

The Blood Gospels

Audio Script of a Novel
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Whoso eateth my flesh,
and drinketh my blood,
hath eternal life;
and I will raise him up at the last day.

The Gospel According to John 6.54
The Bible, The New Testament

DISK 1 — (81:46 minutes)

Blood and Eternity

ANGIE: (her voice coming up out of darkness, young, exuberant, a little shrill in her eagerness to begin their stories) Okay, okay, for me it starts ...

FAYE: (her voice coming up under Angie's voice, hesitant, not nearly so sure where they are headed) "I am Faye ... I can't ... but ... "

ANGIE: (overlapping) ... Mom ... hey, Mom!

MARK: (his voice coming over the both of them, gruff) Angie, one at a time. Let your mother go first.

ANGIE: ... Dad!!!!

MARK: Angie, let your mother go first!"

FAYE: ... Angie, please dear, I can't concentrate."

ANGIE: Oh! Tsssk! (sighs) Lo que sea, lo que quieren.

CONSTANTIN: (his soft, bitter laughter floating up beneath their overlapping voices) The noise ... the noise ... can we not, perhaps, begin with less noise?"

FAYE: (more determined, but still soft) Very well then. Yes, I am Faye. I can't ... but think ... that of the four of us you *will* want to hear first from me —oh, that beginning is weak, far too weak; you will want to think me stronger than that— but a beginning, you understand, you must understand ... a start to it all ... is not ... easy ... is not easily ... wrought —oh, you will think me tedious, they all do, but— I will start again.

My name is Faye. Faye August, wife, mother, scientist —oh, good heavens, how lame— I am Faye. For me— (laughs) Yes, as Angie says, "For me ... !"

ANGIE: (wearily) Oh, tssk, Mom!

FAYE: ... oh, I'm sorry, dear. For me, it ... began with that first bite. Yes. The flow of blood. That drag of his eyes, up. The force of his will, which had a body and gravity of its own, dragging my eyes up.

Then his extraordinary beauty. Well, his ridiculously beautiful face, that ivory skin, that hair that framed— that really more resembled softly curling copper wire than— copper threads ... than hair, copper threads tousled and falling adorably about his temples and over his forehead, down almost to his eyes— but those eyes, yes, his eyes glinting amber, and most of all the *expression* in those eyes, visible even at that distance as though projected into my own eyes, that expression at once of hope ... and hurt ... and longing ... in their profundity the jagged aura of a soul lost long ago, and wandering still.

Until that precise moment, you must understand, everything was in control, nicely in control— in *my* control, nicely.

Yes, for me, it started here, beyond my depth in this man's eyes ...

MARK: Oh, that's where it starts. The Gospel According to Faye.

FAYE: Mark!

MARK: Oh, no, no Faye, the Gospel According to Mark, that doesn't start for a while now.

CONSTANTIN: (*below him*) Oh, sarcasm.

MARK: (*overlapping*) Okay, Angie, you're up next. Go ahead. Take off.

ANGIE: (*with teenage sarcasm*) No, Dad, no, I can wait.

MARK: No, now, come on.

ANGIE: Oh, is it okay, then?

CONSTANTIN: (*below them both*) Oh, another, my goodness.

MARK: (*laughs*) Come on, sweetheart.

ANGIE: Oh, well, if it's okay, then, if it's okay with everybody, Angie here, and yeah, my mom's right, and she can laugh, but for me ...

CONSTANTIN: (*below them*) Oh, will this be endurable?

ANGIE: ... for me, yeah, for me it starts right here, right now in that same moment. See I'm right there with her, and I've got my eyes on my mom —yeah, she's Faye, like she already told you— and she's like ... transfixed, that's exactly the word for it, transfixed. And I look to see

what she's all transfixed at, and it's this mosquito on her knuckle right next to her wedding ring. She's got her knuckle right up in front of her eyes, and this mosquito's got his nose, his proboscis thing as she calls it, shoved deep into her knuckle, sucking up all this blood into his body which is first transparent but starts turning blood red. And she's letting him do this, see, well watching him because she's always on the lookout for science and she's always saying, "Oh, Angie, look at this!" because when you're a 14-year-old everyone thinks they can tell you what to do and what to look at, but I'm almost 14, and that's almost 15, and so I don't need to be told what to look at anymore, you know, and in my mom's case it's always something scientific and gross, like now when she's got me looking at this mosquito filling up with her blood on account of how she's told me like a hundred thousand times that when the mosquito bites he injects this anticoagulant stuff to keep your blood flowing, instead of clotting, you know, which is what blood is always doing —I mean see what I'm talking about how gross she can be— but the idea is if you let the mosquito get his fill naturally, instead of scaring him off, then he drinks back in all his anticoagulant stuff, and that's what causes the itch.

So okay, I am looking at the mosquito like she told me to, tssssk! And then I look up at my mom's face and I see her eyes all transfixed, but there's this second now where they do this weird thing, the pupils like flutter, then her eyes lift off the mosquito, only it's my mom lifting them, like it's this heavy load on them that she's got to *lift* them, like with muscles, and she lifts her eyes higher and higher and higher and then stands there, even more transfixed, transfixed to the nth, transfixed like she's staring down a long tunnel at something way down at the end, something very scary, but you know, fascinating. She's, like, fascinated.

I follow her eyes across the street, up to the second story of the hotel over there, the Hotel Colonial, and there's this guy standing in this window. And he's naked! Only because of the window sill, all I can see is his chest and the flat of his stomach, so it's not like shocking, it's not like this guy is exposing himself or anything. He's just standing there transfixing my mom, and he's got this look on his face just like the look on my mom's face, like they know each other. Or *knew* each other a long time ago. He's got this whole attitude of disbelief, like he's in a

photograph titled *Surprise!* with his arm up and his hand grabbing onto the edge of the drape like he just threw back the drapes just this second, and just saw her, and froze. His lips are pressed together in this hard, straight line, and he's got this face like out of the movies, like think of the handsomest man you've ever seen and multiply him by like a million. His hair is jet black, and his eyes are like, they're like black, too. Black, black, black, like Carlsbad Caverns when they turn out the lights black. Only with fire right in the center of them. Even at this distance I can see these black orbs with this fire in the center, like this laser piercing all the way across the street and transfixing my mom.

I look back at my mom, and the bloodsucker on her finger is huge, his guts full of my mom's blood.

Now I don't want you to think I'm the kind of girl who faints when I see blood. I mean, I'm not indelicate or anything—in fact, my mom's always saying I'm sensitive beyond words, "Angie, you are sensitive beyond words", that's what my mom's always saying—and I can stand the sight of a little blood. It's just, first of all, I'm a vegetarian so blood's not my thing. And second, right while I'm watching, the mosquito's guts get so full of my mom's blood that suddenly he poops! This yellow poop! Yesterday's blood! I mean gross!

I need to give you the whole picture. It's very important you get everything, especially you, I mean, you know. It's late Friday afternoon, I'm dying to get out of here, I've been in school all week, I'm going home to Santa Cruz de K'u for the weekend—big thrill!—it's the hottest day in the history of time and the hottest place in the known universe, right upside this blazing white hospital wall on the streets of Mérida in the Yucatán Peninsula of México.

Uh, excuse me, Me-hi-co.

Like my dad says—who dragged us here in the first place—the Yucatán is like this skillet sticking out over the Caribbean, flat and hot and frying in the sun all day long. Then the very second the sun goes down, the bloodsuckers come out, first the mosquitoes in the dusk, singing in your ears and crawling up under your hair, then deep in the black of the night, the vampires.

So here's my mom, transfixed by the naked guy in the Hotel Colonial across over there and the mosquito on her finger, whose butt now is rubbing on her wedding ring as he starts to make his getaway, pulling his periboscus thing out of her knuckle, then pushing it back in and pulling it back out, getting every last drop. But when he goes to fly away, he's so fat that he can't take off right but dips down right in front of me, and I splat, right between my hands, right in midair, splat! And the echo of the splat ricochets back at us off the wall of the Hotel Colonial across the street.

My mom jumps at the noise, that splat, and looks down at me like she's just made the roundtrip return from the rings of Saturn. "Angie," she says, in that low voice with that tone of surprise that she uses when I've done something very very surprising, like get an *A* on a paper.

"Angie." And she's breathing like she just did two extra laps. I open up my hands and there's, like, a half gallon of my mom's blood all over them. "You got him," she says in that same voice.

She fishes in her purse as her eyes lift up again to the hotel window, and she stands there holding this used tissue for me to take, and so I go ahead and take it and smear her blood good into it, looking up myself again at the hotel window, too.

The naked guy's still there. He's still got his arm up, his hand still grabbed onto the edge of the drape, his eyes still ... his eyes still ...

But then ... tsssk! ... my dad drives up in the Jeep.



MARK: Yeah, I'm her dad. You know me, yeah.. I'm Mark. Faye's husband, yeah. Yeah, I got a story to tell, too, but, uh, it doesn't start here for me. So let them talk first. Let ... *him* ... talk.



CONSTANTIN: (laughs softly) Call me Constantin. If you needs must call me something. If you needs must have a word for me, call me Constantin.

For me, it began centuries ago. If we had names for the years, then, I did not know those names. If we had names for the places, I did not know those, either, and they are different now, if you look on the maps they now have, the names are different. It must have been in the black mountains within Moldavia, that is where, for me, it began.

I was in love. You must remember this. This you must remember. Her name was Ilona. Beautiful. Soft. Soft voice. Soft hair. Soft eyes. She was the other half of my being. Boring?

So beautifully boring.

I was Greek. She was Moldavian, married to a brute named Johannes. He took her whenever he wanted. Used her as a beast. Never even saw her eyes, simply took her.

And she loved me.

We made plans to escape. We would go to Greece where we would be married. We would have children. We would live a good life. And after many years and much love, we would die. Together.

That night ... that first night... I waited outside her window. The father and brothers were in the front of the house eating their uncouth food, laughing and howling and belching, yapping at the mother to bring them more, more of their uncouth food. Johannes was in the bedroom with Ilona. She endured him without a sound until he was finished with her, had planted his brute seed and left to join his brute family.

I tapped softly on the window. She turned, saw me, reached under the bed, brought out her packed bag, threw her cloak around her shoulders, and came to me. She opened the window. We kissed. The smell of her.

She returned quickly to the bed and picked up the child, her brat with Johannes, a she-child merely three weeks old, feeble and puking. Ilona came to me and gave me the brat to hold while she let herself out the window. It puked in my arms, its mother's milk.

Ilona took back the child and we moved quietly through the woods toward my carriage. We could see through the windows the creatures at their food. The baby whimpered. Ilona held it closer. We crept faster. The baby cried out loud. The slaving from the house stopped. They came to the door in a pack. The moon was full. We were easy to see. There was a moment of utter silence before they raised their shouts and came after us.

We ran now, but Ilona was hampered by the child in her arms. A shot rang out and I felt a blow to the back of my right leg. I fell to the earth onto a sharp rock which cut deep into my left knee. Ilona stopped, turned back to me, tried to pull me to my feet, but I had no control of my legs.

But the carriage was near now and I dragged myself to it. Ilona pulled at my jacket to help me along. The pain was blinding. The blood pounded in my ears. I crawled onto the floor of the carriage. Ilona handed me up the child, climbed into the seat, grabbed the reins and horse whip and snapped it between the horse's ears.

The carriage lurched forward, but the creatures closed the gap. Johannes in the lead got his hand onto the back of the carriage and started to pull himself on board. Ilona turned and lashed him across the eyes with the horse whip. He shrieked and fell back onto the road.

I saw the father take aim with his musket. He had it propped on the shoulder of one of his sons. I pulled Ilona down below the seat. The bullet whistled over our heads. We took a bend in the road, and we were free. We laughed.

For one moment only, we were free, and we laughed.

Before us lay a crossroads, in the middle of the crossroads a hay cart, beside the hay cart its driver, looking up at us with astonished, wide eyes. Ilona reined the horse to the side. The carriage slued. It tipped and overturned. Ilona was reaching for the baby in my arms when I was thrown from the carriage, Ilona's beautiful, horrified face ripped from my vision. I took the fall on my back and shoulders, saving the child.

I remember the carriage wheels turning, the scream of the horse thrashing in its harness. I remember the confusion of sounds, the wails from the baby, the calls of the pack as they came

running up. Ilona lay like a broken doll between the spokes of one of the wheels of the hay cart. Her legs and arms were at fantastic angles. Out of a great gash across her neck, blood flowed out, poured out, Ilona's blood drained from her body in a flood. I left the baby in the dirt and dragged myself to Ilona. I pulled myself up beside her to lean against the hay cart wheel. I pulled her out of the spokes, pulled her legs free, and drew her into my arms. She was limp.

"Ilona, Ilona, Ilona, Ilona, Ilona..." I could do nothing but repeat her name.

I put my hand against the gash in her throat to staunch the blood. It gushed through my fingers and soaked into the dirt. I clamped my mouth to the wound. Her blood filled my mouth. I swallowed. Her blood filled my mouth again. I swallowed. There was no stopping the blood. Into the soil or into my body, Ilona's blood would not stop flowing.

I looked for help to Johannes and his father and brothers who had now come close to watch. Terror and glee mingled in their eyes. The brute mother now approached and picked up the baby and turned away.

"I will kill you!" Johannes said and started toward me. I pulled my knife. He stopped, drew back. I turned the knife and plunged it into my own heart.

There was blackness.

I do not know for how long there was blackness. An eternity, but mere moments, for the full moon was still at its zenith when I next became aware of light. I could hear the voice of Johannes: "Oh, God, may you not receive this creature into your kingdom, this suicide, this Greek adulterer. May the earth spew him out so that his body shall remain incorrupt, without soul and without redemption, wandering in darkness through all eternity."

I left my body, a purity pulled out through its pores, and rose above the scene, above Ilona and Johannes and his father and brothers and mother and baby, and the frightened driver of the hay cart, on his knees and praying in soundless mutterings to a god he prayed might be listening. But the only voice that could be heard was the voice of Johannes and the only other noise, the wind in the trees. I hung high above them, gazing at the body splayed out in the center

of the crossroads, the blood leaking from around the knife buried in its heart, Ilona's blood dripping from its mouth.

And yes, for me, it started here.



FAYE: Those moments before Mark drove up in the jeep —and I can't even conjecture how long because time seemed no longer measured in seconds or minutes but in stark, sudden glimpses now of eternity— I could hear Angie calling and I knew I must come back to her from this man's eyes. But I could not pull my eyes away from his. When Angie clapped her hands on the mosquito, it was a release, as if a too tightly coiled spring snapped in my head, sending its parts flying in chaos so that it took me another scattering of moments to even recognize my child.

Now, I cannot describe to you how unlike me this was. I know that I can't expect your immediate trust, but please believe me when I tell you that I look for truth in all things. And then I tell truth when I find it. It's not so much a principle, I think, as a complete inability *not* to. This is not to say that I am infallible, of course, and you will find for yourself very shortly ... just ... how fallible I can be. As I tell you my story —our story— you will think me obtuse and unintuitive; you will think me silly, romantic, naive, simple, dense, but you will never find me dishonest. Perhaps —and I must laugh as I say it— it is my medical training. (ha!) Perhaps it is because I consider myself a scientist. (ha!) Please forgive that ha!; I don't mean it sarcastically but offer it to you anticipating your own laugh. I admit that my medical training was indeed laughable, however sincerely I undertook it, and especially laughable in the context of the Yucatán where nothing I ever learned appeared to apply in the hospital where I — (ha!) — volunteered my ... quote-unquote, expertise.

And this moment, standing outside that very hospital in the steaming streets of Mérida, looking at my daughter with her bloody hands and her awed, guilty yet almost gleeful expression as she displayed for me the gore and little dark smear of exoskeleton that had been the mosquito,

I surprised myself by giving myself a curiously uncharacteristic, single-minded command: whatever you do, I told myself, do *not* look back at that man in that window.

And immediately I knew myself, too, to be utterly ridiculous. And as always, the acute knowledge of my own fallibility made me acutely angry, and I began to silently argue the points at issue. Why should I not be free to look where I might? What within me was afraid? Afraid, why? And was it really fear? Ashamed? Why? Certainly not ashamed. Embarrassed, yes; I had looked too long into the man's eyes. He had made a flagrant pass and I had encouraged it. So what? Yes, I was a married woman, yes I was standing in my daughter's full view, yes I had allowed a fleeting flirtation with what appeared at first glance to be the handsomest man in the entire world, so, yes finally, I was willing to admit that for a moment, only for that moment, I had somehow found myself somehow ... lost. But now I was in control again. So now if I cared to allow my eyes to stray back across the street, to that window of the Hotel Colonial, perhaps, I could damn well do it.

He would probably be gone in any case.

He was not gone.

And now, it was as if I saw him for the first time. He was naked. (And so beautiful, good heavens!) Young. Perhaps twenty-three. Yet so ... mature. With his fine features, flaming hair that even in the growing darkness of twilight had a light of its own —a ... a ... a *sheen* they would write in romantic novels, not like Mark's dull, sandy red hair, but copper, yes as I said, brilliant, as though someone had taken a Brillo pad to a copper bowl and tossed it high into the sunset—well, enough, Faye, enough! He was a spectacle; what woman could resist stealing a longer glance? But, enough!

But what held me most stricken was that I recognized him. I couldn't possibly tell you where I had seen him before —because I knew I had *not*— but somehow I recognized him.

Just then, Mark came careening up in the Jeep, blabbing. Mark always careened; in these past months, Mark always blabbed. "Faye, I'm sorry, I had to blah blah blah..." I couldn't fasten my attention on him. It took me a moment even to fasten my eyes on him, again even to

recognize him. My husband of sixteen years, the father of my daughter, and I could not bring him into my focus. And in that instant I saw my marriage through the eyes of that young man across the street. It was a marriage of one and a half; there was only half of me ever attending to my husband, any more.

"Hello, honey," I said. "It's all right," I said, and my voice filled the street and I wondered where I got that voice. I walked toward the Jeep, and I wondered where I got that walk. From what dreadful movie queen, what sultry vamp had I copied this posture and pace, this slink? I was excruciatingly aware of every move I made, every move the man across the street watched me make, every word he heard me utter. "Isn't it hot!" I said, and the word came out of my mouth vulgar, the echo of it off the walls of the hospital and the Hotel Colonial bouncing ludicrously back at me: "Hot! Hot! Hot!"

"Jeez, Mom!" Angie's voice came from behind me, an annoying, adolescent stridency like the whine of a mosquito. But I knew she was right: I was obscene. I ran my words through my own head, re-examining them: "Hello, honey. It's all right. Isn't it hot?" May a woman not, I argued with myself, say these things to her husband without accusations from her daughter, or her self?

As I hoisted myself into the seat, always a clumsy maneuver, I remembered with annoyance that I had forgotten to remind Mark to put the top back on the Jeep this morning. From his window above us, the man would see my awkwardness and the thickening of my thighs as they squelched on the seat, and I admonished myself at that thought, too. That this man possessed my every thought galled my every thought. If only I could think where I had met him, or seen him, or dreamed him, perhaps then I could put him happily out of my mind. I leaned across the seat to Mark, as I always did, and kissed him on the cheek and rubbed the nape of his neck, realizing again with a sudden surge of sensuality what a fine, strong, horselike neck my husband had, covered with his down of roan hair.

Oh, horses!

It occurred to me to wonder how my fingernails would look from the window across the street, ruffling my husband's hair, lovingly, and I ruffled his hair, lovingly. I would not look up at the window. I would not.

Mark was still blabbing I don't know what. I tried hard to focus on his words, ruffling his hair and annoying myself. Meanwhile Angie climbed into the back seat and Mark pulled away from the curb. I would not look back. I would not.

Just before Mark turned the corner, I looked back.

I could still see the window of the Hotel Colonial, but the angle now was acute and I could not see the man, if he was still there. We turned the corner, and his window was gone.

I dropped my eyes. They met Angie's where she sat in the back seat staring at me with ... so many apparent emotions ... doubt, apprehension and, somewhere, anger. I shrugged. After all, nothing had happened. I turned back to face the road ahead.



MARK: Mark here, yeah finally, because for me, see, it doesn't start till we get home. That other stuff they're telling you about, I didn't know about that. Well, when you don't know about something, you just don't know about it. It doesn't make you stupid; you just never heard about it; you never thought about it; it never ... was anything ... that ever crossed your mind.

So, the three-hour Jeep ride from Mérida to Santa Cruz de K'u doesn't seem any different from every other Friday night these last months, except that Faye is so quiet. Well, she doesn't have much of a chance, actually, because I'm full of my day and I want to tell her about Homer Aud and his news about the vampires.

"Odd! Odd! Odd! Homer Odd!" Angie keeps repeating in the backseat, laughing that idiotic laugh she's adopted this week...

FAYE: Mark!

MARK: (*overlapping*) ... she can be such a little teenage twit.

ANGIE: Dad!

MARK: (overlapping) "Aud!" I yell back at her. "A-u-d! The man's name is Homer Aud! Leave it at that!" She shuts up back there and starts swelling and sulking. Faye keeps telling me it's just a stage, but damn it, Angie's been going through a stage ever since the day she was born.

ANGIE: (under Mark) Like you haven't?

MARK: Okay, so have I, okay .. Homer Aud is this Peace Corps volunteer that I met in the mercado where he was picking up some straw hats and hammocks before going back to the States. Weird guy! Tall, gangling, standing a foot taller than all the Indians in the marketplace, and white as an albino, really a sight.

He sees me and yells over the Indians' heads, "¡Hola, gringo!" So I go over and talk to him. His face is weird too. His bifocals are cracked and one arm of the frames is missing so that when he looks at you his left eye is magnified into this great big eye and his right eye is refracted into a dozen little blue eyes, so he gives you this impression of being half-cyclops half-fly.

"What's your se llama?" he says to me and grins. His teeth are all snagged. I like him right off. I say, "Mark August." And he says, "Homer Aud." Well, Angie's right. It *is* a funny name, and I can't keep from cracking up because this is one odd turkey.

But here's the thing that's so exciting! He's on his way back to the University of Texas where he's going to complete his dissertation based on the field work he's been doing in Belize. Vampires! The guy's been observing vampires! And he's got all this field information on how they feed, and when, and where they sleep. Everything.

"The females," he says —and he's got this Texas twang, and he really lays the good-old-boy on thick so you'd never take him for a doctoral candidate— "The females, they feed first. And they say chivalry's dead, huh? Huh?" And he laughs this stupid laugh that makes me laugh too. We've moved now to this restaurant next to the mercado, and he's eating pan dulce and he's got spit flying and crumbs dropping all over his chest which is this rat's nest of hair. "During dark of the moon," he says, "that's when the little ladies feed. And most of the girls get back in before midnight, generally the pregnant or lactating ones first and then the young virgins. It's not till

between three and five in the morning that the males catch up and come wandering back in. And they say chivalry's dead, huh? Huh?"

He rears back and his two eyes zoom in and out and break up in their lenses. Then he leans across the table very dramatically. "And it's not those two sharp canine teeth they use, no! That's just Hollywood. These vampires got these sharp incisors, sharp, I mean sharp! And they use these incisors just like a razor to scoop out a wound to give a good steady flow of blood, and they lap it. Lap it, with their tongues! And the next night they come back to this very same wound and scoop off the scab with these incisors to lap at the very same hole they made the night before. The very same hole! Oh, very efficient! And they got a touch just as delicate as a butterfly, so you don't even feel it. Damn, they *are* efficient! No wonder their population is exploding!"

I'm telling Faye all this in the Jeep, laughing, and I look over and she's like a zombie. I look in the backseat. Angie's dead asleep. I say, "And so I killed him." I look over at Faye again and she doesn't say anything, just stares ahead. "I cut him into pieces and served him to the queen for lunch." Still no response.

So, what's the point? You tell me, if you know. What's a guy like me supposed to do with a woman like this? And what could I have changed? You tell me, if you know.

A couple of hours later we pull up in front of the house in Santa Cruz de K'u. Orlando's there waiting for us. "¡Señor Mark, Señor Mark!" Orlando yells. "¡Venga pronto, los vampiros!"

Vampiros. Vampires in Santa Cruz. This is what I've been waiting for.



ANGIE: Yeah, it's me, again, Angie, if you can bear it, if you can stand any more of the August family and the weird vampire guy. But you gotta listen 'cause all this stuff you gotta know. And listen to *this*, when we get to Santa Cruz de K'u it's all crazy down in the town. It's always dark down there, but this night I'll bet every kerosene lamp in every house is lit. It's kind of pretty but in this real scary way.

Orlando's all jumping up and down when we drive up to our house, and he's screaming at my dad, "¡Señor Mark, Señor Mark!" He's got this accent that breaks you up and this most beautiful black hair that's bouncing all around his face in the headlights, and his eyes are black, too, so black that you can't tell where the pupil starts, and he's just so cute you want to eat him up. But so stupid. And he goes, "¡Señor Mark, Señor Mark! ¡Venga pronto, los vampiros!" And my dad's all, let's go! And they go tearing out on foot down the hill toward town.

See, our house is on this hill right outside of town, and after the road passes us, it only goes another hundred yards or so down the hill to the church on the edge of town. I mean, Santa Cruz de K'u isn't a town at all, it's just a village, just this jumble of houses without roads or anything, just paths around the houses. But it's got this big old church, and the people from miles around come into Santa Cruz de K'u to go to this church.

Now ordinarily my dad and his vampires are the last thing in the world that I want to know more about, but as they're heading down the hill I can hear Orlando saying something about José Luis and the vampires. My mom and I look at each other, and we tear off down the hill after them.

José Luis is this little kid in town, real smart, real nice. I mean this kid you just want to take home and cuddle. And all of us loved him at first sight, even my dad, because the day we arrived in Santa Cruz de K'u, José Luis was waiting for us in the house with this big old grin and a pineapple. And every day he'd come by and bring us something different, some papayas or bananas, whatever he could find ripe in the bush. And when my dad told him that he was studying the animals in this part of the Yucatán, José Luis started bringing him specimens every day, you know bugs and frogs and reptiles and the kind of small animals a kid that age can catch. His Spanish was pretty good, and he gave my dad all the Spanish names and also the Maya names for all the specimens. Then my dad would tell him the Latin names, and damned if the kid didn't learn those too. Oh, he was smart, José Luis.

A lot smarter than Orlando, who was cute, period! My dad always said that he'd give a hundred Orlandos for one José Luis, but José Luis was too little and couldn't stay out at nights to

hunt the vampires. That's why my dad chose Orlando as what he calls his *informant*. Which was too bad for Orlando, if you ask me. It spoiled him. He'd get his pay and go right into Mérida on the bus and spend it all on his girlfriends, of which he had plenty if you could believe Orlando. And I did. I mean, the way he looked in his pants and all, he'd be pretty hard for those girls to resist. I mean, his buns?!? Well, never mind his buns, he spends plenty of time admiring his own buns. But Orlando would also spend his pay on stupid things like this portable radio that he couldn't even use in Santa Cruz de K'u because there aren't any radio stations. And it made me mad, him showing off in front of all the other people in town who were dirt poor.

So this night when my mom and I hear Orlando screaming about vampires and José Luis, we go tearing after Orlando and my dad who go tearing into town. As soon as we pass the church we begin gathering this crowd around us. It's pretty unusual to see all us gringos coming into town together anymore, especially after dark like this.

We get to José Luis's house and my dad knocks on the door. It opens a crack, and it's Bincha, José Luis's mother. She comes out, and she's real shy. They're all real shy, Maya people, real polite people, real nice, real friendly, and proud, you know, but some of the women, like Bincha, are kind of scared of gringos and never really look you right in the eye.

Bincha's got her eyes down as she comes out the door, closing it behind her. Orlando says something to her in Maya, and she says something back and shakes her head. He turns to us and grins and shrugs. He is so dumb.

My mom says in Spanish, "Orlando, is José Luis in there?"

Orlando says something more to Bincha in Maya, and she says something back, and I see my dad jerk and suddenly go all stiff like he knows what she said, only he can't speak any Maya. I mean, my dad can barely speak Spanish! The worst! But Bincha says something and my dad jerks like one of those string puppets. He goes, "Orlando, tell Bincha we want to see José Luis," but his Spanish is so bad that Orlando looks at him like, huh? So my mom says it for him. She's got real good Spanish. My mom's real good at everything.

Orlando says something to Bincha, but she kind of shakes her head, still looking down. Orlando turns back to my mom and shrugs and grins again. He is so cute and so stupid you just want to swat him.

My mom slips between Orlando and Bincha and says in Spanish, "Bincha, won't you let me see your little boy? I am his friend. Orlando tells me he is sick. I am his friend. José Luis comes to my house sometimes."

Bincha actually looks up a second, looks in my mom's eyes, but then she drops her eyes and says something in Maya. In Spanish Orlando goes, "Bincha says José Luis is better now."

Bincha turns back inside, but my mom says quick in Spanish, "Orlando, tell Bincha it is *The Winds*. Tell her I have medicine against *The Winds*."

Orlando's mouth falls open and he can't say anything, but he doesn't have to because Bincha understands. The look on her face is something! Like, oh yeah, The Winds, huh-oh, hoo-boy, whoa! She slowly opens the door to my mom and says to her in Spanish, "Entra, Señora, usted sola, entra."

"Come in. You alone, Señora, come in."

So they go in. I'm like, hey! And my dad's all, wait a minute! But my mom disappears into the hut.

So we wait outside a second, then my dad starts examining the hut, first the windows then up at the top of the wall where the thatch roof comes down and overhangs it. He's acting real agitated and he says to Orlando in Spanish, "You're sure it's vampires?" Orlando shrugs. Then my dad says in English, talking to himself, which he does all the time and drives me nuts, this crazy mumble under his breath. He goes, "Goddamit, goddamit, goddam holes, goddam vampires, goddam it." And he goes all around Bincha's house and comes back, still all goddamming everything. He's just all the time all noise. "Goddam Velasquez, goddam them all!"

My dad's always goddamming Velasquez because he doesn't take my dad seriously. Like who does? My dad's got all these theories about vampires, and Velasquez is like the King of agriculture in the Mérida area and he won't believe anything my dad says, well nobody does.

I look around at all the people who are, like, staring at my dad because the gringo's so crazy and so gringo, and my eyes land on old Señor K'u. Talk about crazy! He's what the people in Santa Cruz call the *h-men*, this like priest-shaman-witchdoctor-spook. And all the people give him great respect. But see, this is the thing about K'u and the people in Santa Cruz de K'u. When we first moved into our house up on the hill, everyone was so generous to us. They'd come by with food, all of them. Every single person in Santa Cruz de K'u. Except K'u himself. He never even came *to* our door, let alone *through* it.

My dad and I first ran into him when we came down to look in the church, and K'u was inside acting like the phantom of the cathedral or something. I mean he haunts the place, lurking around every alcove! And see, this church is so beautiful! Real old, with all this ornate trim, gold leaf, real expensive, and the people keep it in beautiful repair. It's got this huge stained glass window of the Virgin Mary with this beautiful look on her face of wonder and awe and motherhood, holding the baby Jesus in her arms, and in the background higher up is the adult Jesus hanging on the cross with drops of blood raining down from his hands and feet and head under the crown of thorns, and further in the background way at the top right Jesus emerging from the cave tomb with wings to fly away. The whole thing is done really *México*, with lots of drama and phantasmagoria and all. And when you think all this stuff, the stained glass panels, the stones, the pews, everything had to be carried miles and miles on the backs of all the people—because the dirt road didn't come in until a couple of years ago—you start thinking that every person in town is crazy. God crazy.

Or *gods* crazy. It's weird how they believe. They're Catholics, only they also keep a lot of their Maya beliefs that go way back to the pyramids and sacrifices on the altar and blood running down the steps and all that. I keep thinking how much more fun their church must be than St. Anne's back in San Francisco. But then I don't like anything about church anyway, except the music, and neither does my mom.

So I'm watching K'u playing with his beads when Bincha's door opens and my mom comes out. She's got José Luis in her arms wrapped in this really beautiful Maya blanket and I

can see his face in all these colors, and it's like death. I mean this kid is usually brown, or kind of red-brown, but now he's just yellow-gray.

My mom says quick to my dad, "We've got to get him to the hospital fast! You carry him. I'll run ahead and get the Jeep." And she puts José Luis in my dad's arms and takes off on the run.

"My God," my dad says, "there's nothing to him!" and he just stands there stock still holding José Luis.. K'u steps up and makes a few passes with his hands over José Luis and says a few words in Maya. Then he puts this big old amulet around José Luis's neck. The kid's head rolls to one side and I about faint. My heart jumps into my throat and my blood drops right out of my head and into my feet. All over the side of his face and neck are all these gouges and scooped-out pits in his skin, raw sores and scabs oozing pus and blood.

And so I just throw up. I just throw up, all over the ground. That poor little kid.



MARK: Angie sick all over the ground in front of Bincha's house, but somehow I get her to the church, and I've got J José Luis in my arms still, and Bincha and all the people are swarming around, and here comes Faye down the hill in the Jeep, driving like a champ, wheeling it around and sending up a spray of gravel. She slides across to the passenger's seat and puts out her hands for José Luis. "Here, I'll hold him. You drive."

The whole town is with us and poor Bincha is hanging back and spinning in circles like a bitch with pups, not really trusting us to take him but afraid not to let us. We put Bincha and Angie into the back seat but drop off Angie up at the house telling Crescencia to take care of her and get her to bed. Angie's making these little urps and I don't want to take her with us to Mérida because we'll probably be there all night. But there's nobody except us in Santa Cruz to drive. Hell, there are no other vehicles in Santa Cruz de K'u.

I have to take it slow on the first half of the trip because the road is dangerous. It's a dirt road in bad repair which winds for some miles along the cliffs of the coast. In the mirror I can see Bincha's face, and from the terrified look on it I figure she's never been in a moving vehicle

before, but she knows this is a matter of her boy's life, and she's given herself up to us. Once I get to the paved road into Mérida, I can speed along and I turn my attention to Faye and José Luis.

"How does he look?" I say.

"We're going to be too late. I know we are."

"What did you tell Bincha?"

"Stupid woman!"

Now, this isn't like Faye. You've got to understand that. She's always, always been this generous, kind person, always very understanding of the people in Santa Cruz de K'u and their damn peculiar ways. She's almost a saint to them. I glance in the mirror. Bincha can't understand English, but she heard her name and she heard the tone of Faye's voice. She's sullen, scared, and defiant. Faye says, "You know these Indians and their damn superstitions! All those demons and witchcraft and trash!"

I say, "What was that you said back there to her about the wind?"

She says, "The Winds, Mark. The witches are supposed to ride on —oh, Mark, it doesn't matter."

"No, damn it! What? Tell me."

"The Winds," she says, "come out of the cenotes, and the witches —I don't know, Mark! — the witches get on these Winds somehow and ride them. Evil people send them to infect you or poison you or kill you or— I don't know! They talk this kind of junk at the hospital all the time. The patients are all afraid someone's made medicine on them, even the nurses, even the doctors, all of them, like this infection of stupidity. That's all I know about it. I could just shoot Bincha! She's had him locked up in there like this for days!"

The cenotes, I think, sure, makes sense. Cenotes are havens for vampire bats. So in the people's minds, in the legends of the centuries, vampires became The Winds, sure, black wings of death flying out of the cenotes every night like witches on The Winds. Makes sense, if you're crazy.

Cenotes are large natural wells, thousands of them all over the Yucatán, some of them hundreds of feet across and hundreds of feet deep. The entire Yucatán Peninsula is a flat plain of limestone undercut by a network of subterranean water. In places the limestone has given way and fallen into the waters below, making these huge wells with walls like cliffs dropping sheer to the water and opening up into deep caves, perfect protection for the bats from all predators. Some of the pools at the bottoms of these cenotes are still unfathomed. Some of the caves are so labyrinthine they can't be explored.

The first time I stood at the rim of the Sacred Cenote at the Mayan ruins of Chichén Itzá, I understood at once why the Indians revered and feared it. I could feel the presence of the place as the wind came out of the depths and blew into my face. It chilled my guts. The story goes that sacrificial victims were thrown into this particular cenote, young virgins probably drugged out of their minds offering themselves as brides to Chac, the god of water. Whatever the truth, the Sacred Cenote has been a treasure trove for archaeologists. When they finally began dredging it, they found untold numbers of human bones along with Mayan relics from a thousand years ago, supposedly wedding gifts tossed into the cenote for the brides and their god groom. Standing on the edge of the Sacred Cenote, I knew that mysteries were here, mysteries all over the Yucatán, down the cenotes, out in the jungles, in every village, mysteries, mythologies, and superstitious terrors.

