. Nothing would have saved my brother but exorcism, prayer, and fasting, men to hold him down while the devil raged in his body and tried to throw him about. "The devil threw him down the steps; it's perfectly obvious," he declared. "You weren't talking to your brother in that room, you were talking to the devil." Well, this enraged me. I believed before that I had been pushed to my limits, but I had not. He went on talking about the devil, about voodoo amongst the slaves and cases of possession in other parts of the world. And I went wild. I wrecked the room in the process of nearly killing him."

"But your strength . . . the vampire . . . ?" asked the boy. "I was out of my mind," the vampire explained. "I did things I could not have done in perfect health. The scene is confused, pale, fantastical now. But I do remember that I

drove him out of the back doors of the house, across the courtyard, and against the brick wall of the kitchen, where I pounded his head until I nearly killed him. When I was subdued finally, and exhausted then almost to the point of death, they bled me. The fools. But I was going to say something else. It was then that I conceived of my own egotism. Perhaps I'd seen it reflected in the priest. His contemptuous attitude towards my brother reflected my own; his immediate and shallow carping about the devil; his refusal to even entertain the idea that sanctity had passed so close."

"But he did believe in possession by the devil!"

"That is a much more mundane idea," said the vampire immediately. "People who cease to believe in God or goodness altogether still believe in the devil. I don't know why. No, I do indeed know why. Evil is always possible. And goodness is eternally difficult. But you must understand, possession is really another way of saying someone is mad. I felt it was, for the priest. I'm sure he'd seen madness. Perhaps he had stood right over raving madness and pronounced it possession. You don't have to see Satan when he is exorcised. But to stand in the presence of a saint . . . To believe that the saint has seen a vision. No, it's egotism, our refusal to believe it could occur in our midst."

"I never thought of it in that way," said the boy. "But what happened to you? You said they bled you to cure you, and that must have nearly killed you."

The vampire laughed. "Yes. It certainly did. But the vampire came back that night. You see, he wanted Pointe du Lac, my plantation."

"It was very late, after my sister had fallen asleep. I can remember it as if it were yesterday. He came in from the courtyard, opening the French doors without a sound, a tall fair-skinned man with a mass of blond hair and a graceful, almost feline quality to his movements. And gently, he draped a shawl over my sister's eyes and lowered the wick of the lamp. She dozed there beside the basin and the cloth with which she'd bathed my forehead, and she never once

stirred under that shawl until morning. But by that time I was greatly changed."

"What was this change?" asked the boy.

The vampire sighed. He leaned back against the chair and looked at the walls. "At first I thought he was another doctor, or someone summoned by the family to try to reason with me. But this suspicion was removed at once. He stepped close to my bed and leaned down so that his face was in the lamplight, and I saw that he was no ordinary man at all. His gray eyes burned with an incandescence, and the long white hands which hung by his sides were not those of a human being. I think I knew everything in that instant, and all that he told me was only aftermath. What I mean is, the moment I saw him, saw his extraordinary aura and knew him to be no creature I'd ever known, I was reduced to nothing. That ego which could not accept the presence of an extraordinary human being in its midst was crushed. All my conceptions, even my guilt and wish to die, seemed utterly unimportant. I completely forgot *myself*," he said, now silently touching his breast with his fist. "I forgot myself totally. And in the same instant knew totally the meaning of possibility. From then on I experienced only increasing wonder. As he talked to me and told me of what I might become, of what his life had been and stood to be, my past shrank to embers. I saw my life as if I stood apart from it, the vanity, the self-serving, the constant fleeing from one petty annoyance after another, the lip service to God and the Virgin and a host of saints whose names filled my prayer books, none of whom made the slightest difference in a narrow, materialistic, and selfish existence. I saw my real gods . . . the gods of most men. Food, drink, and security in conformity. *Children*."

The boy's face was tense with a mixture of confusion and amazement. "And so you decided to become a vampire?" he asked. The vampire was silent for a moment.

"Decided. It doesn't seem the right word. Yet I cannot say it was inevitable from the moment that he stepped into that room. No, indeed, it was not inevitable. Yet I can't say I decided. Let me say that when he'd finished speaking, no

other decision was possible for me, and I pursued my course without a backward glance. Except for one."

"Except for one? What?"

"My last sunrise," said the vampire. "That morning, I was not yet a vampire. And I saw my last sunrise.

"I remember it completely; yet I do not think I remember any other sunrise before it. I remember the light came first to the tops of the French windows, a paling behind the lace curtains, and then a gleam growing brighter and brighter in patches among the leaves of the trees. Finally the sun came through the windows themselves and the lace lay in shadows on the stone floor, and all over the form of my sister, who was still sleeping, shadows of lace on the shawl over her shoulders and head. As soon as she was warm, she pushed the shawl away without awakening, and then the sun shone full on her eyes and she tightened her eyelids. Then it was gleaming on the table where she rested her head on her arms, and gleaming, blazing, in the water in the pitcher. And I could feel it on my hands on the counterpane and then on my face. I lay in the bed thinking about all the things the vampire had told me, and then it was that I said good-bye to the sunrise and went out to become a vampire. It was . . . the last sunrise."

