

## “Interview With My Vampire”

I’m running late. He’s used to me avoiding him, but I have called on him in this instance and so he will linger for as long as it takes. We have known each other for ten years. Have we been friends? I think so. We argue and jab at each other on a regular basis. We lose our tempers and storm off in snits which last for days, sometimes weeks, on end. But there is love between us; a wry sort of affection that will keep us close for the rest of my life.

He is the stuff of my dreams: tall, dark, slender, casually elegant with a rock star’s glamour and thick long hair that threatens to swallow your hands. His face is beautiful enough to make you wince though some might dismiss him as pretty and think nothing more of it. Most people stare after rather than at him, trying to get a better look without attracting his eye. He has dangerous eyes. If you meet them in the middle of a sentence, you’ll lose your train of thought and wind up feeling foolish when he smiles. He has little tolerance for fools. He abides my nonsense because he chose me in the beginning. Would he choose me again, knowing now how trying I can be?

“I don’t know,” he says slowly. A faint smile indicates that he probably would.

He’s waiting in a shadowed corner when I finally arrive. He is wearing his hunting leather—the fringed bomber jacket and snug black trousers I’ve described a dozen times in various scenes. There’s a white tank top under his jacket and his ankh pendant glimmers softly in the hollow of his throat. His skin is fair, not pale. “Have you just come from the kill?” I ask, dropping my purse onto the seat of the booth and sliding in beside him.

“Some time ago,” he says, making his point with a subtle lift of his eyebrows. A glass of red wine is on the table in front of him. I’ve learned over the years that his immortal body can absorb and process liquid, but can’t take solid food. He likes cabernet sauvignon and Caesar cocktails the best. I haven’t seen him drink anything else—other than blood, of course. Which seems as good a place as any to start.

“You’ve expressed disdain for vampires who choose to drink preserved or animal blood in lieu of taking human life. Why?”

“Why not?” he responds.

“You were human once. Don’t you feel a connection with us?”

He leans forward, resting his forearms on the table and lacing his fingers around the stem of his glass. “The first thing I want to make clear is that I am still human. I still own my soul. What I have done is adapt to the needs of my immortal flesh. If this involves the taking of mortal life, then so be it. In answer to your question, I feel the human connection more strongly in the death embrace.”

“Don’t you worry about being discovered?”

His smile is a cold reminder that regular rules do not apply to him. “People disappear every day. I try to feed on those who have already vanished.”

“You ‘try’?”

The fringe on his jacket whispers as he shrugs. “I don’t always succeed.”

“Why not?”

“The best blood is pure. No additives or preservatives. It’s difficult to find one who does not abuse some substance in one form or another. Alcohol, tobacco, caffeine, illegal or prescription drugs—I dare you to find someone who abstains from everything I’ve just mentioned, yet who has not taken an over the counter drug in the past twenty-four hours.”

“But drugs and such don’t affect you,” I say.

“They kill the taste,” he says. “As I say, the best blood is pure. On occasions when I find it, it’s impossible to resist.”

“Do you place any restrictions on yourself?”

“I don’t feed on children, pregnant or nursing females. Anyone else is fair game.”

“And you won’t consider preserved blood?”

He grimaces with revulsion. His fangs are not retractable, neither are they overtly prominent. If you look hard, you’ll see sharper tips extending a fraction of an inch longer than those on either side. Long enough to break the skin and the wall of the vein beneath it. “They refrigerate it,” he declares, shuddering. “It has an expiry date. No, I will not consider preserved blood.”

“Not even when nothing else is available?”

He shakes his head. “I can last without it for a few days, as you could survive without food. It’s not pleasant, but it’s possible.”

“You sound as if you’ve done it.”

“Travelling in the old days forced the issue. Technology has made it easy to be a vampire in this century.”

“You like being a vampire, don’t you, Jules?”

He nods.

“You have no time for those who loathe what they are and long to become mortal again, do you?”

“Absolutely none,” he replies emphatically. “Especially for those who ask to become immortal then renege when they suffer an attack of conscience. Lestat de Lioncourt had the right idea when he traded flesh with the Body Thief. It’s fine to visit, but I wouldn’t want to live there.”

“You don’t miss it?”

“Who in their right mind would miss aches and pains and encroaching age, blurred vision, faulty hearing, dwindling strength, muddled thought processes—should I go on?”

“It’s a fine thing to be physically superior,” I comment.

