

# A plague of dreams

## Double preface /1

*Silent stillness  
The weight of questions  
And of pain for the pain of the world  
-- Feel it --  
Without faith without release  
Softly whistling in the dark  
No tightrope walking on karma anymore.*

*And so breath you again,  
Again raise up your head, straighten your back to steps  
Remeasuring earth with the soles of your feet  
And touch again water and fur and blood,  
Turn around at the turn of light and darkness  
With the useless vain pride of the living  
To die again your fragmentary deaths.*

LPL

## Double preface /2

*Each spring, the calycanthus flowering  
awakens the worst passions in me.  
LdL*

*Now it is echoing,  
the frightening laugh of gods, powerful and raw,  
exempted from both conscience and discourse.  
His execution we've imagined, yet  
the despot lives anew and still he lives,  
only intent on His arcane designs  
always requiring multifarious death  
and births, and the renewal of the pain.  
Terrible spring is upon us again  
and there's no strenght for a tyrannicide.*

*But it is I the tyrant, I'm that face,  
impassive, drinking still the hearts of men  
refusing still to learn what He won't know.  
At dawn the tyrant may be killed at last  
and from the pain the world may yet be free,  
or this pain freed from its bond to the world.  
The thick writing of things, deeply engraved  
on the surface of soul by the sharp claw  
of doubtful thought, does leave  
no room to alternatives. I'm going away.*

*On the threshold of sunlight calls me back,  
cool, unexpected, a calycanthus scent.*

\*\*\*

**1.** This series of stories begins with a series of images, flowing in front of the mind's eyes like neat, clean-cut photographs of a movie. Imagine, then.

Imagine a classic titles' shot. The main character is getting dressed. All in close-up. You don't get to see his face. Like in *Dangerous Liaisons*, *The Big Chill*, or *Blue Steel*...

But. But instead of a formal attire (whatever the time the story is set in) you see casual, frayed, unironed clothes, although they look like being just taken in after having been dried in the sun after washing. You almost smell the fresh scent of the breeze clinging to the thread.

The man is clothing himself from scratch. You can see the texture of each garment shifting up or down on his skin, unaffectedly, unselfconsciously covering in turn shoulders, arms, loins...

Some unusual particulars can be seen. A key-hanger made with a leather browband from a bridle. A silver rat-tail bracelet slipping down along the back of the hand. The movement of the wrist as the watch disappears into a pocket. Fingers raking through hair, tying it up in a ponytail with a leather thong. Private gestures made out of habit.

Last, he wears a three-quarter jacket of dull black leather, which he leaves unbuttoned.

And when he is ready and you would expect the camera to wide out and let us see him whole...

Cut to a medium shot on an empty room, and,

Turn three-quarters of a circle and,

Cut to,

Ext. Night.

Wet avenue, streetlamps.

Spring.

Brisk breeze.

A man -he, Louis- standing against the light. We see his back.

Close up a bit.

He rubs the root of his nose between thumb and forefinger, head slightly bent, as though he tries to erase a painful memory.

A step on the cobblestones, from a dark alley behind him. He raises his head at once, he turns around, fast as thought, but with a quietness devoid of alarm.

"Oh, it's you!" he says softly, surprised and happy.

"Who else?" answers the newcomer.

"Quite. Who else?" he echoes back.

Their profiles while their eyes lock silently, both wrapped in a secret half smile of their own.

Then Lestat throws an arm across his shoulder and they go together along the road.

**2.** Face downwards he slept, near me, above me: large and solid his lithe warm body. One arm abandoned across my stomach, the other gathered between shoulder and chest, his long legs close and stretched on the mattress, his features completely absorbed in sleep like a child or a napping cat. I pushed back a strand of his silky hair, brushing my finger lightly along his smooth temple. And I felt I would never, ever wish to hurt him, and I knew I would hurt him, inevitably, when I would wake him - as I was going to do - to ask and demand from him the gesture which for one of us is the most intimate, because it is pleonastic: that of undressing. And I knew he would love me all the same.

*What follows is based on posts 263 and following of the RPG-Spec Hollywood Vampires. As the sequel, Dagger of the Mind, remained for so long tantalizingly absent from its site, hiding somewhere among discarded backups and misplaced files, I was inevitably led to figure out a version of my own...*

## **1: Lestat** **What dreams may come**

*Grazie alla Lupa Grigia per aver illuminato il senso di rovesciare il vecchio motto latino.*

**1.** Lestat felt cold in his sleep. He turned around uneasily on the soiled mattress of the stuffy motel room, unconsciously feeling for the familiar form of Louis at his side, but he found nothing. Through his hand, stretched on the cover, a spike of anger spread along his arm and quivered at last like an arrow in the very core of his heart. Sleeping, he heard a voice reading Mercutio's curse from his beloved *Romeo and Juliet*. The voice, he realized, was his own, modulated, mellow, but the words were somewhat different: "A curse of dreams on all your houses...". The voice was drowned by a rumble from above, faint at the beginning, rapidly growing to a cosmic cry: "The eleventh plague, a plague of dreams!". A rush of adrenaline chilled his spine as he relived in this dream - this nightmare - the happenings of the night.

Fiercely he stood in the middle of the crowded room, looking straight in Louis' eyes, trembling with an anger that barely covered his desperation. He heard himself say those cruel words, those lies... "I don't love you. I don't care about you. I caused your nightmare and I'd do it again in a second. And my feelings about you will never, ever change". Here, he'd done it, surely now that look of unbearable hurt on Louis' face would disappear from his sight as he would turn away and leave without a word. Now shoving away the rest of the coven as well would be easy, now the worst was over, he would soon be left alone to grieve, maybe condemned to relive this self-inflicted agony day after day in the dreams he conjured upon himself as well as upon the others.

But this one dream was taking quite another turn. Louis did not go. He stood silently, eyes locked on his, until Lestat felt he could not bear it a single moment longer. And just when he was going to look away, not even his mad resolve strong enough to keep him from crying, Louis began to speak. "Very well. Fine" he said, his voice now in the grip of an icy self-control and as cold as a swordblade. "But, sir, you are forgetting something. You are taking no count of *\*my\** feelings for you. You weave and unweave history as it pleases you, and you are the best judge surely of your own soul, but you have not and never will have jurisdiction over mine. And I happen to love you, sir, so I am going to stay right here". "WHY? Why do you love me?" roared Lestat. "My reasons are no concern of yours, sir. You may have the power to kill me, but you haven't the power to cut me off from your life. Dead, undead or alive, I will always be with you. And *\*that\** you can't do anything about".

Lestat startled awake, breathing heavily, heart racing. What the hell?!... This is what you may call a nightmare! He had tried to make everybody hate him, beginning with the man who had always been the closest to his soul, the only one to withstand every crazy leap of his heart; he thought he had crushed him down with just a few choice words, and what had he found instead? A love like a weapon, stainless, unbreakable, pliant and resilient like tempered steel, challenging even his own preternatural powers, a love he had never known until now, when it slipped glistening out of its velvet sheath and dazzled him with its light. "Louis..." he gasped under his breath.

"Yes, Lestat?...". How soft, how cool the voice coming from the shadow. Lestat tried to sit up, wake out, penetrate the early evening dusk thickening in the room. A familiar silhouette was sitting on an armchair in the darkest corner, composed, still. Lestat's heart skipped a beat. "Louis!" he cried again "I didn't..." "Be quiet now. Don't talk" the reply came in the same even tone. "But..." tried once more Lestat. "The plague of dreams won't cease until the chosen people will be released from captivity. The vaults are open, Lestat. You have taken off the lid. The dead are rising. All forgotten gestures, all unconfessed thoughts, all will be revealed, every secret will be proclaimed from every roof and tower. Be quiet now. It will pass. They will all come out, and then they will pass. The world itself will pass, and then this plague will be over".

"I'm sorry" Lestat heard himself say, his voice small with pain. "I know" answered Louis "but you and I are here". He rose slowly, came toward the bed, offered his hand to help Lestat stand up. "Icarus, Phaeton, Epimeteos, my shining Achilles, come, and wade through this plague with me".

**2.** Louis had fed early that summer evening. The nightly sky was still translucent with the last glimmer of a glorious sunset when he turned toward home. Lestat had already gone out when Louis had woken. He tried to fight off the demons of fear and horror that haunted him every time Lestat was not with him. Every time it got more difficult, or he was just cracking up. He walked along the avenue under the great trees he had seen being planted such a long time

ago. Many had died, some had been replaced, but some were still growing. He seemed to feel the cool pale sap coursing through their limbs, fresh, soothing. Passing along, he brushed his fingers against the piebald bark of the plane trees. It was not enough to calm him. He stopped, pressed his brow on the trunk of the last one in the row, and he murmured "Bless me, plane, because I am so tired".

Lights were out in the windows of the apartment. Louis had not the heart to go inside alone. He found himself walking to the stable. It was dark there also, but the darkness was alive with the quiet sound of horses munching hay or sniffing their bedding, preparing to lie down for the night. On impulse, Louis went to the saddlery, tucked his Kieffer dressage saddle and gel pad under his arm, picked the Sprenger double bridle from its hook, and went to the box where his black Trakhener mare was waiting for him, nickering softly as he came near. Without speaking, he slid the door open and greeted her with some feathery breaths on her nose. She sniffed his hair, tenderly, then she lowered her head to lick his fingers. She was shining in the faint light of the moon coming in through the dormer window. Quickly he brushed her, combed out her mane and rich flowing tail and picked out her feet. Then without thinking, almost like a sort of lucky charm, he also lightly groomed the Friesian stallion Lestat used to ride and saddled both. He was checking the fit of the leather-covered curb chain on the mare when he heard the faintest noise in the corridor. He held his breath in happiness: the charm had worked, Lestat had come. Louis realized he was making himself heard on purpose, both to avoid startling him or the horses and to ascertain whether he was welcome just then. "Lestat," he said softly. "I hoped you would come. Will you join me for a ride in the moonlight?"

White light shone on the grassy hills and through the lace of leaves. They had walked in silence their horses along suburban roads, shod feet ringing sharply, rhythmically, on the pavement. Now they had reached open ground. They left the road and took a light canter on the soft springy turf. Lestat's Friesian was snorting a little against the single-rein Centaur bit he used to ride him in. Louis whistled under his breath, and his mare rounded her back and neck and slowed to a collected trot. Lestat reined in his horse, and to Louis' untold relief he lightened his hands as soon as the big black stallion paired himself with the mare. Louis straightened his shoulders, tucked his seat forward on the saddle, took up just a sigh more of the curb reins, leaving the bradoon's hang down, and the lithe body of his Trakehner began dancing in a lively passage. Lestat looked at them out of the corner of his eye. So beautiful! Two bodies and one fluid, easy movement. It had ever been that way, since the beginning. Louis on horseback was a thing of absolute beauty, a joy forever. His horses loved him, loved his body upon them. He never seemed to have to think about what to do, it all came natural, both for him and any horse he rode, on his face the abstract look of a buddhist monk in meditation. It was an eerie feeling. Lestat felt excluded from something deep and subtle he could not understand. He gave rein, and his horse thrust himself powerfully forward, stretching low through the long grass. It was only a moment before Louis followed him, the mare's feet swift and silent on his tracks.

They galloped together to the end of the meadow, then Louis circled right, slowing down. Lestat saw he was smiling. "What about some cross-country jumping?" he said. Lestat threw him a concerned look. "But you're on a dressage saddle. Would it be safe?". "Surely not," Louis answered. He took his feet out of the stirrups, reached down, undid the elastic girth, shifted out of the saddle and let it slip to the ground on the right side. "I'll take it up later. Aren't you coming?". The Trakehner mare had picked up on what was going to happen and pranced impatiently, eager to go. Louis just had to lean a little on his left for her to turn and take a brisk canter. Lestat chirruped to his horse: it was his turn to follow. He saw the mare in front of him, her stride regular, determined, her tail flowing. He saw her approach the open ditch closing the meadow on the farthest end without changing her rhythm, take off and land lightly on the far side. His horse was getting excited and he hurried a little, ending up by putting in an extra stride before jumping. Lestat glimpsed Louis smile to them over his shoulder. "Just let him choose when" Lestat heard him say. "Or have you really to be in charge every single time?!". Then they forgot everything in the surge of motion, wind, moonshine.

It was well past midnight when they approached home at last. The horses chomped contentedly their bits, walking on loose reins to their rest, necks stretched, sweat almost dry on them. "Wouldn't you stay with me a little longer?" Louis asked in a low voice, without looking up. Lestat felt the unspoken urgency of the request, and his own desire mingled with it so hot it hurt. He could not answer with words, but slipped down to sit on a bale of straw in the courtyard, his back to the wall. There he remained without moving, without talking, while Louis washed down both horses in the warm night and walked them dry, one on each hand, the sound of their feet resounding in the quiet of the night. Lestat's eyes and heart filled with the simple grace he was beholding, the calm efficiency of each gesture, the tenderness of those beloved hands on

the black glistening necks. He remembered something Louis had told him once about being around horses. "It's not *Citius altius fortius*," he had said, "Rather it's *Lentius altius dulcius*". "Like good lovemaking," Lestat had commented then, and Louis had blushed.

At last Louis put them in their boxes, gave them a slice of hay, rinsed the caked foam from the bits and girths, and finally came to stand in front of him. Lestat closed his eyes and leaned his head on the wall. "Come," he heard Louis murmuring, "Come and sit with me". He took Lestat by the hand and gently made him rise. Lestat followed him in the mare's box. They sat on the clean straw, their back to the door, and again there was silence. The mare smelled sweet and salty as she moved quietly around, turning sometimes to take a sip of water from the bucket in the corner. Then Louis spoke, so softly Lestat could hardly make out his words.

"This is a good place for fending off nightmares. She knows what it's all about. Horses are wise. They can manage terror, and be happy all the same. They can mop up ours, too. Do you feel it? Feel the peace here". Lestat was feeling it. He was afraid to break it, so instead of answering he just put his hand on Louis' knee at his side. Louis covered it with his own. "Remember this. I try to. Remember this when the horror seems so real. This is real as well. This is a place to return to. I wanted so much to have you here, feeling this with me, and now you are here. I'm happy".

It was almost dawn when they quietly slid out of the box and made their way home. The black mare was sleeping, curled down, and did not wake.

*This bit is in resonance with Journeys of the Heart, part 3, Foxfire, chapter 9, by AprilMist.  
What if this particular dream had caught up with Lestat before the next evening...?*

**3.** It had happened, then. Lestat felt a chill remembering. They had made love. Tenderly, passionately, with all the gentleness and the roughness their knowledge of each other infused in every gesture. Completely surrendering to the unity they became, in the time without time when they were locked in blood. Surrendering together to sleep, when it came upon them, one in the arms of the other. Yet, they had both known it was the last time. Lestat knew his heartbeat declared it, stronger than the shroud of silence between their minds: /I am leaving you/. He had heard in Louis' heartbeat the answer: /It is time to leave me/. Lestat had slipped out of the bed at the first dusk, and he had not looked behind. Without a sound he had closed the door and gone out in the cool scentless night, to his new mortal lover.

Then... What had happened? He walked in darkness, and the darkness was empty of promises. He was alone. A long time seemed to have passed. It was a different season, a different place, a different epoch. Strange clothes on his limbs. He found himself in unfamiliar surroundings. The barren outskirts of a city he didn't recognize. The crumbling brick wall of an abandoned factory. A faint rustling on the other side. Lestat quickly climbed on top of the wall and looked below. The moonlit yard was filled with garbage. Wooden, painted models for huge pieces of machinery, broken parts of cast-iron components, every sort of rubble, weeds and bushes growing among it. The hot, dry smell of coal, no, of carbon and machine oil, and the fine, black, abrasive dust settled everywhere told him this place had once been a foundry. A long black snake, a *miroldo*, slipped fast along the foot of the wall. He sat there on top of the wall, waiting. Waiting for what?

A silhouette came against the light from the far end of the yard. Lestat recognized it at once. That walk, those shoulders, the way he turned his head. In his hands something very white, gleaming in the darkness. A bottle of milk. Something eerie in the silence. He moved soundlessly. Louis had never been so soundless, had never cared to be. He walked toward the wall. Lestat half feared, half hoped that he would see him, crouching there above his head, but he seemed blind to anything beyond his immediate goal. He poured some milk in a flat bowl at the foot of the wall, and Lestat was startled when he saw the *miroldo* coming out of the shadows and slowly coiling in the moonlight.

Now the light caught Louis also, and Lestat could see him at last.

He looked starved. His hair was dirty and tangled. His hands were dirty too, and his face was streaked with old crusts of blood-tears left to dry, oxidized brown by time. His clothes were tatters. He looked like washing or clothing didn't matter anymore if it wasn't for Lestat to see. Like he forgot to feed since it wasn't to be warm and full for Lestat. Like he didn't read anymore since Lestat was not there to read to, or to talk to about the books. Like he didn't even think anymore, so that no thought of Lestat could come to trouble him. Like being a person, rather than a mere walking body, was not important now that his time with Lestat had come to an end. And it seemed that even living or dying didn't make a difference anymore, unless to keep witness to memories which would otherwise be lost forever.

Lestat was appalled. There was no vibration of life coming from that once beloved figure, only silence, void, dirt. Nothing human, nothing vampiric even. A revenant. A mindless creature, who had let itself get utterly lost, like the discarded envelope of a once cherished, and now burned love-letter. He tried to cry out to him, and no voice came. He tried to jump down and run to him, but he couldn't. Then the haggard, filthy figure raised his face at last and looked him straight in the eyes. Lestat felt a cold shiver. It was his own face, staring at him, blank of all expression. He felt himself falling backwards from the wall, and the fall never ended.

He woke with a start, trembling, and for a while he couldn't manage to open his eyes. He couldn't even feel the outline of his own body. Then gravity finally gave him the sense of boundaries and position. He was curled tight around Louis' back. He was holding him. They were in bed, naked under the featherlight cashmere throw. They had made love before dawn. Louis still slept, a frown of pain on his beautiful face. He moved weakly in his arms, as though he was trying in vain to wake up. Lestat's heart was racing. What was real, what was a dream? What had they shared in the circle of blood before falling asleep? Was it real, had it been real... their parting? He didn't know anymore. He was scared to know. He held Louis in his arms and he couldn't remember anything beyond this. No other love. He began shaking him, trying to break the lingering slumber. A moan escaped Louis' lips when at last he opened his eyes, and they were dark with sorrow and fear.

"No, no, no, no, not anymore, go now please, leave me" he whispered hoarsely. "Not real, not real, not real, you're not real... Louis, quit it immediately!" he ordered himself harshly. "Quit making it up!"

Lestat took Louis' face in his hands. So cold it was. He tried to look into those eyes who refused to meet his. "Louis, listen to me. Louis, you were dreaming. I have been dreaming too. Louis, wake up!". He grabbed Louis' hand and he passed it among his own hair, forcing him to repeat the familiar gesture. A moment later the limp fingers were clutching a strand of golden hair, tugging at it near the root, near the nape of the neck, hurting him. Startled, unbelieving, Louis' eyes finally raised to meet Lestat's.

"Don't let me wake. Oh God don't let me wake" he gasped.

"You are awake. We both are. We have been dreaming. I fear to think it may have been the same dream".

"It was no dream. You are leaving" Louis' voice stopped just before breaking. "I thought you would be gone before I woke".

"Never. Never. My love, never. It is not what I want. I don't want this. I love you forever".

"*Nothing's forever not even five minutes when you're heading for the finish line*" Louis' words were a whisper. "But love me now, this moment, one moment more, and I don't want to see further, nor dreams nor reality".

Then no more words were said.

*The quotation is from Finish Line by Lou Reed, in the album Set the Twilight Reeling, 1996.*

## **2: Armand** ***Domine, quis sustinebit?***

*In loving memory of La Rossa, the cat with the wolf-eyes,  
who chose to face death alone  
1990-2000*

**1.** Armand woke with a start. Breathless, eyes wide open and unseeing, he hugged himself under the heavy embroidered cover. He tried to look at the familiar room around him, at Daniel still deeply asleep at his side, but the images of his dream kept superimposing themselves to the physical reality in which he suddenly felt drowning. This was a new dream. This was not a memory, cruelly reenacted during the day's deathly slumber, nor a nightmare actually, no, not a nightmare at all; rather, an imperative communication from his deepest self. Armand forced himself to breath slowly and regularly, and it didn't take long before his heart slowed down. Heavy, heavy: how long since he had last recurred to this! Heavy arms, heavy legs. He willed himself down, following his dream. Warm, warm all over, and heavy, like the coming of sleep after a late hunt just before dawn. Heavy, warm, down... What was it then?

The figures in his dream floated again in front of him. He was in an ancient garden he had never been in before, lush with groves of fruit trees and great oaks scattered on vast lawns. Deers and peacocks roamed quietly around under an almost full moon, bathed in the fresh green scent of growing grass. He felt in peace like he had not since the days when his immortal life had just begun. He felt at home among the ancient trees, the contented deers and birds. Then he heard an owl calling, piercing the night with its cry. He raised his eyes, and at a distance, in the shadow of an elm, he saw a silhouette he knew only too well. "Maestro!" he gasped, and without thinking he moved at once towards the dark figure standing. He began running, with the airborne run even vampires know only in dreams, towards those hands, that embrace, aching for feeling them again. But the figure did not move. Armand could only glimpse his face among the shadows, and no recognition lighted those eyes. Only a curious, distant look, like a stranger who finds himself mistaken for someone else. Armand could not run anymore. That unrecognizing stare transfixed him, stopped him in his tracks. And already the vision vanished, the garden melted away, and only those distant eyes remained. Marius did not know him anymore.

**2.** Louis and Daniel were sitting, silent, on top on the World Trade Center in New York, waiting for darkness to thread deeper. The lights of the city were beginning to blink and glitter under them, and the stars would soon be obliterated. Only Orion was still clearly visible, halfway up from the eastern horizon. Daniel sighed. Once again he wondered where Armand may be now. One more time he had slipped off on his own just after sunset. Daniel was torn between his keenness to help and the feeling of being a complete goof about it, every time he tried. Usually he would end up angry with Armand and with himself, but tonight he was only sad, for both. Louis looked at him out of the corner of his eye.

"It's difficult, is it?" he said. "He's keeping everything inside like it was a plague waiting to strike all those around him. He can't see his own light, or can't believe it". Daniel turned to him, wide-eyed. "That's it! He can't believe he is the fine person I love. He makes me feel like, because I love him, and he believes he's worth nothing, I'm worth nothing also". Louis smiled quietly. "It took me a long time to get to his pain. He is so very good at hiding it. It took me..." Daniel saw him shudder a little, although the night was not cold. "It took me Memnoch to get near it, only to understand how much worse his pain is than mine. He is more than just hurt and frightened, he's ashamed of himself also". Louis averted his eyes, looking at the blue-black sky. In a low voice, almost speaking to himself, he added: "No seventeen-year-old boy can be expected to fight for his convictions against a moral authority, however self-appointed. How could he trust himself to do that? How could he hold fast alone, against what looked like a whole world condemning him for daring to be happy?"

Daniel shifted his weight, uneasy. "I just wish he'd let me love him. He lets me, for a while, but whenever he could use my help, he just disappears. I'm not saying I can erase his pain, but I'd try to make him happy now". Louis took some time before answering. His voice was sad. "I don't think you can help. Not now. He won't let your love help him". He paused again. "He needs someone much easier". "What do you mean?" Daniel felt a prick of jealousy. He may not be the easiest guy on earth to live with, but... Louis blinked at the cold rush of emotion coming from those violet eyes. "Oh, I don't mean another of us, or a human for that matter. I mean someone \*really\* easier. Don't you know where he is now? He goes there almost every

night, before you get up. Come" he said, and he rose to his feet. "Won't you?". He tended his hand to Daniel, who frowned, hesitated, and then took it. Without another word, without a sound, they were gone. A single seagull, resting for the night on top of that craggy, artificial cliff, put his head under his wing and at last drifted to sleep.

**3.** The alley was darkly lit by a single streetlamp. Lurid rays glittered on broken glass, discarded tins and all the bits and pieces a crazily affluent society leaves in its wake. Louis put his hand, lightly, on Daniel's arm, signalling to him to be quiet and careful. Something moved behind the last litter bin at the dead end of the alley. Daniel could just make out a faint sound he didn't recognize. He looked better... and there was Armand! Daniel guessed, more than he saw, what was happening. Armand's white sweater, Armand's grey jeans, Armand's slender shoulders as he crouched among rubbish, and in front of him a small furry form stroking itself to his legs. A cat! a small alley cat, a brown tabby mottled with orange brindles, and it was purring softly, like cats do when they know they don't have to beg. Armand was stroking it tenderly. The cat rose its golden eyes, wild and serious like a wolf's, to meet his, then squeezed them a little. "I love you too" they barely heard Armand whisper, as he answered the cat by blinking in his turn. The cat reared a little against his knee, then meowed almost silently. "Ready for supper, Red One?" Armand took out of the front of his sweater a can of food. He had fed already, and he had carried the can next his own skin to warm it for the cat. Still crouching, resting his chin on his arms crossed upon his knees, he watched with rapt attention as the animal enjoyed its food.

Daniel could not turn off his eyes. He had never seen such transparent purity in Armand's demeanor. He had never seen him so powerful, yet so considerate and respectful, as he was now in the company of a stray cat at the bottom of a dirty alley. He could not see the expression in his eyes, but he suddenly realized how similar Armand's gestures just now were to those he so much loved in Marius.

"Let's get away now" Louis breathed "before he's finished".

**4.** Daniel felt his legs still shaking when they sat on the grass in a park some blocks away. He could not find any words for what he had seen. Louis looked at him in silence while Daniel thoughtfully passed a hand in his hair.

"Is that what you mean by \*easy\*?" he said in the end. "Yes, that's it" Louis answered slowly. "You can't lie to a cat. A cat won't lie to you. No words, no seduction, no treason, not even the multiple, ever-conflicting layers of a human soul: only truth, seeping out of the body and its movements, echoing in the tone of the voice. No obligation to love, either. A cat won't feel bound to love you every day, every moment, or in every situation. One's relationship with a cat moves on from the basis of its past, but is not bound by it. You get back what you put into it. It's freedom". Daniel felt the warmth of Louis' voice filling him with something more akin to hope than he would have thought possible. He heard him say again "He feels worthy of that cat now, if not of you... yet".

Daniel stared at Louis, realization dawning on him. He blinked in surprise. Louis blinked in return, like Armand had answered the cat. Daniel was flooded with relief. "The cat loves him... it's this, is it? It has no reason to, other than his being...". "Impeccable to her?" Louis interrupted softly. "\*It\* is a \*she\*, you know. Yes, he is impeccable, and he also has no reason for that, other than love. He may not have a great opinion of himself, but that cat has, and I think he's beginning to believe her... At last".

"I wish he would believe me also. Whenever I try to tell him that I love him, he smiles that icy smile of his and then he looks away. I can never relax and just enjoy myself with him, he's always ready to throw in a prickly line. Yet he spies me when I'm asleep. I wake up and he's there, staring at me, unreadable. He frightens me sometimes". "I know" Louis said under his breath, and he meant "I remember". He searched for words, found them, and went on.

"His happiness is like a small child. It has never grown up. His pain has matured to adulthood, strong and wary, but not his happiness. He doesn't want to help it grow, he doesn't even want to have anything to do with a thing so young and tender. Twice already being young and happy and trustful has spelled tragedy to him and his loved ones. So now he always keeps himself and you on your toes, defenses up, ready to fight, never relaxed. Happiness is dangerous. Relaxing is losing control. His joy must stay within and not be seen, because there is no safe place out there. Danger begins immediately outside his skin. He is so accomplished in defending himself from happiness! He wears so many different masks that you never know which is his true face. When he keeps you at a distance, it is so that you can't see how very happy you



make him. He won't go to his maker because Marius knows him so thoroughly that he could never hide his joy from him, and this frightens to death".

Daniel sighed deeply, overwhelmed by all this. "What can I do?" he asked finally, his voice small and almost childlike. "Be patient. Wait. It can take a long time to heal five hundred years of shame and fear. But we have time, if nothing else". Louis sighed in his turn, "He may have to go back to the beginning, somehow face again all the people in his life. The dead will be the hardest". Saddened, Louis stroked a finger on his brow between the eyes. "He will go to Marius. Oh, I know they have met a number of times, but neither has dared to thread again into their true intimacy. You are the latest in his life". He looked at Daniel at his side. The boy was trembling slightly. Louis sat nearer and put an arm around his shoulders. "He'll come to you in the end". His voice was low and thick as velvet. "Just as he will first have to go back there alone. He never, ever chose, until he chose you".

Daniel looked up at the sky. His vampiric sight could just make out the glimmer of Aldebaran, the Bull's eye, shining bright yellow over New York in the late winter sky. "I'll wait for him" he said.

**5.** Armand was dreaming again. An earlier, heavier sleep than usual had taken him, and he now lied curled up on the satin couch, still wearing his clothes and shoes. A light frown passed on his face. A strange dream...

He was in the alley again, sitting with legs crossed, arms resting on his knees, his back to the dirty concrete wall, staring at nothing. Next to him the cat was also sitting quietly, her dapper little feet circled by her neatly curled tail, light shining on her mottled brown and orange hair. She was purring softly to herself, almost inaudibly. Armand felt her purring in his stomach. He felt her trust in him, her pleasure in his silent company. He knew then that she didn't love him because of the food he gave her or the care he took of her, but, quite simply, for himself. He realized she considered him as an equal and a partner in the enterprise of being. He felt so moved by this sudden certainty that he closed his eyes.

When he opened them again, his vision was changing. The wall opposite them was disappearing, and the view was opening in a shimmer of nightly darkness. They now looked over a desolate expanse of dried-up grass and stones, coursed by shallow, gravelly ditches. A light haze covered the scene, closing off the horizon. But a cool breeze rose, faint and pleasant, and the haze was slowly dispersed. In the distance, across the wasteland, could now be seen the ancient garden, with its tall majestic trees in their full glory of budding leaves. And it seemed like the garden was flowing towards them: a wave of grass expanded in their direction, covering the bare wasteland with a carpet of glistening, translucent blades vibrant with the drone of crickets.

Armand rose his eyes to the peacock-blue sky and saw the brightest stars he could ever imagine. They were pouring out coloured light, white and blue and red and yellow and orange, and among them he saw Saturn moving through space and coming down toward them, shining pearly within its iridescent ring. Astonished, he understood it was a celebration in honor of them both, the cat and himself, companions and warriors, both shining in their turn in the newly-born splendor of things. Again he closed his eyes in disbelief, and again the vision changed. It was lighter now, like just before dawn on an April morning after a night rain, when the earth sends out its young damp perfume. A blackbird chuckled briefly near them, then took wing. And someone was coming. Armand rose to his feet, but could not move.

Marius was coming across the meadow, threading lightly on the grass, once again cloaked so that Armand could not see his face. Silent, he came nearer. Without stopping he pushed back his cape, discovering the dear features Armand had not dared to think about since so long. "*Vien qua fio, zogia mia, anima mia. Andemo casa*", "Come, son, my joy, my soul. Let's go home" he heard him say in that mellow, ancient Venetian of his, that elder brother of Italian, which Alighieri in *De vulgari eloquentia* had called fuzzy, *hirsutus*. Armand was breathless with happiness at the touch of that voice, so deep, so tender. Marius was here, Marius had come for him, and now he had circled his shoulders with that strong, agile arm of his, and was leading him back, to the garden, home. "*No ti vien?*", "Aren't you coming?" his Master asked the cat over his shoulder. She yawned, rose up, lifted her tail straight in the air, tilted its tip forward, and followed them.

### **3: Marius Of mirrors, and fear**

**1.** Stifling. Stifling. Walls closing over him, again. Marius recognized the nightmare at once. He knew what was coming. The passages between damp moldy bricks getting narrower, the sky above unreachable. The urgency to go home, yet his limbs heavier at every step. The desperate stubborn fight to keep moving. Feet slipping on the slimy stones, limbs scratched while he forced his way through, and always, everywhere, the stifling smoke. There it was, the palace, wrapped in flames and screams, black figures writhing at the windows, and he strained his body in a last wrenching effort as he tried to cry out, but he was sinking down below the pavement level, unable to move, unable to speak, unable even to close his eyes and shut the horror out, unable to fling himself in the bonfire and die with his beloved. Then the breathless darkness.

But this time the dream did not end there. A gray light came upon him in the formless place he was. Fighting to regain control of his body, he thrust himself headlong into it, deep into his own terror, as he always did into anything which frightened him, to see it through and beyond. Fog drowning the landscape. He could barely see his way. Sleep pulling at him. So easy to lie down and close his eyes in this cold gray place. But he knew somehow that the road he was threading led to his home. He commanded himself to walk on.

The fog cleared slowly, and with a gasp of recognition he found himself in front of the arched doorway of the palace. Music came from the lighted windows. The door was ajar. He stepped inside. The wide, low, beamed hall, spreading all the way to the water entrance at the other side, looked different. Different furniture, different paintings on the walls. People he did not remember, mixed with his own apprentices and servants, went about their business, all chatting merrily, passing him by, glancing at him with mild interest in their forgetful eyes. He followed the music up the marble staircase. He crossed the landing to the hall of the feasts. He stopped short in his tracks, and suddenly the changes in his own house and the opulence of the masked ball unfolding in front of him did not matter anymore.

