

THE QUEEN OF THE DAMNED

THE THIRD BOOK IN THE
VAMPIRE CHRONICLES

ANNE RICE



BALLANTINE BOOKS

THE QUEEN OF THE DAMNED

THE THIRD BOOK
IN THE
VAMPIRE CHRONICLES

by

ANNE RICE

Ballantine Books
New York

This book is dedicated

with love

to

*Stan Rice, Christopher Rice,
and John Preston*

And to the memory

of

my beloved editors:

John Dodds

and

William Whitehead

TRAGIC RABBIT

*Tragic rabbit, a painting.
The caked, ears green like rolled corn.
The black forehead pointing at the stars.
A painting on my wall, alone
as rabbits are
and aren't. Fat red cheek,
all Art, trembling nose,
a habit hard to break as not.
You too can be a tragic rabbit; green and red
your back, blue your manly little chest.
But if you're ever goaded into being one
beware the True Flesh, it
will knock you off your tragic horse
and break your tragic colors like a ghost
breaks marble; your wounds will heal
so quickly water
will be jealous.
Rabbits on white paper painted
outgrow all charms against their breeding wild;
and their rolled corn ears become horns.
So watch out if the tragic life feels fine—
caught in that rabbit trap
all colors look like sunlight's swords,
and scissors like The Living Lord.*

STAN RICE

Some Lamb (1975)

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About the Author

I'M THE Vampire Lestat. Remember me? The vampire who became a super rock star, the one who wrote the autobiography? The one with the blond hair and the gray eyes, and the insatiable desire for visibility and fame? You remember. I wanted to be a symbol of evil in a shining century that didn't have any place for the literal evil that I am. I even figured I'd do some good in that fashion—playing the devil on the painted stage.

And I was off to a good start when we talked last. I'd just made my debut in San Francisco—first “live concert” for me and my mortal band. Our album was a huge success. My autobiography was doing respectably with both the dead and the undead.

Then something utterly unforeseen took place. Well, at least I hadn't seen it coming. And when I left you, I was hanging from the proverbial cliff, you might say.

Well, it's all over now—what followed. I've survived, obviously. I wouldn't be talking to you if I hadn't. And the cosmic dust has finally settled; and the small rift in the world's fabric of rational beliefs has been mended, or at least closed.

I'm a little sadder for all of it, and a little meaner and a little more conscientious as well. I'm also infinitely more powerful, though the human in me is closer to the surface than ever—an anguished and hungry being who both loves and detests this invincible immortal shell in which I'm locked.

The blood thirst? Insatiable, though physically I have never needed the blood less. Possibly I could exist now without it altogether. But the lust I feel for everything that walks tells me that this will never be put to the test.

You know, it was never merely the need for the blood anyway, though the blood is all things sensual that a creature could desire; it's the intimacy of that moment—drinking, killing—the great heart-to-heart dance that takes place as the victim weakens and I feel myself expanding, swallowing the death which, for a split second, blazes as large as the life.

That's deceptive, however. No death can be as large as a life. And that's why I keep taking life, isn't it? And I'm as far from salvation now as I could ever get. The fact that I know it only makes it worse.

Of course I can still pass for human; all of us can, in one way or another, no matter how old we are. Collar up, hat down, dark glasses, hands in pockets—it usually does the trick. I like slim leather jackets and tight jeans for this disguise now, and a pair of plain black boots that are good for walking on any terrain. But now and then I wear the fancier silks which people like in these southern climes where I now reside.

If someone does look too closely, then there is a little telepathic razzle-dazzle: *Perfectly normal, what you see*. And a flash of the old smile, fang teeth easily concealed, and the mortal goes his way.

Occasionally I throw up all the disguises; I just go out the way I am. Hair long, a velvet blazer that makes me think of the olden times, and an emerald ring or two on my right hand. I walk fast right through the downtown crowds in this lovely corrupt southern city; or stroll slowly along the beaches, breathing the warm southern breeze, on sands that are as white as the moon.

Nobody stares for more than a second or two. There are too many other inexplicable things around us—horrors, threats, mysteries that draw you in and then inevitably disenchant you. Back to the predictable and humdrum. The prince is never going to come, everybody knows that; and maybe Sleeping Beauty's dead.

It's the same for the others who have survived with me, and who share this hot and verdant little corner of the universe—the southeastern tip of the North American continent, the glistening metropolis of Miami, a happy hunting ground for bloodthirsting immortals if ever there was such a place.

It's good to have them with me, the others; it's crucial, really—and what I always thought I wanted: a grand coven of the wise, the enduring, the ancient, and the careless young.

But ah, the agony of being anonymous among mortals has never been worse for me, greedy monster that I am. The soft murmur of preternatural voices can't distract me from it. That taste of mortal recognition was too seductive

—the record albums in the windows, the fans leaping and clapping in front of the stage. Never mind that they didn't really believe I was a vampire; for that moment we were together. They were calling my name!

Now the record albums are gone, and I will never listen to those songs again. My book remains—along with *Interview with the Vampire*—safely disguised as fiction, which is, perhaps, as it should be. I caused enough trouble, as you will see.

Disaster, that's what I wrought with my little games. The vampire who would have been a hero and a martyr finally for one moment of pure relevance...

You'd think I'd learn something from it, wouldn't you? Well, I did, actually. I really did.

But it's just so painful to shrink back into the shadows—Lestat, the sleek and nameless gangster ghoulie again creeping up on helpless mortals who know nothing of things like me. So hurtful to be again the outsider, forever on the fringes, struggling with good and evil in the age-old private hell of body and soul.

In my isolation now I dream of finding some sweet young thing in a moonlighted chamber—one of those tender teenagers, as they call them now, who read my book and listened to my songs; one of the idealistic lovelies who wrote me fan letters on scented paper, during that brief period of ill-fated glory, talking of poetry and the power of illusion, saying she wished I was real; I dream of stealing into her darkened room, where maybe my book lies on a bedside table, with a pretty velvet marker in it, and I dream of touching her shoulder and smiling as our eyes meet. "Lestat! I always believed in you. I always knew you would come!"

I clasp her face in both hands as I bend to kiss her. "Yes, darling," I answer, "and you don't know how I need you, how I love you, how I always have."

Maybe she would find me more charming on account of what's befallen me—the unexpected horror I've seen, the inevitable pain I've endured. It's an awful truth that suffering can deepen us, give a greater luster to our colors, a richer resonance to our words. That is, if it doesn't destroy us, if it doesn't burn away the optimism and the spirit, the capacity for visions, and the respect for simple yet indispensable things.

Please forgive me if I sound bitter.