“Indeed.”

“And mentally superior?”

He pauses to consider that one. “I don’t think I am more intelligent than most mortals. What knowledge I have results from existing for centuries opposed to four score and a handful of years. I have an advantage over the average mortal, that’s all.”

I smile, teasing. “What’s this? Humility? From you?”

He smiles back, radiantly. “I have been accused of arrogance,” he admits. “From you, no less. But I was arrogant in mortality as well. We all have our moments.”

“What about shame?”

His smile dims. “What about it?”

“I’ve read that other vampires feel it. Do you?”

“The vampires you read about have no right to be vampires. Some are too weak. Others make a mistake and choose to wallow rather than make the best of their circumstance. Many are a complete embarrassment. Any vampire who longs to become mortal again should never have been made in the first place, and the vampire who wantonly makes him should be destroyed.”

“So there are standards for immortality?”

“There should be.”

“Would you meet them?”

He smiles again, warmly. Intimately. “You know that I did not ask to be made what I am. I am the product of one soul’s longing for another. Jan was lonely. She was miserable. I loved her and swore, with a mortal’s romantic passion, to love her forever. She took me at my word. And I failed her.”

“How?”

He leans back with a sigh. “We are cursed,” he says quietly, “but the curse is not the blood fever that drives us to kill humans. Our curse is the intensity of feeling that comes with physical perfection. Not only are our tactile senses amplified a thousand times over what we knew as mortals, but we feel the intangibles as acutely. You may think you have plumbed the depths of despair or soared to the heavens in a lover’s arms. The truth is that you have only scratched the surface. What you know is nothing compared to the howling ache of a cold and lonely heart. The qualities we adore in a mortal lover are the same qualities we will kill if we make that lover immortal.”

“How so?” I ask, intrigued.

He frowns, stung by memories he has yet to reveal. “We are hunters. We are solitary by nature yet cannot bear to be alone. We are still human, my dear, but we are trapped in flesh that is not. Our basic instincts change, but our dreams remain the same.”

“ ‘The spirit is willing but the flesh—’ ”

“—is often stronger,” he finishes for me. “It can be troublesome unless one finds the balance.”

“Have you found it, Jules?”

“Not quite,” he admits. “I am yet torn between love and loneliness.”

I reach impulsively for his hand, covering it with mine. His hands are long and slender with tapering fingers and short, buffed nails. He plays piano brilliantly, favouring Chopin. He can be so gentle, yet I’ve seen him snap bones like balsa wood with a twist of those delicate fingers. “I love you, Jules.”

“I love you, too,” he replies sincerely, stroking my wrist with his thumb. I wonder if he is trying to find my pulse. The doctor tells me that I have three on each side. I can’t remember which side houses the heart. But I’m not frightened. Not for my life, anyway.

“What about sex?” I ask.

He is visibly startled—a rare coup for me—and laughs to cover his surprise. “With you?”

I scowl at him, reclaiming my hand. “No, not with me—though you don’t have to treat the idea so hilariously. I mean in general. I’ve read varying accounts of what vampires can and cannot do with mortals or immortals, and you’ve scoffed at most of them. Set me straight.”

“I’ve been trying to set you straight for ten years,” he laments. He is betrayed by an amused sparkle in his dark eyes.

“Just answer the question,” I say, sourly.

“It may very well be possible for other vampires to engage in sexual activity as described in the writings you have read,” he says. “I don’t know for sure. But it seems to me that copulation in the mortal style is excessive and ridiculous between immortals. There is no genital climax for the males or females of my acquaintance. Blood gives us our release. Penetration and possession are achieved orally, with the canine teeth.”

“Is it a natural drive between immortals?” I ask.

“It’s a form of bonding,” he replies. “From what I remember about being mortal, the drive is not dissimilar.”

“Do you feel it for mortals?”

“Not usually. I admit to being sexually aroused by the scent of human blood, but once I taste it, the effect is gone. The only time I have ever wanted to make love as a mortal with a mortal was when I fell in love, soul to soul, with a mortal woman. And that is not a matter for discussion in this instance.” He folds his arms across his chest, signing that he means it.

“Is there a risk of pregnancy with a mortal woman?” I ask, thinking back on one of the books I’ve read.

“Don’t be absurd,” he tells me, annoyed.

“Hey, I’m just citing instances in literature.”

“Absurd instances,” he sneers.

“In Greek mythology, the gods mated with mortals and had children as a result,” I argue.