Bincha used a certain word back at her house, a Mayan word I think, *civateteo*. I had heard this word before —or these syllables— doing my field work with Orlando in the villages surrounding Santa Cruz de K'u. Orlando spoke very little Spanish, and mine wasn't so hot either, but in some of the remote villages we visited, the people spoke no Spanish at all. Probably they would call themselves mestizo, *mixed*, mixed between indio and ladino, but in some of the southernmost villages down near Quintana Roo, they seemed almost utterly untouched by Spanish influence. It was difficult enough dealing with the various Maya dialects with Orlando as interpreter, but there were also barriers of formality and hospitality, not to mention distrust of

the gringo with his white face and blue eyes and red hair. I must have looked weird to them, probably, maybe fierce, I don't know.

They would be very outgoing, friendly people when we arrived, but at Orlando's first mention of the vampires, all communication would shut down altogether. They would absolutely clam up, a physical thing with their smiles fading instantly to creases, their shoulders hunching forward, their arms coming up and crossing over their chests, their heads nodding down like they were going into a coma. But I heard this word—or words—again and again. They pronounced it like a quiet exclamation mark to put an end to the conversation with Orlando. Five short syllables, *ci-va-te-te-o*.

And now Faye provides a clue to the superstitions from the civilized hospital in Mérida. Witches on Winds coming out of the cenotes.

I say to Faye, and I've got my eyes on the mirror, watching Bincha, "Have you heard them talk of *civateteo*?" Bincha freezes. Only her eyes move, finding mine in the mirror, then looking away.

But Faye is distracted. "What's this?" she says and plucks at the leather necklace and amulet around José Luis's neck. "He wasn't wearing this in the hut."

"K'u hung it on him."

"Who?"

"K'u, the *h-men* at the church."

"Oh, Jesus!" she says.

She takes off the necklace and starts to throw it out of the Jeep, but Bincha leans over the seat and grabs it from her. Bincha starts to put it back around José Luis's neck, but Faye stops her and it becomes a regular all-out fight between them. Finally Faye pulls José Luis away from Bincha and corners herself up against the dashboard and yells at Bincha in Spanish, something about the necklace and the sores and rubbing and sangre, blood. Bincha stops a second, then pulls José Luis's hand out from the blanket and ties the leather around his wrist.

Faye tries to stop the new bleeding with a handkerchief, and while she works on him I look down at the amulet Bincha tied around José Luis's wrist. I can barely see it in the light of the dashboard. It's beautiful workmanship, a smooth jadelike stone carved on one side with a cross, a crucifix, a Catholic amulet, I suppose. I turn it over and see carved into the other side an animal's head.

I've seen this design before. It's on the stones that form the foundations of the church at Santa Cruz de K'u. Faye thinks those stones must be part of an ancient Mayan ruin and that whoever built the church leveled a small pyramid and built on top of it, one holy place on top of another. On the stones, worn away by centuries of weather, the design is hard to make out, but here on the amulet it's clean-edged and distinct. A cat of some kind, I think at first, an ocelot or jaguar with very sharp canine teeth and long, pointed ears.

Then I recognize it. *Desmodus rotundus*. The little animal that I came to the Yucatán to study. The vampire bat.



FAYE: If only Mark could hear himself, or if he merely paid attention to what he says, out loud, to the effect on other people of the things he says, but, oh, at the hospital, he could not stop talking about his bats. Every doctor, every nurse had to hear about the vampires and how the Yucatán was at greater and greater peril from the vampires, and the vampires this and the vampires that. We had a boy I deeply cared about on the edge of death, desperately needing immediate attention from supportive medical staff, and here was Mark scaring the daylights out of them, or antagonizing them, or intimidating them, or making them think he was just plain whacko.

Because of my volunteering in this hospital, I was able to short-circuit a lot of the red tape and get I.V.'s into José Luis immediately. I tended his wounds myself, cleansing them with antiseptic and bandaging them.

Bincha stood in one corner terrified, terrified of the white walls and bright lights, terrified for herself, terrified for her son. My heart went out to her. She was a victim of her own ignorance. Isolated, untaught, ignored. And she was not to blame. God was to blame. And I blamed him.

Oh, you'll think me as whacko as Mark. A scientist, ha. God, ha. He exists only when I need him, for laying blame, for the goddam way this world is, whacko. How could any just god make an innocent child so beautiful and pure as José Luis and then defile him in such a hideous way? God? Whacko.

I could hear Mark talking to Eduardo Diaz, the best of the physicians at the hospital. "Have you seen many cases like this?" Mark asked him in terrible Spanish.

"And ... who are you, Señor?"

"Mark August, the señora's husband. Have you seen wounds like these before?"

Diaz wouldn't talk. He looked at me. He trusted me. I could see he was frightened. I shrugged, not knowing how to help him. He said to Mark, "Why do you ask this, Señor?"

"Have you? I'm working with Juan Velásquez," Mark said.

"At the Departamento de Agricultura?" Clearly Diaz was impressed.

But this was a lie, really. Velásquez was having nothing to do with Mark, probably because he, like everyone else, considered Mark a raving lunatic. Mark had been brought in to control the vampires because of their threat to the livestock, but Mark's continuing insistence that vampire attacks on humans were not only happening but happening commonly and ubiquitously over the entire peninsula were not only annoying to Velásquez but an embarrassment to the Departamento and to México as a nation. Rather than work with Mark, Velásquez more often tried to evade him, wishing, no doubt, that Mark would simply disappear from the Yucatán. But now, at the mention of Velásquez, Diaz looked up from the charts on which he had been scribbling in his effort to avoid Mark, and now gave him full attention.

Mark said, "I'm here with USAID to study vampire bats and reduce their populations. We know there is an increasing problem of vampire predation among livestock, and there have been

reports of attacks on humans. But no one will talk. José Luis is the first actual case I've seen. What have *you* seen? How many?"

Diaz shushed Mark and pulled him to one side. I was busy with José Luis and couldn't catch everything he said. "Please, Señor, it is the children. They are so pure. They sleep so deeply that they do not wake." Something about scars, something about rabies, a child dying of rabies, loss of blood. "Please Señor, if there is anything you can do, and Señor Velásquez, please help." They drifted away to talk. Mark was in heaven. Someone at last to listen.

Bincha was still standing in the corner, shivering. I took her hand and led her to the bed so she could sit beside her son. She allowed me to lead her like a wild animal made docile by a deep and terrible hurt. I pulled up a chair and sat nearby.

It was late. It would be dawn soon. The hospital was strangely quiet. My mind began to drift. I let it. Until now I had kept it tightly bottled. From the moment Angie slapped the mosquito and brought me back from the copper-haired man's copper eyes with new and unwanted thoughts, I had told myself, "You will not go there. You will not."

Since I was a child, I have been able to force my mind to my will. In times of stress or pain, at the abuse of foster parents and all their hateful children, I would lie in bed at night and conjure into my mind a bubble, pink and shimmering like the one in the *Wizard of Oz* that the beautiful witch travels in. I would make the bubble grow larger and larger until it filled all my vision, and then I would merely step inside the bubble, safe and warm.

The first time I can remember conjuring this bubble was when I was traveling with one of the foster families —I can't remember now which one; you would think I could remember, particularly now; but I can't— and we visited a caverns, a huge caverns. How well I remember. The entrance was small, a mere slash in the rock face so small that the fat man with us could barely squeeze through. Oh yes, it was Mr. Grimes, I remember now. Mr. and Mrs. Grimes. So I must have been six or seven. And fat Gary Grimes, age nine and a little son of a bitch.

The caverns were wondrous, a series of chambers each lit by hidden lighting. I found all the secret lights, hidden behind rocks, and I got in trouble, of course, for climbing all over the

rocks when they had warned us in no uncertain terms to stay on the paths. The chambers were all very different from each other, and they had names: Chamber of Fantasy, Ice Palace, Grotto of Monsters. In the Grotto of Monsters, behind one of the rocks off the path, I found a small hole and slipped into it, thinking it was just a cubby hole and wouldn't it be fun for me to hide from the family. But the hole opened up at the top into a very low tunnel that I found I could squeeze into, and along. And after crawling several yards —and now I was in total blackness— my hand in front of me, as I was crawling, fell away into nothingness and I only barely caught myself from falling by digging my heels into the ceiling of the tunnel. I had made a little scream when I fell forward and it echoed back at me for several seconds, like a live thing, changing. I held my breath and listened until the echoes stopped, and there was nothing but silence, a vast, black silence. I was at the edge of something enormous, and empty. Then, in the far distance I could hear a soft dripping. Then I could hear dripping all around me, high above me on ledges, it seemed, and deep below me in pools. It was so lovely and peaceful and cool and black.

I heard them calling my name, back up the tunnel behind me. Of course I would not go back. And so I imagined the pink bubble of the beautiful witch and grew it and grew it until it filled the entire cavern, full of light, and I was about to stand and step into the bubble when someone grabbed me by the foot and pulled me screaming backwards out the tunnel. It was a ranger. Of course, I was punished.

But I kept the bubble and used it often after that at the various harassments by my various foster brothers and sisters as I was passed on from one family to another, labeled more and more surely *a troublemaker* and *a sulky girl*, yes, an insular girl with her own private pink bubble.

And so, in the grip of the naked man's stare, up in his window at the Hotel Colonial, the bubble came of a volition almost not my own —it was so automatic— and I stepped into it. As Mark drove away from that window in the Hotel Colonial, with its unworldly inhabitant, I stepped into my bubble.

Or so I have supposed ... since then. I must have had some sort of protection, I know now, because this was an incredibly powerful mind and will that had just entered my life. But all I

knew at the time was that in the grip of this strange... naked...ness ... this naked man's naked stare, strange images were suddenly flung before my mind's eye, images I could not identify, images I could not even claim as my own. Dark rooms opened one upon another, connected by labyrinths of darkness, but with brilliant, tiny things like little stars casting a cold, comfortable little light. Little dark rooms with little bright lights. I liked it. I feared it. I wanted it.

But as Mark had driven the Jeep farther and farther away from the hotel and deeper into the stillness of the jungle, I was able more and more to reassert my will, as though diminishing a magnetic pull that I would not let get the best of me.

Arriving in Santa Cruz de K'u we were immediately taken up with José Luis and Bincha, and there was no time either for thought or thought-control. In the Jeep on the trip back to Mérida, and in the hospital, my mind was still riveted on the child, getting help for the child and doing everything to save his tiny, fragile life.

Now, however, in the white stillness of the hospital just before dawn, waiting —the Hotel Colonial so near, the copper-haired man's room just across the narrow street in this darkest hour — the strange images wove their way back into my mind and I stretched and allowed myself to wander among them, finding new pathways and tunnels in the labyrinth, exciting, fearful pathways that opened up darkly before me until, suddenly, without warning, I homed in on the man himself, waiting for me.



CONSTANTIN: You are never so weak as during the first and last hour. You must attempt nothing in the first or last hour.

And yet this woman made me ravenous. The smell of her. I knew at once she was Ilona's blood, of the lineage of the she-brat of Ilona and Johannes, a long line of contamination, now ended here in this woman. The smell of her.

But it was the first hour. Attempt nothing.

And then in the last hour, she was back. I had used up the night searching the city for her. The hunger on me, I had taken a whore. You must take a whore only when there is nothing else. A whore is safe because they do not come looking for a whore. But a whore is dangerous because she will have been used by too many malignant men. The malignancies permeate a whore's blood and being.

I was vomitous with bad blood in the last hour, and that is when this woman came to me again, into the caverns, searching for me.

But next, came the sun.

End of Disk 1 — (81:46 minutes)

It will have blood, they say:
Blood will have blood.

Macbeth III.4.122
William Shakespeare

DISK 2 — (69:37 minutes)

Blood of Children

ANGIE: "Such a gorgeous day! And such a gorgeous place to be buried!"

"Yeah, if you've got to *be* buried."

That's my dad. That's my mom. And they're at it again. Each other's throat.

"Goddam it, Faye, can't you leave it!" my dad says through his teeth. "Can't you just leave it even now!"

I mean he's doing it as bad as she is! It never used to be like this. I've always considered us a lovely family. That's what my grandma always says, "Angie, yours is a lovely family, but..."

"...but!" That's my grandma.

But my dad's been really weird since coming to the Yucatán to kill vampires, and my mom's been really weird, maybe always, but especially since seeing that naked guy in Mérida. And now they're both weird squared. And I'm thinking we're on our way to divorce court. Why can't grownups just grow up!

I look out at the ocean. We're standing on the cliffs by the little cemetery in Santa Cruz de K'u, and the ocean is so beautiful it looks like out of a beer commercial. Pale blue! You've never seen water like they've got in the Yucatán, and white beaches, but the sun, God!

It's Sunday and we're at José Luis's funeral along with everybody-in-México else. I mean, Santa Cruz de K'u is this little town on the edge of nowhere and José Luis is this little boy, so like how many friends can he have already? So then, who the hell are all these people?

And boring?

Old K'u is presiding over the ritual and he's doing everything like five times, then taking two steps backward and turning in circles and doing it all over again. And everything's in Maya, and K'u is muttering under his breath so you can't understand anything. But all these people are stock-stone still and breathless watching him.

José Luis is on this table set up on this mound near this open grave, and he's decked out like a rich boy. I mean, where did Bincha come up with the money for this? None of these people have any money. They're all farmers and make hammocks out of henequen and little dolls and cloth and junk to sell in the market in Mérida. I mean, I'm looking around this little village cemetery at all these ornate monuments and tombstones and decorations, and I'm thinking these people get into death in a big way.

I remember when we stopped in Guanajuato on the way down to the Yucatán and my mom's looking at the guidebook and she goes, "Oh, how interesting, they've got a mummy museum here," and so we've all got to go see these mummies. I mean, a whole museum with nothing but mummies in it, like hundreds of them! My mom and dad are like, "Ooh!" right in the face of these mummies, and they corner the guide, my dad trying to get him to explain just what minerals and just what salts in the soils of Guanajuato account for this mummification, and my mom trying to get him to explain again just why these bodies were dug up to begin with. And get this. The families didn't keep up their installment payments on the graves, so the mummies were evicted!

And then their poor little dried up bodies were brought to this museum and put in glass cases for tourists! For entry fees! And all of them with their mouths, every one of them, wide open like they died screaming. So real looking, yet so unreal, yet so real, dead. Some of them had boots on and nothing else, all the clothes rotted off so that you could see the remains of their pubic hair, even. This one man you could even see the foreskin on his penis, like wrinkled leather.

Most of the mummies, though, were not men but women, which tells you something about how much they value their women in that town, they don't even make the payments on their graves! In this one glass case were these twin little girls, still with their party dresses on, leaning up against each other, one's eyes closed and the other's eyes just gone, just open, empty, and their mouths pulled back like they died crying for their mommy and stayed preserved like that forever.

I didn't want my mom and dad to see me crying so I got away over to this corner where there was this upright coffin with a woman inside who looked from the size of her stomach like she had died pregnant. And screaming. I talked with her for quite a while and gave her the name Silencia, which I thought she would appreciate. I told her that I knew her soul was at peace in spite of the fact that her body was eternally screaming right here for everyone to watch. Just then this flash went off and I turned to see that this Méxicanito tourist had taken my picture with Silencia! I was so surprised and mortified that I started screaming too. I mean, what kind of ghoul would want a picture of this gringa teenager with a mummy!

See, I have this problem with screaming. When my mind gets, like, blown out of my head I start screaming and can't stop.

I don't remember my mom getting me out of the mummy museum, but I do know that my dad managed to buy the roll of film from the Méxicanito tourist for a lot of money, taking his address and promising to send him the other pictures when they were developed, but not the one of me. When those pictures came back, you bet I was the first to open the envelope because I wanted to see that picture. Turns out the guy is a horrible photographer and he cut me off right down the center, with my mouth dropped open in surprise. But there was Silencia, screaming, but looking kind of beautiful in an awful way. I decided to keep that picture forever.

Now, at José Luis's funeral as I'm remembering that picture, I realize how poor Bincha looks like Silencia, standing next to José Luis's body, looking down into his face, her mouth wide open in silent pain as she presses a handkerchief against it. It's as terrible to watch her now as it was when my dad and mom brought her back to Santa Cruz de K'u with poor dead little José Luis clutched to her chest. Then she wasn't silent but screaming out loud and tearing her hair and clawing at her face. I mean, I never saw emotions like this, so out of her head and out of her body. I mean, this was the first time. This is when I first knew for sure how bad life sucks.

But this day in the cemetery Bincha's like petrified, like petrified ash, like the mummies. I can't even watch her because she makes me hurt so bad inside. And I can't watch José Luis because he was such a sweet kid and now his body's lying there empty of him, and his face is

like a polished stone mask, and the worms and bugs are going to be eating him. And I can't watch my mom and dad because they're being so jerky. And I can't stand watching K'u. So I turn my head out to the ocean, over to Cabeza del Perro, the point of land up behind our house. It looks from here exactly like a dog's head, which I guess is why they call it Cabeza del Perro, which is Spanish for head of the dog. I'd like to go sit between the dog's ears and watch the ocean all around and listen to the wind. From there, because of the way the point juts north out into the bay you can see the sun both rise and set over the water.

Cabeza del Perro, that's where I'd like to be, but I'm standing instead in this circle of people with the sun getting hotter and hotter, beating down on my black dress and black hat, and I start to get dizzy, and my sweat drips into my eyes, burning them. I shake my head and my eyes rattle and the sweat goes whipping off my face. Through the sweat I can see Orlando over on the other side of José Luis where he's lying on the table, and Orlando's making these eyes at me the way Mexican men do. (If you ever go to México you'll know what I mean.) And I'm trying to pretend like I don't see because it's not right for poor José Luis that Orlando's over there flirting with me over his dead body. But Orlando's so cute that it breaks me up just thinking about it.

So I look back at Cabeza del Perro and try not to laugh. But this big laugh just escapes right out of my mouth. I mean, it's like a snort because as soon as I feel it start to come out, I clamp my teeth together which forces it through my nose. So this is even worse because I blow snot right onto the ground. So I put my head down and start feeling in my pockets for a handkerchief. I mean, I am mortified! Laughing and blowing snot at José Luis's funeral!

So this makes me laugh again, another snort. I bite my lip so hard that I can taste blood, and I put my hand over my mouth to hide it, but I can't stop laughing. So I put my other hand up to cover all my face, and my dad thinks I'm crying for José Luis, so he puts his arm around my shoulder and says, "It's okay, Angel, he's in heaven now," and this like sends me into convulsions, and I start laughing right out of my gut, which gets me all choked up and heaving until suddenly I think I'm going to die right here and now, and they're going to have to bury me in the same grave with José Luis, which makes me snort again, so that now I can't get my breath

and it starts to hurt inside my chest and I suddenly realize that this is serious stuff and that I may give myself a heart attack. I can feel the blood pounding in my temples, and this is God striking me dead for laughing at José Luis's funeral.

These black spirals start spinning in front of my eyes, and in the center of the spirals I see K'u looking at me. He leans down, picks up the shovel, walks straight at me. Then when he gets on the mound side by side with José Luis's body, he stops, turns to the people all around, shouts, "¡Dios protégenos del vampiro!" swings the shovel back, over his shoulder, over his head, around and down and whack, and then again whack, and then again whack, and then again whack, until splat! José Luis's head falls on the ground and comes rolling down the mound right at me ... right at me ... right at *me!*



FAYE: Angie screamed the entire climb up the hill from the cemetery to the house, a piercing, hysterical scream that drilled into my head. I took her out of Mark's arms, and he gave her over to me easily.

You will think me ineffectual and maternally resourceless, but I could find no words to comfort or calm her. I suppose that doesn't matter any more, but it has always mattered. Angie is my baby; a mother takes care of her baby; first, last, a mother takes care of her baby.

"Shhh, baby, shhh," I said to her. I said other things like, "It's okay," ineffectual, maternally resourceless things. I brushed the hair back from her sweating forehead and kissed it, knowing that inside that skull was etched forever the image of the human horror out in the cemetery, the people's faces, not horrified but set and grim, enduring the hacking of the shovel on that little neck without so much as a wince among them. Except Bincha, of course, the mother watching her baby mutilated; Bincha was indescribable.

"Everything will be all right," I kept saying aloud to Angie as I kept asking myself how anything could be right ever again when a society stands by and watches its priest hack off the head of their precious little boy.

I had to pull Angie forcibly away from José Luis's head as she screamed into his face. I had to drag her up the hill and into the house. She kept trying to push me away from her. Where was Mark, I kept thinking. In her bedroom at last she stopped the screaming and broke into a paroxysmal sobbing that frightened me in its violence. She threw her arms around me and clutched me so tightly that I had to fight her back to get a breath. I gripped her right arm and pried it loose from around me, but I had to strain to hold it away from my body. I never suspected she had grown so strong.

"Shhh," I kept whispering until she calmed enough that her straining arm slowly went slack and her grip around my waist loosened. I stroked her head until her sobs subsided into soft hiccups. I looked for a blanket to pull around us, but we had had hot nights, and there were only the sheets on the bed.

My mind was a vacuum, my thoughts sucked up and whirled away and lost before I could grasp them. What had happened in the cemetery seemed as insubstantial as a dream, as though I might wake and it would never have happened. Even Angie, finally quiet in my arms, began to seem and feel unreal, like a lump of warm, quivering mass that was not flesh, or human, or in any way my little girl at all. And, holding her, I leapt suddenly in my mind back to the dream I'd had the night before. It was a baby dream.

I hadn't had a baby dream in many years, those frantic baby dreams where there was always a baby crying somewhere. If I was in a house, the crying baby would be in another room, and I would go searching for it, but all the doors would be locked. Or the crying baby might be on one bank of a stream, and I would be on the other, and when I tried to go down the bank, it would become steeper and rockier and more dangerous, and the stream —when I would finally reach it— would grow wider and deeper and the current more and more fierce. And the baby would cry on and on. Frightening, exhausting dreams.

But this dream, from the night before José Luis's funeral, had the most lovely baby in it, and it wasn't crying, but asleep, and it was in its mother's arms, and she was as lovely as the baby, and sleeping, too. I was somewhere high above them —I was flying, yes, which was not

uncommon in my dreams, but now hovering, which was new to me— hovering above the baby in the arms of its mother, lying on a shallow hillside, and they were Indians, dressed indio, and I hovered nearer and nearer to them until I could quite distinctly discern the fine pores in the soft skin of the baby's face. And then I covered both mother and baby with my wings, and all was black and pink, with a sensation of warmth that was like ... it was like when you wet the bed, and there is that sudden, lovely flow of warmth, but only at first, of course, because when you wet the bed it quickly becomes cold and nasty. But with the Indian baby, the flow never became nasty, but only lovely, and warm, and pulsing softly, and when I pulled up and away from the baby, I found that it was —still lovely, yes, but now— old, a shriveled, little, old baby, and just as lovely as when it had been plump.

I realized later, of course, that this was not a dream at all. It was some sort of connection. But that morning I never imagined it as anything but a dream, and I remembered flying away ... in the dream ... very happy.

"Where was the blood?" Angie muttered, still in my arms.

I said, "What?"

"When he cut off José Luis's head. There should have been blood."

"Don't think about it, honey," I said. "His heart wasn't beating, it wasn't pumping the blood, don't think about it."

"Did you hear what he said? When he did it? About the vampire?"

"Just forget about it, Angie. It doesn't matter. You better? Let's see." I swept the hair back from her forehead and tried to look into her eyes, but they were so dilated that all I could see was the pupil of each, and she was obsessed by the question.

"Dios, protegenos del vampiro. God, protect us from the vampire. He said vampire. Not vampires."

"Did he? You want some cocoa?" Cocoa usually worked. Hot cocoa, that's what Mother gives.

As I pulled her off the bed, she looked down and gasped. The white sheets and her dress and legs were red with wet blood. I gasped too. Still gripped by the horror in the cemetery, it took me a moment to realize where the blood had come from. Angie's long-awaited period had returned with a vengeance.

Her first period had come almost a year ago, I would say, toward the beginning of her thirteenth year, and after that her next several periods had been regular and without problem. She had even welcomed them because she felt that at last she was changing from child to adult. I had made sure to talk with her many times about periods and hormones and the changes she would undergo, and she seemed fully prepared. But as her breasts developed and her hips began filling out, she became acutely self-conscious, called herself fat, wore baggy outfits, put herself on a strict diet. She became a vegetarian, would not eat any type of animal products, only grains and fruits. I tried to convince her that these changes were natural in a girl's body at this age, but she was sure she was going to be as fat as poor Mary Pettifore down the street. Perhaps because of the diet, or perhaps because of our coming to the Yucatán not too long after, her periods stopped. I wasn't particularly concerned as I knew that a girl's first menstruations are likely to be irregular. But as the months went by, I did become worried. Angie was beside herself, thinking she was already a freak, and now probably a *hermadite*, as she said, meaning hermaphrodite.

That her period should come back at this moment of supreme trauma surprised me. Certainly the trauma could not have caused the period, though it was conceivable trauma might have brought it on early. I could see on Angie's face renewing horror as she looked at the blood. I tried to ward off another attack of hysteria. "Boy!" I laughed, "you sure have a hell of a timing!" The laugh worked rather better than I hoped as it evoked from Angie a giggle so shrill and prolonged that it hurt my ears.

"What a mess!" she squealed.

There was so much blood it was alarming. Her dark dress hid it, but on the white sheets the blood spread rapidly and showed red and voluminous. I helped Angie out of her dress and pulled the sheet from the bed and gave it to her to wipe herself up.

I laughed again. "You know," I said, "my first time, I didn't even know what it was. No one even told me."

"Mrs. Dodd didn't even tell you?" She squealed, so near hysterics again.

Mrs. Dodd was our private little joke. Mrs. Dodd was perhaps the best of the foster parents I had lived with, a good woman, I know, but a peculiar woman. We endured each other the longest of any of the fosters, through most of my teenage years, and I owe her very much for that almost-safe harbor.

"Oh, Mrs. Dodd," I said, and Angie said with me, "Poor Mrs. Dodd," and we laughed. Again I smoothed the damn hair away from her forehead, kissed her, and massaged both her temples. She was calming nicely, nicely gaining control again. "Oh, I guess Mrs. Dodd thought the fosters before had explained it all to me. I guess they all thought that. Or hoped they had. It was poor Mrs. Dodd who got stuck with the real thing when I got my first period."

"What happened?" Angie said, and she hiccupped; it was so sweet.

"Well, you know, poor Mrs. Dodd *never* talked about anything that happened *down there*. In fact, I don't think poor Mrs. Dodd even *HAD* a *down there*." Angie laughed; I knew she would. "I didn't know what to do. I thought I was bleeding to death, so I put on a Band-Aid!"

"You're lying!"

Oh, how well she knew me.

"There was so much blood I couldn't get it to stick!" We both laughed. Yes, she was calming very nicely.

It seems to me I used to laugh, quite a lot. I remember once laughing so hard I fell out of bed. Mark fell out on top of me. He couldn't get his erection back all night. It was just so funny. The sex was so funny. And so fun. The smell of him. That was fun to laugh like that.

Angie had cleaned up most of the blood but there was one thin, bright rivulet which ran down her leg and reached her ankle. She said, "You didn't either, do that with the Band-Aid." But there was a question mark, too.

"No," I said. "I used the bed sheet, just like you." I lent a hand with one end of the sheet. I chuckled. "You should have seen the look on Mrs. Dodd's face, though."

I remembered it perfectly. Poor Mrs. Dodd. The old lady was horror-stricken, guilt-stricken, just plain stricken. She had taken me into her house out of Christian duty, had given me food and discipline out of Christian duty, and she knew that out of Christian duty she should have prepared me for these aspects of growing up. But even then, as I sat there on the bed, bloody and crying, she could not bring herself to sit down with me and talk. She threw onto the bed a box of Kotex and practically ran up the hall. Poor Mrs. Dodd.

"Well," I said to Angie, complimenting myself what a good lesson this all was, "growing up means leaving some things behind. That day I left behind a little innocence, a lot of fear, and the faith and comfort that grownups know what they're doing."

"Oh, Mom, get over yourself." Angie has never let me get away "with that shit" as she calls my didactic mothering. Now in her bathrobe she pointed to the sheets, dress and panties on the floor. "What do we do with all that?" It was a truly breathtaking volume of blood to have lost so rapidly yet, incredibly, the flow seemed to have stopped as quickly as it had begun. Angie was already putting a mini-pad in place.

I said to her, "Angie, I don't think that will be sufficient."

She said, "No, it's stopped. Like God plugged it up again. What a pain! And I'm going to have to put up with this all my life? It's just so gross!"

I took up the bloody things from the floor, but I felt a sudden twinge of disgust that surprised and embarrassed me. "Here, I'll clean them up," I said. "You go get a bath."

I opened the door just as Mark was passing by in the courtyard. He saw the sheets in my hands and came closer to look. "Where'd all that blood come from?" he said.

Angie was mortified. "Dad!" she screamed—that piercing scream—and pushed him back out the door and slammed it. Mark threw it open again so violently that I thought it would break off the hinges. He grabbed Angie by the arm and twirled her around to face him.

"Don't you ever slam the door in my face!" he shouted.

"Mark, stop it!" I shouted over him and put myself between them. I don't think I had ever seen him so angry. He backed off, releasing Angie's arm, and I could see in his face that he had shocked himself. The smell of blood on the sheets came rank and nauseatingly up between us, and Mark recoiled.

Angie threw herself onto the bed, pulling the pillow over her head. "Get him out, Mom! Get him out!"

"Come on, let's go," I said to Mark.

He resisted a little, looking like a foolish child. "Well, what's going on in here that I can't see?"

I pulled him out the door and shut it behind us. "Don't be so stupid, Mark. Where do you imagine the blood came from? She's got her period again, that's all." I headed across the courtyard to the kitchen to wash out the sheets.

"She'll be okay," I said to him over my shoulder. "Leave her alone."



MARK: "Don't be stupid, leave her alone." You hear those words, you want to get an ax. Or something. I don't know.

How many times had I heard it this past year? All these new secrets Angie shares with her mother, giggling together, whispering. And if I try to join in, if I ask what's so funny, Angie makes one of her sarcastic remarks she thinks are so clever. Or she breaks out crying for no reason, and Faye says, "Leave her alone." So then I try to keep out of their way. Then I'm "uncaring" of course. They're a team now —Faye and Angie, Angie and Faye— and there's no winning against them.

When I think back on the way Angie and I used to play together, and roughhouse all over the rug and play piggyback and ride-a-little-horsey, it makes me wish she would always stay a little girl. And when I think about the way Faye and I used to play, it makes me almost wish ... that ... Angie was never born. She changed everything.

Now, standing outside the door and listening to Angie in there crying, I watch Faye's back as she crosses the courtyard and disappears into the kitchen. And the courtyard is empty except for me. This beautiful courtyard. For me, this courtyard has meant, as nothing else, a new life in a new home, a new life where we might find again some happiness, some sense of family at home.

Faye fell in love with the courtyard the moment she saw it, when we first opened the "great doors" —as we laughingly called them because they're huge and ornately carved— such beautiful doors to this beautiful house high on a hill overlooking a cove leading out to the Gulf of México. Who built this house, and why and for whom, we wondered. The lush green of the banana trees in the courtyard garden and the colors in the hundreds of flowers smacked us in the face. The sunlight glistened off the red tiles of the interior roofs as water from a recent rain still dripped from them into the garden. The four long corridors along each side of the courtyard were dark and cool beneath the roofs, the tall doorways to the many rooms inviting us to come in and make ourselves at home. All three of us stood together in that moment, beholding this beautiful courtyard, and we held onto each other's waists, simply taking it all in. "How lovely!" Faye said, using that lovely murmur that comes out of her only when she is suddenly confronted with truly lovely things.

Now I follow her across the courtyard and stop in the kitchen doorway to watch her as she dumps the bloody sheets and clothes into buckets of water and starts working at them with a bar of hand soap. Faye's answer to all problems, hand soap. I wonder how it's possible that even scrubbing panties this woman is so goddam ethereal, so beautiful that she crushes my chest and pierces my heart and leaves me panting.

"Sorry," she says without looking at me. She swishes the water idly, then returns to scrubbing. "But Christ, Mark, can't you just show a little sensitivity some time."

"Yeah, yeah, I'm sorry too, Faye. I see my wife and kid covered with blood, I think maybe one of them is hurt, maybe I should help, and I'm such an insensitive asshole, sorry!"

I wait for her to come back at me, but she just keeps on scrubbing, beginning that little tuneless whistle that comes out of her head when she withdraws into it. And I'm all alone again. Then Crescencia comes up behind me and whispers at me and nods, trying to slip by me in the doorway. She's changed out of her formal huipil from the funeral and back into her working huipil. Orlando's tagging along behind her like a hot pup after a bitch in heat, still in his city suit and arching his neck and back because he thinks he looks so good.

"¡Señora, que pasó!" Crescencia cries when she sees the blood. Faye tells her and Crescencia blushes. The pure dark skin of her face turns a chocolaty red. Orlando's eyes bug out of his head as he scopes the bloody panties. Faye asks them to draw more buckets of water from the well and they leave, Orlando brushing up against Crescencia and cooing into her ear.

"Orlando," I yell after them, "take it outside!" He can't understand the words but he knows what I mean. I've told him before about that sexy Latino macho shit, strutting like a goddam cock among hens. He wasn't like that at first, but I made the mistake of taking him with me to México City, and I guess he picked up some tricks in the zócalo, because since he's been back, he's all clicks and clucks and goo-goo eyes. Well, not in my house, not where Angie can see and hear.

I look back at Faye. She's pissed at me. So what's new? But she keeps whistling the same tuneless tune under her breath, building up steam. She'll blow soon, and there'll be hell to pay. So what's new?

I had hoped the Yucatán would change her, somehow give her back some joy of life. She had been dying in Berkeley, a slow death. Me too. I always tried to be understanding, and sometimes it was a big stretch. I gave her room, all through the years, stretched every way I could to accommodate her goddam genius strapped tight into this family trap of ours. She had to give up medical school when she got pregnant. So what? It happens to a lot of women. Goddam it, it happened to me; I quit with her. But I thought she'd go back after Angie was born. I encouraged her to go back; in fact, it was the deal we made. First we'd get married, then to pay the hospital bills and start the family I'd drop out and get a job —teaching goddam sophomore

biology in Oakland, for Christ's sake— but the plan was that Faye would enroll again in the fall semester.

But no, then she decided she had to be the world's best mother, and daycare wasn't good enough. So then the plan was she'd go back after Angie was in school, but no, then she decided she needed time off to "redirect" herself.

And the years went by. God, the years went by. Ha! That's gone, I guess.

And Faye stagnated. You could see it happening, see it on her face, that vacant, absorbed look, a book in her hand —always a book in her hand— escaping out of this world into any other. That fun she used to have, that joy she got out of plain, everyday living was gone, who knows where or how? I couldn't get her to go anywhere or do anything. All she'd want to do was read. What was in her head? Who could say?

What she really needed, I knew, was work. In med school she was an exemplar, for Christ's sake, both for the women and the men. All our teachers at Berkeley fully expected she'd go on to win the Nobel Prize or something. To be honest, I knew when I dropped out that it was just as well; I didn't have the guts or talent to be a doctor. I think Faye knew that too. But Faye did have talent. She would have made a terrific, caring, bright doctor. She loved science. She loved the work. She lived on the work.

So what happened to her? Why did she settle? So what do I know about women? I went to see my mother. Even so far as my mother. I remember that trip across the Bay Bridge into San Francisco, wondering how to put it to my mother, these questions about my wife. My mother's never been a receptive woman; she keeps her thoughts to herself, her opinions, her love. I went up the steps to the front porch of the old Victorian where I had grown up. She'd had it newly painted and redecorated. My dad was dead. It was the house of a stranger. My mother opened the door. She was the mother of a stranger. She offered me tea. I hate tea. We sat in the living room looking out over the bay. The Campanile at U. C. Berkeley stood erect way the other side of Coit Tower. I could picture Faye sitting in our sun room facing us across the bay. Reading.

My mother waited for me to come out with it. She would never ask, no. She would never be the one to seek me out. I didn't know what to say. I said did she notice anything funny with Faye. She asked what did I mean. Jesus, Mom, give me a hand! I said Faye was just kind of lackluster, kind of vague, and what did my mother think about that. She just looked at me. I wanted to shake her until her false teeth rattled in her head. Mom, come on, you're a woman, aren't you? You know these things, don't you? But I kept steady, kept pulling, kept searching. I asked if maybe Faye was going through some kind of stage, some kind of hormones maybe, and maybe my mom went through it too, and could she maybe give me some ideas?