I don't have any right to be. I started the whole thing; and I got out in one piece, as they say. And so many of our kind did not. Then there were the mortals who suffered. That part was inexcusable. And surely I shall always pay for that.

But you see, I still don't really fully understand what happened. I don't know whether or not it was a tragedy, or merely a meaningless venture. Or whether or not something absolutely magnificent might have been born of my blundering, something that could have lifted me right out of irrelevance and nightmare and into the burning light of redemption after all.

I may never know, either. The point is, it's over. And our world—our little private realm—is smaller and darker and safer than ever. It will never again be what it was.

It's a wonder that I didn't foresee the cataclysm, but then I never really envision the finish of anything that I start. It's the risk that fascinates, the moment of infinite possibility. It lures me through eternity when all other charms fail.

After all, I was like that when I was alive two hundred years ago—the restless one, the impatient one, the one who was always spoiling for love and a good brawl. When I set out for Paris in the 1780s to be an actor, all I dreamed of were beginnings—the moment each night when the curtain went up.

Maybe the old ones are right. I refer now to the true immortals—the blood drinkers who've survived the millennia—who say that none of us really changes over time; we only become more fully what we are.

To put it another way, you do get wiser when you live for hundreds of years; but you also have more time to turn out as badly as your enemies always said you might.

And I'm the same devil I always was, the young man who would have center stage, where you can best see me, and maybe love me. One's no good without the other. And I want so much to amuse you, to enthrall you, to make

you forgive me everything....Random moments of secret contact and recognition will never be enough, I'm afraid.

But I'm jumping ahead now, aren't I?

If you've read my autobiography then you want to know what I'm talking about. What was this disaster of which I speak?

Well, let's review, shall we? As I've said, I wrote the book and made the album because I wanted to be visible, to be seen for what I am, even if only in symbolic terms.

As to the risk that mortals might really catch on, that they might realize I was exactly what I said I was—I was rather excited by that possibility as well. Let them hunt us down, let them destroy us, that was in a way my fondest wish. We don't deserve to exist; they ought to kill us. And think of the battles! Ah, fighting those who really know what I am.

But I never really expected such a confrontation; and the rock musician persona, it was too marvelous a cover for a fiend like me.

It was my own kind who took me literally, who decided to punish me for what I had done. And of course I'd counted on that too.

After all, I'd told our history in my autobiography; I'd told our deepest secrets, things I'd been sworn never to reveal. And I was strutting before the hot lights and the camera lenses. And what if some scientist had gotten hold of me, or more likely a zealous police officer on a minor traffic violation five minutes before sunup, and somehow I'd been incarcerated, inspected, identified, and classified—all during the daylight hours while I lay helpless—to the satisfaction of the worst mortal skeptics worldwide?

Granted, that wasn't very likely. Still isn't. (Though it could be such fun, it really could!)

Yet it was inevitable that my own kind should be infuriated by the risks I was taking, that they would try to burn me alive, or chop me up in little immortal pieces. Most of the young ones, they were too stupid to realize how safe we were.

And as the night of the concert approached, I'd found myself dreaming of those battles, too. Such a pleasure it was going to be to destroy those who were as evil as I was; to cut a swathe through the guilty; to cut down my own image again and again.

Yet, you know, the sheer joy of being out there, making music, making theater, making magic!—that's what it was all about in the end. I wanted to be alive, finally. I wanted to be simply human. The mortal actor who'd gone to Paris two hundred years ago and met death on the boulevard, would have his moment at last.

But to continue with the review—the concert was a success. I had my moment of triumph before fifteen thousand screaming mortal fans; and two of my greatest immortal loves were there with me—Gabrielle and Louis—my fledglings, my paramours, from whom I'd been separated for too many dark years.

Before the night was over, we licked the pesty vampires who tried to punish me for what I was doing. But we'd had an invisible ally in these little skirmishes; our enemies burst into flames before they could do us harm.

As morning approached, I was too elated by the whole night to take the question of danger seriously. I ignored Gabrielle's impassioned warnings—too sweet to hold her once again; and I dismissed Louis's dark suspicions as I always had.

And then the jam, the cliffhanger...

Just as the sun was rising over Carmel Valley and I was closing my eyes as vampires must do at that moment, I realized I wasn't alone in my underground lair. It wasn't only the young vampires I'd reached with my music; my songs had roused from their slumber the very oldest of our kind in the world.

And I found myself in one of those breathtaking instants of risk and possibility. What was to follow? Was I to die finally, or perhaps to be reborn?

Now, to tell you the full story of what happened after that, I must move back a little in time.

I have to begin some ten nights before the fatal concert and I have to let you slip into the minds and hearts of ~~other beings who were responding to my music and my book in ways of which I knew little or nothing at the time.~~

In other words, a lot was going on which I had to reconstruct later. And it is the reconstruction that I offer you now.

So we will move out of the narrow, lyrical confines of the first person singular; we will jump as a thousand mortal writers have done into the brains and souls of “many characters.” We will gallop into the world of “third person” and “multiple point of view.”

And by the way, when these other characters think or say of me that I am beautiful or irresistible, etc., don't think I put these words in their heads. I didn't! It's what was told to me after, or what I drew out of their minds with infallible telepathic power; I wouldn't lie about that or anything else. I can't help being a gorgeous fiend. It's just the card I drew. The bastard monster who made me what I am picked me on account of my good looks. That's the long and short of it. And accidents like that occur all the time.

We live in a world of accidents finally, in which only aesthetic principles have a consistency of which we can be sure. Right and wrong we will struggle with forever, striving to create and maintain an ethical balance; but the shimmer of summer rain under the street lamps or the great flashing glare of artillery against a night sky—such brutal beauty is beyond dispute.

Now, be assured: though I am leaving you, I will return with full flair at the appropriate moment. The truth is, I hate not being the first person narrator all the way through! To paraphrase David Copperfield, I don't know whether I'm the hero or the victim of this tale. But either way, shouldn't I dominate it? I'm the one really telling it, after all.

Alas, my being the James Bond of vampires isn't the whole issue. Vanity must wait. I want you to know what really took place with us, even if you never believe it. In fiction if nowhere else, I must have a little meaning, a little coherence, or I will go mad.

So until we meet again, I am thinking of you always; I love you; I wish you were here...in my arms.