The vampire was looking out the window again. And when he stopped, the silence was so sudden the boy seemed to hear it. Then he could hear the noises from the street. The sound of a truck was deafening. The light cord stirred with the vibration. Then the truck was gone.

"Do you miss it?" he asked then in a small voice.

"Not really," said the vampire. "There are so many other things. But where were we? You want to know how it happened, how I became a vampire."

"Yes," said the boy. "How did you change, exactly?"

"I can't tell you exactly," said the vampire. "I can tell you about it, enclose it with words that will make the value of it to me evident to you. But I can't tell you exactly, any more than I could tell you exactly what is the experience of sex if you have never had it."

The young man seemed struck suddenly with still an-

other question, but before he could speak the vampire went on. "As I told you, this vampire Lestat, wanted the plantation. A mundane reason, surely, for granting me a life which will last until the end of the world; but he was not a very discriminating person. He didn't consider the world's small population of vampires as being a select club, I should say. He had human problems, a blind father who did not know his son was a vampire and must not find out. Living in New Orleans had become too difficult for him, considering his needs and the necessity to care for his father, and he wanted Pointe du Lac.

"We went at once to the plantation the next evening, encoined the blind father in the master bedroom, and I proceeded to make the change. I cannot say that it consisted in any one step really—though one, of course, was the step beyond which I could make no return. But there were several acts involved, and the first was the death of the overseer. Lestat took him in his sleep. I was to watch and to approve; that is, to witness the taking of a human life as proof of my commitment and part of my change. This proved without doubt the most difficult part for me. I've told you I had no fear regarding my own death, only a squeamishness about taking my life myself. But I had a most high regard for the life of others, and a horror of death most recently developed because of my brother. I had to watch the overseer awake with a start, try to throw off Lestat with both hands, fail, then lie there struggling under Lestat's grasp, and finally go limp, drained of blood. And die. He did not die at once. We stood in his narrow bedroom for the better part of an hour watching him die. Part of my change, as I said. Lestat would never have stayed otherwise. Then it was necessary to get rid of the overseer's body. I was almost sick from this. Weak and feverish already, I had little reserve; and handling the dead body with such a purpose caused me nausea. Lestat was laughing, telling me callously that I would feel so different once I was a vampire that I would laugh, too. He was wrong about that. I never laugh at death, no matter how often and regularly I am the cause of it.

"But let me take things in order. We had to drive up the river road until we came to open fields and leave the overseer there. We tore his coat, stole his money, and saw to it his lips were stained with liquor. I knew his wife, who lived in New Orleans, and knew the state of desperation she would suffer when the body was discovered. But more than sorrow for her, I felt pain that she would never know what had happened, that her husband had not been found drunk on the road by robbers. As we beat the body, bruising the face and the shoulders, I became more and more aroused. Of course, you must realize that all this time the vampire Lestat was extraordinary. He was no more human to me than a biblical angel. But under this pressure, my enchantment with him was strained. I had seen my becoming a vampire in two lights: The first light was simply enchantment; Lestat had overwhelmed me on my deathbed. But the other light was my wish for self-destruction. My desire to be thoroughly damned. This was the open door through which Lestat had come on both the first and second occasions. Now I was not destroying myself but someone else. The overseer, his wife, his family. I recoiled and might have fled from Lestat, my sanity thoroughly shattered, had not he sensed with an infallible instinct what was happening. Infallible instinct. . . ." The vampire mused. "Let me say the powerful instinct of a vampire to whom even the slightest change in a human's facial expression is as apparent as a gesture. Lestat had preternatural timing. He rushed me into the carriage and whipped the horses home. 'I want to die,' I began to murmur. 'This is unbearable. I want to die. You have it in your power to kill me. Let me die.' I refused to look at him, to be spellbound by the sheer beauty of his appearance. He spoke my name to me softly, laughing. As I said, he was determined to have the plantation."

"But would he have let you go?" asked the boy. "Under any circumstances?"

"I don't know. Knowing Lestat as I do now, I would say he would have killed me rather than let me go. But this was what I wanted, you see. It didn't matter. No, this was what I thought I wanted. As soon as we reached the house, I

jumped down out of the carriage and walked, a zombie, to the brick stairs where my brother had fallen. The house had been unoccupied for months now, the overseer having his own cottage, and the Louisiana heat and damp were already picking apart the steps. Every crevice was sprouting grass and even small wildflowers. I remember feeling the moisture which in the night was cool as I sat down on the lower steps and even rested my head against the brick and felt the little wax-stemmed wildflowers with my hands. I pulled a clump of them out of the easy dirt in one hand. "I want to die, kill me," I said to the vampire. "Now I am guilty of murder. I can't live." He sneered with the impudence of people listening to the obvious lies of others. And then in a flash he fastened on me just as he had on my man. I thrashed against him wildly. I dug my boot into his chest and kicked him as fiercely as I could, his teeth stinging my throat, the fever pounding in my temples. And with a movement of his entire body, much too fast for me to see, he was suddenly standing disdainfully at the foot of the steps. "I thought you wanted to die, Louis," he said.

