

## CHAPTER 1 NO USE CRYING OVER SPILLED BLOOD

Laurent arose from the bed, careful not to awaken Fabien. As he walked cautiously closer to the figure, some red mist seemed to surround and envelop him; as if it were attempting to drown him. The mist had developed tentacles, wrapped themselves around his body, and drew him ever closer until the figure's face finally appeared before Laurent. It was Stefan! Laurent opened his mouth to scream but couldn't. The figure in front of him instantly became a liquid mass that entered Laurent's mouth entirely.

Laurent stood momentarily motionless by the window; the red mist had disappeared and now, had completely filled his insides. He turned slowly to see Fabien lying on the bed in his undead slumber and walked over and laid back down, careful not to awaken him, and closed his eyes.

Shortly after the sun had set, Fabien awakened and noticed the empty bed next to him. Sensing something was amiss, he exited the room using his vampire speed and raced down the staircase and into the drawing room as Laurent stood there, draining the blood from their trusted servant, Barthelme's neck.

Laurent turned his attention to Fabien and greeted him. Fabien stood motionless and stared at the spectacle in shock and horror.

"Good evening, my love. You have finally awakened. So sorry, but I decided; I have never cared for the taste of dog's blood and thought I might upgrade to something delightfully different, something human," he said mockingly with a sinister grin.

Instantly, Laurent's face transformed into Stefan's as Fabien reacted in horror and disbelief. Fabien was momentarily speechless and finally found the will to cry out, "No!"

"What is the matter my love, did you truly think you could get rid of me so easily?" Stefan said as his face quickly morphed back to Laurent's, yet still speaking in Stefan's voice.

"I do not understand?" Fabien barely managed to utter as he started to tremble.

"Come now, did you think you were the only one to perfect the art of spirit possession when you took over Jack's body?" Stefan sarcastically asked and shook his head. "No, I let you go once, but now you will never be rid of me! From the beginning, you and I were meant to be together for all eternity. Now be a good sport and help me say goodbye to our trusty servant Barthelme!"

From outside the stately mansion named "*Le Petit Fleur*," the bloodcurdling screams of Fabien and Barthelme were heard.

(Fabien narrates)

Like Laurent, I fled the chaos and destruction that threatened my existence. Over two centuries ago in Paris, Stefan destroyed me. However, centuries later, fortune was on my side, as I was able to spirit possess the body of a mortal who appeared strikingly similar to me. Jack Devereaux, Laurent's love interest, became my vessel once I returned from the spirit world, where Laurent had lured Jack to his home, and I could take over his body in the early morning hours. With Laurent's dark gift of immortality, I was reborn as a vampire, thirsting for blood again.

I took to the air high above the city of New Orleans as thoughts raced through my mind.

Now, Stefan, inhabiting Laurent's body, was after me, and I had to protect myself and my independence. To survive, I had to break free from this endless cycle of violence and destruction caused by Stefan. It was clear that leaving New Orleans was the only way to escape Stefan's evil clutches. The question was where to go. For now, I sought refuge in Lafayette Cemetery in the city's garden district. The cemetery was eerily quiet as it was nearly six o'clock in the morning with most of the city dwellers fast asleep. All except the creatures of the night that like me, lurk amongst the shadows until the daylight drives us back into a darkened dwelling.

Looking up I noticed the faintest traces of light appear in the sky warning me to seek shelter. I quickly chose a nearby mausoleum, and easily pried the wrought iron gate open. I felt temporarily safe but deep inside, I knew my encounter with Stefan was far from over. I had to fight back and protect myself, no matter the cost. Survival was my only option, so I waited until the following evening to exit and face whatever challenges lie ahead.

While lying in the cold, damp coffin during my undead slumber, nightmares of Stefan ran through my mind like scenes from a movie. I saw images of us in Paris in the 17th century and in the later part of the 20th century, specifically 1985. I thought Laurent and I had set the ultimate trap for Stefan, but his spirit returned to possess Laurent's body and thus be reborn into the same evil and unfeeling monster. Stefan was full of rage and hatred. He wanted to destroy everything that I held dear. He wanted me to suffer for all eternity, and I knew that I had to face him one last time and put an end to his evil once and for all. But for now, I needed to find a way to outsmart Stefan and prevent him from destroying everything I held dear. I swore to myself, that I would return one day and defeat him and save myself and the world from his evil.

I instinctively woke up feeling the absence of sunlight and lifted the concrete lid as if it were merely a child's toy and rose from my concrete tomb to look outside the mausoleum window. The

cool darkness confirmed that it was night. In the distance I heard a dog howl as the blood lust took over my entire being reminding me that it had been nearly two evenings since I last dined and decided to track down the exact location of this animal that had announced itself with its anguished yelps.

I took flight and as I hovered above the cemetery, I spotted the dog in the distance. In protest, the startled animal yelled and screeched as I swooped down and grabbed it. My dark and unrelenting thirst would soon be satisfied as I bit into its neck and tasted its warm, rich blood which ran down my throat. I laid the dog down and once again took to the air.

As though by an unseen force, I found myself drawn to the city center, landing in an alleyway in the French Quarter. Feeling secure in the knowledge that Stefan disliked being in public, with the exception of hunting for victims, I made my way to Bourbon Street without the worry of running into him. Luckily, there was no one around to witness my sudden drop out of the sky, which would have proven difficult, if not impossible to explain.