PROEM

DECLARATION IN THE FORM OF GRAFFITI

—written in black felt-tip pen on a red wall in the back room of a bar called *Dracula's Daughter* in San Francisco—

Children of Darkness

Be Advised of the Following:

BOOK ONE: *Interview with the Vampire*, published in 1976, was a true story. Any one of us could have written it—an account of becoming what we are, of the misery and the searching. Yet Louis, the two-hundred-year-old immortal who reveals all, insists on mortal sympathy. Lestat, the villain who gave Louis the Dark Gift, gave him precious little else in the way of explanations or consolation. Sound familiar? Louis hasn't given up the search for salvation yet, though even Armand, the oldest immortal he was ever to find, could tell him nothing of why we are here or who made us. Not very surprising, is it, vampire boys and girls? After all, there has never been a Baltimore Catechism for vampires.

That is, there wasn't until the publication of:

BOOK TWO: *The Vampire Lestat*, this very week. Subtitle: His "early education and adventures." You don't believe it? Check with the nearest mortal bookseller. Then go into the nearest record store and ask to see the album which has only just arrived—also entitled *The Vampire Lestat*, with predictable modesty. Or if all else fails, switch on your cable TV, if you don't disdain such things, and wait for one of Lestat's numerous rock video films which began to air with nauseating frequency only yesterday. You will know Lestat for what he is immediately. And it may not surprise you to be told that he plans to compound these unprecedented outrages by appearing "live" on stage in a debut concert in this very city. Yes, on Halloween, you guessed it.

But let us forget for the moment the blatant insanity of his preternatural eyes flashing from every record store window, or his powerful voice singing out the secret names and stories of the most ancient among us. Why is he doing all this? What do his songs tell us? It is spelled out in his book. He has given us not only a catechism but a Bible.

And deep into biblical times we are led to confront our first parents: Enkil and Akasha, rulers of the valley of the Nile before it was ever called Egypt. Kindly disregard the gobbledygook of how they became the first bloodsuckers on the face of the earth; it makes only a little more sense than the story of how life formed on this planet in the first place, or how human fetuses develop from microscopic cells within the wombs of their mortal mothers. The truth is we are descended from this venerable pair, and like it or no, there is considerable reason to believe that the primal generator of all our delicious and indispensable powers resides in one or the other of their ancient bodies. What does this mean? To put it bluntly, if Akasha and Enkil should ever walk hand in hand into a furnace, we should all burn with them. Crush them to glittering dust, and we are annihilated.

Ah, but there's hope. The pair haven't moved in over fifty centuries! Yes, that's correct. Except of course that Lestat claims to have wakened them both by playing a violin at the foot of their shrine. But if we dismiss his extravagant tale that Akasha took him in her arms and shared with him her primal blood, we are left with the more likely state of affairs, corroborated by stories of old, that the two have not batted an eyelash since before the fall of the Roman Empire. They've been kept all this time in a nice private crypt by Marius, an ancient Roman vampire,

who certainly knows what's best for all of us. And it was he who told the Vampire Lestat never to reveal the secret.

~~Not a very trustworthy confidant, the Vampire Lestat. And what are his motives for the book, the album, the films, the concert? Quite impossible to know what goes on in the mind of this fiend, except that what he wants to do he does, with reliable consistency. After all, did he not make a vampire child? And a vampire of his own mother, Gabrielle, who for years was his loving companion? He may set his sights upon the papacy, this devil, out of sheer thirst for excitement!~~

So that's the gist: Louis, a wandering philosopher whom none of us can find, has confided our deepest moral secrets to countless strangers. And Lestat has dared to reveal our history to the world, as he parades his supernatural endowments before the mortal public.

Now the Question: Why are these two still in existence? Why have we not destroyed them already? Oh, the danger to us from the great mortal herd is by no means a certainty. The villagers are not yet at the door, torches in hand, threatening to burn the castle. But the monster is courting a change in mortal perspective. And though we are too clever to corroborate for the human record his foolish fabrications, the outrage exceeds all precedent. It cannot go unpunished.

Further observations: If the story the Vampire Lestat has told is true—and there are many who swear it is, though on what account they cannot tell you—may not the two-thousand-year-old Marius come forward to punish Lestat's disobedience? Or perhaps the King and Queen, if they have ears to hear, will waken at the sound of their names carried on radio waves around the planet. What might happen to us all if this should occur? Shall we prosper under their new reign? Or will they set the time for universal destruction? Whatever the case, might not the swift destruction of the Vampire Lestat avert it?

The Plan: Destroy the Vampire Lestat and all his cohorts as soon as they dare to show themselves. Destroy all those who show him allegiance.

A Warning: Inevitably, there are other very old blood drinkers out there. We have all from time to time glimpsed them, or felt their presence. Lestat's revelations do not shock so much as they rouse some unconscious awareness within us. And surely with their great powers, these old ones can hear Lestat's music. What ancient and terrible beings, incited by history, purpose, or mere recognition, might be moving slowly and inexorably to answer his summons?

Copies of this Declaration have to be sent to every meeting place on the Vampire Connection, and to coven houses the world over. But you must take heed and spread the word: The Vampire Lestat is to be destroyed and with him his mother, Gabrielle, his cohorts, Louis and Armand, and any and all immortals who show him loyalty.

Happy Halloween, vampire boys and girls. We shall see you at the concert. We shall see that the Vampire Lestat never leaves it.

THE blond-haired figure in the red velvet coat read the declaration over again from his comfortable vantage point in the far corner. His eyes were almost invisible behind his dark tinted glasses and the brim of his gray hat. He wore gray suede gloves, and his arms were folded over his chest as he leaned back against the high black wainscoting, one boot heel hooked on the rung of his chair.

"Lestat, you are the damnedest creature!" he whispered under his breath. "You are a brat prince." He gave a little private laugh. Then he scanned the large shadowy room.

Not displeasing to him, the intricate black ink mural drawn with such skill, like spiderwebs on the white plaster wall. He rather enjoyed the ruined castle, the graveyard, the withered tree clawing at the full moon. It was the cliché reinvented as if it were not a cliché, an artistic gesture he invariably appreciated. Very fine too was the molded ceiling with its frieze of prancing devils and hags upon broomsticks. And the incense, sweet—an old Indian mixture which he himself had once burnt in the shrine of Those Who Must Be Kept centuries ago.

Yes, one of the more beautiful of the clandestine meeting places.

~~Less pleasing were the inhabitants, the scattering of slim white figures who hovered around candles set on small ebony tables. Far too many of them for this civilized modern city. And they knew it. To hunt tonight, they would have to roam far and wide, and young ones always have to hunt. Young ones have to kill. They are too hungry to do it any other way.~~

But they thought only of him just now—who was he, where had he come from? Was he very old and very strong, and what would he do before he left here? Always the same questions, though he tried to slip into their “vampire bars” like any vagrant blood drinker, eyes averted, mind closed.