You've got to know my mom. She never comes out and says anything direct, but she knows how to lead you to infer ... infer maybe from out of ... maybe ... nothing. I told her I was worried about Faye's sanity. She said she didn't think it was her sanity. I asked her what then. She asked me where Faye went when I was at work. I said nowhere. She said how did I know. I asked what was she getting at. She said where did I imagine Faye might go.

Imagination, it's a devil. Once you start it, where does it end? A woman is dissatisfied with her life. Where might she go? What kind of man might she pick? Somebody like me? Or somebody utterly different? What would he be like in bed? What was his body like, how big was he, how hard did he get it? What kind of things would he do to her? And how would she like it? Where would they meet? Where would he take her? His place? What was it like? How did he live?

I don't remember what I said to my mother, how I got out of there, how I got home. But as the days went on and the months went by, I grew sure that my mother was right. It was the only thought in my head. Okay, there was another man. But I could never find any real evidence of him. I'd come home early from work, looking to find her with him, but she would be there alone, with a book in her hands, or writing on scattered sheets of paper. She claimed it was going to be a novel, but she wouldn't let me read any of it until she was finished. I got a glance at some pages once. It wasn't a novel, and it was never going to be finished. There were no characters, no story. It was nothing but strings of words, philosophical ramblings that weren't even very

profound and followed no coherent path. Mathematics, the universe, the Bible, Shakespeare, Nietzsche all jumbled together. I worried about her sanity. And yet she acted sane. She maintained.

Paramountly clear, I was not giving her the life she needed, and neither was Angie. I was growing desperate. Even if she was having an affair, I didn't want to lose her. I looked around for something to give our marriage back the charge that we used to have together.

Sex, which had always been so great with her, so comfortable and fun and full, now became a disaster. Trying to figure out what she wanted from this other guy, I started trying new techniques and going back to the old tricks that had fallen by the wayside of years and intimacy and silliness. At first she laughed and said what's up? And I laughed back. She was even game for some of the inventions, even enjoyed some. For a while. Some she tolerated. For a while. Then she'd get mad. What was I doing, she wanted to know. She liked it the way it used to be, she said. But we couldn't go back now to the way it used to be. Pretty dreadful, the human mind, the human body, human hangups. I couldn't take us back to where we were. And she closed off. And I closed off. And all desire was gone.

But I loved her, loved my family, and wanted above all to keep us together. I went to my mother again, tried to be straight. She was a woman, goddam it, couldn't she tell me something I could use. She asked if I didn't think a move might be good, a new and exotic locale far away. It wouldn't have to be permanent, only long enough for Faye to get over this guy. Only my mother didn't say anything about the guy. My mother never actually mentioned this other guy, never let on that she was the one who had put the idea about the other guy in my head to begin with. But the whole premise of the talk depended upon another guy, getting Faye away from this other guy.

A move? Maybe I could arrange a job swap? Maybe some biology teacher in some high school in maybe Hawaii, maybe Alaska or Europe or New Zealand, maybe would jump at the chance to come live in the Bay Area for a year. I took the idea to Faye. How would she like that? She just smiled that damn vague smile and said, "Maybe."

Then I came across this article, lost in the back pages of *The Chronicle*. There were unconfirmed reports of vampire bats attacking humans in the Yucatán. It sounded funny. It caught my imagination. The guy quoted from USAID had a familiar name, Wesley McFarlane, an old professor of mine. I decided to get in touch, got his number, gave him a call. He remembered me, although to be truthful I think he had me confused with Mike Angle, who was a much brainier type than myself. McFarlane was very convivial, charmed that I had seen his name and called him. I asked him if they were recruiting biologists to work on vampire control in the Yucatán. In fact they were "beginning to lean in that direction," were "putting together some thoughts along that line," were "formulating a game plan." In short, nothing was going to happen unless someone made it happen. I brushed up my curriculum vitae, which in fact had not changed in fifteen years, and shot it off to him. But first I went to the University of California and did some quick research. There had been a few isolated vampire attacks on humans this century in places like Trinidad, but nothing substantive. I decided to up the ante. I included with the curriculum vitae a ten page paper "to be published soon in a major journal" detailing the "dire effect on vampire predation of the great swine flu epidemic in Central America." Pigs were the vampire bats' primary host; ergo, after the pigs were wiped out, the bats had to look elsewhere for food, "translocating" to cattle, horses, chickens, and finally ... yes, finally to human beings. First reports of human attacks in the Yucatán were now coming in; ergo, a vampire eradication program was "urgently needed."

McFarlane liked it. I think it must in turn have raised *his* ante somewhere in the echelons of USAID, a notch up in the pecking order, and in very little time indeed, USAID was prepared to offer me a fine if not whopping salary, transportation and moving expenses for my family, a house with an electric generator, a maid, an informant, a Jeep and all the equipment I needed, mist nets, poison, tools. I would work within the guidelines and with the approval of México's Departamento de Agricultura.

It was too beautiful, too right to be true. The Yucatán, a tropical paradise, beautiful beaches. Angie would love it. She had already begun taking Spanish in school; now she could

put it to work. We'd find a school for her in Mérida. Only Faye. I called the hospital in Mérida, gave them Faye's credentials and her medical school records. They said they would love to have her as a volunteer.

Only then, when I had all the details in place, did I put the idea in front of Faye. I wanted so bad for her to say yes, to get as excited about it as I was, to giggle with it the way she used to. I chose the time very carefully. I made love to her first. And it was good this time. It was very good between us, almost like it used to be. And then I told her about the Yucatán, my job, her job, the school for Angie. She was quiet a long time, so quiet that I thought she had fallen asleep. Then she said, "Why not?"

Strange, that tone. Disappointed? I wondered. I wondered if maybe the guy was out of the picture, if that's why she just said, yeah, okay, why not. After sixteen years of marriage, I still couldn't fathom the least depth of her mind.

Now I stand and watch her as she sits in the kitchen on a low stool in front of a pail on the floor, whistling as she washes sheets in bloody water and scrubs panties, Angie's panties, Angie's blood, the water in the pail splashing red onto the red tiles of the floor. It makes me shiver. Angie's woman blood. My little girl bleeding a woman's blood. My wife washing my little girl's woman blood out of her woman's panties.

"What shit are these thoughts!" I think, and I get sick to my stomach. Angie and Faye together, and me on the outside. I think I'm going to heave. The tuneless whistle, the same damn four notes, pierces my head like an ice pick, her whistle of boredom and distilling aggravation, her slow penning up of emotions until when does she blow?

I want to hurt her for not being satisfied and for making me ache with wanting to please her. I say to her, "Wouldn't you like to know what they did with José Luis?"

"I saw what they did with José Luis!"

"After that. Wouldn't you like to know what they did with José Luis after K'u took off his head?"

She trembles. She starts on the other sheet, scrubs it against itself in the water, the clotty blood smearing into the fabric. "No," she says. "I would not like to know anything about that. If that memory could erase itself from every cell of my brain, I'd roll over and say a prayer of thanks."

"They cut him into pieces," I say this, almost enjoying it now. "They cut off his legs first, then his arms, then the fingers from his hands, then his genitals."

She doesn't say anything, just clamps her eyes shut and leans forward onto her hands in the bucket of bloody water. I'm too angry at her to keep anything back that might hurt. "They sliced his penis away from his testicles. They took all the parts, the head, the body, the two legs, the two arms, the ten fingers, the testicles, and the penis, and they put them onto separate piles of wood in a big circle in the cemetery. Then they set each pile on fire."

Faye sits on the stool leaning on her hands into the pail, onto her knuckles, I imagine ... hurting.

"They scattered rice around every fire."

"They scattered what?" she says. It's a snort.

"Grains of rice. Around every fire."

"And ... " she opens her eyes and looks at me " ... why?"

What a mind —I can hear it in her voice, in the pause between "And ... why?"— her mind shifting with only the briefest catch into scientist gear, looking for cause, measuring effect, examining the doings of the people. "Why would they scatter rice?" she says, taking her hands from the bloody water and wiping them on the kitchen towel, leaving it blotched.

"I asked everybody. No one would tell me."

"They wouldn't tell you? Or couldn't tell you."

"Wouldn't."

"They scattered rice. How much rice?"

Crescencia comes in with a bucket of fresh water, Orlando behind her with two more, looking up at me like a scolded dog.

"Orlando," Faye says in Spanish. "The people scattered rice after burning José Luis. How much rice?"

Orlando hesitates. He looks at me, every thought in his head plain on his face: "The gringa is angry with the gringo. If I answer her I will make the gringo look bad in front of his woman."

He says, "Enough."

"Enough for what?" Faye says.

"Enough to keep him busy."

"To keep who busy?"

"José Luis."

"To keep José Luis busy?"

"Until the sun comes up."

"Until the sun comes up?" she says, catching on.

Orlando is smiling now, thinking to himself, "Oh, you smart gringos don't know this, eh? Oh, you are so smart, and yet this little piece of information you do not know? Oh, just how smart are you, Señor and Señora Gringo?"

"Sí," he says with a wide grin. "If any part of José Luis returns, he will pull himself together. But with the rice, all night long he will be picking up grains of rice because José Luis is now very greedy. And this will keep him busy until the sun comes up. And then he must go back into the earth. And this way, the town is safe."

Now, see, all of this is in Spanish, but I'm ... I'm following it.

"Safe? From José Luis?" Now Faye smiles. And now she laughs. She laughs so hard, she starts to cry. And then to scream. "I hate this place!" she screams and runs from the kitchen across the courtyard to our bedroom.

Orlando and Crescencia stand there looking down at their feet. "No se preocupen," I say to them and go after Faye. "Don't bother yourselves."

I'm halfway across the courtyard when I see Angie's door open and she comes out. She's got a startled look on her face. "What's wrong with Mom?" she says.

She's changed into her bathing suit and is in the middle of fastening the top part of her bathing suit, the bra thing. I can't get over the way she looks. She's a young woman standing there. With breasts. Fastening the top on her bathing suit. With breasts. With a waist and hips. Fastening the top on her bathing suit, with hair falling down over her shoulders, her mother's hair, honey colored and thick, falling down over her shoulders as she fastens the top of her bathing suit, that bra thing. Where is my little girl?

I suddenly remember, though I don't want to, the day on the subway in México City when we made the mistake of getting into the men's car during rush hour. We didn't even know there were men's cars and women's cars during rush hour! We were jammed so tightly together that we were unable to move anything but our fingers. After only a moment Angie started to scream. It was unreal, the crush of men around her gazing at the ceiling with smiles of innocence and rapture as which one of them or how many of them felt through her skirt with their fingers. I couldn't see. I had been pushed several yards into the car by the crowd, so there was nothing I could do but watch over their heads as their upturned faces broke into smiles as Angie jerked and screamed at them to stop. I mean, they were all right next to her, on top of her. Next to her, Faye managed to get one arm free and beat at the men around her, but they just ducked their heads and laughed out loud. All of them laughed. I was just becoming aware that, rubbing up against the back of my hand trapped at my side, the short fat cock of the man next to me was hard and throbbing when the car pulled into the next stop, the doors opened, and we were pushed out onto the loading platform by the swarming, laughing crowd of men. They took off in all directions to new cars as new men loaded onto the car we just left, all of them talking and laughing at the two gringas and their man who were so foolish as to get onto the men's car at rush hour.

I look now at Angie in her bathing suit and my eyes drop, against my will, to the crotch of her suit, and I'm embarrassed for her, embarrassed for us both. What I tell myself is that I'm checking to see if she's bloodied her suit and if so I should tell her to go back to her room and

change. Or maybe I'm checking to see if she's wearing a pad, to see if the bulge of the pad shows through her suit and if so I should tell her to go back to her room and change. But she chose her ruffled suit, the silly one Faye gave her to hide just this kind of situation. It's okay. No blood, no bulge.

"Honey ..." I say to her. And I want to tell her something about how sorry I am. I did something wrong, and even though I don't know just what I did, I want her to know I'm sorry for it.

But she says, "Where'd Mom go? I heard her scream. What'd you do to her?"

I say, "She just got upset on account of José Luis. She's resting now."

Angie does this cluck thing with her tongue that she reserves only for me and says, "Oh ... men!" Disdain drips from her eyelids and every muscle as she turns back into her room, picks up her beach towel from the table just inside the door and walks out into the courtyard.

I watch the way she walks. She's got this new way of walking, like she's trying it out, like she's got a top half, and she's got a bottom half, and in between there's some sort of universal joint so that her right hip swivels to the max out to the right at the same time that her breasts swivel to the max out to the left, like she's trying to brush the wall on the left and the banana tree on the right, both at the same time.

I look across the courtyard and see Orlando. I see his eyes. They're all over her, eating her up. I know she sees him. But she just keeps walking like that.

She throws the towel out over the patch of grass in the courtyard where the sun makes a rectangle for her to lie in. Every part of her throws out the towel, and every part of her jiggles and bounces and ebbs and flows like waves over rolling sand. Orlando watches it all. She lies face down on the towel. She tosses her head, and her hair falls off her shoulders and onto the towel.

But she can't lie still. She takes the ruffle of her suit and lays it up over her buttocks and tugs up the tight hem of the suit to make the tan line just right. She spends a lot of time on it, making this damn tan line so perfect, fingering the hem, looking back, her hair dripping between

her shoulder blades, straightening the hem along the smooth curves of her bottom so that there will be a hard, exact line between the tan and the creamy white of her buttocks. Then she unhooks the bra thing. She doesn't want a line across her back. No, there must not be a line across her back. It's all right that her breasts are pale and milky, that her breasts never see the light of the sun, but no, there must not be a line across her back.

Then she stretches out.

Orlando begins to move sideways down the right wing facing the courtyard. So he can see from the side. So he can see the swell of her pale, milky breast below her armpit. He is as obvious as she is in this game they play together.

I come into the courtyard. I march into the courtyard. I catch her arm and pull her to her feet. She will not do this!



ANGIE: You know, it's not every day that you, like, witness a beheading. And so if you cramp up and bleed your guts out, isn't it okay to maybe go take a little R and R, like go out and try to get a little color without your dad turning lunatic?

Suddenly he's standing over me and yelling all this stuff, and he jerks me up by my arm, which makes this big old bruise, and he's jerking me around, and I'm trying to keep my top up, but I'm hanging out all over the place in front of Orlando, in front of my dad, in front of Crescencia. Then suddenly my mom is there and she's pulling my dad off me and yelling and telling me to go pack, that she's taking me and we're going for a holiday, and before I know it we're out of there, my mom driving the Jeep like a madwoman toward Mérida.

I'm thinking is my dad totally yo yo or what? It all happens so fast, I can't figure any of it out. I'm packed already, of course, because it's Sunday, and Mondays I go back to school, and anyway I keep most of my clothes in the dorm there, so when my mom yells at me to pack, I'm packed.

I look over the side of the Jeep and the cliffs are flashing by and it's straight down to the rocks and the ocean, you know, and my heart's jammed in my throat, and I go, "Mom, slow down, jeez!"

She goes, "Sorry," and slows down like one mile an hour for like one second, but pretty soon she's flooring it again and she pounds her hand on the steering wheel and goes, "What is wrong with him!"

I go, "Come on, Mom, slow down! You know, he's just going through a stage."

"Well, who isn't!" she yells and pounds the steering wheel again. "We're all going through a stage! All of us, all the time! But that doesn't excuse crap like that!" I mean, she's like really overusing her exclamation points way too much.

Okay, you've got to understand, for my mom to use a word like crap you know she's mad. Oh, I know, you hear lots worse every day right out on the street and in the supermarket and especially at school and on the playground. I mean, I don't notice it so much, because I'm, like, used to it? But when I'm out with my grandma she's, like, scandalized every step she takes in public. I know she's just embarrassed because she's with me, or at least I think that's why she's so embarrassed, but when she starts going purple and apopleptic I start paying attention to what people are saying around us, and it's all "shit and goddam, shit and goddam," and the F-Word (which of course I never use except sometimes) and even from little kids, the F-Word even, even from old people, even on park benches sitting and watching a sunset, "What a great sunset! Shit and goddam!" So that's when you start to realize that that's just how people are.

Oh, but not my mom. She's got extraordinarily exacting standards for language. She's always telling me, "Angie, it is an impoverished vocabulary that cannot express an idea, however lowly or plain, without descending into the gutter." So when my mom is forced to descend into the gutter to find a word like "crap" it's pretty clear to me that she's fed up to the nose with my dad's shit.

When we come driving into Mérida, the sun is just going down and a perfect Sunday is drawing to a perfect close. I'm expecting my mom will take us to the Hotel Colonial because it's

next to the hospital, but at the last minute, when we turn the corner and see the Hotel Colonial right ahead of us, my mom changes direction like a weather vane in a sudden cross draft and I have to hold onto my head to keep it from twisting off my neck. My mom takes us instead to the Hotel El Salvador! This is gonna cost us a fortune!



CONSTANTIN: Her having twice come so close—my having now tasted her essence—I was content she would come again. Patience I have learned—during the stretch of eternity—has value.

End of Disk 2 (69:37 minutes)

I will even set my face against that soul that eateth blood,
and will cut him off from among his people.

Leviticus 17.10
Bible, The Old Testament

DISK 3 — (80:11 minutes)

Blood and Fog

ANGIE: Now the Hotel El Salvador, this is one classy place. Each room is like a suite, and it looks like my mom is in no mood to be stingy. I mean, the mood she's in, I don't say nothing!

As we're unpacking, though, she puts on this real cheerful voice, "What do you say we go to the zócalo? I'll bet there's dancing tonight."

I go, "Sure," all cheery too. "You want to do my makeup?"

That's the candy for her. The truth is I do a much better job with my makeup than my mom, but tonight she seems real needy, so I figure it can't hurt me that much to let her do it. She always likes to give all this advice about how "less is more" because it makes her feel like a mom and she's still needed.

By the time we get my makeup on, the sun's down and the kids are all coming out and beginning to flood out to the zócalo. My mom and I head out, but in the hotel lobby there's this TV playing, and my mom does this double take and goes, "Oh, wait. It's *Queen Christina*."

I'm like, "Huh?"

She goes, "It's Greta Garbo in *Queen Christina*." So we stop. "Oh," she goes, and her voice is all creamy. I look at Greta and she's like, okay. I mean, she's no Marilyn Monroe or anything, hardly any breasts at all. And a big nose. Big big beak on that woman. Long neck. Terrible hairstyle. But you know her face kind of grows on you, and she's real dramatic. In fact, she's overacting something terrible. My mom goes, "It's the bedroom-memorization scene."

I'm all, "Ooh!" like this is so cool, I'm creamy too.

She goes, "Queen Christina and her lover have just made love for the first and only time. For the good of her country, the queen must leave him and never see him again. She is memorizing the bedroom so that she will never forget every moment she spent here with him."

Greta, now, is massaging the bedpost, the candlestick, the clothes rack, every phallic symbol in the room. I go, "Mom, let's move it." But she doesn't answer. I go, "Mom? Mommy? Oh, mamma mia?"

She's all, "Huh? Oh, you go ahead, honey. I'll be right there."

So I take off. That's okay in Mérida. It's not like Berkeley or San Francisco where a teenager goes out on the street alone and immediately get kidnapped and raped.

The zócalo is jumping tonight. They've got the stage all lit up and the bailarinas folklóricos are dancing like crazy up there. The square is always filled with people, but on a Sunday night it seems like everything is just more festive. All the young people are walking around, but the boys with the boys and the girls with the girls, see, and the older people sit on the benches and watch them like hawks. The boys walk in one direction and the girls walk in the other, so they can see each others' faces each time they pass. And the guys are all eyes, and the girls pretend they don't even see. So cool! But after a while they start breaking off from one another, and the boys and girls find each other. And the parents sitting on the benches are all, hey, where did everyone go? God, I'm glad I'll never get old. To just sit on a bench frowning at all the kids flirting. I just want always to be the kid flirting.

Over against one building these guys are playing this macho leapfrog game *Méxicanitos* love to play night after night in the zócalo. They're all fifteen or sixteen, way too old to be playing such a kid's game. One guy stands with his back against the wall, another guy bends over in front of him and puts the back of his neck up against the first guy's crotch. I mean, imagine a guy from Berkeley High doing that! Then the next guy bends over and puts the back of his neck up between the second guy's legs, hard up against his butt, and then the next guy and the next and the next until they've got a line of six guys bent over with their necks in each other's butts making this train of backs for the rest of the guys to jump onto. The other guys come running up one at a time and make this big leap trying to get all the way to the first guy's back, only the first jumper generally only gets as far as the third back, then the other jumpers go one at a time and pile up on that guy till they're three and four deep and the bottom guy's legs can't take it any

longer and the whole thing collapses. Real fun, yawn. If they'd put me in the game I'd show them how to do it. I could leap all the way to the first guy's back easy. But girls aren't allowed to play. Girls all stand around watching and giggling and looking pretty.

I watch for a while, but these guys get boring fast. So I head over to these tables where I always spend all my time in the zócalo. Indios and Mestizos from all over the Yucatán come to Mérida to sell their goods, and they've got these adorable Maya dolls, little Indian families all dressed indio in these little white clothes, with the father carrying sticks of wood on his back and the mother with a basket of food in her arms, and little kids playing with toys, these dolls are so cute.

While I'm standing there, looking at this one Maya doll family that I really want to buy, who should come up to me but Orlando, all wagging his tail and grinning ear to ear. He took the afternoon bus out of Santa Cruz de K'u and he's in town looking for one of his girlfriends and he's just having himself a good old time, laughing and jabbering and all the time swiveling his head around in circles like a puppet to watch all the girls walking by. This makes me like incredibly mad because it's like I'm not good enough or pretty enough to keep his attention, which I'm not, but he doesn't have to make it so obvious.

He's still dressed in his suit from José Luis's funeral, and it's real shabby because he wears it all the time, and suddenly I feel so bad for him because he's such a country bumpkin in the city. See, my mom explained it to me, how Orlando is going to have all these problems in his miserable life because of how he dresses. He comes from this town called Oxamal up the road from Santa Cruz de K'u, about halfway to the paved road, where some of the people are richer than the people in Santa Cruz de K'u. Some of them, like Orlando, dress *catrín* which means in store-bought clothes instead of the traditional mestizo clothes. The mestizo clothes are way nicer, beautiful *huipils* for the women all white and with flowered borders at the neck and hem, and for the men white pants and big loose white shirts, and the straw hats of course.

But not for Orlando. When he was a baby his parents made the decision to dress him *catrín* like the upper class *ladinos*. My mom says this was probably to give him "upward

mobility" and shit like that. But then all dressed nice and fancy *catrín* he's no good to make milpa like the other people, go out and cut the bush and burn it and make the farm and plant the corn and henequen and all the important things that the village lives by. So Orlando is set apart. Dressed *catrín*, all he can be is like the schoolteacher or something, but he's so dumb! He's only got a sixth-grade education! I mean, if that! He's just lucky that my dad came along and hired him. But for how long? What's supposed to happen to Orlando when the gringos go back to the States?

And what's supposed to happen to Crescencia? She's crazy about Orlando. She comes from Oxamal too, and they grew up *cariños* together, boyfriend and girlfriend. When we first came, my dad was advised not to hire from Santa Cruz de K'u because it would make the people jealous if he chose one K'utecan over another, so he went up to Oxamal and hired Crescencia first, and later she brought him Orlando.

It'll kill Crescencia if she doesn't marry Orlando, but her parents decided at her birth to dress her *mestiza* instead of *catrín*, like Orlando. I mean, it fries me! I mean, so what! But my mom says it's like this really big deal.

And then there's the problem of the surnames because Orlando's got two Spanish surnames, Orlando Rodríguez Ruíz —and you should hear how he rolls those *rrrr*'s!— but Crescencia's only got one Spanish surname and one Maya surname, García Tum. Crescencia Amelita García Tum. That's so pretty, isn't it?

Méxicans have got so many names your mind boggles, and they keep surnames from both the father's side and the mother's side. While my dad was going around to all these towns and villages doing his vampire research, my mom went with him and did all these elaborate charts of the surnames of all the families, like she was running one of her botanical studies. She's always doing shit like that. She found that although most of the towns had fifty-fifty Spanish and Maya surnames, there were more Spanish-Spanish surnames than Maya-Maya surnames, so her "conclusion" was that the people prefer to marry Spanish surnames instead of Maya surnames.

I mean, I don't get it, I just report it. And my mom's all worried about it because, see, she worries about everything on the planet. She goes, "What's going to happen to these people?"

My dad goes, "Faye, it's not your problem. These people have lived here for thousands of years and they will survive Orlando and Crescencia."

But my mom's even more worried because Orlando is fair-skinned and European looking (and dumb) and Crescencia is really dark-skinned and indio. I mean Crescencia is beautiful! Crescencia is like a beautiful, deep dark brown rose unfolding to the sun, and her skin and eyes and hair are brilliant, perfect! But in my mom's eyes it's like Orlando and Crescencia are doomed, like Romeo and Juliet. And that's why Orlando is here in Mérida looking for some stupid catrín girlfriend who's got fair skin and two Spanish surnames.

Orlando asks me if I want to dance and I'm like, oh sure! Like I would! Like I would betray Crescencia!

And like I know how! I mean, the marimbas are going a hundred and the bailarinas are doing these fancy folklórico dances from all over México, and Orlando wants to know if I want to dance? I'd rather go out there and strip naked. Orlando would probably like that better too.

But I just go, "No, gracias," and Orlando just smiles at me that adorable smile and goes, "¿Por favor?" which means "please" but the way he says it, it means "pretty please with sugar and salsa on top?" I mean no way am I going to do it, but Orlando is so cute he's like breaking my heart.

But I go, "No, gracias," and what does he do? He looks around and sees this other girl and, without even looking back at me, goes after her and with this big old smile he slips his arm around her waist and leads her out to this open space near the stage where you can dance if you want. I suppose she's this Lupe he's been telling me about. Well, she can have him!

I'm standing there with my mouth all hanging open thinking that if I'm real careful maybe I can get back to the hotel without busting out into tears, when suddenly I get this funny prickly feeling on the back of my neck. And I turn around, and it's him, the guy from the Hotel Colonial,

that so handsome naked guy, and he's looking right at me. My blood turns to ice. I mean, he is so cool!

He's dressed like I've never seen anyone dress. This silky shirt like from another galaxy, just glimmering in the lights, billowing in the breeze. Tight pants. And a body that's just so hard and firm, and his chest is like ... well, never mind, you know what I'm talking about.

And it's like time stops for me. One second I'm ready to break into tears, and the next second I'm in the center of a merry-go-round, the marimbas playing and the people dancing all around me, up and down and around in circles, and across the people he's watching me, and I'm like frozen. As the people go by, his eyes keep moving away from mine and flicking down and up and over the people passing by like he's a judge at a fair or something, like he's giving them a rating, and none of them is too good. And then his eyes flick back up to mine, and they're like, oh yeah, here's the sassy item.

And he starts across the zócalo straight toward me, and his eyes are like pinning me in place, and the people separate in front of him like he's parting the Red Sea, and he's like floating through them coming closer and closer, and I'm like whoa!

But then he stops, and his eyes move to the side. "Boo!" my mom says right in my ear, and I jump into the treetops. She makes me so mad when she does that! And here's the guy over there watching me! My mom laughs and puts her arm around me and goes, "Sorry, baby," because I'm like out of my skin, and then she turns to look where I'm looking and she sees him. And she freezes. It's the same like Friday evening, like they're trying to place each other, like she's searching through all her brain cells to find the one that says, "You." He floats over to us.

My mom goes, "No!" Then she shakes her head and goes, "I'm sorry, do I... do I know you?"

He goes, "Not yet."

So cool! My mom's all flustered. She goes, "Because you looked as though you knew me. I mean, as though I were someone else. And I'm not. I mean, someone else."

He goes, "Perhaps you will be."

I mean, can you believe just how silly? But so cool, too.

My mom goes, "Ah ... ha ha ha ha." I mean, it's like she's laughing some laugh like she never laughs: "Ah ... ha ha ha ha," like some socialite from the movies, like Greta Garbo, probably. And then they don't say anything for just the longest time, just looking deep into each other's eyes, and I'm all, uh hey? You guys? Mom? Mr. Universe? I am so pissed at her!

Finally I go, "Well, why don't I make the introductions? I am Angie and this is my mother, Faye."

He goes, "Faye," and he takes her hand. "It is a charming name."

She goes, "No!"

I'm all, "Mom!" I wait for him to introduce himself, but he just keeps gazing into my mom's eyes, holding her hand, so I go, "And *you* would be ... ?"

He goes, "Constantin." Only you've got to hear the way he says it. He's got this accent like from the moon, and it's also the way he moves his lips when he talks, like he's wrapping them around chocolate, and you just melt for him.

But my mom is like getting really mad or something. I can feel her getting tense and pulling away. I know what she's thinking. This guy has got her hand in his and he's making a pass at her right in front of her daughter, and he's way too young for her. He's more like twenty-three or twenty-four and she's pushing forty. And even though my mom looks great for her age, she is, after all, pushing forty. Constantin is way closer in age to me than he is to her. So that's what she's thinking. And suddenly she says to him again, "No!"

And it's like that kind of wakes her up or something, and she goes, "I'm sorry. Did ... didn't you ask me ... to dance?"

He goes, "No."

She goes, "I'm sorry. I thought you did."

He goes, "No. But would you care to dance?"

She goes, "No."

I go, "I would!" I mean, this comes out of my mouth without me even realizing it. At first I'm thinking someone else said it, and I even look behind me to see who it is when suddenly it comes out of my mouth again, "I would!"

I mean, I am the world's worst dancer! And that's even just standing in place and moving in time with the music. But with these folklórico dances, I'm dead. But sure, I go, "I would!"



FAYE: There were other things said than were spoken. Angie was not aware then, and surely even now she's only dimly aware.

It was some sort of hypnosis he was working on me. I could almost realize that, even then. I realized that I could not gain control.

The labyrinth of his mind opened up dizzily and I pitched forward into it, but held by his eyes and floating above profound darkness. I heard my name called. But it wasn't my name, or like any name I had ever heard; yet I knew he was calling my name. I know it now: Ilona.

"No," I said out loud, and I tried to conjure the beautiful witch's pink bubble. He burst it with a chuckle.

"Fascinating," he said but without saying it, without moving his lips, without giving voice. "You are fascinating. You are so much more than I expected. But of course, you are she, Ilona."

I tried to laugh. "No!"

"Fascinating. You have so many colors, and so many barriers already in place around your colors. Your mind is capacious, and yet you know nothing of it. So many colors, so many barriers. You know that you cannot stop me?"

"No!"

He laughed. "Fascinating, you fascinate me. Fascinating, your evolution, your language, and you still use it. *To fascinate:* to attract irresistibly, to hold spellbound. Very old, from the Latin *fascinare*, to charm, cast under a spell, from *fascinum*, a bewitching amulet shaped like a

phallus. Very, very old notion, from long before I was born. 'You are fascinating,' they tell me just before I have them. And I shall have you, Faye. You fascinate me."

"No," I said. And again, "No." What a feeble, feeble, feeble response to his incredible strength.

In fact ... I cannot even now understand how it is that I am able to ... remember ... to replicate his speech. Pardon me, I'm so confused. I shall do better. I shall do this better. Please, abide with me.



ANGIE: So Constantin, and me, Angie, together, me in his arms. I think he's, like, in love with me, I really do. When he takes me in his arms out to the area where they're dancing, under his silky shirt I can feel his muscles, hard and round. Scary, a man's muscles. Not like a boy, not like Orlando. A man. I can feel his breath in my ear, and I smell chocolate. I think I may faint.

And then suddenly we *are* dancing. And it's like I know all the dances by heart. And I'm graceful! Me, Angie! And I'm not just deluding myself. I mean I am hot! And he's the best. He's got his eyes glued to mine like he's communicating to me every move to make. The music keeps changing, but we keep changing the dance to suit the music, and it goes on and on, I don't know how long.

And there's this one moment, this one moment I'm looking into his eyes, and somehow I see myself. Right in the center of the black pupil of his eye I see myself, all in white, twirling like a ballerina only in slow motion, my arms out, my fingers curved upward, my whole body curved into this arch of white in the black of the pupil of his eye, my hair floating around my face. And I'm beautiful. He has made me beautiful. And I love him. With every beat of my heart I love this man.

The music stops. He holds me to his chest. I think he might kiss me. But suddenly everyone bursts into applause. I look around and everyone's watching us. And they're clapping

and whistling. No one's even looking at the bailarinas onstage anymore, only at us. Poor Orlando's got his mouth all hanging open, and I feel bad for him but at the same time victorious. Let him have Lupe and all the rest of his girlfriends. I can dance! And I am in love.

Constantin bows to me like I'm a princess and ushers me back to my mom. I look at her, expecting she's going to be all jumping up and down like she does when I do good stuff, but she's like so mad her eyes are crossed. She goes, "It's time to go back!" I'm all, wait, I want to keep dancing! She goes, "I'm sorry, Angie, I've got a headache. It's been a long day." And she goes, without even looking Constantin in the eye, she goes, "Thank you for dancing with my daughter, but we have to go now."

She pulls me hard by the wrist like I'm a little girl or something, and we're out of there. Just as we're leaving the zócalo I look back, and Constantin's smiling at me. I smile back and wave. My mom goes, "Come on, Angie!" and jerks me around the corner.

But it's the wrong corner, see, because she's in such a hurry to get away that we left the zócalo on the wrong side. So she takes a couple of turns, walking at sixty with those long legs of hers so that it's hard to keep up, and after awhile I can tell by the way she's walking that she's confused and doesn't know where we are. The streets on this side of the zócalo are empty. No one. And then we take this next turn and, splat, we suddenly come into this fog. And it's the weirdest fog, thick and warm, like it's alive, like it's an animal's fur wrapping around you. You can taste it, and it's sweet and chocolaty. And you can't see anything. A couple of steps into it, and we're lost.

I go, "Mom!"

I hear her voice. "Right here. Right here. Give me your hand."

So I reach out for her hand, but I can't find it. I go, "Where are you?"

I hear her voice. "Here. I'll keep talking, and I'll stand right here, and you come towards my voice." So I head for her voice, and she does keep talking, but I'm all dizzy and it's like I'm turning in circles and I can't find her. She goes, "Angie! Come towards my voice!"

I go, "Yeah, I'm here! Mom! Where are you!" And I'm reaching out for her, but I can't touch her. And I start getting sick to my stomach, like my stomach suddenly drops out of my body like when you're on a roller coaster going a hundred and you go over a hump and leave your stomach behind, then you quick take a turn and go over another hump, and your heart joins your stomach, and your blood rushes hot into the vacancy and you lose your breath and start to black out.

I open my mouth to scream but the fog fills my mouth and this other sound comes out, this sound like I've never made before, this animal sound in my throat, and I go all cold and my legs start to buckle and I feel myself falling. But then suddenly it's like I'm flying through the fog and it thins and becomes clear as it rushes into my mouth and down my throat and through my body, and there's this sound, this laugh, this deep laugh fading into that animal sound in my throat. And I can taste the chocolate.



FAYE: You will think me selfish, if you listen to Angie. And I have been selfish, at times, at certain times, yes. But that night I was not selfish. I was merely common-sensical. Angie was being a complete teenage twit, as Mark says. She was furious with me, of course. In the hotel room, she wouldn't speak but went right to bed.

If you have children —and you might— you must learn to get out of yourself and take care of them. You learn that not from books but from experience, and there's some instinct that kicks in, too. Cats do it, chickens do it, in their way, and a human mother must have some instinct, too, because once again, I made the effort. I sat on the edge of the bed. I tried to talk with her.

It was transparent that Constantin was using her to get to me. I had no doubt he had used some sort of hypnosis on her, too —though what this bizarre power was, I could not yet fathom. But of course you can imagine what Angie would have said if I had suggested any of that to her. "You're jealous," she would sneer.

Of course I was jealous. I was not such a fool that I couldn't see my own jealousy. The man was extremely attractive. Not just his physical presence—which was ridiculous, as I keep saying again and again, and not merely to remind myself—in his beauty and dash and sheer sex appeal, ridiculous. But his eyes, the depth of his eyes and the mystery, the tender, sparkling core of his soul shining out of his eyes, his dare, and the haunting memory that somehow I knew him when I knew most certainly that I did not, could not ever have met him. This man I would remember.