The boy made a soft, abrupt sound when the vampire said his name which the vampire acknowledged with the quick statement, "Yes, that is my name," and went on.

"Well, I lay there helpless in the face of my own cowardice and fainfulness again," he said. "Perhaps so directly confronted with it, I might in time have gained the courage to truly take my life, not to whine and beg for others to take it. I saw myself turning on a knife then, languishing in a day-to-day suffering which I found as necessary as penance from the confessional, truly hoping death would find me unawares and render me fit for eternal pardon. And also I saw myself as if in a vision standing at the head of the stairs, just where my brother had stood, and then hurrying my body down on the bricks.

"But there was no time for courage. Or shall I say, there was no time in Lestat's plan for anything but his plan. 'Now listen to me, Louis,' he said, and he lay down beside me now on the steps, his movement so graceful and so personal that at once it made me think of a lover. I recoiled.

But he put his right arm around me and pulled me close to his chest. Never had I been this close to him before, and in the dim light I could see the magnificent radiance of his eye and the unnatural mask of his skin. As I tried to move, he pressed his right fingers against my lips and said, "Be still. I am going to drain you now to the very threshold of death, and I want you to be quiet, so quiet that you can almost hear the flow of blood through your veins, so quiet that you can hear the flow of that same blood through mine. It is your consciousness, your will, which must keep you alive." I wanted to struggle, but he pressed so hard with his fingers that he held my entire prone body in check: and as soon as I stopped my abortive attempt at rebellion, he sank his teeth into my neck."

The boy's eyes grew huge. He had drawn farther and farther back in his chair as the vampire spoke, and now his face was tense, his eyes narrow, as if he were preparing to weather a blow.

"Have you ever lost a great amount of blood?" asked the vampire. "Do you know the feeling?"

The boy's lips shaped the word *no*, but no sound came out. He cleared his throat. "No," he said.

"Candles burned in the upstairs parlor, where we had planned the death of the overseer. An oil lantern swayed in the breeze on the gallery. All of this light coalesced and began to shimmer, as though a golden presence hovered over me, suspended in the stairwell, softly entangled with the railings, curling and contracting like smoke. 'Listen, keep your eyes wide,' Lestat whispered to me, his lips moving against my neck. I remember that the movement of his lips raised the hair all over my body, sent a shock of sensation through my body that was not unlike the pleasure of passion...."

He mused, his right fingers slightly curled beneath his chin, the first finger appearing to lightly stroke it. "The result was that within minutes I was weak to paralysis. Panic-stricken, I discovered I could not even will myself to speak. Lestat still held me, of course, and his arm was like the weight of an iron bar. I felt his teeth withdraw with such a

keenness that the two puncture wounds seemed enormous, lined with pain. And now he bent over my helpless head and, taking his right hand off me, bit his own wrist. The blood flowed down upon my shirt and coat, and he watched it with a narrow, gleaming eye. It seemed an eternity that he watched it, and that shimmer of light now hung behind his head like the backdrop of an apparition. I think that I knew what he meant to do even before he did it, and I was waiting in my helplessness as if I'd been waiting for years. He pressed his bleeding wrist to my mouth, said firmly, a little impatiently, 'Louis, drink.' And I did. 'Steady, Louis,' and 'Hurry,' he whispered to me a number of times. I drank, sucking the blood out of the holes, experiencing for the first time since infancy the special pleasure of sucking nourishment, the body focused with the mind upon one vital source. Then something happened." The vampire sat back, a slight frown on his face.

"How pathetic it is to describe these things which can't truly be described," he said, his voice low almost to a whisper. The boy sat as if frozen.

"I saw nothing but that light then as I drew blood. And then this next thing, this next thing was . . . sound. A dull roar at first and then a pounding like the pounding of a drum, growing louder and louder, as if some enormous creature were coming up on one slowly through a dark and alien forest, pounding as he came, a huge drum. And then there came the pounding of another drum, as if another grant were coming yards behind him, and each grant, intent on his own drum, gave no notice to the rhythm of the other. The sound grew louder and louder until it seemed to fill not just my hearing but all my senses, to be throbbing in my lips and fingers, in the flesh of my temples, in my veins. Above all, in my veins, drum and then the other drum; and then Lestat pulled his wrist free suddenly, and I opened my eyes and checked myself in a moment of reaching for his wrist, grabbing it, forcing it back to my mouth at all costs; I checked myself because I realized that the drum was my heart, and the second drum had been his." The vampire sighed. "Do you understand?"

The boy began to speak, and then he shook his head. "No . . . I mean, I do," he said. "I mean, I . . ."

"Of course," said the vampire, looking away.

"Wait, wait!" said the boy in a welter of excitement. "The tape is almost gone. I have to turn it over." The vampire watched patiently as he changed it.

"What happened then?" the boy asked. His face was moist, and he wiped it hurriedly with his handkerchief.