Along the way, I passed a newspaper stand and glanced at the headline appearing at the top of the Times Picayune which immediately caused me to stop in my tracks. The headline read: *Strange attack in San Francisco leaves woman completely drained of blood.* I felt temporarily mesmerized after having read that and decided to purchase the paper to read the article in its entirety.

Choosing a nearby bench I sat down and opened the newspaper to the article that I had captured my attention and imagination. I thought, *surely there are others of my kind that lurk in the shadows only to feast on the blood of mortals during the dark shadows of the night?* This was confirmed when Thaddeus, Stefan's vampire maker, appeared after we asked for his help. He declined, so we had to come up with our own plan to defeat Stefan. Unfortunately, our plan failed and caused unexpected and disastrous consequences.

As I continued reading, I felt transfixed learning about the victim and the details surrounding the violent attack in San Francisco. The victim, age thirty-two, was attacked near Fisherman's Wharf and found completely drained of blood with two small puncture wounds in her neck.

It was at that moment that I made the decision to move to San Francisco in search of others of my kind, vampires, leaving behind the city that I had once loved, despite the short amount of time I spent with Laurent at our home, Le Petit Fleur.

Since Stefan took over Laurent's body, I knew I could not defeat Stefan by myself, so perhaps I could find others who would be willing to help me in my quest to destroy the creature who took away the one I loved most deeply."

I walked back to the newsstand and asked if they sold any out of town newspapers. I was informed by the young man behind the counter that they sold several including, *the New York Times*, *Chicago Tribune*, and *the San Francisco Examiner*. Naturally, I was only interested in one of them, and hoped there would be a real estate section included. I paid the man and sat back down to scan through the various homes being advertised for sale and quickly spotted a magnificent mansion located in the city's affluent Pacific Heights neighborhood. I decided to locate a payphone which was conveniently located a block away. Using the leftover change in my pocket I dialed the number hoping to speak to the realtor listed in the ad. Much to my luck he answered.

*"Hello, this is Sam Shepherd."*

"Good evening, Mr. Shepherd. My name is Fabien Levesque and I am relocating from New Orleans to San Francisco. I'm calling about the stunning home you have listed in the paper."

*"Yes, Mr. Levesque, the home just came on the market. Are you interested in seeing it?"*

"Yes, most definitely. I will be arriving tomorrow evening. Would it be possible for you to show it to me then?"

*"I don't usually take evening appointments, Mr. Levesque."*

"My apologies, my flight does not arrive until well after sunset. I know this is a terrible inconvenience, but would you make an exception? I'm very interested. In fact if the home looks anything like the picture I may even make an offer while we meet."

*"That does sound awfully convincing. Sure, what the heck. What time shall we meet, Mr. Levesque?"*

"How does seven o'clock sound?"

*"That sounds fine. Do you have the address?"*

"Is it the same address that's listed in the ad?"

"Yes."

"Then yes, I have it."

*"Wonderful, I will meet you tomorrow at 2939 Vallejo Street at seven."*

"Until tomorrow evening, Mr. Shepherd, and thank you."

*"I'll look forward to meeting you and showing you the property then. Good bye, Mr. Levesque."*

"Have a pleasant evening, Mr. Shepherd." I said and hung up. I felt an immediate sigh of relief. If the picture was accurate and up to date, the mansion would do nicely. I would undoubtedly make an offer above the asking price while meeting with the realtor to secure the deal.

My final stroll through the French Quarter was a fitting way to say goodbye to the city I had grown to love. As I admired the jazz bars and historic buildings with their wrought iron balconies, I

felt a momentary sadness. However, I could not stay in New Orleans for eventually Stefan and I would cross paths. Still, I felt fortunate not to have run into him on my last night.

Several hours passed, and noticing fewer and fewer people out and about I looked up at the clock above St. Louis Cathedral and saw that it was already four-thirty in the morning. Soon, the sun would be out and I would have to find my way back to Lafayette cemetery's mausoleum, my temporary refuge.

I decided to head back before the darkness faded and walked briskly towards the mausoleum, opening the wrought gate for the last time.

Soon, I would live in a mansion fit for a king and no longer endure endless nights in a mausoleum and a concrete coffin meant for an unrelated prominent family's remains.

I opened the concrete lid of the coffin, lay down inside, and closed it, ready for my undead slumber to commence.

## CHAPTER 2 SAN FRANCISCO OPEN YOUR GOLDEN GATE

(Fabien narrates)

The next evening, I emerged from the mausoleum and hurriedly left, worried about being late for my meeting with Sam Shepherd. I closed the Iron Gate behind me, heard it creak a final farewell, and took to the sky. Briefly, I hovered over the city, feeling emotional as I remembered happier times with Laurent and our servant Barthelme at *Le Petit Fleur*. However, that was all in the past, and I was eager to start my new life where memories of the past would not constantly haunt me. I thought, *it's highly doubtful that Stefan would find me in my new surroundings* as I flew through the air faster than any mortal-made mode of transportation.

Moments later, I saw the city lights of San Francisco and the Golden Gate Bridge shrouded in fog. Only the tips of each tower were visible, with red lights flashing in an unknown code to welcome me.

I landed in the city's financial district on a Street named Leidesdorff. Being unfamiliar with the city I decided to take a taxi as I briskly walked over to California Street to hail one. Within minutes a yellow cab came barreling towards me until it stopped with a screech as I entered the vehicle. "Where to?" the driver asked.

"Driver, would you be so kind to take me to 2939 Vallejo Street?" I politely asked.

"Sure" he replied in a curt manner.