Angie pointedly yanked at the bedspread beneath me and said, "Would you get off, please? It's hot? I'd like a little air? I'd like it if you didn't smother me?" She has learned how effective this sort of pique can be with her parents. It enrages us. Mark lashes out like a teenage twit himself, falling in with her again and again in the most adolescent of competitions. I retreat inward, refusing to deal at that level and refusing to allow her to see the score. No one wins.

Now I got up from the bed, went to the window, opened it and took a deep breath, keeping my back to her. I hoped it looked nonchalant. There was a slight breeze which felt delicious in the hot stuffiness of the room. That fog had dissipated altogether, but the smell of it lingered on, bay leaf and marshmallow and ... semen, good heavens, yes, it was the smell of semen mixed into that unforgettable scent. And that eldritch taste lay palpable in the back of my mouth.

Eldritch ... that is a word I had never used, out loud. But I whispered it now, to myself as I stood at the window trying to identify all of those odors, and the emotions. The fog *was* eldritch, other-worldly, unknown and untasted previously, as though it were a fog descended from Venus, planet of vapors, dense, warm, velvety, so that it was almost impossible to stop inhaling and begin at last to exhale. The fog had worked inside my body and mind like a drug. Patently it had worked the same effect on Angie. I had heard her groans and sighs and ghostly little-girl animal cries, and I understood too well the waves of orgasmic sensations she was feeling ... so young ... because they were shuddering through my own body, strumming my own spine, electrifying my own nerves, knifing my mind and culminating in those racking orgasms,

how many and for how long I have no idea. When I finally came back to my senses, the fog had dissipated —when and how I don't know. I found myself and Angie clinging weakly to each other, Angie crying and laughing and gasping. I myself felt I had been the plaything of a troop of rampant phalluses, my every orifice on fire and my entire being infused with hot, glowing blood.

I know now, of course, that it was Constantin. We all do, now. But at that moment I didn't even imagine connecting this eldritch fog to even the idea of Constantin's hypnosis —or whatever that spellbinding power was. I might have imagined it, and I think *should* have imagined it; they happened so near each other in time and place that a good scientist would at least have examined a possible connection.

But what I did instead, of course, was to scientifically click through the knowns to try to identify this new unknown: the tropical bogs I had read about, emanating vapors from the peat and mold, click; that village by that lake in Africa, the lake belching in the night a miasma that killed every villager as they slept, click.

If my mind might have ventured near any improbable connection between Constantin's hypnosis and this fabulous fog, to begin to capture even a notion of such a connection, such a thought would not only have slipped away but would have been met by the sledge hammer of my conscious mind and bashed into nonsense. This young man, and myself? Preposterous. This exquisite young man with the hypnotic eyes, so revealing yet so veiled, and myself? And how, in scientific fact, could it possibly indeed be hypnosis? And what foolish vanity made me think so? Wasn't it all simply my damn infatuation?

And with a laugh ejaculated by a sudden memory —met with a loud cluck from Angie in the room behind me, "Tsssk" that maddening "Tsssk!"— my mind leapt back many years to that young woman, Faye, asked out for the first time by that handsome young man, Mark. This older, wiser Faye could still remember and even analyze the tremendous physiological effect on that giddy girl who usually kept herself so —oh, what would Faye call that girl, looking back?— plain and unemotional. She was between classes and practically on the run when that young Mark — whom she had barely dared look at because of his brilliance— laid a soft hand on her

shoulder —just outside the hall of science, she would always remember— and she stopped and turned and, in the morning light, Mark was radiant, his eyes bright and earnest and smart and full of fun, eyes that were. at that time, the exact color of his hair, amber, also amber —and the older, wiser Faye suddenly wondered, when ... when ... when possibly did those eyes become blue? and how could that possibly be?— and that young Mark asked her —me, Faye, young, giddy Faye— if I wanted to go out for pizza and study for the midterm together.

I floated into class, late, with a huge, idiotic smile for everyone. The professor was Dr. Eider, and she was never lovelier than that day, and I didn't hear a word she said but found myself almost giggling throughout her lecture, drawing pictures all over my notebook, pictures of hearts, and not hearts with arteries and valves, but valentines, ha. My head was empty of practically everything, and I remember registering that very fact as though it were a keen bit of science and remarking to myself these very words in my head, "So this is love."

And so it was easy now for me, Faye, looking through the window and trying to recollect the fog, but remembering only those eyes, to recognize the same phenomenon with this man, Constantin.

Certainly, of course, this was not love but mere infatuation. Oh, and yes, lust, I was sure, was also there somewhere. But it was not, after all, hypnosis. Such a silly notion, I now thought. I had not had visions, I did not "go under", and here I giggled at the thought of "going under" with Constantin, and from behind me a gigantic and pointed "Tsssk!" from Angie, and I giggled again.

As I stood at the window breathing the fresh air, I found that my head had that same emptiness of noggin as the one on that young Faye, that lightness of all burden of thought. My head had become merely a vessel, located above my jaw and behind my eyes, with a very thin and resilient membrane to contain my brain and hold it safely in place while my mind juggled and shot non-ideas up into the stars like a pinball machine except without all the bells and racket. If an idea did drop out of the ether, forming a cogent ball of question as it dropped, zing, out it would fly.

Hypnosis, zing. Love, zing. Infatuation, zing. Sexy fog, zing and ha!

I gave it all up. Perhaps there would be something in the newspaper tomorrow about the mysterious fog, number one. Number two, I would make sure that neither I nor Angie ever saw this man Constantin again. Number three, zing.

I turned from the window back into the room. Angie was lying in a pout on top of her bed, watching me, waiting, I supposed, for an apology of some kind. I went into the bathroom without a word to her.



ANGIE: I'm glad when my mom goes into the bathroom. I want to be alone and I don't want to talk about it. I just want to taste the chocolate and feel those feelings again, all inside me, all sharp and hot and cold and spicy. I want to think about Constantin.

He told me he loved me. I can't remember just how he said it, and I can't remember the words, "I love you," but he told me all the same. He told me with his eyes. He told me by the way he held me.

And then the fog. I loved the fog. I want the fog. The fog is Constantin, it's forever in my mind Constantin, it's thrill, it's fever, it's hot fish sliding inside me and cold, wet iron holding me tight and still.

I feel a breeze and turn my head to the window. The fog is back, outside the open window, lying back outside the window and curling in the air but not coming inside the room. The room is so hot. The fog looks so cool.

"Come in," I say to the fog. "Come inside. Come inside me again. Come inside me. Come. Come."

The fog flows over the window sill, the way the fog drops into the bay over the Golden Gate Bridge, a tail of gray, cool, moist air falling into the room. But when the fog reaches the floor, it changes.

It's like it condenses on the red tiles and turns into a liquid, the gray fog becoming drops of gray-black liquid, swirling, turning blacker and blacker, each drop breaking away from the tail of fog, breaking away and bouncing, hopping, hopping toward me in the bed. I want to scream. I want to run away into the bathroom with my mother and lock the door. But I lie there waiting, watching, fascinated, as the little black drops swirl, sprout little wings, sprout little ears, and hop, hop, hop toward me.



FAYE: Angie had left the bathroom in a mess, as usual. She had asked me to help her with her makeup for the zócalo, and I had been glad. I've made a point of not intruding in her personal choices of dress, but, oh, she does a lousy job with makeup. I had showed her again how to use the colors which suit her best, how to feather it so that the makeup itself cannot be seen. But after I had finished, she had gone back into the bathroom and put on the works, a terrible hodge-podge of what looked like everything in my makeup bag. By the time we had left the hotel, she had herself made up like the cheapest of cheap whores.

Now I looked at the mess she had left on the vanity, and I snapped. "Angie," I yelled from the bathroom, "if you're going to use my makeup, put it away!" She didn't answer. I heard a rustle, as if she were turning over on the bed, putting her shoulder to me. "Less is more!" I couldn't help adding, in spite of the fact that I knew she knew I couldn't help adding it.

I thought I could hear her mouthing it back to me, "Less is more," a little whisper of angry sound from her bed. But it was a very simple concept, a very practical and obviously needed piece of motherly advice and I could not refrain from giving it. She had looked like a tramp in the zócalo, dancing so beautifully with her blonde hair swirling about her shoulders, yet painted garish and so at odds with the lovely naturalness of the Mexican girls in the folklórico. Everyone stopped dancing to gawk at her, the ill-bred gringa.

I heard a snickering from Angie's bed.

I started putting away the makeup and the simple act of simply doing something seemed to bring me back to reality. Against my will I caught a glimpse of myself in the mirror, more reality, too much reality. I stopped to look, pointedly. The face frowning back at me was not pleasant, a woman no longer happy, no longer fresh. I dabbed some makeup under my eyes. The skin sagged like crepe, held there a moment, then slowly, so slowly, resumed its place. Next year, it would only sag further. I thought of Angie's skin, the way it had sprung back into place as I smoothed on her makeup, and I tried to remember that once my skin had been that resilient.

I thought of Garbo as Queen Christina in that last, long, loving camera angle descending from the high shot into the extreme closeup of that unforgettable face. Was there ever a more lovely, soulful human being? I thought about Garbo's life, her youth passing into old age, the ravenous people with their cameras pursuing her, trying to capture again her face. And now she's dead.

I smeared a circle of blush on one cheek and let my thoughts drift again to the young man—Constantin—let them float pleasantly over the beautiful young man. What was the harm, after all? Only a dream.

"He finds you attractive," I whispered to the reflection in the mirror. I smirked at her, and her smirk back was obscene. "A handsome woman. That's what he would say of you. They used to call you pretty; now you're handsome; next you will be well preserved."

I remarked to myself that I was talking to myself. In fact, I think I even said it out loud, "Faye, you're talking to yourself." Yes, I did say it out loud. I remember watching the reflection of my lips as I spoke. I remember the look in the woman's eyes. Amused. Wary. "That's the first step, Faye."

I heard another rustle from Angie in her bed, "the first step," she whispered. So, had she heard me? "My stupid father talks to himself, and now my stupid mother talks to *herself*." I was almost sure of the words. A set of parents going quietly insane? And the child in her bed, whispering to herself? I laughed. Another rustle from Angie.

Mark. Mark. He was in my head now. Mark. How had I let him get in?

How had I let him down? How had we come to this point? I stood looking at the woman in the mirror and thought now long and carefully, about Mark. I tried to think of him as if he were the friend of a friend, a nice fellow with a problem not my own, a disappointed fellow with a disappointing life and a disappointing wife.

Mark and I had agreed, when he gave up medical school, that he would go back to school as soon as we were able, after we got back on our feet again financially after Angie's birth. But it was as though meanwhile he had settled, as if teaching sophomore biology fulfilled him, as if it was all he had ever dreamed life might be. My fault, my fault, my most grievous fault.

I should have pushed him, perhaps. He always loved competition. Perhaps if I had returned to school after Angie's birth he would have returned also for no other reason but to compete with me. But where would we have found the money? And the truth is, I never wanted to go back to school, ever. Back to school, back to curriculum, back to a course of study, never. It wasn't until I was freed from it that I saw clearly how I loathed curriculum. My curriculum vitae was empty except for what I had been channeled by someone else to learn and when to learn it, a man-made curriculum, elementary, intermediate, high school, college, medical school. Out of school now and into my own life, it was all mine. All of literature, art, science, all of knowledge from the beginning of time was mine, at my choosing, at my leisure.

More to the truth, perhaps —and now of all times I want to share only the truth with you; you do understand that, don't you? you do trust that?— I had been, very simply, depressed, living day to day as best I could in a longterm state of depression, getting through. After Angie's birth I recognized the depression but at first I called it postpartum blues, because after all the name does exist and the phenomenon is in fact common among young mothers. I had read about it. The truth is what I felt about Angie and Mark and my life was loathing. No, loathing is too strong a word. Merely despair.

Looking back now, I can tell you the exact day that my depression manifested itself, in stark clarity: it was the day before Angie was born. Until that day, my life was running on a course of little thought, and if anyone had asked I'd have answered that I was insanely happy.

Being in love is very like being insane. And I was insanely in love with Mark August. The world stopped for Mark August, and I stopped with it, until that Fourth of July weekend when the world changed forever.

Mark and I were at the ranch of my friend Nancy, Nancy whom I so admired, Nancy on whom I had always had a crush since high school, Nancy whose independence and style and swagger I would try to emulate without ever truly succeeding. The ranch was in the panhandle of Texas, an enormous expanse of plains and gullies and canyons which Nancy had inherited from a great aunt she had met only once, a single woman who admired single women and who passed on her legacy to her lesbian great niece.

The baby was not due for three weeks and Mark and I were both out of school for summer, killing time waiting for the big change.

Killing time. Strange that I should have chosen that expression. But that is an English expression. Isn't it? Don't we have that expression in English? It's too familiar not to be an expression, probably a common expression. Killing time. Yes, we say that. Mark and I were killing time.

Nancy drove us in her pickup around the ranch, a fabulous, magnificent landscape, much of it wild, but much of it fenced and divided into several pastures. We ran across some burros which were now mostly feral from running free on the range and as skittish as deer. There was an adorable foal among them, all white and shaggy with a single brown blotch on one of his floppy ears. It appeared his mother was weaning him because as he kept reaching for her teat she would shy away, baring her teeth and snapping at his rump. We watched for some time, and I fell in love with the foal. I said I wished I could have him and tame him.

Nancy said, "If you can catch him, you can have him."

I laughed. "Sure! And where in Berkeley would I keep him?"

Mark volunteered, "We could board him in one of the ranches over on Mt. Diablo. You could visit him on the weekends."

I laughed again. Ridiculous thought. And of course I had a foal of my own on its way.

Nancy dropped us off at the ranch house and started into town for supplies. Mark asked her if he could take her three-wheeler out for a spin and she reluctantly agreed. "Careful how you take the hills; it can tilt on you suddenly. And watch for the canyons; you're on top of them before you know it." She took off in the pickup and Mark took off on the three-wheeler looking like a big redheaded kid on his motorized tricycle. I settled down to read the newspapers.

I had never before had the time to read newspapers, having been immersed in curriculum, and it was with horror this summer that I discovered the daily news as I lay in my pregnant heap on sofas and beds. Not only was the news terrifying, but the reporting of the news and the public's consumption of the news—the relish of writers and readers for murder and blood on the local level, for corruption in government on the national and international level, for destruction of the forests and the atmosphere on the global level, for the grimy-handed outreach to the universe, the goals and games and betrayal which fascinated this society of which I was a member—were at once addicting, revolting and fascinating to me. It was as though until that summer I had looked at mankind only through a microscope, examining the organs and tissues and cells which made up this supreme living machine without ever considering the organism as a whole, each part with its individual personality and identity working as a cog in a gigantic, evolving machine bent on its own destruction, taking the planet with it.

As I read the grim news, page after page, in the distance I could hear the roar and putt-putt of Mark's three-wheeler as he took it through its paces. I've always both adored and deplored Mark's boyishness, that ability to throw himself wholly and passionately into play without any sense of standing off to look at the game itself and see it for its ridiculousness. I even allowed myself to hope, on those few occasions when I allowed myself to ponder it, that our baby might be a boy; it seemed it would be fun to be a boy and just *play* like that.

I went out to Nancy's porch to watch Mark on his big trike. He was a good way off in one of the pastures creating a virtual dust storm wheeling around the pasture. After a moment I realized that he was chasing something. Nancy kept a telescope on the porch to watch the wild and domestic animals by day and the universe by night. I trained it on Mark and saw that he was

chasing the little white burro with the blotch on its ear. He had cut the foal away from his mother who now fled in the opposite direction braying and kicking as Mark chased her foal—or drove it, rather— toward a gate which stood open at the bottom of the pasture, leading to the corrals. But the gate was not well situated to drive the burro through, opening into the pasture from the side rather than at the end, and as Mark drove the little burro along the fence time after time, it would run past the gate rather than through it. It was laughable at first as the two circled the pasture, the burro foiling Mark's plan each pass.

The telescope had a zoom so I could see the expression on Mark's face, the V-frown of his brow and the set of his jaw. I looked to the little burro, whose jaw was set in the same exact grim lines as Mark's, its nostrils flaring, its shaggy hair glistening with sweat. That was when I realized that it was far too hot for these two animals to be out in the afternoon sun, chasing around.

At one point Mark stopped the chase. I hoped he was giving up, but instead he drove the three-wheeler up to the far end of the pasture and opened a gate there which lay at the end rather than at the side of the long running fence. Then he sped down the far pasture to the gate at its lower end which also led into the corrals. It would mean driving the foal the long way around, but Mark would have more success driving it through the end gates instead of the side gate.

After he propped the second gate open, Mark jumped back on the three-wheeler and raced back up the far pasture, back through the gate, and headed toward the burro which stood on a little rise, gasping in the heat. His mother had come to his side, but now she shied away again as Mark roared up on the three-wheeler, and the chase recommenced.

The foal galloped along the fence with Mark hard behind him and when he came to the gate at the end of the pasture passed right through. Mark stopped on the other side and closed the gate behind them. The far pasture was much bigger and the burro made off up the hill. Mark circled around in his effort to drive the burro toward the open gate at the lower end, but the burro whirled and headed off over the hill toward the far corner of that wilder pasture where I knew a

canyon marked the opposite border. Mark chased after the burro and disappeared over the hill. I waited, breathless, listening to the sound of the receding three-wheeler.

There was a storm blowing in fast from the northeast and the advance winds broke up the sound of the motor and carried it off so that for moments at a time I lost the sound entirely. I could see the lightning flashes in the thunderhead as it swept toward us and could hear the faint rolls of thunder growing louder by the second. We were in for a big storm.

After several moments, I picked up the sound of the three-wheeler again among the thunder rolls just before the burro broke into sight over the hill, clearly exhausted but still running his heart out. Mark dogged him, butting him with the front wheel of his trike. I picked up the burro in the telescope again, could see the matted hair dripping with sweat, his chest heaving wide trying to get air. Mark was running him to death.

I yelled to him to stop, screamed at him, but he couldn't hear. I started out toward the pasture but I was huge with the baby and could only waddle. The earth was pitted by many hooves and the going was agonizingly slow because I did not dare fall.

When I reached the first pasture I climbed very carefully and awkwardly through the barbed wire fence and headed toward the gate at the far end. By the time I got halfway there, however, Mark had managed to circle around the burro again and was driving it down the hill toward the second gate. This time he ran him through the gate, but about thirty feet from the corral the burro stopped, simply stopped in his tracks, panting, his whole body shuddering with the effort to breathe. Mark got off the three-wheeler and put a lasso around his neck and started to pull him toward the corral. But the burro fought. He kicked and reared, then he stuck his feet into the ground and stood stiff-legged against the rope. Mark pulled harder and the noose tightened around the burro's neck, but still it stood against him, its air completely closed off.

I shouted to Mark again to let him go, but the storm was almost on us now and the hot wind that sped it along blew my voice back into my face. Walking hard without a hat in the fierce heat, I grew exhausted and began to feel sick. I stopped for a moment in the shade of a small tree, leaned against the trunk and vomited into its roots. In a moment after I got my breath

back I walked on down the hill, slower now, unsure if I would even be able to make it to the corral. I was afraid I might collapse in the pasture.

I did make it to the corral and I saw with relief that Mark had the sense to loosen the noose around the burro's neck to allow it to breathe for a moment. But then he started to pull it again toward the corral. The burro took a few steps before he dug his feet in again, and again the noose tightened until his air was choked off. Mark loosened the rope, hesitated, and then in a sudden motion, looped the tail of the rope around the burro's hind legs. Now when Mark pulled on the rope, the pressure was not only around the burro's neck but also on his hind legs, forcing him to hobble forward step by step as Mark hauled him toward the corral.

Step by step I closed the gap between us, shouting into the howling wind to Mark to let the poor little thing go. But it was not until I got through the gate and into the inner corral, only a few yards from them, that Mark heard me.

"Bullshit!" he yelled back. "You wanted the little fucker and you're going to get him!"

Mark tied the burro to one of the rails, and both of them stood facing each other, both heaving for air. There was a hose lying in the trough and I turned on the faucet and put the hose into the burro's mouth, trying to get him to drink, but he wouldn't drink, stood stiff-legged with his jaws clamped shut and nostrils flaring, his eyes wild. I sprayed the cool water over his head and back, and it was then that the storm struck. A few drops of rain and then a deluge. Hail the size of marbles pelted us as lightning cracked everywhere at once. Mark and I fled into the barn. I wanted to bring the burro in with us, but I knew that was hopeless.

Inside the barn I screamed at Mark, but the thunderclaps were so loud that he couldn't hear me. I beat at him. I doubled up my fists and hit at him until he grabbed my wrists and held me away from him, looking at me like I was insane. Like *I* was insane. *I*.

After struggling for several seconds, I pulled away from him and went into one corner of the barn, sat on a bale of hay and vomited again. I retched until there was nothing else to come up, and yet retched on. Mark sat on the bale beside me, put his hand on my shoulder and tried to speak, but I pulled away from him and kept on retching.

I don't know how long the storm lasted. I have often thought back to try to fix some sense of time passage in that barn, but it eludes me. It might have been ten minutes or hours. It was dark, the lightning flashes blinding, the thunderclaps deafening. But after a time the deafening sound of the hail on the tin roof began to soften as the hail turned to rain, and softened again as the rain died to a sprinkle.

Mark was first to go out. I followed but stopped in the barn door to stare. The burro had not moved from the spot where we had left him, but now he was a mound, tipped over, collapsed, wet with rain and with balls of hail still tangled in his matted hair. His open, amber eye stared back at me. His tongue hung out of his mouth into a pool of blood on the ground. His long, black penis lay distended from his body. His chest didn't move. He was dead.

Mark knelt beside the burro and searched for a heartbeat. I came out of the barn and stood above them trying to understand what had happened. Mark looked up at me and started to cry. Like a little boy he choked and started to cry. "He's just a little guy!" he said and put his arms around my legs and buried his face in my thighs and sobbed. My abdomen lay hard and heavy on his shoulder, and I was in extreme discomfort, but I let him cry for some time before I pulled away and started back to the ranch house. I didn't trust myself to say anything to him.

That night in bed, I held him tightly throughout the night while he wept. As we clutched each other, my labor began. Since I wasn't due for three weeks and since I had experienced several similar contractions through the past month, I paid it little attention at first but continued stroking Mark's head, saying nothing, waiting for sleep, waiting for the pain to stop.

As the night went on, the contractions came more frequently and lasted longer and began to be accompanied by a more intense pain. Finally just before dawn a terrific contraction so racked me that I cried out, and Mark woke, red-eyed. I don't remember the trip to the hospital; I remember only pain. In fact, throughout the labor which, they tell me, went on that day and night, culminating just before midnight with the stupendous, cleaving birth of Angie, I can remember nothing except a series of ceilings with a dreadful vision on them, the burro lying

dead, with its dead, amber eye, its tongue hanging out in the pool of blood, its penis lying black, flaccid and muddy between a jumble of thin, angular legs.

When Mark so proudly held Angie up in front of me, wailing in all her wrinkled, red ugliness, thoughts of birth and death were so twisted in my mind that I could do nothing but turn away and weep. That I had brought a child into a world this cruel hurt deep into my womb ... human child to perpetuate human suffering, to come blindly through a hideous passage and endure such pain in order to share an ignorant, evil society, to kill and eat and sleep, and in the end to be killed and eaten in turn, finally to face the sleep of oblivion, and ... why?

In the days that followed, when I tried to bend myself so unprepared into a motherhood for which I had so carefully prepared, more dreadful images would come unbidden into my mind. One recurrent image stands out particularly in my memory, seen from a rooftop, the baby dropping out of my hands, falling a long fall to the sidewalk below, her head breaking open, her brains splashing over the concrete. Night after night, hour after hour this image would spring without warning before my mind's eye and leave me sweating and helpless. I thought I would go insane with it and knew myself at last to be a terrible, wicked person and hateful mother.

Nancy was a great help during the first days after I came back to the ranch from the hospital. Even though she had never known and never planned to know childbirth, she understood postpartum depression and was not judgmental over my inability to cope. She was the last person I would want to see me in this state, but she was generous and kind. She kept the baby away as much as possible and let me sleep. She managed even to keep Mark away, though he would return timidly to the doorway throughout the days and in the middle of the night, tiptoeing in to check on me. I never found out how Nancy reacted to the death of the little burro. She never told me, and I never brought the subject up with Mark again. I always wondered if he thought I forgot.

When we returned to Berkeley, Margaret would come over every day from San Francisco to help out with her new grandchild. Margaret didn't have Nancy's understanding and she prodded me with guilt into a clumsy motherhood. After I would try unsuccessfully for a quarter

of an hour to burp Angie, Margaret would take the baby and with a few pats be rewarded with a walloping belch. I watched her resentfully as she would change Angie's diapers, so cleanly and efficiently, and goo goo into Angie's face with a mother love which I had rarely seen her share with Mark, and which I was far from feeling myself.

But somehow I did grow to love Angie. Remarkable, nature. Utterly defiant and bent on preservation of the species my body had performed that most basic function of all living creatures: it had reproduced. And now somehow the wherewithal to nurture that offspring was instilled in my heart as, day by day, hour by hour, I grew to love Angie so deeply, so utterly that I would have endured anything at all for her.

In fact, I endured life for her.

I remember in my childhood and teenage years toying with notions of suicide. I suppose they lent a type of romance to an unloved existence. But after Angie's birth, in however profound depression I might find myself, I never once entertained the thought of suicide. There was Angie. There was, after all, Angie.

As for Mark, he took to fatherhood as he takes to all games, his heart and soul devoted to her. He would watch her by the hour. He would bring her onto our bed and lie with his chin in his cupped hands, watching her in wonder, reaching out to fondle the dimple in her elbow, caress the frown on her forehead, stroke her nose, her lip, her eyebrow. He couldn't sleep for watching her.

Watching Mark watch Angie through those first several months, I began to understand that the postpartum blues, for which I had prepared myself, had deepened—or rather had broadened—to a state of perpetual depression that resided in me like cancer in the bone, a pervasive malignancy which I not only self-diagnosed but self-treated. I did not use drugs—I've always had a horror of drugs and drug use in America—but I did plant herbs with known antidepressant effects and learned a new way of cooking. While Angie was still a baby, this self-treatment was sufficient to keep the depression at bay. Every day was filled with taking care of her needs. When Angie went away to school, however, the very day I took her to the gate of the school and let her walk in by herself, so heartbreakingly brave, tugging at the hem of her first-

day-at-school dress, I knew I would need to find something else immediately to take me out of myself. I turned, saw the public library across the street and spent the entire morning there, waiting for Angie's school to let out.

Books were a great solace, but they were also a trap. As I read more about mankind and our terrible, exhilarating history, I grew at once more depressed and more intensely absorbed. There was so much to learn and only a short lifetime in which to learn it.

And somehow years passed.

My ongoing self-treatment was rational. When the depression would periodically and unpredictably swell in me, almost like a being itself, I would recognize it in the early stages and deal with it immediately by surrounding myself with color and music and comedy, bring flowers into the house, plant bulbs in the fall and plan for the spring, set out on a new project to learn all the chamber music of Schubert or Mendelssohn or to reread the entire canon of Shakespeare comedies, or Molière, or Oscar Wilde, or any of the lovely, light novels of Muriel Spark which always inspire at least a type of hope. Dipping into Mark Twain's burlesque would be sure to lift the spirits.

At the same time I would force myself into physicality; a striding walk up the hills into Tilden Park and all its wild beauty was sure to get me at least through the day and perhaps allow me to sleep through the long night. I would take Angie shopping for new clothes. Angie always had marvelous fun. She also had remarkably inexpensive taste, and I found bargains particularly cheering. And so no one knew I was depressed. No one would ever guess, as I would smile and smile.

And I survived. Day by day by day, I got through. And I did love Angie, did love Mark. I do love them, even now, especially now. Yes, if you trust nothing else, trust this and keep it always in mind.

I agreed to come on the lunatic Yucatán adventure not for myself, although I allowed that a great change might be beneficial, but because I thought it would be good for Mark. I had

trapped him, it seemed to me, in my own sickness. I was always so sorry for him that his wife gave him so little of herself and concealed so much.

But after all what would have been the purpose in letting him know about the depression? What could he do? And what could he feel but guilt? Perhaps this vampire bat project of his might engage Mark in real science again, research, field work, a published article perhaps, a jumpstart for his life, our lives. I talked it over with Margaret and she agreed.

Talked *with* Margaret? Talked to her, at her, never with her. For all her ability to goo goo to a baby, Margaret was not a responsive woman, not overtly responsive, and I often wonder if she was ever even covertly responsive. As I told her of the Yucatán idea, she appeared to listen, appeared to understand, appeared to agree, nodded at least. I watched her nod, thinking to myself, never let me become like her.

Now I stared in the mirror, nodded. Had I become like Margaret? The makeup job was finished. I looked cheap. And very old.

From the other room came that rustling sound again from Angie. But now I turned to the sound. It was different. It had become no longer an occasional rustle but a constant rustling, a susurrus swelling and fading but never ceasing altogether.

With a jab of jealousy I wondered, for the first time, if Angie could be masturbating. Well, why not, I thought; at this age, it was not unlikely. But I grew angry. Not because I felt there was anything wrong with her masturbating but because of her irresponsibility; if I were to walk in on her in flagrante delicto it would be a fine embarrassment for us both. But far more important and far more painful—I realized as I stood there listening to the rustling—this would be the first secret she had ever kept from me.

But as I held my breath, listening to the sound coming from her bed, I became aware that it was something else. A soft flapping, yes, as of flesh on flesh, wet with fluids, and fervent, yes, but also a high-pitched whistling.

I came to the bathroom door and looked toward her bed. My eyes took a moment to adjust. I could see the outline of the bed but no other details. I could not see Angie's face or her

hair or her body, but I began to distinguish a blackness, an undulating blackness covering the entire bed.

In another moment, I could see wings, I could see ears, I could see teeth, fangs.



ANGIE: I didn't mind that at all.

I didn't mind any of that.

I loved it.

It was like warm bubbles.

End of Disk 3 - (80:11 minutes)

I am in blood
Stepped in so far that,
Should I wade no more
Returning would be as tedious as go o'er.
Strange things I have in head...

Macbeth III, 4. 156-70
William Shakespeare

DISK 4— (75:14 minutes)

Blood and Vampire Eyes

FAYE: My reaction was all instinct and without thought. I flipped the light switch to see better. I ran for the bed. I waved my arms at the bats. I shouted Angie's name to wake her.

The bats took flight at once, filling the air with their wings, hundreds of them flapping blindly in the small room, beating me like a trained force back against the wall. I put my arms in front of my face to ward them off and made my way through them to Angie's bed. Some bats were still on her body, too heavy with her blood to fly.

"Angie!" I shouted directly into her ear and shook her, but I could not rouse her. I knocked the fattened bats off the bed and covered her with the blanket. Then I ripped the bedspread off my bed and started beating at the bats with it, trying to drive them out the window.

But there were too many. They flew into my hair and beat at my face with their bony arms—but delicately, like butterflies—I could hardly feel them for their delicacy, the way it might be in a nightmare, unreal, impalpable.

Their flapping wings seemed to suck the air from around me, sucked the air even out of my lungs. For what seemed like an eternity, I kept flailing back at them, screaming for help. But no help came.

Again and again I tried to get to the door, but the bats massed in front of me and beat me back. I gasped for breath as their wings beat the very air away from my head. I opened my mouth wide to try to get oxygen, but the bats flapped at my lips. I caught some of them between my fingers and flung them away from my face so that I could breathe. I had to get air.

Some of the bats began to land on the bed again, hopping onto the blanket I had thrown over Angie and beginning to cut through it with their teeth. I fought my way to the bed again and pulled at her. She slid onto the floor. I tried to drag her to the door, but my strength was going quickly and I had no breath left. At the last moment, knowing I was about to faint, I covered Angie's body with mine.

What happened next is hard to describe because I was not conscious even at the same time as I was super-conscious. As if through a convulsive iris, opening and shutting erratically on a fractured lens, a deep blackness took up my entire vision, with shadows and black wings streaking even blacker through the blackness.

I could hear the flapping of the wings and the shrieks of the bats fading in and out, merging ultimately with that same susurrus, a heavy breathing filled with sighs and catches. My own breathing, Angie's breathing beneath me, and the breathing of someone above me.

Gentle hands gripped my shoulders and turned me. The iris of black opened momentarily and I saw his face looking into my own, his amber eyes searching my eyes, and I felt his breath on my mouth, his fresh breath pumping deep into my lungs.



CONSTANTIN: At first it was the blood, Ilona's blood, that drew me. The heady scent of the girl's menses, even after so many generations of dilution, reeked of Ilona. I could not stop myself the tasting of it.

But the woman...

Having seen into the woman's mind, having found there wells and springs and secret light, I knew I wanted more of this woman than her blood. As one of our kind once told me, "Loneliness is the downside to eternal life."

Ha.

Ha ha.

Here was more than the blood of Ilona.

Take care. Constantin, take care.



MARK: The taxi driver drove me nuts. He couldn't get the taxi over forty-five miles an hour, and he couldn't tell me anything. All I had was Faye's note. "Angie's been attacked by vampires. Come to the hospital."

I didn't know how bad she was. Or how it happened. All the driver would say was that a señora had sent him to me with this message. She was driving a Jeep to the hospital. She had a sick girl wrapped in a blanket. There was much blood.

And there was a man with them.

It's about five in the morning when the taxi finally pulls into the hospital. I'm rushing in when I see Faye. And him. A black man. Tall, lean, muscular. Good looking, I suppose. Built like an athlete, in shape. In very good shape. He's leaning against the wall of the corridor with Faye facing him. She's pale and trembling, facing him, and he's got this tremendous erection bulging out against the shiny black fabric of his pants. Faye has this dreamy smile on her face, her eyes lowered. And she's trembling.

Through a trick of acoustics on the shiny white walls and linoleum floor, I can hear his voice distinctly the second I come in the door. It's one of those deep black voices and he's got it modulated in what he thinks is this seductive murmur. "All the time in creation," he's saying. "All the riches of the world." Funny accent. Definitely not American. Not African or Jamaican. Exotic. Erotic, I guess. "All the places in the world. All the people in the world. The world."

Such a lot of shit he's saying to her.

So this is the guy, I tell myself. I hold at the door a second watching the two of them together. Faye keeps smiling. She raises her eyes to look straight into his. She says, "You know I'm married."

"Many people are," he says.

"You know I have a daughter."

"I didn't suppose she was your sister."

I almost laugh out loud.

But this surprises her. She doesn't like this. It's all over her face, insult, petty insult, nothing more. He says, "Yes, she is your blood. Yes, you would want her with you. Very well."

Strange. Somehow I can stand the two of them there making love right in front of me. I can even be glad —somehow, in a perverse way— to finally have it out in the open where I can see it. And they're pathetic, the two of them, ridiculous and pathetic. But him bringing Angie into it, that I can't stand.

"Faye!" I say in a good loud voice, and I come down the hall. I don't care if they know that I heard. "Where's Angie?"

She looks up at me like she's snapping to attention, back to business, doctor training. She isn't even embarrassed. "She's okay," she says. "She's sleeping." Faye tells me about the wounds, thirty-four of them but shallow and not much blood loss. Angie's still in shock, she says, but she seems to be coming out of that. They gave her a rabies shot already, but Diaz wants to keep her in the hospital the entire morning for observation. If she looks okay, he's willing to release her by noon.

"Where are the wounds?" I say. "On her face and neck?"

"All over. But we don't think they'll leave scars."

"What did you do, leave the goddam window open?" And I can see on her face that she did. "Goddam it, Faye!" I yell at her. "How many times have I told you to keep the windows shut at night!"

She yells back, "That was in Santa Cruz de K'u! Not Mérida!"

"Anywhere! Anywhere in the Yucatán until I've got the bat eradication in hand!"

A nurse steps from behind the reception desk and shushes us. I stop shouting. I turn to the guy. He's been leaning back against the wall, watching me. And for my part I've been aware of his every move, every blink, of which there were none. Now he steps between me and Faye and says, "Yes," he says, "you are eradicating bats. Vampires. You are quite ruthless," he says.

He's the kind of guy you hate on sight. Smooth. Sure of himself. I say to Faye, "You want to introduce me?"

She says, "Oh. I'm sorry. This is ... I'm sorry, what did you say your name was?"

Like I'm going to fall for that.

"Constantin Liliane," he says, and he stares at me like, take my hand if you want to get it crushed. I just stare back.