"I saw as a vampire," said the vampire, his voice now slightly detached. It seemed almost distracted. Then he drew himself up. "Lestat was standing again at the foot of the stairs, and I saw him as I could not possibly have seen him before. He had seemed white to me before, starkly white, so that in the night he was almost luminous; and now I saw him filled with his own life and own blood: he was radiant, not luminous. And then I saw that not only Lestat had changed, but all things had changed.

"It was as if I had only just been able to see colors and shapes for the first time. I was so enthralled with the buttons on Lestat's black coat that I looked at nothing else for a long time. Then Lestat began to laugh, and I heard his laughter as I had never heard anything before. His heart I still heard like the beating of a drum, and now came this metallic laughter. It was confusing, each sound running into the next sound, like the mingling reverberations of bells, until I learned to separate the sounds, and then they overlapped, each soft but distinct, increasing but discrete, peals of laughter." The vampire smiled with delight. "Pearls of bells.

"Stop looking at my buttons," Lestat said. "Go out there into the trees. Kid yourself of all the human waste in your body, and don't fall so madly in love with the night that you lose your way!"

"That, of course, was a wise command. When I saw the moon on the flagstones, I became so enamored with it that I must have spent an hour there. I passed my brother's oratory without so much as a thought of him, and standing among the cottonwood and oaks, I heard the night as if it were a chorus of whispering women, all beckoning me to

their breasts. As for my body, it was not yet totally converted, and as soon as I became the least accustomed to the sounds and sights, it began to ache. All my human fluids were being forced out of me. I was dying as a human, yet completely alive as a vampire; and with my awakened senses, I had to preside over the death of my body with a certain discomfort and then, finally, fear. I ran back up the steps to the parlor, where Lestat was already at work on the plantation papers, going over the expenses and profits for the last year. 'You're a rich man,' he said to me when I came in. 'Something's happening to me,' I shouted.

"You're dying, that's all; don't be a fool. Don't you have any oil lamps? All this money and you can't afford whale oil except for that lantern. Bring me that lantern."

"Dying!" I shouted. "Dying!"

"It happens to everyone," he persisted, refusing to help me. As I look back on this, I still despise him for it. Not because I was afraid, but because he might have drawn my attention to these changes with reverence. He might have calmed me and told me I might watch my death with the same fascination with which I had watched and felt the night. But he didn't. Lestat was never the vampire I am. Not at all." The vampire did not say this boastfully. He said it as if he would truly have had it otherwise.

"*Alors*," he sighed. "I was dying fast, which meant that my capacity for fear was diminishing as rapidly. I simply regret I was not more attentive to the process. Lestat was being a perfect idiot. 'Oh, for the love of hell!' he began shouting. 'Do you realize I've made no provision for you? What a fool I am! I was tempted to say, 'Yes, you are,' but I didn't. 'You'll have to bed down with me this morning. I haven't prepared you a coffin.'"

The vampire laughed. "The coffin struck such a chord of terror in me I think it absorbed all the capacity for terror I had left. Then came only my mild alarm at having to share a coffin with Lestat. He was in his father's bedroom meantime, telling the old man good-bye, that he would return in the morning. 'But where do you go, why must you live by such a schedule!' the old man demanded, and Lestat be-

came impatient. Before this, he'd been gracious to the old man, almost to the point of sickening one, but now he became a bully. 'I take care of you, don't I? I've put a better roof over your head than you ever put over mine! If I want to sleep all day and drink all night, I'll do it, damn you!' The old man started to whine. Only my peculiar state of emotions and most unusual feeling of exhaustion kept me from disapproving. I was watching the scene through the open door, enthralled with the colors of the counterpane and the positive riot of color in the old man's face. His blue veins pulsed beneath his pink and grayish flesh. I found even the yellow of his teeth appealing to me, and I became almost hypnotized by the quivering of his lip. 'Such a son, such a son,' he said, never suspecting, of course, the true nature of his son. 'All right, then, go. I know you keep a woman somewhere; you go to see her as soon as her husband leaves in the morning. Give me my rosary. What's happened to my rosary?' Lestat said something blasphemous and gave him the rosary...."

"But . . ." the boy started.

"Yes?" said the vampire. "I'm afraid I don't allow you to ask enough questions."

"I was going to ask, rosaries have crosses on them, don't they?"

"Oh, the rumor about crosses!" the vampire laughed.

"You refer to our being afraid of crosses?"

"Unable to look on them, I thought," said the boy.

"Nonsense, my friend, sheer nonsense. I can look on anything I like. And I rather like looking on crucifixes in particular."

"And what about the rumor about keyholes? That you can . . . become stean and go through them?"

"I wish I could," laughed the vampire. "How positively delightful I should like to pass through all manner of different keyholes and feel the tickle of their peculiar shapes. No." He shook his head. "That is, how would you say today . . . bullshit?"

The boy laughed despite himself. Then his face grew serious.

"You mustn't be so shy with me," the vampire said. "What is it?"

"The story about stakes through the heart," said the boy, his cheeks coloring slightly.

"The same," said the vampire. "Bull-shit," he said, carefully articulating both syllables, so that the boy smiled. "No magical power whatsoever. Why don't you smoke one of your cigarettes? I see you have them in your shirt pocket."