Amadeo was on the far side of the hall, composedly sitting on a Savonarola chair, presiding the feast, beautiful as a young god in white velvet and gold filigree. Marius' heart skipped a beat. He had eyes for him only, his boy, his lover, alive and safe and radiant and masterful. Marius had hoped and waited just for this to happen, that his beloved would flourish in happiness and powerful grace. He came nearer, trembling inside. Amadeo was whispering something to an elderly man standing on his right, his shining curls flowing along his left cheek. Then he raised his right hand to gather them back from behind, a gesture so much his own, so very young and intimate, that Marius could not but cry his name. Amadeo looked up at him for a moment, then smiled a cold, ironic smile, the smile of a monarch bothered by a beggar. Marius felt himself dying in that instant, reeling in dizziness.

**2.** He woke up in a muck sweat. It took some time before he managed to open his eyes, blindness clinging to him like a sticky tar of discomfort. Powerless, useless, and worse, a corruptor. He had been powerless to protect those he loved most, to defend their lives, their happiness. Now he saw he was useless also. They were happy. They were strong. They didn't need him, or even recognize him. But there was something worse. Night after night he had lived again the horror of his innocent Amadeo dying among the flames together with everyone and everything he had ever loved. Now he was chilled by a deeper horror, the mortal fear that he had survived, beautiful and full of grace and power and all the gifts he had bestowed upon him in love, but scornful and evil and cold like that cruel, princely smile. He knew he had not gone wrong when he had seen the purity of soul at the bottom of the frightened eyes of the abused child. He clung now to the memory like a lifeline. It had been a single flashing moment, the hit of the beak of the Paramahansa bird, a single perfect moment of definition and awareness. But then, how could that soul have soured? What had Marius done wrong, if everything had been done and given in love? Yet it had to be his fault. He had often wondered why Amadeo had not come to him after knowing he was alive. Now this dream showed him why he himself had not tried to reach him. It had been fear, pure and simple. Fear to find him changed, together with the deeper fear to find himself failing the standard he had always tried so hard to conform to. He had hoped to be able to avoid this confrontation, letting the past slip behind him forever. But now the past had caught up with him, and he found that time had compounded his fear with the added guilt of cowardice.

Marius saw the sun had just set under the horizon, the light still vivid enough to hurt, but he could not wait. He needed to go out, at once. Silently, he opened the heavy larchwood door and for a second he thought he was still dreaming. Sitting on the ground between the wooden

jambes of the arch at the far side of the small antechamber, one knee raised, arms resting on it, was Amadeo. He was looking the other way, and Marius could see the cascade of his hair catching the last of the sunset like they were on fire. Almost as a mirror image of the dream, he rose his left hand and from behind pulled back a strand of hair, his face turning toward him in the movement. His dark eyes widened, sparkling joy as he jumped up and stood in front of him, his right hand on his left shoulder like he used to do when emotion threatened to overcome him. Marius could not believe he was not envisioning the fond memory of the times when his beloved, still in his mortal days, waited out the night sitting like that on the doorstep, just to be the first to greet him at his return and take off his boots before the servants came. He leaned on the door and closed his eyes for a moment, asking, praying to be able to stand it. A chill went through him when he felt those small, strong hands circling his thighs. Amadeo was kneeling in front of him, head bowed under that fiery hair, hugging his legs. "*Paron, de grazia, lassème star qua. Paron, ve prego, guardème*", "Master, I beg, let me stay here. Master, I pray you, look at me".

Marius leaned toward him, took him by his shoulders, helped him stand, pushed back the auburn curls and looked at that dear face staring at him, tight with emotion verging on fear. With a sudden pang of anguish, he realized how dangerous and surely painful coming there so early had been for the boy, the fierce rays of the sun still vibrating and burning in the sky and on his skin. Yet here he was. Marius felt a slow smile warming him, and his heart beat faster when he saw the same smile reflect itself on Amadeo's lips. Then his nightmare caught up with him.

"Don't lose your time with me, my son. Don't waste your life. I could not take care of you, or anyone else. I tried, I failed. I have no power to give you happiness, and I have been a coward. I am unworthy of you".

"Master," came the answer in a whisper. "I beg you to forgive me for staying away so long. I was afraid. I was ashamed of what I had chosen to endure, and to do, rather than die. I am afraid still, but if I would not come back to you, in the end I would lose even the memory of the happiness you gave me. I would not let it happen, because it is the core of my whole life, and I cannot live without it, or without you, anymore". Amadeo reached up and timidly brushed a kiss on his master's cheek, light as a feather. Marius in his turn took his hand, put it to his lips and kissed the smooth palm near the wrist. "I cannot either, my love. I was dying without you. I thank you for coming" he sighed.

Out they went together, silent under the clear night sky, Amadeo at his left as they were wont to do. He searched Marius' hand with his, and he threaded his slender fingers with his maker's like the wind threads itself among the leaves of a willow.

**3.** The night embraced the sea. The empty sand glimmered faintly under the light of the stars and the moon was but a thin letter traced in deep gold on the deep blue of the sky. They were sitting side by side on the beach, looking at the innumerable waves coming and going like the years of their immortal lives. Armand slipped his arm under his maker's and began to speak, barely audible over the quiet sound of the sea.

"I dreamt of you. With all my powers I tried not to think of you and not to remember, but every morning sleep takes me, and every day I dreamt of you. I was in a garden as perfect and joyful as paradise, and you were lord and master there, and you didn't know me anymore". His voice broke suddenly, but he went on, as though waiting to regain composure would rob him of a last chance to save his own life. "Then yesterday I dreamt again. Look at me".

Marius turned to meet his eyes. He gazed at them a long time, glistening, shimmering, and he slowly lost focus on the beach and the sea and the features of the face dearest to him. A vision emerged in those eyes as he stared in rapture. He saw Armand shining like a light beyond the wasteland, and beside him the smaller light of another being, a cat. He knew the light was love. He felt drawn by that double light like a moth to a taper. He felt himself moving toward them in a wave of pure happiness, so strong that he startled with a small cry.

"Did you see it? You did!". Armand was trembling in his arms. Marius closed his eyes, gathering his vision within himself, before looking once more at Armand. "I saw it. I saw it. I don't know how, but I did". His voice was warm with emotion. "Yesterday I also had a dream of you and I could not believe you were really there when I awoke".

"Tell me, Master, I pray you".

Marius' words were husky with pain as he told his nightmare of the burning palace. He felt Armand shudder at his side and bow his head, sharing the agony. "Then I saw you alive and beautiful and full of power, the master of the house, a prince feasting in glory, but...". For a moment he could not continue. "But you were something evil. Your eyes were cold and pitiless.

Your smile was the smile of a god, but giving pain was as much an amusement for you as the feast you were offering". Marius covered his face with his hands. "I was devastated when I thought you were dead. Then it was hard to think that you may be alive and happy without me, I need you so much. But it frightened me most that you may have changed, and that it would have been my fault".

Marius felt the touch of Armand's hand on his bent neck, fingers pushing tenderly through his hair along the base of the skull, then closing on the roots, turning his head to him, delicate and imperious. But Armand's face was pale with anxiety.

"My lord and Master, look at me! Look at me now, outside our dreams, and tell me what you see. Tell me who I am, here, now, because I don't know anymore, not since that night of fire".

Silence became solid and humming under the stars, for a long minute. Then Marius spoke, his voice young with happiness and ringing certainty.

"I see my boy, my love, my Amadeo. I see you alive and safe and beautiful. I see you grown up like I always hoped you would, wise and kind and full of grace. I see you endowed with the power to choose, and the capacity to love, and the terrible strenght to hold on against the insufferable and even against yourself. I can't believe I made you. I am so proud of you, my son".

Marius stopped a moment. This was the most frightening thing he could remember doing, ever. But it had to be done, now, whatever the outcome. He thought it was small penance anyway for his faults.

"Amadeo" he said, his voice heavy with emotion. "Now do you look at me and tell me what is left beyond my love for you, for what it's worth".

"Master, you have given me life for the third time tonight" whispered Armand, and he curled up at his side. "I see and feel your love, unchanged. I see your pain, even worse than mine has been, so searing that for centuries I was afraid to feel it, and I still am, Master. And I see your fear, the mirror and double of my own, which has kept us apart for so long. I hate this fear, and hate myself, and yet I love you all the more for feeling it. You are not God almighty for me anymore. There is no God almighty. But you are my Master and my father, and my lover if you will want me yet, and I would not have you any different".

"Then we are giving life to each other this time, my love" Marius answered softly, and he kissed the flaming curls.

## 4: Louis

### a. Heart of a hunter

*Had we never loved so kindly,  
had we never loved so blindly,  
never met or never parted,  
we'd have never been broken-hearted.*

Robert Burns, *Fond Kiss*

Louis was sitting beside Marius at the far end of the meadow, where his horses grazed calmly under the first quarter of an April moon. They could hear the faint sound of water in the trough on the other side, continuously filled by a nearby brook. Louis had carefully arranged for drainage of the overflow, so the ground would not become dangerously muddy.

"It is not much different from my times" sighed the ancient one. "Taller horses, though," he added as an afterthought. Louis could feel Marius' happiness rippling from him, as clear as light, and he felt filled with peace.

"I would like to tell you something tonight". Louis' tone was quietly determined. "I could not yet bring myself to it, but what happened between you and Armand has changed it somehow". Marius looked at him, concern slowly spreading on his face, hearing an overtone of tightness in his voice. He covered with his large strong hand Louis' knee, and the younger vampire lowered his cheek to rest on it for a moment, taking comfort for what he wanted to say. Then he raised his head and stared in the distance at the shining black velvet of his mare.

"I know you took Armand not only because he would meet death without you, but also because you saw his beautiful soul and you knew who he would become, the love that was in him. I never was so wise. You know how I met Claudia". He drew his breath in sharply, and Marius was flooded with the pain his friend still felt just saying her name aloud. He drew himself nearer. Louis looked at him, and smiled. "Oh, I can stand it now," he said, mocking himself. He looked away again before going on.

"I didn't ask myself what sort of person she may be. I only saw a helpless creature, and I wanted to spare her more pain, like I would kill off a wounded animal. Her loveliness and sorrow were something I could not stand to see any longer. She made me think of those terrible words in Matthew's gospel: *Behold the lilies growing in the field...* She was white and wonderful as a lily, and she was being cut and thrown in the furnace. My pity for her was also pity for the world and for myself, for the eternal, incomprehensible pain of existing. And then she was made an immortal".

He was silent for a while, his eyes lost. When he spoke again, his words were grave. "She was utterly ruthless, like children can be. Yet her helplessness, and my compassion, lingered on. Her apparent childhood allowed me to avoid facing the most important question: was she really so different from me? How could I look at her like at a cat playing with his prey, cruel yet inevitable, and at the same time condemn myself for killing and feeding, as painlessly as I could? I could neither see her as evil as me, nor myself as good as I willed myself to think her. So I settled my uneasy mind to the task of giving her an education". He laughed under his breath, but his laughter was bitter.

"Maybe I hoped to prove that a born predator like she was could grow a conscience. Maybe I hoped to prove that to Lestat, who did not seem to have a conscience of his own at the time. I only got an educated predator for my efforts, all the more cunning and deadly". He leaned back on his hands, then turned to Marius. "I loved her more than ever. Can you understand? She was guilty, yet she wasn't. She only was herself, with all the energy of her indomitable little soul. No more, no less than whoever else on this green Earth of God, and at least she was never hypocritical about it". Louis paused a moment.

"She also loved you" Marius said under his breath.

"Oh, yes, she did". Louis sighed deeply. "It is written, *Thou shall not judge*. It took me until that night in Carmel Valley to see she had been teaching me much more than I ever taught her. She taught me to love against my own conscience. She taught me to accept without question what I am, and what others are. And it was she who taught me to love Lestat".

Louis raised his eyes to a solitary cloud, trailing the sky on the northeastern breeze. "I had not even realized his love for me. I could not believe somebody so completely alien may be fond of me, cherish me for the very convictions he did not share, and hold me so dear as he did. I believed love happened between twin souls". He laughed quietly. This time it was a happy

sound. "I was a fool". He lowered himself back among the grass and lied there, his long hands resting on his chest, looking up at the stars.

"I went crazy when she died. It was not only that I loved her and I knew she loved me as much. It was not even for the injustice of it. No living being deserves death as punishment, and who is judging whom, anyway? She was no more a monster than they were, or than I am". Anger had crept in his voice. He waited a moment to steady it before going on.

"It was the horrible definitiveness of it that shattered me. The story finished there, no happy ending, and all that remained was to look at it for what it was. I could not illude myself anymore that she would grow up and be good. Eventually, I had to realize she had grown already: she was a woman in her childish body, and her frustration was making her vicious. Soon she would not content herself anymore with just hurting me. She was slowly turning from a shark or a swallow, hungry and innocent, into a willful torturer, and I would not have any power to avoid it or to protect her from herself. This I was unable to face for more than a hundred years".

Marius gently brushed his cold smooth hand on Louis' furrowed brow, and he turned his head to look at him among the leaves of lush timothy. "But I still love her, more than ever" he said "And I always will. My heart breaks thinking of her. Whenever I am with Lestat, I want to cry, because she gave him to me in the end".

Marius remained silent for a while. When he spoke, it was without words. /Life is a very strange thing,/ he said. /Irreplaceable. I think humans have come to call this "a singularity". What I am certain of, after all this time,/ he went on, more serious than Louis had ever felt him, /Is that nothing ever really passes away. Things only change. Nothing is forgotten as long as one is alive. Maybe even after that. I don't know, and I don't want to. It frightens me even more than the thought of my own immortality/.

He gently picked up one of Louis' hands and stared at it, tracing with his finger the course of each fine bone beneath the skin. /In the end, we only own our awareness. So, everything is a gift not even death itself can rob/.

"It can take so long, however," sighed Louis "Before one can find a place for each bit of it, and learn to live with it". He pushed himself up on his elbow. "But we are the luckiest. We have all the time in the world, if nothing else, don't we?" he laughed.

"Indeed," Marius smiled back at him. Then a blackbird chuckled his call among the leaves of a poplar. Louis slipped back down and began to sing softly.

*Blackbird singing in the dead of night  
take this broken wing to learn to fly  
all your life  
you were only waiting for this moment to arrive...  
Blackbird, fly,  
you were only waiting for this moment to be free...*

Lennon-McCartney, *Blackbird*

## **b. Sleeping in the Devil's bed**

*Grazie alla Primiissima Dea che ha dato le primissime parole all'identità di arma e ferita.*

*I thought of you there next to me  
wearing your pretty face  
I thought of you in my bed  
You were there, bound and chained...*

Daniel Lanois, *Sleeping in the Devil's Bed*

The sun had set among the roofs of the old town, the moon was slowly floating higher, and still Louis could not wake. He was dreaming of walking hurriedly in an ancient city he did not know, yet it somehow had the taste and scent of bleak, rainy Paris in those days of *fin de siècle*, or *fin du globe*, when he had met Armand. He was trying to escape something, a vision that haunted him and that he feared to meet around every corner of the empty streets. Again and again, however he tried to change his course, he found himself returning at the same door, strangely bright in varnish red as dark blood, the only bright thing in the dreary blacks and

browns around him. He felt his fear grow until he could not stand it anymore, and in a sudden, desperate impulse he climbed the few steps and went in, his heart in his mouth.

He found himself in a room bare of furniture, walls covered all around in sheets of rippling, raw silk of a purple so dark it was almost violet, yet glowing like embers left over after a bonfire. The door itself seemed to have disappeared under that wealth of silk. The room was warm, and a rich, thick, animal perfume oozed from incense burners in the four corners. It seemed that the room revealed itself to him slowly, as he focused his attention on some item, like it happens in dreams. In the very center was a narrow bed, or rather a tatami raised on a platform, covered in black satin flowing down on the sides. And on it, his limbs shining brighter against the black gleam, with only an equally black cloth thrown over his nakedness, lied Lestat. He was bound hands and feet to the platform by fleece-covered chains. Louis could see his ice-blue eyes, astonished, frightened, yet unyielding, his perfect body, muscles moving under the smooth intact skin, and the ridge of his collar bone accenting the powerful shoulders, that most beloved place for his kisses.

Then he saw something else, and his heart seemed to stop. He saw himself. His double, all clothed in peacock blue, from his soft leather boots to his tight trousers, to the silk shirt flowing out of a rich, eighteenth-century waistcoat, to the stock tie around his neck. He saw himself, Louis, near the bed. He saw the hunger in his eyes, and even more he could feel it within, wrenching and irresistible. He saw Lestat's fear when that silent presence bent over him. He felt his unresigned helplessness. Without a word, Louis slowly raised his hands above the naked body. Still standing in his corner, unable to move, invisible to them, he could feel into himself the emotions waving through both. He heard their thoughts, ringing in different tones in his mind. He was the executioner and the victim, the weapon and the wound.

/Now I have you in my power at last,/ surged within Louis like a fountain of fierce, terrible joy /To do as I wish with you, forever/.

/He can't have me,/ rang clear Lestat's mantra, stubborn, desperate, / He can't touch my soul/.

With the slowest, quietest motion, Louis passed his fingers on Lestat's brow and cheek, down his neck, along the curve of his shoulder, resting them at last on that very place above the collarbone where the scented warmth of his body seemed to gather.

/Now you can't leave me. Now you can't put yourself in any more danger. Now I won't lose you. Now you depend on me for everything. Now I can make you happy forever. Now at last I have the power to keep you for good/.

His hand shifted lower, brushing against the solid shaft of the sternum, following the ventral line where the fine golden hairs crossed and parted. His finger hooked under the cloth covering Lestat's belly, drawing it down and to the side, oh so slowly. Lestat did not move, did not even cringe under the delicate, raping touch. Instead he stared straight in those green eyes made long with lust. "No! I don't want" he said.

"You are free to want or not want whatever you wish" was the answer, Louis' voice velvety, purring, tender and dangerous. From his corner, he thought for a moment he saw his double as a big black panther, rolling in delight and stretching, claws extended, before feeding on a coveted prey already slain. Louis rested both his hands lightly on Lestat's sides, just above his hips, then he began stroking them upwards on the flawless skin. "I don't need you to trust me. I don't want to own your soul. I only want to own your life, and now I have it all for myself".

"And what are you going to do with it?" he heard Lestat gasp, fighting the waves of desire that rushed upon him under those cold searching fingers.

"I am going," Louis whispered closing his eyes and pushing his head back, so that his dark glistening hair flowed down his shoulders, "I am going" he chanted softly, "I am going to make you die of pleasure".

And nothing but pleasure came from those hands, those lips that now brushed along Lestat's arm, climbing to his neck with agonizing tenderness, coming, going, returning, changing course, losing themselves in the hollow of an elbow or behind a knee or around the nub of an ankle, feeling the twin tense muscles of his back from scapulas to loins, tangling themselves in turn among the rich blond strands of his hair and the crisper fur under the armpits or around his sex, while Lestat's body began to move even against his will, leaning to the touch, mad with unwanted delight, his breathing shallow and fast.

A cry escaped him when at long last he fangs sharply penetrated the artery running blue across the groin, and the irresistible rapture conquered Lestat's unwilling consciousness, annihilating the last of his resistance, carrying him away, where nothing else mattered anymore.

He woke suddenly, supine on his bed, and for a second the terror gripped him that he may be chained to it in his turn. He sprang up panting. A cool darkness enveloped him, flowing

into the room from the window open on the April night. He looked around. Lestat lied on the other side of the bed, head propped on his hand, and he smiled faintly when Louis met his eyes.

"You were dreaming," he said quietly. "I saw it". His voice was thin and troubled. "Come to me". Louis let Lestat draw him down to sit beside him. "Can you remember it?"

Louis nodded silently. "May I tell you about it?". Louis could not, would not assent. Lestat was silent for a while. When he spoke at last, his voice was filled with compassion.

"I was completely in your power. I could not escape you. You could do me whatever you wished, and you ...wished to make me good. It was insufferable. You didn't try to force or cheat me to consent. You didn't lie to me as I did when I made you: you were not giving me a choice. You had that much respect for me. You didn't try to rob me of my own soul. It was complete control, pure and simple, unmasked and unashamed, performed by a will endowed with absolute power both over me, bound and chained, and on your own ambivalence. Now that at last you had allowed yourself to take your power into your hands, nothing more kept it apart from its prey. Yet control endured. Stronger than my fear, stronger than my rebellion, stronger even than your unconfessed hate, was your love for me. Your hunger for me". Lestat brushed lightly his hand on Louis' temple, damp with sweat. He bent to breathe the intimate smell.

"This I was afraid to face for two hundred years," he went on. "The intensity of your love, strenghtened by all the viciousness you have never allowed yourself to own, and yet you do own it. It is so sharp, so hard, like a perfect sparkling diamond cut out of evil, that you hide within your very heart". He sighed. "You never cease to astonish me, my love".

"I am so sorry" whispered Louis. He sat with his head bent, hands covering his face. Then he passed them among his hair and raised his eyes to meet his maker's. "Can you ever forgive me for ...for this thing?".

Lestat drew him nearer and hugged him tight. "Don't ever ask my forgiveness for your dreams. 'Every secret will be proclaimed from every roof and tower', remember? This was the control freak's ultimate erotic dream, and the devil knows I've earned as much. How many times have I made you frightened crazy that you were going to lose me forever? Moreover, I'm sure I didn't show such respect for your immortal soul when I took for granted you would gladly comply and make me a vampire in Raglan's body". Laughter rippled in his voice, and Louis could not but smile.

"And I'm not going to ask \*your\* forgiveness!" Lestat added, blinking his eye. "Won't we go out now, my beautiful hunter, before I begin to think about how to take my revenge?". He took Louis by the hand, raised him to his feet, quickly kissed him on the mouth, and a moment later the warm scented night had engulfed them.



**5: Daniel**  
**Full moon over Madrid**

*Tu che guardi verso di me  
hai visto i tori nel sonno  
e hai lasciato Madrid*

...  
*Tu che prendi a calci la notte  
bevi fiumi di vodka  
e poi ti infili i miei jeans*

...  
*Tu col cuore fuori strada*

...  
*Tu fai l'amore selvaggio  
e trovi sempre un passaggio  
per andare più in là*

Gianna Nannini, *Ragazzo* ("Latin Lover")

**1.** Troppo freddo quel letto senza di lui. Le lenzuola di seta blu scivolose come gorgi di mare tra gli scogli senza il suo svelto corpo liscio cui aggrapparsi e l'onda calda dei suoi capelli bai. Daniel si rannicchiò a palla e aspettò il sonno con un dolore in gola.

Il sonno arrivò con i sogni. E nei suoi sogni si infilava il ricordo dei sogni sognati dai tori, la notte che ubriaco e ancora mortale aveva camminato nel silenzio attorno alla Plaza de Toros illuminata dalla luna piena, e aveva udito i sogni dei tori addormentati. Giacevano sulla paglia e sognavano di ruminare. Aveva ascoltato, l'ultima pace che avrebbero avuto prima della strage. Era stato il sangue, lo sapeva. Quei pochi sorsi oscuri che aveva attinto, o carpito, al corpo luminoso che gli riempiva la mente e l'anima ogni minuto come un dolore. Era stato il suo primo dono devastante. I tori non sapevano.

Era fuggito, a piedi, verso la stazione, aveva comprato un biglietto a caso, era partito. Ora nel suo sogno di immortale riviveva quella lucida spaventosa irruzione di consapevolezza e la sua inutile fuga in cerca delle ottuse percezioni degli umani. Il terrore di trovarsi di nuovo solo con un tale insopportabile lampo di percezione l'aveva infine spinto a frugare in tasca per le ultime monete, a cacciarle in un telefono, a chiamarlo. Aveva cercato di intossicare la sua mente e il suo corpo con qualsiasi cosa nelle brevi ore che dovevano passare prima che venisse a prenderlo. Si era abbandonato a un torpore senza pensiero durante il viaggio di ritorno. Che fosse lungo, quell'intervallo di nulla, prima di dover affrontare di nuovo il buio, o la luce.

Ora ormai sapeva. Ora capiva che cos'erano cinquecento anni di testimonianza della morte. Strano che avesse compreso soltanto dopo che il silenzio irreparabile era caduto tra di loro. O forse no. Forse era stato un atto di compassione, risparmiargli quella conoscenza finché era stato possibile. Ricordava quanto insopportabile gli fosse stata l'ineluttabilità con cui lo desiderava. Era stato padrone della sua vita, una volta. Aveva lottato per esserlo, con determinazione e tenacia. Aveva rimosso dalla sua vita qualsiasi cosa non avesse scelto. Era libero. Trovarsi, all'improvviso, ad avere bisogno di lui, a ogni istante, a ogni respiro; della sua presenza o almeno del pensiero di lui, senza sapere se l'aveva scelto o se era stato scelto o se era stato il caso, o il destino, a rubargli la sua vita, lo faceva soffocare. Era sopravvissuto a malapena. Forse non sarebbe sopravvissuto, se lui non lo avesse protetto in quel modo. Se non avesse impedito che l'orrore della conoscenza si infiltrasse in un desiderio che comunque lo consumava.

Non gli aveva parlato di come trovasse le sue vittime. Non ce n'era stato bisogno. Daniel l'aveva visto, e aveva compreso. *Non come i tori*. Non riusciva a immaginare un coraggio più grande. Una notte dopo l'altra, da cinquecento anni, essere disposto a conoscere una pena tanto grande da far impallidire i colori della vita, e tuttavia non pretendere di conoscere o di giudicare chi provava quella pena... Soltanto scioglierla in una nuvola di illusioni, perché non c'è niente di reale che possa opporsi alla realtà del dolore. Neppure Louis aveva tanto coraggio. Louis non voleva sapere. Daniel era certo che se non avesse parlato per primo, quella notte, se non avesse dato di sé anche solo la scintilla del suo tono di voce, della sua curiosità, ora sarebbe stato morto. Ricordò quello che diceva sua nonna a proposito dei polli che allevava in cortile: "Io non mangio chi conosco".

Il sogno si dilatava, come una lenta marea di sizigia, e i pensieri e i ricordi vi galleggiavano sopra come detriti di una burrasca. Il ritmo del respiro dei tori. Il ritmo del sangue dei tori. Il

ritmo dei sogni dei tori. Dormendo temeva il tramonto come un rimorso: un risveglio senza di lui. Il sonno si smagliava, via via che la luce spariva dal mondo. Sentì che stava per destarsi, e non voleva. Passare dall'impotenza del passato all'impotenza del presente gli era insopportabile.

E lo sentì giungere. Ancora addormentato lo sentì entrare, inginocchiarsi accanto al letto, posarvi la fronte sulle mani, vicino alle sue. Si destò mentre le sue dita già passavano tra i riccioli lunghi, lucenti. Non si dissero nulla. Entrambi pensavano ai tori, e alla luna piena su Madrid.

**2.** Si sono appena svegliati, uno dopo l'altro, uno nelle braccia dell'altro. Armand segue con l'indice la traccia delle vene sul dorso della mano di Daniel. Mani da uomo, mani grandi, la cui lenta perfezione non nasconde le tracce dell'uso. Daniel prende la mano di Armand nella sua, la esamina, la rigira a osservarne il palmo. Una mano agile, intatta; una mano di fanciullo.

"Avevo terrore che tu aspettassi troppo," gli dice piano. "Che i nostri corpi sarebbero stati troppo diversi. Pensavo a me stesso a trentaquattro anni. Avrei avuto il doppio della tua età. Avrei potuto essere tuo padre, e sarei stato tuo figlio. L'incesto in un gioco di specchi."

Armand sospira, gli abbraccia la schiena, posando la testa sulle sue spalle.

"Lo so. Vedevo i tuoi sogni. Ma eri così interessante... Ti vedevo cambiare nel tempo, ed ero affascinato. Non ho mai avuto vent'anni, venticinque o ventotto. Non l'ho mai desiderato. Ma ti guardavo, ed eri ogni anno più bello e più forte. Non riescivo a distogliermi dal seguire le storie che il tempo accumulava, un segno dopo l'altro, su di te."

A Daniel sembra a volte di parlare con un marziano.

"Avresti voluto vedermi invecchiato, ammalato magari? Avresti voluto vedermi morire? Anche questo avresti trovato ...interessante?"

"Avrei voluto che tutta la ricchezza della tua vita si raccogliesse non solo nella tua mente e nel tuo spirito, ma anche nel tuo corpo. Non riescivo a scegliere di fare di te il mostruoso paradosso... che io sono."

Daniel si gira, lo abbraccia, affonda il viso tra i riccioli lunghi.

"Non dire così. Non pensarlo nemmeno. Sei il mio maestro, il mio padrone e il mio amore. Sei un miracolo. Un paradosso, ma di sicuro non un mostro."

Troppo vicino. Troppo tenero. Troppo felice. Rapido come il pensiero, Armand gli sfugge, si rivolta verso di lui, scopre i canini soffiando.

"Ne sei proprio sicuro?" ringhia piano.

Daniel sobbalza, poi scoppia a ridere.

"No," dice, "Ma ti amo," e afferrando il cuscino glie lo pianta sulla faccia.

"Cosa dicono del barattolo di vermi aperto?..." ridacchia Daniel dieci minuti dopo, sputando una piuma e scuotendone altre dai capelli.

"Vieni che te lo spiego," mormora Armand, e gli brillano gli occhi.

**1.** Too cold, the bed without *him*. The blue satin sheets as smooth as whirlpools surging around the rocks, without *his* lithe body to cling to, and the warm wave of *his* bay hair. Daniel curled up into a ball and waited for sleep with an ache in his throat.

Sleep came together with dreams. And into his dreams filtered the memory of the dreams dreamt by the bulls, that night when, drunk and still a mortal, he had walked around the Plaza de Toros in Madrid under a silent, full moon, and he had heard the dreams of the sleeping bulls. They were lying on straw and they dreamed of ruminating. He had listened, their last share of peace before the slaughter. It was the blood, he knew that. Those few dark sips he had drawn, or stolen, to the radiant body which filled his mind and soul every minute like a pain. It had been *his* first devastating gift. The bulls did not know.

He had fled, on foot, to the railway station, he had bought a ticket at random, climbed a train and left. Now in his immortal dream he was reliving that terse, frightening irruption of awareness and his useless flight back to the blunt perceptions of humans. The terror of finding himself alone again with such an unbearable flash of sensations, had forced him at last to search his pockets for the last coins, push them into the slot of a telephone, call *him*. He had intoxicated his mind and his body by whatever he could get his hands on in the few hours of waiting before *he* came to him. He had let himself slip in a drowsy, thoughtless stupor during their trip back home. Let it be long, that break full of nothingness, before having to face again darkness, or light.

Now he knew. Now he understood at last what five hundred years of witness to death did mean. Strange he had grasped it only after irreparable silence had fallen between them. Or maybe not. Maybe it had been an act of mercy, sparing him that knowledge as long as it was possible. He could remember how unbearable had been the finality of his desire for *him*. He had been master of his own life, once. He had fought, wilfully, stubbornly, to be such. He had

removed from his life anything he had not chosen. He had been free. Finding himself suddenly needing *him*, every moment, at every breath; needing *his* presence, or at least the thought of *him*, without even knowing whether he had chosen or had been chosen, or if it had been chance, or destiny, to rob his life from him, was choking. He had barely survived. Maybe he wouldn't have, unless *he* had protected him that way. Unless *he* had prevented the horror of knowledge seeping through his consuming desire.

*He* had never told him how he found his victims. There had been no need. Daniel had seen, and understood. *Not like the bulls*. He could not imagine a greater courage. Night after night, since five hundred years, prepared to face a pain so deep that it washed away the colors of life, and yet not assuming to know or judge those who felt it... only dissolving it in a cloud of illusions. Nothing real is there to fight the reality of pain. Not even Louis has that much courage. Louis did not want to know. Daniel was sure that if he had not spoken first that night, if he had not given of himself even just the spark of his tone of voice, of his curiosity, now he would be dead. He remembered what his grandmother used to say about the poultry she raised in her yard: "I can't eat my acquaintances".

The dream dilated, like a slow sizzling tide, and thoughts and memories floated on the surface like wash-outs of a storm. The rhythm of the bulls' breathing. The rhythm of the bulls' blood. The rhythm of the bulls' dreaming. Still sleeping, he feared sundown like a remorse: waking without *him*. His sleep grew thin, while light was taken from the world. He felt he was waking, and he did not want it. Going from past powerlessness to present impotence was unbearable.

And he felt *him* coming. Still asleep he felt *him* come in, kneel beside the bed, *his* brow resting on his hands near his own. He woke up while his fingers already threaded among *his* long, shiny curls. They didn't speak. Both were thinking of the bulls, and a full moon over Madrid.

**2.** They have just awoken, one after the other, in each other's arms. Armand trails with his fingertip the blue veins along the back of Daniel's hand. A man's hands, full-grown, whose slow perfection doesn't hide the strata of half a life of use. Daniel takes Armand's hand in his own, looks at it closely, turns it over to examine the palm. An agile hand, intact; the hand of a boy.

"I was terrified you would wait until too late," he says under his breath. "When our bodies would be too different from each other. I figured myself at thirty-four. I would have been double your age. I could have been your father, and I would have been your child instead. Like incest made with mirrors."

Sighing, Armand hugs him from behind, hiding his face on Daniel's shoulders.

"I know. I saw your nightmares. But you were so very interesting... I saw life change you, and I was fascinated. I never was twenty, or twenty-five, or twenty-eight. I never wished to be. But I looked at you, and you became more beautiful and strong with every passing year. I could not stop reading the stories time was writing on you, stroke upon stroke."

Sometimes Daniel is under the impression he's talking with an alien.

"Did you wish to see me aging, getting ill maybe? Did you wish to see me die? Did you think this, too, would be ...interesting?"