Time to leave their questions unanswered. He had what he wanted, a fix on their intentions. And Lestat’s small audio cassette in his jacket pocket. He would have a tape of the video rock films before he went home.

He rose to go. And one of the young ones rose also. A stiff silence fell, a silence in thoughts as well as words as he and the young one both approached the door. Only the candle flames moved, throwing their shimmer on the black tile floor as if it were water.

“Where do you come from, stranger?” asked the young one politely. He couldn’t have been more than twenty when he died, and that could not have been ten years ago. He painted his eyes, waxed his lips, streaked his hair with barbaric color, as if the preternatural gifts were not enough. How extravagant he looked, how unlike what he was, a spare and powerful revenant who could with luck survive the millennia.

What had they promised him with their modern jargon? That he should know the Bardo, the Astral Plane, etheric realms, the music of the spheres, the sound of one hand clapping?

Again he spoke: “Where do you stand on the Vampire Lestat, on the Declaration?”

“You must forgive me. I’m going now.”

“But surely you know what Lestat’s done,” the young one pressed, slipping between him and the door. Now, this was not good manners.

He studied this brash young male more closely. Should he do something to stir them up? To have them talking about it for centuries? He couldn’t repress a smile. But no. There’d be enough excitement soon, thanks to his beloved Lestat.

“Let me give you a little piece of advice in response,” he said quietly to the young inquisitor. “You cannot destroy the Vampire Lestat; no one can. But why that is so, I honestly can’t tell you.”

The young one was caught off guard, and a little insulted.

“But let me ask you a question now,” the other continued. “Why this obsession with the Vampire Lestat? What about the content of his revelations? Have you fledglings no desire to seek Marius, the guardian of Those Who Must Be Kept? To see for yourselves the Mother and the Father?”

The young one was confused, then gradually scornful. He could not form a clever answer. But the true reply was plain enough in his soul—in the souls of all those listening and watching. Those Who Must Be Kept might or might not exist; and Marius perhaps did not exist either. But the Vampire Lestat was real, as real as anything this callow immortal knew, and the Vampire Lestat was a greedy fiend who risked the secret prosperity of all his kind just to be loved and seen by mortals.

He almost laughed in the young one’s face. Such an insignificant battle. Lestat understood these faithless times so beautifully, one had to admit it. Yes, he’d told the secrets he’d been warned to keep, but in so doing, he had betrayed nothing and no one.

“Watch out for the Vampire Lestat,” he said to the young one finally with a smile. “There are very few true immortals walking this earth. He may be one of them.”

Then he lifted the young one off his feet and set him down out of the way. And he went out the door into the tavern proper.

The front room, spacious and opulent with its black velvet hangings and fixtures of lacquered brass, was packed

with noisy mortals. Cinema vampires glared from their gilt frames on satin-lined walls. An organ poured out the ~~passionate Toccata and Fugue of Bach, beneath a babble of conversation and violent riffs of drunken laughter.~~ He loved the sight of so much exuberant life. He loved even the age-old smell of the malt and the wine, and the perfume of the cigarettes. And as he made his way to the front, he loved the crush of the soft fragrant humans against him. He loved the fact that the living took not the slightest notice of him.

At last the moist air, the busy early evening pavements of Castro Street. The sky still had a polished silver gleam. Men and women rushed to and fro to escape the faint slanting rain, only to be clotted at the corners, waiting for great bulbous colored lights to wink and signal.

The speakers of the record store across the street blared Lestat's voice over the roar of the passing bus, the hiss of wheels on the wet asphalt:

*In my dreams, I hold her still,
Angel, lover, Mother.
And in my dreams, I kiss her lips,
Mistress, Muse, Daughter.*

*She gave me life
I gave her death
My beautiful Marquise.*

*And on the Devil's Road we walked
Two orphans then together.*

*And does she bear my hymns tonight
of Kings and Queens and Ancient truths?
Of broken vows and sorrow?*

*Or does she climb some distant path
where rhyme and song can't find her?*

*Come back to me, my Gabrielle
My Beautiful Marquise.
The castle's ruined on the hill
The village lost beneath the snow
But you are mine forever.*

Was she here already, his mother?

The voice died away in a soft drift of electric notes to be swallowed finally by the random noise around him. He wandered out into the wet breeze and made his way to the corner. Pretty, the busy little street. The flower vendor still sold his blooms beneath the awning. The butcher was thronged with after-work shoppers. Behind the cafe windows, mortals took their evening meals or lingered with their newspapers. Dozens waited for a downhill bus, and a line had formed across the way before an old motion picture theater.

She was here, Gabrielle. He had a vague yet infallible sense of it.

When he reached the curb, he stood with his back against the iron street lamp, breathing the fresh wind that came off the mountain. It was a good view of downtown, along the broad straight length of Market Street. Rather like a boulevard in Paris. And all around the gentle urban slopes covered with cheerful lighted windows.

Yes, but where was she, precisely? Gabrielle, he whispered. He closed his eyes. He listened. At first there came the ~~great boundless roar of thousands of voices, image crowding upon image. The whole wide world threatened to open up, and to swallow him with its ceaseless lamentations.~~ *Gabrielle*. The thunderous clamor slowly died away. He caught a glimmer of pain from a mortal passing near. And in a high building on the hill, a dying woman dreamed of childhood strife as she sat listless at her window. Then in a dim steady silence, he saw what he wanted to see: Gabrielle, stopped in her tracks. She'd heard his voice. She knew that she was watched. A tall blond female, hair in a single braid down her back, standing in one of the clean deserted streets of downtown, not far from him. She wore a khaki jacket and pants, a worn brown sweater. And a hat not unlike his own that covered her eyes, only a bit of her face visible above her upturned collar. Now she closed her mind, effectively surrounding herself with an invisible shield. The image vanished.

Yes, here, waiting for her son, Lestat. Why had he ever feared for her—the cold one who fears nothing for herself, only for Lestat. All right. He was pleased. And Lestat would be also.

But what about the other? Louis, the gentle one, with the black hair and green eyes, whose steps made a careless sound when he walked, who even whistled to himself in dark streets so that mortals heard him coming. *Louis, where are you?*

Almost instantly, he saw Louis enter an empty drawing room. He had only just come up the stairs from the cellar where he had slept by day in a vault behind the wall. He had no awareness at all of anyone watching. He moved with silky strides across the dusty room, and stood looking down through the soiled glass at the thick flow of passing cars. Same old house on Divisadero Street. In fact, nothing changed much at all with this elegant and sensuous creature who had caused such a little tumult with his story in *Interview with the Vampire*. Except that now he was waiting for Lestat. He had had troubling dreams; he was fearful for Lestat, and full of old and unfamiliar longings.