"Oh, thank you," the boy said, as if it were a marvelous suggestion. But once he had the cigarette to his lips, his hands were trembling so badly that he mangled the first fragile book match.

"Allow me," said the vampire. And, taking the book, he quickly put a lighted match to the boy's cigarette. The boy inhaled, his eyes on the vampire's fingers. Now the vampire withdrew across the table with a soft rustling of garments. "There's an ashtray on the basin," he said, and the boy moved nervously to get it. He stared at the few butts in it for a moment, and then, seeing the small waste basket beneath, he emptied the ashtray and quickly set it on the table. His fingers left damp marks on the cigarette when he put it down. "Is this your room?" he asked.

"No," answered the vampire. "Just a room."

"What happened then?" the boy asked. The vampire appeared to be watching the smoke gather beneath the overhead bulb.

"Ah . . . we went back to New Orleans posthaste," he said. "Lestat had his coffin in a miserable room near the ramparts."

"And you did get into the coffin?"

"I had no choice. I begged Lestat to let me stay in the closet, but he laughed, astonished. 'Don't you know what you are?' he asked. 'But is it magical? Must it have this shape?' I pleaded. Only to hear him laugh again. I couldn't bear the idea, but as we argued, I realized I had no real fear. It was a strange realization. All my life I'd feared closed places. Born and bred in French houses with lofty ceilings and floor-length windows, I had a dread of being enclosed. I felt uncomfortable even in the confessional in

church. It was a normal enough fear. And now I realized as I protested to Lestat, I did not actually feel this anymore. I was simply remembering it. Hanging on to it from habit, from a deficiency of ability to recognize my present and exhilarating freedom. 'You're carrying on badly,' Lestat said finally. 'And it's almost dawn. I should let you die. You will die, you know. The sun will destroy the blood I've given you, in every tissue, every vein. But you shouldn't be feeling this fear at all. I think you're like a man who loses an arm or a leg and keeps insisting that he can feel pain where the arm or leg used to be.' Well, that was positively the most intelligent and useful thing Lestat ever said in my presence, and it brought me around at once. 'Now, I'm getting into the coffin,' he finally said to me in his most disdainful tone, 'and you will get in on top of me if you know what's good for you.' And I did. I lay face-down on him, utterly confused by my absence of dread and filled with a distaste for being so close to him, handsome and intriguing though he was. And he shut the lid. Then I asked him if I was completely dead. My body was tingling and itching all over. 'No, you're not then,' he said. 'When you are, you'll only hear and see it changing and feel nothing. You should be dead by tonight. Go to sleep.'

"Was he right? Were you . . . dead when you woke up?"

"Yes, changed. I should say. As obviously I am alive. My body was dead. It was some time before it became absolutely cleansed of the fluids and matter it no longer needed, but it was dead. And with the realization of it came another state in my divorce from human emotions. The first thing which became apparent to me, even while Lestat and I were loading the coffin into a hearse and stealing another coffin from a mortuary, was that I did not like Lestat at all. I was far from being his equal yet, but I was infinitely closer to him than I had been before the death of my body. I can't really make this clear to you for the obvious reason that you are now as I was before my body died. You cannot understand. But before I died, Lestat was absolutely the most overwhelming experience I'd ever had. Your cigarette has become one long cylindrical ash."

"Oh!" The boy quickly ground the filter into the glass. "You mean that when the gap was closed between you, he lost his . . . spell?" he asked, his eyes quickly fixed on the vampire, his hands now producing a cigarette and match much more easily than before.

"Yes, that's correct," said the vampire with obvious pleasure. "The trip back to Pointe du Lac was thrilling. And the constant chatter of Lestat was positively the most boring and disheartening thing I experienced. Of course as I said, I was far from being his equal. I had my dead limbs to contend with . . . to use his comparison. And I learned that on that very night, when I had to make my first kill!"

The vampire reached across the table now and gently brushed an ash from the boy's lapel, and the boy stared at his withdrawing hand in alarm. "Excuse me," said the vampire. "I didn't mean to frighten you."

"Excuse me," said the boy. "I just got the impression suddenly that your arm was . . . abnormally long. You reach so far without moving!"

"No," said the vampire, resting his hands again on his crossed knees. "I moved forward much too fast for you to see. It was an illusion."

"You moved forward? But you didn't. You were sitting just as you are now, with your back against the chair."

"No," repeated the vampire firmly. "I moved forward as I told you. Here, I'll do it again." And he did it again, and the boy stared with the same mixture of confusion and fear. "You still didn't see it," said the vampire. "But, you see, if you look at my outstretched arm now, it's really not remarkably long at all." And he raised his arm, first finger pointing heavenward as if he were an angel about to give the Word of the Lord. "You have experienced a fundamental difference between the way you see and I see. My gesture appeared slow and somewhat languid to me. And the sound of my finger brushing your coat was quite audible. Well, I didn't mean to frighten you, I confess. But perhaps you can see from this that my return to Pointe du Lac was a feast of new experiences, the mere swaying of a tree branch in the wind a delight."