"I wished the richness of your life could be gathered not in your mind and spirit only, but also in your body. I could not get myself to make you a monstrous paradox... such as I am."

Daniel turns to Armand, embraces him, his face deep among the long soft curls.

"Don't say that. Don't even think it, ever. You are my maker, my master and my lover. You are a miracle. A paradox, but surely not a monster."

Too near. Too tender. Too happy. Fast as thought, Armand slips away, spins around, bares his fangs in a hiss.

"Are you quite sure?" he growls lowly.

Daniel starts, then he laughs out.

"No," he whispers, "But I do love you," and grabbing the pillow, he pushes it over his face.

"What's that they're saying about the can of worms once open?..." he chuckles ten minutes later, spitting out a feather and brushing others from his hair.

"Come here, I'll explain," murmurs Armand, and his eyes are shining.

## **Choice** **or, What really brought Lestat back**

*In the alchemical splendor of the dawn  
shone the white and black magpie, taking flight  
from the guard-rail beside the highway lane.  
And the magnificent rhomboid of its tail  
proclaimed at last the most frightening truth.*

LdL

**1.** Nothing had changed. He lied there unmoving, untouched by the passing of nights and days, untouched even by hunger. Yet he lived. The enduring splendor of his fair faultless body was made utterly frightening by the empty eyes.

Louis was past wondering. Every night he sat there, legs crossed on the cold stone at his side, and he read to him. He had come to shut out from his mind every other thought. He could not stand the awareness of that blank or the memory of the vivid life which that blank had replaced, so he shut both out. He read. His quiet voice became the background upon which the lives of all the others rolled on, night after night, hearing it in their minds like a continuous bass of pain. Every few hours he would stand up, stretch his limbs, easing the knots forming in his muscles, then sit back and read further.

He didn't care what anymore.

Then it happened.

He was well into *Bhagavadgita*, and he had read already how Yudhitshira the wise, Yudhitshira the great, had gambled his own beloved ones at dice, together with himself, and lost them all to slavery. He had read how Yudhitshira had come to the lake, and had been questioned, and had answered wisely and well. He had now come to the point when Yudhitshira, and his companions, and a dog, at last went on the long voyage.

'They left their ornaments, they celebrated the last rites, they threw the domestic fires into the water, and they went, those great souls. Already they were out in the desert, in front of the Himalaya. The first to fall, extenuated by hunger and rotten by sin, was Draupadi the beautiful: all her brothers were crying, but Yudhitshira the wise did not even turn. Then fell Sahadeva the scholar. Belly-of-a-Wolf cried out to the King: "He was the most learned of us all, why then has he fallen?". "Too proud was he in his wisdom" answered the King, and he walked on with the dog. Then it was the turn of Nakula, the most handsome of the brothers, and again the King did not even turn to look at him. And also Arjuna fell, that hero, and Belly-of-a-Wolf prayed that they would stop and bury him, but the King thought Arjuna had been too proud and he had no pity of him. At last Belly-of-a-Wolf himself fell to the ground, and he cried: "I have fallen also and I believe myself to be innocent. Tell me why I am dying, if you know, brother". And Yudhitshira said "Too greedy you were, brother", and he walked on without looking back. Only the dog followed. Then he came on top of the great mountain, in front of the gates of Heaven, and the God of Victories appeared to him. "Come in!" He said'. 'And Yudhitshira threw himself at His feet. "My siblings are dead, let them come in also". Then God answered, "They will join you presently. Now leave that dog and come to your heavenly throne". Yudhitshira looked straight in His eyes. "Let the dog come in too", he said. God was angry. "Leave that dog, I command!" He cried'.

'Yudhitshira did not answer Him. He stayed out there, alone with the dog'.

Louis paused, his eyes lost. He was startled when he heard the sound of clothes brushing imperceptibly on the floor. He looked down. Lestat was moving! His back stretched uneasily. Louis could see his fingers slowly shifting, one at a time, a symmetrical, mesmerizing movement, fifth, fourth, third, second, thumb, and then again thumb, second, third, fourth, fifth. The fingers seemed to have a life of their own, separate from a body that still could not shake itself free. It was frightening. He crouched over him, held those hands in his own, just to stop them.

"Lestat," he said, "Lestat, Lestat" like a sounding line, trying to catch his mind. He saw his lips open, try to form words. He heard them at last.

"It is a choice," whispered Lestat "but how to trust either...". His voice died away in a mutter. He was not talking to Louis. He still seemed oblivious to anything, except that burning question. Louis thought he could just make up some more words. "Mani, Arimane. What has Job learned for his troubles? To shut up and don't ask... Evil within, evil without. Choice—choice—choice" he went on "Like inside, like outside. Like above, like below...". He stopped

suddenly. "Then it doesn't matter which!" he cried out, and his eyes flashed open. Clear and shining they were, and they locked on Louis', wide in astonishment.

Louis was breathless. He fought to speak. "Lestat," he managed to whisper. "So won't you stay out here with Mojo? ...and me" he added softly.

Lestat struggled to sit, grabbing with shaking hands the arm he stretched at once to help him. "Louis," he said, "My brother, I will". His words were cut short by a small sob. But a moment later he sparkled him a glance, and the ice in his eyes was lit suddenly by the well-known fire as he said under his breath "Heaven was a wonderful place, and this may be Hell's waiting room, but as I'm left with nobody else than myself to trust in these matters, and if I may borrow the concept from our late mutual friend... then I think the best company is right here".

**2.** "Would you tell me about it?" Louis asked calmly, but his eyes sparkled with interest. It was early evening, on the next night. Lestat was sitting very straight, his back to the wall, his legs comfortably crossed, arms resting on his knees. He was still shackled to the ring in the wall. Maharet was being very prudent.

"I don't know how to begin". A crease of worry ran across Lestat's brow. "Philosophy... or should I say theology? is more your province than mine. I felt I have really grasped something, but when I try to put words to it...". His voice trailed off. "It's rather frightening" he sighed.

He glanced sideways to Louis. He was sitting beside him in the very same position, composed and silent. He was waiting. Lestat felt peace coming from him, cool, unhurried, ready to wait forever for an answer even if it would not explain anything... not anymore. The comfort of his presence. The safety of his unbelief. Louis was the one and only person he could confide into, without fear that he would go mad, or kill himself, or start a religion. Lestat closed his eyes, then opened them again, startled at the renewed miracle of sight. When he spoke, it was in a low, hesitant voice.

"It was something I saw while you were reading. I didn't really listen, or even make out the words. I saw something black and white, and it took over the whole of the universe. But then black and white together suddenly were raised away, and there was another universe under them, or rather behind them, colourful and brilliant. Like, opposites are such only within a shared frame of reference. The frame was taken away, and still the world was there, and I was there too, within this other universe. Sticking to the universe behind, instead than to the black-and-white whole". He was silent for a while, musing.

"It goes all back to that vision of God and the Devil talking at the coffee-shop" he went on.

"The duality. The inescapable duality. I was torn between them. I loved both, how could I not love them? And yet there was something I loathed in each one of them. I felt they were sharing the world between them like the spoils of a battle, not minding the massacre. Then Memnoch tried to convince me that the strife was temporary. That all could still come out fine in the end. That the massacre was not really taking place. But it did! It does!".

There was anger now in his voice, and fear. "He tried to convince me that it just seemed so, that if I just tried harder to understand, I would see the beauty and rightness of it all. And Christ... He didn't even try to convince me. He only questioned me, how could I do this to Him. They were fighting between them for my soul, one with the weapon of reasoning, the other through emotions, like I was the last scrap of universe they had yet to conquer. They wanted me to have faith in one of them, or in both, and in the frame of reference they share, and the fight would end. But I can't!" he cried.

Louis put his hand on his shoulder, lightly. Lestat felt his worry that Maharet would hear him, and he strived to regain composure. When he spoke again, it was with full self-possession.

"I can't have faith in either. I don't trust either of them with my soul. They won't have it, however they may own the rest of the world".

"The *privatio boni* theory," Louis said, so softly that only Lestat would hear him. "It is medieval formal logic: the opposite of *good* is *not-good*, lack of good, no third item allowed. There may be gradations, of course, but they are only gradations in quantity. Shades of grey between black and white. And maybe *good* can grow in time. 'God only allows evil to bring out a greater good'" he quoted. There was bitterness in his voice when he added, "Maybe hell itself is not eternal, some ventured to say. Most of them were burned at the stake for their efforts, however. It seems those who believe ethics depends entirely on the fear of punishment always get to have the upper hand. The everlasting, slaughtering myths of general prevention and social defence!".

"To bring out a greater good'," Lestat repeated. "But no heaven can atone later for such suffering! I saw terrible suffering, Louis. To know about it, as we all do, is not the same as being there. And the injustice of it! Such unequal, unjustifiable shares of pain! How can heaven

itself erase all this? It *is* real, and it *is* evil, and it *is* unjust, and nothing can ever convince me it is not!"

Louis sighed deeply. A dejected look was on his face. His voice was unusually hard. "It has gone on since," he said. "The idea that heaven is infinite goodness, and any share of suffering is nothing in comparison with it, once you get there. Then there was Pascal. Risky business, this one. God can't be grasped by reason; He's completely irrational. You can only gamble on Him, bet that He does exist, *and* that He is good, *and* that He's going to be the winner in the end. Like Yudhitshira... but Yudhitshira lost the gamble. 'The highest usefulness for the highest number', that's utilitarianism in our own XVIII century, when monarchs were trying to become gods to their people. 'The prey offers itself to the hunter' say now the New Agers. It does not matter that the prey tries to escape, that it fights for its life, that its death is painful and frightening. 'We got it, it had to be. Its soul goes beyond to higher awareness' they say. Anything to avoid facing the reality, the terrible finality of pain. The fact that, however we may try to avoid increasing the pain, or even strive to diminish it, we are ultimately powerless to erase it. Even the best human faculties, reason, conscience, whatever, are ultimately useless. God said he made us His equals, but won't allow us the most precious knowledge. We can't ever attain truth, but only trace, by degrees of approximation, laborious maps of untruth. Without access to a whole, clear knowledge of good and evil, "free choice" is but a tragic mockery. And the worst realization is, that God does not love or protect us any more than that wretched fig tree in the gospels".

"You know better than most how real is the pain of God's creatures". Lestat felt a wave of awed respect for his fledgling surge within him. /How could I not see it in him... or see it and not care/ he thought. /He knew already. I had to be swept through the whole of creation to see it, and he knew it all along/.

"That's what I saw," he went on. "While you read to me. Two opposites pillaging the world, taking the whole of it into their plans, boasting that those plans be the ultimate good for everyone involved. But who exactly *is* 'everyone'? Who gets left out of 'the highest number'? Who *are* 'the highest number'? I don't want to be among them. Not anymore, not at the cost of the suffering of those who are left out, whoever they may be. I won't, in the name of whatever is nearest to goodness in me. I want to stay out. I want to be the Third, even if it comes to be Excluded. I am out, we are out, you and me. Out of black and white, out where the colors are. It took me so very long to understand. I've been such a judgmental, self-righteous hypocrite. You called yourself out such a long time ago".

Louis looked at him, affection glowing in his eyes. It shone so warm, so tender, Lestat wished to cry.

"We just treaded different ways" Louis said. "I tried so hard to abide by all the rules, and to ask all the right questions so as to find all the right answers, but neither you nor God were forwarding me any. So I had to do without them. Meanwhile, you have broken each rule and all, and you always seemed to find more answers than your questions were. In the end, we have both learned that rules are useless and that, how many the questions may be, there are no answers. Not in this world nor in the next, as it seems". He sighed.

They were silent for a while, sitting together on the cold stone floor, their backs to the wall. The position of their physical bodies seemed to mirror the finality of the choice their conscience shared. Then Louis threaded his fingers among Lestat's.

"It remains to be seen," he said again "whether we're worse put if Those Two do exist, and they are such a couple of moral irresponsibles, or they don't, and pain just marks the boundaries of what is possible for the living protoplasm". He turned his head to look at Lestat. "Which do you like better?"

"I really don't know. I don't like either. But I remember you quoting once to me that medieval king of Castile... What was it?"

"Alfonso el Sabio. He said 'If only God had asked for my advice when He made the world, I may have suggested some useful improvement'".

"I guess he was right. He wasn't struck by lightning, or was he?"

Lestat began to laugh, and his laughter rang through the halls and the corridors, startling the ghosts of the children in the dormitories, setting a-quiver the spiders on their webs, and swerving the bats who were flying back to the attic before dawn. Louis smiled at himself, realizing he'd missed this one sound more than anything else, and clasped his hand tighter in his maker's.

Maharet heard it also, and at once she stood up. /Time to let him loose,/ she thought. /At last/.

## Sciolgo i giuramenti

**Bello sarò per te quando fa sera  
luciderò la spada e l'armatura  
furia dei mari splendida chimera  
ti spaccherò di baci a luna piena...**

**Gianna Nannini, *Bellatrix***

*a 0'25" il violino respira nel risveglio  
a 0'49" l'onda alta che si slancia  
ad abbracciare lo scoglio, lucente di sole  
a 1'12" si scioglie, si quietava*

**Sciolgo le catene  
Sciolgo i giuramenti  
Sciolgo le promesse vane  
Ora come ora  
Tutto torna niente**

**Niente accade ancora uguale  
Gianna Nannini, *Piangerò***

*a 2'55" la musica cessa e resta il battito di  
un cuore  
a 3'22" il primo violino solitario, un filo  
d'anima  
a 3'41" il secondo, più basso e denso  
a 4'00" l'incantesimo,  
e i due violini si avvicinano e si intrecciano,  
uno diretto e sottile, l'altro danzante*

**Lestat**

*Ti sei fermato sulla riva del fiume  
antico più di noi.  
Hai alzato le braccia a sciogliere  
il nastro che ti legava i capelli.  
Li hai scossi all'indietro,  
scuri come acqua fonda.  
Hai chiuso gli occhi.  
La tua mano levata esitava,  
stringendo tra le dita il nastro stinto.  
Ti ho sentito mormorare qualcosa...  
un incantesimo, una preghiera?  
Hai riaperto gli occhi, hai aperto le dita.  
Il nastro è scivolato fluttuando nell'acqua  
e la corrente l'ha portato via.  
Ti sei girato verso di me.  
"Eccomi" hai detto.  
Il tuo odore mi ubriacava.*

**Louis**

*Il tuo odore mi ubriacava.  
Il tuo odore di fuoco  
presso l'acqua notturna.  
Risplendevi,  
guardandomi, e per la prima volta mi  
vedevi.  
Non cercavi di vincere.  
Non più difeso, eppure vittorioso  
come non eri stato fino ad ora.  
Te io amo.  
E' il tuo sguardo stanotte,  
luminoso guerriero, che mi scioglie  
il nodo antico che ci separava.  
Mi protegge il tuo sguardo come scudo.  
Il desiderio  
(de-sidere, giù al buio senza stelle)  
fu non scaldarmi alla tua fiera luce.  
Soltanto ora hai saputo  
che cosa vuole dire essere pari.  
Ora sì, chiedo e voglio esserti eguale.  
Ora in te io mi amo.*

Lestat è seduto, a prima sera, solo, sul bordo di un breve molo di legno proteso sulle acque scure e torbide del Mississippi. Getta ciottoli nell'acqua, uno alla volta, aspettando che i cerchi si allarghino e si spengano prima di gettare il successivo e sentirne il tonfo molle. Il cielo è pesante, ingorgato di nubi disfatte, ma non piove. Non piove da settimane.

La vibrazione lievissima del terreno, che come un'onda ancora più impercettibile di quelle mosse dai ciottoli si propaga all'assito scheggioso del molo, avverte Lestat di chi sta arrivando. Non si volta. Riconosce quel corpo quasi come la propria faccia nello specchio, senza bisogno di guardare. Louis.

Lo cercava, l'ha visto. Si ferma in capo al molo. Ha notato il gesto involontario di Lestat quando si è accorto della sua presenza. Aspetta invano che lo chiami. *Se ne andrà?* si chiede. Una domanda nera. No, si avvicina. Gli si siede accanto, due palmi alla sua sinistra, e tace. Dopo un attimo gli posa la mano sulla spalla e la lascia lì.

Lestat sospira piano, solo per sé. E' così strano e solo il suo silenzio, che Louis si volta a guardarlo, e un filo sottile di ansia gli si annoda attorno al cuore.

"Cosa c'è?" domanda.

Invece di rispondere, Lestat gli posa a sua volta una mano sul ginocchio e la strofina piano sul denim sbiadito. Quella mano dice *Aspetta*, dice *Non chiedere*. Louis tace, ma il desiderio di

lasciarsi scoprire cresce, finché Lestat si sente annegare. Si ascolta parlare, con una voce spenta che non sembra sua.

"Sono stanco... e ho paura. Davanti a me non vedo più nessuno. Non so chi sono. Non so più dove trovare qualcuno con cui confrontarmi per sapere i contorni di me. Ho spavento di cercarlo, e ODIÒ avere paura!"

Le dita di Louis si stringono un poco sulla sua spalla. E ode la sua risposta limpida, immune dall'emozione che filtra dal suo tocco. Dice:

"Hai lottato con l'Altro, come Giacobbe, per tutta la notte. Sei ancora vivo. E il tuo mondo è una distesa di umanità senza nome, sulle cui teste cammini regale, cercando chi possa batterti, contenerti, costringerti a un divieto che ti definisca. Nemmeno dio e il diavolo ci sono riusciti. Ma non credi che possa definirti l'eguaglianza?"

Lestat lo guarda, stupito. Non capisce.

"Patti, Lestat. Accordi, tra amici. La parola data tra gentiluomini, anziché gli ordini dati ai sudditi da un legislatore giustiziere. Ci hai mai pensato? Uno solo è il sovrano, come unica è la morte: gli altri sono sudditi, o servi. Ma il due, è l'eguaglianza. Un patto si stringe tra eguali, vincola entrambi allo stesso modo a una volontà che è di ciascuno perché è di tutti e due. Definisce senza sottomettere. Ci hai mai provato davvero?"

Lestat non risponde e guarda lontano. E' una prospettiva tanto nuova su se stesso che non sa neppure se gli piace. Sente su di sé gli occhi calmi del suo compagno e si sente a disagio nel proprio silenzio. Sa quello che sta per accadere. Louis non si fermerà a questo. Non avrà pietà di lui, come lui non ne ha mai avuta in passato. E infatti riprende:

"Lo sapresti se ti permettessi di saperlo. Per smettere di correre alla morte ogni notte della tua esistenza, devi rinunciare a cercare di convincerti di essere onnipotente e invulnerabile. Altrimenti non riconoscerai mai i tuoi eguali nel folle miracolo di essere nato, e resterai solo. Tu hai sempre avuto il coraggio di sporgerti dal bordo e acciuffare quello che vuoi, ma hai anche il terribile coraggio di lasciare andare quello che ti è costato lacrime e sangue, e pezzi strappati alla tua anima? Non hai mai avuto altra sicurezza che il tuo potere soverchiante. Chissà se l'affronterai mai, l'avventura dell'eguaglianza... se potremo mai affrontarla insieme."

Lestat sente brillare nelle sue parole un sorriso che non vuole guardare. Ma non c'è ironia, non sorride della sua debolezza di stasera. E' puro affetto, che cade e affonda nella sua anima e vi scompare come i sassi nell'acqua. Piano, gli risponde:

"Tu ce l'hai quel coraggio. Tu non rompi le regole per vedere che succede. Non ti si applicano, le regole. Tu non le vedi. Vedi la realtà, e la realtà è fatta di limiti. E' la tua forza... e vorrei averla anch'io."

Ha il tono vinto di uno che ha rinunciato.

"Non ci riesco," conclude.

"Lestat." Lo prende per le spalle. "Guardami." Lo volta verso di lui.

Lestat non gli resiste, Lentamente alza gli occhi ad incontrare i suoi.

"Cominciamo ora. Cominciamo qui, tu e io. Facciamo un patto, e vediamo che succede. Che cosa vuoi da me?"

Sorride, incoraggiante. Semplice. Senza secondi fini. Non c'è nulla di cui abbia bisogno. Anche i suoi desideri sono gratis. Senza attaccamento, pura libertà. Una volta dopo l'altra, la presenza di Louis gli fa sentire che ha un'altra possibilità, e non si sente più così solo.

D'impulso gli domanda:

"Perché rifiuti ancora il mio sangue? Io sono diverso da quando ti ho fatto. Anche tu sei cambiato. Sei più forte, eppure sei ancora più diverso da me di quanto fossi il primo giorno.

Non ti conosco. Forse anche tu non mi conosci. Mi fa impazzire vedere accanto a me la meraviglia continua della tua esistenza e sentirla estranea, non poter entrare. Perché?"

Gli occhi di Louis si fanno fondi di emozione.

"Anch'io ho paura. Del tuo sangue, di me stesso. Che accadrebbe se non sapessi controllare un potere come il tuo? Faccio già abbastanza male nel mondo, abbastanza errori, da allievo come sono. Non voglio altre armi."

Le sue mani tremano leggermente. Le lascia cadere lungo i fianchi. L'incertezza gli annerchia i lineamenti, eppure Lestat intravede qualcosa di inaspettato - il desiderio.

"Fammi di nuovo, Louis. Fammi diverso da come mi fece Magnus. Fammi come te, come non potrei mai essere altrimenti. Dammi il tuo potere di pazienza. Dammi la tua compassione, e lascia che ora sia io il tuo allievo. Lascia che anch'io ti faccia di nuovo, che ti dia i talenti e la forza che ho raccolto attraverso gli altri. Non sarai mai un male per il mondo. Non lo sei mai stato. Ti prego."



Louis lo guarda, e non vede solo amore. Vede fiducia, e rispetto. Vede Lestat come non l'ha mai visto prima: arreso, e felice con le spalle al muro, splendente senza più ombre, ora che si è detto finalmente a se stesso ancor prima che a lui. A lungo lo guarda.

Si volta, si avvicina all'acqua, alza le braccia a sciogliere il nastro che gli lega i capelli. Getta indietro il capo, li scuote liberi. Chiude gli occhi, solleva la mano che tiene il nastro. Lestat lo sente mormorare qualcosa, un incantesimo, una preghiera? Riapre gli occhi, schiude le dita. Il nastro cade fluttuando nell'acqua scura, e la corrente lenta lo porta via galleggiando.

"Eccomi," dice. Lavato dal vento, lavato dal passato, lavato dalla pioggia che ora comincia a cadere. "Fratello, amante, figlio. Quanto ho desiderato di sciogliere quel nodo. Quanto desidero il tuo sapore, che ricordo e che non è più quello."

"Figlio, fratello, amante." Com'è strano non essere al comando. Non avere niente da dimostrare. "Fai di me il tuo allievo. Amami, come non sono stato mai amato. Non lasciamo che altro tempo si perda dietro di noi."

"Non è stato tempo perso."

"Non torneresti indietro?"

"No."

E sotto la pioggia tiepida, in riva al fiume ancor più antico di loro, si regalano l'un l'altro il dono impensabile di una felicità appena nata.

(English translation follows: **Untying oaths**)

**Shining I'll be for you when evening's  
coming  
I'll polish up my sword and suit of  
armour  
rage of the seas, magnificent  
chimaera,  
I'll break you up with kisses in the  
moonlight**

**Gianna Nannini, *Bellatrix*\***

*at 0'25" the violin is breathing its waking  
at 0'49" a high wave is tiding over  
and embracing the rock, bright in the  
sunlight  
at 1'12" it's loosening into quiet*

**I'm unlocking chains  
I'm untying oaths  
I'm taking back void promises  
As it is just now  
All gets back to nothing  
Nothing happens twice all over**

**Gianna Nannini, *Piangerò*\***

*at 2'55" the music ceases and  
the beating of a heart remains  
at 3'22" the first solitary violin, a thread of  
soul  
at 3'41" the second, lower, thicker  
at 4'00" the spell,  
and the two violins get close and  
intertwine,  
one straight and fine, the other dancing*

Lestat

*You stood on the bank of the river  
more ancient than us both.  
You raised your arms to loosen  
the ribbon tying your hair. You shook it  
back,  
dark as the darkest water; and closed your  
eyes.  
Your raised hand was poised,  
the faded ribbon held between your  
fingers.  
I heard you murmur something...  
An enchantment, a prayer?  
You opened your eyes again, opened your  
hand.  
The ribbon floated slowly down on water  
and the current then floated it away.  
You turned to me, "I'm here" you said.  
Your scent intoxicated me.*

Louis

*Your scent intoxicated me.  
Your burning scent  
near the water of night.  
Shining you were,  
looking at me, and for the first time saw  
me.  
You were not trying to conquer.  
No more defended, yet you were victorious  
as you had never been until this night.  
You I do love.  
Your look tonight,  
bright warrior, unties for me  
the ancient knot which held us distant.  
Your look protects me like a shield.  
Desire  
(de-sidere, dark abyss without stars)  
was not get warm at your fierce light.  
Only now you have learned  
what it is being equal.  
Now, I do ask and wish to be your equal.  
Now in you I can love me.*

\* My translations.

Translation of the prose part from Italian into English courtesy of my Maker, Emilia

## Untying oaths

Lestat is sitting alone, at nightfall, on the edge of a short pier outstretched over the dark and muddy Mississippi waters. He's throwing pebbles into the water, one by one, just lingering to see the circles enlarge and vanish before flinging the next one and hearing its muffled splash. Although the sky looks heavy, choked up with worn-out clouds, it is not raining. It hasn't been raining for weeks.

Lestat is warned of somebody coming by a slight vibration of the ground which propagates to the splintered pier floor like an imperceptible wave, even more imperceptible than those

produced by the pebbles. He doesn't turn. He can recognize that body without looking, almost like his own face in the mirror. Louis.

He was looking for him, he has seen him. He stops just at the pier's edge. He has got aware of the unintentional acknowledging movement of Lestat at his presence. He keeps uselessly waiting for a call. Will he go away? he wonders. A black question. No, he's approaching. He sits down beside him, two breadths on his left, and keeps silent. In a moment he puts his hand upon his shoulder and rests it there. Lestat sighs by himself. His silence is so strange and lonely, that Louis turns to look at him, a tenuous thread of anxiety tying itself around his heart.

"What's the matter?" he asks.

Instead of answering, Lestat on his turn puts his hand upon Louis' knee and gently rubs the faded denim. Wait, that hand is saying; it says Don't ask.

Louis keeps silent, but the desire of opening himself up is growing, until Lestat feels he's choking. He listens to himself speaking in a voice that doesn't sound like his own.

"I am tired... and I am afraid. I see no one left before me. I don't know who I am. I don't know where I could find anyone to compare with and fix my own outlines. I fear to search, and I HATE being afraid!"

Louis' fingers lightly press his shoulders. And he can hear his limpid answer, free from the emotion that reveals itself in his touch. He is saying:

"You have struggled against the Other all night long, like Jacob. You are still alive. And your own world is an extent of nameless mankind, on whose heads you kingly walk, searching one who can defeat, contain, compel you into a prohibition capable to define you. Neither God nor the Devil made it with you. Can't you believe equality could do it?"

Lestat stares incredulously at him. He can't understand.

"Agreements, Lestat. Pacts between friends. The word of honour between gentlemen, instead of orders given to his subjects by a legislator and executioner. Did you ever consider this? Only one is the king, so as sole is death: all the others are subjects or servants. But two, that's equality. An agreement can be made between equals, it is binding on both to a will which is each one's own because it belongs to both of them. It puts its terms without subduing anyone. Did you ever try?"

Lestat doesn't answer and looks away. This point of view is so new for him that he doesn't even know whether he likes it. He feels his lover's calm look on himself and he feels uneasy in his own silence. He knows what is going to happen. Louis won't stop here. He won't be merciful on him, so as he himself hasn't been in the past. In fact, he is going on:

"You would know, if you only would allow yourself to. If you want to stop pursuing death every night of your life, you must convince yourself you are neither invulnerable nor omnipotent. Otherwise you will never recognize your equals in the crazy miracle of being alive, and you will remain alone. You have always been bold enough to lean out of the border and catch all you liked, but have you also got the terrible courage to release what has cost you tears and blood, and pieces torn out of your soul? You have had no other safety than your own overwhelming power. I wonder whether you will ever undergo the trial of equality... whether we will ever face it together".

Lestat guesses in his words a smile he will not look at. But there is no irony, he is not smiling at his weakness this evening. It is pure love, falling down and sinking into his soul and disappearing like the stones do into the water.

He slowly answers:

"You have got that kind of courage. You don't infringe the rules just to see what will happen. You are not subject to rules. You don't see them. You see reality, and reality has its own limits. That's your strenght. I wish it were mine also". His beaten tone sounds like he's given up.

"I can't do it" he concludes.

"Lestat" he hugs his shoulders "Look at me".

He turns him. Lestat doesn't resist. He slowly looks at him in the eyes.

"Let's begin now. Let's begin here, you and me. Let's make a pact, and watch what's going to happen. What do you expect from me?"

He smiles encouragingly. Simple. No hidden purpose. He needs nothing. Even his wishes are quite free. No attachment, pure freedom. Time after time, Louis' presence makes him feel he has got another opportunity, and he no longer feels so lonely.

He asks abruptly:

"Why do you still refuse my blood? I am no longer the same now as I was when I made you. You too have changed. You are stronger, and yet you are even more different from me than you were at first. I don't know you. Maybe you too don't know me. It makes me crazy when I

get aware of the everlasting wonder of your existence by my side, and yet realize it's alien to me and I can't penetrate it. Why?"

Louis' eyes get deep with emotion.

"I am afraid too. Of your blood, of myself. What would happen if I couldn't be able to control a power like yours? I am already making evil enough in the world. I commit mistakes, a fledgling as I am. I don't need other weapons".

His hands are slightly trembling. He lets them drop. Uncertainty darkens his features, and yet Lestat catches an unexpected glimpse of desire.

"Make me anew, Louis. Make me different from what Magnus made me. Make me like you, as I could never be otherwise. Give me your patience. Give me your compassion, and let me become your fledgling. Let me too make you anew, let me give you the talents and the strength I have reaped from others. You will never be evil for the world. You have never been. I beg you".

Louis looks at him and he doesn't see love alone. He can see faith and respect. He can see Lestat as he never saw him before: surrendered, and happy with his back to the wall, shining and shadowless; now he has revealed to himself even sooner than to Louis. He gives him a long glance.

He turns, approaches the water, lifts his arms and unties the ribbon on his hair. He tosses his hair free. He closed his eyes, raises the hand holding the ribbon. Lestat hears him murmur something, an enchantment, a prayer? He opens his eyes, opens his fingers. The ribbon falls wavering into the dark water, and the indolent current takes it floating away.

"Here I am" he says. Washed by the wind, washed by the past, washed by the finally falling rain.

"Brother, lover, son. How long have I yearned for untying that knot! How much I am longing for your taste, which I remember but is no longer the same".

"Son, brother and lover". How strange it is not to be the leader. Having nothing to demonstrate.

"Make me your fledgling. Love me the way I have never been loved. Let time never be allowed to waste behind us".

"It wasn't wasted time".

"Wouldn't you go back again, then?"

"No".

And under a tepid rain on the bank of the ancient river, more ancient than them both, they present each other with the gift of a newborn happiness.

## Tupavvoç

Translated and remastered as the second epitaph  
within *Double preface* in *Plague of Dreams*

*Una primavera dopo l'altra, il calicanto  
risveglia in me le peggiori passioni.*

LdL

Ecco risuona  
la spaventosa risata degli dèi, puro potere  
immune da coscienza e da ragione.  
Sul patibolo l'abbiamo immaginato,  
ma il despota rivive e vive ancora,  
solo intento a quei suoi progetti arcani  
a cui necessita multiforme morte  
e nascite, e dolore rinnovato.  
Ritorna la tremenda primavera  
e non c'è forza per il tirannicidio.

Ma *io* sono il tiranno, quella faccia  
impassibile che ancora beve cuori  
e non vuole saper quel che non sa.  
All'alba, si può uccidere il tiranno  
e liberare il mondo dalla pena  
o questa pena dal mondo che la lega.  
La scrittura fitta delle cose, graffita  
sull'anima dal tempo con l'acuta  
unghia del dubbio critico, non lascia  
spazio all'alternativa. Me ne vado.

Sulla soglia del sole mi richiama,  
inaspettato, odor di calicanto.

## ***Alba Nigra***

Translated and remastered as epigraph within *Choice*

L'alchemico splendore del mattino  
illuminò la gazza bianca e nera  
mentre s'alzava in volo dal guard-rail.  
E la magnifica coda romboidale  
disse la spaventosa verità.

## Why

*"All right, Master-Mind. I see. Show Your cards, NOW".*  
E aspettò il giorno con l'anima sguainata.

I do know well the reason why I did it.  
I chose to see the game of Master-Mind.  
Told Him to show the cards that He kept hidden  
and saw there was no game or Master-Mind.

No God, no Satan, no everlasting Heaven,  
no Hell, no sense or reason to the world,  
only the Sun implacably returning  
to burn out me and my too restless mind.

I could not say my goodbye to my dearest,  
I could not tell them why I had to go:  
such step is lonely as only Death can be,  
and lonely did I face the deadly game.

I did not think, all thought was void and broken.  
I waited dawn with my unsheathed soul,  
and when light came and pain burned searing through me  
I knew it was Love that held me burning there.

It was not for the love of God invisible,  
not as a penance for my too many sins,  
it was your love that made it worth the suffering  
and love for you that brought me flaming back.

So now I know the limits of Impossible,  
no weight of doubt is holding down my heart.  
The sky is empty and free of ghostly authority  
and I can love you as never loved before.