As we rode through the city, I noticed the driver's widened eyes and open mouth as he looked in the rearview mirror. "My eyes must be playing tricks on me, I need to get home after this," he muttered. Not being able to see a passenger's reflection clearly wasn't something he was used to.

After arriving at the address in Pacific Heights, the driver announced the fare was five dollars. I paid him, then walked up to the three-story, French-influenced mansion with white paint, several chimneys, and a Parisian-style roof. I stood there admiring its magnificent architecture before briskly walking up the staircase to the front door and ringing the doorbell. A man soon opened the door, introducing himself as Sam Shepherd. "And you must be Fabien Levesque?" he said.

"Yes, I am," I replied.

"Please come in, Mr. Levesque. Your timing is impeccable. It's exactly seven o'clock," he said, glancing at his watch. He extended his hand for a firm handshake, noticing my cold touch with an odd expression. "I have a rare circulatory disease. Nothing serious, just unpleasant to the touch," I said apologetically.

He chuckled. "I see. I bet the cold San Francisco night air doesn't help either." He led me to the living room and asked, "Isn't this exquisite?" He asked as we walked to the kitchen, which I knew, would not be used much, if at all.

"How do you like the gourmet kitchen? Isn't it magnificent? If I may be so bold, I can picture you entertaining your friends here, Mr. Levesque."

I laughed and said, "I am new to the city, I do not know a soul, and I hate to disappoint you but I am not much of a cook." I replied much to his disappointed expression.

"Shall I show you the bedrooms? There are eight in total."

"By all means, Mr. Shepherd. Lead the way."

"If you'll follow me," he said as we ascended the contemporary looking staircase. And while the house was a bit modern for my taste, and certainly lacking the old world charm of my former mansion back in Vacherie, *Le Petit Fleur*, I found myself open to the possibility of existing in a more up to date home.

"This is the master bedroom." He announced proudly.

"It is a bit small," I said with a sigh much to his dismay.

"Perhaps you might consider tearing down a wall between the master and one of the guest rooms to make it larger?"

"That is a distinct possibility, Mr. Shepherd."

"Shall we continue to the other bedrooms?" he asked as he moved passed me so closely I could hear the pulse of his jugular vein as it throbbed deliciously. He stopped abruptly in front of me and turned to say, "Mr. Levesque would you care to join me?"

"My apologies, Mr. Shepherd, I have not dined for a while. I am afraid I am growing a bit lightheaded."

"Didn't they offer you a meal on board?"

"I do not care much for airline food. I would rather go hungry, Mr. Shepherd," I said as he laughed at my reply.

Of course, that's understandable. That must have been a long flight from New Orleans," he said.

"Not as long as you might think, Mr. Shepherd." I said and grinned and followed him throughout the rest of the bedrooms and finally downstairs where we sat in chairs opposite each other.

"So, what did you think?"

“Aside from the small master bedroom, and the house appearing so contemporary, I am quite impressed. Especially by its exterior, it reminds me a little of my native France.”

“Oh, I’ve been to Paris several times, I love France.”

“I am originally from the Loire Valley, from a town called Valençay, although I eventually moved to Paris and lived near the opera house.”

“I’ve never been to the Loire Valley, I must go some time.”

“Mr. Shepherd, although Paris is stunning with a rich and long history, there are also many breathtaking regions of France that are often overlooked or missed.”

An awkward silence developed between us until I asked, “Is the furniture to remain?”

“The home is staged, but if you want it included with your purchase I’m certain I could make that happen.”

“No, the style of furniture is too contemporary for my taste, despite all of my furniture being destroyed back in New Orleans. I’m certain that I will find some exquisite antique shops here in San Francisco in order to furnish my new home with.”

“I’m so sorry to hear that, Mr. Levesque. Yes there are plenty of lovely antique shops in the city. Does this mean you’re interested in the home?”

“Yes. I do not have the patience to look at endless homes while staying in a hotel. I would like to make an offer.”

“The asking price is ten million.”

“I will pay over that amount to secure the deal. How does eleven million dollars sound?”

“That is a very impressive offer, Mr. Levesque. Naturally, I will need to consult with the owners. Where are you staying in the city?”

“I am staying at the Mark Hopkins, atop Nob Hill. Perhaps you have heard of it?”

“Yes, it’s an exquisite property. I’m certain you’re very comfortable there.”

“Not as comfortable as I will be staying in this home, Mr. Shepherd.” I replied.

“Pardon me for saying so, Mr. Levesque, but you look as pale as a ghost. Perhaps while you’re here you might go see a doctor.” He said with concern.

“It is attributed to the rare circulatory disease I mentioned earlier. It is not fatal.”

“In any event, it was a pleasure meeting you Mr. Levesque. Once I’ve spoken to the owners, I’ll draw up the necessary paperwork. I will call you and we can arrange a time for you to come to my office and sign. May I call you at the hotel?”



“Yes, I have not yet registered, I came directly from the airport to this appointment. I shall be at the hotel later this evening, once I’ve nourished myself.”

“Yes, a person has to eat, that’s for certain.”

I ignored his remark and made my way to the door.

“Well, good night Mr. Levesque, it’s been an absolute pleasure.”

“The pleasure has been all mine, Mr. Shepherd. I will look forward to your call.”

“Good night,” he said and closed the door. I walked down the stairs and stood outside, admiring the house while watching for my realtor. Seeing the lights being turned off, I took to flight and headed in the direction of the hotel, as I doubted a taxi would come quickly in this quiet, upscale neighborhood.