"Yes," said the boy, but he was still visibly shaken. The vampire eyed him for a moment, and then he said, "I was telling you . . ."

"About your first kill," said the boy.

"Yes, I should say first, however, that the plantation was in a state of pandemonium. The overseer's body had been found and so had the blind old man in the master bedroom, and no one could explain the blind old man's presence. And no one had been able to find me in New Orleans. My sister had contacted the police, and several of them were at Pointe du Lac when I arrived. It was already quite dark, naturally, and Lestat quickly explained to me that I must not let the police see me in even minimal light, especially not with my body in its present remarkable state; so I talked to them in the avenue of oaks before the plantation house, ignoring their requests that we go inside. I explained I'd been to Pointe du Lac the night before and the blind old man was my guest. As for the overseer, he had not been here, but had gone to New Orleans on business.

"After that was settled, during which my new detachment served me admirably, I had the problem of the plantation itself. My slaves were in a state of complete confusion, and no work had been done all day. We had a large plant then for the making of the indigo dye, and the overseer's management had been most important. But I had several extremely intelligent slaves who might have done his job just as well a long time before, if I had recognized their intelligence and not feared their African appearance and manner. I studied them clearly now and gave the management of things over to them. To the best, I gave the overseer's house on a promise. Two of the young women were brought back into the house from the fields to care for Lestat's father, and I told them I wanted as much privacy as possible and they would all of them be rewarded not only for service but for leaving me and Lestat absolutely alone. I did not realize at the time that these slaves would be the first, and possibly the only ones, to ever suspect that Lestat and I were not ordinary creatures. I failed to realize that their experience with the supernatural was far greater than

that of white men. In my own inexperience I still thought of them as childlike savages barely domesticated by slavery. I made a bad mistake. But let me keep to my story. I was going to tell you about my first kill. Lestat bungled it with his characteristic lack of common sense."

"Bungled it?" asked the boy.

"I should never have started with human beings. But this was something I had to learn by myself. Lestat had us plunge headlong into the swamps right after the police and the slaves were settled. It was very late, and the slave cabins were completely dark. We soon lost sight of the lights of Pointe du Lac altogether, and I became very agitated. It was the same thing again: remembered fears, confusion. Lestat had he any native intelligence, might have explained things to me patiently and gently—that I had no need to fear the swamps, that to snakes and insects I was utterly invulnerable, and that I must concentrate on my new ability to see in total darkness. Instead, he harassed me with condemnations. He was concerned only with our victims, with finishing my initiation and getting on with it.

"And when we finally came upon our victims, he rushed me into action. They were a small camp of runaway slaves. Lestat had visited them before and picked off perhaps a fourth of their number by watching from the dark for one of them to leave the fire, or by taking them in their sleep. They knew absolutely nothing of Lestat's presence. We had to watch for well over an hour before one of the men—they were all men—finally left the clearing and came just a few paces into the trees. He unhooked his pants now and attended to an ordinary physical necessity; and as he turned to go, Lestat shook me and said, 'Take him.' The vampire smiled at the boy's wide eyes. 'I think I was about as horrified as you would be,' he said. 'But I didn't know then that I might kill animals instead of humans. I said quickly I could not possibly take him. And the slave heard me speak. He turned, his back to the distant fire, and peered into the dark. Then quickly and silently, he drew a long knife out of his belt. He was naked except for the pants and the belt, a tall, strong-armed, sleek young man.

He said something in the French patois, and then he stepped forward. I realized that, though I saw him clearly in the dark, he could not see us. Lestat stepped in back of him with a swiftness that baffled me and got a hold around his neck while he pinned his left arm. The slave cried out and tried to throw Lestat off. He sank his teeth now, and the slave froze as if from snakebite. He sank to his knees, and Lestat fed fast as the other slaves came running. 'You sicken me,' he said when he got back to me. It was as if we were black insects utterly camouflaged in the night, watching the slaves move, oblivious to us, discover the wounded man, drag him back, fan out in the foliage searching for the attacker. 'Come on, we have to get another one before they all return to camp,' he said. And quickly we set off after one man who was separated from the others. I was still terribly agitated, convinced I couldn't bring myself to attack and feeling no urge to do so. There were many things, as I mention, which Lestat might have said and done. He might have made the experience rich in so many ways. But he did not."

"What could he have done?" the boy asked. "What do you mean?"

"Killing is no ordinary act," said the vampire. "One doesn't simply glut oneself on blood." He shook his head. "It is the experience of another's life for certain, and often the experience of the loss of that life through the blood, slowly. It is again and again the experience of that loss of my own life, which I experienced when I sucked the blood from Lestat's wrist and felt his heart pound with my heart. It is again and again a celebration of that experience; because for vampires that is the ultimate experience." He said this most seriously, as if he were arguing with someone who held a different view. "I don't think Lestat ever appreciated that, though how he could not, I don't know. Let me say he appreciated something, but very little, I think, of what there is to know. In any event, he took no pains to remind me now of what I'd felt when I clamped on to his wrist for life itself and wouldn't let it go; or to pick and choose a place for me where I might experience my first

kill with some measure of quiet and dignity. He rushed headlong through the encounter as if it were something to put behind us as quickly as possible, like so many yards of the road. Once he had caught the slave, he gagged him and held him, bearing his neck. 'Do it,' he said. 'You can't turn back now.' Overcome with revulsion and weak with frustration, I obeyed. I knelt beside the bent, struggling man and clamping both my hands on his shoulders, I went into his neck. My teeth had only just begun to change, and I had to tear his flesh, not puncture it; but once the wound was made, the blood flowed. And once that happened, once I was locked to it, drinking . . . all else vanished.