*Thanks to Adamine de Micidiale for putting the idea in motion.*

## Senza voce

"Armand held himself above Daniel for a moment, resting on his elbows, his face right above Daniel's. Daniel's arms came around his back as Armand leaned down and kissed Daniel's lips tenderly".

Bette Bourgeois, *Daniel*, 1996

...ma nella seconda parte si è infiltrato un incubo di quarant'anni fa...

"Verso la porta

lei si voltò

<Ora vorrei andare,

lo vedo che stai

soffrendo ma

non per questo ti amerò>"

Angelo Branduardi, *Piano piano*, 1986

L'odore straniero del tuo corpo  
sotto la camicia, sotto le mie dita.  
La tua schiena sottile  
tra le mie braccia  
mentre steso sopra di me  
rimani immobile e mi guardi.  
I tuoi muscoli saldi  
le dita dure delle tue piccole mani snelle  
le tue agili gambe unite tra le mie  
e quei tuoi occhi alieni e scuri  
in fondo a cui c'è un'anima  
che non riesco a vedere  
mi fanno impazzire.

Sei sempre un po' più in là.

Ti chiamo e non mi aspetti,  
fulva antilope,  
non ti giri nemmeno  
a guardarmi riverso  
sul marciapiede, incapace  
di seguirti  
e intanto cola il buio su di me.  
Riluce l'onda baia dei capelli  
giù dalle spalle  
e in silenzio ti allontani  
intanto che senza voce  
urlo il tuo nome  
invano.

The foreign scent of your body  
under your shirt, under my fingers.  
Your slim back  
between my arms  
while lying above me  
you remain still and watch me.  
Your firm muscles  
those hard fingers in your small slender hands  
your agile legs stretched together between mine



and those eyes of yours, alien and dark  
and the soul at the bottom  
I can't reach to see  
drive me insane.

You are always a bit further.

I call you and you don't wait,  
tawny antelope,  
don't even turn your head  
to look at me lying  
on the sidewalk, incapable  
to follow you  
while darkness pours on me.  
The bay wave of your hair shines  
down your shoulders  
and in silence you go away  
as without voice  
I scream your name  
in vain.

# Knots

## Lestat

I have never told him why it happens sometimes that I tie him —to the bedstead, to the railing of the stairs, to the master-beam in the attic, to the piping in the shower— when we make love. I can see it rather upsets him, sometimes. But I can't help it, sometimes. And I don't believe I will ever be able to tell him that it is fear.

Not fear of his willingly leaving me: he has done that already, and we both, somehow, survived. Anger is strong fuel for survival. But fear that something can take him away from me, unwilling. I dread chance, I dread fate, I am scared that he may just disappear, and I won't know why and what happened to him.

And I'm sure I'm never going to tell him my darkest layer of fear, that his disappearance will be caused by something I have done, and I will never know what it was. So every time he's out alone, I'm one step ahead of panic, and every time he stays in for the evening, I hold my breath until I unlatch the door and hear his voice greeting me back.

I have never told him why it happens sometimes that I tie him when we make love. I think he understands.

## Louis

I think I understand now why he ties me, sometimes, when we make love... when his love for me is so intense that it hurts. No, it's not quite so. It's not the love that hurts, it's panic. It hurts us both. At times he loves me so much that the simple possibility of a distance, a physical distance between us, scares him out. It is not because he wants to exert his power on me, or to hurt me — although sometimes he does, unaware. He only needs to feel that I'm going to stay there. That he's allowed to keep me. That we won't be separated again, not by fire or high water, not by God or the Devil. Not even by ourselves, for that little while. And I take willingly the pain, when pain is there, and I willingly face my own piercing fear of being so bound and confined, because with them also comes the feeling, tactile and hot and licking me like a flame, that he loves me enough to do even this thing to me. To even risk my wanting to leave. He would not stop me. He never did.

He has never told me why he ties me, sometimes, when we make love. I think I understand.

# Nodi

## Lestat

Non gli ho mai detto perché qualche volta accade che lo lego -alla testiera del letto, alla ringhiera delle scale, al trave maestro della soffitta, alle tubature della doccia- quando facciamo l'amore. Lo vedo che ne è un po' turbato, qualche volta. Ma non posso farne a meno, qualche volta. E non credo che sarò mai capace di dirgli che è per paura.

Non paura che possa lasciarmi di sua volontà: l'ha già fatto, e siamo entrambi sopravvissuti, in qualche modo. La rabbia è un buon combustibile per sopravvivere. Ma paura che qualcosa possa portarmelo via, contro la sua volontà. Temo il caso, temo il destino, ho il terrore che possa semplicemente scomparire, e non saprò perché e che cosa gli è accaduto.

E sono certo che non gli dirò mai il mio più oscuro strato di paura, che la sua scomparsa sarà causata da qualcosa che ho fatto, e non saprò mai che cosa. Così ogni volta che è fuori da solo, sono a un passo dal panico, e ogni volta che passa la sera in casa, trattengo il respiro finché non giro la chiave nella toppa e sento la sua voce che mi dà il bentornato.

Non gli ho mai detto perché accade qualche volta che lo lego quando facciamo l'amore. Credo che capisca.

## Louis

Credo di capire ora perché mi lega, qualche volta, quando facciamo l'amore... quando il suo amore per me è così intenso che fa male. No, non è proprio così. Non è l'amore che fa male, è il panico. Fa male a entrambi. A volte mi ama così tanto che la semplice possibilità di una distanza, una distanza fisica tra noi, lo terrorizza. Non è che voglia esercitare il suo potere su di me, o farmi male -anche se qualche volta accade, senza che lo voglia. Ha solo bisogno di sentire che starò lì. Che ha il permesso di tenermi. Che non saremo più separati, nè dal fuoco nè dall'acqua, nè da Dio nè dal demonio. Nemmeno da noi stessi, per questo breve tempo. E accetto volentieri il dolore, quando c'è dolore, e affronto volentieri la mia propria penetrante paura di essere legato e costretto in questo modo, perché con essi viene anche la sensazione, tattile e calda e che mi lambisce come una fiamma, che mi ama abbastanza da farmi anche questo. Da rischiare anche che io voglia lasciarlo. Non me lo impedirebbe. Non l'ha mai fatto.

Non mi ha mai detto perché mi lega, a volte, quando facciamo l'amore. Credo di capire.

## Tapping

Louis is out tonight. I hear Lestat tapping his nails on the polished top of the desk in the library. He looked for him there in the early hours of the evening, but he'd gone already. I realize it's unusual for Lestat to wait for him in that room. It's unusual for him to wait at all. The tapping goes on, nibbling at the edge of my consciousness. Disquieting. It sounds like something I should remember. I know this sound, this vibration of a subtle nervousness beyond help. Nails tapping, rasping on a hard surface. A subdued desperation which is not human in its persistence... I remember. A horse, a golden anglo-arabian just arrived by sea from Tarbes. I remember the gleam of his hair in the dusky shadows of the stall, the white of his eyes as he tried to understand his destiny and take part in it. And the rasping, the tapping. His left forefoot raised so gracefully. Then his neck arched, his lips tightened, and the unshod foot would crash down, digging a hole in the straw, hitting the stone floor in endless, compulsive repetition. *Somewhere else. Somewhere else. Not here.* They had given him a goat as a companion. In time he had calmed down, in part.

Suddenly the memory links itself to the present. Not quite so different after all. Not species nor blood can make any of us so very different. The unspoken restlessness of the horse, hot-blooded, generous. The wisdom of the goat. The austere goat, who can digest almost anything and survive on almost nothing. Patient, low-maintenance goat, capable of incredible leaps if needed; born cliff-hanger, fearless horn-fighter, sturdy long-lived goat.

I sit down here, on the floor, my back to the wall of the corridor. I don't want him to remain alone. I hope for my presence, which I know a fringe of his senses is aware of, can help him to keep in check an anxiety he dares not name.

And I hear the key in the latch at last, and I know at once he has heard it also. The tapping stops. I alone can perceive his deep, relieved sigh. I feel the muscles in my shoulders untying, like I know his own are untying this very moment.

"Lestat?" I hear Louis' voice, low and quiet, and the sound of the bunch of keys thrown on the *console* in the entrance. Lestat doesn't answer. I can see him now in my mind, leaning back in the chair, those nervous fingers stilled at last, while with his eyes closed he tastes this joy. And he won't answer, and I know that he'll erase that comforted smile from his lips before Louis can see it.

"*Buonasera, Marius*" says Louis. "Lestat, where is he?". He speaks softly, as usual, but I feel an undercurrent of uneasiness I had never been aware of before now. "He's in the library," I answer. And I add, "He was waiting for you".

Before I raise my eyes, he's gone. I think I hear a soft purring sound coming from behind the closed library door. No more tapping.

I wonder if I can find out Amadeo.

# Lestat: Care & Maintenance

## 1. Why a Lestat

1. Good investment: Practically indestructible. Said to get better with time.
2. Good-looking. Quite.
3. Sense of humour, provided you like it wicked.
4. Immensely rich. Usually generous, also.
5. Can fly.
6. Always eager to pass an evening out.
7. Much more cultivated than he'll let you guess at first sight, although mostly self-taught.  
Loves The Bard.

## 2. Not choosing

Appliance tries so hard to be the one who does the choosing, that he never realizes when he does get chosen. This can easily lead to misunderstandings about who's loving and who's loved, and to the unfounded assumption that he can't be both.

To overcome this fault, a new and upgraded model is currently under beta-testing at Sheri Richardson's engineering plant on Divisadero Street, San Francisco, CA.\*

## 3. (Un-)living with it

1. TLC: Won't work. Ever. It gets about the same response as calling in a 13-year-old boy from playing cowboys and indians, and ask him to kiss welcome to an old aunt come for tea.
2. Taking the lead: He won't let you. Don't try. Don't even think about it, he'd know.
3. Letting him take the lead: sure to get results. Which ones, he doesn't guess himself.

## 4. Advanced functions

1. Insert danger at one end (whichever), much more danger comes out on the other side.
2. Insert love at the right end (which one is right may vary), you never know what will come out, if ever, at any end. It's always worth trying, though.
3. Insert new interest in any drive, appliance will start a routine which isn't going to stop until all bits of information about the topic present on Planet Earth's hard drive have been irreversibly processed and output produced.
4. Can perform brilliantly on stage.
5. Designed to be proficient, if somewhat messy, at wolf-hunting. Function now disabled on ecological as well as humanitarian grounds.

## 5. Troubleshooting (on sight)

1. Appliance sulks. Try ignoring it for a while. If the problem persists, results may be obtained by awakening his curiosity.
2. Appliance recriminates. Much balance needed. Avoid succumbing to guilty feelings.
3. Appliance gets a talking fit. Don't let it become a talking match. Just throw in a word here and there to show you're listening, and wait it out.
4. After a spell of boredom, appliance concocts some scheme for stirring up things. Don't try to find out the details, don't try to talk him out of it, Scream For Maharet At Once! Immediate assistance needed!

## 6. Technical Specifications

1. The appliance comes complete with one oversize ego, extra thick skin, a store package of stubbornness, a set of spare resources, and fully clothed in expensive garments of dubious taste.
2. Never expose any part to ultraviolet rays. Never let appliance try to, either.
3. Do not expose to temperature over 451° F.
4. Expose frequently to hot showers, preferably in suitable company.
5. Regularly feed by plugging standard PC (Pulsating Current) fangs into main artery of vertebrate, preferably *Homo sapiens sapiens*. Cold-blooded vertebrates may supply temporary buffer in an emergency.

\* Reference is made to the series of Specs written between 1995 and 1999 by Sheri Richardson, comprising *Another interview*, *Resurrection*, *Citadel of grace*, and *Afterword to the Louis stories*.

## **Marius to Amadeo**

**/ S to CB**

So young and hurt and frightened you were  
at the time when we met, yet your soft lips  
grazed mine in a kiss that sealed your trust.  
You flowered as joy was yours again, your body  
shining and sleek and beautiful and healed.  
But the time came to fight, and I was not  
strong enough, brave enough to fight for you,  
my love, my child, my happiness and pride.  
You were betrayed to jealousy and greed.  
How many days, weeks, months, or even years  
did you wait in your jail for me to save you,  
before accepting that I would not come?  
I prayed the gods to take good care of you,  
made of your loss a sacrifice to them,  
hoping to save my soul by the same act  
that damned me to my hell. Hypocrisy.  
And did they listen, did they care for you?  
Now in my dreams, you never recognize me.

## You did not come

"Padrone, why did you not come?"

"I cannot bring myself to know. Only your question compels me now to go through it, and once again I would prefer to die, like so often I wished to in all these years. For one, if I could not keep you safe then, much less I could rescue you later. If I had lacked the courage and the strength at the time of the attack, much more I lacked them in the aftermath. But the years passed and I was strong again... stronger than I had ever been before, and yet I did not come. This is the most painful, so that I tried until now to avoid to think of the reasons. The time came when I could have come, and I did not. A new fear gripped me, a double fear. One, that you would not recognize me, or love, or want me, or need me, or trust me anymore. The other, to call my sin with its own name. I had been charged against my will with a task that did not concern me. Taking care of parents, when they are powerful and healthy, and of their other children, is not a task for even an elder son. Not if he himself has his own child to provide for. That is the sin. I had sold my life and soul to their selfish needs, in exchange for a sense of being useful and ...good. I let myself believe that my first duty was to my parents and my parent's children, and not to you, my love. It is a sin for which there cannot be forgiveness. Somehow I prized you, my own son, less than theirs, and your love and your trust less than their bidding, only to keep intact my selfish pride. How ironic that obeying the gods may be a sin! I was like Abraham, ready to slaughter Isaac, but none of the gods came down to stop my hand, and the knife hit, and hit your heart, my son. I was afraid to demand of them that they took responsibility for themselves and their children, and that they let me free to care for you. No, I am lying again: I was always free. Only my choices bound me. And I chose not to face this sin of mine, until now. I have suffered for this, but you have suffered more, and that is why there cannot be forgiveness. Even you can't forgive me for this sin".

Marius is kneeling in front of his child, his head bowed down with sorrow and with shame. Armand takes his face between his hands. He does not speak, just puts his forehead against his maker's. Marius feels his cool breath upon his face and the lightest of kisses on his lips. "You're right. I can't forgive you. But I love you," he says. "and hope that you may love me still".

"Padrone, why did you not come?"

*"I cannot bring myself to know.*

*Only your question*

*compels me now to go through it, and once again*

*I would prefer to die, like I so often*

*wished to in all these years.*

For one, if I could not keep you safe then, much less I could rescue you later.

*If I had lacked the courage and the strength*

*at the time of the attack, much more*

*I lacked them in the aftermath.*

*But the years passed and I was strong again...*

*stronger than I had ever been before,*

*and yet I did not come. This is the most painful,*

so that I tried until now to avoid to think of the reasons.

*The time came when I could have come,*

*and I did not.*

*A new fear gripped me, a double fear.*

*One, that you would not recognize me,*

*or love, or want me, or need me,*

*or trust me anymore.*

*The other, to call my sin with its own name.*

I had been charged against my will with a task that did not concern me. Taking care of parents, when they are powerful and healthy, and of their other children, is not a task for even an elder son. Not if he himself has his own child to provide for. That is the sin. I had sold my life and soul to their selfish needs, in exchange for a sense of being useful and ...good.

*I let myself believe that my first duty  
was to my parents and my parent's children,  
and not to you, my love. It is a sin  
for which there cannot be forgiveness.*

*Somehow I prized you, my own son, less than theirs,  
and your love and your trust less than their bidding,  
only to keep intact my selfish pride.*

How ironic that obeying the gods may be a sin!

*I was like Abraham, ready to slaughter Isaac,  
but none of the gods came down to stop my hand,  
and the knife hit, and hit your heart, my son.*

I was afraid to demand of them that they took responsibility for themselves and their children,  
and that they let me free to care for you. No, I am lying again: I was always free.

*Only my choices bound me. And I chose*

*not to face this sin of mine, until now. I have suffered for this, but you have suffered more,  
and that is why there cannot be forgiveness.*

*Even you can't forgive me for this sin".*

Marius is kneeling in front of his child, his head bowed down with sorrow and with shame.

Armand takes his face between his hands. He does not speak, just puts his forehead against  
his maker's.

*Marius feels his cool breath upon his face  
and the lightest of kisses on his lips.*

*"You're right. I can't forgive you. But I love you,"  
he says. "and hope that you may love me still".*



## ΦΕΡΕΙΣ ΟΙΣ ΦΕΡΕΙΣ ΑΙΓΑ ΦΕΡΕΙΣ ΠΑΤΕΡΙ ΠΑΙΔΑ

Night Island.

He is sitting on the flagstones of the terrace facing the ocean, his back to the wall, legs stretched and crossed, head bent under the weight of the sound pouring from the headphones he's wearing. His breath follows the rhythm. No rock music tonight. He's listening to the rippling happiness of *The Triumph of Bacchus and Ariadne* in the words written by Lorenzo de Medici on a summer day in 1473. He feels drawn to its utter lack of sentimentality, its ease with the presence of death: joy without illusions.

*Che dolcezza vuoi che senta  
chi ha sete tuttavia...*

What sweetness can ever taste  
those who are always thirsty...

A new vibration adds to the sound of music: a light, aerial step sets a-quiver the beams of the terrace, a step he recognizes at once... restless yet contained, anxious yet controlled.

"Hi, boss," he says, and he lowers the headphones to hang around his neck.

A cloud of hair comes down on him, a cool kiss grazes his lips, and in a moment melts away. His maker sits down at his side, one knee bent, arm resting upon it. His slender hand gleams in the light of the moon while the music still tingles faintly from the headphones.

"I've been with Marius". The words are blunt, the voice is low but raw with unrest.

"I know. I saw you on the beach".

The silence between them is like brittle ice. Both tread softly, afraid to break it, afraid of the void beneath.

"You know I'm not leaving," Armand says again. His tone devoid of question, yet it is a question. Emotion frozen, yet visible under its cold transparent shroud. The maker's fear makes the fledgling shiver. He reaches down to touch his small hand and he feels those fine tough fingers squeeze his own and tremble slightly.

"It's OK, boss," he whispers, trying to keep his tone neutral. "I'm not leaving either".

A sigh escapes the other's lips, an unbidden sigh of relief, and now Daniel hears himself speak more forward, more tender words than he ever thought he would ever dare address to his maker.

"You'll be fine. Take it easy. I know how difficult it must be. You had such a short time together, and then the pain must have seemed to last forever. Don't hurry, let it come out little by little. I don't want you to hurt yourself by keeping it inside any longer, or by letting it out all at once".

"Aren't you jealous?". Curiosity, a hint of surprise.

"I can't be jealous of Marius. I owe him what I love most in eternity. You, who love me". He bends to quickly kiss his maker's temple. The scent of his hair fills his nose. There is tension still in that scent - a thread of worry in the taut muscles of his neck. Daniel shifts without rising, slips between the wall and Armand's back, quietly begins to massage his shoulders. The knots don't loosen. Instead, the mane of curls flows forward as the head bends, and the spine quivers under his fingers.

"What's wrong? Tell me, carissimo. Can't you tell me, please...?".

His maker shakes his head and Daniel hears a muffled sniff. He strokes his temples, damp with sweat from the effort of holding in the tears, and he gathers back the unruly strands of hair with the gesture of a mother. A thought hits him, as though sparkling from those shiny waves.

"\*You\* are jealous of Marius, isn't it?". He feels his maker's back tensing against his own, and a sharp intake of breath. This must be faced at once, before the thorn can fester. But he's so frightened to hurt him...

"I may fall in love with him. He is so strong and warm and shining and so worthy of love. Or he may even fall in love with me... there is no pain between us to stand in the way of love. There is no silence of the heart. I've often felt his eyes upon me, his mind touching mine, since we met here. We may prefer each other to you, and you would lose us both... you would both lose your chance to have your time with him at last, and lose what nearness we have been able to let grow between us until now. Is this what you fear?".

A sigh. His maker nods, the slender nape of his neck appearing beneath the parting hair. Daniel gathers him in his arms and hugs him tight.

"Don't be scared, my love. Don't fear that your two loves may cross and hurt you. Do take your time with Marius. We have time. I love you and I'll keep loving you and none else. You are my first priority, just as you have been his. I can wait, but you two waited too long already. Don't let this one fear stop you now. Trust us both, trust yourself, trust our love. Take what's your own. Be happy with him, let him be happy with you, and I will be happy also. Please, my love, won't you be happy at last? You'll find you place near him, and when you're comfortable there, I'll come and find you. Will you trust me, beloved? We both love you. You are safe".

"*Si, dolce, anima mia, di te mi fido.* But I don't trust myself," he breathes in response. "I know I'm safer now than I ever have been... safer from anybody but myself. For such a long time I hoped for this to happen, and then I did not dare to hope anymore, and now I am afraid that I will make some horrible mistake and lose him once more, or lose you. I want you both, but I am so afraid".

"I know. You can't cope with us both at the same time. Don't be too demanding on yourself. Believe me, it will be all right. You're not going to make any mistakes. Our love for you doesn't lie and we are not mistaken loving you. Let us both love you. You are so tired, be rested in our love".

Daniel keeps stroking his hair and as his words die out he feels his maker's body suddenly melt against his own and its light weight relax and lean on him.

"*Grazie, amor mio*". Daniel feels himself blushing. He had never heard Armand thank him before. His maker's arm reaches back and upwards, circles his neck, pulls him gently down. Their lips meet in a lingering kiss.

"I love you," they say at the same time.

Angelo Branduardi, *Il Trionfo di Bacco e Arianna*

## 97 short essays about vampires

### one: about love

Se per un vampiro uccidere equivale a quello che per gli umani è fare sesso, Louis è uno che (per citare Philippe Noiret in *Tango* di Patrice Leconte) preferisce una buona sega a un cattivo matrimonio, mentre Lestat è ovviamente uno che va a puttane.

Lestat come li raccatta così li pianta, gioca a innamorarsi; Louis non vuole conoscere le sue vittime per non correre il rischio di un (altro) amore, perché il suo amore gli è stato tolto, e non vuole che possa accadere mai più.

Interessante.

*"...Credo che fosse la pallida ombra dell'uccidere." "Ah... nel modo in cui farti male come faccio ora è la pallida ombra dell'uccidere." "Sì, signora," dissi. "Sono incline a ritenere che ciò sia esatto." E inchinandomi rapidamente, le augurai la buona notte." IV, 226*

*Una notte, passata da molto tempo, mi era presente come se ancora fossi là,... Sedevo accanto a lei e cantavo per lei, mentre mi fissava aggrappata a una bambola... Puoi immaginarlo, questa splendida intimità, luci basse, il padre vampiro che canta per la figlia vampiro? Solo la bambola aveva un volto umano, solo la bambola. IV, 216-217*

*Louis che chiedeva cortesemente a Jesse di descrivere ancora una volta l'apparizione di Claudia. E la voce di Jesse, piena di sollecitudine e di confidenza: "Ma Louis, non era reale." QD, 466*

### two: about Paul de Pointe du Lac

Visto che *a pensar mal se fa mal ma se ghe intiva*: non è che le visioni del fratello piccolo di Louis le abbia combinate Lestat, che è giusto il tipo da innamorarsi di un santo, e che l'abbia fatto fuori quando si è reso conto che poteva divertirsi molto di più con le ambivalenze di Louis che con la fede di suo fratello?

### three: of curiosity, and quiet

Lestat passa da una scenata a un'altra ("Meglio male accompagnati che soli" è il suo motto), Louis ha una quiete fluida: nessuna risposta, nessuna soluzione, nessuna fede, nessun rimedio, soltanto la calma accettazione dell'immutabile, inevitabile. Non è adesione, comprensione, convinzione nemmeno riluttante che ciò che accade sia giusto o anche solo logico: è pura presa d'atto, e compassione.

Anne Rice sembra essere giunta dopo un paio di libri a considerare Louis come personaggio insipido e non suscettibile di evoluzione - sottovalutando un fatto fondamentale e cioè la portata folgorante della sua quiete. Sembra darle l'impressione di picchiare su un materasso o affettare il loukoum.

Louis non è curioso: non pasticcia con le persone e le situazioni "per vedere cosa succede" (e per avere il gusto ipocrita di dire a se stesso dopo il massacro che non l'avrebbe mai immaginato: Lestat lo fa proprio perché non riesce a immaginare cosa succederebbe! come dio).

*Sei noncurante e spaccone e presuntuoso. Oh, non lo dico per offenderti. Davvero. Fai di tutto per farti notare e farti avvicinare e farti badare e per metterti nei guai, rimescolare la minestra e vedere se riesci a farla traboccare e se dio non verrà giù a prenderti per i capelli. Be', non c'è un dio. Potresti essere tu, dio. BT, 111*

Louis è tenace per posizione e non per sforzo, come una inforcatura salda, fedele alla linea anche quando non la vede. Non l'equilibrio stabile del cubo ("*ben tetragono ai colpi di mia sorte*" come dice Dante) ma l'equilibrio indifferente della sfera. Non importa sapere il destino, perché nessun destino può più cambiarlo. La lama delle Stelle.

Non è freddo come può sembrare a fianco di Lestat, che è una fiamma libera: Louis è una bottiglia dell'acqua calda, una teiera fumante, un sacco a pelo.

### four: of illumination

"Tutto è compiuto", un'opera è stata completata, un cambiamento definitivo ha avuto luogo, e c'è calma, e libertà assoluta, l'insostenibile leggerezza dell'essere, l'agire senza motivi e senza

scopi degli illuminati. Ora è illuminato - ma non vuole essere maestro, nè discepolo, a nessuno. E non è più curioso.

E' passato in una notte dall'angosciata eloquenza del primo tempo del concerto per violino di Mendelssohn op. 64 (nell'esecuzione di Ormandy con la direzione di Stern e la Philadelphia Orchestra) al Canone in re maggiore di Pachelbel, assolutamente conciso ed esauriente sull'argomento della pace.

E ancora: *Calling all angels* di Jane Siberry e k.d.lang, in *Until the end of the world* di Wenders; e *Praia do mar* dei Madreus, spiaggia vuota davanti all'oceano, un vuoto freddo paradiso di fronte alla fine del mondo.

*Ero in uno di quei rari momenti in cui sembrava che non pensassi a nulla. La mia mente non aveva forma. Vedevo che la pioggia era cessata. Vedevo che l'aria era chiara e fredda. Che la strada era luminosa. E volevo entrare al Louvre. IV, 342-343*

*Pensavo quietamente, Non c'è altro che possa dire, niente altro che possa fare. Volevo andare dove non ci fosse nulla di familiare. E nulla importava. E questa è la fine. Non c'è altro. IV, 361-362*

### **five: about measure**

Louis è uno che non dice "ti prego": dice "per favore". L'understatement come condizione esistenziale, lento all'ira come al perdono, capace di sopportare l'ambivalenza.

Ci vuole del bello e del buono perché Louis prenda un'iniziativa, e quando accade di solito finisce per appiccare incendi con le sue emozioni (acting out!)

### **six: love's labours lost, or are they?**

Che cosa porta infine Louis a ricambiare così limpidamente l'amore di Lestat? Lo stesso riconoscimento di questo amore, come se non potesse esistere (o non dovesse esistere) un amore non ricambiato; neppure questo amore, che Lestat nega una volta dopo l'altra, come se fosse una debolezza invece che una forza, fino a avvolgere la fiducia iniziale di Louis in una rete di diffidenza e delusione? La pura compassione per la carne e il sangue di vampiro di Lestat, sofferente e spaventato in un mondo con cui ha perso il contatto? La violenta percezione da parte sua della distanza incolmabile tra l'abitudine all'affetto reciproco, in cui è cresciuto Louis, e la solitudine, il disprezzo e la violenza tra cui è nato e in cui è riuscito a sopravvivere Lestat? O soltanto il fatto che li amiamo per quanto sono splendidi, e non necessariamente per dove hanno il cuore?

Armand/Amadeo fatica a concepire che tra vampiro maestro e novizio non ci sia reciproco amore, e non ha torto. Anche Lestat ha fatto Louis per amore. Il fatto è che un amore selvatico, impaziente, indisciplinato, inconsapevole di sé, come quello di Lestat, non è facilmente percepibile da un galantuomo come Louis.

*Distolsi lo sguardo da lui, desiderando di poter dire quello che davvero avrei voluto dire. Che lo amavo. Ma non potevo. Lo sentivo troppo profondamente... L'amore che provavo per lui era nientemeno che umiliante. VI, 574, 580*

*Sperso come il resto di noi. Non il geloso custode di una conoscenza che temeva di condividere. Non sapeva nulla. Non c'era nulla da sapere. L'avevo odiato per le ragioni sbagliate... E Lestat sedeva lì a occhi chiusi, la faccia trasfigurata dal dolore. Sembrava la copia di Lestat, una creatura ferita, sensibile che non avevo mai conosciuto. IV, 259, 327*

*"Hai sofferto mentre ero via?". Molto sobriamente rispose, "E' stato puro inferno." BT, 407*

*All'improvviso mi resi conto che quello che desideravo di più al mondo era voltarmi verso di lui e buttargli le braccia al collo e piangere sulla sua spalla come non avevo mai fatto. Che vergogna. Che banalità! Che stupidaggine. E quanto sarebbe stato dolce. Non lo feci. BT, 408-409*

### **seven: about spirit and movement**

La figura di Louis è delineata con più delicatezza e dolcezza dalle parole di Lestat che dal tono di quanto dice di se stesso, sempre distaccato e neutrale e freddo come non è mai quando parla di Lestat; Louis non riconosce in se stesso ciò che cerca. E Lestat descrive Louis solo come movimento, un corpo che si muove, dà solo informazioni sul movimento... occhi di predatore?

*Agile, spostandosi appena un po' troppo lievemente per un mortale, le membra che si muovevano come seta sotto gli indumenti trascurati... Aveva oltrepassato l'elicottero, rigirandosi e indietreggiando come un danzatore per alzare lo sguardo su di esso, i pollici infilati negligenemente nelle tasche dei jeans neri. Quando guardò di nuovo verso di me, vidi distintamente il suo viso. E sorrideva, delicato e accecante come un laser mentre si avvicinava. VL, 573-574*

*Per un lungo momento rimasi a spiarlo. Amavo fare questo. Spesso lo seguivo quando andava a caccia, semplicemente per osservarlo mentro si nutriva. Il mondo moderno non significa nulla per Louis. Cammina per le strade come un fantasma, senza suono, lentamente attirato verso coloro che attendono la morte, o sembrano attenderla. E quando si ciba, è indolore e delicato e rapido. BT, 104*

*Il passo pieno di grazia di uno che non ama fare rumore, o fare confusione, o essere visto. Abiti neri, semplici come l'espressione sul suo volto. MD, 423*

### **eight: about Marius and sight**

E invece Marius vede Louis molto più nitidamente di Lestat, vede non solo il suo modo di muoversi ma il suo modo di sentire e di pensare, e la qualità del suo continuare a esistere. Ne vede il centro, l'essenziale, a colpo sicuro. Lo riconosce.

*Louis, quello gentile, con i capelli scuri e gli occhi verdi, i cui passi risuonavano spensierati, che fischiettava tra sè nei vicoli bui così che i mortali lo udissero venire... Provava un grande affetto per quello lì, per Louis. E l'affetto non era saggio, perché Louis aveva uno spirito tenero, colto, e nulla dell'abbagliante potere di Gabrielle o del suo diabolico figlio. E tuttavia Louis avrebbe potuto sopravvivere tanto a lungo quanto loro, ne era sicuro. Curioso, il tipo di coraggio che serviva per durare. Forse aveva a che fare con l'accettazione. QD, 18-19*

*Louis, quello che stava a guardare, quello paziente, era lì puramente e semplicemente per amore. QD, 202*

### **nine: of loss and missing**

Fin da subito, Louis si trova privato del maestro che si aspettava di trovare in Lestat. Poi, anche la stessa presenza fisica di Lestat finisce per essere la posta della scelta tra lui e Claudia, una scelta che non è abbastanza veloce per fare e che il destino o il caso o il senso della sua paternità fanno al posto suo. E li perde entrambi, e c'è un vuoto di decenni, un abisso permanente attorno al quale è costretto a radicare la sua esistenza. Poi lo ritrova, e subito rischia di perderlo di nuovo, una volta, due volte, tre, senza poterci fare niente. Una lama attraverso l'anima, e che lucido silenzioso coraggio quello di attraversare il prato con calma mentre pure il passo si fa leggero di felicità, verso di lui per un momento solo, casualmente gettato di traverso a una eternità di solitudine. Lo stesso venir meno del dolore sordo e continuo della sua mancanza è una pena in sè, rimette tutto in gioco, sradica dalla base un modo di esistere che già gli è costato fino all'ultimo sospiro; e già incalza una diversa mancanza, un diverso modo di non averlo. Non fa meraviglia che in tutta onestà Louis finisca per preferire la definitività di un Lestat di nuovo mortale, e perduto, sposato a un'altra vita, piuttosto che dare mano, lui stesso, a perpetuare la tortura dell'assenza. Non fa meraviglia che il suo bacio sia freddo e senza passione. Non averlo è tutto quello che resta.