"Yes," she says. "And you may remember my daughter telling you my name is Faye. And this is my husband, Mark August."

"Faye," he says. "Yes. It is a charming name." But he never takes his eyes off me, and it's like his eyes are burning a hole into my eyes until I can't help it, goddam it, I've got to look away.

"Let's go see Angie," I say, and I take Faye by the wrist and pull her down the hallway away from him. But she pulls her wrist out of my hand with this look on her face like, you try that again, macho man, and you're dead meat, a great act. I back off and I lean against the wall. Okay, I say to myself. Play on. She turns back down the hallway.

"Goodbye, Constantin," she says to him.

"This is not goodbye," he says back.

She stands there a long time before answering. I just wait. Finally she says again to him, "Goodbye." And she turns to me and says, "Come on. I'll take you to Angie." And that's the last word she'll say to me. She's the one who's pissed! She's betraying me —or ... or so it seems to me, you know, at that time— and she's the one who's pissed!

Through the window in Angie's ward I watch the sun come up and I try not to think about anything. Faye sits beside me, our daughter lies bandaged in front of us, we are the mother and father, husband and wife. The lover seems to have disappeared, but I try not to think of him.

At noon, Diaz releases Angie and we get to take her home. I put her in the back seat of the Jeep and wrap her up. She looks so small and pale and helpless that ... oh, man, I break into sobs, I can't help it. I've got José Luis in my mind and can't get him out. We could have lost her.

On the trip back to Santa Cruz de K'u I try to make sense of what Faye tells me about this bat attack, but it doesn't follow nature in any way. Hundreds of bats, according to Faye. On a

single prey. In the city. In a hotel room. Either Faye is insane, or I am. Because these are not vampire bats.

At home, we put Angie to bed and try to catch a little nap ourselves. But not too long after sunset, Crescencia knocks on the door. "There is a man to see you," she says, and she's looking at us funny. "A dark man."

Faye and I get dressed and come out into the courtyard, and who should it be but the man himself. Liliane. He says, "I've come to see the little girl."

"How did you find us?" Faye says, and she looks at me like the puppy with the chewed-up shoe. "Oh, yes," she says to him, "I suppose you must have heard me tell the taxi driver the name of the town and how to get here." She looks at me again.

He says, "Now that I know you exist, I will always be able to find you."

I'm wondering how far I should let this guy go, wondering if I'm more of an asshole to take him straight out, or to be civilized and let him keep making assholes of all three of us?

I say to him, "Oh, you're here to see Angie? Oh, do let me take you to her. Faye, darling, why don't you make us some drinks? After Mr. Liliane pays his respects to our daughter, we can all sit around and act very very cool."

Faye's like a wild bird in a cage, hopping around trying to find a way out. I lead the man to Angie's room. "Honey," I say as I open the door, "you've got a visitor."

"Constantin!" she says, and it's like she just opened up a box of chocolates.

He sits down on the edge of the bed and takes her hand and talks so softly to her that I can't hear his words, but it sounds like another language I've never heard before. She nods. He touches each of her bandages and she stretches up to his hand like a kitten, the way she used to do with me. She says something I can't hear, or maybe I can hear it but can't understand it. It's weird, my daughter and this guy, and my gut starts to wrench as I start to wonder what else went on back in Berkeley.

He turns to me and smiles. "She says she is worried about death. Surely there are some fatherly words of wisdom you would like to give?"

Any minute, I think, this guy's going to find a fist in his face. But for now, Angie needs a dad, and I'm going to be here for her. I sit on the other side of the bed, and I take her other hand, the one he's not already holding. She's trembling. And there's an electricity that flows out of her and through me that makes the hair all over my body stand on end.

I say to Angie, "Oh, death!" And I shrug and make a little face at her and laugh. But she doesn't laugh. She looks at her hand in mine like she doesn't know what she sees. I say, "Oh, honey, death is something you don't have to worry about for a long time." She looks up at me, but her eyes show me no Angie. I try again. "But you know, sweetheart, death is nothing to be afraid of anyway. It's the one sure thing, the only thing we can all count on. Life, that's what you've got to worry about, life, because life keeps changing on you. And after all, death can't be so bad. It's probably a sort of relief after life. And since it happens to everybody, you just may as well make up your mind not to be worried about it."

I'm feeling pretty pleased with this answer, a good, kind, gentle, solid, truthful answer, and I'm a good dad. But Angie busts out crying. I turn around and there's Faye in the doorway with this look on her face like she married the world's biggest jerk. Liliane just sits over there across the bed, smiling at me.

I say to myself, "Shit!" But I say to them, "Well, I for one am ready for that drink." and I get up and leave the field to Faye. She can take better care of Angie than I can, that's clear. And if she wants this guy, she can have him. I sit down at the table in the courtyard, but who should come out and sit with me but, again, the man himself. He settles his perfect goddam body into a chair, stretches out his legs, rests his dark brown wrist and hand on the table, tapping his long perfectly shaped fingers and manicured nails against the wood, and watches me.

"Lily-Annie," I say to him. "That's a funny name." And I emphasize the word funny so that he knows I don't mean funny-ha-ha. "Where were you born?"

"Born?" he says and laughs like it's a completely new concept. "I should have to say I was born in the black mountains of Moldavia, at a crossroads on a brightly moonlit night. But I am Greek by birth."

He lets that sit a moment, smiling at me with perfect teeth made all the whiter by the dark velvet of his thick, full lips. Then he adds. "That is to say that my mother bore me in Greece, but that is not where I was born." He laughs again. "I think your Noah Webster would approve of that conjugation and etymology." He says, "Ah, but I grow tedious. I bore you. In Santa Cruz de K'u, I bore you. And soon, perhaps, very soon, I will bore you in another way?" And he laughs.

"You have one terrific sense of humor," I say to him. "Sometime maybe you'd like to share the joke with me."

"Perhaps I will," he says. "Sometime. But you must forgive me. It is your English language. It fascinates me. Its vagaries. Blood, for instance. Look at blood. A good solid old English word for a good solid fundamental concept. Blood. Good. Hear how the words resonate. Blood good."

He smiles to show even more teeth. Goddam, he's good looking.

"Food!" he ejaculates and laughs again. "Blood good food. Three utterly different sounds, yet spelled nearly identically. Listen to the words, how they fight each other, blood good food, how they embrace each other. One can imagine some ancient Briton—one of your august ancestors— shouting to his primitive kin across the blasted heath, 'Blood good food.' And the clansman shouting back his enthusiastic concurrence, 'Blood good food. Tough, though, through trough.'"

And again he laughs. "Ah, the march of civilization! Fascinating, language. Spelling. To spell. To cast a spell. Good spell. Gospel. Fascinating, mankind is fascinating, I love mankind." And he leans across the table toward me. "You are fascinating, Mr. August. You fascinate me."

I just look at the guy. What is this? Does he want my wife, or does he want me? I've been hit on by guys before, a hand dropped onto my knee in the movie theater, the look in the eyes. But this guy is different.

And what can you answer to crap like he's talking? I mean, when you think about it, it's kind of funny, these two stone-age guys shouting at each other, "blood good food comma tough

though through trough." And even though I'm no linguist, I can appreciate that the guy's got at least something of a brain and that Faye isn't going after him just for the sex.

I lift the bottle of gin that Faye has put out on the table along with a bottle of tonic and a bowl of peanuts. I say, "Drink?"

He says, "No."

I say, "Nuts?" and I offer him the bowl of peanuts. He looks at it like it's turds.

He leans across the table and says to me very quietly, "You are what you eat, Mark." Then he shows those teeth again. "And I am even more so."

I keep staring at him. He stares back, those burning eyes almost amber against the dark brown of his face under the perfect arch of his black eyebrows. I pour myself a big gin and tonic and pop a couple of nuts.

Orlando comes up and says he's going home now. He's been hanging around flirting with Crescencia, distracting her from her work and making a general nuisance of himself. Earlier I heard him in the kitchen strumming his guitar and "serenading her" with those Méxican songs that keep breaking into that passionate falsetto. Orlando looks at the man, and I know I should be polite and make introductions, but these two guys I dislike so much that I don't care to involve myself in their courtesies. So Orlando says to him, extending his hand, "Me llamo Orlando."

And the man answers in Maya, tells him his name I guess. Orlando's peeing his pants with delight that this big rich foreign black man knows his language, and he's about to sit down at the table when I say to him with an exclamation point at both ends, "¡Buenas noches, Orlando!"

Orlando takes the hint, which in itself is a big surprise, and he starts toward the great doors, saying goodnight. As he walks across the courtyard, the man watches him. I watch the man. He's got this look on his face as he watches Orlando that makes me take a second look at Orlando. The way he's walking he reminds me of something, and suddenly I figure it out. Those tight pants, that cute little tail, switching from side to side as he walks, his shiny black hair

bouncing as thick and luxuriant as any girl's. Orlando looks good enough to eat. I look back at Liliane, at the hard-on throbbing in his pants.

I look back at Orlando who stops at the door, looks over his shoulder, right into the eyes of the man, and then turns and steps across the threshold and closes the door behind him. I look back to the man. He looks hungry.



FAYE: You will think I am given easily to emotions. Or perhaps you will think just the opposite. The truth is neither and both. I say this with some pride and some embarrassment as either way it's a handicap as well as an advantage. But you must understand the physicality, the merely human physicality. That Monday night I was exhausted both in mind and body. The mist, the bat attack, the night in the hospital with all its anxieties, the drive home with Mark's angry persistence about not only the bats but about Constantin and his role in the nightmare left me debilitated.

But I could not sleep. Mark's annoying ability to fall immediately into a deep sleep, his calm, regular breathing punishing me, and the fact that I could find no rational explanation for any of what had happened in Mérida kept my mind whirling in tiny, vicious circles.

Just after sunset, when Crescencia knocked and told us Constantin had arrived, I was sick with fatigue. I saw everything that happened next through a fog reminiscent of those years in our late teens and early twenties when we experimented with pot and acid, inducing delirium, expanding the mind into unknown realms and freaking out the imagination.

The sense that I could derive from the words and actions around me made no sense, nonsense, anti-sense. To hear Mark lecturing Angie about death after enduring the bat attack, as though death were to be expected tomorrow, and welcomed! To hear Angie's terrified sobs. To hold her close and try to find the words to soothe her back into that sleep that was so frighteningly like a coma. To return to the patio and find Mark and Constantin, two big redheaded boys playing out their macho strategies like socialized bull elephants, flapping their

ears at each other, flaring their endowments to assert hegemony over the prize female, I thought I might burst out laughing, or weeping, or screaming.

Orlando was just leaving by the great doors as I came out of Angie's bedroom. Obviously something had happened among the three of them. The tension was palpable. Constantin rose to greet me as though I, or he, were royalty. I thought he might even take my hand and kiss it.

"I must go," he said in his mysterious accent and calculated murmur.

"Oh, must you?" Mark mocked, splayed on his chair in a defiant, angry, rude posture. I thought of kicking him. I thought of kicking them both.

I walked Constantin across the courtyard toward the great doors, embarrassed and uncertain. Certainly I owed this man a debt. I didn't know how Constantin had managed to find us in the hotel or rescue us from the bats, but certainly he had. Certainly he had managed to get us to the hospital while I had merely fallen into my womanly swoon. I remembered vaguely the ride in the Jeep and writing the note for a taxi driver outside the hospital to deliver to Mark in Santa Cruz de K'u, remembered Angie's blood dripping along the polished hospital floor as Constantin carried her in, remembered precisely the many conversations with Diaz. But everything else during the long wait through the night for Mark to arrive was like a dim dream from long ago. Certainly Constantin had been there beside me. Certainly he had been kind and gentle. And certainly, he had said things to me, romantic things out of moonlit make-believe, things I might treasure and fondle in dark lonely moments, but things which I could never allow him to say again. Now that I was again in command of my senses, I had no intention of losing that control again.

And yet, as I walked Constantin across the courtyard, I felt a nearly unconquerable desire to slip my arm around his waist. I blushed at the notion, my face and throat hot, and I almost laughed aloud. I turned to him at the door, and he was smiling at me as though he read my mind.

I said, "Thank you for coming to see Angie, Mr. Liliane," and I made sure my voice was loud enough so that Mark could hear from where he sat at the patio table. "That was so nice of you," I added.

He said, "I did not come to see Angie. You know that."

I lowered my voice. "Please. Please don't say these things to me. You mustn't. You see my life. You see my husband, and my daughter. Please, I'm not free. I don't want to be free."

"Yes, I see your life," he said without lowering his voice. "Won't you come with me now?"

Go with him, I thought. For what? To what?

"To love," he said simply, again as though reading my thought. "For ever."

"No. No, of course not," I said. I laughed. Or I tried to. He did not.

"Won't you walk with me for a bit then? The night is lovely."

"No," I said again. "Please go." I kept my voice lowered. I could see Mark out of the corner of my eye shift in his chair, readying himself to come play the matrimonial cop.

"Please, please, please go," I whispered.

"I'll wait outside for you."

"No, don't wait."

"I've waited for you so long. I will wait longer."

I put my hand on his chest and pushed him gently out the door. He yielded easily, backing away, his chest like a magnet drawing my hand with him. With all my will I pulled my hand back and softly shut the door on him. I turned. Mark's eyes never left me. I walked back to the table, sat, took a deep, burning swallow from Mark's drink and finally met his eyes.

He said, "So what did he do, follow you here?"

I made a careful mental note not to allow myself to be drawn into his adolescent jealousy. I said, "Evidently he remembered what I told the taxi driver."

"Don't be cute. From Berkeley. Did he follow you here from Berkeley?" I suppose my face must have shown my bewilderment. I simply had no idea what he was talking about, and I could find no answer for him. He said, "Did he get lonely without you? How long's he been here? Days, weeks, months?"

I sat blank.

"Your man out there!" he said, so angry he frightened me. "Your lover! How do you arrange it? Have you been going to work at all, Faye? All these Mondays and Fridays you take the Jeep into Mérida, you've been meeting him? Do you even bother to show up at the hospital? I can check, you know. I'll just ask Diaz. Mondays and Fridays in Paradise, huh?"

I tried to make sense of the words he was speaking to me. I mean, yes, of course I understood the words and yes I understood the preposterous thought behind the words—that I was having an affair with Constantin—but I could not put together how and where Mark could have given birth to the thought. I could only respond with the same anger that he flung at me.

"Yes," I said, "you big stupid jerk. Yes by all means check with Diaz. I met Constantin for the first time last night. You know as much about him as I do."

It was not a lie, but I knew in my heart that it was a lie because in fact I did feel enormous attraction to Constantin. And because of the lie I knew that I had lost any hope of honesty or integrity in this argument. I thought about running into the bedroom or into the bathroom or into Angie's room. I stood abruptly and almost knocked into the cage of vampire bats that Mark kept on the patio for observation, three little horrid black things that made flapping sounds throughout the nights. I turned back to Mark, made more furious because of my own dishonesty. "If I did have a lover," I said to him, "how could he ever compare with your lover here, your precious *Desmodus rotundus* who takes you from your wife's bed every night? Just how faithful have you been to *me*, Mark?"

It was an insane attack; I realized it immediately. But what I had not realized until this moment was how much I resented the bats. It was the bats that had brought us to this desolation, devouring not only all of Mark's nights but all of his thoughts. It was the bats that killed José Luis. It was the bats that almost killed Angie.

Mark leaned toward me and lowered his voice as though he was delivering the coup de grace. "Faye," he said. "He's gay."

It was one more nonsequitur in an evening of them. I could find no word to speak in answer. He said, "Your big stud out there likes boys. You should have seen him ogling Orlando

just a minute ago. He had a hard-on for him like a randy mule. He even made a pass at me." Mark stared at me as if waiting for an answer, as if I could possibly formulate one. "Have you been tested for HIV, Faye?" he said at last. "I guess we'd better both get tested now. I guess you've brought your infection home with you."

"You're insane!" I said. "Mark, listen to yourself. You're going insane."

"Your lover boy's waiting outside for you, Faye. Why don't you go to him? And why don't you never come back?"

I wanted to attack him, physically punish him, spit at him, claw at his smug face. Instead I picked up his glass and flung his drink into his face, an act that always seemed would be great fun. It wasn't fun. It was pathetic. I threw the glass across the patio. More pathetic. I stood, quivering beside the table, mute with rage and humiliation. Before I knew it, before I had made a conscious decision, I was through the great doors and outside, walking fast down the hill toward the church.



MARK: Let her go, I thought to myself. Just let the horny, stupid bitch go rut. Let her rot. I started for Angie's room to look in on her, but stopped. Instead I poured another drink.



ANGIE: All around me was black syrup, and I was floating and warm.

I could hear them screaming, like from a far off shore.

But I was floating in warm, black syrup, and I didn't care.



FAYE: I was almost to the church when Constantin suddenly loomed up in front of me. "Here I am," he said.

"Look, you!" I shouted into his face, grabbing the lapel of his shirt and shoving him out of my way. "Don't push me! Just don't!"

In a moment I was at the church door, but it was locked. Locked. The church door was locked. Church doors don't get locked. Church doors should never be locked. Church doors shouldn't even have locks put on them.

Not knowing where to go and feeling like a fool in front of this man, I turned in circles. Maybe I would go back and get the Jeep. Maybe I would drive into Mérida. Maybe I'd buy a plane ticket and fly fucking home. I'd buy two. I'd take Angie and fly fucking home.

I started to cry. To my shame and horror, I stood crying in front of the church until, my knees weak and trembling, I sank onto the low wall which formed the courtyard of the church, and I sat crying and crying and waiting—to my horror and shame—for Constantin to come out of the night and take me into his arms. He didn't come.

Through a prism of absurd, unconquerable ... womanly tears I looked up the hill and saw our house, the only electric lights for miles around, brilliant in the black of the night. Beside the house the generator putt-putted softly. For the first time it dawned on me how mysterious and alluring and grand our house must seem to the people of Santa Cruz de K'u gazing up the hill each night since the rich gringos arrived.

Crescencia's bedroom window was open and she was sitting on the sill, the light flooding out around her onto Orlando, sitting straight-backed and handsome on a boulder just below her, strumming his guitar and serenading her with his dulcet, passionate voice. How sweet they both were, how innocent, how romantic. How I would love to be Crescencia sitting safe and beautiful in my window, wooed by my handsome lover.

"Your tears hurt me, my dear," came the soft voice in my ear. Constantin sat beside me and put his arm around me and drew me close. I put my head onto his chest and wept outright and prolonged.

"The church is locked!" I sobbed at last. I don't have any explanation why I was so preoccupied with the damn church. Except for the first day in Santa Cruz de K'u seeing the

sights, I had never even cared to step inside this church. Since I was a child, a foster child dragged for my good into church after church after church of every denomination, I have hated churches.

"Yes," he said, kissing my eyes. "It is dark of the moon. Every house in town is locked and shuttered. All the windows and doors are hung with garlic. It is dark of the moon and the undead spirits are flying. Civateteo. But you know this. Mark has told you this."

Oh, what was he on about now? Civateteo. I tried to think where I had heard the word before. Oh, yes, Mark, in the Jeep, Bincha behind us, José Luis in my arms. Oh yes, civateteo, and all that crap. And here was Constantin kissing my eyes and licking at my tears and whispering into my ear in front of the damn church about civateteo.

I pulled my face away from him and said, "You and my husband should get together."

"Yes," he said. "We will."

"Please," I said. "Please leave us alone!" I tried to push myself away from his chest, even though I had an insane, nearly irresistible impulse to draw him tight and reach up and kiss the skin on his beautiful throat. "You're rich and handsome and charming and clever, and so what? What do you want with me? You can have any woman you want."

"And any man."

I kept him at straight-arm distance, looking into his eyes, trying to follow his words, trying to link his words to Mark's words, trying to follow a thought to a meaning. Through his chest his heart pounded into my hand resounding through my body right down to my feet. "Please be quiet," I said. "You confuse me." I sank into his chest and put my ear to his heart, felt it beating along my cheek, my blood racing to the pulse of it. I held onto him like an anchor in a fast current.

"Only the brave or foolish," he said, "are walking in Santa Cruz de K'u tonight. Or, like your Orlando, those in love."

"Which are we?" I said, hating immediately that I would allow a stupid, flirty thought like that to escape from my head. He bent down and nibbled under my ear with his soft lips,

smelling of warm coconut and cream. I could not stop him. I no longer wanted to stop him. I wanted him to do anything at all to me, everything to me. His voice came softly into my ear.

"There was once a man and a woman. There is again the man and the woman. And all the years that have separated us, heaped lonely one upon the other, are nothing more than a moment in time, and have led us here." His words made no sense, but it no longer seemed to matter. His lips, his smell, his soft, firm arms enveloping me were all that mattered. "Our souls cry out to be joined," he murmured into my ear. "You feel it, too. You know it. Yet you resist."

Resist? I almost laughed. Where in this coconut cream filling of a woman did he detect resistance? And as I searched through myself for the resistance he felt, I found it. What kind of fool was this, sitting out under the stars within earshot of her husband and child making ridiculous love? Love?

"No!" I said, and I forced myself away from him, fought, pulled, dragged, tore myself away from him. "No!" I said and I stood. "No!" I said and I backed away. "I can't. You want too much. You want love."

"I already have your love. I want more from you than love. I shall have more than that from you, and you from me."

"Not from me, mister," I said, and I backed slowly away from him up the hill toward my house and family. "We're never going to see each other again. Do you understand?"

"You will see me always, wherever you look."

"No!" I said, and I turned and ran up the hill toward the light. Ran, hardly. It was like running in a dream, in slow motion, legs weak and exhausted taking step after step yet making no headway, the long hill stretching above me, the gravel slipping under my feet, giving me no purchase. I could feel him behind me, his coconut cream breath on the back of my neck, under my ear, in my hair. Step by step I ran away.

Just before I reached the house a figure rose up out of the dark before me. I stopped short with a gasp. It was Orlando, leaving Crescencia's window and starting home. "Oh, I am sorry to

surprise you, Señora," he said, but I pushed past him through the great doors into the courtyard and bolted them behind me.

Mark was still sitting at the table fingering his glass. I caught my breath and dragged myself back to the reality of my life. I combed my hair back from my face with my fingers, the smell of coconut and cream wafting about my head, and walked toward him, exerting calm over my heart and through my blood down my trembling legs. As I neared the table, I could see that he had polished off more than a couple of drinks while I had been down the hill at the church. I didn't want to talk to him, not now. Later yes, we had to talk, yes, but not now. There was too much to say, and I couldn't think straight, and he was drinking. I veered toward our room. No, I thought, I'll sleep with Angie tonight. She probably needs me tonight. And I veered again toward her door.

"Going somewhere?" Mark said with a sneer in his voice. So he could see, then. I wasn't fooling anyone. I kept a straight line to Angie's door and opened it to find her standing at the open window.

"Angie, get back to bed!" She looked at me blankly, and I could see that she was feverish. I helped her into bed, and then closed and locked the shutters. "From now on, I don't want you opening this window again. Ever." I covered her with a blanket and stroked her neck and forehead. She was burning up.

A sound came from outside, muffled by the shutters and coming from a distance. It sounded like a man crying out or singing out, but suddenly choked off. It sounded like Orlando. Perhaps he was calling to Crescencia. It was not unusual for him to return several times a night to her window. I listened for the sound to be repeated. It was utterly still outside. No sound of crickets or cicadas. Nothing.

After a long moment, another sound arose out of the silence, a sound I could neither identify nor locate. Was it animal or human? Was it just outside the window or did it come from a great distance? Was it only in my mind? Soon the sound seemed to float at me from all directions, a continuous wail.

I left Angie in bed and came out into the courtyard. Mark was on his feet, alarmed. He, too, heard the sound. Crescencia came to her door and looked out into the courtyard, her eyes wide and terrified. She had her rosary in her hands, counting beads and murmuring prayers.

I looked up at the sky above the courtyard. The stars were fantastically bright, piercing the black with their infinity of pinpoints. The strange sound was now everywhere around us, raining down on us from the sky. It became a howling. A dog, I thought, only a dog. But the howling changed. It fragmented and became many howls mingled into one, as though every dog for miles around had joined in. Then came the sounds of other animals, the bleats of goats and the crows of roosters and the racket of hens and geese and wild cats, howls and screams.

In their cage in the courtyard, the three vampires emitted piercing shrieks. They pulled back their pale lips and lapped at the air with their tongues, baring their teeth and gnashing them as they bit at the wires of the cage and tore at the wires with the claws on their wrists and beat at the wires with their bony, featherless, winglike arms until blood streamed down the wires, puddling onto the patio below.

I felt a hand grasp mine. It was Angie. She was trembling. Crescencia too came to my side. Finally Mark. We stood huddled together in the courtyard with the screams of havoc piercing our eardrums until a sudden silence sliced through the din, a silence as piercing as the screams themselves.

We waited one, two, three minutes. Then from a distance came a lone howl.



CONSTANTIN: He was a tasty boy with no other thought but his dream of ecstasy, so long deferred. Now, of course, he has tasted his ecstasy. Yes, he was very nice, pure, completely unobjectionable. An altogether tasty boy.



ANGIE: Talk about weird.

When I wake up late Tuesday afternoon, my mom and dad are like, well, you know, like, you know, and I'm like ... it's like I'm in a brand new world. It's like the bats' blood and my blood are mixed up together and I'm like half Angie and half bats and half something else, three halves instead of one whole. First of all, I'm real smart. I mean, I know things I've never known before in my life. And I see things I never saw before in my life. And I understand things I never understood before in my life. I can't remember shit, but I'm like super smart, like Wonder Woman, but still real weak, and I don't have any lassos or bracelets or anything like that, you know, but ... I can see things .

I get out of bed and I kind of float to the door, but with my feet on the ground and walking, but like I'm on air instead of stone, and I come out of my room into the courtyard, and even though it's way past midday the light is so bright it hurts my eyes. You know, like I've got bat eyes. My mom's lying on the lounge in the shade of this banana tree, with her eyes closed and this book in her hand, *Anna Karenina*, and zap, I know in a second what the whole story is about, this Russian woman who's got this terrible, repressive husband who drives her into an affair with another man who leaves her so she kills herself, and I know that Greta the Great played Anna in the movie. So how do I know this? Maybe I'm like reading my mom's mind? Or maybe it's the bat eyes. Well sure, I know now, but for me then it was like incredibly scary.

And then this next thing. My mom jerks like somebody pulls her string and she looks up from her reading to the great doors, and I know as sure as anything that she thinks somebody is out there watching her, somebody special. But no one's there. So she puts down the book beside her and leans her head back like, boy does she need sleep, but she doesn't sleep, and I can hear her mind in there working like a computer hard drive gone berserk, whirling and sorting and dumping data.

My dad comes out of his workroom where he's been studying the bats who killed themselves in the cage during the howling, and he looks over at my mom, and he just stops there, staring at her. And I know, like what they call déjà vu only magnified to the nth, that he's going to come to her and put his hand out and massage her neck the way he always used to do but

doesn't anymore. She's got her eyes closed when he comes to her, so she doesn't see. He stares down at her for a long time, and he puts out his hand. But then he takes it back. And I know he's just so miserable. And he wants to say he's sorry, but he knows she'll jump all over him like the woman from hell. So he goes back into the workroom without even saying anything!

I suddenly feel so bad for him that I go to him in the workroom and put my arms around his neck. "It's okay, Daddy." I haven't called him Daddy in years. He's all, huh? Then he hugs me to him close and goes, "Angie. Baby. How're you feeling, Angel?"

I go, "I'm good. I'm hungry."

He goes, "Well, come on, then! I'll fix you something!"

This is like it used to be between my dad and me. He was always good to me, always taking care of me. Not like now when he's mad all the time. We go into the kitchen, and what does he want to fix me? A taco.

I go, "Dad, I don't eat meat, remember?"

He goes, "Angel, do me a favor, just eat it. You lost some blood. You need meat."

I go, "Dad, there's some bread here. There's some peanut butter. I'll be okay."

He goes, "Angel, just do me this little favor, okay?"

I go, "Maybe later." I go, "Just leave me alone right now, okay, Dad? And I think maybe you'd better just leave Mom alone too."

And he jumps all over me like the man from hell. I mean, jeez, when someone tells you you should leave someone alone, you should just pay attention and do it. But not my dad. He storms out of the kitchen and into his workroom and starts throwing his tools in the toolbox, and he gets out his poison, and he gets out his nets, all the time swearing under his breath, goddam this and goddam that and goddam Orlando.

My mom breaks out of her coma and starts up out of the lounge like she's going to try to stop him, and I know there's going to be a fight so I go, "It's okay, Mom. He's okay, he's just a little upset about Orlando."

My dad's on his way back to the workroom when he hears Orlando's name and he goes apopleptic. "Goddam Orlando!" he goes. "Orlando's fired!" he goes. "This is the last time I'm waiting around for his highness Señor Orlando! You tell him that!"

My mom goes, "Mark, you're not going out tonight?"

He goes, "Of course I'm going out tonight! Goddam it! It's my job, remember? It's what I'm paid for? I kill vampires? They're out there breeding? Every night I go out, I catch a couple of hundred, a couple of hundred contaminate a couple of thousand, a couple of thousand less to eat up your daughter? Remember? But sure, okay, Faye, I'll stay home, you bet."

See, what my dad's yelling about, the bats contaminating bats —and this will just gross you right out!— he showed me all this one night when he took me out with him on his foray. He waits until the bats leave their caves to go out hunting, and then he puts up his mist nets in front of the cave, so in the morning when the bats fly back to roost, they get caught in the nets. But see, it's not as bad as it could be because my dad is very environmentally correct. He separates the vampires out from the other bats, the fruit bats and the insectiv— insectiver— ver— insect-eating bats, and all the good bats that do good things for the environment and are really just little cutems —they are, all furry and cuddly except for their wings, of course, which are like out of a nightmare— and he lets the good bats go and only kills the vampires. To me they deserve it because they're out there bloodsucking the horses and cows and sheep and pigs and spreading disease and all. I mean, vampires, leeches and mosquitoes, these things should never have been created. I mean, that's what I thought then. I mean, you know, I know now that we all have to live, and all, you know, but ...

... but anyway the vampire bats, my dad separates them out and smears their wings with what he calls "vampiricide" which is this kind of poison he got from the Departamento de Agricultura. Bats, see, are real sociable little mammals and they hang around in colonies of the same species, sort of like at Berkeley High at lunch how the Blacks hang with the Blacks and the Whites with the Whites and the Latinos with the Latinos and the Asians with the Asians, and like that. So the vampires are hanging in the caves with the vampires, and they go around and groom

each other, you know lick each other clean, and so one bat with poison on him gets licked by maybe a dozen other bats, and they all die. And the death is like really horrible because of the way the vampiricide works. It's actually an anti-coagulant, and since when they come home from hunting they're all full of blood, they hemorrhage in the space of one day, and they're stone dead by the next night. I mean, this is what my dad does for pay!

So that's why my dad is so out of his head crazy mad at my mom for trying to keep him home. He already lost Friday night and Saturday night because of José Luis and the funeral. Then Sunday night was the bat attack on me in Mérida, and thank God I don't remember much about that. Then Monday night I don't remember much about either because that's when Constantin came to visit me, and all hell broke loose with the howling, and the bats in the cage killing themselves and all. So my dad didn't go out again, so that's four nights in a row he's lost. And now without Orlando, my dad's like one-armed, so he's like royally pissed, and now when my mom starts nagging him to stay home, he blows up.

He goes, "Goddam it, woman, can't you understand any goddam thing!"

This "woman" sends my mom into attack mode. I mean, imagine calling your wife "woman" and, like, I mean especially my mom! She hates that word particularly because she says it comes from *womb man*, and she's not a man in any shape or form because men are so mean. Except my dad usually —when he's not calling her "woman" because in spite of everything he's pretty liberated in a lot of ways— is pretty evolved for a man because my mom's spent so many years training him.

So now my mom goes, real quiet, "Mark, we need to talk."

He goes, equally quiet, "What do we have to talk about, Faye? Your man? Is that what you want to talk to me about?"

She goes, "Don't be stupid!" and she looks at me. So does my dad. They both shut up a second and I start putting two and two together. My mom is having an affair. Jeez! But before that can really sink in, my mom starts on him again. She goes, "How can you go out after what happened to Angie?"

I hate that, when they use me as a weapon against each other.

He goes, "Angie is *why* I'm going out. Can't you get it through your thick head?"

She goes, "Mark, they came after her. They know. Somehow they know what you're doing to them!"

He goes, "Who? What are you talking about?"

She goes, "The bats. Somehow they know you're out to eradicate them. They're counter-attacking by coming after Angie."

He goes, "The bats? What are you, crazy? Bats don't think like that! Bats don't think at all!"

She goes, "Then how do you account for it? That was an organized, planned attack. They kept me from getting to the door!" I can hear her hard drive again whirling around in there searching like crazy for something that just doesn't compute.

My dad goes, "You're crazy." He stands looking at her a minute, then he shakes his head and goes again real quiet, "You're crazy, Faye. You're crazy."

My mom looks at him a minute, then real quiet, she goes, "Then tell me, sanely, how you account for it, Mark? You're the vampire expert."

He goes, and it's this sort of stammer, he goes, "You you you said Angie was smeared with makeup and perfume, everything you had in your purse, maybe some of it was old, maybe it attracted them by the smell."

She goes, "Vampires are attracted by blood, not Max Factor." He doesn't answer but just looks at her. She goes, "What about the three in the cage? What about them? Bats don't commit suicide either, right?" He doesn't answer again. She goes, "Mark, don't go out tonight." He stands looking at her a minute, then he just turns around and starts across the courtyard for the workroom. She goes, "You're the one who's crazy!" and takes off into her room and slams the door. This is like what she meant when she said we need to talk.

My dad goes, "Goddam it to hell!" and storms into the workroom and slams out again with his toolbox and cans of poison and storms back across the courtyard and slams out the great

doors, and in a second I hear the roar of the Jeep and the squealing of tires. Real adult behavior from both of them.

The sun is down now, and the light is softer and doesn't hurt my eyes so much anymore, and the mosquitoes start coming out, and the courtyard is all quiet like a graveyard. I stand there for a minute, really pissed at both of them, but then I think about my mom in her room probably crying, and so I go over to her door and I'm just about to knock when suddenly she jerks it open and looks right in my eyes, and I know like I can read her mind that she thinks I was going to be *him*.

I say to her, "You want some cocoa or something?"

"Oh, honey," she says, and her eyes fill up with tears. "Aren't you good?" she says. I like that, when she says things like that in that soft tone of voice. That's when I like my mom the best. She goes, "Come on, let's get some cocoa together. I'll bet we've even got some coconut to put in it."

I'm like, coconut and cocoa? But I go, "Okay," and we go heading across the courtyard when she suddenly stops. There's this vase of flowers on the patio table, and I'm like, how did they get here! And I mean these flowers are the most beautiful flowers I have ever seen in my life, huge suckers. There's a card next to them. My mom picks up the card, and she's got this smile on her face like somebody just gave her a back rub. She reads the card and the smile goes way bad. She drops the card, looks around, then runs out the great doors, her head whirling around to see all directions at once.

I pick up the card. It's got this handwriting on it that is so classy. It says, "The flowers are beautiful, are they not? Watch them as they wilt and die and rot." I'm like, whoa!

I go through the great doors. My mom's looking down the road. No one. She goes to the side of the house, looks around the corner. No one. She goes to the other side of the house, looks around that corner. No one. She disappears around the corner, and in a few seconds comes all the way around the house and she goes, "Did you see him?"

I go, "Who?"

She doesn't say anything but runs back inside. She looks for the card but can't find it. Finally she sees it in my hand and takes it from me and tears it into little pieces. She goes, "You never saw this, do you hear me?"

I go, "Why?"

She goes, "This is something ugly. And I want you to wipe it out of your mind." She takes the vase of flowers and heads into the kitchen with them but changes her mind. She stands there a second, and then she heads for the great doors. She goes, "Come on," and I follow her out and down the hill to the church. With the sun gone it's almost completely dark now, but there's still enough light to see the road by. We get to the church and go around back into the cemetery. The cemetery's got all these new black circles of fresh ashes in the grass where there had been fires. My mom puts the vase in the middle of one of the biggest circles of ashes and says, "These flowers are in memory of José Luis." Then she goes, "Come on," and I follow her back up the hill to the house. I can see where Crescencia is turning on the lights. We come back in the courtyard, and there on the patio table is the vase of flowers ... again.