I landed in Huntington Park across from the hotel. I doubted anyone witnessed my arrival as the park was empty. I quickly strode through the park arriving mere seconds later at the Mark Hopkins Hotel. I walked in and approached the front desk, where I was greeted by an attractive woman with dark brown hair and heavy makeup.

“Good evening Sir. How may I help you?”

“Good evening. I’m wondering whether you have a room available.”

“We have several. What type of room were you looking for?”

“A suite, will do nicely.”

“I have the Presidential suite available.”

“Excellent, I will take it.”

“Wonderful. May I have your name, Sir?”

“My name is Fabien Levesque.”

“Alright, Mr. Levesque.” Moments later she looked up and looked confused seeing as I was empty handed. She asked politely, “Do you have any luggage, Sir?”

“I am afraid the airline lost my luggage. So, no not at the moment. Not until they find it,” I said and smiled.

“I’m sorry to hear that. There are some very nice stores in the area if you need to purchase any clothing.”

“Thank you. I will keep that in mind.”

“You’re going to be in suite number 1721. It’s on the seventeenth floor. Here’s your room key, Mr. Levesque. The elevators are located right around the corner.”

“Thank you.”

“Have a pleasant evening, Mr. Levesque.”

I smiled at the young woman, nodded, and pressed the elevator button, patiently waiting for its arrival. I had become accustomed to the modern inventions of the twentieth century, which were vastly different from the world I lived in before becoming a bloodthirsty creature of the night.

Once I entered, and after pushing the button for the 17<sup>th</sup> floor, the elevator began its ascent.

I arrived at my floor and eagerly opened the door to my luxurious room. The foyer was tastefully decorated and led to a living room with rich dark wood paneling, a fireplace, and traditional furniture, including a settee, a wingback chair, and a coffee table.

I walked over to the window and glanced out. The city view was breathtaking. The fog nestled in the hills near a giant radio tower, appearing like a wall as lights flickered below. I was eager to explore this city I had heard so much about which was to be my new home.

My thoughts were interrupted by the sudden ringing of my phone as I walked over to answer it. “Hello?”

*“Hello, Mr. Levesque. It’s Sam Shepherd. I apologize for calling so late. I wanted to make certain you arrived safely at your hotel.”*

“Yes, as a matter of fact, I just arrived. I’m admiring the view from my window.”

*“I’m sure it’s stunning. Mr. Levesque, I wanted to touch base with you on our meeting. I have spoken to the owners and they have agreed to your very generous offer. Are you available tomorrow evening to come to my new office to sign the paperwork?”*

“That is wonderful news. Certainly, I will make myself available, Mr. Shepherd. I am new to the city so my social calendar is open for now.”

*“Wonderful, Mr. Levesque. Do you have a piece of paper and a pen handy?”*

“Yes,” I replied as I walked over to the desk quickly locating some hotel stationary and a pen.

*“My office is located at 555 California Street on the 10<sup>th</sup> floor. You can take the cable car from where you are staying at the Mark Hopkins. It will drop you off directly in front of my building.”*

“May we meet at 6:30, I am afraid I will be involved with my business dealings all day?”

*“Yes, that would be fine. See you tomorrow, Mr. Levesque. Enjoy your evening, and welcome to San Francisco!”*

“Thank you. Goodbye Mr. Shepherd.” I said and hung up the receiver.

I was impressed by my realtor having reached me so quickly. However, I recognized that his motivation was to earn a commission on a deal worth over ten million dollars.

At times, it appeared as though the only things that mattered to mortals were money and sex. Interestingly, some vampires share these same priorities. Despite my wealth and status, the thing I desired most was a companion, a soulmate. I had found that in Laurent until Stefan took him from me. I told myself, I must move on and create a new existence for myself, starting fresh. Perhaps in this city, where there is a substantial population of men who are attracted to one another, I may find love once more. The question is whether it will be with a mortal or a vampire.

After receiving an important call from my realtor, I decided to explore the city's predominantly gay neighborhood, The Castro, and see the sights. The night was calling to me as a lover might. I could not stay confined in my room until the following evening. Perhaps I would find someone willing to work for me as a servant, but first I would need to pass for human in order for them to accept my offer of employment. It would eventually come to pass that I would reveal my secret, and that individual would consent to be bitten, but would not be transformed into a vampire, but rather become an immortal mortal, outliving most humans and being immune to disease.

Instead of flying, I opted to take public transportation as my realtor had suggested and blend in with other city dwellers. This way, I could pass by Sam Shepherd's office and know exactly where it was located so I would not run late tomorrow evening trying to find it for my appointment.

I left the hotel and walked a block down California Street and waited for a cable car at the corner of California and Powell Street. Shortly after my arrival, the cable car arrived and I found an empty seat. A young man wearing a *Walkman* was seated across from me, listening to his music. I explained to the gentleman collecting the fares that I was new to the city and could only pay with cash when asked for my "*muni pas*". The gentleman reluctantly agreed and informed me that they do not normally accept cash. I thanked him, handed him the two dollar fare and continued observing the young man across from me who by this time, had started singing along to the music he was listening to.

I arrived at the cable car turnaround on the corner of California and Market Streets. From there, I spotted the "Muni" underground and descended the stairs to head for the Castro district. I had heard so much about this charming area of the city, with its many Victorian homes, quaint cafes and restaurants, and the many bars that attracted men who desired other men. I was curious to experience this kind of atmosphere, unlike anything I had ever seen before. Truth is, Laurent and I rarely went out among humans when we were together in Vacherie, but I needed to explore the city and experience it in its entirety. Knowing that I would not cross paths with Stefan made exploring the city even more desirable and adventurous, and certainly less stressful.