'Lestat and the swarm and the noise of the distant camp meant nothing. Lestat might have been an insect buzzing, lighting, then vanishing in significance. The sucking mesmerized me; the warm struggling of the man was soothing to the tension of my hands; and there came the beating of the drum again, which was the drumbeat of his heart—only this time it beat in perfect rhythm with the drumbeat of my own heart, the two resounding in every fiber of my being, until the beat began to grow slower and slower, so that each was a soft rumble that threatened to go on without end. I was drowsing, falling into weightlessness, and then Lestat pulled me back. 'He's dead, you idiot!' he said with his characteristic charm and tact. 'You don't drink after they're dead! Understand that!' I was in a frenzy for a moment, not myself, insisting to him that the man's heart still beat, and I was in an agony to clamp onto him again. I ran my hands over his chest, then grabbed his wrists. I would have cut into his wrist if Lestat hadn't pulled me to my feet and slapped my face. This slap was astonishing. It was not painful in the ordinary way. It was a sensational shock of another sort, a rapping of the senses, so that I spun in confusion and found myself helpless and staring, my back against a cypress, the night pulsing with insects in my ears. 'You'll die if you do that,' Lestat was saying. 'He'll suck you right down into death with him if you cling to him in death. And now you've drunk too much, besides; you'll be ill.' His voice grated on me. I had the urge to throw myself

on him suddenly, but I was feeling just what he'd said. There was a grinding pain in my stomach, as if some whirlpool there were sucking my insides into itself. It was the blood passing too rapidly into my own blood, but I didn't know it. Lestat moved through the night now like a cat and I followed him, my head throbbing, this pain in my stomach no better when we reached the house of Pointe du Lac.

'As we sat at the table in the parlor, Lestat dealing a game of solitaire on the polished wood, I sat there staring at him with contempt. He was numbing nonsense. I would get used to killing, he said; it would be nothing. I must not allow myself to be shaken. I was reacting too much as if the 'mortal coil' had not been shaken off. I would become accustomed to things all too quickly. 'Do you think so?' I asked him finally. I really had no interest in his answer. I understood now the difference between us. For me the experience of killing had been cataclysmic. So had that of sucking Lestat's wrist. These experiences so overwhelmed and so changed my view of everything around me, from the picture of my brother on the parlor wall to the sight of a single star in the topmost pane of the French window, that I could not imagine another vampire taking them for granted. I was altered, permanently; I knew it. And what I felt most profoundly, for everything, even the sound of the playing cards being laid down one by one upon the shining rows of the solitaire, was respect. Lestat felt the opposite. Or he felt nothing. He was the sow's ear out of which nothing fine could be made. As boring as a mortal, as trivial and unhappy as a mortal, he chattered over the game, belittling my experience, utterly locked against the possibility of any experience of his own. By morning, I realized that I was his complete superior and I had been sadly cheated in having him for a teacher. He must guide me through the necessary lessons, if there were any more real lessons, and I must tolerate in him a frame of mind which was blasphemous to life itself. I felt cold towards him. I had no contempt in superiority. Only a hunger for new experience, for that which was beautiful and as devastating as my kill. And I saw that if I were to maximize every experience available

to me, I must exert my own powers over my learning. Lestat was of no use.

"It was well past midnight when I finally rose out of the chair and went out on the gallery. The moon was large over the cyresses, and the candlelight poured from the open doors. The thick plastered pillars and walls of the house had been freshly whitewashed, the floorboards freshly swept, and a summer rain had left the night clean and sparkling with drops of water. I leaned against the end pillar of the gallery, my head touching the soft tendrils of a jasmine which grew there in constant battle with a wisteria, and I thought of what lay before me throughout the world and I throughout time, and resolved to go about it delicately and reverently, learning that from each thing which would take me best to another. What this meant, I wasn't sure myself. Do you understand me when I say I did not wish to rush headlong into experience, that what I'd felt as a vampire was far too powerful to be wasted?"

"Yes," said the boy eagerly. "It sounds as if it was like being in love."

The vampire's eyes gleamed. "That's correct. It is like love." He smiled. "And I tell you my frame of mind that night so you can know there are profound differences between vampires, and how I came to take a different approach from Lestat. You must understand I did not snub him because he did not appreciate his experience. I simply could not understand how such feelings could be wasted. But then Lestat did something which was to show me a way to go about my learning.