He sighs. “We are not gods. We are freaks of nature banned from procreating in the conventional fashion. A vampire is created through the exchange of blood between a mortal and a vampire. It’s that simple. And that dangerous.”

“You mean you have to be careful in case a mutant vampire is made and goes on a murderous rampage.”

“A flawed character makes a mutant,” he corrects me. “History’s most evil villains have not been vampires. They have been human.”

“Good point,” I allow.

He sips his wine, savouring the mouthful before he swallows.

“You’re a hedonist,” I observe.

He smiles so charmingly that the toughest nut would crack in the face of it. “I was a hedonist in mortality as well. When Charles II was restored to the English throne, I was twenty-five and as fed up with the stifling mores and hypocrisy of the Puritans as my Royalist compatriots were. I plunged headlong into the sensual pleasures of Restoration England and have never recovered.”

“And you make no apologies,” I add.

He inclines his head in agreement. “It has served me well in my current estate. Perhaps this is why I have so little patience with the vampires you wished to discuss with me.”

“Should we talk about them?”

“I thought we had.”

“I wanted to ask about some of the vampire myths which inevitably pop up in literature.”

“Such as?”

“Shape changing.”

His brows arch inquiringly. “Can you become a wolf or a bat?”

“I’m sure I’ve been accused of being a cow,” I respond with a smirk.

“Perhaps figuratively,” he says patiently. “But literally?”

I shake my head.

“Then why would you think I can adopt their forms?”

“I don’t,” I insist.

“I have no supernatural control of the elements or lower life forms,” he declares. “I cannot hypnotize a mortal with a look, though I appear to have a somewhat irritating ability to render them speechless in mid-thought.”

“That’s nothing,” I say. “Celebrity icons have the same effect.”

“Indeed.”

“Well, they’re demigods themselves, aren’t they? Tell me about Ann Wilson.”

“I don’t know her.”

“But you have a crush on her.”

He colours slightly, looking almost embarrassed. “I am inspired by her,” he corrects me in a measured tone. “Her voice—It defies description.”

“Would you make her a vampire to preserve that voice?”

He shakes his head. “Truly great mortal talent will achieve immortality on its own merit. She will be remembered as one of the great voices in twentieth century music, and that is enough for me.” His wine glass is empty. He glances at it, then at me. “Are we done, or should I order a refill?”

“I guess we’re done,” I answer. “Unless you have something to add.”

“Nothing comes to mind,” he says, shrugging.

I crawl out of the booth and he follows, catching my arm in his hand as he comes abreast of me near the door. The women close by watch us leave and I experience a smug sense of superiority in response to their envious glances. They don’t need to know that I’m just his biographer.

Outside, our cars stand side by side in the parking lot. His is the early 90s Jaguar XJS, indigo blue and flawless under the streetlights. Mine is the ’96 Camaro, black and grubby from not being washed since its last tune up. Julian gallantly ignores the grime and nods his approval as I unlock the driver’s door. “Very nice,” he comments.

“It’s called ‘Jules’,” I tell him, hoping he’ll be touched by the sentiment.

His smile assures me that he is. “Drive carefully,” he says, indulging me—and maybe himself as well—with a quick, warm hug. “I wouldn’t want anything to happen to you.”

I swallow the sudden tears which have caught me off guard. “I will,” I say in a strangely husky voice. “See you again? We do have a book to finish.”

His fingers gently tuck my hair behind my ears and trail lightly along my chin before he breaks the contact in search of his car keys. “When you can find the time,” he says, fishing them from his jacket pocket.

The jab—a blatant referral to my dithering about rather than concentrating on my writing job—is not lost on me. “Maybe the weekend?” I suggest.

He actually laughs. “If there are no horse shows to watch or groceries to be bought or gallivanting to be done,” he agrees. He circles his car and meets my surly gaze across the roof. A disarming gleam winks in his eyes and I decide to forgive him for the impudence. I do, after all, have another life which requires maintenance—regrettably, at his expense. He opens the car

door, which he rarely bothers to lock, and gets in. An instant later, the big engine roars to life and the vehicle backs smoothly from its space. I can hear Ann Wilson's voice reverberating through the stereo speakers as he cruises past on his way to the main road. He doesn't wave. I linger in the parking lot, watching until the Jaguar's taillights disappear around a bend. I miss him when he's gone.

He's the best of my boys.

October 14, 1998