### 3 STEPPING OUT

The train slowed down as it approached the Castro Street station. I joined a diverse group of people, some wearing “*Act Up*” buttons and rainbow-colored flags, as we exited the train station. Most were dressed casually in t-shirts and jeans, with a few individuals wearing business suits.

The moment I arrived on Castro Street, I noticed the neighborhood’s rich history. Across the street was a bar named “Twin Peaks.” Intrigued, I decided to visit it as I stood waiting for the crosswalk to turn green.

Upon entering, I noticed several bar patrons watching as I made my way through the mature men’s bar. Despite my youthful appearance, they may be surprised to know I’m over 200 years old—an immortal bloodsucker.

I quickly moved past the bar area, for fear of someone noticing my lack of a reflection in the mirrored wall behind the bar area. I sat at an empty table toward the back. A handsome gentleman looked over at me and smiled. I returned his smile and nodded. He stood and walked over to my table.

“Excuse me; I noticed you as soon as you entered the bar. I believe you captured everyone’s attention as well.”

“You are too kind. Would you care to join me?” I asked the man, who appeared to be in his late thirties.

“Thank you, I’d appreciate that. But just so you know, it doesn’t work that way,” he replied.

“My apologies, I am confused. Would you mind explaining what you mean?”

“The bar is self-service. You have to get your own drink.”

“I see.”

“Speaking of which, may I buy you one?”

“Yes, a glass of red wine please.” I replied knowing I wouldn’t touch it and would merely pretend to be sipping it.

“I’m sorry, where are my manners? My name is Henry Rollins.”

“Pleased to meet you, Henry Rollins. My name is Fabien Levesque.”

He smiled at me and promised to bring our drinks back soon. Though handsome, I was not attracted to him as I was to my vampire soulmate, Laurent. I missed him and thought about what drew me to him—his innocence, strong convictions, courage, strengths, weaknesses, and smile. Unfortunately, Laurent’s soul was now trapped deep inside Stefan, who had spirit possessed his body.

Lost in my thoughts I was unaware that Henry had returned and had repeatedly called my name trying to get my attention.

“Excuse me, Fabien?” Henry said sounding a bit frustrated holding two drinks as he sat back down.

“I apologize, my thoughts were elsewhere.”

“Yes, it seems that way. So, I hope you don’t mind me saying this but I find you incredibly handsome.”

“I am flattered Henry. Still, I know nothing about you. Tell me about yourself,” I said not feeling obligated to return the compliment regarding his looks. However, I was curious to learn more about this mortal and whether he would be a good fit for me as my servant and gatekeeper.

“Actually, there’s not much to tell. I’m originally from Omaha, Nebraska. I moved out to San Francisco about a year ago to lead a more open life. Being closeted and keeping secrets is no way to live, wouldn’t you agree Fabien?” he asked with inquisitive eyes. *If only you knew Henry*, I thought.

“So now I know where you are from, but what do you do professionally, Henry?”

“I work as a caretaker to a very wealthy family in Tiburon.”

“I see. Are you happy there?”

“Not really. They treat me as if I’m beneath them. I may be the caretaker, but I’m not a doormat.”

“Right you are, Henry.”

“Tell me about you, Fabien?”

“I am originally from the Loire Valley in France. From a small town called Valençay. Have you ever been to France?” I asked.

“No, but I trained at the International Butler academy in the Netherlands.”

I must admit, I was impressed by his training. When he described his duties as a caretaker, I never imagined that included being the family's butler as well. The academy boasted one of the finest Butler training programs in all of Europe. I instinctively liked this man from Omaha who had trained over in Holland. I knew he would be a perfect fit.

"Henry, how would you like to come work for me?"

"Are you serious? But we just met."

"You seem to be fairly direct, so I will be as well. I like you Henry, but not in that way, if you catch my drift?"

Henry started to chuckle.

"What is so amusing?"

"To hear a Frenchman use an American expression like that struck me as funny. I mean no disrespect."

"None taken," I replied and smiled.

"Do you live here in the city?"

"Yes. I recently purchased a home in Pacific heights. Do you know the neighborhood?"

"Yes. I've heard there are many magnificent mansions there. But why have you chosen me, Fabien?"

"Very simply, I have recently decided to make some much-needed changes here in San Francisco following the death of my former butler, Barthelme, back in New Orleans. However, I prefer not to conduct interviews in bars. Would you be willing to come over to my place so we may speak in private? It would also give you a chance to see my home firsthand."

"That sounds better than staying here in this tired bar. Shall we go?" he asked enthusiastically. Despite making it clear to Henry that I was interested in him purely for business purposes by possibly hiring him as my butler, I could not help but feel that he somehow thought I was attracted to him and that we might engage in sexual activity.

"Oh, forgive me. I did not mean now. I will not take ownership of the house for another week, Henry. Perhaps you can give me a phone number where I may reach you."

"I'm afraid that won't be possible. You see, if you call and any family members are around to overhear my conversation, they will ask me to leave at once. That might be a bit awkward since I live with this family."

“I understand. To simplify things, how about we meet at this same location a week from today? By then, I should have settled in. We can conduct the interview there once we have left the bar together.”

“Yes, that sounds great. I can assure you, Fabien, I would be one of the best butler’s you have ever had.”

“That remains to be seen, Henry. I have had many. I recall the servant that accompanied me to Paris from the Loire valley. But that was long ago.”

“What was his name?”

“His name was Jacques. I considered him a member of the family. He raised me from childhood. There was not anything that he would not do for me. I had his undying loyalty. If I decide to hire you, I shall expect the same from you.”