Reluctantly, he let the image go. He had a great affection for that one, Louis. And the affection was not wise because Louis had a tender, educated soul and none of the dazzling power of Gabrielle or her devilish son. Yet Louis might survive as long as they, he was sure of that. Curious the kinds of courage which made for endurance. Maybe it had to do with acceptance. But then how account for Lestat, beaten, scarred, yet risen again? Lestat who never accepted anything?

They had not found each other yet, Gabrielle and Louis. But it was all right. What was he to do? Bring them together? The very idea....Besides, Lestat would do that soon enough.

But now he was smiling again. "Lestat, you are the damnedest creature! Yes, a brat prince." Slowly, he reinvoked every detail of Lestat's face and form. The ice-blue eyes, darkening with laughter; the generous smile; the way the eyebrows came together in a boyish scowl; the sudden flares of high spirits and blasphemous humor. Even the catlike poise of the body he could envisage. So uncommon in a man of muscular build. Such strength, always such strength and such irrepressible optimism.

The fact was, he did not know his own mind about the entire enterprise, only that he was amused and fascinated. Of course there was no thought of vengeance against Lestat for telling his secrets. And surely Lestat had counted upon that, but then one never knew. Maybe Lestat truly did not care. He knew no more than the fools back there in the bar, on that score.

What mattered to him was that for the first time in so many years, he found himself thinking in terms of past and future; he found himself most keenly aware of the nature of this era. Those Who Must Be Kept were fiction even to their own children! Long gone were the days when fierce rogue blood drinkers searched for their shrine and their powerful blood. Nobody believed or even cared any longer!

And there lay the essence of the age; for its mortals were of an even more practical ilk, rejecting at every turn the miraculous. With unprecedented courage, they had founded their greatest ethical advances squarely upon the truths embedded in the physical.

Two hundred years since he and Lestat had discussed these very things on an island in the Mediterranean—the

dream of a godless and truly moral world where love of one's fellow man would be the only dogma. *A world in which we do not belong.* And now such a world was almost realized. And the Vampire Lestat had passed into popular art where all the old devils ought to go, and would take with him the whole accused tribe, including Those Who Must Be Kept, though they might never know it.

It made him smile, the symmetry of it. He found himself not merely in awe but strongly seduced by the whole idea of what Lestat had done. He could well understand the lure of fame.

Why, it had thrilled him shamelessly to see his own name scrawled on the wall of the bar. He had laughed; but he had enjoyed the laughter thoroughly.

Leave it to Lestat to construct such an inspiring drama, and that's what it was, all right. Lestat, the boisterous boulevard actor of the ancien régime, now risen to stardom in this beautiful and innocent era.

But had he been right in his little summation to the fledgling in the bar, that no one could destroy the brat prince? That was sheer romance. Good advertising. *The fact is, any of us can be destroyed...one way or another. Even Those Who Must Be Kept, surely.*

They were weak, of course, those fledgling "Children of Darkness," as they styled themselves. The numbers did not increase their strength significantly. But what of the older ones? If only Lestat had not used the names of Mael and Pandora. But were there not blood drinkers older even than that, ones of whom he himself knew nothing? He thought of that warning on the wall: "ancient and terrible beings...moving slowly and inexorably to answer his summons."

A frisson startled him; coldness, yet for an instant he thought he saw a jungle—a green, fetid place, full of unwholesome and smothering warmth. Gone, without explanation, like so many sudden signals and messages he received. He'd learned long ago to shut out the endless flow of voices and images that his mental powers enabled him to hear; yet now and then something violent and unexpected, like a sharp cry, came through.

Whatever, he had been in this city long enough. He did not know that he meant to intervene, no matter what happened! He was angry with his own sudden warmth of feeling. He wanted to be home now. He had been away from Those Who Must Be Kept for too long.

But how he loved to watch the energetic human crowd, the clumsy parade of shining traffic. Even the poison smells of the city he did not mind. They were no worse than the stench of ancient Rome, or Antioch, or Athens—when piles of human waste fed the flies wherever you looked, and the air reeked of inevitable disease and hunger. No, he liked the clean pastel-colored cities of California well enough. He could have lingered forever among their clear-eyed and purposeful inhabitants.

But he must go home. The concert was not for many nights, and he would see Lestat then, if he chose....How delicious not to know precisely what he might do, any more than others knew, others who didn't even believe in him!

He crossed Castro Street and went swiftly up the wide pavement of Market. The wind had slackened; the air was almost warm. He took up a brisk pace, even whistling to himself the way that Louis often did. He felt good. Human. Then he stopped before the store that sold television sets and radios. Lestat was singing on each and every screen, both large and small.

He laughed under his breath at the great concert of gesture and movement. The sound was off, buried in tiny glowing seeds within the equipment. He'd have to search to receive it. But wasn't there a charm in merely watching the antics of the yellow-haired brat prince in merciless silence?

The camera drew back to render the full figure of Lestat who played a violin as if in a void. A starry darkness now and then enclosed him. Then quite suddenly a pair of doors were opened—it was the old shrine of Those Who Must Be Kept, quite exactly! And there—Akasha and Enkil, or rather actors made up to play the part, white-skinned Egyptians with long black silken hair and glittering jewelry.

Of course. Why hadn't he guessed that Lestat would carry it to this vulgar and tantalizing extreme? He leant

forward, listening for the transmission of the sound. He heard the voice of Lestat above the violin:

Akasha! Enkil!

Keep your secrets

Keep your silence

It is a better gift than truth.

And now as the violin player closed his eyes and bore down on his music, Akasha slowly rose from the throne. The violin fell from Lestat's hands as he saw her; like a dancer, she wrapped her arms around him, drew him to her, bent to take the blood from him, while pressing his teeth to her own throat.

It was rather better than he had ever imagined—such clever craft. Now the figure of Enkil awakened, rising and walking like a mechanical doll. Forward he came to take back his Queen. Lestat was thrown down on the floor of the shrine. And there the film ended. The rescue by Marius was not part of it.

“Ah, so I do not become a television celebrity,” he whispered with a faint smile. He went to the entrance of the darkened store.

The young woman was waiting to let him in. She had the black plastic video cassette in her hand.

“All twelve of them,” she said. Fine dark skin and large drowsy brown eyes. The band of silver around her wrist caught the light. He found it enticing. She took the money gratefully, without counting it. “They've been playing them on a dozen channels. I caught them all over, actually. Finished it yesterday afternoon.”

“You've served me well,” he answered. “I thank you.” He produced another thick fold of bills.