I'm all, get outa here! So is my mom. She looks around, and her eyes are all bugged out and scared. She grabs my hand and backs into a corner. "Crescencia!" she yells.

"Si, Señora?" Crescencia comes out of her room.

"Who was here?" my mom says in Spanish.

She goes, "No one."

My mom goes, "Come over here," and Crescencia sees us all scared and suddenly she's like terrified. She starts across the courtyard in a crouch, looking all around. My mom pulls me with her, and we all three start backing down the hallway to her room, and it's getting darker and darker so there are shadows in all the corners. We get to her room and get quick inside and bolt the door, looking all around, under the bed, behind the wardrobe. We back into the corner, and my mom pulls the blanket off the bed and wraps it around us.

And we stay like that all night, me and Crescencia whispering questions and my mom saying, "Shhh!" and "Listen!" So we listen, but there's nothing, no noise at all, like someone has

wrapped a blanket around the whole house, muffling out the world. And as the night goes on, it's like the muffler starts to wrap itself around my mom, individually, and she withdraws from me and Crescencia like she's going into a cocoon.

And that's how my dad finds us in the morning, all wrapped up in the corner, wide awake and scared shitless and needing to pee real bad. He can't get in because of the bolt, and he has to knock and my mom just sits there all wrapped up, and finally I go to the door and open it, and there's my dad standing there in the doorway with the gray light of dawn in the courtyard behind him, and he's looking at my mom and Crescencia wrapped up in the blanket on the floor and he's like, what's going on with the three of you?

I look to my mom. She's all, huh? Like she just woke up from a bad nightmare. She gets up and Crescencia kind of scrambles and crawls across the door and out into the courtyard. My mom drops the blanket onto the bed. She stretches. She goes, "Do you want some breakfast?" She goes, "You must be very hungry after a night of killing," and she passes him in the doorway and heads for the kitchen.

My dad shakes his head and sits on the bed and rubs his eyes. He's tireder than I've ever seen him, and nervous, twitching. I go, "Tough night?" But it's like he doesn't hear me. He sits there twitching. I go, "Yeah, it was a real tough night here, too. Mom's acting weird."

He looks at me for a second and goes, "Yeah, tell me about it. Listen, Angel, I need to get cleaned up."

That's when I notice he's a real mess. One side of his face and his neck is all scratched up. His shirt is torn across his chest and there's all this blood all over him. I want to ask him what happened to you!?! But I'm so afraid to know the answer, that I just say, "Sure, Dad. See you at breakfast." and finally I remember to go pee, and man!

My mom sets the table real fancy and puts the vase of flowers on a doily right in the center. We eat in silence, only I don't eat anything. Neither does my mom. My mom and dad don't look at each other. He just sits there twitching. Every once in a while he jerks like he's got a sudden idea. He doesn't eat either. Only Crescencia eats, looking at all three of us, one at a time,

the crazy gringos, you know. After she finishes her plate, she gets up and starts clearing the table. I help her. Then we stand in the kitchen doorway watching my mom and dad sit there not talking to each other. Then my dad gets up and goes into their room and closes the door.

My mom turns in her chair to find me. She goes, "Angie, we'd better get some sleep," and she goes with me into my room and we go to bed together.

I don't say like, "Mom, why are you sleeping with me?" I don't say like, "So what's happening, Mom?"

I turn over in bed and look at her, lying there beside me like a board, stiff, hard and splintery, her eyes open and staring like knotholes, nothing in them. Talk about weird!

End of Disk 4 (75:14)

The times has been,
That, when the brains were out, the man would die,
And there an end; but now they rise again...

Macbeth III, 4.75-80
William Shakespeare

DISK 5 — (77:11 minutes)

Blood in the Temples

MARK: It had been hard work, all night, trying to get the mist nets in place single-handed, and I was crazy even to try. No, mad. Out of my mind mad at Faye and her jerk of a boyfriend, mad at Orlando and his carelessness, mad at Angie just for no good reason, just on principle out of, maybe, habit. But mad, mad, mad.

That night, the site I choose is a cliff about two hours by road and another quarter hour on foot from Santa Cruz de K'u. With Orlando I would choose a different site, a new site I discovered recently where the vampire population looks to be extremely high.

But alone, knowing I'll have to make several trips back to the Jeep, and in dark of the moon, I choose this cave facing out over the Gulf where we've worked before. The vampires are nearly gone here, but my intention tonight is to annihilate them completely.

At the top of the cliff, I tie the pulley securely around a tree trunk and loop the rope through, hooking it at one end to my belt. Throwing the rest of the rope over the edge of the cliff, I put on my gloves and lower myself hand over hand down the steep side, the mist net slung over my shoulder. The cave is about fifty feet down the cliff. When I reach it, I attach the other end of the rope securely to the other side of my belt, freeing up my hands to work. I search out with my flashlight the attach sites for the mist net and start hooking it in place. The bats have all left their roost to go feed and the place is absolutely still. Hanging there in the blackness over that deep drop down to the ocean below, the only sound my own breathing ... yeah, I have a sudden spasm of fear.

I've never been here alone before, and never in dark of the moon. I shake it off, finish hooking the net to all the attach sites in reach, which spreads over about half the cave mouth, and then I start the rope swinging so that I can arc over to the opposite side to pull the rest of the net into place. As I swing I feel a sudden pull and drop on the rope, as though the rope is cut through on the sharp crags above me.

This is something I'm always afraid of, and I've rehearsed what to do if it should happen. I reach out quick for a handhold on the cliff—it's a little bush, just a twig really, but it holds—and I drop the flashlight. I can hear it clatter down the rocks as it falls all the way to the bottom. My gloves protect my hands from being cut, but I scrape my face and chest hard up against the crags as I hug the cliff. I can taste blood, and I can feel it drip down my neck and chest and belly. I hold there a long moment until I get my breath back.

It's ... you know ... it could have been death.

I'm expecting the cut rope to drop down on me, but it still seems to be attached above somehow. Maybe caught in a crevice, maybe caught up there on a jagged rock. I pull on it to bring it down, but it's taut. I don't trust my weight to it, though, and I start to climb up the cliff, finding hand and footholds. In the blackness, with the sheerness of the cliff and jaggedness of the limestone crags, it's dangerous, slow work, but after some time I reach the top. Orlando's flashlight is in the toolbox. I grab it and walk back to the tree where I tied the rope. The rope is still there around the pulley, and I've still got both ends attached to my belt. I haul the rope up. It's intact, one long strand of rope. I examine every inch of it in the flashlight. No cuts, nothing.

I search ... I search ... back in my memory for the feeling of that pull and drop as I was swinging through the air below. That pull and drop.

There was a pull. A pull. Someone was up here. Someone very strong who was able to give the rope a jerk just at the moment that I swung out below. Someone was able to see me ... way below ... when I swung out way below ... someone ... someone was watching me.

The sudden knowledge that someone is here on the edge of the cliff playing with me gives me a rush of adrenalin. I turn the flashlight into the bush. The beam picks up the trunks of the low trees, all gnarled and deformed each one looking like a man ... or maybe an ape ... they don't have apes in the Yucatan ... they only have men ... and ... The gnarled trunks of the trees catch the beam from the flashlight and make hopping shapes and shadows as I quick move the light from place to place looking for him. I wonder for a second if it might be Orlando, playing a joke on me. I guess it must be Orlando. That's all I can think of ... or ...

But I know it's not Orlando; he couldn't get all the way out here from Santa Cruz de K'u by himself. My mouth goes dry.

Pushing down an impulse to panic, I slowly unhook the two ends of the rope from my belt, listening for sounds around me, and I start walking back toward the Jeep. I don't try to pack up the tools; I'll come back for them tomorrow. I keep my eyes searching the bush in front of me and to the sides as I move along the path Orlando and I have made. Every few yards I stop to listen—to catch my breath it would appear to anyone watching—but really to listen. Not a sound. If someone is following me, it's without light and without noise. I begin to seem foolish to myself. How can there be anybody out here in the bush, miles from any human life?

When I get back to the Jeep, I examine the spot carefully. It's the end of the road. The dirt is still wet from a recent rain. There are no tracks but those of the Jeep and my own. There is no one here but me. I *am* a fool.

I turn around and start back for the cliff, but first I reach into the Jeep for an agua mineral, telling myself that that's the reason I came back to get myself a cool drink of water. And now I'm going back to work.

Back at the cliff, all is still. I reattach the rope to my belt and lower myself again to the mouth of the cave, every foot of the way thinking, oh God, how crazy I am. When I shine the light on the net I just put in place, I see big gaping holes in the mesh. The strings have been cut. I look more carefully. The strings are shredded, not cleanly as if cut through with a knife, but as if eaten through by hundreds of sharp teeth. I think about what Faye said ... about the bats ... being ... organized. What kind of bats are these?



ANGIE: I sleep like the dead all that day.

Well, pardon me, but that's what my mom always says about me, "Angie, you sleep like an angel, a dead angel."

You know, that's not even funny, even to someone who believes in angels, but anyway, I sleep all through the whole day just like a dead angel until just as the sun is setting I wake up and find my mom still lying there beside me with her eyes open and staring, blind. I go outside and find my dad with the Jeep already packed up. He's sitting in the driver's seat writing a mile a minute on these sheets of paper. He's so intent on his writing that he doesn't even see me when I come up to him.

I look over his shoulder and see that his handwriting is wild, all over the place, capitals and cursive and print all mixed together, wild, not my dad's neat handwriting at all. It looks like letters, only wild letters. There are all these other letters on the passenger seat, so I pick them up and start reading. They're wild, talking about how the vampire bats are organizing, how they're gaining some sort of collective intelligence which allows them to destroy his nets, how they're banding together on forays to the capital, how he's got proof now that they're attacking humans, proof, his own daughter. Oh, man!

I start shivering, reading all these wild letters, and me all bat-eye-infested. Well, yeah, it did happen, but it's the crazed tone of the letters and all the exclamation points. They're going to think some guy is writing them from the nuthouse. In fact, I'm going to remind myself to stop using so many exclamation points from now on. I don't want people thinking *I'm* nuts. I got enough trouble!

I go, "Dad ..." and he jumps a mile. I pull back, figuring he's going to start yelling at me for scaring him, but no, he takes a big breath and tries to give me a smile but it doesn't reach his eyes, you know how that works. He goes, "Hi, Angel, you feeling better?"

I start to tell him that *I'm* okay but I'm sort of worried that my mom is going crazy and so is *my dad*, but I don't have a chance to finish because Crescencia comes up the hill from town just at that moment and my dad yells at her, "¡Donde carajo está su carajo cariño!" which

translates roughly, "Where the fuck is your fucking boyfriend!" which is a very rude thing to say to someone as sweet as Crescencia.

Crescencia starts crying. She doesn't know where Orlando is. She went to his house in Oxamal looking for him, but his family doesn't know where he is. Nobody in town knows where he is. They figure that because Sunday was payday, he probably went off to Mérida to spend it all on his girlfriends.

So my dad goes, "Goddam it!" and Crescencia escapes into the house while my dad starts throwing his nets into the Jeep. The way he's grunting when he lifts the nets makes me take a second look at them. They're not the usual mist nets with the thin strings but more like rope nets, the kind the fishermen use in the bay.

I go, "Are these going to work? Aren't they too heavy?"

He goes, "They'll work."

I go, "Dad..." and I want to ask him to stay home tonight because I'm worried about my mom and how crazy she's acting, but there's something about the way he's throwing things around that makes me think he's even crazier, and maybe it's safer for him to go after all. In a few seconds more, he's got the Jeep loaded and he doesn't even say bye but he's gone in a cloud of dust.

I go back into the courtyard and there's my mom standing at the patio table staring at the flowers. All the most beautiful flowers are dead already, and what a stink! She takes the vase into the kitchen, tosses the dead flowers, trims the stems of the good ones, swishes the vase with bleach, fills it with fresh water, then puts the good ones back in and rearranges them carefully. She smiles. It is a weird smile, a real scary, weird smile.

Tonight we don't go running around. Tonight we're not afraid. The muffler's up around the house again, all quiet, no stars, just black velvet above the courtyard, and we sit, just sit, waiting. Waiting for what? I don't know. All my wondrous knowledge and my bat eyes are gone now, like a dream after you wake up or a delirium after you're better, and you're stupid as hell.

My mom doesn't even pretend to read but puts her chair right in front of the great doors and watches them like a cat at a mouse hole. She doesn't blink. She doesn't move a muscle. I think about the hours in front of us until my dad gets home. I think about Crescencia, about maybe going into her room and sitting with her in the corner and fingering her rosary, but I can hear her in there crying over being dumped by Orlando and really, I can't face that shit. I think about going down the hill to the church maybe, and maybe getting K'u to come up and look at my crazy mother. But then I think about how crazy K'u is, and I go over and throw the bolt on the great doors.

My mom jerks like she was shot. She goes, "Unlock it."

I go, "Well, I'm kind of scared. I mean, Mom, aren't you scared?"

She goes, "Unlock it." This low, hoarse voice, you know, I mean... weird.

So I unlock it. I don't know what to do, so I get a chair and drag it up beside my mom and sit in front of the door with her, wondering what it is we're waiting for and wanting not to know. My sores from the bat bites have scabbed over and they're pulsing and itching. I take off one of the Band-Aids and start picking at the scab. I peel it off. Underneath the skin is just a little pink, not even sore or tender. My mom says, real hoarse and back in her throat, "Leave it alone. It's healing." I look over at her and she's like way gone. "You're lucky," she says with her eyes still on the door. "You are very, very lucky."

The minutes are like hours, the hours like years. I keep listening for noises outside, but it's total silence. Suddenly my mom jerks. She sits forward in the lounge, thinks a second, then goes into my room fast. I jump up and follow her but as I get to the door, she's coming out and she's got my CD player. She carries it across the courtyard and puts it on the patio table then goes into her room and comes out with a CD, puts it into the machine, tries a number, tries another number, then another. This time she leaves it play, but she cranks up the volume full blast so that the sound fills the courtyard. Crescencia comes to her door and watches, surprised.

I recognize the music. Well, not really, but I recognize the type of music. It's one of the operas my mom's always listening to. I try not to pay any attention to them, though that's hard because, man, they're loud.

She listens for about five minutes, then goes back to the beginning of the number and listens to the same thing again, then back to the beginning again and again. The look on her face is like she's concentrating on every note. I go over to the table. I hang around. When she starts the number over again, I go, "What's going on?" She doesn't hear me. I go, "Mom!"

She goes, "Huh?"

I go, "What's going on?"

She goes, "*Rigoletto*." And she starts the music again in the same spot. It's this guy singing, and he's pretty fantastic, really. He's what they call a tenor, and boy can this guy hit the high notes. He's real passionate and he's singing this really incredible love song. I go, "Is that the hero?"

She goes, "Huh? No. He's the villain."

I go, "Oh. Well, who's he so in love with?"

She goes, "Huh? Nobody. He's in love with nobody. He just uses them."

Then there's this woman's voice. I go, "Is ... she the one he's in love with?"

She goes, "No. She's nobody."

Then there's this other woman's voice, so beautiful, high, pure, dancing above the other two. I go, "Who's that?"

She goes, "Shhh, it's Gilda."

I go, "Is that who the tenor guy's so in love with?"

She goes, "No. Gilda's in love with him. Her father is going to kill him."

I go, "Kill him? Jeez!" Then there's this other man's voice, this bass, really low, you know. I go, "Is that her father?"

She goes, "Huh?"

I go, "Is that Gilda's father? The bass guy? The one who's going to kill the good looking guy?"

She goes, "No, he's nobody." She hesitates. "I think. I think he's nobody. I'm trying to remember. Shhh."

So these two nobodies and this tenor jerk and this beautiful soprano all sing the hell out of this quartet, and although you can't tell what they're saying because it's all in Italian, you know they mean every word. They're all super passionate. And my mom starts it over again from the same spot.

I go, "So how come these two nobodies are doing so much singing?"

She goes, "They're just voices. They're just there to make it pretty. I'm trying to remember. Shhh." Then she goes, "She's a whore, and he's a murderer. He's going to murder Gilda's father."

I go, "Gilda's father is going to murder her boyfriend, and this other guy is going to murder Gilda's father?" I imagine myself as Gilda, beautiful. I'm in love with Constantin, but my dad wants to kill Constantin. And then maybe Orlando's the one who wants to kill my dad. Ooh.

My mom goes, "Yes, that's right. I'm sure that's right. But Gilda puts on men's clothes, so the murderer stabs her instead, and both her father and lover live."

I go, "Oh, come on!"

But my mom's not listening. She's listening to the music. This time she lets it play through after the quartet, and it is so beautiful and scary. There's this storm, with lightning crashes and the wind moaning—the moaning is violins, I think— and bangings on doors and screams, and the whole courtyard is full of music and terror. Crescencia watches with this look on her face like the Martians have landed, and they're us.

My mom starts it all again from the beginning. She leans over the vase of flowers, touches them with the tips of her fingers, traces the veins in the petals. She finds another dead one and takes it to the garbage in the kitchen and washes the vase out with bleach again and trims off the stems and then puts them all back in the vase with fresh water and puts it back in the

exact center of the doily again. Then she starts the CD over in the same damn place and walks over to the lounge in front of the great doors and sits, waiting. I take my seat next to her.

I guess I fall asleep because it must be hours later and I wake up to hear the Jeep come roaring up outside. The CD player is off. My mom's sitting there with her eyes fixed on the great doors. I get up and throw open the doors and for just a split second I can't see anything at all. Everything outside is as black as the inside of a coffin six feet under. Then suddenly it's like layers of black unfolding and flying off in the air, and I see the Jeep, and there's my dad getting out of it, and the sky is red with the sun just about to come up.

I run up to my dad. I go, "Mom's sick!" I'm like screaming at him.

My dad looks even tireder than yesterday morning, but this wakes him up. He goes, "Sick? What's wrong with her?"

I go, "She's just sick! You've got to help her!"

He drops his toolbox and runs inside. My mom's just getting out of the lounge, stretching. She goes, "I'll get the breakfast." She's like nothing happened.

He goes, "You sick? Angie says you're sick."

She goes, "Just a little tired. I've been waiting up for you. I'll start breakfast."

My dad looks at me. I whisper, "No, Dad, she's sick. She's really, really sick."

My mom goes, "Angie, you're tired. After breakfast, I want you to go right to bed." And she goes into the kitchen.

When she's gone, I go, "No, Dad. She wasn't waiting up for you. She was waiting for *him*."

My dad looks at me for a long moment, just stands there looking into my eyes, chewing his lip. I look away. He goes, "Who, honey?"

I go, "You know."

He goes, "Who? Did you know him in Berkeley?"

So this starts me thinking. I was figuring this guy she's having the affair with is someone she met in Mérida. I was even thinking maybe it was Constantin because of how mad she got

when Constantin asked me to dance, and I was remembering the way they looked at each other when we spotted him in the hotel window. But if the guy's from Berkeley, and if he's Constantin, then Constantin's from Berkeley, and he followed her here, so if he followed her here, then he probably doesn't care anything at all about me, but only about her. But... see... there's this whole thing about the way he danced with me, and the way he looked into my eyes, and the way he felt in my arms, the way he held me. And this is all too confusing to think about any more. So I just shake my head. I go, "I don't know anything about that. I just know she's sick."

My dad doesn't say anything for a second, just watches me. Then he puts his hand on my neck and rubs it the way he used to, and it feels so good, and I want to stay just like that with him so he can take care of me and my mom. He goes, "Don't worry, Angel." He starts toward the kitchen but stops, stands there for a minute with his shoulders all hunched over, then turns and goes across the courtyard to their bedroom. He doesn't unload the Jeep or put away even the poison but just like gives up. He goes into their room and closes the door.

I go to the kitchen door and look in at my mom. She's breaking eggs into a bowl. When she breaks each egg, she stops to examine it, big tears in her eyes. I go, "Mom, you can forget breakfast. Dad's gone to bed. I think he's sick."

She looks up at me for a moment, then blinks. "Yes, bed." She comes out of the kitchen and takes me by the arm and we walk across the courtyard together. It's like a stroll. The sky above us is turning from red to blue. She looks up at the sky and says, "Isn't it beautiful? So blue. So light." Then she goes again, "Yes, bed." And we keep strolling up to my bedroom door.

I go, "Mom, don't you think you should go in and sleep with Dad? You know, he's been working hard all night. He comes home and he wants to see a little bit of his wife, you know?"

She looks at me for a second like she's trying to place my face, then she nods. She turns and goes to their door, pauses, opens it, and goes inside.

I go into my room and get in bed and listen for their voices, waiting for the shouting to start. I hear him say a few things, but I can't hear the words. I hear her answer. I hear him say

something more. Then there's a silence. He says one more thing. Then I hear them move in the bed. I wonder if ... maybe ... they'll make love. I hold my breath and listen.



FAYE: When I woke that afternoon, it took me several minutes to understand where I was. I felt as though I had been heavily drugged and was still very much under its influence. A man with red hair lay in a deep sleep beside me in bed, and for a disorienting long moment I was sure it was Constantin.

Moreover I was sure we had enjoyed rough, intimate, intense sex, this man and I, in my husband's bed. I reared up, a cry of some sort rising in my throat; a scream of disgust is what I expected. But then the man turned in bed and I saw he was Mark, and the scream aborted in the way a sneeze sometimes does, leaving me twitching and weak and wanting.

I don't remember dressing. I don't remember leaving the house or walking there or running there, but I remember being there between the upright stone ears of the dog's head at the point of Cabeza del Perro. I stood leaning against one of the stones, looking out to the Gulf, the sun high overhead, burning down on me between the blazing rocks.

It was good to be in the open air, and the bright sunlight helped to clear my mind. I felt keen, even high, exalted as I stood on the tall cliffs looking across the water so extraordinarily light blue, shimmering like a bowl of zircons swirling beneath a bright light. In a moment however, the intensity of the colors grew unbearable and I turned to the land for the restful dark green hues of the bush below me.

But the land was transformed. Our house and the dirt road from Mérida which ended at the church below our house were not to be seen. Santa Cruz de K'u was no longer a little village at the base of the hill and promontory on which I stood, but a much larger town of pole-and-thatch dwellings stretching away for over a mile with the green bush forming an arc around it. The little hills which broke the horizon in the far distance were no longer green and covered with jungle, but were gray stone pyramids and tall temples painted in vibrant colors.

A great causeway cut straight through the forest toward where I stood, running from the most prominent of these pyramids through the extended town and ending directly below me at a point where the modern dirt road should end, but where now the rising steps of a great temple began, a temple which was built to conjoin the sheer walls of the natural cliffs which formed the spit of rocks and crags we now call Cabeza del Perro. At the foot of the great stairway, the causeway intersected a crossroad which in its turn cut straight through the forest to the left and right stretching off out of sight into the far jungle.

People in ancient dress of fantastic colors were converging upon the pyramid from all three directions on these crossroads, climbing the steep steps and pouring over the top plateau of the pyramid, moving like a ribbon up toward me along the incline of flat stones which paved the surface of the promontory. And at that moment I realized that I was no longer in the sun, that the ears of the dog around me were no longer eroded stone uprights but thick walls supporting a roof above me, stelae inscribed with designs I recognized from other ruins throughout the Yucatán, sacrifices to Chac, Chac the modern god of ... water ... I think he was.

I was standing at the altar atop the most fabulous temple of them all, and the people were coming to attend to me. Along the incline they approached. And suddenly I knew fear. I was to be sacrificed. How ... ? The next part of the dream is blurred.

For it was a dream, of course, however real it seemed in my delirium. Now I was no longer in the altar at Cabeza del Perro. Now I was in front of the church. Yes, I'm quite sure. The next thing I can remember is standing in front of the church in Santa Cruz de K'u. This, however, was not a part of the dream. This was in the present, and I was Faye.

I mean ... I mean ... to say that Faye was actually there in front of the church—in the present, I mean—and this was not a dream or vision which placed another woman in another century upon a sacrificial altar. But I can no longer tell, not really.

I had toyed with a thesis about this church of Santa Cruz de K'u. I, Faye. From the day we arrived and first explored the church, I noticed that its foundation was of very irregular stones very like the rubble-and-mortar fill in the Maya ruins we had visited. I had always thought this

foundation curious since the rest of the church was finished so beautifully and with such attention to detail and symmetry. But the foundation, particularly on the bay side of the church, seemed to be of a different period altogether, left exposed purposely by the builders of the church two or three hundred years ago, I suppose, or exposed afterward by the worshippers, the Catholic Maya who kept their Maya beliefs even as they embraced the new Christian beliefs.

When the Spaniards came to this area they destroyed the great temples of the Maya, as they did all over México, and built their own temples on the ruins. I believed this church of K'u had as its foundation the ruins of a Maya temple. Now, having seen from my vision the tremendous extent of the original Maya city of K'u, I realized that the Spanish church was not built upon the great temple itself but only upon an outlying building. The great staircase to the temple still existed beneath the tall hill, upon which our house stood, leading out to the cliffs of Cabeza del Perro. Through the centuries of wind and rain, the soil had blown back over the steps on the leeward side of the promontory and the bush had reclaimed its territory, burying all evidence of the temple which rested beneath it, and beneath our house.

At the door of the church, I took a moment to wonder why I was here, Faye. I, Faye, why I was here. Then it struck me. There was a passageway, originating somewhere in the interior of the church and extending to the heart of the Mayan temple. I don't understand how I knew this; I only know that I had to find the passageway. The great wooden doors of the church opened at my push. There was no noise, only the sound of the wind. But as I stood in the doorway, the wind did not push at my back, coming from the sea, but blew instead into my face, lapping up coolly from within the church. I sniffed it. It was dank and tasty like a wine cellar.

I moved into the church. The statues of the saints watched me —their eyes and heads actually turned, it seemed to me, to follow me — as I passed down the nave and stopped midway between the double transept and looked into each. The Madonna in her alcove at one end of the transept gazed back tranquilly; in the opposite end of the transept lay a glass casket holding a martyr's remains, a Spanish missionary killed and tortured by the Indians he had come here to save.

The soft, invitational wind still blew into my face and I proceeded into the sanctuary to the altar, above which a Christ regarded me sadly from his crucifix. The wind came up at me from beneath the altar. There was a small door there, opened a crack. I opened it further to reveal wooden steps descending into a blackness. The soft wind blew stronger into my face with an intoxicating scent of ancient things.

I started down the steps which soon gave way to a smooth rock floor. The walls to my right and left, rough rock of the rubble-and-mortar type in the foundation of the church, closed in around me, and the ceiling lowered above me, not in a claustrophobic but a comforting way. I continued along the channel, aware that in the distance there was a light growing brighter and larger as I neared it. Finally I came into a chamber lit by candles in trays set in alcoves of stone. The candlelight from one of the alcoves was amplified through a large crystal skull, the lambent flames in the concave eyes making great dancing lights and shadows on the stone walls of the chamber. The wall to the left was carved with a bas-relief of a double rack of skulls after the Toltec fashion, as many as twenty skulls with twisting snakes coming out of their necks to represent the dripping blood. The other walls were hung with modern Maya tapestries decorated with ornaments of gold and copper and jade. The immensely thick solid stone wall to the right had a funnel like hole opening to the outside, letting in a refreshing sea breeze. Through the small opening I caught a glimpse of water and the cliffs on the far side of the bay, a view I recognized at once, having seen it every day from the kitchen window of our house. This chamber of stone must lie directly beneath our house, sealed into the rock cliff.

There was a man in the chamber, his back to me as he knelt before an altar draped with the plumage of hundreds of birds. Beside him was a jade-studded jaguar throne very like the one in the center of El Castillo, the gigantic Toltec pyramid at Chichén Itzá in the heart of the Yucatán Peninsula. This, however, was a Were-jaguar wearing a human face with a naggingly familiar physiognomy and expression of triumph, and possessing human hands instead of paws, the fingernails clutched around stone skulls which supported the throne off the rock floor.

The Were-jaguar throne was tandem with a reclining stone statue, a Chac-Mool of the finest workmanship I have seen, resting on his elbows with his hands crossed upon his belly and holding a large offerings bowl there. The Chac-Mool's head turned at a right angle to his body, casting his insolent eyes to the entrance to the chamber where I stood. If I had not been so fascinated by the artistry of this Chac-Mool, I might have been terrified by that expression in his eyes, since clearly he was watching me, forbidding me to enter.

The Chac-Mool was carved of a single stone and was so large that it could not have been brought through the narrow tunnel I had come down. He —along with the Were-jaguar throne— must have been placed here by Toltecs who, after subordinating the original Maya of K'u, built over the Maya temple with a grander one of their own, as the Toltec conquerors had done at Chichén Itzá.

A rattling noise from the man on his knees before the altar drew my attention to him. He was casting bones and shells onto a cloth braided with plumage. I recognized him now. He was the *h-men* of Santa Cruz de K'u, old K'u himself. He made several casts in silence then spoke in Spanish, without turning, "You are welcome, Señora. We have been waiting for you."

I had made no noise. I was surprised he knew I was there, let alone who I was. Now he turned, and his fearful old eyes, wise and as insolent as those of the Chac-Mool, met mine. "You are in need of the curandero. You scoff at our medicine, yet when you are in need, you come, like all the people have always come, so that the curandero may expel the witches for you and disperse The Winds."

I might have protested, but I seemed quite unable to speak, as though my body had no corporeal powers.

"Your soul is in danger," he said, "and you are afraid. A sorcerer has ensorceled you, and his spell and The Winds within you are poisoning your blood."

He rose, removed one of the trays of burning candles from its alcove and placed it in the offerings bowl on the belly of the Chac-Mool. He went into one corner of the chamber and retrieved a live chicken, tied by the feet, which had been resting there soundlessly. He brought

the chicken to me and held it above my head for a moment. It fluttered its wings a moment but otherwise was docile. I stood rooted in the entranceway, my nose full of the malodorous chicken and the tangy scent of the man.

"The chicken inhales The Winds from you and absorbs their evil."

The *h-men* turned and walked to the Chac-Mool and, with hardly a break in stride, placed the head of the chicken beneath his foot, slit its throat with a sharp knife and flooded the chicken's blood into the tray of candles he had placed in the bowl on the belly of the Chac-Mool. The blood left trails of black-red in the clear, molten wax in the bottom of the tray. When the chicken's bleeding slowed to a drip, the *h-men* ceremoniously laid it out on the cloth of plumage. He made a final cast of bones and shells and chanted in Maya over the cloth. Then he turned to the tray of candles and looked intently at the trails of blood in the molten wax. He smiled.

"He tells you he loves you. He tells you he must have your consent. He tells you he will wait."

He laughed, and the laughter filled the stone chamber with evil echoes. Suddenly he picked up the tray and held it before me. The candles, of various sizes from tiny to huge, each carved into the shape of a phallus, flickered with the quickness of the *h-men's* move, and some of them extinguished. Waxy smoke rose into my nostrils from the smoldering wicks to choke me.

"You are free now of The Winds of this sorcerer. But he will re-enter your body as does this smoke."

He gazed unblinkingly into my eyes, questioning me without words. After a moment, the questioning expression changed to a sort of humor bordering on impudence. He said something to me in Maya, and although I did not understand the words, the sneer in his voice was apparent.

Suddenly I understood what he was suggesting with his phallic candles and smoking wicks. The fascination, even amusement, with which I had watched his antics until now left me instantly, and I was filled with disgust. With the back of my forearm I swept the candles off the tray and sent the tray itself flying. The molten wax and chicken blood splashed into the insolent face of the Chac-Mool that still watched, unblinking.

With that I turned and ran back up the tunnel toward the church. The fresh sea breeze from behind me took on the smell of blood and smoke mingling with the dank, ancient, moldering things. An echo chased behind me, the echo of a laugh or howl or cackle or scream, amplified with each ricochet off the stone walls of the tunnel behind me.

Ahead I could see the soft light from inside the church where I had left open the door beneath the altar. Slowly the hole grew larger as I scrambled up the tunnel, keeping my head down to be sure I did not hit it against the low ceiling. Just before I reached the doorway, the figure of a man blocked out the light, his hair throwing out a red halo around his head. I tried to push past him, but he held my arms fast to my side and pinned me with his body against the wall of the altar and whispered into my ear, "Why do you torment me, Faye?"

His mouth clamped on my mouth so that I could not breathe, and I felt him hard, thrusting deep inside me. As I pulled my mouth away to gasp for air, the taste of coconut and cream, bay leaf and semen filled me. My blood rushed hot through my body, scalding the inside of my veins, and I cried out and turned over and woke, finding a man with red hair beside me in my bed.



ANGIE: I wake up in the afternoon, and for the first time I've got a plan for my mom and dad, and me too, of course, but mostly for my mom and dad since they can't be trusted to make a good plan of their own. This plan, it's like it came to me in a dream. I get out of bed and go listen outside my mom and dad's door, but I can't hear anything. I figure they're still sleeping. Good, that gives me time.

My mom and dad are crazy. There's no question about that. Whether they made love this morning or not, I don't know, because I guess I fell asleep listening ... you know ... for it. But even if they did make love so now they're not hating each other anymore, they're still going to wake up crazy. I need to get them out of here. I need to get them back to Berkeley so I can talk to

Dr. Kemp about them. But that's not going to be so easy, getting them to leave, both of them crazy and all.

First things first, they need to eat something. I'm thinking back over the past few days, and I can't remember either of them eating. So it's no wonder they're crazy. Like my dad always says, you gotta eat or you get sick. Well, they're both sick. They both need help. Who's going to help them? Who do they have? Me. So, first things first, I head down to the little mercado near the church on the edge of town. Good food. None of the junk they like to stuff themselves with, meat, eggs, poison.

I'm a vegetarian, like I already said, only it doesn't always work because when you're a kid everyone's always forcing you to do things you don't want to do, like eat meat. My mom tries to make special vegetarian dishes for me, and I'm a pretty good cook, too, but my dad has got to have red meat on the table like every night. I'm always saying to him, "Dad, you're eating blood, you know."

He goes, "It's cooked. It's well done. There's no blood. I hate blood."

I go, "It's cooked, but it's still blood. Cooked blood."

But you know, once you start drawing the line at animal products, then what are you going to do about milk? No milk means no cheese which means no pizza! I mean, I'm kind of rethinking the animal products part because I know for a fact that I can't go the rest of my life without pizza. But eggs? Do you know where eggs come from? And what they are? Fetal chickens. I mean when you think about where most of our food comes from, you wonder about the evolution of mankind, right? How did we ever dream up eating things like that?

It's like sex. I mean, when you actually think about sex can you imagine anything so gross? But people do it all the time and supposedly even enjoy it. And some of the sex things people do? Like with their fingers and mouths? I mean, gross!

And it's the same with food. Like back in Berkeley after I had already decided on vegetarianism as my lifestyle, one day I'm out with my mom in her iris garden. She's got these beautiful irises and roses that she hybridized herself—you know, plant sex—where she mated

the males with the females to get seeds, and these seeds are genetically different from the parents, so that when my mom plants the seeds she gets brand new flowers that exist nowhere on the planet but right there in her garden. Anyway, my mom's spreading out this white stuff and digging it into the dirt, so I go, "What's that?"

She goes, "Bone meal."

I go, "That's not what it sounds like, is it?"

She goes, "Yep."

I mean, barbaric! They grind up bones and sell it so that people can dig it into their dirt? So I go out to the shed and I look at the other bags of stuff she's got out there, and there's bat guano. Do you know what bat guano is? And chicken manure, and steer manure? I mean, they call it manure to disguise what it really is because otherwise people sure wouldn't buy that shit.

And I go, "You don't put this stuff into the vegetable garden, do you?"

She goes, "Yep."

So you know what that means. All those tomatoes?

And she calls her garden *organic*, right? That means no poisons, right? So what does she do about the snails? She goes out to the garden in the middle of the night, which is when the snails troop out to feed on her plants, and she collects these hundreds and hundreds of snails in this bucket. And you should see them, like something out of hell, crawling all over each other and sliming each other up, sticking out these long horrible necks and antennas and making for the top of the bucket for all they're worth. But my mom's got her eye on them, and she keeps knocking them back to the bottom of the bucket as she keeps collecting more and more and more. And then she's got to get rid of the snails, right? And she wants to be *humane*, right? So she brings the snails into the kitchen and puts them down the garbage disposal. Can you believe that? And she calls herself humane.

"A humane death," she says. "They don't feel a thing."

Now how can she know that? And she wonders why I stopped eating things from her garden!