*"Non stai per lasciarci, vero?" chiese d'improvviso, la voce tagliente per l'ansia. "No," risposi. QD, 477-481*

*E poi si sporse in avanti, chiudendo la distanza tra noi, e posò le sue lisce labbra di seta sulla mia guancia. Volevo sottrarmi, ma usò tutta la sua forza per tenermi fermo, e io lo permisi, questo freddo bacio senza passione, e fu lui a ritirarsi infine come una pila di ombre che si chiudono l'una sull'altra, con solo la sua mano ancora sulla mia spalla. BT, 408-409*

*"Vieni a casa con me," disse. Una voce così umana. Così gentile. Se qualcosa avesse potuto confortarmi, sarebbe stato lui: solo con il cenno affascinante del capo, o col modo in cui mi guardava, proteggendomi con una calma piena di intimità da quello che aveva dovuto temere per me, e per sè, e forse per tutti noi. MD, 423*

### **ten: of being and feeling**

*"Perché mi ami?" chiesi. "Lo sai, l'hai sempre saputo. Vorrei essere te. Vorrei conoscere la gioia che tu conosci." "E la pena, vuoi anche quella?" "La tua pena?" Sorrise. "Certo. Farei cambio con il tuo tipo di pena in qualsiasi momento, come si suol dire." BT, 407*

Vorrei essere te. Diventare te che amo. Per diventare amabile anche io, se tu lo sei così tanto, e se solo io riuscissi a somigliarti, e invece c'è di mezzo il mondo e tutta una vita e un'anima tutta diversa.

Marius e Amadeo hanno un linguaggio di sentire comune, ma se Louis è un labrador, Lestat è un fox-terrier: il labrador non riesce in una settimana neanche a immaginare il casino che il fox combina in un pomeriggio.

### **eleven: of the growth of love**

Com'è interessante che entrambi imparino ad amarsi, un po' per volta!

Quello che li ha messi insieme è stato un combinarsi di motivi più o meno casuali e non condivisi, la cui portata è breve.

Poi, subentra qualcos'altro. Uno stare a vedere che succede, per il caso che poi vada meglio, e comunque finché non vada molto peggio, da parte di Louis; il solito giocherellare per vedere che cosa si romperà prima, da parte di Lestat. L'incrollabile pazienza dell'evoluzione filogenetica, accanto alla irrefrenabile curiosità dei primati.

Dopo ancora, ecco lo sguardo cambiare. Ciascuno giunge a essere talmente inconfondibile agli occhi dell'altro, che le uniche sorprese possono riguardare quanto l'altro riesca ad essere se stesso, anche cambiando nel tempo; e allora sono solo belle, le sorprese. E allora, chi prima chi dopo, ecco l'accettazione e non più il giudizio, perché ciascuno è già stato giudicato; ed ecco l'amore, per lo splendore unico di quell'esistenza e proprio quella. E' vero, ad amare si impara. Si diventa più bravi, pur che non si abbandoni troppo presto. Dopo i primi duecento anni, è tutta discesa.

### **twelve: vampire eyes**

Tenere a mente: l'esperienza del tempo e del mutare del mondo che hanno i vampiri, e il lasciare andare che permette a Louis di sopravvivere. Lasciare andare tutto ciò che è mortale, come noi mortali lasciamo andare le rondini in autunno sapendo che le rondini torneranno, ma non saranno le stesse rondini a tornare. Guardare ogni cosa che vive come il giardiniere guarda le erbe annuali: durano solo una stagione, vanno in seme, ne nascono altre l'anno dopo.

Se non esiste un metro di qualità valido in sé, come pensare che la cosa nuova che arriva sia peggiore della cosa vecchia che se ne va? il dolore colpisce il vecchio e il nuovo in ugual misura. Sapere che non essere è meglio che l'alternativa non porta necessariamente a concludere che il mutare delle cose che hanno la sventura di esistere sia un male ulteriore.

Vedere con occhi da vampiro: vedere il paradiso dietro la siepe di quell'orto lungo la strada e accettare il fatto che sparirà e ci costruiranno sopra uno schifo di condominio con le tue in cortile, e nessuno saprà mai più che lì c'era il paradiso - però sarà nato un altro pezzo di paradiso da un'altra parte, intanto che i ceppi dei platani antichi assassinati marciranno qui.

Occhi da vampiro - senza amare meno quello che muore.

*"Tornai a New Orleans. Era la tarda primavera di quest'anno. E appena emersi dalla stazione, seppi che davvero ero tornato a casa. Era come se l'aria stessa fosse profumata e speciale, e mi sentivo straordinariamente a mio agio camminando su quei marciapiedi larghi e caldi, sotto le querce familiari, ascoltando gli incessanti vibranti vivi suoni della notte. Naturalmente, New Orleans era cambiata. Ma lungi dal rincrescermi di quei cambiamenti, ero grato per tutto ciò che sembrava ancora lo stesso." IV, 347*

*"Quanti vampiri credi che abbiano la resistenza necessaria all'immortalità? Ogni cosa cambia tranne il vampiro stesso; ogni cosa tranne il vampiro è soggetta a costante corruzione e distorsione. Presto, se la mente è inflessibile, e spesso anche con la più flessibile delle menti, l'immortalità diventa una condanna... e quel vampiro se ne va a morire. Spesso nessuno attorno a lui -sempre che cerchi ancora la compagnia di altri vampiri- nessuno sa che è disperato. Ha smesso molto tempo prima di parlare di se stesso o di qualsiasi cosa." IV, 308-309*

### **thirteen: of writing**

What does Louis write by night? Diaries, essays, poetry, novels? Dreams, nightmares? His quiet is not to be underrated. Like the little fox in the sixty-fourth sign of I-Ching, he warily crosses the frozen river of eternity.

### **fourteen: of killing and human life**

Louis non ha la presunzione di adoperare le vite dei viventi per passare il tempo, come fa Lestat (e come fa Dio con Giobbe). Louis ha per le vite dei viventi il rispetto che il vecchio Amleto non ha mai avuto per la vita di suo figlio; il rispetto dovuto in quanto vivente anche al peggiore dei criminali; il rispetto per Caino, per Don Giovanni e il suo rifiuto di pentirsi, e per tutti i fin troppi malvagi consapevoli e senza pentimento della vita reale.

Louis non è moralista; non presume come Lestat di possedere una scala di valori valida in sè, in base alla quale giudicare condannare ed eseguire la sentenza, senza contraddittorio, basandosi solo sulla sua propria testimonianza e su illegittime e inaffidabili intercettazioni telepatiche. Louis uccide con piena e sincera consapevolezza che si tratta di un atto arbitrario. Chi è l'ipocrita tra i due?

Quanta più onestà nelle uccisioni indiscriminate e indolori di Louis, che non vi proietta l'arroganza di un giudizio.

Noi mangiamo le bistecche, e non vogliamo sapere come è morta la bestia. Un vampiro uccide di persona, uccide per mangiare, responsabilmente (o no).

Una prospettiva non specie-specifica favorisce l'apprezzamento dell'ecologia dei vampiri. Mostri a chi?! Se un vivente vale l'altro, non è la morte che importa ma la sofferenza.

Lestat ha una mente da torero, Louis è come Jeremiah Johnson in *Corvo Rosso non avrai il mio scalpo*.

### **fifteen: of compassion, and letting go**

E soprattutto: Louis lascia andare. Ha chiaro quale rapporto possa esserci tra un immortale e i viventi, il solo che può preservare la capacità di un immortale di provare compassione, il solo che può impedire che l'amore per i viventi sia fonte di sofferenza per coloro che ne sono oggetto: non interferire! Non cercare di conservarli in vita, non toccarli neppure, perché il tocco degli immortali è letale per i viventi. Lasciarli andare: lasciare che i grandi alberi antichi siano tagliati o abbattuti dalle tempeste, che gli uomini muoiano di cancro e i gatti siano presi sotto per strada e le specie si estinguano e altre ne nascano e altri alberi e bambini, perché nemmeno un immortale può eliminare l'ingiustizia del dolore.

Louis sa, e Lestat non vuole credere, che nemmeno un immortale può evitare di fare danno se cerca di salvare qualcuno senza il suo permesso; e probabilmente nemmeno con il permesso - sia per i mortali che per gli immortali, vale il principio attento a quello che chiedi, potresti ottenerlo.

Louis è un vampiro post-buddhista, taoista, indeterminista.

### **sixteen: about recognition**

Dopo duecento anni, dopo che le due sole persone (la donna, il prete) dalle quali aveva sperato in un riconoscimento basato sui suoi atti, impeccabili verso di loro, hanno corrisposto al suo scoprirsi con orrore, rabbia e disperazione, ecco che Louis si trova davanti uno sconosciuto che lo guarda negli occhi e lo riconosce e gli resta davanti e parla con lui, senza che nulla ve lo spinga o costringa: come chi si trovi fronte a una tigre nella foresta e la guardi per la sua realtà e bellezza e sincerità e per questo venga a sua volta riconosciuto e onorato dalla tigre - 10. *Lü*

E già questo solo vedersi è fin troppo per Daniel.

*"Vedo che vuoi farmi una domanda." Il vampiro si fermò. "Oh, no," disse il ragazzo, che aveva voluto nascondere. "Ma non devi aver timore di chiedermi nulla. Se qualcosa mi è troppo vicino..." e quando il vampiro disse questo il suo volto si oscurò per un istante. Aggrottò la fronte... in una curiosa espressione di profondo dolore. "Se qualcosa mi fosse troppo vicino perché tu me ne domandassi, non ne parlerei neppure," disse. "Provavi qualcosa di speciale per Babette?". "Vuoi dire amore," disse il vampiro. "Perché esiti a dirlo?" "Perché hai parlato di distacco," disse il ragazzo. "Pensi che gli angeli siano distaccati?" chiese il vampiro. Il ragazzo rifletté per un momento. "Sì," disse. "Ma gli angeli non sono capaci di amore?" Fissava il*

*tavolo, come se stesse ripensando a quanto aveva detto, e non ne fosse interamente soddisfatto. Si spostò sulla sedia e girò il viso alla finestra. "Temo di aver fatto una domanda troppo personale. Non intendevo..." disse ansiosamente il ragazzo. "Non hai fatto nulla del genere," disse il vampiro, d'improvviso guardandolo negli occhi. "e" una domanda assolutamente a proposito." IV, 66-67*

### **seventeen: I know my horseman**

*Il vampiro si protese sopra il tavolo e gentilmente spazzò via un frammento di cenere di sigaretta dal colletto del ragazzo, e questi fissò allarmato la sua mano che si ritraeva. "Chiedo scusa," disse il vampiro. "Non intendevo spaventarti. Ecco, lo rifaccio. Di nuovo, non l'hai visto... Il gesto a me è apparso lento e piuttosto languido. E il suono del mio dito che sfiorava la giacca era perfettamente udibile." IV, 30-31*

Questa è una cosa da uomo di cavalli: questo gesto, questa ripetizione tranquillizzante, il discorso del tatto, così familiare, intimo, fisico, denso e terrestre, riconoscibile anche (perfino) nel timbro alieno di un essere inumano. La lingua franca del tatto.

Come la camminata oscura e splendente di Jack Celliers alla fine di *Merry Christmas Mr. Lawrence*: "...As he was doing no more than walk across the paddock at home to take a high-spirited stallion in hand".

### **eighteen: ethics**

"Io so un segreto ma non te lo dico": lo dice Geova ad Adamo ed Eva, lo dice il vecchio Amleto al figlio, lo dice Lestat a Louis e a Claudia perché la curiosità e la paura li tengano con lui e per farsi credere superiore - MA ANDATE A FARVI FRIGGERE chi vi ha chiesto niente

Louis cerca qualcuno con cui stare alla pari. Lestat cerca qualcuno che gli sia inferiore (oppure, per cambiare, sperticatamente superiore), ma mai, mai alla pari.

### **nineteen: about Memnoch**

Il diavolo, Memnoch:

oscuro perché è triste e non perché sia cattivo

triste perché non capisce e non rinuncia a capire

perché insiste per capire

perché non si rassegna all'idea che non ci sia niente da capire

perché non si rassegna a dover mettere limiti al proprio amore

e a dover scegliere se amare le creature sofferenti o il creatore indifferente

perché non si rassegna a dover cambiare opinione sul suo dio

perché se è costretto a cambiare opinione sul suo dio, non può fare altro che non voler avere più nulla a che fare con lui

anche se questo comporta essere escluso da un luogo magnifico

e non può nemmeno sapere se tutto questo è poi vero

### **twenty: about Job**

E poi è proprio dio, che per milioni di anni ha fatto restare male Giobbe e i gigli del campo e i due passeri per un soldo e tutti i viventi che si fidavano di lui, a guardare Lestat battendo gli occhioni dicendogli "come puoi pensare di farmi questo"!

Non è un caso che il postumo più tenace di coloro che sono stati torturati sia la insidiosa convinzione di essere loro i viscidati traditori.

Cosa ha imparato Giobbe che non sapesse già prima?

A non fare domande.

Chi avrebbe dovuto imparare qualcosa non è Giobbe ma Dio.

Dio crea individui per avere un contraddittorio, e poi non vuole ascoltare (anzi si incazza)

Non è che Dio possa pensare di cavarsela solo perché è così bello e/o potente

Non più di quanto possa pensarlo il diavolo o qualunque degli umani, o dei vampiri

Che razza di "amore per tutte le creature" sarebbe, se si accompagna all'indifferenza verso quello che accade loro, perché tanto "non ha bisogno di loro"?!

### **twenty-one: about flesh and blood**

"Ama dio" e "ama il prossimo" non sono imperativi necessariamente compatibili, come mostrano almeno duemila anni di guerre di religione.



Non è OK nessuna idea che imponga il sacrificio della carne e del sangue, nemmeno se questa idea è un'idea di dio (ammonisce giustamente Maharet "*guardatevi da ciò che non ha carne e sangue, guardatevi dagli dei, guardatevi dal diavolo, guardatevi dalle idee*").

Non sottoscrivo nessun progetto che non preveda l'entrata in paradiso anche del cane insieme a Yudithshira.

### **twenty-three: about heaven**

Dice Memnoch che la sofferenza umana è più profonda di quella degli altri viventi perché gli umani ci riflettono su. Ma mentre sta capitando non rifletti un accidente! se stai lì a riflettere su come possa dio permettere tutto questo, vuol dire che hai il lusso di tempo ed energia da perdere e non stai lottando per la vita tua e quella di chi ami.

Non basta neppure restare fuori dal paradiso con gli umani, se non si resta anche con i cani e i canarini e i loro pidocchi e le rane di Venere in *Out of the Silent Planet* di C.S. Lewis. Che cosa è accaduto alle rane fatte a pezzi dal demonio? non se ne parla più, non vengono più menzionate, nemmeno una parola sulla loro sorte, come se non fossero importanti. Invece sono importanti! una sola di quelle rane dimenticate, proprio perché sono dimenticate, basta per mandare a gambe all'aria tutta la costruzione dell'universo come creato e gestito da un dio buono.

### **twenty-four: about evolution, and suicide**

Le anime in Sheol, come Louis, non si evolvono oltre: e che si evolverebbero per fare? per subire e causare altro male? Non sono più curiosi, non assomigliano più a dio (e a Lestat); stanno fuori col cane.

A Louis non viene neanche in mente di suicidarsi come Armand, scommettendo la vita contro la posta del paradiso: non gioca d'azzardo, mai, perché sa che si può solo perdere.

### **twenty-five: about sheol**

La pace degli spiriti in Sheol che hanno perdonato dio: coloro per i quali la sofferenza patita da ciascuno non importa più, perché sanno che nulla potrà riportarli là in mezzo, che sono al sicuro per sempre: che è passato, la vita è passata, e passerà anche per tutti gli altri. La stessa pace di Louis, il pensiero che poi la vita passa, anche se insieme al dolore passa lo splendore delle diecimila cose.

Come possono desiderare il paradiso? le sue stesse delizie sarebbero una beffa a fronte di quello che le ha precedute! Non c'è nulla che possa compensare l'ingiustizia del dolore; non esiste ricompensa "a mille doppi" che non sia un insulto, il prezzo pagato alla puttana dopo averla violentata. Come Thornton in *The Call of the Wild* di Jack London chiede e ottiene da Buck di fare per amor suo una cosa impossibile, e poi lo premia con una carezza.

### **twenty-six: of pain and time and forgiving**

Non passa il dolore, come ancora riesce a sperare Armand: non è il dolore che passa. Passa il tempo in cui è avvenuto, e non può ricominciare da capo. Rimane il danno, l'impercorribilità di tutta la vasta area di emozioni dove Louis non tornerà mai più, e si guarderà bene dal tornare, dopo la perdita di Claudia.

Gli è passato? No, per niente. Ha perdonato? No, mai: ha solo compassione, perfino per i colpevoli (ma non per sè). Gli ha cambiato la vita? Sì, per sempre. Come sopravvive? Ricordando che non potrà accadere di nuovo mai più: che la sua stessa irreparabilità porta con sè la certezza che è passato.

### **twenty-seven: of patience**

Louis a cui non passa mai niente; infinitamente paziente, come un molo tra i frangenti, verso i capricci di umani e non umani; incapace di fare a fette l'esperienza a colpi di idee, per separare arbitrariamente il dolore e il rimorso dalla gioia e dalla speranza, e pronto piuttosto a rinunciare a queste per non causare quelli; modesto, perché si giudica al di sotto dei suoi stessi criteri; capace di tenerezza impeccabile verso chi è abbandonato, e di implacabile freddezza verso chi quella tenerezza la pretende; che si lascia andare ai propri sentimenti in privato, e non in pubblico come Lestat; che decide ogni sera di sopravvivere anche se è assurdo, e non cerca giustificazioni fittizie della sua scelta

Louis è l'acqua tranquilla in cui scendere, lontano dalle diecimila cose. L'acqua e il fuoco, 64: *Ue Tsi, Prima del compimento*, la piccola volpe che con grande attenzione attraversa il fiume ghiacciato dell'eternità, senza saltare alle conclusioni, senza bagnarsi la coda proprio all'ultimo.

*Le Stelle*, 17, "In quest'acqua tranquilla / scendi", contrapposto a Lestat, *Il Mondo*, 21, le diecimila cose...

### **twenty-eight: the look of him**

Sorride guardando, senza una ragione apparente, e gli occhi splendono, come se vedesse e riconoscesse lo splendore in colui che guarda, e fosse felice solo perché c'è; un sorriso che non vuol dire nulla sulla sua posizione, non implica nessuna scelta, come essere felice per la luna piena della sera non vuol dire non esserlo altrettanto della pioggia pulita del mattino. Non è azione, quel sorriso, non è scelta e non è prendere parte: è pura presenza, pura consapevolezza che tu sei lì e splendi e lui lo vede e ne è felice. E' privato, solitario, non cerca compagnia, non comunica nulla; il sorriso di un maestro giovane, nato maestro, che non sa insegnare.

Tutto è dato gratis, tutto è dono.

### **twenty-nine: of innocence and guilt**

Nessuno è innocente o colpevole: è solo che quella volta lì non è/è stato lui/lei a fare (più) male. Non è vero che "non lo sapevo": è vero che "non ho voluto pensarci" (come dio), e con questo logoro pretesto si dovrebbe avere accesso al paradiso (dove sta anche dio)? Se dovessimo essere trattati come meritiamo, il più santo di noi non sfuggirebbe alla frusta. La saggezza di Amleto. Tanto basti per le punizioni. A chi serve più dolore? E cosa sposta che dio stesso venga giù a fare un giro, e poi dica "ho provato anch'io"? poteva ben risparmiarselo, per la differenza che ha fatto.

### **thirty: of faith**

Meno male che Louis è ancora là e non prende iniziative e non prende posizione e resta a guardare e resta vicino e lascia passare, perché esistere è tanto strano, troppo improbabile per farci pasticci - e lui resta a vedere, come Marius.

E non si suicida come Armand e Mael dopo aver visto gli effetti speciali di dio (come si fa senza Armand? che peccato, che spreco. Come si fa senza Mael? Potremmo stare benissimo con meno incidenti stradali, meno cancro, meno stronzi come chi-so-io, ma gente seria come Armand e Mael potrebbe restare benissimo accanto agli infarti e ai giaguari).

Meno male che Louis crede senza credere. Meno male che non si fa tirare dentro il gioco misterioso e scintillante di spionaggio e servizi segreti teologici in cui Lestat si butta a pesce, dimenticandosi del suo cane Mojo. Meno male che Louis ha la tenacia di restare, e di pensare che ci sarà un futuro e che ancora si leggeranno libri insieme agli amici.

Benedetto buon senso di Louis.

### **thirty-one: of answers coming too late**

Tutte le rivelazioni di Lestat dopo la sua avventura mistica arrivano di molto troppo tardi, quando ormai Louis ha già risolto tutto quello che è possibile risolvere, e l'ha risolto da solo. Il racconto mistico di Lestat non gli fa cambiare l'assetto dei suoi valori etici e non gli apre alcun orizzonte verso cui valga la pena di partire, perché ha già raggiunto da solo la saldezza dell'illuminazione: non c'è alcuna luce.

Se questi sono i maestri (l'aveva già detto ad Armand), meglio imparare da solo.

Louis non è uno che parte per la corsa all'oro, non è uno che vende tutto quello che ha per comprarsi l'evangelica perla preziosa (e che se ne dovrebbe fare...?). Preferisce la sua casa i suoi libri i suoi quadri e la compagnia di coloro che ama: che ama arbitrariamente, non in base al merito, come uccide, come ama Lestat.

L'irruzione di Memnoch nella trama del tempo non gli porta nessun nuovo problema e nessuna nuova soluzione; ovvio che Memnoch si rivolga a Lestat e non a Louis, che non ci casca più.

*Aveva sempre avuto tante domande; e ora aveva le sue risposte, forse più di quelle che avrebbe mai voluto avere; e che cosa avevano fatto alla sua anima?* QD, 477-481

### **thirty-two: more theology**

(censored)

### **thirty-three: about forgiving, again**

Things I still can't forgive Lestat, as he is portrayed in Rice's books:

a. He appoints himself judge and executioner of his victims (for instance, Dora's father), just through his telepathic readings. But how can he presume to really know somebody this way, when he still can't say he knows his most intimate friends and lovers? And how can he presume to be better than his victims are, and entitled to issue judgment? Who told him his criteria are the only good ones? At least Armand lets his victims be their own judges, by whatever criteria are true for them. That's paradoxically much more honest and straightforward.

b. He never stops from hitting hard on what he should instead protect or at least refrain from harming, like Louis' intellectual honesty and ethical honour. "I know, but I won't tell you because I don't feel like it" is quite exasperating, and he never loses occasion to kick anybody who's on the ground, be it friend or foe, to hell with *noblesse oblige*.

### **thirty-four: about development and relief**

To my relief, however, a number of VCSpecs are now showing his autocritical developments in this area, but this only stresses that a change is sorely needed.

By the way (be it Christ's blood that changes Lestat, or a sort of placebo effect, or again the shock of his supernatural experiences opening a breach through which Louis', and Marius', and even Maharet's impeccability can flood him at last) as soon as his own capacity to love and be responsible is released and allowed to surface, he becomes much less anxious, and much happier. And we all with him.

KC's solution through lightning-induced amnesia in "*Return to Innocence*" seems a bit drastic, but it does prove equally effective.

### **thirty-five: of questions and aims**

On his part, it is true that sooner or later Louis has ended up by dumping everybody in turn, at least for a while, but he also has always been the one to ask himself what seem to me the pitiless, necessary questions. It is not "How can I win" (Lestat) or "How can I control" (Armand), but "How can I avoid adding to the pain of the world". Only Marius is really like him: even David doesn't care a damn for the pain of the world.

### **thirty-six: of hope**

One can understand why Louis said he would change his pain with Lestat's. Not that one is sharper than the other; but one entails hopelessness for all the living, the other for the whole of one's existence. Louis has to learn to concentrate on a singularity, Lestat to look beyond individual boundaries.

### **thirty-seven: about seducing**

Il maestro seduttivo finché non ti ha nelle mani, e dopo te la fa pagare per avergli ceduto, e resti lì a domandarti per anni quale gaffe devi aver fatto senza saperlo. Qualcuno in cui hai fiducia che ti molla quando conti su di lui, lasciandoti a chiederti che cosa hai sbagliato.

Ma il paradosso è che non perdonare e tuttavia continuare, in qualche modo, a qualche livello, ad avere compassione, e a voler bene, e perfino ad amare, sono cose che possono stare insieme. Louis non ha perdonato a Lestat di aver partecipato alla morte di Claudia; e non gli ha perdonato il suo comportamento nei primi anni. Ma la comprensione dei motivi e la pura e semplice compassione, perché tutti siamo colpiti dal dolore, vivi e non-morti allo stesso modo, e siamo tutti figli di puttana uguale, è compresente in ogni momento.

### **thirty-eight: about pride**

Louis sembra avere un talento per amare nonostante tutto, a dispetto di tutto. Come mai, anche se viene trattato così male? Perché non ha abbastanza amor proprio. Louis è cresciuto nell'affetto della sua famiglia, a differenza di Lestat; eppure non crede di essere degno di affetto. Si sente beneficiato da un dono che non ha meritato e per cui prova una gratitudine perenne. Non considera ovvio essere amato; considera ovvio che sia amato Lestat. Quindi gli va bene tutto, non si aspetta di essere trattato bene, gli pare normale che sfoghi i nervi su di lui, o peggio. L'unica cosa a cui tiene e che difende è la sua percezione di quello che è giusto, proprio perché non crede che sia sua: proprio perché è lo standard a cui cerca di conformarsi, e crede di non riuscirci.

### **thirty-nine: about guilt**

Louis feels guilty for choosing to defend Claudia against Lestat. I wish he would also think about how guilty he would have felt if he had not. Between two fighting predators, he found himself standing on the side of the younger, smaller, weaker, like the gentleman he is. Which he won't, ever, realize or believe.

### **forty: about power**

Marius si comporta come se l'unico motivo per sopportare il potere sia l'occasione di usarlo per proteggere qualcuno dal dolore. Per poter occuparsi senza interferenza, da parte di nessuno, di quelli che può, dei suoi cari che ama. Per non ricevere ordini, da nessuno, riguardo a questo; per poter assicurare a chi vive con lui, nel suo territorio, nel suo regno, anche le libertà che "non stanno bene" secondo le regole del decoro del momento. I gatti nel letto, i gatti sulla tavola. Questo potere lo vuole! per questo potere è disposto a lottare, e a essere spietato.

Ha grazia, in questo potere. Il suo potere non è rozzo e greve, anche se non è neppure sottile e leggero. E' denso e caldo, solido, morbido, e con un'anima inflessibile.

### **forty-one: about suicide, again; and friendship**

Mi pare ovvio che Lestat non abbia parlato con Louis di quello che l'ha spinto ad aspettare il sole nel deserto; che Armand non abbia parlato con Daniel, o con Marius, di quello che l'ha spinto ad aspettare il sole davanti alla cattedrale. Si può -forse- parlare di darsi la morte con un amico, ma non con un amore. Si può parlarne con qualcuno per il quale un discorso come questo è solo una parte della sua vita; con qualcuno la cui vita non viene capovolta da un discorso come questo, perché non sei tu la sua prima priorità, così come non cambia poi gran che nella tua se quando lo cerchi non c'è o ha da fare con il suo, di amore, perché non è lui la tua prima priorità. Un amico davvero intimo può ascoltare il racconto che fai della tua vita, esserne testimone, ma non la vive insieme a te. Le vostre vite si toccano, si abbracciano, ma scorrono separate. Non si può parlarne con un amore, perché con un amore due vite sono diventate una, e scorrono nello stesso letto. Quale dei due fiumi è l'affluente? E quello che può spingere a darsi la morte è proprio ciò la cui esperienza non si può condividere, con nessuno, mai, e quindi non si può dire all'altra metà dell'acqua. Se si potesse parlarne, non porterebbe a morire.

### **forty-two: Armand, and betrayal**

Armand/ Il suo tradimento verso Marius è forzato dalle circostanze - e dopo, che si fa? Ancora più difficile che ammettere, senza scuse, di avere tradito, è tornare di fronte/accanto a chi è stato tradito, e non solo per chiedere perdono, ma per riprendere un rapporto qualsiasi. E' già difficile quando sono morti; ma uno vivo (per così dire) come Marius è qualcosa di terrificante, perché la presenza di una ulteriore variabile nell'equazione ("e lui ora cosa farà?") la rende inaffrontabile.

### **forty-three: trust**

Per di più, ogni volta che gli scappa di fidarsi a essere felice Amadeo sembra incappare in qualche disastro di cui finisce per sentirsi colpevole - eppure un ragazzino di diciassette anni non poteva farcela a difendere la propria anima con un senso della realtà che non poteva ancora essersi costruito.

Risultato: non si sogna nemmeno di fidarsi più di nessuno, men che meno di se stesso, e (per proiezione) nemmeno di Marius. In effetti, sta in un'incidente di doppio vincolo: se viene perdonato, o comunque amato ancora, si sente ancora di più una merda, e se viene anche solo rimproverato trova conferma che non può fidarsi nemmeno quando, da parte sua, è davvero impeccabile, al punto di avere il coraggio di chiedere perdono.

### **forty-four: self-esteem**

Non si fida perché non si stima abbastanza. Non si stimava abbastanza allora, perché non ha creduto di avere ragione al punto da continuare a lottare contro quelli che dall'alto gli dicevano che aveva torto e che era cattivo a causa di quello che credeva (e che amava). Non si stima adesso, perché si è reso conto che avrebbe dovuto continuare a lottare, per difendere se stesso ancora prima che Marius o la sua memoria.

### **forty-five: healing?**

Non serve a niente sperare che si arrenda a un amore che lo curi, perché si sentirebbe ancora più impotente; e non si autorizza di sicuro a lottare per se stesso contro quelli che ha tradito.

Allora ecco che fa finta di niente, fa finta che il tradimento sia il modo normale di funzionare per tutti, e riproduce all'infinito la situazione per mimetizzare tra le ripetizioni il guaio irrisolvibile.

### **forty-six: healing!**

Ci vogliono anni, secoli; ci vorrebbe che avesse il coraggio di azzardarsi a curarsi impeccabilmente di qualcuno che ne ha bisogno -qualcuno di facile, non un umano, o un ex-umano- anche senza amarlo, solo per adempiere a una promessa verso se stesso, e avesse successo fino in fondo, e riuscisse a sentire di stare facendo penitenza abbastanza per presentarsi al cospetto di quello che amava anche di più, ma il proprio amore per il quale non è riuscito a difendere.

A diciassette anni si crede che la felicità sia davvero possibile, e ci vorrebbe un miracolo per riuscire a tenere duro davanti a un' "autorità morale" che odia qualsiasi amore e gioia al di fuori di sé. Ci vogliono anni anche solo per riuscire a pronunciare di nuovo quel nome, altri per chiedere perdono, troppi per decidere di vedere se è possibile ritrovarlo, e chissà diavolo che cosa per sentire di aver cominciato a riparare un pochino. Per Armand non può esserci fiducia e stima in nessuno se non c'è prima fiducia e stima in se stesso e in quello che ha imparato - imparato a essere, non a sapere!

### **forty-seven: on lies, and hypocrisy**

Armand is a liar. He is a master at all the forms of this subtle art: not saying, suggesting, inducing conclusions, and outright telling lies. But he does not lie to himself; does not even just hope for the best. He knows better than anybody the dangers of wishful thinking in any matter, but especially about oneself.

On the other hand, Lestat has a stubborn vein of hypocrisy. He tends to fear uncomfortable truths, so he does his best to dodge them by any means. When he lies to others, he often ends up believing his own lies. He has never been cornered by intolerable realizations about himself like Armand has been; he has never reached the bottom of disillusionment.

### **forty-eight: sense of reality**

Another way to put it: Armand has necessarily developed a strong sense of reality. He had to, in front of his marginal chances of survival (and sanity) throughout his mortal and immortal existence. Lestat hasn't: he always somehow found resources to spare, without finding himself shackled down to the basics of things-as-they-are.

### **forty-nine: being spoiled**

Again: although his formative years were more than uncommonly hard, Lestat has managed to be spoiled all the same. It seems he did it himself, as nobody else cared enough to do it. Armand is not spoiled. He could not afford the energy. He did not even get spoiled by Marius. Surely he was not spoiled by his power as coven master... his awareness of the dangers involved outweighed whatever heady effect such position might have had. He now takes care not to be spoiled by Daniel. This may be a part of their problems, as such caution involves a sort of reticence or lack of trust.

### **fifty: being spoiled, again**

On the whole, the fastest way to get spoiled is living for some time without anyone criticising you. It becomes all too easy to get into the habit of believing to be always right, just because nobody dares, or cares, to propose alternative points of view. Armand has always been especially good at criticising himself, quietly and effectively, from the inside. He is a sort of living, permanent brainstorming session. He never allows himself to believe that good things won't go bad, bad things won't get worse, and he won't make some terrible mistake at some time or other.

### **fifty-one: about gambling**

Lestat è il tipo da giocare agli sciocchi giochi di sorte, dadi, lotto, faraone. E' un cane a poker perché gli si legge tutto in faccia. Sente il gioco d'azzardo come una cosa che sta dalla parte della vita. Armand vince ai giochi di calcolo psicologia e ragionamento, bridge, scacchi,

Terraform. Minimizzare l'incidenza della sorte. Giocare è rassicurante, come per un samurai allenarsi con la katana, lo strumento perfetto per una perfezione che sta fuori dallo strumento e fuori da chi lo usa con precisione mortale. Louis non gioca d'azzardo, non più. Il gioco d'azzardo è una mimesi della morte, un corteggiamento della morte. Sa benissimo che non c'è nulla che valga la pena di ottenere vincendo al gioco, e che comunque si perde sempre.