“Yes, of course, and you would have it. I hope you don’t mind my saying this, Fabien, but I noticed you haven’t touched your wine?”

I had to think of something to tell him, lest he grow suspicious. “I had a glass before coming out for the evening, and I have a very busy and hopefully, productive day ahead of me tomorrow. I would hate to have alcohol interfere with that. Perhaps I did not need that glass of wine after all.”

“I see. There is one other thing, and again, I hope I’m not going to offend you by saying this, but I have never seen someone with your skin color. It’s the color of snow.”

“My doctor recently diagnosed my condition as being anemic.”

“I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have mentioned it.”

“That is quite alright. Now are there any other concerns you might have?” I asked him playfully with a smile.

“No. I’m looking forward to our interview, Fabien.”

“I am as well, Henry. Well it is getting rather late,” I said as I stood. “I just realized I have not dined this evening and I am absolutely ravenous. To be perfectly honest, I am not very pleasant company to be around if I miss nourishing myself.”

“What an odd way to describe eating,” he muttered as he stood.

I ignored his remark and replied, “If you will excuse me, Henry. I must be going. Until next week.” I shook his hand before leaving and noticed him wince undoubtedly due to the icy touch of my hand.

As soon as I left the bar, the blood lust raged inside me until it became uncontrollable. I needed to find something to quench my desire, something that has consumed me ever since I was forcibly transformed into this bloodsucking creature centuries ago.

I must admit, there were times back at the bar when it nearly overtook me several times, but I resisted the urge. Rather than attack a mortal, I would seek out a stray dog or cat or other animal and feast on its blood privately. Since being transformed, I have lived by a code of ethics I instilled in my lover Laurent. Which was we would only target those humans who fall into the category of criminals: thieves, murderers, namely those that are feared and are regarded as the evil that threatens society.

I quickly strolled down Castro Street and found myself at Collingwood Park. Except for a few men standing about who I had quickly passed and briefly made eye contact with, each hoping I would stop and engage in sexual activity with any number of them, sadly there did not appear to be any stray animals around. I suddenly found myself in a panic and took to flight thinking perhaps I would have better luck closer to my hotel on Nob Hill as I landed within minutes in a darkened side street close to Huntington Park.

There, in the distance, I spotted what appeared to be a raccoon digging through one of the trash cans. Fortunately no one else was around to witness what I was about to do. I rushed over to the creature using my vampiric speed and scooped it up as I lowered my mouth and bit into its neck as the warm, rich blood flowed like a fountain down my throat.

Having sufficiently nourished myself, and feeling satisfied, I placed the creature's remains in the garbage can and wiped my mouth with my handkerchief in order to remove the blood that had been dripping down my lips and chin. I figured having blood smeared across my face, would not be wise for me to enter the hotel, drawing the unnecessary attention of other guests or those at the reception desk who would offer assistance to me on the assumption that I was injured.

Before returning to my hotel, I spotted a fountain nearby and used it to dampen my handkerchief, effectively removing any remaining blood stains from my face. I then made my way back to the hotel and entered without drawing any attention from the other guests who were gathered in the lobby, enjoying a drink and friendly conversation.

I hurriedly made my way over to the elevator and pressed the call button repeatedly hoping no one else would share the elevator with me. It finally arrived, empty, and within moments, I was back in my room securing the curtains to ensure privacy and total darkness in my room as a shield from the dawn's impending arrival.



The following evening I left the hotel and arrived promptly at six-thirty at the towering office building of my realtor, Sam Shepherd. I entered and made my way to the tenth floor.

Standing in front of my realtor's office I knocked as he opened the door seconds later.

"Mr. Levesque, I must say I'm impressed by your timing," he said with a warm smile.

"Thank you, Mr. Shepherd. I have always prided myself in being prompt. May I enter?" I asked.

"Yes, by all means. Come in and make yourself comfortable."

"Thank you," I replied as I glanced around his office filled with expensive paintings, sculptures, and antiques.

"I must say, Mr. Shepherd, I am equally as impressed by the way you have decorated your office. You have exquisite taste."

"Coming from a gentleman such as yourself is indeed a compliment, Mr. Levesque."

"I guess we have both become members of the mutual admiration society," I said as the two of us shared a laugh together.

"Please take a seat, Mr. Levesque. As I briefly mentioned to you over the phone, the sellers have accepted your offer. Here is the paperwork. As you can see, it's fairly standard boilerplate. Please let me know if there is anything that you have questions on."

After a few minutes I had carefully gone over all eight pages of the paperwork despite it being *standard boilerplate* and said, "I have read through the paperwork detailing my soon to be home on Vallejo Street."

"Do you have any questions, Mr. Levesque?"

"None whatsoever, Mr. Shepherd. Tomorrow I will contact my bank back in New Orleans and request that they wire the funds into the account you have provided me with."

"Excellent, Mr. Levesque. If all goes according to plan you should be in your new home by the end of the week."

"Nothing would make me happier, Mr. Shepherd. It truly is an exceptional home and one where I will feel safe and secure in for a very long time. I do have one question though?"

"What's that?"

"I could not recall whether the property had a cellar?"

"A cellar?"

"Yes. I may need some storage space for my collection of items that I have acquired over the years as I am an avid art collector," I told him. In reality, I needed a place to rest during the day

without being disturbed by the sunlight and its punishing, destructive rays, as I knew there would be no furnishings or draperies once I moved in to shield me.