So this afternoon in the mercado I get only all this really healthy stuff, good clean tomatoes, corn, squash, beans, greens, all these things the Maya have been eating for centuries, snails or no snails, and nothing that has hoof or claw or face with eyes, and I head back up the hill to our house. When I go by the church, I see crazy K'u standing in the doorway, watching me with those eyes of his, and I say hola but he doesn't answer. Crazy.

The sun's just going down and I'm setting the table when my mom comes out of her room. I'm hoping to see this big beaming smile on her face, because that's what's supposed to happen when a woman makes love to her husband, right? But she comes out with this glazed-over look —again!— so I know that it must have been a dud in the sack this morning and she's back to sleep walking. She heads right to the vase of flowers on the table, and they're like totally dead and hanging over the edge of the vase and smelling to high heaven.

I go, "I've got dinner all ready, Mom." But she doesn't say anything, just takes the vase off the table and goes into the kitchen with it. She comes back in a few minutes, and she's saved like three little limp stalks with some buds that maybe will open, maybe. She puts the vase on the table.

I'm thinking what a lot of crap those flowers were. They were fresh on Tuesday night and here it is only Thursday night and all of them are gone in only three days, even though it seems to me like an eternity. If I knew how to get the money back, you can bet I would, but I don't even know where they came from.

My dad comes out of the bedroom. And I'm like, well, how'd it go? But he's got this look on his face like you see when you open your door on Halloween.

I knock on Crescencia's door and after a second I hear this little voice. "¿Sí?" She comes to the door and opens it this little crack. Talk about weird. Ever since that night of the howling, and then the next night when my mom went berserk over the flowers, Crescencia's slinking around like a cat, hugging the walls, watching everywhere at once, watching us, thumbing her rosary, saying prayers and generally spooking the hell out of me. She drops something every five minutes, and that can really get on your nerves. Plus which you know the girl's got to be feeling

miserable with her turkey Orlando just going off without even a goodbye to her. I tell Crescencia that I've already got dinner made for all of us, and she slinks out of her room and out to the table.

We eat the meal in total silence, all four of us. My mom and dad are worse. They don't even look at each other, but just sit there wrapped up in their own heads. But they both eat, so that's good. After dinner, without a word my dad goes into his workroom, packs a box and carries it out to the Jeep. I rush out after him with this lunch I've packed for him. I look in the back of the Jeep, which he didn't even unpack this morning, and I see that all his nets are all cut up, even the thick ones, and lying in a tangled heap.

I go, "Jeez, Dad, what did you do to your nets?" He doesn't answer but puts the box from his workroom on top of the nets. In the box is dynamite. I go, "What's the dynamite for?!?"

He goes, "Don't worry about it, Angie. I'll see you in the morning." And he drives off.

I'm like, oh shit!

I go inside to tell my mom about the dynamite but she's already got the lounge pulled up in front of the great doors again and is deep in her coma. I look at Crescencia. She looks away. Together we start clearing off the table, but when Crescencia starts to take away the vase with the three little limp buds in it, my mom goes, "Leave it!"

Her voice is all hoarse again and back in her throat. Crescencia jumps a mile but puts the vase back on the table and whispers, "Bueno, Señora," and waits a second then says, "Buenas noches," and slinks off to her room.

I come over to my mom's side. I'm wondering just how to tell her that I've decided to take her and my dad both back to Berkeley when all of a sudden Crescencia lets out this scream to wake the dead. It even wakes my mom who jumps out of the lounge and turns to face Crescencia's door just as Crescencia comes busting out, screaming things in a mixture of Spanish and Maya. Something about Orlando. Something about Orlando's mouth. Something about blood.

I'm trying to calm her down and even my mom's trying to get hold of her hand, but suddenly Crescencia breaks loose and runs to the great doors and throws them open and runs out

into the night. When my mom and I get to the great doors, Crescencia's gone into the darkness. There's hardly any moon tonight, just a pale crescent a few inches above the horizon. We can't see anything.

In a second, from the church down the hill comes this hollow pounding and Crescencia's screams and cries. The only word we can pick out is "Orlando". We can hear the *h-men's* voice coming from inside the church, all hollow and echoing, shouting things in Maya. But the pounding on the doors goes on and Crescencia cries even louder. Then the pounding stops and we hear Crescencia's voice coming from farther away. She's down in the town now, going from house to house. We see flickers of lights, kerosene lanterns being lit inside houses and shining through cracks. But no doors open.

Crescencia's voice keeps moving around town, getting weaker and weaker. Finally we can't hear her anymore. There's total silence. I go, "Mom? I think we better go in, okay Mom? If Crescencia comes back here, we'll let her in. Okay? Okay, Mom?"

But my mom doesn't say anything. She just stands there looking out into the darkness like she's expecting something more. So I take her by the arm and pull her inside and bolt the great doors. I go, "Let's go check all the windows, okay? Let's go together, okay?"

So I pull her with me and we go from room to room to make sure all the windows are shuttered tight. I leave Crescencia's room for last. But I know that we've got to lock it up too, and finally we come to it. I go, "Okay, Mom," and my voice is all shaking, and my mouth is dry so I can barely talk. I go, "Okay, so we just open the door," and I open it, "and see, no one's in here," and with relief I see that no one is. But the window is wide open. Across the room, in the stark white wall, the window looks like this frame on a picture titled *Midnight*.

I go, "Okay, so now all we have to do," and I keep my mom's hand in mine and start pulling her across the room, "is go across the room and close and bolt the shutters," and we go across the room. When we get to the window, I like can't breathe, I'm so scared. I stop and take a lot of deep breaths in a row, then take one last deep breath and reach out into the darkness to grab

hold of the shutter but two hands suddenly grab mine, and Orlando's head raises up out of the blackness into the window frame.

I can't scream. I can't breathe. I'm frozen looking into Orlando's face. And this is a picture I don't want to remember, no. Orlando is horrible. And there's a whole lot of blood. And yes, Crescencia did say something about his mouth, and yes, Orlando's mouth is horrible, and his breath is like rotten meat. But other than that, I don't remember much.

He goes, "¿Por favor?" and it's this slobber of sound. He wants to come in. He's hurt. He's so pitiful.

I finally get my voice back. I go, "God, Orlando! What happened to you! Come around to the great doors."

But my mom quick steps up and reaches out and grabs Orlando's hands and pries them off mine. Then she says something I can't understand and Orlando yelps, then freezes. Slowly she grabs first one shutter, then the other and she says in Spanish —and it's that same hoarse voice from the back of her throat— "No, Orlando. You can not come in. Find Crescencia. Crescencia will help you." And she pulls the shutters closed, right in front of Orlando's face, and he's got these tears mixing with blood rolling down his cheeks.

I go, "Mom, he's bleeding! We've got to help him!"

She goes, "We can't help him. You must not invite him into this house."

And this woman works in a hospital!

She bolts the shutters and takes me by the hand back out to the courtyard and puts me in a chair at the table and sits down herself, taking the vase of three dead flowers onto her lap.

I don't wait. I don't explain. I go into my mom's and dad's room and start packing their bags. If I have to hit them over the head and knock them out, I'm going to get them out of here. I don't worry about the small stuff but just pack enough to get us onto the plane, and I stack the suitcases just inside the great doors to wait for my dad.

I look at my mom but she's deep in her own head. I pull her off the chair and walk her to the lounge and cuddle up with her. I go, "Don't worry, Mom, I'm going to take care of everything."

I suddenly remember this one time when I'm a little kid and I wake up and it's all dark and I'm scared. From downstairs I can hear my mom and dad talking, and there are some other voices. I come out into the hall, and it's so spooky in the dark, and I go down the stairs where I can see there's light. My mom and dad are at the front door and they're saying goodbye to someone, I don't remember who. My mom closes the door and my dad comes up behind her and gives her a kiss on the neck and she turns to him and kisses him back. It's scary, grownups in a grown-up, after-dark, out-of-sleep world, and I start crying. My mom and dad turn to me, and it's like slow motion in my memory the way they come across the floor to me. My mom puts her arms around me and says soft things in my ears and cradles me. Then my dad picks me up and carries me back upstairs to my bed. Mommies and Daddies and little kids. It's scary, you know? Love?

I guess I fall asleep on the lounge with my mom because the next thing I know, I hear something and jerk awake. The sky above the courtyard is gray instead of black, with streaks of red in the clouds, so I know it's almost dawn. I sit up, and my mom says, "It's your father."

I look at her, not real sure from the funny sound in her voice just exactly who she means.

I go to the great doors, throw back the bolt, open the doors, and look out. The Jeep is sitting in front of the house, so I figure that's the noise that woke me, the Jeep pulling up. I'm like, thank God! I look outside for my dad, but he's nowhere around. I walk around the Jeep and see him down the road heading toward the church.

I yell, "Dad!"

He yells, "I'll be right back."

I look to the east and the sun is just coming up over the ocean, bouncing its first rays off the smooth, black water.

I hear this noise and look down to the town. Every door opens at exactly the same second, and all the people come flooding out. K'u comes out of the church and all of them gather together and start yelling. I think about Crescencia running through town and pounding on their doors and them not letting her in, and I shout out loud at them, "You sickos!"

I don't waste any time but start loading the suitcases into the Jeep. My mom comes to the door looking like she just woke up. She goes, "Angie, what are you doing?"

I go, "Mom, we're getting out of here. We're going to Mérida, and we're getting plane tickets, and we're going to fly the hell out of this place and go home. Come on, get in."

I climb into the Jeep expecting an argument from her, but she thinks for a second then says, "Yes. Yes, we'll go to Mérida."

I'm about to say, "Yeah, and the rest of it, too," but I hear my dad yelling at us and I turn and see him running up the hill. Behind him, all the people of Santa Cruz de K'u have shovels and hoes and they're beginning to swarm like bats, gathering together and pointing themselves up the hill in our direction. My dad gets to the Jeep and yells, "Faye, get in! You've got to get out of here!"

My mom goes, "Why? What's wrong?"

He goes, "There's no time to explain. Just get out of here."

She goes, "Why aren't you coming?"

And I go, "Mom, would you just come on! Dad, would you come on!"

My dad pulls her to one side and takes her by the shoulders and talks to her quick and low so that I can't hear. She pulls back and looks at him like he's out of his mind. He yells at her, "Faye! Wake up! Who do you think they're going to come for next? Who else in town has been attacked by vampires? Get Angie out of here!"

I look down the hill at the people. They're on their way up here after me and I'm like, oh, shit! I go, "Mom, come on!" But she's all, but but but, and looking at my dad. So I go, "I'm getting out of here! You can stay if you want." And I slide across the seat and turn the key and

the Jeep jerks forward. I don't know how to drive. Something to do with that pedal on the left. Something to do with the gear shift thing. I start trying everything I can.

My dad goes, "Stop it, Angie! You're going to flood it. Faye, get her out of here!"

My mom comes around the Jeep and gets in, pushing me back across the seat and yelling at me to get out of the way. She tries to start the Jeep, but it's just grinding away, just like it always does in the movies. I look back at the people. They're so close. They're so very very close.

The Jeep starts and my mom does the pedal and the gear shift thing and we peel out of there. I look around. The people are swarming around my dad. He yells at us, "I'll meet you at the Hotel Colonial!"

My mom yells back, "No! The El Salvador!" I mean, what is the deal with the hotels! But I don't even know if he hears her or not. I don't know what happens to him next. We take the turn at the top of the hill, and we're out of there.



MARK: I know when I pull up in front of the house in the black before dawn that something strange is going on down in Santa Cruz de K'u. I can see lights burning in the church and in every house, but no one's outside.

It's not until this moment that I realize that this has been going on ever since José Luis's death. Always before when I would come home in the morning from the caves, the people would be out chopping wood, drawing water, getting ready for the day. But the last few days they wouldn't come out until after sunup. Still, they wouldn't burn their lamps, they wouldn't waste kerosene like they're doing this morning. Kerosene is expensive and hard to come by. Something big happened here last night while I was dynamiting vampires.

I didn't ... I didn't ... like doing that ... the dynamiting ... because too many good bats get killed along with the vampires, but ... but ... that's of no account now anyway, yeah I was wrong to do that but, anyway ... anyway ...

... I get out of the Jeep and go down to the church and get there just as the sun shows. Everyone comes out of their doors like at a signal, all talking at once, talking in Maya. K'u, the *h-men*, takes charge and shouts at the people but they don't pay any attention. But then the people suddenly shut up and turn and move aside to make a pathway. A man walks toward K'u in front of the church, pulling the body of a woman by the hair. He stops in front of K'u and lets her drop. She rolls over and I see her face.

It's Crescencia. Her throat is torn open and there's blood all over her front.

I start to go to her, but the people start talking all at once, and there's hate and fear in their voices, and I see that I should keep out of this. I keep hearing two words that make my blood run cold, *Orlando* and *civateteo*.

Instinct tells me to get out of there. I start running up the hill, thinking fast but without really understanding anything. The entire town is being taken over by a mass hysteria about *civateteo* which they tie in with the vampire bats, sure; I've seen them behead and dismember José Luis because of the bat attack on him, and they know about the bat attack on Angie. Crescencia told them.

I know I've got to get Angie out of town fast. But I'm not in any danger, or at least I don't think so; I'm killing bats, I'm on their side, they all know that. I figure Faye can drive Angie into Mérida while I stay behind to keep my eye on the situation here. When the bus comes —around ten it comes every weekday— I'll catch it into Mérida and report Crescencia's murder to the police there. I should know by then whether or not it'll be safe to bring Angie back to Santa Cruz de K'u.

So when I get up the hill to the Jeep, I see that it's already loaded up with suitcases and Angie's already in and ready to go. I try to get Faye to move but she's still deep in one of her moods. Even yesterday morning, after she made love to me like a wild animal in heat, she went immediately back inside her head where she's been staying, locking me out.

Now I pull her aside and shake her hard. I tell her about Crescencia and how the people are talking about Orlando and civateteo, and finally she understands. She jumps in the Jeep and drives off just as the people get up to the house.

But the people aren't paying any attention to us. K'u is in the lead dragging this terrified dog by a rope. The dog is big and pure white, a beautiful dog, healthy and well kept, not like most of the other dogs in town which are diseased and scabby and eating off the garbage heaps. K'u leads the people around the corner of our house and along the cliff out to Cabeza del Perro overlooking the ocean. The sun is now completely showing above the horizon, sending blinding flares reflected off the scarlet water. The *h-men* kneels and holds the trembling dog's head toward the sun for a long moment, and the dog grows calm.

The *h-men* beckons and a man steps forward with a can of red paint which he puts on the ground beside the *h-men*, handing him a brush. The *h-men* dips the brush and paints a thin red line curving upward from ear to ear across the dog's broad white forehead. He dips his brush again and makes a curve downward from the other ear, forming the outline of an eye. He beckons again, and a woman steps forward with another brush and a can of yellow paint. The *h-men* dips this brush into the yellow paint and completely fills in the outline of the eye. The dog holds still, gazing toward the rising sun. The *h-men* beckons a third time, and a child steps forward with a can of blue paint and a brush. This time the *h-men* steps back and lets the child move closer to the dog. The child dips the brush into the blue paint and dabs it into the center of the yellow eye.

The dog whimpers a moment, but as the blue and yellow paints begin to bleed, turning green, the dog lets out a howl which echoes among the rocks and back and forth between the ears of Cabeza del Perro.

The *h-men* beckons again, and another man steps forward from the crowd carrying something. It takes me a second to realize what it is. Crescencia's head, severed from her body. I gag and have to swallow back vomit.

The *h-men* takes the head by the hair and dangles it in front of the dog who sniffs it a moment, then wheels, tears his leash from the *h-men's* hand and runs baying back around the house and down the steep hill toward the church, the people hot after him. I run with them.

Looking back now, I wonder at my own mind, my own perceptions. When the obvious is obvious, you wonder how you miss it. But this day in Santa Cruz de K'u, running full-tilt after the people running after the dog running who knows where, the obvious to me is something altogether different. It's obvious Orlando, poor kid, has murdered poor Crescencia, obviously driven to it by lust and by this society and church that forbid her to give in to Orlando's passion, however much she might want to. I remember him sitting outside her window singing to her every night, those passionate songs. They were so much in love. A crime of passion as common as a day in history.

And now Orlando is on the run, with the people chasing him down. If they catch him, I'm afraid they'll do something terrible to him, a crowd this wild. Maybe I can stop them somehow from committing this vigilante execution on which they seem hell-bent.

At the same time I'm thinking this, I realize that I'm excited by it all, my blood pulsing and my mind whirling. I'm fascinated by the people and what they're thinking. The obvious to them, with their superstitions running amok in a mob mentality associating Crescencia's murder with José Luis's death by vampire bats, is that there is a *civateteo* among them. Not just witches who ride on winds, but vampires, blood-sucking undead. It's goddam fascinating!

And so ... I run with them. Right with them. One of them. I want to be with them when they find Orlando.

End of Disk 5 — (77:11 minutes)

Whoso sheddeth man's blood,
by man shall his blood be shed.

Genesis 9.6
Bible, The Old Testament

DISK 6 — (66:06 minutes)

Blood and Screams

FAYE: I pulled the Jeep over as soon as Angie and I reached the paved road, two hours down that terrible dirt road, those cliffs dropping away on either side ... I needed coffee badly, and Angie was ... Angie was ... Angie ... needed something. It was that restaurant where I always meant to stop, but Mark was always in too much of a hurry and ... never mind that... we stopped.

I took my first gulp of coffee too quickly and scalded my mouth and throat because, as I saw the date on the newspaper that had been left at our table, I was stunned to find it was Friday. I called the waitress back to the table, intent upon asking her what day it was, wondering how I could possibly have lost three days. That's when it happened. The scream...

But first, I must tell you this. The waitress... I had noticed her earlier, to the point of distraction. I admired her immensely. She was clearly of Maya descent with a lovely demeanor and carriage, her entire aspect contagious with the love of life. She must have been in her late sixties or early seventies but had a youth and grace about her, gay and friendly and frank. I found the distraction extremely irritating because I was trying to make a plan of action, you see, yet I was finding it impossible to concentrate on anything but the loveliness of the old woman.

Also there was her sister, her twin in the corner, identical except with an altogether opposite aspect, sombre and frowning as she joylessly patted tortillas with none of that quickness or life in her hands common to the women of México who had patted tortillas for countless generations.

How like and unlike these twins were. One of them was, or perhaps both were, unquestionably the forebear of all the younger people working in the restaurant who shared a remarkable family resemblance; the man in his thirties who oversaw the operation of the restaurant and took the money, the younger woman who waited tables, the boy endlessly running in and out the front door, the baby in the cradle whom each member of the family picked up in turn to fondle and chortle into the face of, all offered the same beautiful almond eyes, the same

dusky shade of skin, the same nose and forehead, distinctly Mayan as pictured on the frescoes in the ruins, yet shaped with familial definition, and mixed ever so slightly, how many generations back with European blood. A lovely lineage except for the crone in the corner with the misery genes.

This family appeared so different from yet so similar to the people of Santa Cruz de K'u that I had paused to contemplate each of them. Slightly lighter skinned, dressed entirely *catrín*, probably with double Spanish surnames, they lived on the paved road and communicated routinely with the city, ran a restaurant and had commerce with tourists. I remember pondering how this family would end up as they traveled their continuum in both chronological and chirological time simultaneously.

Oh, you will think me ponderous and didactic —well, as Angie would tell you, duh! and I have already confessed to you that I *am* fallible— but I must share with you this particular distraction as it has great significance for us all, particularly at this chirological moment in time, *our* *chiros*. Chronological time, of course, is what we are used to and flows in a steady, gradual evolution. Chirological time, however —and this ... might be something that I have ... perhaps ... invented, but it's very useful; it is an age-old concept even if I am... just now... inventing it, the terms I mean— chirological time veers away from the continuum, fractured, a *chiros*, a digit caused by some birth or some death or some other event of enormity, bending time and altering destiny.

The birth of Christ, of course, is merely one example... and of course you no doubt have no interest in that... or I don't know, is what I mean ... but as one perspective, one might view the birth of Christ as the single most significant chirotic event in human history because not only was a new and earth-changing religion born, but time did literally change, from BC to AD at a single event.

But of course there have been countless other chirotic events in history, even ones that reshaped or redefined the counting of time itself very much in the same way as the birth of Jesus Christ: in the year equivalent to 3113 BC, for instance, the zero year on the Maya calendar.

What on earth could have happened 3113 years before the birth of Christ which was so significant that it was agreed upon by an entire people as the beginning of time, their zero year?

Perhaps... I will wager this... I will submit to you... I will conjecture, a mere conjecture, that it was their invention of zero itself. An incredible invention, zero, which we today take utterly for granted as though it is a notion which has always been with us, but it is an incredibly profound notion, requiring a prodigious intellect to imagine and convey and convince others to accept: zero.

I don't mean to get us started on zero, but it was huge, and it *was* a chirological event, and I am not insane for saying so.

But to get back to the Maya woman, that's what I mean to do ... get back to the lovely woman and her troll twin and their family, because you must understand their importance to us now, at *our* chiros. Imagine how this family would appear had there been no chirological arrival of the conquistadores, with their new way of counting time, their new religion, their new diseases, and their strange new killing ways? But, you see, the Spanish did come, and these Maya did survive. Unlike their neighbors, the Indians of North America who were vanquished and all but destroyed by the white invaders, these Meso-American Indians endured and eventually *conquered* their conquistadores, subsuming their blood and their religion into their own culture.

You must find this a delicious irony, you must: the Maya kept their legends secret from the Catholic missionaries, and when the missionaries burned the Maya's hieroglyphic texts and made them learn the Roman alphabet in order to teach them the new religion, the Maya subsumed their *alphabet* as well and rewrote their own mythologies, giving us today the books of the *Jaguar Priest* and even a newer religion founded on top of the conquering religion, very like the church, built upon the former temples. Using every resource, even those —especially those! — of their conquerors, the Maya adapted, and they survived, and they kept their culture alive with them! And we must learn from that!

And remember that other, earlier chiros —bear with me, please, because it all does make sense and does have a hugely important point— that mystery hundreds of years *before* the conquistadores arrived of why the Maya, the the Toltecs abandoned their great centers of civilization. Why? No evidence pointing to the usual chirotic events which cause a people to pack up and leave: war, famine, drought, disease, none of these. And even earlier, a millennium *before* they abandoned their cities, what spurred them to begin *building* the cities in the first place? What transmutation, genetic or otherwise, escalated them so suddenly from stone age to civilization with hieroglyphic writing, with a calendar year calculated to 365.1211 days, with — oh, good heavens!— a zero?

Why and how had this woman and her family survived? To serve me coffee so hot it scalded my mouth. To serve my daughter ... hot ... hot ... hot chocolate. And now, as I called the woman over to ask her how it possibly could be Friday, that's when it happened. That scream ... that eldritch scream ...



MARK: Yeah, that scream.

But now, back to me, because I want you to know this, I want all of us to know what happened that day in Santa Cruz de K'u.

I'm thinking as I'm running alongside the people, among them. I'm thinking about what these people must be thinking, what's driving them.

In the United States, you live with vampires —vampires!— from early childhood, when your mother first lets you watch *Dracula* on the TV, but you don't believe in them. Vampires are amusing, scary things, but they're just for fun.

The people of Santa Cruz de K'u, though, isolated and steeped in legends and folklore that go back hundreds or maybe thousands of years, and then colored by all the blood and gore of Catholicism—all those pictures in stained glass of Jesus Christ raining blood, and Saint Francis

with all those arrows in his body, and all that gore— these people are at the whim and mercy of fantastic beliefs. To them vampires are only too real.

And somehow, running with them I'm caught up in the spell myself, and I find myself becoming a part of the mob, yelping along with them, yelping along with the white dog with the eye on his forehead scanning the bush as he leads us out of the town on one of the many paths out to the surrounding farms. In a short while we leave the path behind and work our way into the bush. The foliage here is so dense that the sun doesn't even penetrate to the ground. It's dark and cool and wet. We come to a small creek and the dog follows it to a point where it widens and forms a small sandy beach. There the dog stops and throws back its head and howls as it did up on the cliff, a cry from its bowels.

The *h-men* catches up to the dog and pulls it aside. He gives an order and several men step forward with shovels and start to dig. In just a few seconds something is revealed in the sand. A foot. The men take the foot and pull, dragging a body out of the shallow grave. It's Orlando.

Orlando is dead. It takes me a second to register this. But suddenly the obvious careens toward a new understanding. Obviously Orlando did not kill Crescencia. Obviously it's a double murder. I count back. Orlando's been missing for three nights. From the smell of him and the state of decomposition, and judging from the wetness of the sand and warmth of the air, he's been dead the entire time. The last time he was seen was the night Liliane came to Santa Cruz de K'u. Monday night. I remember the way Liliane watched Orlando as he walked to the great doors, the look they shared over Orlando's shoulder, the hunger in Liliane's eyes.

So. After leaving our house, Liliane found Orlando and brought him into the jungle for sex. When Orlando caught on to what Liliane wanted from him, it was too late. They were alone and far from town. Liliane was much stronger, twice the weight of Orlando. He killed him, then buried him here where the digging was easy.

But why, then, did Liliane return last night for Crescencia? Maybe she had seen something to incriminate him in Orlando's murder? Maybe she saw something through the

window that night. That might explain why she had been acting so strange since Orlando's disappearance.

I'm putting all this together in my head as the men pull Orlando from his grave; all these pieces of logic are clicking into place, when something happens that blows them utterly out of my head. I'm watching as the *h-men* takes a shovel from one of the men and swings it over his head. I've seen this before, in the cemetery, with José Luis and I start to turn away my eyes, gagging again at the thought of another beheading, when suddenly there comes this scream like nothing I have ever heard before, a scream of such agony and terror that my skin breaks out with goose pimples.

I look down at Orlando's open mouth and his wide open, terror-stricken eyes, and there's no doubt where the scream is coming from. The shovel comes down with a flash, and the scream is cut off. After several more hacks, Orlando's head flips off his body and splashes into the stream. Out of his body flows red, fresh blood that sinks like a stain into the sand.

The thoughts spinning through my head make me stagger as I'm standing there. The incredible fixes itself into reality, and now at last the obvious lies before me without logic, reason or science to obfuscate it. It wasn't sex that Liliane wanted from Orlando; it was blood.

There is another vampire in the Yucatán besides *Desmodus rotundus*. This one is on foot. And my wife and daughter are heading right towards him.



FAYE: Oh, so that scream was ... oh ... of course ...

... I had heard screams before: rabbits, on a rabbit farm, being slaughtered. peacocks, every sunrise and sunset in the park near our house in Berkeley. In films I had heard horses scream, and women, of course, in the movies, ad nauseam.

But this scream was like nothing from this world. Though it seemed to come from a great distance, it sounded clear and nearby; it seemed almost to sound inside my head, shrill and painful, yanking the nerves in my spine. I stood up so violently that I knocked over the chair. The

lovely Maya woman, who had just arrived at our table to take our order, jumped back and stared at me. I said to her, "What was that noise?"

"What noise, Señora?"

"It was a scream. A man's scream."

"I heard nothing, Señora."

I looked around the restaurant. The patrons nearest our table were alarmed and staring at me, but those farther away were eating, chatting, clearly oblivious to the scream that still rang in my head.

The woman righted my chair and stood back, waiting for me to sit. "Are you all right, Señora?" she asked.

The scream stopped abruptly. The silence rang on in my ears.

"Yes, yes," I said. I remained standing, knowing that in fact I was not all right. In fact I was going insane.

This was Faye's thought: "I must be going insane."

The woman hesitated a moment longer, then took a cloth from out of her apron and began cleaning up the table. There were shards from a broken cup. Angie's hot chocolate had spread over the tabletop and was dripping onto the floor.

"Oh, señorita!" the woman cried as she looked up and saw Angie's face, and she sat right down with Angie, shared her seat, took her in her arms, held her gently.

Now I saw Angie, saw that her eyes were dilated enormously, saw her eyelids twitching, saw her trembling all over in this woman's arms. Angie had her hands clamped tightly, violently over her ears. And I realized that Angie, too, had heard the scream. Only she and I, that scream in both our heads, we alone.

"Tshu, tshu, tshu," the woman was saying to Angie, rocking her, making a soft shushing noise.

And then another word, again and again. I thought at first she was using Angie's first name, her formal name, Angela, but with the Spanish pronunciation, the *g* sounding as an *h*: "An-hela, tshu, tshu, An-hela."

But I could not conceive how this woman could possibly *know* Angie's name; surely they had never met. But then I heard that I was wrong. It was not "An-hela" but something more like "Nell" ... but not "Nell" ...



ANGIE: So, excuse me for butting in ... but!

This is something I do know something about, and I'm getting just a little tired of sitting here in the backseat all the time like I'm a complete idiot with nothing important to say, especially when my mom is all going on like she knows everything in the history of the Universe. Okay, she's smart. But I think she hit the nail on the head when she told you in the beginning that she is fallible. Like duh! Like very!

And her Spanish is good, like I already told you, but she is, after all, fallible. What this nice lady was saying to me was not a name, and not Nell. It was *anhelo*.

Now *anhelo* is a word we don't have a good word for in English, but I know all about it because on my first day at school Bitcherichia —her real name is Beatricia, but soon enough I started calling her Bitcherichia (in my own head, not out loud) because she is the meanest young lady who ever put on a training bra, and just because her father owns like half of Merida and her mother is some kind of big socialite, that's no reason for her to think that she is the princesa of the entire school.

Well, but she is, I know, but like so what? I was a new kid in school and a stranger to her country, a gringa, and she should have had better manners, especially if she really was the

princesa. But when Maestra introduced me to the class very nicely by my name, Angela —and like my mom said, in Spanish they pronounce it An-hay-la— Bitcherichia leans over to one of her tag-alongs and whispers something and they both giggle and look over their shoulders at me. I know this kind of girl. This kind of girl and me? Well, don't even ask.

So I'm watching out all day to see what's coming down from the princesa, and pretty soon all the girls are saying to me, "Oh, Ann-nell-o this and oh, Ann-nell-o that." See in Spanish not only do you pronounce *g* like an *h*, but you also don't even pronounce the *h* at all because it's silent. So what they're saying to me is, "*Anhelo*, giggle giggle giggle."

And the giggle? I know that giggle. That giggle means that it's dirty or sexy or somehow bad, but me? I just pretend I'm dumb. I don't say anything. I just smile, and I make it a real sweet gringa kind of smile, "Oh, I am so happy to be in your pinche country, so happy to be in your pinche school."

But *anhelo*, what does it mean? Well, I wasn't going to ask any of them, that's for sure. And I wasn't going to ask my mom! "Oh, Mom, the girls are all calling me a dirty name, do you know what *anhelo* means?"

See, when my mom told you that about how I never have any secrets from her, like when she thought I was masturbating when the bats were all swarming over me and sucking my blood? I mean, really! That's another thing my mom doesn't know. Like I'm going to tell my mom that I've learned how to masturbate? I am sure! I am just sure! I've got plenty of secrets from her, but they're *secrets*, right? I mean, duh!

I can tell *you* about them, some day, *some* of my secrets, if you want to know. But anyway, *anhelo*?

I immediately go to the school library and try to look it up in all the dictionaries, but I can't find it because I'm spelling it wrong because of the silent *h*, see, and so I go to Crescencia as soon as I get home that weekend. Because Crescencia now, Crescencia is exactly the kind of girl that I really really like, as you already know. So I ask Crescencia, "Que significa *anhelo*?"

You had to see her face, oh, that beautiful girl! She looked surprised. She looked up, she looked down, she looked around. She was blushing, and it was so cute. Oh, Crescencia!

And then she says softly, like we're in a conspiracy against the world, "*Anhelo*, Angelita, es un gran pasión, un deseo tan grande —pero al mismo tiempo tan íntimo— que no puedes respirar, ni inhalar ni exhalar ni soplar. Debes solo sufocar de ... *anhelo*."

So *anhelo* is like this great big sexy relentless passion, but at the same time so intimate, so personal, something you want so bad that you just suffocate with it. I'm like, "Yeah?" Actually, I kind of like that.

So I say to Crescencia, "Como tú y Orlando?"

I mean, that girl. The way she blushed. You just have to weep for her. And you just have to weep for Orlando.



FAYE: *Anhelo*. Oh, Angie is right. I did not know that. So, it all begins to fall into place. Now.

But then, this lovely, lovely woman from the Maya family by the roadside, taking my child into her arms, soothing her, not understanding anything at all of what Angie had been through, but understanding that indeed it was all about *anhelo* and shushing her and telling her

that it's all right, such beauty, such timeless, transcendent, motherly beauty and even at that moment I so wished that I had even the smallest particle of that. In fact, that is my *anhelo*.

But I said to the woman, extricating Angie from her arms, "Thank you, Señora, you've been very kind. I shall take care of her." I tried to sit with Angie, but she shrank from me. "It's all right, honey. Calm down. Try to be calm."

Resourceless.

I couldn't think. Was it some sort of joke that these people were playing on us? How could it possibly be so well orchestrated? And why would they have done it? Gringos are very peculiar, of course, and two gringas traveling alone, what fun. I smiled around the room to let them know that I understood their joke, but the people had already gone back to their business. No one was paying the least attention to us. The lovely woman had left us alone with a single backward glance. I sat alone with Angie, who sat with her eyes clinched.

I still wasn't well. I wasn't lucid. I remember looking at Angie a long moment, and all I could see was Mark. Mark, and Ev. There was nothing of me in Angie at all, I realized suddenly. Yet there must be. And of my mother. What genes had my mother passed to Angie through me? Insanity genes?

You too will think I was insane —I, Faye— to be wondering these things at this time, to be bothering with these thoughts when eldritch screams were in the air. But, you see, genetics were all around Faye at this moment, patent on every face. Survival, you see. And there in front of her was Faye's very daughter, whom Faye loved so much, in pain, and why couldn't Faye — why couldn't I, Faye— ease that pain? What would Faye's mother have done with Faye — if the bitch had only stayed with her baby even an hour after giving birth to her— what motherly tenderesses? But no, she merely passed on her genes and went merrily on her goddam way,

never having so much as the tiniest nightmare of throwing a baby off a rooftop or from an altar or from the edge of a cenote.

And so Faye looked at Angie, shuddering with fear and pain among the Maya, and tried in vain to find herself in Angie's physiognomy. Angie had her eyes and her hair, but what else? Angie's every other feature, her stature, even her posture came through the August line. Not Margaret, but Ev, thank the heavens for tiny mercies.

Dear Ev, as Faye always called him. Faye thought about Ev now. It calmed her. Yes, she thought, she would drink her coffee and picture dear Ev, Ev's pale freckled skin, his high forehead, his cleft in the chin, every detail down to his ear lobes, the same ear lobes Angie had been begging to pierce on her own head. Even the personality, the attitudes, that straightforward, no-nonsense, unimaginative August response to all stimuli no matter how provocative. Ev had them. Mark had them. Angie had them. How Faye had always envied them.

Dear Ev. Faye loved to think of him as her own father —instead of that creature who had shot his sperm into her mother's hot womb and went looking for the next womb to shoot into. Ev was so old by the time Faye's life transected his that Faye knew to begin almost immediately practicing his death. She knew it would come too soon, and she needed to be prepared. She practiced his death the way one practices a play, carefully putting the details of agony into place. During Ev's last months, seeing him failing, she smiled and smiled and practiced his death. She practiced after dinners at Ev and Margaret's home, as she walked from their kitchen out to the veranda where she could see him lying in his hammock, practiced finding him peacefully passed away with a full belly and a half finished glass of wine. She practiced at home, as she walked to the ringing telephone, the conversation with Margaret that would begin, "I have bad news."

So when the phone did ring one morning and Margaret did deliver the news that Ev had died in his sleep, it did not kill me —me, Faye. It did not quite kill me.

I don't know how long I sat there in that Maya restaurant with these thoughts ... or might have continued sitting there ... but suddenly the restaurant door banged open and I turned to see a busload of tourists flood in, college students from the look and sound of them, boisterous Texans

—everywhere in the Yucatán, Texans— full-blooded, romping and frolicking with each other like lambs in a flock, all unaware of anything but themselves, their own lives, their bodies, their youth, their very vitality. Lambs, lovely, delicious lambs, and I could not not take my eyes from them. I, Faye.

It was only a moment I sat there watching them, I'm quite sure, but Angie shrieked at me so loud that the entire restaurant fell silent. "Stop it!" she screamed. "Stop looking at them like that!"

I looked down at her. Her eyes were wild, her face blanched. "Stop looking at *me* like that!" she screamed and ran out of the restaurant, knocking into two of the Texans on her way who reeled back against the doorjamb.