### **fifty-two: happiness and danger**

Nota anche: la faccenda della felicità pericolosa. Ogni volta che Armand si sente felice e che comincia a convincersi che possa essere vero, succede un disastro. Perché? che cosa apre la strada al pericolo? che cosa lo rende pericoloso per se stesso e per gli altri? Risposta: il fatto che essere felice si identifica nell'abbattimento delle difese. Si sente felice quando si sente al sicuro; quando è felice non sta in guardia. Si lascia scoprire, si lascia vedere, per quanto è in carne viva, e indifeso. L'entusiasmo è felicità, felicità è sentirsi al sicuro, e se la fortuna è cieca, la sfiga ci vede benissimo.

### **fifty-three: honour**

Nulla di breve può restituire a Armand il suo onore davanti a se stesso. E' questa mancanza, questa lesione, a far sì che Armand -anche se fa abilmente in modo che non si veda- già al tempo del Théâtre des Vampires stia messo parecchio peggio di Louis dopo *Memnoch the Spec* e *Sins of the Past*. Sta messo come D'Artagnan in *Vingt ans après*. Non solo è ferito dalla sofferenza che gli è stata inflitta, ma si vergogna pure. Non riesce ad assolversi nè a chiedere di essere assolto, perché non ce la fa a tornare sopra quella sofferenza. Come la strega Karabà non riesce a pensare di affrontare il dolore che sentirebbe se la spina della malvagità le venisse strappata dalla schiena.

### **fifty-four: trust and love**

Armand è capace di amare, anche se è così possessivo (come la bambina romena adottata dalla mia amica Manuela, che non voleva spogliarsi per paura che le portassero via i vestiti); ma non si fida. Non si fida di Daniel: perché dovrebbe? Lo vuole, ma non si fida. Non gli dice nessuna delle cose che si dicono agli amici. Non gli dice come si sente. Dagli torto! Non desidera neanche più di potersi fidare. Non gli manca più. Ha dovuto imparare che si può vivere senza fidarsi. Che fidarsi è troppo rischioso. Guarda cosa è capitato nei primi vent'anni della sua vita! che cosa potrebbe resistere su una durata di tempo infinita, se nulla ha resistito anche solo vent'anni? *Nothing's forever not even five minutes* (Lou Reed, *Finish Line*).

### **fifty-five: trust, again, and wanting**

Magari ha solo un'idea sbagliata della fiducia. Un'idea infantile, che ci sia qualcuno, da qualche parte, che non potrà mai farci del male perché ci ama. Magari è questo, pretende troppo, o piuttosto nulla. Incapace di sostenere l'ambivalenza altrui, e per questo incapace di perdonare, o anche solo di dedicare anima al recupero di amori affondati.

E' un peccato? oppure è saggezza? E' più ingenuo pensare che non si possa ricostruire una storia naufragata (letteralmente: che non valga il dolore che costerebbe), o pensare che quella storia sia indispensabile all'universo? E' più ingenuo rinunciare, o volere ancora di più? Da bambini si tende a volere sempre di più, a volere il massimo, a volere tutto, a volere la favola. Come fa Lestat. Ora Armand tende a non volere niente che non sia certo di poter avere.

### **fifty-six: too late?**

E' quello che è, ormai. Non sa che cos'è; sa dove non è. Non è più un problema di essere, è un problema di avere: avere cose, potere, persone vicino, un territorio in esclusiva, finché ce la fa - finché i secoli e la morte non lo svuoteranno e il mondo non si impadronirà di nuovo di quello che è stato suo.

Controllare quello che si ha, chi si ha. Tenerlo accanto, o almeno sotto controllo ogni momento. Non è OK seminare roba e gente in giro come Lestat. Non basta essere senza avere (niente, nemmeno un amore su cui contare) come Louis. Prudente come un serpente, anche a costo di non essere innocente come una colomba.

### **fifty-seven: courage**

Armand ha più coraggio di Louis nell'affrontare la conoscenza del dolore degli altri. Louis ha più coraggio di Armand nel rinunciare a farsi delimitare dal feedback di qualcun altro.

### **fifty-eight: solitude standing**

Armand non riesce a restare da solo. Da solo sparisce, non percepisce i propri contorni. Forse anche il suo coraggio di guardare dentro la pena degli altri è un modo per sentire che la sua è da un'altra parte; che è diversa; che non è quella lì.

### **fifty-nine: about power**

Ci sono modi ben peggiori di quelli di Armand per gestire il potere. Capita che sia crudele, ma non ha mai la mancanza di rispetto che è l'indifferenza. Cruel, never uncaring. He does care. He cares as much as Marius, but his power is different. It is the power of seduction, not of protection. Armand feel powerless to protect. His presence demands that you are responsible for yourself, that you take care of yourself and make your own decisions, and face the consequences - including his own reactions. It may not be quite a comfortable position, but one understands how this may have come to be.

### **sixty: about advance payment**

Ancora: non si sente all'altezza nè della felicità nè del dolore. Non gli riesce di riconoscere la felicità e di apprezzarla e soprattutto di lasciare che si veda (che Daniel veda) che la apprezza, perché il dolore verrà di sicuro, presto, perché non si può mai pagare prima, si paga tutto sempre dopo...

### **sixty-one: masks**

CHI è quando è felice? e CHI è quando il dolore colpisce? avvolto di maschere, con parole prese a prestito, senza sentire il sapore di quello che sta accadendo e che non è tanto veloce o coraggioso da seguire... non è nessuno, appena la superficie dell'acqua si arruffa lui sparisce sotto. Il tempo e l'accumularsi del dolore non elaborato fiacca la stessa forza che cresce con gli anni, sia verso il dolore fisico che verso la sofferenza interiore.

### **sixty-two: is a child really so innocent?**

Lestat/ E' testardo e pieno di arie e di aspettative che pretende gli vengano soddisfatte, intollerante possessivo verso chiunque gli piaccia, non si ferma davanti a niente per ottenere quello che vuole e non tiene conto di come ciò fa sentire gli altri. Li chiude in gabbia e li lascia lì intanto che se ne va per i cazzi suoi, solo per il gusto di sapere che li ritroverà quando torna e che nulla di interessante potranno fare o potrà loro accadere se non sarà lui a farlo succedere. E quando è felice non gliene frega niente se qualcun altro non lo è. E' tutto quello che Louis ha lavorato dalla nascita e continua a lavorare per non essere, anche a costo di non essere felice, e di cui non vorrebbe sapere proprio più nulla mai, se non gli fosse capitata la sorte (buona? cattiva?) di innamorarsene.

### **sixty-three: how many centipedes under that stone?**

Eppure ecco che sotto (tanto sotto che Anne Rice non lo lascia nemmeno sospettare, e ci vuole la tenerezza degli Spec writers perché me ne accorga) lo accompagna la sensazione sottilmente orribile che c'è qualcosa che lui non vede, e che NON è piacevole. Che quello che sa di se stesso non è tutto, e che quello che non sa e che non vede non è niente di bello. Non si rende conto che questa cosa oscura dalle molte gambe formicolanti non è affatto ciò che teme lui. Lui teme di essere inamabile, e invece è amato con passione da un sacco di belle persone. Quella cosa oscura è la mancanza di una cosa che ha sempre data per scontata, dall'alto dei suoi nobili natali, ma che non è ereditaria e che viene dall'educazione del cuore, che ognuno dà a se stesso: il concetto che *noblesse oblige*, che chi è (o si sente) superiore ha il dovere di coscienza di proteggere chi gli è inferiore, senza volere nulla in cambio. Una cosa che a Louis viene del tutto spontanea, e che Lestat non si sogna nemmeno. Il che smonta definitivamente qualsiasi definizione precostituita di "nobile" e "borghese".

### **sixty-four: about escaping, and fighting**

E allora Lestat non vuole vedere e non vuole che vedano gli altri, per cui non si lascia aiutare e non si aiuta neanche da solo: si sposta altrove, non si mette mai lì a fare psicodrammi nemmeno soltanto con se stesso; non riflette mai, reagisce e basta. Dannato angloarabo. Eppure è ammirevole come abbia le palle per tenere duro anche quando la posizione è insostenibile. Non cede mai. Non smonta nessuna delle sue aspettative: al contrario, lotta per esse anche quando sono impossibili.

### **sixty-five: habits**

Un'altra cosa: Lestat è abituato a stare male come un cane senza che nessuno possa farci un accidente. Lo trova normale. Ci hanno pensato i suoi, a fargli prendere l'abitudine. Quindi trova altrettanto normale che soffrano anche gli altri. Louis invece no: è stato amato, si sono presi cura di lui, è abituato a ricambiarli, non riesce a concepire che il dolore non sia uno sbaglio, rimediabile, da rimediare, subito.

### **sixty-six: the age of happiness**

La felicità/ Si diceva: Felicità per Lestat è quando le cose accelerano, è combattere e vincere un avversario forte. *Happiness is a warm gun*. Felicità per Louis è quando le cose rallentano, è poter abbassare la guardia e deporre le armi. *Happiness is a warm heart*. Felicità per Armand è qualcosa che riempie l'anima, e non avere paura. Entusiasmo che non deve nascondersi, che può lasciarsi vedere. Quando è felice non si protegge, e lo beccano sempre. Perché quando è felice è piccolissimo. La sua felicità non è cresciuta. Il suo dolore è adulto, ma non la sua gioia. Non è cresciuta perché non vuole educarla, anzi non vuole avere proprio niente a che fare con qualsiasi cosa di lui sia così piccola e indifesa, anzi non vuole avere a che fare proprio con nessun cucciolo che deve ancora crescere, visto quello che hanno fatto a lui. Non mi stupisce che ne abbia sterminati tanti. Essere veramente felice, e piccolo, lo ha portato sempre a sbattere il naso contro qualcosa di adulto, incomprensibile e infrangibile come una scogliera, contro cui non ha avuto mai nemmeno il permesso postumo di arrabbiarsi.

Ha un sacco di senso immaginare in che modo e perché si difende così abilmente dalla gioia. Non si lascia vedere felice, perché è pericoloso. La gioia deve restare dentro, non vedersi, restare mascherata da una -da un'infinità- di maschere, di *personae* accettabili per il mondo; e il mondo comincia subito al di fuori della pelle, e non esiste nel mondo un solo posto sicuro al di fuori della pelle. Per forza non va in cerca di Marius: perché Marius lo conosce per dentro e per fuori, e da lui non potrebbe nascondersi, silenzio radio o no. Per forza tiene a distanza Daniel: perché è così vicino, e lo rende così felice, che finirebbe per vedersi.

### **sixty-seven: by the way**

(Lo stesso meccanismo di Lestat con Louis, con la differenza che Lestat non ha paura di nessun pericolo nè in cielo nè in terra nè altrove, semplicemente si rifiuta di ammettere un legame qualsiasi; gli va benone di essere felice, ma non di essere dipendente da qualcuno).

### **sixty-eight: intimacy**

Quale intimità ammette la condivisione della gioia (dell'entusiasmo senza paura, anche se è così bambino)? Tutte hanno ceduto, prima o poi, lasciando a nudo la vulnerabilità della sua gioia che si trasforma in dolore.

### **sixty-nine: is happiness selfish?**

Lestat: quando è felice, è una maledetto stronzo egoista, a cui sembra che nessuno possa avere dei problemi veramente gravi, dato che LUI è felice. E comunque non ha nessuna intenzione di occuparsi dei guai degli altri, perché se no gli toccherebbe smettere di essere felice. Non è capace di essere felice mentre qualcun altro non lo è, quindi evita anche solo di vedere (non vuole vedere, è bravissimo a non vedere!) l'infelicità degli altri.

E' tutta un'altra storia il fatto che Louis non tocca chi conosce, e non vuole conoscere le sue vittime. Difendere una felicità egoista non è lo stesso che decidere di sopravvivere ancora un giorno soffrendo meno possibile, facendo quello che serve per arrivare a domani, e domani vedremo.

### **seventy: even worse than that**

Armand/ Su che cosa si può contare? Sulla persistenza del dolore. ALLORA? Allora meglio essere prudenti, basarsi sull'ipotesi peggiore che è sempre la più probabile, e costruirsi una vita meno peggio possibile basandosi sulla considerazione che non si può contare sulla felicità qualsiasi cosa si faccia per raggiungerla o per tenercela; basandosi su quanto amore e fedeltà è possibile ottenere su questo presupposto. Se è felice lo piantano, se è triste, ben che vada, almeno lo sopportano.

### **seventy-one: addition**

Può darsi che in fin dei conti la principale puttanata che si fa quando si è felici sia saltare alle conclusioni e aspettarsi che duri. Che "adesso" non potrà accadere più niente di male, né a me



né ad altri. Che loro staranno dalla mia parte, che lui non sparirà in fondo alla piazza, eccetera eccetera.

Un'altra cosa che Armand sa, e vedi sopra a proposito dell'intimità: nemmeno l'intimità dura per sempre. Nessuna esperienza condivisa nel passato è di per sé garanzia che l'intimità duri. L'intimità dura per quello che le succede adesso. Non è mica diverso che per i gatti. Ci si trova, si sta insieme, poi c'è che ci si separi, anche per sempre. E' la vita. La fine di una intimità non la svaluta retrospettivamente. L'abitudine, l'adattamento, l'affezione sono una colla potente, ma nemmeno questa basta da sola. Le storie finiscono, davvero, di solito, quasi sempre. Non sempre.

### **seventy-two: ambivalence**

C'è qualcosa che non quaglia - non ancora. La faccenda della felicità e dell'intimità che finisce è ancora così ambigua. Non ha ancora capito. Sa solo che l'irreparabile esiste, e che non può più riparare la cosa peggiore che sa di aver fatto (e spera con tutta l'anima di non averne fatte altre di peggiori di cui non si rende conto), e che qualsiasi altra cosa non può non essere tinta di questo colore. Se non ha saputo lottare per Marius, se non è stato fedele a lui, a chi altro vale la pena di essere fedele? Sono uno stronzo? sono uno stronzo. Però prudente.

### **seventy-three: of command and obedience and anarchy**

Per esempio, la questione del comando (e dell'obbedienza).

Mi sa che l'unico a cui comandare piace proprio è, al solito, Lestat. Gli piace dare ordini e ottenere obbedienza, cieca pronta assoluta e rispettosa. Fa in modo di avere sempre sotto qualcuno a cui comandare.

A Marius invece viene naturale, ma non sembra tenerci particolarmente.

Marius non costringe nessuno a obbedire. Spiega sempre il perché dei suoi ordini. Non si fa servire per rafforzare il suo ego sottolineando la sua superiorità.

Louis doveva essere piuttosto bravo, attento, probabilmente abbastanza gentile da essere considerato un buon padrone, e non riesco a immaginare che abbia tenuto altro che un profilo basso nell'organizzare il lavoro e tenere la disciplina tra gli schiavi, ma appena non ha più avuto da badare alla piantagione ha accuratamente evitato sia di dare ordini che di riceverne. Mi sa che è il vero anarchico fra tutti: non ha bisogno di essere né di avere un capo, non rompe le regole, nemmeno le vede... Un po' come Tristan Ludlow?... "Afflitto da complesso di parità: non si sente superiore o inferiore a nessuno".

Armand... credo che, dopo gli ordini pazzeschi che era stato costretto a eseguire, obbedire a uno come Marius fosse il massimo della felicità immaginabile. Non avere nessuno a cui obbedire, a quel punto non è immaginabile. Scorpione e Leone, il primo ministro e il sovrano, due modi di esercitare il potere non necessariamente incompatibili, forse complementari se riescono a delimitare e dividersi i campi dell'ideazione e dell'azione. Obbedire, ma solo a lui; a lui, che comanda tutti gli altri. E invece ecco che gli finisce addosso la tensione continua di svolgere entrambe le funzioni, di progettare e di comandare, di essere solo al potere, coven master. Una fatica acuta come un dolore.

### **seventy-four: free us from power**

Non è per caso che l'irruzione di Lestat lo affascini totalmente. Forse, forse, ecco qualcuno che può prendere il comando, alleggerirlo di metà del peso spaventoso del potere assoluto. Non è per caso che passa tanto tempo con Louis, in compagnia del quale il problema del comando non si pone a nessun titolo. Anche Night Island è organizzata in modo che non ci sia un coven master: né lui stesso, né altri. Mai più. Per chi, in nome di cosa? Mai più. Resta vuoto il posto dove una volta c'era LUI, e non smette di fare male anche se non c'è più nessuno -neppure lo stesso Marius- che abbia la forma esatta di quel vuoto e possa colmarlo.

### **seventy-five: kill the Buddha**

E Louis? Quando ha creduto di aver trovato un maestro, ecco che non era così. Il maestro era più piccolo di lui. Allora ha ucciso il Buddha. Non si fida più di nessuno. Non vuole obbedire più a nessuno. Forse nemmeno a se stesso. E non gli interessa dare ordini: non abbastanza per desiderarlo, per fare in modo da poterne dare. Non abbastanza per superare il timore di trovarsi a dare ordini come a schiavi e non a dipendenti, a creare accettandola una situazione di disparità, di disegualianza. Meglio fare da solo, meglio non chiedere aiuto a nessuno, meglio non comandare a nessuno.

### **seventy-six: is neurosis adaptive?**

"La nevrosi è adattativa"

Non ha senso affrontare di petto quello che non si può risolvere.

Ma come fare a sapere che cosa non si può risolvere? le grandi domande, i rapporti affondati... c'è energia abbastanza da rischiarla (rischiare di perderla, inutilmente) per recuperare quello che si è perduto? Il rischio è reale.

Di irreparabile c'è, realmente, solo la morte. Ma tutto muore un po' alla volta, quasi niente muore tutto d'un colpo.

Come fare a sapere che cosa è già morto e cosa ancora vive? a sapere se ce n'è ancora abbastanza perché abbia senso, e prudenza, correre il rischio...?

### **seventy-seven: wish**

Ancora a proposito di Armand/ E' guardare in grande che fa venire voglia di morire.

Tra oggi e domani, si trova sempre qualcosa che distrae abbastanza da far sembrare che valga la pena di tirare avanti: se non altro, come fa vedere il training autogeno, il cuore batte, il respiro continua, il corpo c'è (ancora). C'è sempre qualcosa che aspetta, qualcosa da fare stasera, o domani mattina.

Sono le larghe vedute a uccidere -- vedere le proporzioni della propria personale esistenza e di quella dei propri cari in rapporto a quelle del mondo, vedere (non solo sapere) le migliaia di creature macellate per te, intanto che per il soffio di pochi anni o pochi secoli cerchi di fare felice qualcuno che ami.

### **seventy-eight: the world is too much for us**

E più tempo passa, più è difficile pensare in piccolo. Il mondo preme sulle pareti della mente, si infiltra nelle fessure, cola dentro come un'acqua nera. Dopo trecento anni tocca sgottare ogni sera. Dopo quattrocento... *The more I hurt, the less I feel. The more I know, the less I rest* (River Phoenix, *Lone Star*).

La mente umana non è fatta per reggere a prospettive così vaste, e sopravvivere. Non senza avere alle spalle una forza già radicata: una vita piena e felice come Marius, uno scopo bruciante come Maharet.

### **seventy-nine: Armand/ renounce**

Armand è sopravvissuto rinunciando, e quello che prende non è mai suo -- lo sfiora soltanto. Di nessuno dice "è mio". Non ha nulla e nessuno in esclusiva. Anche Night Island è a disposizione di chiunque. Perché niente dura. *Better to have loved not, than to have loved and lost. Better to have not, than to have and have lost.*

### **eighty: Armand/ the pain will come**

*oh oh these little earthquakes*

*oh here we go again...*

(Tori Amos, *Little Earthquakes*)

come si dice quando sai che verrà il dolore, inevitabile come sforzi di vomito o le doglie del parto; quando ormai sai prevedere al secondo il momento preciso in cui ti attraverserà come una fredda lama sottile, insopportabile, invisibile, e sai che non hai potere di cambiare nulla e hai smesso di pensare a quanto tutto dovrebbe essere diverso (e avevi creduto che potesse esserlo); a quella che immaginavi fosse la felicità, e invece era un sogno, estraneo al modo di andare del mondo.

### **eighty-one: Armand/ accepting?**

Non è accettazione, non è rassegnazione perché ancora non capisci il perché e non credi che ce ne sia uno. E' solo che tutta la forza e tutta la pazienza e tutto il coraggio sono succhiati fino in fondo solo per far sopravvivere a quel dolore la tua anima, e non ne resta nemmeno per fare una domanda, o protestare, o sperare in qualcosa di diverso, o per la compassione di Louis.

Il dolore irresistibile come le doglie

*here we go again*

non c'è niente che si possa fare

niente da qui alla fine dei secoli

un sapore duro amaro ma unilaterale, liscio, pungente, stretto come un grido che non si sente perché se lo si lascia uscire non si smette più di urlare, e non si può urlare sa che sapore ha l'inevitabile quando non c'è un altro posto dove stare che stupidità aver pensato che potesse andare altrimenti che spreco credere di poter dedicare energie a immaginare che andasse altrimenti

### **eighty-two: the seducer**

La seduzione/ altro bel problema. La seduzione è un potere non legittimo, perché non manifesto. La seduzione subentra quando chiedere apertamente non ha dato risultati. E' una di due cose, costrizione ("se vuoi questo, allora devi fare quest'altro") oppure frode ("non si accorgerà neanche che sono io ad averglielo fatto fare"). Non è OK. E' come coprire gli occhi al cavallo per fargli l'iniezione (quella a cui appartengo si incazza come una bestia: "ma per chi mi prendete?". Preferisce il torcinaso, almeno è onesto) oppure picchiarlo tanto che preferisce passare dove prima aveva paura. E' come "guarda l'uccellino!" per fare quelle dannate foto. E' come tutti i "vedremo", i "domani", le mezze bugie, le promesse false che si dicono ai bambini per farli stare buoni per mezz'ora. O andare a fare le coccole al papà perché così ti molla le diecimila lire. (Louis si rifiuta di tentare di sedurre chicchessia che gli abbia risposto picche quando ha chiesto qualcosa direttamente. A parte che non è capace, perché ci vuole una certa finezza mondana, e Louis non si prende la briga di essere così con nessuno che non sia un cavallo, e quelli non ha bisogno di sedurli. Che incredibile fortuna non aver mai dovuto imparare a sedurre per sopravvivere. Che peccato che non abbia avuto i riflessi abbastanza pronti per combattere e far sopravvivere quella che amava).

### **eighty-three: about anger**

Arrabbiarsi/ Arrabbiarsi fa bene. Un guaio con Armand è che ha smesso di arrabbiarsi contro l'ingiustizia. Perché? Perché si sta malissimo. Tanta ce n'è, di ingiustizia, tanta ne ha vista, tanta ne ha subita, che ha rinunciato ad arrabbiarsi come ha rinunciato a fidarsi. L'orrore è normale: l'orrore repentino, imprevedibile, inevitabile. Non ci si può fare niente. Arrabbiarsi, o chiedersi perché accade, sono lussi da bambini ricchi. Ha smesso di discutere con dio, come con chiunque altro; non prende neanche più in considerazione che possa esserci un dio (persona o proiezione che sia), pur di non trovarsi a dover essere in disaccordo con lui (o lei, o esso/a). Non solo non c'è un criterio oggettivo di bene o di vero, ma soprattutto non vale la pena di indagare che cosa lui stesso sia personalmente convinto che sia bene o vero... tanto, presto accadrebbe qualcosa che gli porterebbe via anche quelle convinzioni, arbitrarie quanto preziose. Basta, quel che non c'è non si può rompere. Si era convinto che fosse possibile essere felice: ah, ma allora si poteva! e poi di colpo no: ecco, mi pareva... Era possibile, e proibito.

### **eighty-four: getting back there**

*"Non dovrebbe avere più importanza"* come disse il Corto Maltese, ma invece ne ha tanta che non ce la fa a tornare là, a vedere il momento del passato in cui ha visto sparire quella felicità che gli era sembrato potesse essere sua, e non in prestito. Per questo è addirittura più facile per Louis pensare a Claudia: la sua morte non ha cambiato le sue convinzioni, solo il modo in cui affronta un mondo creato, a quanto pare, secondo criteri incompatibili con i suoi. Per questo Armand è affascinato da Louis, la cui rabbia contro l'ingiustizia lo spinge a bruciare un teatro e fare una strage. Armand non ci riuscirebbe più. Armand quando stava con Marius cercava ancora, contro ogni speranza, qualcuno di cui fidarsi e da amare. Poi diventa come la mia cavalla, la tenerezza distrutta per sempre, non cercata più. Sempre in guardia.

### **eighty-five: here we go again**

*Oh oh these little heartbreaks  
oh here we go again...*

Little earthquakes,  
little heartbreaks...

l'irreparabile, inevitabile che mormora al mio orecchio "eh già", con quel tono piatto e vuoto di quando non c'è vita di fronte a quella cosa, non resta nemmeno il ghigno involontario dell'orrore, che sembra un sorriso e non lo è.

*Little heartbreaks*

con la stessa tenace rassegnazione di Parlando del naufragio della London Valour di Fabrizio De André... e il macellaio mani-di-seta distribuì le munizioni.

### **eighty-six: anything can happen**

Di questi tempi, Armand fa attenzione a non dimenticare mai la sua fortuna, il potere che facilmente potrebbe dare per scontato che gli spetti... con quello che gli ha fatto, che fa dio al mondo, chiunque può fargli qualsiasi cosa. E' stato il suo punto più debole quando è stato catturato: la spaventosa certezza che LORO POSSONO fargli del male, e che lui NON PUO' farci niente. Ora sta attento a non abituarsi che non possano fargli niente, a lui e ai suoi. Sarebbe un pericolo. Non ha più paura di altre cose, ma di questa sì.

### **eighty-seven: transitions (*Little Earthquakes, again*)**

E dopo che per cinque volte Daniel dice *I can't reach you* e per nove volte giunge la risposta la richiesta di Armand *give me life give me pain give me myself again* ecco lo scivolo giù per la ripida, e poi una mezza fermata, elastica eppure perentoria, subito released, non più in là di così, e la transizione al *passage* poderoso e rassegnato.

### **eighty-eight: submission**

Intimacy/ Submission in sex may be useful to avoid intimacy under two different aspects, each of them working both ways. Being submissive relieves from the effort of trying to read the other's wishes and feelings, as the other is empowered to know them himself and enact them on his own. Being dominant allows to go as close or inside as the agent wishes, which may effectively fake nearness. Both are palliatives for feelings of emotional inadequacy: I can't read his soul, I don't know what he is feeling, I can't have an idea how to make him happy, does he love me, what does it mean when he says he loves me, I am afraid something I am unable to see is pushing us slowly apart, it won't last, he said he would go away if I... etc.

### **eighty-nine: respect**

Armand has more respect for the human (or vampire) soul than Lestat. He doesn't think he can own someone's soul, the very feeling which on the other hand could calm his anxiety. So he gets along by s/m practices: just because he doesn't feel he owns whom he loves.

### **ninety: scope**

Armand è un ritmo basso, immenso, come *Little earthquakes* e come *Indiani* di Branduardi, e *maestose maree muove la luna*, like his black racer su un mare lungo, penetra senza attrito e senza suono in falcate stese che sembrano facili e leggere e sono poderose come il tempo. Come la mia signora *Vanilla* e *All tomorrow's parties* dei Velvet Underground.

### **ninety-one: rhythm**

Lestat, ancora/ Nell'unità di tempo c'è dentro un sacco di roba. Nell'unità di tempo si muove moltissimo, come tutto l'intrico di suoni che c'è stipato dentro ciascuna pulsazione all'inizio di *The Bell* in *Tubular Bells remastered* di Michael Oldfield. E guarda come si completano reciprocamente, lui e Marius, che è il cadere perfetto, regale, pieno di grazia, di tutta questa energia accumulata: *...and, Tubular Bells*. Quello che si può farne, se la si conserva e la si dirige verso quello scivolare impeccabile in un risultato. Lestat in diastole, accumulo, Marius in sistole, release. Il corpuscolo-fotone come pacchetto di onde. La vibrazione interna al ritmo del suono. Le infinite variazioni su ogni unità di suono nei Brandemburghesi.

### **ninety-two: power, again**

Potere, ancora/ Armand si avvolge di potere come unica possibile barriera alla catastrofe. L'unico modo perché tutto quello che appare possibile, permanente, amabile, non crolli da un momento all'altro gettando il mondo nel caos e l'anima all'inferno, è di essere il vampiro più potente di tutti. Ma non basta. Il potere deve essere invisibile. Non si deve sapere. Marius era il più potente di tutti, e si vedeva, e su di lui come su un grande albero in cima a una collina si è scaricato il fulmine invidioso e devastante. Il potere funziona se non si fa vedere, se si avvicina di nascosto, se agisce invisibile, accumulandosi inavvertito. Solo allora, forse, la faccia del mondo può rimanere stabile, e non tramutarsi all'improvviso, senza ragione, in un ghigno orribile e feroce.

### **ninety-three: roping techniques**

Lestat's power upon Louis is holding him: not letting him go away. Hard-and-fast roping. Armand's power upon Daniel is control: letting him go, and get him back again at will. Dally roping.

### **ninety-four: figures of speech**

Bisogna anche ricordare che:

- Quando si emoziona, Armand chiama Louis "Alvise".
- Informato dell'invenzione del telefono cellulare, Marius è stato udito dire "*Chi che no mor in cuna ghe ne impara sempre una*".
- Marius: --*Paxe, fio mio, ricordite che la pazienza...* Armand: --*Xe la virtù dei morti. Me ricordo, Paron.* //Nothing tastes better than a 500-year-old pun// he thought.

### **ninety-five: what does all this mean?**

These disjointed and not very coherent reflections are the backbone of a snake of thought which began uncoiling about seven years ago and of which, as it seems, the lumbar vertebrae have not yet been reached. Each of them can or could at some time be said about myself also. Most were first expressed in different form, with reference to facts and situations too private for strangers, and then rewritten to fit other eyes beyond my own. The highs and lows of identification are clearly stratified within, with all the inherent ambivalence and contradictions. But when all is said and done, what remains is:

### **ninety-six: about fanfiction**

Why do people write fanfiction? because it's meditation, of course!

You happen on an image so powerful you can't keep your mind off it. It feels so intimate, yet so very different from anything you use to call "I". You keep looking, and it moves, it changes, and you just have to record its evolution. The image may be a mandala, or the icon of a spiritual master, or one of Rice's vampires, or really anything. What matters is that it is a guide helping to formulate questions which had never been asked before, and then off you go searching answers. Meditation can begin any way, and can lead anywhere. Some horsepeople meditate in the silence of the stable, in the powerful presence of horses. What a blessing when a story finds you! and surely it's great if and when someone else likes it, but this does not really influence the sense the story has in itself and for you.

In the confusion that inevitably follows one's own death, the Tibetan Book of the Dead advises to recall and hold fast to whatever image one meditated over during life. It may be a picture of the Dalai Lama, Mickey Mouse, one's left foot, and in one instance recorded by C.G. Jung it was a loudly striped pijamas. Whatever helps one to remember one's goal (and avoid slipping into a womb, again). Why should it not be Louis' stillness?

### **ninety-seven: about Vampire Chronicles fanfiction**

Reality is what the artist perceives to be the world. Art is the expression of a critical standpoint about reality. A work of art is made a part of reality on its creation, if nothing else, because it is the product of man: a living being, him/herself a part of nature. It is as much real, and as much a fit object for art, as a sunset, or an emotion, or a spiderweb glistening with dew. Distinction between nature and culture, or nature and art, is a fake in front of the actual reality pertaining equally to both as part of the world perceived by the artist. It is a paralogism to accept the writing of a critical essay about a work of art, and censor the writing of fanfiction.

Like Louis, Anne Rice has told her story. Like Daniel, we have been changed by the story in ways unforeseen by its author. We have listened, and now act with sincerity upon the change wrought in us.

Art is a gift to the world. The recipient is grateful for the gift and has freedom to enjoy it. Fanfiction does not mar or sequester the gift from the enjoyment of others, nor violates the right of the original author to be recognized as such, to the integrity and wholeness of his/her works, and to the financial gain to be gathered from them, although I understand this last may appear to be a petty and minor consideration from the point of view of the original author.

Fanfiction writing is a form of expressing enthusiasm about characters or stories, a creative form of art critique, and a form of meditation. I wish Oscar Wilde's reflections on the point in *The Critic As Artist* were taken into deep consideration. Ms. Rice has changed the texture of reality with her characters. Fanfic writers are witness to this change.