“My apologies, but I thought you mentioned that you had lost your furnishings and possessions back in New Orleans?”

“Most of them, not all,” I replied with a lie.

“Yes, in fact, there is. I apologize, Mr. Levesque. I totally overlooked showing you the cellar. I’m certain it will provide you with enough space for you to store your many fine collectibles in.” Upon hearing that, my momentary panic subsided, and I was enveloped with a sense of serenity.

## CHAPTER 4 THE INTERVIEW

A week had gone by, and now I was the proud owner of a yet unfurnished mansion in the esteemed Pacific Heights area of San Francisco. Shortly after I joined Laurent in New Orleans we combined our wealth and opened a shared account at the Louisiana State Bank. As instructed by my realtor, the transfer of funds was executed seamlessly and without incident, and my dealings with my realtor, Sam Shepherd, had come to an end.

It would be my servant Henry Rollins' responsibility to help assist me in finding unique antiques and artwork to personalize my home and replace what was lost during the fire at my former mansion, Le Petit Fleur, in New Orleans.

Remembering this was the evening that I was to meet Henry Rollins, I realized I needed to head to the bar on Castro Street where he and I had agreed to meet. I hurriedly left my building and felt the cool breeze in the night air. In the distance, I heard the echoing sound of fog horns.

In order to save time, I chose to fly instead of using the usual mode of transportation. As I soared over the city, its countless lights shone like a treasure trove.

I landed on Hartford Street, only a block away from the bar where I was supposed to meet Henry. Fortunately, the only one that witnessed my landing out of thin air was a drunken guy who appeared to be using the building to prop himself up.

"Hey, how did you do that?" he said slurring his words as he nearly lost his footing.

"Magic," I said with a wink as I strode toward Castro Street.

I chose to wait outside instead of going inside since Henry and I would be interviewing at my home for privacy reasons and without the distractions of other people's conversations which could sometimes become loud and boisterous in a bar setting.

As I waited for Henry to arrive I glanced at some of the men that passed by some in fact gave me suggestive looks just as the others had the other evening passing by Collingwood Park when the only thought in my head was quenching my thirst for blood.

I peered across the street and saw a small group of people emerge from the underground station, called *Muni* and spotted Henry amongst the crowd and waved to him. He smiled and returned the wave and waited for the pedestrian stoplight to turn green and then crossed to join me at the bar's entrance.

"I hope I didn't keep you waiting too long?" he asked sheepishly.

“No, as a matter of fact, I just arrived myself a few short minutes ago.”

“Shall we go inside?” he asked.

I looked at him curiously and said, “No, as I mentioned before, I do not conduct interviews in a public setting. We agreed to meet here because it would have proven awkward for you had I called and someone overheard your conversation.”

“Forgive me. It’s just when I’m in the company of a good-looking gentleman such as yourself, I naturally prefer to have a drink in my hand.”

“While I am flattered, Henry. This is a business proposition, not a romantic one. I think I made that clear to you when we initially met last week?” I said sternly as he lowered his head. “Now shall we get a taxi to return to my place? The night is not getting any younger and soon it will be daylight and I have important business to attend to tomorrow morning,” I said in a halfway scolding manner.

“Yes, whatever you think is best.” He replied sounding defeated.

“Good, then we agree,” I said before hailing a taxi and gesturing for it to stop. Henry and I entered from opposite sides and the cab quickly drove off. The driver asked about our destination.

“Kindly take us to 2939 Vallejo Street.”

“Right away.”

Henry and I sat silently in the back seat until we arrived in front of my newly purchased mansion.

“Seven dollars,” the driver said as I handed him a ten dollar bill and said, “Keep the change,” and exited the vehicle with Henry trailing close behind.

“This is impressive,” he said as the two of us climbed the stairs which led to a double door entry as I unlocked it and stepped inside. “Please come in, Henry.”

“Thank you, Fabien.”

“Henry, if I’m going to consider hiring you as my Butler, I would prefer you call me Master Levesque.”

“Of course. I thought perhaps calling you by your first name might sound a bit informal.”

I nodded and replied, “I would much rather things be kept formal between us.”

“As you wish, Master Fabien.”

“Unfortunately the house is still unfurnished,” I said as we entered what is presently known as a living room. Of course I preferred the traditional term, *drawing room*.”

“Henry, I need someone who is not only a Butler, but essentially my gatekeeper.”

“I don’t understand, Master Levesque?”

“This is a very complex situation, so I will need you to listen very carefully and consider what I am telling you, Henry.”

“Alright.”

I have specific requirements that I will need your help with. Sadly, I lost all my belongings at my previous estate in Vacherie, Louisiana, where I lived with my lover, Laurent. Therefore, your task will be to locate and acquire furniture and artwork that match my preferences. I prefer a baroque aesthetic.

“I know of quite a few antique showrooms which are located in the showplace square area of town. One store in particular, the *Antique and Art Exchange* may have exactly what you are looking for. They deal in 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century furnishings and paintings. In addition there are other antique stores located in your neighborhood with the nearest being located on California Street. I’m certain I will find whatever you desire.”

I nodded my approval, “Excellent. It appears you are quite resourceful, Henry. I like that. The other thing I will require of you is to guard me during the daylight hours.”

“Forgive me, I’m not following you? Guard you during the daylight?” he said looking confused.

“What I am about to share with you may come as a complete shock, so I want you to brace yourself, Henry,” I said mysteriously. I could tell by the expression on Henry’s face that he was growing anxious.

“And as you shared with me upon our first meeting, you had moved to San Francisco to lead a more open life. In a way that holds true for me as well,” I said.