“No big thing,” she said. She didn't want to take the extra money.

You will.

She took it with a shrug and put it in her pocket.

No big thing. He loved these eloquent modern expressions. He loved the sudden shift of her luscious breasts as she'd shrugged, and the lithe twist of her hips beneath the coarse denim clothes that made her seem all the more smooth and fragile. An incandescent flower. As she opened the door for him, he touched the soft nest of her brown hair. Quite unthinkable to feed upon one who has served you; one so innocent. He would not do this! Yet he turned her around, his gloved fingers slipping up through her hair to cradle her head:

“The smallest kiss, my precious one.”

Her eyes closed; his teeth pierced the artery instantly and his tongue lapped at the blood. Only a taste. A tiny flash of heat that burnt itself out in his heart within a second. Then he drew back, his lips resting against her frail throat. He could feel her pulse. The craving for the full draught was almost more than he could bear. Sin and atonement. He let her go. He smoothed her soft, springy curls, as he looked into her misted eyes.

Do not remember.

“Good-bye now,” she said, smiling.

HE STOOD motionless on the deserted sidewalk. And the thirst, ignored and sullen, gradually died back. He looked at the cardboard sheath of the video cassette.

“A dozen channels,” she had said. “I caught them all over, actually.” Now if that was so, his charges had already seen Lestat, inevitably, on the large screen positioned before them in the shrine. Long ago, he'd set the satellite dish on the slope above the roof to bring them broadcasts from all the world. A tiny computer device changed the channel each hour. For years, they'd stared expressionless as the images and colors shifted before their lifeless eyes. Had there been the slightest flicker when they heard Lestat's voice, or saw their very own image? Or heard their own names sung as if in a hymn?

Well, he would soon find out. He would play the video cassette for them. He would study their frozen, gleaming faces for something—anything—besides the mere reflection of the light.

“Ah, Marius, you never despair, do you? You are no better than Lestat, with your foolish dreams.”

. . .

IT WAS midnight before he reached home.

He shut the steel door against the driving snow, and, standing still for a moment, let the heated air surround him. The blizzard through which he'd passed had lacerated his face and his ears, even his gloved fingers. The warmth felt so good.

In the quiet, he listened for the familiar sound of the giant generators, and the faint electronic pulse of the television set within the shrine many hundreds of feet beneath him. Could that be Lestat singing? Yes. Undoubtedly, the last mournful words of some other song.

Slowly he peeled off his gloves. He removed his hat and ran his hand through his hair. He studied the large entrance hall and the adjacent drawing room for the slightest evidence that anyone else had been here.

Of course that was almost an impossibility. He was miles from the nearest outpost of the modern world, in a great frozen snow-covered waste. But out of force of habit, he always observed everything closely. There were some who could breach this fortress, if only they knew where it was.

All was well. He stood before the giant aquarium, the great room-sized tank which abutted the south wall. So carefully he had constructed this thing, of the heaviest glass and the finest equipment. He watched the schools of multicolored fishes dance past him, then alter their direction instantly and totally in the artificial gloom. The giant sea kelp swayed from one side to another, a forest caught in a hypnotic rhythm as the gentle pressure of the aerator drove it this way and that. It never failed to captivate him, to lock him suddenly to its spectacular monotony. The round black eyes of the fish sent a tremor through him; the high slender trees of kelp with their tapering yellow leaves thrilled him vaguely; but it was the movement, the constant movement that was the crux.

Finally he turned away from it, glancing back once into that pure, unconscious, and incidentally beautiful world.

Yes, all was well here.

Good to be in these warm rooms. Nothing amiss with the soft leather furnishings scattered about the thick wine-colored carpet. Fireplace piled with wood. Books lining the walls. And there the great bank of electronic equipment waiting for him to insert Lestat's tape. That's what he wanted to do, settle by the fire and watch each rock film in sequence. The craft intrigued him as well as the songs themselves, the chemistry of old and new—how Lestat had used the distortions of media to disguise himself so perfectly as another mortal rock singer trying to appear a god.

He took off his long gray cloak and threw it on the chair. Why did the whole thing give him such an unexpected pleasure! Do we all long to blaspheme, to shake our fists in the faces of the gods? Perhaps so. Centuries ago, in what is now called “ancient Rome,” he, the well-mannered boy, had always laughed at the antics of bad children.

He should go to the shrine before he did anything else, he knew that. Just for a few moments, to make certain things were as they should be. To check the television, the heat, and all the complex electrical systems. To place fresh coals and incense in the brazier. It was so easy to maintain a paradise for them now, with the livid lights that gave the nutrients of the sun to trees and flowers that had never seen the natural lights of heaven. But the incense, that must be done by hand, as always. And never did he sprinkle it over the coals that he did not think of the first time he'd ever done it.

Time to take a soft cloth, too, and carefully, respectfully, wipe the dust from the parents—from their hard unyielding bodies, even from their lips and their eyes, their cold unblinking eyes. And to think, it had been a full month. It seemed shameful.

Have you missed me, my beloved Akasha and Enkil? Ah, the old game.

His reason told him, as it always had, that they did not know or care whether he came or went. But his pride always teased with another possibility. Does not the crazed lunatic locked in the madhouse cell feel something for

the slave who brings it water? Perhaps it wasn't an apt comparison. Certainly not one that was kind.

~~Yes, they had moved for Lestat, the brat prince, that was true—Akasha to offer the powerful blood and Enkil to take vengeance. And Lestat could make his video films about it forever. But had it not merely proved once and for all that there was no mind left in either of them? Surely no more than an atavistic spark had flared for an instant; it had been too simple to drive them back to silence and stillness on their barren throne.~~

Nevertheless, it had embittered him. After all, it had never been his goal to transcend the emotions of a thinking man, but rather to refine them, reinvent them, enjoy them with an infinitely perfectible understanding. And he had been tempted at the very moment to turn on Lestat with an all-too-human fury.

Young one, why don't you take Those Who Must Be Kept since they have shown you such remarkable favor? I should like to be rid of them now. I have only had this burden since the dawn of the Christian era.

But in truth that wasn't his finer feeling. Not then, not now. Only a temporary indulgence. Lestat he loved as he always had. Every realm needs a brat prince. And the silence of the King and Queen was as much a blessing as a curse, perhaps. Lestat's song had been quite right on that point. But who would ever settle the question?

Oh, he would go down later with the video cassette and watch for himself, of course. And if there were just the faintest flicker, the faintest shift in their eternal gaze.

But there you go again....Lestat makes you young and stupid. Likely to feed on innocence and dream of cataclysm.