## The Senses series

### Touch: Dalliance

Daniel è disteso supino sul ruvido tappeto di fibra di cocco. I jeans sbiaditi sono sbottonati. E' a torso nudo, le braccia distese e aperte, le gambe unite, gli occhi chiusi. La pelle e gli abiti sono umidi del suo sudore umano, pervasi dall'odore muto dei capelli incollati alle tempie. Ai due lati, appena oltre le sue dita che si contraggono, i due enormi amplificatori da cui arrivano note basse e lente. Sopra di lui si china Armand. Non lo sfiora nemmeno. Soltanto l'onda dei capelli fa rabbrivire la pelle nuda del suo petto. Daniel percepisce ogni movimento come se lo sentisse sul suo corpo, come percepisce la vibrazione della musica che lo attraversa. /Non muoverti,/ sente ripetere nella sua mente la voce di Armand. /Non aprire gli occhi/. Ora Armand soffia sulla sua fronte, un fiato lieve e freddo che scende nel luogo sacro tra gli occhi e poi lungo il dorso del naso. Lo sente sulle labbra come un bacio non dato e si contrae, ma non può disobbedire. Nulla lo lega, eppure è legato da un intreccio di volontà come da tesi lacci di filo metallico. Il soffio scende ancora mentre la musica si snoda come un serpente, scende sul collo e l'arteria palpita al ritmo del cuore affannato. "Prendimi," sussurra, le sillabe ingarbugliate dal desiderio. /No,/ risponde in silenzio il suo amante, il suo padrone, il signore della sua anima e del suo corpo. Il gelo di quel fiato segue la linea delle clavicole, si annida nella fossetta del giugulo, e intanto la musica sembra fare fusa da leopardo e il suo diaframma ne segue il passo attutito come un'eco delle nere membrane degli amplificatori. Più rapido lungo la linea ventrale, ed ecco che quel freddo gli colma l'ombelico come pioggia nel cavo di un sasso. Senza fretta scende ancora, e la disciplina di stare fermo diventa troppo crudele mentre quelle dita salde e sapienti sfilano i jeans, ancora senza toccargli la pelle, e il tocco è solo immaginato come il tocco delle note sulla sua anima intanto che il tessuto spesso scivola lungo le sue gambe e lo lascia ancora più solo nel vuoto privo di contatto. Avanti e avanti va la musica, sottovoce, e lontano si intrasentono arabeschi evanescenti di tastiera basso e batteria, mentre il soffio leggero di nuovo gli sfiora il ventre tracciandovi spirali e Daniel trema impotente al desiderio di quel corpo che sente così vicino e che pure non c'è. E nel buio dietro gli occhi chiusi, nel buio nero della musica, sul tappeto che gli punge la schiena, nell'attesa di una carezza che non viene, crocifisso tra la pena e il desiderio, si accorge d'improvviso che la voce nella sua mente ora tace, e la musica è finita, ed è rimasto solo nella stanza.

### Indugio/Corteggiamento

Daniel is lying supine on the rough sisal carpet. His faded jeans are unbuttoned. His chest is bare, his arms outstretched, his legs together, his eyes closed. His skin and clothes are damp with human sweat, permeated by the muted smell of his hair glued to his temples. At his sides, just beyond his twitching fingers, two huge speakers from which are coming bass, slow notes. Armand leans above him. He doesn't even touch him. Only the wave of his hair gives a shiver to the naked skin of his breast. Daniel can feel every movement as though he felt it on his own body, just as he feels the vibrant music go right through him. /Don't move,/ he hears Armand's voice repeat in his mind. /Don't open your eyes/. Now Armand is blowing on his forehead, a faint cold breath going down to the sacred place between the eyes and then along the bridge of his nose. He feels it on his lips like a kiss withheld and he contracts, but he can't disobey. Nothing is binding him, but he is bound by a steel braid of will. Blowing, the breath goes lower while the music uncoils like a snake, reaches his neck and the artery pulsates at the rhythm of his breathless heart. "Take me," he whispers, syllables garbled by desire. /No,/ answers silently his lover, his owner, the master of his soul and of his body. That chilled breath follows the line of his collar bones, nests into the jugular cavity, while the music seems to purr like a leopard and his diaphragm mimics its soft pace, echoing the black membranes of the speakers. Faster then along the ventral line, and now that chill fills up his navel like rain into the hollow of a rock. Unhurried, it goes lower still, and the discipline of lying still becomes almost too harsh as those tough knowing fingers peel off his jeans, once again without touching his skin, and the touch is only imagined while the thick fabric slides along his legs and leaves him even more lonely in a void without contact. On and on plays the music, softly, and mazes of keyboard bass and battery fade far away, while the faint breath again reaches his belly tracing spirals and Daniel is trembling helplessly with his want for that body he feels so

near but which is not there. And in the darkness behind his closed eyes, in the black darkness of the music, on the carpet piercing his back, crucified between pain and desire, waiting for a caress that never comes, he suddenly realizes that the voice in his mind is now silent, and that the music stopped, and that he is alone in the room.

*Empowered Man Blues, The For Carnation*

### **Sight: Touch**

The sky is overcast, dense clouds shut out the faint light of the new moon. A low rumble comes near. The first gust of wind sets the streetlamps swaying, and Louis' shadow dances in front of him as he walks up Rue Royale. As always, his hand strokes the cast-iron railing of the front steps. The surface is worn smooth by decades of touch, and the tiny irregularities of the fusion have been erased, leaving a sleek hard metal skin and the dry smell of iron and carbon. Louis knows Lestat's fingers ran along this same railing when he went out at dusk, and he smiles. The house is dark and silent, he must still be out hunting. Louis reaches to his back pocket, fingertips sliding along the old, pliant leather of the bridle browband which is his keyholder, clipped to the belt of his jeans. The familiar weight of the bunch of keys is retrieved, the heavy one selected with a single, fluid gesture, and he feels its precise click when it turns in the latch and the door opens on the darkness inside. A warm, wet tongue on his hand, a big, heavy body against his legs.

*"Bonsoir, Mojo,"* he says, and he kneels to hug his furry neck. *"Ou est Lestat?"*

A lick on his face, and Mojo trots away.

*"Attend-moi,"* he laughs softly as he just manages to catch his receding tail. From the sound of his panting, Louis can feel Mojo is smiling. Still holding the thick bushy tail, he follows the dog along the corridor and up the stairs to Lestat's bedroom, feet and paws making small sounds on the shining parquet. Mojo stops and sits in front of the closed door, nose raised expectantly.

*"Lestat est ici, n'est-ce pas? Bon chien. Reste!"* Mojo sighs, then he lies down, his large head upon his crossed forelegs. Louis thanks him with a scratch behind his ear, then he turns the ancient brass doorknob shaped like a seahorse, and he enters the room. Darkness inside.

"Lestat?" Silence. "Are you there?"

Two more steps inside, and his foot touches something solid. He reaches down at once, trying to make out the form of the body lying on the carpet.

"Lestat, are you all right?" A pair of hands grasp his arms and pull him lower. Gentle thumbs quickly follow the line of his eyebrows, gentle fingers brush back his hair. A warm, eager mouth comes up to kiss his lips.

"I was waiting for you, my beloved," he hears Lestat whisper. "I was aching to touch you, and here you are".

Louis kneels down astride his maker's body, runs his hands slowly up along his sides and on his chest. Lestat can almost feel him smiling in the dark.

*"L'amour est aveugle,"* he hears him say softly.

*"Il faut se toucher,"* Lestat completes the sentence.

## Sound: I can't hear my own footsteps

*Io non odo i miei passi lungo il viale  
muto per ove il sogno mi conduce...*

I can't hear my own steps along the muted  
lane wherein I'm walking in my dream...

GABRIELE D'ANNUNZIO

Just picture a junction at night, void of traffic, quiet, bats silently fluttering under the orange glow of the lights where insects are swarming. The black figure of a man is silhouetted sitting on the guard-rail, one foot on the ground, the other tucked under, head bent, immersed in thought. He raises his eyes suddenly: something, someone is coming?...

Out of the cone of light, walking softly on the dusty weeds beyond the corrugated aluminium barrier, the other one approaches.

- You do stir up a lot of noise - sneers the one sitting under the light.

/I have to credit the Roman for being the first to notice how careless he is/ he thinks to himself under his smooth, impregnable shields. /Marius always catches the essential/.

The other one lithely jumps the rail and sits down next to him, two feet to his left, and the light shines on his black silky hair neatly tied in a tail.

- I want to know where I am and where I come from. The sound of my feet leaves a track - he says quietly.

- Then anybody could find you.

- Not anybody. Even after the book and before the culling, when many were searching for me, nobody found me that I didn't allow to. Yet I want to be found - by those I want to.

- Don't you think you're just lucky, Ace?

- No, I don't. It's my choice. Like a warrior well versed in the teachings of Don Juan Matus, you erase your traces and become invisible. But you are also alone. Safe, and alone. Nobody looks for you, for you are not even seen. Is this enough for you?

- You know it has to be enough. Who wants to find me who doesn't hate me? - he answers, his voice more bitter than he would have wanted it.

- I do - the other says under his breath - And here I am.

- Why?

- Because your loneliness is a waste. You have had the terrible courage to change your mind. Don't let the aftermath of something you have left behind weigh down your life any longer. Unless your loneliness is a shield against something else.

- What would that be? - He is uneasy. He's used to be the one in command of the conversation, but this one tonight is taking an unexpected turn, and for once he can't react quickly enough. He feels worse than found, he feels found out. Yet, whence is it coming, that insidious release of tension, how is it that not being in command tastes so safe? Who is this man who can talk to him this way and make him feel so good?

- Friendship. Love.

Words like the blade of a knife. His face goes blank for a moment, then collects itself again in a wicked grin, against the pain, against the truth.

- Friendship? Love? Love is a hobby, Louis, and I don't need hobbies. I have enough on my hands with everybody's hate to while away my time.

- *Love is a danger of a different kind* - smiles the other - Are you quite sure it isn't worth to try it, sometimes, Santino?

And, silent like a wisp of smoke, he's disappeared.



## Smell: No more to be found

People milling around in the vast glittering hall. The buzzing noise of a busy evening in the arcade at Christmas time. Nothing natural in sight... even the potted plants and season decorations are plastic. It's cheaper than replacing those who wither and die in the pressurized atmosphere and artificial light of this building, this spaceship sealed against the bleak outside world where beggars shiver under their covers of newspapers, this spaceship traveling to Consumerland at a thousand miles per hour. Two figures walk more leisurely among the hurried stream of bodies, a middle-aged man and a boy. At first sight, nothing obvious distinguishes them from the average customers. Only a calmer demeanour, a deeper look in their eyes, softer voices, fewer words.

The younger one stops suddenly in front of a door, half-ajar on the darkness of a storage-room.

- Do you smell it? - he asks the elder, and his eyes are shining.

- What?

- *Secchiaio* - the boy answers - You know, the damp, moldy smell of the room behind the kitchen, under the stairs, where the water jars and the copper buckets were kept. Moldy bricks, wet stone. It's years since I smelt it - he ends, a touch of sadness in his voice.

The man lightens up at the memory.

- Yes, you're right. *Secchiaio... varda ti*, fancy that, in an arcade! And do you remember the smell of water in the buckets? The copper behind it, cool and metallic. You don't feel it anymore. Now it's chlorine and pollution, instead of the clean smell of rain filtered by the bricks of the well. Do you remember when we had the new well built in the courtyard? Pebbles as top layer in the filtering tank, right under the granite pavement, then gravel in the middle, and sand at the bottom. Paduan rounded bricks, the very finest pores, for the chimney of the well, Euganean granite for the bottom slab. You chose the design for the gattoli, the Istria stone gutter holes in the corners of the courtyard. It was a rainy autumn, the well was filled in less than a month.

The man is still talking, lost in his memories, when he feels the boy's hand touching his, cool fingers entwining his.

- Let's get out - he hears him plead, his voice suddenly young with some unexpressed pain. He lets himself be lead against the flow of people, towards the nearest exit and through the crowded parking lot, to the empty darkness of the neglected field just out of the harsh light of the lamps.

- Snow - the boy says under his breath, so as not to let his voice tremble. - Snow is coming. Snow still smells the same.

The boy lets himself fall sitting among the dried out weeds, his back to the darkness of the field, his head bent down. The man crosses his legs and sits down in front of him. His larger frame, silhouetted against the parking-lot lamps, overshadows the boy's, whose face is lost in darkness.

The man can feel in the other a pain like his own pain. Yet, what does he know anymore of this boy, this foreigner he used to love, and who used to love him back so much? Tentatively, he puts both his hands on the boy's knees.

- The smell of new grass growing - he says, his voice slow and deliberate. - The bitter, fresh smell of the leaves of the fig-trees in July - he adds, following his nose through memories and along this unexpected talk. He's happy for the darkness shrouding them both, he's happy he can barely make out the boy's eyes and that his own are invisible against the light. Until now, since they met again, they haven't been able to really look at each other, nor to really speak to each other. Too much is the pain standing between them, too much to look at it, or through it, or to talk about it. Yet, both know that nothing they can do together, no time shared between them, can have any sense, unless the pain has been addressed and accounted for. This is a chance neither had hoped to have, and the elder feels he's not alone trying to stretch above for their souls to meet, somewhere, if only in the memory of a scent.

The boy raises his questioning eyes to meet the man's.

- The smell of your greyhounds - he responds, and a small smile lightens up his face. - Of *piacentino* sheep cheese seasoned with saffron and black peppers for Christmas.

- Holocausts burning in temples - the man goes on, and he grimaces. - This one I don't miss.

It was worse even than horse fat melting in the pan to make grease for our horses' hooves and tack.

- That was terrible - agrees the boy. - But I loved your linseed oil, and the pigments, each with its own shade of smell so that I could pick them up in the storage room without lighting the candle.

- Nanto stone wet with rain.

A hint of enthusiasm warms up the tone of the man's voice at the memory.

- Drenched box hedges after a summer shower - the boy echoes back, with the ghost of a laughter in his words at the thought of raindrops gleaming on his hands and wetting his hair after he dipped halfway into the closely clipped bushes to inhale the sombre, dark-green scent.

- The powder made with the dried roots of *Iris Florentina*. Bianca's room always had a scent of iris - the man recalls fondly.

- Those black Etruscan *buccheri* you took home from Tarquinia. I can still smell their earthy, subtle scent when you filled them with water.

The boy's voice is still awed by the simple, age-old magic he witnessed then.

- They said they were made with the last veins of earth from Eden, and that they retained some scent of the lost paradise - whispers back the man, his wonder for such magic, older even than his mortal days, undampened by his scepticism.

- *Freschin*, the rotting, watery smell coming from the sea when the tide is low. Dead seaweed and fish.

It's the boy's turn to grimace.

- When the seagulls and the small white herons, the *garzette*, come to feed on the damp sand and shallow water of the *velme* - the man goes on, and he sighs, suddenly homesick.

- *Oldani*, balls of resin and perfumed powders to keep in rooms, wardrobes and pockets. You had them made for you with myrrh and storax and cloves for a spicy touch. You insisted that I always carry one with me to guard me from disease - smiles the boy, and his heart aches, remembering the tenderness of that large cool hand slipping the scented ball into his pocket.

- Longobardic mortar. Once I met a man, Guido Mor, a history teacher at a university, who could tell you the year a medieval wall had been built from its smell and the taste of the mortar - the man adds playfully, loving the game.

- Hair spray. Ugh, I hated that. Louis, too. I'm happy women don't use it anymore.

The game is catching on, part jest, part wistfulness.

- Old nutwood pews in churches, the very scent of silence - says again the man, reverence in his voice.

- The paper of *The Fifteen* - the boy blurts out.

- Which fifteen? - asks the man in surprise.

- An illustrated encyclopedia for children in fifteen volumes - the boy answers with a blush - in the nineteen sixties. The paper smelled great.

- The perfumed pard.

Now it's the elder's voice that trembles a little.

- The perfumed pard - the boy repeats, and his small hands cover the man's on his knees.

- She was scented in winter - the man continues.

- Her head left its perfume on our clothes. So dense, deep - echoes the boy.

- She burrowed between us under the covers in bed.

The man's voice is down to a whisper.

- She kept us both warm.

Fondness rises in the boy's words for the long-ago gift of trust and happiness.

- I miss her scent.

How hard to acknowledge need for this man who never found help, and comfort, and shelter, yet helped and comforted and sheltered so many.

- I miss her too. Almost as much as one other smell - the boy adds almost unwillingly, under his breath.

- Which?

- Yours, when I hugged you at your return. You smelled of the night and the sky and the stars and of places I had never been to. I miss that.

- *Fio mio*, son, you don't have to.

- Don't I? *Paron*, Master?

- No.

The man's arms stretch open, a gesture of surrender, of offering, his eyes down, waiting, hoping. The boy bends to him. The lightest kiss grazes his forehead and he expires, half grateful, half disappointed. But a moment later the boy's arms are around his neck and his head is on his shoulder and he finds he can hug him tight at last, that slim strong body his fingers remember so well.

He feels the boy sniffing deeply at the junction between his shoulder and chest.

- You still smell the same - Armand says, happiness in his voice.

- And I love your scent, and you - Marius answers softly in his ear.

### ***Intermezzo: Of foals, and fear, and forever***

December. It's late night in Paris. The Salon du Cheval has closed its gates to the last visitors of the day, who hurried out excitedly chatting about the Classical Dressage exhibition with the *pas-de-deux* by one black and one pure white Andalusian. The hundreds of horses of all breeds -or of no breed at all, temporarily housed under these echoing vaults, are trying to relax after the hustle and bustle of the long day. Some are munching on hay or on what's left of their evening rations. A few still turn around in their boxes or shift uncomfortably from side to side in their stalls, disturbed by the strange shadows, by the sounds, by the smells of this foreign place. Some are lying down already, dozing off, heads hanging over their bended knees, waiting for deeper sleep and dreams of their familiar paddocks and friends at home. Many of them won't ever get back there: they are going to be sold and taken to new places. They don't know yet. They don't get asked.

Darker than the shadows, two figures move silently among the stalls, so quiet not even the horses can sense them. Silhouetted against the blue-white light of the security lamp at the head of the corridor, they walk along the row of dappled grey and occasionally raven-black rumps in the section where the Percherons are stabled, their tails tightly braided like the hair of Renaissance ladies. The easy-going, peaceful draft horses are always the first to fall asleep, and most yearlings and two-year-olds are already curled down and breathing heavily.

"May we go and see the Appaloosas? I heard Khali O'Lena arrived today and will compete tomorrow in the reining championship".

The whisper is so soft only the very nearest horse ear twitches briefly back.

Silence. No answer.

"Boss?..."

Daniel is worried. Since they rose at sunset, Armand has been uncommonly withdrawn. He hurried the both of them here, quickly found out where the Andalusians and Lipizzans were being worked, and there he remained silent, leaning on the aluminium railing of the arena, watching without speaking a word, without moving a muscle, while those solemn powerful bodies danced to a music not heard by human ears. Even when the exhibition began, he didn't move from his place at the corner of the practice arena. There he stood all evening, taking in each of the subtleties in the dialogue between the riders and their mounts, all those little gestures that remain hidden during the show but are the substance of the shared work that builds perfection. Daniel tried to break that trance-like immobility, but the only words he got from his lover made him feel even more lonely.

"What are you watching that's so interesting?"

"I remember" Armand said without turning to look at him, without taking his eyes off the heartbreaking beauty of a shining white Lipizzan doing *piaffe* under the bright light in the middle of the arena. His voice is centuries old, like the implacable, diagonal cadence of the feet on the golden sand, like the powerful hocks pushing the horse's body up at each step and the wavy, silky, full and spread-out tail just brushing the ground.

Daniel had felt left out. He felt he was on the threshold of that vast area of bliss turned to unspeakable hurt, where he had never been granted access as a mortal and that still now was denied to him. He had had to read a book to get to know something about it, and while he had come to understand -with a sharp pang of acknowledgement- how some things are easier made known to strangers than to loved ones, he could not yet make his peace with being excluded from any discourse about it. He *wanted* to know how it had been, no matter the pain. No measure of pain coming from getting to know how it had been could be worse than always seeing that pain at the bottom of Armand's eyes. Than looking at him there now, silent and tense in the presence of these ghosts of horses, these horses of long ago, horses like those he and Marius had ridden together. He wanted to try and heal some of that pain. Take the bliss over to the reality of *now*, and leave the suffering in its place in the past, whence it can't come out again unless as memories. Yet he was not allowed to, and he could not even be sure why. Was Armand trying to protect him? Did he think him too clumsy to be let into the delicate garden of tortures that was Armand's memory? Was he afraid that the knowledge of

everything Armand had been, of everything had happened to him before they met, would warp irreparably Daniel's life and his link to him, tender, cruel, brittle yet enduring as it was? Silence. No answer.

Daniel had felt a lump of tears in his throat, and had gone off by himself to look at the Welsh and Shetland ponies. He had come back to Armand when the Salon was beginning to empty of people and the lights were being put off for the night. He had found him still there, his chin on his crossed arms on top of the fence, one foot on the low rail, at the edge of the dark and empty arena. Armand had been startled by the light touch of Daniel's hand on his shoulder. He had turned to look at him, his eyes unfocused, a slight frown on his brow, and without a word he had led Daniel into their aimless prowling among the resting horses.

Now Daniel is scared. There is something otherworldly in Armand's aloofness tonight. Not like his usual shifting away from emotions that threaten his fastidious self-control; rather like he's shut up in a bubble he doesn't want to come out from, a bubble of feeling nothing. Daniel is stifled, choked. Sadly he walks beside him, not daring to touch the slender body tantalizingly gleaming a few inches in front of him. Daniel's breath still catches whenever he looks at the barely visible embroidery of faint scars that course that ivory skin after the burning.

They stop at a pen where a few Camargue mares and foals are gathered.

'They look like sheep when they're resting' Daniel thinks 'Yet when they are ridden they transfigure into something else, horses for heroes. The Romans conquered the world with horses such as these'.

The dim light of the night lamp accents the cream colour of the rumps and necks, the slightly convex noses, the flowing manes.

One foal is not sleepy yet. He's trying to entice the others to play, but all are dozing near their dams, some standing, some lying down flat on their sides under their mothers' bellies, some couched on bent legs like cats.

A big Rottweiler bitch comes trotting towards the pen. She belongs to the breeder whose Friesians are stabled in the next row. The mares have seen her pottering about the whole day and know she's friendly, so they acknowledge her presence with just a nod of their heads or the flicker of an ear and they get back to sleeping. The foal, however, is eager for company, and he clumsily canters to the rail to make friends with the big black-and-tan animal. He stops abruptly, his forelegs parted, and reaches across the bars towards the stranger with his velvet white nose, sniffing deeply. The bitch stops, then walks near. She sniffs also, and recognizing the scent of a newborn, she puts out her large wet tongue and slaps a big lick on the foal's nose. He's frightened by the unexpected move. /Predator!/ his instincts scream. He leaps up, turning in mid-air, and gallops all out to his mother. She wakes up suddenly and gives a throaty nicker to her baby, who pushes himself against her big warm belly and sticks his neck under hers to hide from his own fear. The other mares also wake up and stomp a little in the sand, but soon they sense there is no real danger and quiet down again. The bitch, a bit hurt by the outcome of her friendly gesture, trots away, panting a little, on her own nightly business.

The foal's mother is pressing her neck above her baby's in a comforting gesture. He begins to relax, his short fluffy tail comes up from between his thighs and he smacks his lips and chews, feeling safe and happy again. He turns around and makes for the full udder. He finds the fount and the darkness is filled by the sucking sound of his lips on his mother's teat.

Daniel is so fascinated by the scene unfolding in front of him that at first he doesn't pick up the other sound. Then it penetrates suddenly. He turns to look. Armand is laughing softly, his agile body leaning on the pen's fence, hands clasped at the end of extended arms. His eyes are shining. He doesn't have that faraway look anymore. He's slipped into the \*here\* and \*now\* again, for a moment, for the moment. He looks like what he is, a seventeen-year-old boy witnessing a tender exchange between a mother and her son. No hurt, no fear, no memories. Daniel can't stop himself. On impulse, he hugs him from behind, sweetly and tight.

At once he feels Armand startle under his hands, like a frightened prey struggling to wrench free in a panicked, run-or-fight reaction. There was a time when he would just let go. Now instead, fast as thought itself, his vampire instincts take over: his predatory instincts to grab the victim in his arms. He holds fast.

"Shh... It's only me. You're safe" he whispers, and his voice breaks under the weight of the consequences of the centuries-old abuse heaped upon that child's body. The memory floods him of an interview he had, thirty years ago, with a teacher of autistic children. When leaving, he had said goodbye to her pupil by firmly passing a finger across the palm of his hand, in an unpremeditated gesture of acknowledgement and affection. The boy had shivered for a moment, then a bright smile had lighted up his face, his blindness to feelings broken for a

moment. The warmth of this long-forgotten touch fights the chill he feels coming from the taut body he holds now in his hands.

"Please. Trust me. I am here. You are here. It's all right. Please" he begs, without leaving him, his hands clasped across Armand's slim chest which is now shaken by ragged breaths. He hears his heart beating wildly, yet Armand doesn't move, just stands there, rigid in his arms. Daniel feels him on the brink between giving in and slipping away. He knows he couldn't hold him if he chose to go. He knows he could lose him now, maybe forever.

"Please" he whispers once more. He leans forward, like he was trying to enclose his lover's shivering figure within an invulnerable shield against all evil past and present. He can see Armand's eyes are closed tight, that his eyelids are quivering.

"Don't think of the past. This is now. This is here. This is me. And I love you. Let me love you". There is nothing else he can do to get himself to be seen by this child made blind to love, too frightened to open his eyes and look at him. He can only hope his love, his passion, his compassion and tenderness for the helpless, wounded soul that is now revealed to him may be enough to keep Armand there. He doesn't dare to hope that their eyes may meet at last.

Silence. No answer.

Beaten, Daniel begins to loosen his embrace. He has lost again, and the defeat hurts even more because both are defeated this time. But before his arms fall down at his sides, with a sudden resolute movement, Armand is turning around, and he opens his eyes and now he is looking straight at Daniel.

"I do. I trust you. I love you" he says, his voice low but clear and sure as mountain water.

"Love me" he says again, and Daniel feels this beloved body melt against his own and hug him like he never had before, like a son to his parent, like a friend to a friend, with the complete abandon of the age when betrayal and suffering are nothing more than tall tales yet, and the wonder of life and love still shine untouched by pain. Completely *\*there\** for the first time, nothing held back. It's bliss.

They only let go when one of the Friesians stallions slips into deeper sleep and begins to snore loudly. They both laugh under their breath, and on they go, arms around each other's waist, towards the rest of their life together.

*Khali O'Lena is a wonderful reining stallion and a registered Appaloosa (although he's unusually all black, without any of the characteristic markings). He has been imported in Italy and his rider, Tonino Achenza, calls him affectionately Cariolina, "Little Wheelbarrow".*

## Taste: Blindness

It is two hundred and twenty-nine years since I became blind to taste.

*Le visionnaire aveugle* in Buenos Aires, Jorge Luis Borges, wrote about the sombre red haze, the blood haze, enveloping his world. He slowly lost his sight when he was in his forties. I lost the sense of taste all at once at half his age.

Now it is only blood for my lips and my tongue, just like it was only blood red for his eyes. No more greens, no more yellows and blues for him. No more summer peaches, no more spiced roast meat, no more *beignets* for me. Only the ever-present, rusty taste of haemoglobin. I have become a *gourmet* for this oxidized iron molecule. I can recognize arterial from venous blood. I can recognize a blood group just by the sip of a few drops. I can tell the taste of each component apart in this dense, life-giving soup. I would be a Nobel prize hematologist, if I still cared for prizes.

Blood is my life.

But I still try to remember what it felt like. The taste of food in the mouth. Its feel on my tongue, down my throat. The taste of things that were not food... Of the stems I used to chew on, after pulling them neatly off their tubular foot, while I lay low in the grass, waiting for the trap to catch some fowl for my own and my family's dinner. Of the panting kisses my proud dogs planted on my face after we had killed a deer. Of the bodies of my lovers in Auvergne, three lifetimes back in the past. Of the varnish that coated Nicolas' violin, its sharp taste filling my mouth and nose one night when he played Tartini so beautifully, and I did not know how else to show my awe than by kissing the shining belly of the slender, tawny instrument still quivering with the echo of the music.

I cannot remember the tastes. All else is present to my memory with threatening clarity, but tastes are lost forever.

Memories are making me hungry with a need deeper than survival. I am aching for something more, something as warm and shining, and forever lost for me, as the sun itself. I am ravenous for the taste of all the juices of the Earth. I crave to feed on the substance of life itself.

My steps have brought me back to Rue Royale. I linger at the gate, my *rêverie* slowly melting into the reality of the stone pavement under my feet, the faint creaking of the hinge, the thick scent of jasmine and the glimmer of the moonlight on the surface of the fountain. And suddenly it is there, the feeling of *that* taste, and suddenly I know why I have come back here. I know what I am going to do.

The flowery, heady, wine-like taste of my beloved.

The very taste of life.

***Ludus puerorum***  
**(Armand to Lestat)**

It's not for power that I crave your blood.  
Your kind of power is not mine to wield:  
I have my own, my secret, darker ways.  
Nor am I trying to spite you for refusing  
to listen to my plea to love me, when  
you came on like a tidal wave, to sweep me  
and leave me again, detritus on a shore.

My friend, you've never known why I so hunger  
for the sweet taste of sunlight in your veins  
so much I'll even steal it if I can.  
Yet it would not be stealing, for it's mine,  
something stolen from me lifetimes ago,  
and now you own it, and I want it back.  
Do you wish me to name it? It is childhood.

Joy when you wake up to a brand-new day  
full of wonders and promises. The world  
stretching before you in time and space as though  
it were a gift to savour drop by drop  
in neverending happiness. It's enthusiasm,  
a god within your soul, the god of life,  
the laughing, lovely, brighter face of Pan.

But I own darkness, his frown has been my share,  
panic and not delight, pain and not bliss,  
the power to endure, not to enjoy.  
Do you still wonder now why I'm forever  
trying to drink back my own from your hot flame?  
You fount of fire, lighting ten thousand things.  
My friend, allow me at last to feel alive.

## **I tuoi begli occhi di arciere** **(Lestat's answer to *Ludus puerorum*)**

You will not share.  
You flow like nightblack water  
in an unseen direction.  
Only the streetlights  
reflect their row of brightness  
on that polished surface,  
but under that  
the void of darkness  
swallows every sight.  
Whatever touches you  
either rebounds off your shiny shield  
or disappears down under.  
Nothing will make you glow.  
I cannot give you life,  
my brother more than friend.  
It never could be yours.  
Each has his story  
stretching behind our backs,  
and that is life.  
You are alive. So live,  
let your story sing for you at every step,  
and maybe sometimes we will share the song.

*Tu non fai parte.  
Scorri come acque notturne,  
non si vede per dove.  
Solo i lampioni  
riflettono le loro luci in fila  
sulla polita superficie,  
ma sotto quella  
il vuoto oscuro  
inghiottisce ogni sguardo.  
Ciò che ti tocca  
o rimbalza dal tuo lucido scudo  
o scompare nel fondo.  
Nulla ti fa splendente.  
Non posso darti vita,  
fratello più che amico.  
Mai potrebbe esser tua.  
Ciascuno ha la sua storia  
che si stende alle spalle,  
ed è la vita.  
Tu sei vivo. E allora vivi,  
che la tua storia ti canti ad ogni passo,  
e forse a volte divideremo il canto.*



## Supernova

"Well?" The voice is sharp, self-assured, even somewhat defying.

"Good," a lower voice answers, hearty, slower. "You are on time."

The summer night is quiet over Isola, lost in the country at the north-west of Padua. The few scattered houses surrounded by the fields are mostly dark, the shutters closed. A big, copper-coloured moon, almost full, is floating up like a balloon behind the stalks of maize, already in bloom and taller than a man. Cicadas are still singing in the top branches of poplars, but their violin chant is dwindling, taken over by the bassoon of frogs. Rippling noise of clear water running in the ditches, scent of maturing cobs and of plane trees.

Unhurried steps sound on the gravel in front of the ancient, silent, empty villa. A figure comes out of the shadows and stops to stand in front of the stone steps to the main doorway.

"Show yourself then," this black figure, the first voice, now goes on.

The loud *staccato* of iron horseshoes on gravel answers his words at once, precise, collected steps at the *passage*. A majestic white shape is coming up the lane, past the stone pillars of the open gate. Mane and tail are waves of milk under the moonlight. An Andalusian mare, dancing under her bareback rider, her face and arched neck streaked by the purple leather of the old-fashioned bridle as by a trickle of blood. No other sound is heard, even the frogs have fallen silent. Only the bats are flurrying on their hunt.

Ten yards away from the steps, without even stopping, the rider nimbly jumps from his mount and in a single fluid movement he slips the bridle from her head and the bit from her mouth. The mare trots on towards the clipped clover lawn, and she begins to quietly graze.

"*E alla pastura / fa andare il palafren senza la briglia* (and to the pasture / is sent the palfrey with no bridle on)." The first voice is ringing with irony. "You never forget your Ariosto, Roman, I see."

"There is no sense in letting her be bothered by the bit, and the reins may be trampled, Santino," the older man says back, without animosity. "It is not easy anymore to find leather like this."

They face each other, keeping their distance, silent. Both wary, feigning ease.

"Does this place suit you?" the rider asks, breaking the silence.

"Yes, I like this quiet. I thank you that you came, Marius." Santino's voice suddenly lowers. He can feel the unease of both. He knows Marius won't be the first to ask him why he called him, and Santino won't force him to. He is uncomfortably aware of the unexpected courtesy Marius has shown him by dismounting and approaching him on foot. He won't insult him by acknowledging this tribute openly, but he knows he has been entrusted with the task to lead the conversation, and he now forces himself to override his own nervousness and get straight to the point. /Or we may pass the whole night sparring with words,/ he thinks to himself. /Go on, then, Santino,/ the other's thoughts ring at once in his mind, and he bites his lip. He should have known better than to try and shield from one so ancient.

"I used to come here to see my friend Andrea, the painter. Mantegna. Nothing much has changed since then," Marius goes on aloud. "You asked that we meet in Venice, but Venice would have been too crowded. It's *La Sensa*, the feast of the Ascension. They are having fireworks at the Lido tonight."

"And Palio tomorrow in Siena" on impulse, Santino echoes him. /I'm crazy to tease him this way, while he is trying to put me at my ease/ he regrets.