"He had more than a casual appreciation of the wealth at Pointe du Lac. He'd been much pleased by the beauty of the china used for his father's supper, and he liked the feel of the velvet drapes, and he traced the patterns of the carpets with his toe. And now he took from one of the china closets a crystal glass and said, 'I do miss glasses.' Only he said this with an impish delight that caused me to study him with a hard eye. I disliked him intensely! 'I want to show you a little trick,' he said. 'That is, if you like glasses.' And after setting it on the card table he came out

on the gallery where I stood and changed his manner again into that of a stalking animal, eyes piercing the dark beyond the lights of the house, peering down under the arching branches of the oaks. In an instant, he had vaulted the railing and dropped softly on the dirt below, and then lunged into the blackness to catch something in both his hands.

When he stood before me with it, I gasped to see it was a rat. 'Don't be such a damned idiot,' he said. 'Haven't you ever seen a rat?' It was a huge, smuggling field rat with a long tail. He held its neck so it couldn't bite. 'Rats can be quite nice,' he said. And he took the rat to the wine glass, slashed its throat, and filled the glass rapidly with blood. The rat then went hurtling over the gallery railing, and Lestat held the wine glass to the candle triumphantly. 'You may well have to live off rats from time to time, so wipe that expression off your face,' he said. 'Rats, chickens, cattle. Travelling by ship, you damn well better live off rats, if you don't wish to cause such a panic on board that they search your coffin. You damn well better keep the ship clean of rats.' And then he sipped the blood as delicately as if it were burgundy. He made a slight face. 'It gets cold so fast'.

"Do you mean, then, we can live from animals?" I asked.

"Yes." He drank it all down and then casually threw the glass at the fireplace. I stared at the fragments. 'You don't mind, do you?' He gestured to the broken glass with a sarcastic smile. 'I surely hope you don't, because there's nothing much you can do about it if you do mind.'

"I can throw you and your father out of Pointe du Lac, if I mind," I said. I believe this was my first show of temper.

"Why would you do that?" he asked with mock alarm. 'You don't know everything yet . . . do you?' He was laughing then and walking slowly about the room. He ran his fingers over the satin finish of the spinet. 'Do you play?' he asked.

"I said something like, 'Don't touch it!' and he laughed at me. 'I'll touch it if I like!' he said. 'You don't know, for

example, all the ways you can die. And dying now would be *such a calamity, wouldn't it?*

"There must be someone else in the world to teach me these things," I said. "Certainly you're not the only vampire! And your father, he's perhaps seventy. You couldn't have been a vampire long, so someone must have instructed you..."

"And do you think you can find other vampires by yourself? They might see you coming, my friend, but you won't see them. No, I don't think you have much choice about things at this point, friend. I'm your teacher and you need me, and there isn't much you can do about it either way. And we both have people to provide for. My father needs a doctor, and then there is the matter of your mother and sister. Don't get any mortal notions about telling them you are a vampire. Just provide for them and for my father, which means that tomorrow night you had better kill fast and then attend to the business of your plantation. Now to bed. We both sleep in the same room, it makes for far less risk."

"No, you secure the bedroom for yourself," I said. "I've no intention of staying in the same room with you."

"He became furious. 'Don't do anything stupid, Louis. I warn you. There's nothing you can do to defend yourself once the sun rises, nothing. Separate rooms mean separate security. Double precautions and double chance of notice.' He then said a score of things to frighten me into complying, but he might as well have been talking to the walls. I watched him intently, but I didn't listen to him. He appeared frail and stupid to me, a man made of dried twigs with a thin, creaking voice. 'I sleep alone,' I said, and gently put my hand around the candle flames one by one. 'It's almost morning!' he insisted.

"So lock yourself in," I said, embracing my coffin, hoisting it and carrying it down the brick stairs. I could hear the locks snapping on the French doors above, the swoosh of the drapes. The sky was pale but still sprinkled with stars, and another light rain blew now on the breeze from the river, speckling the flagstones. I opened the door

of my brother's oratory, showing back the roses and thorns which had almost sealed it, and set the coffin on the stone floor before the prie-dieu. I could almost make out the images of the saints on the walls. 'Paul,' I said softly, addressing my brother, 'for the first time in my life I feel nothing for you, nothing for your death, and for the first time I feel everything for you, feel the sorrow of your loss as if I never before knew feeling.' You see..."

The vampire turned to the boy. "For the first time now I was fully and completely a vampire. I shut the wood blinds flat upon the small barred windows and bolted the door. Then I climbed into the satin-lined coffin, barely able to see the gleam of cloth in the darkness, and locked myself in. That is how I became a vampire."

AND THERE YOU WERE," said the boy after a pause, "with another vampire you hated."

"But I had to stay with him," answered the vampire. "As I've told you, he had me at a great disadvantage. He hinted there was much I didn't know and must know and that he alone could tell me. But in fact, the main part of what he did teach me was practical and not so difficult to figure out for oneself. How we might travel, for instance, by ship, having our coffins transported for us as though they contained the remains of loved ones being sent here or there for burial; how no one would dare to open such a coffin, and we might rise from it at night to clean the ship of rats—things of this nature. And then there were the shops and businessmen he knew who admitted us well after hours to outfit us in the finest Paris fashions, and those agents