How many times over the ages had such hopes risen, only to leave him wounded, even heartbroken. Years ago, he had brought them color films of the rising sun, the blue sky, the pyramids of Egypt. Ah, such a miracle! Before their very eyes the sun-drenched waters of the Nile flowed. He himself had wept at the perfection of illusion. He had even feared the cinematic sun might hurt him, though of course he knew that it could not. But such had been the caliber of the invention. That he could stand there, watching the sunrise, as he had not seen it since he was a mortal man.

But Those Who Must Be Kept had gazed on in unbroken indifference, or was it wonder—great undifferentiated wonder that held the particles of dust in the air to be a source of endless fascination?

Who will ever know? They had lived four thousand years before he was ever born. Perhaps the voices of the world roared in their brains, so keen was their telepathic hearing; perhaps a billion shifting images blinded them to all else. Surely such things had almost driven him out of his mind until he'd learned to control them.

It had even occurred to him that he would bring modern medical tools to bear on the matter, that he would hook electrodes to their very heads to test the patterns of their brains! But it had been too distasteful, the idea of such callous and ugly instruments. After all, they were his King and his Queen, the Father and Mother of us all. Under his roof, they had reigned without challenge for two millennia.

One fault he must admit. He had an acid tongue of late in speaking to them. He was no longer the High Priest when he entered the chamber. No. There was something flippant and sarcastic in his tone, and that should be beneath him. Maybe it was what they called "the modern temper." How could one live in a world of rockets to the moon without an intolerable self-consciousness threatening every trivial syllable? And he had never been oblivious to the century at hand.

Whatever the case, he had to go to the shrine now. And he would purify his thoughts properly. He would not come with resentment or despair. Later, after he had seen the videos, he would play the tape for them. He would remain there, watching. But he did not have the stamina for it now.

He entered the steel elevator and pressed the button. The great electronic whine and the sudden loss of gravity gave him a faint sensuous pleasure. The world of this day and age was full of so many sounds that had never been heard before. It was quite refreshing. And then there was the lovely ease of plummeting hundreds of feet in a shaft through solid ice to reach the electrically lighted chambers below.

He opened the door and stepped into the carpeted corridor. It was Lestat again singing within the shrine, a rapid, more joyful song, his voice battling a thunder of drums and the twisted undulating electronic moans.

But something was not quite right here. Merely looking at the long corridor he sensed it. The sound was too loud,

too clear. The antechambers leading to the shrine were open!

~~He went to the entrance immediately. The electric doors had been unlocked and thrown back. How could this be?~~ Only he knew the code for the tiny series of computer buttons. The second pair of doors had been opened wide as well and so had the third. In fact he could see into the shrine itself, his view blocked by the white marble wall of the small alcove. The red and blue flicker of the television screen beyond was like the light of an old gas fireplace.

And Lestat's voice echoed powerfully over the marble walls, the vaulted ceilings.

Kill us, my brothers and sisters

The war is on.

Understand what you see,

When you see me.

He took a slow easy breath. No sound other than the music, which was fading now to be replaced by characterless mortal chatter. And no outsider here. No, he would have known. No one in his lair. His instincts told him that for certain.

There was a stab of pain in his chest. He even felt a warmth in his face. How remarkable.

He walked through the marble antechambers and stopped at the door of the alcove. Was he praying? Was he dreaming? He knew what he would soon see—Those Who Must be Kept—just as they had always been. And some dismal explanation for the doors, a shorted circuit or a broken fuse, would soon present itself.

Yet he felt not fear suddenly but the raw anticipation of a young mystic on the verge of a vision, that at last he would see the living Lord, or in his own hands the bloody stigmata.

Calmly, he stepped into the shrine.

For a moment it did not register. He saw what he expected to see, the long room filled with trees and flowers, and the stone bench that was the throne, and beyond it the large television screen pulsing with eyes and mouths and unimportant laughter. Then he acknowledged the fact: there was only one figure seated on the throne; and this figure was almost completely transparent! The violent colors of the distant television screen were passing right through it!

No, but this is quite out of the question! *Marius, look carefully. Even your senses are not infallible.* Like a flustered mortal he put his hands to his head as if to block out all distraction.

He was gazing at the back of Enkil, who, save for his black hair, had become some sort of milky glass statue through which the colors and the lights moved with faint distortion. Suddenly an uneven burst of light caused the figure to radiate, to become a source of faint glancing beams.

He shook his head. Not possible. Then he gave himself a little shake all over. "All right, Marius," he whispered. "Proceed slowly."

But a dozen unformed suspicions were sizzling in his mind. Someone had come, someone older and more powerful than he, someone who had discovered Those Who Must Be Kept, and done something unspeakable! And all this was Lestat's doing! Lestat, who had told the world his secret.

His knees were weak. Imagine! He had not felt such mortal debilities in so long that he had utterly forgotten them. Slowly he removed a linen handkerchief from his pocket. He wiped at the thin layer of blood sweat that covered his forehead. Then he moved towards the throne, and went round it, until he stood staring directly at the figure of the King.

Enkil as he had been for two thousand years, the black hair in long tiny plaits, hanging to his shoulders. The broad gold collar lying against his smooth, hairless chest, the linen of his kilt immaculate with its pressed pleats, the rings still on his motionless fingers.

But the body itself was glass! And it was utterly hollow! Even the huge shining orbs of the eyes were transparent,

only shadowy circles defining the irises. No, wait. Observe everything. And there, you can see the bones, turned to the very same substance as the flesh, they are there, and also the fine crazing of veins and arteries, and something like lungs inside, but it is all transparent now, it is all of the same texture. But what had been done to him!

And the thing was changing still. Before his very eyes, it was losing its milky cast. It was drying up, becoming ever more transparent.

Tentatively, he touched it. Not glass at all. A husk.

But his careless gesture had upset the thing. The body teetered, then fell over onto the marble tile, its eyes locked open, its limbs rigid in their former position. It made a sound like the scraping of an insect as it settled.

Only the hair moved. The soft black hair. But it too was changed. It was breaking into fragments. It was breaking into tiny shimmering splinters. A cool ventilating current was scattering it like straw. And as the hair fell away from the throat, he saw two dark puncture wounds in it. Wounds that had not healed as they might have done because all the healing blood had been drawn out of the thing.

“Who has done this?” He whispered aloud, tightening the fingers of his right fist as if this would keep him from crying out. Who could have taken every last drop of life from him?

And the thing was dead. There wasn't the slightest doubt of it. And what was revealed by this awful spectacle?