“That you’re gay?”

“I prefer to describe it as an attraction to my own gender. You see I am very old fashioned.”

“But you’re a young guy, most certainly younger than me?” he said looking confused.

I shook my head and replied, “No, I am much older than you can ever imagine.”

I looked him straight in the eye and remained silent. A momentary flashback played out in my mind which dated back to Paris in the late eighteenth century when I finally disclosed my true self to Laurent, only this time, I was not sharing my dark secret with the man I loved hoping to secure his blessing and asking me to change him into the same immortal creature as myself, but to one that I would employ as my Butler, and who would provide me with the protection I required during my daylight undead slumber.

“Well then, you must have a really good plastic surgeon,” he said and chuckled.

I laughed and suddenly stopped, appearing dead serious. “Henry, look very closely at my skin. Is there anything that you find peculiar?”

“Yes, I believe I mentioned it to you before. It’s similar to the color of porcelain or snow. I don’t think I’ve ever seen anything like it before.”

“Now look at my eyes, what do you see, Henry?”

“They’re the bluest eyes I’ve ever seen, you might describe them as azure blue, almost hypnotic.”

“Watch closely, Henry,” I said as the color of my eyes turned from a pleasing and seductive blue to a fiery red brought on by the blood lust which had once again reared its ugly head.

“My god, they’re red!”

“Relax, Henry. I mean you no harm. You are safe.”

“What are you?”

“My condition has been described in many ways. Some have coined the phrase, a night dweller, a night creature, the living dead, in other words, Henry, I am a vampire. I am over two hundred years old. Does that frighten you?” I asked flatly without a trace of emotion.

He remained momentarily silent and then finally spoke. “I thought vampires were purely fiction. I remember reading Dracula when I was a teenager. It fascinated and frightened me all at once.”

I chuckled, “Ah yes, the Romanian Count from Transylvania complete with floor length cape and coat and tails.”

“Yes, that’s the one.”

“I did not read it myself, but I recall my former lover, Laurent, taking an interest in the book when it was first published in 1897. He read me several passages from the book. Laurent was living in New Orleans at the time, and after reading it, he became incredibly concerned that people might suspect him of being a vampire due to the public’s fascination with the novel. Fortunately, he was able to keep his dark secret hidden from everyone, and he was never exposed. My apologies, I may have misspoken earlier; for beings like me, “living” is not quite the right term. After all, how can a reanimated corpse truly “live”? This thought prompted me to burst into laughter, though I could sense that my conversation with Henry had made him uncomfortable.

I came to the realization that it was time to steer the conversation with Henry back to business and I quickly composed myself. “Henry, listen to me. I require your help just as much as

you need mine. It is evident from your tone that you are unhappy working for a family that does not value you. I need you to protect me during the day and help me with anything I need. I'll compensate you generously, and you will not have to endure the mistreatment that your current employer seems to inflict on you."

"But I'm only human. If you're truly a vampire, what will happen when I die? Who will guard you?" he asked.

At that moment, I realized I had made an excellent choice. Henry's question expressed genuine concern for my well-being and confirmed my decision. I was touched.

"Henry, I have decided to have you join me on this eternal journey of mine."

"I'm confused. Does that mean you will turn me into what you are? A vampire?"

"No, what use would you be to me if we both required escaping the sun's punishing rays by day? No, I will give you an immortal existence only in human form. But I would need to drink some of your blood, and in return, you would take only a small drop of mine. Think about it, Henry. You would never grow old, be immune to all human illnesses, and have the strength of many men. If you agree to be my servant and gatekeeper, I can make all that possible."

He asked, "Just to clarify if I become your servant and you bite me, I'll be immortal and never fall ill or fear death?"

"Yes, Henry. That is correct."

"It almost sounds too good to be true. But with everything comes a downside. Are there any?"

"At first, you will experience a bit of sensitivity toward the sunlight, although you will soon adjust. In addition, you will not be restricted to drinking blood, nor will you crave it. You will continue to nourish yourself with food as you always have."

"And you say you will pay me handsomely?"

"Yes, beyond your wildest dreams. You will be very well provided for, and you will reside here with me."

"Then I accept your offer, Master Levesque."

"Are you certain beyond a doubt, Henry?" I asked not fully convinced he had thought everything through.

"What more do I need to say? Yes, make me your eternal servant, Master Levesque!" he emphatically stated.

“Then it shall be,” I replied, stood, and moved slowly toward him as he softly began to tremble.

“Give me your wrist,” I said forcefully.

Henry extended his arm as instructed and positioned it directly below my mouth. I heard the pulse of his wrist beat much like a drum, thump, thump, thump, as my eyes changed from their azure blue color to a crimson red color. My incisors grew into razor-sharp weapons much like an animal until I lost control and bit into his delicate skin piercing it as my lips embraced the wound and I sucked in the crimson liquid that flowed into my mouth and down my throat, satisfying my bloodlust.

This lasted for mere seconds as I fought back the urge to keep draining the rich liquid that flowed from his wrist much like a river; however, I pulled myself away and bit into my own wrist, which released a trickle of blood that I placed directly over his mouth.

“Drink, Henry, but be careful only to taste a drop of my blood; otherwise, you will join me in becoming one of the undead.

After a moment he stopped as I pulled my wrist away from his mouth. “How do you feel?” I asked him.

“I feel different. My senses feel like they have become heightened. Everything from my eyesight, to my sense of smell and hearing. I feel your immortal blood surging through my veins, Master Levesque.”