Marius grimaces. "I never settle with myself whether they are more stupid or more cruel, racing Thoroughbreds on a stone pavement like that. Strewn sand is not enough to give grip. But we aren't here to discuss horsemanship, I think," he says, and waits.

"We are not. And I am grateful you came. I was not sure you would."

"When I was trapped in ice, you came to help me. When the remains of the suicides had to be burnt at the morgue in New York, you were with me. How could I not come when you called me?" The Roman is smiling, but a current of unrest troubles the surface of his mind. Santino can perceive it. It mirrors his own.

"I am the one who owes you," he begins.

"Don't flatter me, Santino," Marius breaks in. "We know each other well enough. We know each other's faults."

"I am not going to flatter you... not even with truth itself," Santino sighs, "and I am not here to compare faults. I am here to try and put things right between us, if I can. Make up in part for my own share of faults."

"Do not apologize, Christian. I don't wish to lie to you. I am not ready to forgive yet what you did to me, and it is not my place to forgive you for evil done to others."

Marius' voice has a point of sharpness, as if he is trying to control an anger he nevertheless feels unfair. His mind goes back to one long-ago fight with Pandora, who seemed so intrigued by that new coven of Jewish renegades, followers of Jesus. So full of answers, so empty of questions. So sure they could be saved by faith, hope and charity, yet so ready to forget the last one applied also to infidels like him. He now begins to regret being here.

"I am not going to apologize. I am going to help, if you will allow me." Santino goes on, then he stops for a moment. Now it will happen, this is the moment he brought himself to face. No more time to lose in doubts. /Just keep talking,/ he tells himself.

"I want to speak to you about Benji and Sybelle," he says. His voice is steady, and so is his gaze. Marius blinks once, surprised.

/Thank you, Roman, for not reading my mind,/ Santino thinks again, sure to be heard. /I needed to discover if I'd be able to say this aloud/.

"I think I understand what moved you to make them. Your words of explanation are echoing still in Armand's mind. I heard them through him. Believe me, I understand." Santino fights to keep his voice calm, his words slow. Calm is needed to discuss this. Decisions must never be taken in a troubled state of mind, and an important decision is going to be taken tonight.

"Are you going to be my judge, Santino?" Marius' tone is hard, a touch of fear is seeping through.

"It's not for me to judge the way you played your cards," Santino answers, not heeding the sting in the other's words. He goes on, quietly but with blind determination. "I only see the strain among you now. Daniel is troubled and scared by their presence. Armand doesn't feel up to teaching them as they are now. You don't either. I do. I like them, and I think they find me interesting. They find anything interesting. They're fearless, open to every wonder of their new life. You three need time to straighten out the whirlpool of the last few centuries. Benji and Sybelle can wait. I can keep them company. Let me help. Let me take care of them while you, and Armand, and Daniel, find a new way to be together. There are stages you have to go through that can't be skipped or delayed anymore. There are old wounds to heal at the very core of love before love can spread further." There. It is said. He had not said that single word, \*love\*, unless in spite, since more than six hundred years. It had to be said now, whatever the outcome. He knows Marius could torch him on the spot, but even this does not matter. He feels good.

The Roman frowns. He has known he is probably in for some surprise tonight. He has debated with himself whether or not to take advantage of his age and power to glean some information from Santino's mind. He has resolved not to. He has come with prudence, but in trust. And now he's taken aback, caught between panic and anger. The panic he has felt at his own beloved killing himself, at his being rescued by two mortal strangers, at his loving them so much, at the thought that he may lose them to death. At love not waiting for ancient pain to cease before kindling new fires. At Santino now, confronting him with something he would rather forget. Anger at himself for feeling so frightened and acting on impulse when he made the two children. For letting himself be led by the emotion of the moment. Twice only in two thousand years he lost control of himself, overtaken by a need stronger than reason, and both times pain has come from it.

He fights to find something to say. Santino is waiting, patient, silent, leaving him time. Marius is grateful for that, yet it compounds his confusion. Who is this person in front of him now? He used to look on him as a dangerous enemy. He is here tonight as the most dangerous of friends. He wonders if he'll be up to facing either. /I'm afraid/ he thinks with a shiver.

/Remember. In the past I have been witness to the depth of your fear as well as the height of your courage. You never quit, do you, Roman?/ Santino thinks back to him, without either irony or pity. It is encouragement enough. Marius suddenly knows what he needs to confront.

"What sort of tutor would you be to them, Christian? Or should I call you coven master? The doctrine of which divinity would you teach them?" Marius can't help a hint of contempt tinging his words. Faith and reality have always been at odds along the twenty centuries he's witnessed.

Santino can feel it, but he shrugs it away with an effort of will. "Do not let us start discussing theology," he grins.

"I am not going to give my children, and Armand's, to a believer in a creed of murder, Santino. We both have hurt him too much already. I need to know what you feel now about your God." Earnestness is warming Marius' voice. /Not all is lost, then, maybe,/ Santino tells himself. But he still has to answer, and show him his soul as naked and raw as Marius' was just now when he gazed upon it without being asked. /Is this the price to pay?/ he asks himself.

"I'm feeling cheated. Me, the coven master! Cheated by God. My God, in whom I put my trust" he whispers, yet his words are strong and clear.

"There is no God, Santino."

"I know, but my heart still refuses the peace of not believing. I am still angry with my former God," he answers. "I feel even more embittered than I'd have thought possible. I feel like I let myself be misled by some ambiguous phrasing in the lines in small print at the bottom of some contract with God, with life, whatever. Even now, I can't really say they are lies. But if I had been less trustful, and had paid more attention to them, I'd have thought twice before signing the contract. Yet I did sign it, so I have no ground to try and get my own soul back now. This hurts."

"When was it that you ceased to have faith?" Marius goes on ruthlessly. The same necessity pushing him to ask and Santino to answer. /*Il medico pietoso fa la piaga cancrenosa* (pitiful physician means festering wound)/ Santino thinks again. /And the wounds of both of us have festered too long. Be pitiless, Roman/.

"I would think it was during the time when I was teaching Armand. At the beginning, I was obviously much better at reading his mind than he was at shielding his thoughts. I was startled by what I read. How could I not be struck by his character and his story, and the depth of his love for you? I ended up... heartbroken about the reasons and the outcome of my choice to go against you."

"Whoever would suspect it?." Sarcasm is heavy in Marius' voice. "You were still playing the grand Inquisitor, but it was not a game for your victims, or was it?"

Santino's endurance is running short. Confrontation gives sharpness to his words, yet he strives to keep the dialogue going.

"Maybe I fought against the radical reassessment of my own beliefs that this implied. Maybe this is why I taught Armand to shield so well, even against myself. Maybe this is why I sent him away to Paris. Like a poison to my beliefs, were Armand's pain and passion, and the effect of the poison worked in secret for decades, until I left the coven, and here I am." /Wounded by my own past, just as you are, but still standing and ready to fight for myself/ he thinks. /Like it or not, Roman/.

"I wonder how I can believe you." Marius says, doubtful. He knows how difficult it is for anybody to be truthful about one's own soul.

"I swear by Buonarroti's statue of the Night" Santino says, without a hint of sarcasm in his voice. "Is this enough for you? Whatever I believe now, it is as much distant from your own beliefs as was the doctrine I taught my Roman coven. We never had the same beliefs, what else can I swear by now to convince you? Come on, do read my mind, drink from me, do what you will."

"Drinking from you would be an act of love. I do not love you, Santino."

"I'm not asking you to love me. Just to trust me. To believe that I'm different now, although the same. That I am capable of learning from mistakes, even if I can't find a remedy for them. That this makes me human enough for you to let me help. That I am not going to make of your and Armand's children two heartless monsters." Santino is fighting himself not to plead. This is a second chance to not only go on, like he always did, with stubborn will to live, but to go back and face the irreparable past, and maybe redress something of its outcomes. He built this chance with all his cleverness and determination, risking all on this one evening. /*Alea iacta,*/ he thinks.

"I asked them also, with Armand's permission, to come here tonight. They're waiting in the chapel" Santino goes on softly. Marius is startled.

"They trust you." It does not sound a question, yet the question is implied.

"I gave them my word of honour."

Marius takes a deep breath.

"Who else knows about it?"

"Maharet knows. And Lestat. Lestat is very fond of them, especially Sybelle. They all trust your judgement. I hope you will trust mine."

"But how can we take them from Amadeo..." Marius slips back to his old cherished name, and his voice threatens to break.

"Armand will come back to them, because they are his chance to regain what he has lost, by fault of others even before than ours. His childhood, the company of peers, the chance to play children's games. Just as Daniel is his viaticum to being a grown-up, so Benji and Sybelle are his passage to childhood. I won't deprive him of that, nor will you."

"I didn't mean or want that."

"I know."

Silence stretches between them. One step can change the future. It is again Santino who speaks first.

"Whatever happened between us, does not mean that we are going to be or must be enemies forever, Marius," he says.

The Roman shakes himself from his thoughts. He has resolved. He rests his hand on the other's shoulder, in an age-old gesture of friendship.

"I entrust them to you, Santino, and with them, my own life" he says, and their eyes meet.

"Go to them."

The door of the chapel is open. The scent of burning wax and the faint light of candles comes from it. Smell of linseed on old nutwood pews. Soft sound of voices. The tall black shape of Santino stands against the inner glow. Marius can see Benji running to hug him and the slender, ghostlike figure of Sybelle following. He hears Santino say:

"I will be the best of teachers, because I would be the worst of masters. Never trust me without question, and you will learn to love somebody else beyond each other. And to love life as you never loved it before, because this will be a different life you don't yet know. Come, children, let us teach each other."

"Armand is always telling us to never give for granted what we will be feeling in ten years, nor in ten days," Benji answers. "But I \*am\* happy now!"

Marius smiles in the dark. He turns away, to his mare and to Amadeo.

## Love

I love them all.  
I sit with them and watch for their smell.  
Smashed snails.  
Upturned lizards.  
Fish lying on their sides.  
Half-twisted cats, hips flat up, chin scratched to ground between splayed arms.  
Supine children with their mouth open.  
Dead.  
Sometimes ripped open.  
I sit and wait for the smell to come.

## Puzzle

Daniel is lying on the bed before me. Each limb is strongly tied with a leather thong to one of the legs of the bed. I can feel his eyes are closed under the blindfold. His lips are tightly pressed and he is holding his breath. He is waiting for me to do something. I sit across his waist and wonder.

*He used to do the same when he was mortal. He lay there, waiting. But now?...*

I press my fingers along the underside of his arms, from wrist to elbow to armpit. I draw blood in a thin line, gushing under my nails on his white delicate skin like purple ink on finest parchment. I hear him gasp when I reach the sensitive spot under his armpits, and exhale when I shift, slowly, down along his sides, hips, thighs, knees, legs, following my hands with my own body, until I reach the round tips of the tibial bones on his calves and circle them with a perfect "O" of blood. A single drop oozes down, staining the sheet.

*He was alive, once. Each cell in his live body striving to survive. Blood of his own making coursing through his veins. Random patterns of electrical impulses forming and fading in the web of his nerves and brain. The comforting certainty that the eighth or ninth decade at most would bring release from memory.*

I put my spread hand on his chest and press down. My hand is cold and hard.

*But he wanted to be like me. Cold. Hard. Layer upon layer of memory piling up like layers of sand into stone. Painful memories never go away. After five centuries, I feel I am breaking under the weight.*

I slap his side, between ribcage and hip. On the palm of my hand I feel the same tingling hurt he is feeling. A red mark seeps to the surface, turning slowly blue and violet and then green and yellow while healing.

*Now so much has happened. He has got what he wanted. He has also got what I feared. We are both buried in the deadly silence of the mind. Then I tried to die. I was saved, not by him. I recited my confession to another. I as much as left him for a pair of mortals.*

I slip my hands inwards from the points of his hips and I pinch him hard on both sides of his groin. He bites his lower lip to avoid crying out.

*Yet here he is on my bed.*

*Why?*

I bury my hand in the soft pale fur around his penis. I grip it and pull a little and suddenly I feel slightly dizzy.

*::Eh, già:: my mind repeats. One of my déjà-vu loops. His image then, all dewy of human sweat and desire, slips over his image now, and I feel time spinning around its axis that is right here in front of me, spearing through his belly from heaven down to hell. Voglio che passi, eppure non voglio.*

I lean down above him and without touching him with my hands, I begin moving the tip of my tongue on his chest. I start at the dimple below his Adam's apple and then along his sternum. Light strokes like an arabesque of sensations traced by a thin paintbrush down to his navel. There I nip him hard. He moans in surprise.

*He is so strong. He could snap these ties with a single move. He could fight me and maybe even have the better on me for a short while.*

I raise myself to sit once more on his waist. I hear him force himself to calm down by drawing slow, deep breaths which fill his lungs under me like tidal waves. I ride on them like on a sailboat.

*I have also learned about his wisdom. Unassuming, matter-of-fact, down-to-earth wisdom. So what does he want from me now, lying here below me?*

I push my knee tightly under his balls and pinch both his nipples sharply. I can see I am hurting him now. But he remains silent. He never talks to me while we are having sex. Even as a mortal, he never did.

*I can't guess and he won't tell. Why then?*

I release him and kneel down on the mattress between his spread legs, without touching him. I only look at him. His back arches slightly and he moves in his fetters, trying in vain to reach me.

*Che sia...?*

*Che sia...?*

*Che sia amore?...*

## Slipping down

<Please.>

I startle, hearing his voice in my head.

He hasn't communicated with me since more than a week.

No words spoken, no thoughts sent, not even a passing look to meet my eyes. He stays on his own most of the time, yet he sometimes gives me a fright by suddenly appearing beside me.

No expression in his eyes. His face as smooth and still as water in a pond at night.

He's sitting deep in an armchair which seems too big for him. His hands grasp the armrests.

Still he doesn't look up.

<Please.>

He never said this to me.

I am scared.

*It can't go on. I can't go on. I don't care anymore. I am too tired to care. I give in. Once, only once, since my fourth life began -the first of my lives without the Sun- I felt like this, and I gave in. The shame I felt, when the Coven Master himself came to me and took care of my weakness, has kept me from losing control ever again. Until now. Now I am going through my seventh life, and there is no coven and no master anymore, and shame has lost its meaning. I am giving up control.*

"Please".

It is him I hear now. A whispered plead. He raises his eyes to meet mine, but still I can't read them. I see only darkness.

*He is scared. It seems whatever I do either scares or angers him. His pupils dilate until his beautiful irises are all but devoured by them. His lips part slightly as the single word I uttered - almost against my will- reaches his ears. The fingers in his hands, hanging at his sides like he had forgotten them, are moving by themselves, flexing one at a time, his usual gesture when he's worried. I want to see him happy, but all I see when I meet his eyes is this. His happiness I can only steal when he's not looking.*

Slowly he slips down along the seat, his arms spreading out and stretching back like he was hanging from a cross, until he is sitting down on the carpet, still grasping the knobs of the armchair.

The black depth of his eyes keeps his hold on mine. But I can't read in darkness. Not yet.

What does he expect from me?

*I feel like I'm melting under his gaze. I can't hold myself sitting anymore. I ache to open my mind to him, to open myself whole to his eyes. But still I am afraid. My presence is enough to unsettle him, my gaze chills him, my touch gives him shivers, my words never seem to carry for him the sense I gave them. How can I invade his soul with something I am the only one to know the depth of, and that after fifty decades is shattering me at last?*

Something is tapping at the door of my mind. Quietly, lightly, like it didn't want to disturb.

Like it doesn't expect I would ever let it in.

I look down at him, reclining at my feet. I can see him trembling. His fingers are white as wax as they hold now to the legs of the armchair. He lies supine, and his fiery hair is a crown of flames to his unreadable face.

"Help me" he is saying now, his voice so small.

*I am drowning. I am swept away. I am desperate to keep my hold on the very arms of the cross I'm nailed to: the implacable contradiction between fear of losing control and the need for release. But it's useless. Here we go, here we go again, and my heart breaks.*

Like the tide from a broken dam, like the subtle implacable buzzing of perfect silence in a desert at night, like the rush from a shot of heroin, a feeling floods me. His feeling.

\*Loneliness\*. A pain deeper than I ever thought it could be. Like he has always been utterly

alone in the universe. Like there never has been anyone to relieve him from himself, and hope is something only to be dreamt of.

*He keeps his breath, trying not to drown with me in the same tide that's swept my mind and soul. I've killed him. Like everything I ever loved has been killed, or has left me. I am once more the murderer of the one I love. And now there is no place where I can go. No solution. No hope anymore of imagining a hope. I wish I could die too, just to be near him at least -at last- in death. But surely his place in death and mine would not be the same. How could we ever be allowed to share the same place, his innocence of fragrant flesh and my ancient bloodless evil?*

God! No, there is no god, or such pain would never be allowed on a living being. What I feel now is so searing that I don't know how to touch him. He's so deep into it, he can't hear me calling. I am frantic to get to him, but I could as well be dead. He doesn't even see me.

*Alone. Alone. Forever. How could I let myself beg for hope once again? Loneliness is my destiny, and once again I have betrayed it. Loneliness buried deep in the earth, waiting for death to come. Loneliness of the spirit while I became detached from what happened to my physical self. Loneliness in a dark damp cell like I was dead already. Loneliness among hundreds of others in the catacombs, loneliness in front of the crowds in the Theatre pews; loneliness with the one who could have loved me, he who could understand me better than any other, and who left me in the end. Loneliness with this one flower of the flesh, whose eyes are now shut against my defeat. Again and again I allowed myself to hope for release, and every time my saviour left me alone. I can only hear the sound of loneliness anymore, and its voice endlessly repeats my guilt and shame.*

I am shy to touch him with my hands. His pain is so great it seems to make him brittle. His unvanquishable body now seems to have been turned to ashes, and I fear my hand would scatter them.

I touch him with my foot instead. I graze his chest with my naked foot; lightly, tentatively.

*But he's touching me now. How is it that he's willing to touch me? How can he be still alive, and here, and touching me? It is his foot that's touching me. Like I was some dead animal on a road at night, and he was trying to check if I was alive. I am. I don't want to, but I am. And wounded, and dangerous. I don't want to hurt him, but I could. Why does he touch me? Why isn't he afraid?*

He lets me. He could kill me for what I'm doing, but he lets me instead. And in the face of this pain he carried alone and in silence for so long, I don't care if I live or die. I know I could not live on if I didn't try to do something to get near him, so I don't care if he kills me now for doing something wrong. I don't care for what's left of my dignity, or sanity, or common sense. We are both beyond the world of common sense here. His pain is unthinkable. I quit thinking, and keep touching him with my foot.

*His toes are massaging my chest. They part my chamber vest and loosen the scarf-belt. I can feel them on my skin, kneading, touching. This touch of his is holding me, keeping me from disappearing in the whirlpool which is swallowing me. Or rather which was swallowing me. I breathe again, following the pressure of his foot. I enter my body again, surprised to feel... pleasure. His foot is shifting down along my sternum. It moves lower, to my belly. No-one touched me here since... I didn't allow anyone to touch me here since...*

I can feel each one of his ribs. I can feel the shaft of the sternum, and it seems to me I can feel the heart beating under it. Is it really his heart? Is it really beating this much faster?... His belly is flat, concave even as his back tenses while my foot moves down, to his navel and below. I stroke my foot, slowly, along the fold of his groin. His eyes close, those twin shimmering lakes of darkness shadowed at last by the mercy of his eyelids, and a sigh escapes his lips, or rather a half-stifled hiss. His release feels almost like a different sort of pain. I ache to embrace him, but I don't dare. I would envelop him and his pain and his loneliness and keep them as near my own heart as he and I can stand, but who am I to dare? Why would he allow just me, his human pet, to come so close?

I try to keep what I can have, as long as I can have it. I keep moving my foot along his body.



*It's not the pleasure that sweeps me away now. I am acquainted with every shade of pleasure allowed to both human and inhuman bodies, and this is not it. This is different; this is something else. This is comfort, and comfort is something I had forgotten the taste of. I am letting go: of my body, of my mind, of my soul, of my memories and guilt and shame. This is a feeling I had lost four hundred and eighty-eight years ago. This is \*trust\* I am feeling. A groan escapes me as I close my eyes, as much of pain as of relief. I am giving up control to another. I am surrendering myself to another. I am his to do what he wants. If he should throw me aside and leave me, I know I will die.*

I see his body move, almost by itself, without his will or even knowledge. He slips nearer, stretching his arms; he throws his head back, uncovering his throat, and his shoulders rise as he arches up to lean into the contact.

*Something drives me and I can't resist. I am losing hold. My whole body tends toward him and my willpower has disappeared. I feel my hands releasing their hold.*

Now, like an alien power has taken hold of him, he is loosening at last his grasp on the legs of the armchair. His eyes are still closed, but he rises halfway from the floor and his arms extend toward me. Whatever happens, I can't just stand here over him. I kneel down and slip my arms around his slender frame and I hug him like I wanted to do since the first second I saw him, such a long time ago. I may be killed for this, but so be it. We both need it since forever.

*This is bliss. He takes me in his arms, so fearless, so tender, and he holds me tight. I force myself to open my eyes and look into his own. I am scared that I will see triumph there, and once more my weakness and shame reflected in the eyes of one stronger than me. But what I see is ...\*love\*. Trusting, understanding, limitless love.*

His eyes open now and he looks at me. Now I know he will reject me, push me away, maybe kill me at last, now that I have dared what cannot be dared and I have touched what cannot be touched. But his eyes are clear now and finally I can read them. I see the eyes of a child. They are filled with thankfulness and love. There are no masks between us, and I can see at last that his real face mirrors what I am feeling. I love him.

*I know at last what I am feeling, and I am amazed. I am grateful. I trust him. And I love him. I wish there was someone left to pray, for \*this\* to last forever.*

I love him.

*I love him.*

## ***Exsultabunt domino ossa humiliata***

The man is tired. Although he looks little more than forty, he is feeling much older than his years as he is walking home at last in the chill of a January evening. His travel has been long and exhausting, and before dawn he will have to take care of his affairs at home also, after an absence of almost two weeks. He has already summoned the administrator of his properties in Terraferma, and then he's waiting for news about the discussion in Collegio. There was a proposal about entrusting him with the restoration of Guariento's fresco of angels in the great hall where the Maggior Consiglio meets... Those endless cohorts of angels, with their rainbow wings, sweet unreadable faces, and pointed spears.

He can't remember anymore the times when he was free from his duties – when he felt young, eager to travel and to study. When he still knew the meaning of *otium*, that secluded garden of the spirit.

He stops at last along the dark alley, in front of the heavy larchwood door. He sighs. More responsibilities wait for him there, so many people whose life depends on him.

He raises his hand at last, but the iron hammer has barely touched the mallet, and at once the door swings open. A young boy comes running to kiss his hands, his mass of wavy, fawn-coloured hair cascading down his shoulders and his eyes dark with awe and affection as he looks up at his master.

-- *Paron... quanto gavemo aspetà!* (Master, how long you kept us waiting for you!)

and, almost breathless with hope:

-- *Paron, sta casa stasera?* (Master, will you stay home tonight?)

The answer comes in a voice low with regret:

-- *Fio mio, no, vorà che vaga fora deboto.* (No, son, I will have to go out again at once.)

A half-stifled groan escapes the boy's lips, but he's already in a hurry to make the most of this short time allowed him.

-- *Vegna drento, Paron, se scalda, che xe bora. Xe pronto el bagno.* (Come in, Master, warm yourself, this north wind is so cold. Your bath is ready.)

He takes him by the hand, leads him inside. The servants flock around, happy to see their Master back, eager to help, but the boy takes charge at once: sending one outside to fetch the saddle bags, another to put more water to the boil, yet another to the kitchen, preparing some spiced hot wine for their Master.

He holds his hand while they cross the hall toward the bathroom. His Master is the only one in the whole of Venice to have a room with a bath, a large deep basin of white *sasso d'Istria*. He knows the other boys in the house gossip about it: such luxury, such extravagance. He doesn't care, his Master is wonderful, the bath is one more of his Master's wonders.

The small room is warm already from the hot water in the basin, faintly scented by the perfumed oils in the row of jars on a shelf.

-- *Cossa vorlo stasera, Paron? Rose de Damasco?* (Which one tonight, Master? Damask rose?)

They both love Damask rose, but it gives laxness of the limbs, and his Master must go out again tonight.

-- *Menta del Marocco xe meglio. O piuttosto lavanda?* (Moroccan mint is better. Or rather lavender?)

-- *Menta va ben, grazie.* (Mint will be fine, thank you.)

The boy pops open carefully the heavy blown glass flask, pours some oil in the hot water, stirs it with his hand, and the fresh, stinging perfume of mint pervades the room.

He hurries to his Master, begins to slip off his boots. The man gestures him to stop, one hand on his shoulder. The boy looks up to him pleadingly.

-- *Quaeso, nolis te tangam?* (Please, won't you allow me to touch you?)

The man smiles through his exhaustion at this unforeseen exhibition of half-learned Latin.

-- *So' giazzà, fazzo mi, che ve giazzè le man anca vu.* (I am ice-cold, I'll do it myself, or your hands will become cold too.)

-- *No importa, Paron, ve prego...* (I don't care, Master, please...)

He lets the boy undress him, his small strong hands quick and wise along every ply of his body.

Their warmth touches his skin and his soul at the same time. He doesn't want to go out again, although he must, and he doesn't want to go away again, although he knows he will have to, when spring comes. He only wants to stay here, and let the boy, his boy, his love, lead him by the hand to the hot water in the basin, and to a sleep without dreams.

He drops his face below water for a whole minute, trying to imagine what it could ever have felt like, being in his mother's womb. But the boy waits at the side of the basin, he feels he is beginning to be worried. As he surfaces again, he can hear his almost unaudible, relieved sigh. The boy takes off his own coat and shirt and, naked to the waist, he begins to help washing him, scrubbing his back, massaging his hair.

His Master has an unlimited supply of the finest soaps, and it is camphor tonight. Camphor is warming and tonic. How he would love to use *cipri* instead! But no, he knows *cipri* is only for nights at home.

The touch of those fingers, delicate and thorough, seems to reach at last to a frozen core inside the man. He feels slowly melting, until a tide of denied feelings comes rushing over him and pours forth in words.

-- *Per cossa me faxi 'sta carità? No go merito.* (Why do you do this for me? I have not earned this.)

The man turns to look at the boy, his eyes full of regret. How he loves those dark, haunted eyes, where affection, mirroring his own, is shining once again instead of diffidence; that sharp features, where a reclusive soul endlessly paints a passionate story; and those hands of magic, which time after time take his eternal burden from his back, for a short while.

The boy doesn't answer. He can't find words. His soapy hands fall at his sides. He tries to speak, but he can't.

The man raises his arm, circles the boy's narrow waist, pulls him near in a hug filled with emotion.

-- *Zogia, angelo armà de lancia, paron de la mia anima... Exsultabunt domino ossa humiliata* (My joy, my angel with a spear, you Master of my soul... These unworthy bones will rejoice in their Lord) the man whispers, and he kisses the boy's hair.

## Black heart, white heart

*The quote is from the Homeric Hymn XXXII, To the Moon, 7-10*

The night is warm over the Island. The sky is clear, shimmering with stars, and a young moon is just rising above the horizon. The man came on the beach at dusk and sat waiting for her, as still as a statue. Now, as the gleam of her light traces a pattern of flickers on the surface of the ocean, his lips part as he repeats ancient words:

εὖτ' ἄν ἅπ' Ὀκεανοῖο λοεσσαμένη χροά καλόν,  
εἶματα ἔσσαμένη τηλαυγέα διὰ Σελήνη,  
ζευξαμένη πώλους ἐριαύχενας, αἰγλήεντας,  
ἔσσυμένως προτέρωσ' ἐλάση καλλίτριχας ἵππους...

*When up from the Ocean, after washing her shapely limbs  
and wearing her luminous white dress, divine Selene  
hitches her high-necked fillies, shining as eagles,  
and drives them impetuously forward, their manes like waves...*

He falls silent when he catches the almost inaudible sound of steps on the soft sand. At some distance, the slight figure of a boy is walking toward the mobile boundary between the waves and the beach. He is naked, his hair flowing over his shoulders. He does not turn to look at him; he steps straight into the sea, and he keeps walking toward the moon like he was following her bright dancing path, until he disappears underwater.

The man holds his breath, lost in the magic of the moment: Was it a vision? Did he really see him?

He breathes again when the dark water is broken suddenly by a sprinkle of liquid light as the boy surfaces and begins to swim in long agile strokes. He dives, he breaches, he disappears again, deep within his own game, or rite.

The moon has floated upward to the lowest, laced cyrrus, when the boy swims back to shore, walks out of the water, and raises his arms to comb the water out of his hair. Silver droplets shine under the moonlight along his taut sleek side as he faces the beach, and a small, dark pattern becomes visible for a moment on his skin under the left armpit.

The man's ancient heart skips a beat when he sees him come straight in his direction. The boy sits down on his left, silent, his eyes pools of darkness as he looks onto the horizon. Neither is willing to break the magic of the night. They know each other so well, yet in front of such a solemn moon they feel foreign to one another. It is a sudden impulse that brings the man to make the silence human with the sound of his human voice.

-- Is it a tattoo you have under your arm?

The boy turns at last to look at him, startled out of his rêverie.

-- It is,

he answers, and he pauses before adding, his words devoid of emotion:

-- I had it made in New Orleans, after... after *he* left me.

It is the man's turn to be startled. They had never talked about this.

-- Tell me,

he asks, trying to keep his voice neutral. He knows the boy's soul is an animal of deep forests, as secretive as a jungle cat. He doesn't want to shy him away with the scent of his own feelings.

-- Look,

the boy goes on, and he raises his arm again. The shape of a heart is tattooed on his ivory-white skin, one half filled with black, one half only contoured.

-- I felt nothing when *he* left me. I was a void. I kept no track of nights or weeks, just drifted on without a purpose. I didn't care if I lived or died... Indeed, I would not have been able to tell the difference.

His tone is quiet, matter-of-fact, as though that memory, with all its import, was preserved in a jar of alcohol on a shelf. As though it didn't hurt anymore.

-- One night I found myself at the river docks, where all sorts of homeless people gathered to find a temporary shelter. A cargo had just come in from Brazil, and a crowd of refugees had flocked to shore. Famine had flared out again as white settlers in the interior burned the forest

to make room for pasture. I was walking by, not feeling my hunger, when an old woman called at me. "Exu," she said, "Exu the lord of contrast holds your heart". She took me by the hand. I saw she knew what I was, but she was not afraid. "Remember, the heart is never all black, as you think, neither all white. The heart is always half-and-half, half evil and half good." She then pressed her fingers on my forehead, and it was like a light was turned on. I was awake again, and feeling was back, and I understood then something I had never understood before. He has seen my white heart. He knows my black heart too— all too well. He will never forget what my black heart has done --to her and to countless others-- and what it could do again. I forgot for so long your warning: never let your pain be so great that it becomes a weapon. Those I made suffer, I made suffer just to know I was not alone in my own pain. But he chose to look at my white heart, and for the love of that he chose to stay with me so long. I had the tattoo made so that I would try and not forget anymore.

A single tear trickles down from the man's eyes and drops on the sand between them. The boy presses his hand in his own.

-- What is it, Paron?

The man takes a deep breath before he manages to speak steadily.

-- I saw you play *lippa* or *scalon* with the other boys at dusk. You never cheated, and never allowed any of them to cheat. I saw you share your sweets with the beggar children in the streets. The only thing you never shared was me. I saw your white heart every minute, and your black heart in your jealous eyes whenever someone or something took me away from you. But I could not see my own black heart until it was too late for us both.

He lapses into silence. How can he tell this guilt, and his despair? His voice is clotted with grief as he forces himself to go on, his eyes to the ground.

-- My black heart held in itself the desire for power. I wanted power to keep my beloved happy and safe from all evil. What is worse, I believed I had such power. I felt I was a god, and didn't even realize my pride. I strove for perfection, and thought I had it: an impossible perfection. An arbitrary perfection. Who was I to know what another's good was? Or to believe I could prevent the unexpected to strike? I tried to grow a garden of unlimited delights for those whose life was in my hands, and I failed, because no garden can grow outside the real world, and the real world is made of limitations. I did not know then about Siddharta's story, how his father had built a palace closed against all evil, and Siddharta escaped it because he wanted to know life outside; but that is what I tried to do, and you were taken from me by force just before you escaped of your own will, like Siddharta. You would have escaped, in the end. Somehow or other, human or not, you would. That's why it was impossible for me to face you. I had failed you on both sides, and had nothing to give you anymore. I had neither been able to defend the garden, nor allowed you to leave it when you felt it was time. It was my fault that you were trapped there, like the dog in Pompeii, chained to the wall while the volcano erupted and stifled him to death. Now I see you wielding a different power. You control yourself. You never presume you can divert fate; you are always ready for surprises, and that they will be bad is an assumption for you. You tread the razor's edge, and you are so good at it that nobody can see how difficult and dangerous your path is, and how accomplished you are at following it. You have become different from anything I could have imagined, and you shine like Antares, and I am ashamed of myself.

He feels the boy's cool breath on his temple. He shivers. He tried so hard, for so long, to fight this dejection, and now it has caught up with him at last. The only white he can see, or feel, is the gleam of that unreachable moon. He is aching to lean toward those lips, but he dare not. A chill pierces through him when he feels their touch, as the boy whispers in his ear.

-- I know your white heart. I know where it lays. I am the Master of the Keys, and I hold the key to it. Let me show it to you. We have time.

A breeze is rising. The moonlight breaks into sparkles on the ocean, and a seagull cries once. Then there is silence.