Our King is destroyed, our Father. And I still live; I breathe. And this can only mean that *she* contains the primal power. She was the first, and it has always resided in her. *And someone has taken her!*

Search the cellar. Search the house. But these were frantic, foolish thoughts. No one had entered here, and he knew it. Only one creature could have done this deed! Only one creature would have known that such a thing was finally possible.

He didn't move. He stared at the figure lying on the floor, watching it lose the very last trace of opacity. And would that he could weep for the thing, for surely someone should. Gone now with all that it had ever known, all that it had ever witnessed. This too coming to an end. It seemed beyond his ability to accept it.

But he wasn't alone. Someone or something had just come out of the alcove, and he could feel it watching him.

For one moment—one clearly irrational moment—he kept his eyes on the fallen King. He tried to comprehend as calmly as he could everything that was occurring around him. The thing was moving towards him now, without a sound; it was becoming a graceful shadow in the corner of his eye, as it came around the throne and stood beside him.

He knew who it was, who it had to be, and that it had approached with the natural poise of a living being. Yet, as he looked up, nothing could prepare him for the moment.

Akasha, standing only three inches away from him. Her skin was white and hard and opaque as it had always been. Her cheek shone like pearl as she smiled, her dark eyes moist and enlivened as the flesh puckered ever so slightly around them. They positively glistened with vitality.

Speechless, he stared. He watched as she lifted her jeweled fingers to touch his shoulder. He closed his eyes, then opened them. Over thousands of years he had spoken to her in so many tongues—prayers, pleas, complaints, confessions—and now he said not a word. He merely looked at her mobile lips, at the flash of white fang teeth, and the cold glint of recognition in her eyes, and the soft yielding cleft of the bosom moving beneath the gold necklace.

“You've served me well,” she said. “I thank you.” Her voice was low, husky, beautiful. But the intonation, the words; it was what he'd said hours ago to the girl in the darkened store in the city!

The fingers tightened on his shoulder.

“Ah, Marius,” she said, imitating his tone perfectly again, “you never despair, do you? You are no better than Lestat, with your foolish dreams.”

His own words again, spoken to himself on a San Francisco street. She mocked him!

Was this terror? Or was it hatred that he felt—hatred that had lain waiting in him for centuries, mixed with resentment and weariness, and grief for his human heart, hatred that now boiled to a heat he could never have

imagined. He didn't dare move, dare speak. The hate was fresh and astonishing and it had taken full possession of him and he could do nothing to control it or understand it. All judgment had left him.

But she knew. Of course. She knew everything, every thought, word, deed, that's what she was telling him. She had always known, everything and anything that she chose to know! And she'd known that the mindless thing beside her was past defending itself. And this, which should have been a triumphant moment, was somehow a moment of horror!

She laughed softly as she looked at him. He could not bear the sound of it. He wanted to hurt her. He wanted to destroy her, all her monstrous children be damned! Let us all perish with her! If he could have done it, he would have destroyed her!

It seemed she nodded, that she was telling him she understood. The monstrous insult of it. Well, he did not understand. And in another moment, he would be weeping like a child. Some ghastly error had been made, some terrible miscarriage of purpose.

"My dear servant," she said, her lips lengthening in a faint bitter smile. "You have never had the power to stop me."

"What do you want! What do you mean to do!"

"You must forgive me," she said, oh, so politely, just as he had said the very words to the young one in the back room of the bar. "I'm going now."

He heard the sound before the floor moved, the shriek of tearing metal. He was falling, and the television screen had blown apart, the glass piercing his flesh like so many tiny daggers. He cried out, like a mortal man, and this time it was fear. The ice was cracking, roaring, as it came down upon him.

"Akasha!"

He was dropping into a giant crevasse, he was plunging into scalding coldness.

"Akasha!" he cried again.

But she was gone, and he was still falling. Then the broken tumbling ice caught him, surrounded him, and buried him, as it crushed the bones of his arms, his legs, his face. He felt his blood pouring out against the searing surface, then freezing. He couldn't move. He couldn't breathe. And the pain was so intense that he couldn't bear it. He saw the jungle again, inexplicably for an instant, as he had seen it earlier. The hot fetid jungle, and something moving through it. Then it was gone. And when he cried out this time, it was to Lestat: *Danger. Lestat, beware. We are all in danger.*

Then there was only the cold and the pain, and he was losing consciousness. A dream coming, a lovely dream of warm sun shining on a grassy clearing. Yes, the blessed sun. The dream had him now. And the women, how lovely their red hair. But what was it, the thing that was lying there, beneath the wilted leaves, on the altar?

PART I
THE ROAD TO THE VAMPIRE LESTAT

*Tempting to place in coherent collage
the bee, the mountain range, the shadow
of my hoof—*

*tempting to join them, enlaced by logical
vast & shining molecular thought-thread
thru all Substance—*

....



Tempting

*to say I see in all I see
the place where the needle
began in the tapestry—but ah,
it all looks whole and part—
long live the eyeball and the lucid heart.*

STAN RICE

*from “Four Days in Another City”
Some Lamb (1975)*



1
THE LEGEND OF THE TWINS

*Tell it
in rhythmic
continuity.
Detail by detail
the living creatures.
Tell it
as must, the rhythm
solid in the shape.
Woman. Arms lifted. Shadow eater.*

STAN RICE

*from "Elegy"
Whiteboy (1976)*

CALL her for me," he said. "Tell her I have had the strangest dreams, that they were about the twins. You must call her!"

His daughter didn't want to do it. She watched him fumble with the book. His hands were his enemies now, he often said. At ninety-one, he could scarcely hold a pencil or turn a page.

"Daddy," she said, "that woman's probably dead."

Everybody he had known was dead. He'd outlived his colleagues; he'd outlived his brothers and sisters, and even two of his children. In a tragic way, he had outlived the twins, because no one read his book now. No one cared about "the legend of the twins."

"No, you call her," he said. "You must call her. You tell her that I dreamed of the twins. I saw them in the dream."

"Why would she want to know that, Daddy?"

His daughter took the little address book and paged through it slowly. Dead all these people, long dead. The men who had worked with her father on so many expeditions, the editors and photographers who had worked with him on his book. Even his enemies who had said his life was wasted, that his research had come to nothing; even the most scurrilous, who had accused him of doctoring pictures and lying about the caves, which her father had never done.

Why should she be still alive, the woman who had financed his long-ago expeditions, the rich woman who had sent so much money for so many years?

"You must ask her to come! Tell her it's very important. I must describe to her what I've seen."

To come? All the way to Rio de Janeiro because an old man had had strange dreams? His daughter found the page, and yes, there was the name and the number. And the date beside it, only two years old.

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