All heads turned silently to me, the mouths open. I was stunned. I took money from my purse and left it on the table and walked through the stilled room and outside to the Jeep. I found Angie in the passenger seat, sobbing convulsively.

I didn't know just what to say. I stood by her a moment, then said. "Angie, you're sick, honey. You've had a terrible shock to your system and it's making you hysterical. We're going to get help." I made a move to put my arm around her, but she shrugged me away so viciously that my hand slammed against the door frame. I thought I might pass out from the pain. I moved around to the back of the Jeep where she wouldn't see and squatted on my haunches, leaning against the Jeep and massaging my hand and holding back the tears, until I recovered myself. I said nothing more but simply got into the driver's seat, started the engine and pulled onto the road again.

In the open air, with the hot sun beating down on me, in a few moments I felt clear-headed and able to focus again, Faye ... again. I abolished all distractions and forced myself to concentrate on one issue at a time.

Angie. Clearly she was unwell. Sitting in the passenger's seat, she continued to shiver with fever. I pushed aside an annoying thought which strayed into my head that *hysteria* derives from the Greek word for womb —I hate ... that ... crap!— and I presented to myself instead a

first hypothesis that Angie's fever might be due to an infection from the bat attack. Although Diaz had given her a rabies shot, there could be any number of other agents at work in her. Saliva to blood is an extremely efficient vector. Those bats and their saliva. I was assuming bats have saliva, well of course they do, they must.

But this, I knew, was not taking into account my own sickness. Certainly I myself was exhibiting bizarre symptoms, yet I had received no bites from the vampires. Somehow I had lost three days for which I had only vague, dreamlike memories. Though I had no fever I was extremely fatigued and my perception was deficient.

I considered the fog. Might the fog, too, pose a threat as an infectious agent? Both Angie and I had been exposed to that eldritch fog at the same time, and we had both responded immediately and acutely with physical and psychedelic reactions. The fog had an odor and taste and it could easily have contained noxious properties which might cause lingering symptoms such as my own: memory loss, distortions of perception, hallucinations, torpor.

I was thick in these thoughts when I heard a mumbling from Angie. I said, "I'm sorry, honey. What did you say?"

She said, "They wanted to kill me."

"Oh, no, honey," I said, intent on pushing this thought away also. The people swarming up the hill toward us —the people swarming over the steps of the temple like a ribbon, a nightmare— first I had to take care of Angie. I said, "We don't know what they wanted, honey. That's only what your father guessed. We'll have to wait. We'll have to talk with your father."

She said, "No, they wanted to kill me."

We were now on the outskirts of Mérida. As the sun burns away clouds in the sky, so it seemed to have burned away the clouds of my mind. I was much stronger, much keener, though I also felt that I was greatly in need of sleep. I glanced over at Angie. Her posture was straighter, and except for her intense emotionality, which was reasonable under the circumstances, she too seemed stronger. I said, "How are you feeling now, honey?" She glowered at me for answer. I said, "Can you tell me what's hurting? Can you tell me what's the matter?"

"What's the matter with *me*?" she said, and the shrillness of her voice hurt my ears. My hands twitched on the steering wheel and it took all my restraint not to pull the Jeep to the side of the road and take her by the shoulders and shake her.

"Never mind, Angie!" I snapped and decided in that moment many things: I would not go to the hospital; I would not go to the police; I would go home to Berkeley.

I wanted my own doctor, I wanted my own home, I wanted to get my daughter out of this country, and I wanted no delay, no hassle ... and no more! I drove straight to the travel agency and purchased three tickets to San Francisco. Mark would be boarding the bus in Santa Cruz de K'u at ten. With the stops, the bus would be in Mérida perhaps by four this afternoon. Or if he thought to catch a taxi at the first town on the paved road, he might be in by two. The plane left at eight this evening. Even with the long stopover in México City, we would all three be home before dawn. I had a sudden, immense longing to be in my own bed in Berkeley with the covers up over my head.

I had a momentary stumble over not making a report to the police about the incident in Santa Cruz de K'u —whatever that was— murder, that's what Mark said. Or, that was my memory. It seemed to me more and more certain that murder was one of the words Mark whispered to me as the insane people of the insane town made their insane way up the hill toward us. *Crescencia*, murder, Orlando, that ridiculous *civateteo* word again, insane whispers into my torpid head.

No, I decided again, I would not go to the police. They would involve us, delay us, perhaps even keep us in the country. If there was a murder, it was a Mexican murder and the Mexicans could handle it themselves without us.

But now the thought had penetrated the barriers I had put before it, and suddenly I was overwhelmed by it. Murder. *Crescencia*. Orlando. Murder. Those poor, sweet kids. And suddenly a memory jabbed itself into my consciousness. It was intangible, like the remembrance of a scent, but so disturbing that I pulled the Jeep sharply to the curb and tried to grab the memory back to examine it more closely.

I turned to Angie. "Did something happen last night? Something to do with Orlando?" The expression on Angie's face was baffling: anger and fear and something else, distrust ... of her mother. I added, "I had ... I think I had a dream about Orlando."

She screamed at me. "It was no dream and you know it! He came to us sick and needing help and you wouldn't let him in!"

I could only stare at her. That was insane. It was utterly outside the realm of possibility that I could ever turn Orlando or anyone away sick, however delirious I might have been myself. Why would she say such a thing?

I pulled the Jeep back onto the road, drove to the Hotel El Salvador and booked a room to wait for Mark. We would sleep meanwhile. We both needed it. But the room became very tiny very quickly. While I was on the phone to San Francisco, letting Margaret know what time our plane would be arriving in the morning, Angie never took her eyes off me, accusatory, resentful, fearful. Margaret was full of questions that I didn't want to answer here and now, so I cut the conversation short and hung up. Angie watched me until I went into the bathroom and closed the door behind me.

I examined myself in the mirror. No, I looked fine, I looked well, I even looked rather pretty, rather young. Faye. My eyes were bright and unclouded, a little wild; my skin looked healthy, firm and with good color; my gums were pink and my tongue red and uncoated. Whatever the cause of this bizarre disorder, perhaps it had run its course.

As I came out of the bathroom, I saw that Angie had been waiting for me, watching the door. Her eyes followed me across the room as I went to the suitcases and opened each to see what had been packed. Finally I could take it no longer. I looked up at her and said in a whisper so vicious that it surprised me, "Stop staring at me! I've been sick!"

"I'll say!"

"Why don't you sleep?" I said. "You need sleep." I found myself at the door with my purse in my hand. I didn't know how I got there. I said, "I'm going out."

She said, "Where? I know where."

"I will not be cross-examined by my own daughter," I said and opened the door.

"I'm going with you," she said, jumping up from the bed.

"No. No, you are not going with me. You are going to sleep."

She stared at me with plain honesty, and I realized that she did know exactly where I was going. And suddenly so did I.

Yes, I was leaving the country with my family to return home. Yes, I would never see Constantin again. But I owed it to him to tell him this to his face. And as though the thought of him conjured him, his face came before me with every detail as clear as a photograph. And with it, another memory stole into my mind and set me trembling. I turned out to the hallway so that Angie could not see my face.

"Were there..." I started, but stopped, unsure. "Did I receive ... flowers?" There was no answer from Angie. In a moment I turned to her. Her expression was of pure loathing. "Don't worry!" I said. "I'm saying goodbye to him!" I left without another word, not knowing what else to say.



ANGIE: When you're a kid, people are always brushing you off. "Go to bed, you need sleep."

"Sit over there and be quiet."

"Later. We'll tell you later."

They don't think you've got any brains, and you sure don't have any rights.

So they run me out of town, they want to kill me, and my mom tells me, "Oh, no, honey, they don't want to kill you. They're just acting funny. You need sleep." So where's my dad? Why isn't he with us? "Oh, no, honey, he's busy. You can talk to him later, okay? Oh, by the way, I'm going out, honey. I'm going to say goodbye to my lover. Wish me luck. Go to bed."

"Oh, sure, Mom, that's okay. It doesn't matter that I'm crazy about him. It doesn't matter that all he wanted from me was to get to you. It doesn't matter that he sends you flowers and

drugs you and that you're old enough to be his mother and you're married to my father. Go have fun, you and Constantin. I'll take a nap like a good girl."

Actually, none of that matters anymore as I sit on my bed now in the Hotel El Salvador. All that matters is that I've got three tickets to San Francisco in my hand. I put my head on the pillow and look at the tickets. I read the words "San Francisco" again and again and again. I start to cry.

But I hear this knock on the door. It starts way far away, very quiet, but it gets louder and louder, and suddenly I come awake and I realize that I've been dead asleep. I hear my dad's voice calling, "Faye? Angie?" I look at the clock. It's just before three. I go to the door and open it. My dad busts in. He's got his toolbox with him and it's got all his tools in it and a jar of vampiricide. He goes, "Where's your mom?"

I can't think. My head's full of mush, my mouth is full of moss. I go, "I don't know."

He goes, "She left you here alone? Goddam it!"

I go, "I'm old enough!"

He goes, "Goddam it! When's she coming back?"

I go, "I don't know." I'm not telling him anything about her. What's between her and Constantin is over. We're all going home together, and I'm not snitching on her to my dad. I go, "So what happened in Santa Cruz de K'u?"

He goes, "Never mind."

I go, "Come on, Dad, I'm old enough to hear."

He goes, "No time now. I'll tell you later."

I go, "Dad! You said they were coming to get me! They had shovels! You saw what they did to José Luis! I've got a right to know!"

So he starts shouting at me, "Goddam it, Angie! We don't have the time for it! We've got to go get plane tickets for San Francisco."

I go, "We got them already! Jeez!" And I show him the three tickets I dropped on the bed.

He's all, huh?

He goes, "So your mom is ... she's willing to leave? To go home?"

I go, "No, she wanted to cut out paper dolls but couldn't find any cheaper paper!"

He picks up the tickets and looks at them like he can't read. He goes, "She bought these tickets today? So she wants to go home. And the third ticket is for me, right? She told you that?"

I'm all, duh!

He goes, "What time's the flight?" He reads the ticket. He goes, "Eight o'clock. Goddam it! The sun goes down just past six. Why so late?"

I go, "Don't get mad at me! Don't get mad at Mom either. We couldn't book the afternoon flight because of you, because you just had to stay behind in Santa Cruz de K'u! You almost got me killed, and if it wasn't for you we'd all three be in the air right now!"

I can see on his face the wheels starting to turn faster and faster. He goes, "Eight o'clock. That gives him almost two hours." Suddenly he turns to the suitcases and starts pulling out the clothes. He goes, "Is your mom's jewelry box in here?"

I go, "No, we thought the people of Santa Cruz de K'u could use the money, so we left all the valuables behind!"

He goes, "Goddam it, Angie, cut the sarcasm or I'll slap it out of you. This is goddam serious."

He finds the jewelry box and starts picking out all my mom's crucifixes. She's got this big collection of crucifixes because one Christmas my grandma, who's Catholic in a big way, gave her a crucifix because she thinks my mom is such a heathen. My mom says to her, "Oh, how lovely, I love crucifixes," which is such a big lie, and so every Christmas my grandma gives her another crucifix. She's got over a dozen of them, all different sorts. Actually my mom got kind of fascinated by how many different kinds there are, and you might be interested in this actually: the cross as a religious symbol goes way back a long time before Christ, but don't tell my grandma that.

So my dad hands me the crucifixes and goes, "Here, put these on."

I go, "All of them?"

He goes, "Half of them. Give the other half to your mom to wear."

I go, "Why?"

He takes a big breath and calms himself down and lowers his voice and goes, "Just do me a favor, Angel, and do it."

I go, "Well, why? You expecting a vampire or something?"

He goes, "Will you just not ask any questions and just do it for me as a personal favor?"

I go, "Well, sure, but why?"

He yells "Would you just do it now!"

I go, "Oh, all right, all right!" and I start putting them on. "Jeez, what do you want, blood?"

My dad goes apopleptic, and I'm thinking that for the first time in my life he really is going to hit me. But he backs off and swallows it all down and goes, "We're playing a trick on the customs people, okay, babe? We don't want the customs people going through your mom's jewelry box, okay? Not that we're hiding anything from the customs people, Angel. It just makes it quicker in San Francisco, okay?"

I go, "Okay, all you had to do was tell me!"

He goes, "Okay, so when your mom comes back, tell her—"

And I go, "Now where are *you* going? Jeez!"

He goes, "I've got things I have to do before we can leave. So when your mom gets here, tell her I'll be back before six o'clock. Got that? That's very important. Before six o'clock. And I'll drive us to the airport. Got that?"

I go, "Yeah, sure."

He picks up his workbox and goes to the door, then turns and he's suddenly all choked up so he can hardly talk and he goes, "And ... honey ... if I don't come back before ... say before six o'clock ... then you two leave here before six. Got that, *before* six? Go to the airport where there are lots of people. What am I saying, it's an international flight, you've got to be there before six anyway! Okay, so that's great then, she's already planning on it! So you and your mom get there

before six, like she planned, and I'll meet you at the airport before the plane takes off at eight. Got that?"

I go, "Yeah, sure."

He opens the door and steps out, then he turns back and goes, "But if ... if ... if you don't see me at the airport, make sure you get on the plane, okay? Make sure you get your mom on that plane. Got that? Don't let her stay here."

I go, "Yeah, sure."

He starts out again but turns back again. "But if ... if, say, something should happen, if say your mom doesn't show up back here at the hotel and I don't show up back here, then you catch a taxi to the airport, all by yourself, okay? And before six, I'm talking about now, right, before six?" And he takes out his wallet and gives me some money. "And we'll both meet you there. But ... but if we don't meet you there ... if you're all alone at the airport and the plane is taking off, then you just get right on the plane anyway without us. Okay? Grandma knows you're coming? She's going to meet you?"

I go, "Yeah, Mom called her."

He goes, "Okay, give me a kiss." And he puts down his workbox and comes over and gives me this big hug, and he's got like tears in his eyes, and I'm all, huh? While he's holding me, he goes, "And if something should happen that you miss the plane, then ... then ... go, uh ..."

I go, "Dad! Would you stop worrying! We're going to make the plane, okay!"

He goes, "Okay." And he picks up his workbox and runs out of the room.

I sit back on the bed and I'm like, okay, eight o'clock, let's go, let's get the flock out of here!



FAYE: After walking the streets of Merida I don't know how long, meandering, not wanting to go there but wanting to go there more than anything in life, I found myself standing in

front of the hospital looking across the street at the second story window of the Hotel Colonial. It was shuttered.

I went into the hotel lobby and approached the clerk. He looked up and said in English, "May I help you, Señora?" I asked for the room number for Constantin Liliane. He looked blank, then opened his register, ran his finger down the list of guests, and said there was no one by that name.

My heart lurched through its next several beats, and I had to swallow before I could speak. "Oh." I said, "Perhaps he has checked out? Last Friday he was here, and he would have been here at least through Monday?" I added, "Today *is* Friday, again, isn't it?"

"Yes," he said, turning back several pages in the register. "Today is Friday but ..." He smiled politely and shook his head. "No."

I said, "About five-foot-ten, red hair the color of copper, very distinctive. You must remember him." He pursed his lips as he thought, then shook his head again. I said, "His room faces the hospital on the second story?"

He said, "No, we have only one room that faces the hospital on the second story. That has been rented for many years by a young woman."

A young woman. My heartbeat regulated. Yes, of course, there would be a young woman. Rising naked in the early evening after a long afternoon's embrace, he opens the drapes and sees across the street another foolish woman, one of so many. "Thank you," I said, and turned to go. Then as an afterthought I asked, "What is her name? The woman who rents that room?"

He said, "Constance—" but stopped himself. "Oh, Señora, you must understand. I cannot give out a guest's name."

"No, of course not. Thank you."

I left the lobby and returned to my post across the street by the hospital wall, hardly daring to think. Adrenalin coursed through my body, and hope ... hope ... crept back into my mind.

Constance. Constantin. Constancia, perhaps.

Too coincidental, far too coincidental for coincidence.

The first thought of many was that Constantin and Constance were twins —Constancia, as I said, perhaps— and he was here in Mérida visiting his sister, and I could simply go up to her room and knock on the door and say hello, why not?

But the next thought made my stomach revolt in a way that shames me now, so that I turned to the hospital wall, put my head against it and threw up, a dry heave which brought up only a small quantity of acid. It was only then that I tried to think back to when I had last eaten and could not remember. I should get food, something bready to absorb the burning acids of high emotions, a mineral water with gas to make me belch.

Constantin. Constance.

Mark had tried to warn me that Constantin was gay. I had considered it just a hurtful, childish remark coming from Mark's jealousy. Fantastic. But perhaps Mark sensed something I could not, something men see in other men, something hidden from women. Constantin was certainly handsome, with fine features set almost doll-like in his fine face. Slim figure. If he chose to dress as a woman, live as a woman, call himself Constance, why should that make me vomit? Absurd thought, I now know, of course. But at that moment I was looking for answers to absurd questions, and absurd thoughts were all I had.

I tried to remember Constantin's voice, the timbre and clarity, tried to imagine this voice coming through lips painted with lipstick. What color would he choose to go with that copper hair and those copper eyes? But surely he would wear a wig. But still, the eyes, the eyelashes, the eyebrows. I tried to imagine the fine, copper hairs covered with mascara. I tried to remember his walk, tried to picture that walk in a dress, in an evening dress. No, more probably in a blouse and skirt, I thought as I remembered him on the stage dancing with Angie, as lithe as a panther in his silky shirt and tight pants, but virile. Virile. And, in fact, no, I could not picture this Constance. I could not find her in my imagination.

I turned from the hospital wall and looked up again at the window. Second story. Several windows. Yet the clerk said there was only one room that faces the hospital. Then it must be a

suite. Then Constantin was not lying; he did have money; he would arrange for himself only the best accommodations.

I went by a back door into the hotel and climbed the stairs to the second story. There was only one door on the street side, so yes, it was a suite taking up the entire half of the floor. I stood in front of the door a full five minutes, trying to get up the courage, or the stupidity, to knock. What might I find? Constantin in drag? Or Constantin and Constancia, the twins, having tea in the afternoon? Or Constantin and Constance, the lovers, in bed together? All I knew was that I had to see him one last time. I knocked. No answer. I knocked louder.

Across the hall, a maid came out of a room and began pushing her cleaning cart up the hallway but stopped when she saw me. She looked at me with curiosity and accusation. I was embarrassed as though I had been caught in the act. What act? I was immediately annoyed that I should be made defensive for knocking on a hotel door. I said to the maid in Spanish, "I'm looking for the young man —the young woman who rents this suite."

"I've never seen her," she said with a sort of awe.

I said, "But how could you have never seen her? She's rented the room for years."

"Yes," she said. "But I've never seen anyone go in that room, or come out."

"But when you clean the room—" I began but she interrupted me.

"I have never cleaned it. I clean all the rooms but that one. No one in this hotel even has a key to that door. Except the owner. Not for years."

There was nothing left to be said. So I said nothing, but turned and left. I could make no sense of it. In the lobby, I saw there was a different clerk at the desk, a young woman. I approached her and said, "Excuse me. I'm wondering. Would it be possible to rent a room for an extended period of time in this hotel?"

"Yes. That is done."

"And, for reasons of ... great privacy ... would it be possible to keep this room always locked? With a special key? That only I had?"

The original clerk came up beside us. "Why do you ask this question, Señora? Are you interested in such an arrangement ... or ...?" He left the question open. I was humiliated and didn't answer but simply turned and left.

As I walked across the street, I didn't know what to think. This man who had made such an enormous hole in the center of my life was gone, vanished into a mystery. If one believed in mysteries, which I did not. I was flying away with my family in a few hours. I would never see him again, forever.

Never. Forever.

I turned back to the second story window, never and forever cycling in my mind, two words echoing each other from opposite ends of the infinite. I stood a long time staring at the window. Never, forever.

I knew I had to find my way inside.

End of Disk 6 (66:06 minutes)

What a piece of work is man!
 how noble in reason!
 how infinite in faculty!
in form and moving how express and admirable!
 in action how like an angel!
 in apprehension how like a god!
 the beauty of the world!
 the paragon of animals!
And yet, to me, what is this quintessence of dust?

Hamlet 2.2.300-7
William Shakespeare

DISK 7 — (64:51 minutes)

Blood among the Pyramids

MARK: I've got to get this done before six, and meet Angie and Faye. I don't dare go to the police. They won't believe me. They'll hold me there for questioning. They'll take time, and I don't have any time to spare.

I've come prepared. In my workbox I've got vampiricide, a hatchet, and a variety of stakes both wooden and metal. And maybe most important, I've got the amulet that the *h-men* had hung around José Luis's neck. After I leave Angie in the hotel, I stop in the zócalo and buy a couple dozen crucifixes, large and small and put them in every pocket. Then I go to the library. If I'm going to eradicate this vampire, I need information.

I check the hours on the door of the library. Fridays they close at five. Okay. That gives me plenty of time to reach Faye and Angie before sunset and get them to the airport. If he shows up at the airport, I'm ready for him. If he doesn't show, we'll get out of here. I'll call the Mérida police from the air to alert them. They won't believe me, but I'll tell them about Santa Cruz de K'u, tell them about Orlando, tell them about Crescencia, they can go check out the grave in the sandy beach, check out José Luis's ashes in the cemetery. I'll tell them about Constantin Liliane. Maybe I can get Faye to tell me where Liliane's been staying in Mérida. She must know.

Faye. The thought of her and him keeps washing back over me like a cold wave. He's had her in some sort of spell; that's why she's been acting so weird. But this morning she seemed to break out of her stupor. She was able to make the trip to Mérida, she bought the tickets, she's okay again, she has to be. The thought comes to me again that the third ticket might not be for me. She might have bought it for him. After all, where is she now? She left Angie alone in the hotel room. To go where? To do what?

I push that thought away. Faye I'll deal with tonight on the plane, tomorrow at home, the next day and the next. Forever, I'm not letting her go. But first Liliane.

I've been in this library dozens of times, but I've always been in the nature section studying *Desmodus rotundus*, not in the supernatural section where they keep the books on this other kind of vampire.

The librarian hails me, as always. "Oh, Mr. August, more on the desmo?"

She's a funny woman with a throaty, posh English accent, she makes me laugh so much and I've always wondered how on earth she ended up in Mérida. Tall and big boned but without an ounce of fat to her, probably fifty-five though she could be thirty or seventy, with a long broad face and high forehead and the tiniest eyes and thinnest lips I've ever seen. But very emotional, very enthusiastic. As soon as I whisper to her that no, it's not *Desmodus Rotundus* this time, but the other kind of vampire, she emotes, "Vampires!" in a voice that rings from wall to wall. It's as though, feeling trapped behind that bland mask of a face and with a voice and accent so plummy and deep that it sounds like it's coming from the bottom of a well, her enthusiasm needs shouting to express itself.

A guy in the corner shushes her. There are only a few other people in the library, reading at tables, and they all look up.

"¡Oh, perdóname mucho, Señor!" she says with a terrible accent—even worse than mine, if you can believe Angie about that, and yeah, Angie's probably right. The librarian turns back to me, attempting to whisper but hardly lowering her volume at all. "Right profession, wrong voice!" she grimaces, "but how I love books! And vampires! Oooh, fascinating!"

The man shushes her again as she leads me almost on a run into the stacks where she takes about ten books off the shelves. She puts me at a table nearby and opens up a book and lays it before me, speaking in that same echoing voice. "Now, although this probably gives the fullest history of the vampire, *this* book..." and she opens another book and lays it on top of the first.

The guy in the corner says in Spanish, "Señora, if you would be more quiet?"

And she says, "¡Oh, sí sí, Señor, un millón de apologias!" and returns to me, "... *this* book is in English, which you, Mr. August, would probably prefer." I nod. "A milestone of vampirical research! And there are several mentions here—in case you'd care to tie your own research to

local traditions— of Latin American demonology, although these creatures are not vampires per se. For instance, in Mayan belief, there are the *ciuateteo*—"

"*Civateteo*?"

"*Ci-va-teteo*? Yes, it would probably be pronounced so. Witches who attack children during the night and suck their blood."

An Indian man from the next table slides out of his chair and passes us on his way out. "*Civateteo*," he says under his breath to us, nodding his head, making the sign of the cross and slinking out the library door.

A black woman on the other side of us leans across the table and says, "In Haiti we too have such witches. We call them the *loup-garou*. They are the god-forsaken bodies of suicides who rise on the third night to walk with wolves and eat the blood of mankind."

"*Loup-garou*, yes!" the librarian says, and the guy in the corner shushes her. "A mythology derived from the French *loup-garou*, a werewolf, no doubt hybridized with black African folklore! Isn't it fascinating the forms this same legend takes in the various cultures around the world? The very anathema of religion, and yet they become religions in themselves." As she talks, she consults the tables of contents of certain books and flips through the pages and inserts bookmarks and passes the books on to me. "In Latin America the *ciuateteo*, in Haiti the *loup-garou* witch —*not* the same as the zombie, mind you which is quite its *own* thing— in France the *loup-garou* werewolf, in Eastern Europe the vampire or *nosferatu*, in Greece the *vrykolakas*, among the Hebrews *Lilith*, Adam's first wife and the succubus from the psalm," and now she intones, "'Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night ... nor for the pestilence that stalks in darkness.' *Lilith*, the night hag, and her demonic children the *Liliane*."

Liliane. My brain twitches.

The librarian says as an afterthought, "And then of course there's our own Jesus Christ."

"... our own ... ?"

"Jesus Christ, yes. He too rose on the third day. Isn't it, fascinating!"

The guy in the corner gives this great, long shush, and she turns to him and says, "Señor! Would you please stop that! How do you expect us to concentrate with all that shushing!"

I am completely absorbed in the books. None of them approaches the subject with any sort of scientific method, but how could they? What I'm most interested in is how to kill this kind of vampire. All of the books say the same thing, the same techniques we've seen in all the movies, wooden stakes through the heart, crucifixes put into the coffin so that the vampire can't go back to bed and will be exposed to the daylight. Evidently all the fiction writers of the world have relied upon the very same few books, and all of the books relied upon Bram Stoker's novel *Dracula*. None of it is believable.

But then, what fool would believe in vampires to begin with? I wonder if I might be in a dream, the world's most realistic, long-lived dream. But I think back to this morning at the creekside, Orlando's scream coming out of his decomposing body. That was no dream.

Liliane. The demonic child of Lilith. He took down Orlando Monday night, and on the third night, Orlando rose, and he took Crescencia. The howling that Monday night, that incredible awakening of every animal within miles, the three bats inside the cage beating themselves to death against the wires ... did Liliane somehow cause all that? Some of the books talk about the vampires having power over the animal world. The bat attack on Angie. Did Liliane summon the vampires? He must have been at the hotel. And Liliane is after Faye. Oh, God, does Faye know what he is? No, she can't know that. I won't allow myself to think that. He's got her in some sort of spell, but she doesn't know what he is, or what he has become.

Why is he waiting? He could have taken her before this. Sunday night in Mérida at the hospital he was alone with her all night. And Monday night, she went out after him in Santa Cruz de K'u, they must have had a half hour together alone. Why didn't he take her in Berkeley?

Maybe it only recently happened to him, after I brought Faye to the Yucatán. A man suddenly alone in the Bay Area, he could easily have mixed with a bad element, got into a drug culture, or a weird satanic sect of some kind with blood rituals. He's very cultivated, yes, but he has a worldly look, like he's roamed a lot of streets looking for a lot of action. Maybe he got

some, the wrong kind, maybe he picked up a vampire, or a night creature of some kind, a succubus like Lilith, they've been around since Biblical times, evidently. Or maybe it's like a new infection of some kind, like HIV, shared needles, a virus spread through the blood and mutating like crazy.

Crazy, that's right. Crazy to think these thoughts. Crazy to have seen what I saw. Crazy. I shake my head. I need sleep.

I look around for a clock. And that's when I notice that the light in the library is very gray. All the people are gone. The librarian comes up to my table with another book, an ancient looking book with a Spanish title. She cries, "Look what I have found!" and her voice echoes around the empty room. "The Maya built their temples at the crossroads to keep the people safe from ciuateteo! Crossroads, cross, crucifix, there must be a connection. And in England, you see, criminals were hanged on the gallows, which were themselves a cross! The gallows! And the gallows were always set up at a crossroads! And to this day all over England great clumps of Mandragora grow at crossroads! Mandragora, mandrake, the deadly poison? And the men, upon being hanged, would of course ejaculate simply all over. And it is said that where the sperm soaked into the soil, the Mandragora sprang up! Isn't it all simply fascinating?" And she looks at me like she's expecting a bowlful of jelly beans.

I say, "What time is it?"

She says, "A bit past six-thirty, I should imagine."

I say, "But the library closes at five! It can't be six-thirty!"

She smiles! "You were so involved with your research, Mr. August, that I didn't want to disturb you. But that's all right; I have all night."



ANGIE: It's just past six o'clock when my mom comes back to the El Salvador. She walks into the room looking like the drowned Ophelia, her hair stringing around her face, pale as death, and completely nuts.

I go, "Dad was here. But he's gone. So what's new? He says he'll be back before six and he's going to drive us to the airport."

She goes, "So he's coming with us? He said that?"

I go, "Yeah."

She goes, "Where did you tell him I was?"

I go, "I didn't tell him anything. We've got our tickets, we're getting out of here. He says if he doesn't get back here before six we're supposed to drive ourselves and he'll meet us there."

"Why are you wearing my crucifixes?"

"Dad says to wear them for customs. He wants me to wear half and you to wear half. Here." And I hand her all the ugly ones. I've already picked them out. She starts putting on the crucifixes very slowly, and I can see in her eyes the wheels turning, just like with my dad except not fast, slow and confused.

She goes, "No. This is insane."

I look out the window. The sun is just going down. I go, "Well, it's six, so I guess Dad's not going to make it, so we better go," and I pick up my suitcase. But my mom sits on the bed like all her blood just drained out of her. She looks up at me with this helpless look, and I see from her eyes that she's on her way back into her coma. I take her by the shoulders and shake her hard. I go, "Mom! Come on, we've got to go to the airport! You've got to drive. Or no, looking at you now, Dad gave me money for a taxi, that's what we'll do."

Her head waggles back and forth on her shoulders, and I can see her brains shake back into her eyes. I let go her shoulders and she goes, "Yes. Yes. We've got to leave." And she picks up the tickets off the bed and stares at them like she's trying to remember what they are.

I hear a noise and I turn. It's Constantin! He's in the room with us. I'm like, oh God! I mean, what am I supposed to do? He stares at my mom. I look at her. She stares back at him, and her eyes go all jittery, twitching, the blue part of the eye and the pupil like they're shivering at the sight of him. Suddenly she shakes her head and says to him, "Stop that. Please stop that."

He goes, "All right."

She looks at me and I see fear in her eyes. She's afraid of him. And suddenly I'm afraid, too. Constantin walks over to her and reaches for the tickets in her hand. She pulls away, but he gets the tickets anyway. He looks at them and goes, "Three tickets to San Francisco. Fascinating."

She goes, "Yes. I'm taking my family home."

He goes, "A lovely town, San Francisco. Or it used to be. Full of pioneer blood, renegades, a very stimulating town. That spirit is mostly gone now, of course. Pollution. But very well, San Francisco it is. We won't stay long in any case."

She goes, "No. You can't come. I'm going with my husband and my daughter. My husband is coming with us. We are all three going together. And you can't come. Please."

He turns to me and says, "Angie, where is your father?" And his eyes zap me and empty my brain. "He has his workbox? A hatchet? Vampiricide? You don't say." He laughs.

I'm like, oh shit!

My mom goes, "Please, Constantin. Let us go."

"What lovely jewelry you're wearing, Angie. You must be deeply religious."

My mom goes, "Angie, go down to the lobby and wait for your father."

I go, "Huh uh. I'm staying here."

She goes, "Do as I tell you!" I don't want to leave her but Constantin turns his eyes on me and zaps me again, and it's like I'm forced out the door. My mom goes, "And Angie, if you see your father coming, you run up here and tell me, do you hear?"

I'm like, oh sure! I start down the stairs but look back over my shoulder and see my mom come to the door and watch me all the way down the stairs and out of sight. I stop there, and after a second I hear the door close and the lock turn, and I sneak back up the stairs and stand outside the door to listen. There's silence for a long time, then I hear my mom's voice, "Don't. Don't do that. You mix me up."

"All right. It is all your choice. What did you think of my flowers?"

"They were hideous."

"Not when they were full of life. They were beautiful. You are beautiful."

"I visited your room at the Hotel Colonial this afternoon. I went inside. The lock was unlocked."

"Yes, I unlocked it. I knew you would come."

"But you weren't there."

"Yes, of course."

"Where were you? Who is Constance?"

"I was in another place."

"Where? Who is Constance?"

"How did you like the decor? I arranged it myself."

"It's hideous. It's depressing. Why all those black drapes?"

"I am allergic to the sun. And the drapes are not black. They are a deep green, a restful, dark, forest green, the green that you find in the deepest shade of the densest forest."

"They looked black."

"No. Deep green. Often I use purple."

"Where did you get those books?"

"I collect books. I collect knowledge. Did you look into any of them?"

"I was afraid to touch them. Some of them looked ancient. They belong in a museum. Where did you get them? Who is Constance?"

There's a long moment of silence, then she goes, "Don't look at me like that." Another long moment of silence. "No, please. Don't tell me anything more. I can't stand anything more."

Then I hear a rustling like they're moving together, their bodies brushing each other, their breaths coming loud in my ear, and I hear his voice like he's right inside my head. "My dear, I need you to say yes. You know that. If you do not say yes, it cannot be. Without your consent we would have nothing."

There's another moment of silence, and then my mom screams, "Nooooooooooooo!"

And here comes my dad taking the stairs three at a time, his toolbox ramming the walls. He tries the door but it doesn't give. He drops the toolbox and takes out the hatchet and forces the door with his shoulder. My mom's standing in the corner of the room with her face in her hands, crying.

My dad goes, "Where is he?"

But Constantin is nowhere. My dad opens the door to the closet, then the bathroom, holding his hatchet ready. Then he looks under the bed. But Constantin's not here. My dad pulls my mother's hands away from her face and examines her. He goes, "You're okay. You're okay, Faye. Where is he?"

I go to the window to see if he went down the fire escape, and there he is across the street, leaning against our Jeep. He's looking up at me and smiling, his black hair falling over his forehead and making him look like a kid. As a matter of fact, I finally see it, he looks just like Orlando. I go, "There he is!" And my dad comes to my side.

He goes, "Black devil!" and takes off out of the room, grabbing his workbox on the way.

I check out my mom. She's all shuddering and weeping, and I go, "You stay there. I'll be back," and I take off after my dad. I get down to the sidewalk and see my dad in the middle of the street, but he's not running now. He's walking real slow toward Constantin, his neck straight, his shoulders tense, the hatchet in his hand, held ready. That's when I realize that my dad is going to try to kill him.

I go, "Dad!"

"Go back upstairs. Take care of your mother." And he keeps walking like that toward Constantin.

"Dad, don't do anything stupid! Let's just go on home."

Constantin is still leaning casually against the Jeep like he's played this part on stage, the good looking playboy confronting the betrayed husband. Only the hatchet makes it real. He leans back on his arm. "Mark, if we are going to have a scene, and I believe we are, may I suggest we have it elsewhere than under your wife's window?"

My dad looks up. So do I. My mom's standing in the window, watching like a zombie. Constantin says, "May I suggest some place more private? Perhaps my suite?" I remember what my mom said to him about his room at the Colonial with all the black drapes. Just the place to commit ... ax murder.

I go, "Dad, let's just to the airport, okay? Constantin, you just go on home, okay? We'll send you a postcard from San Francisco."

But my dad says, real slow. "Yeah. Your place. Let's go there."

Constantin walks around and gets into the passenger side of the Jeep. My dad gets into the driver's seat and starts the engine.

My mom yells from the window, "Mark, don't!"

My dad pulls away from the curb, and he looks over at me and says, "Get her on that airplane and get out of here."

Mom screams, "Mark, stop!" But he drives off without looking at her. So she screams after them, "Die then! Both of you! Kill each other and go to hell!"

I run back into the hotel and start up the stairs but my mom's already on the way down, like a madwoman, kicking the suitcases down the stairs in front of her. She says to me, "Come on, we're getting out of here."



MARK: I'm driving slow and careful but thinking fast. Faye's okay. She didn't have any marks on her. She's hysterical, but if Angie can get her on that plane, my mother will take care of her in San Francisco until I get there.

If I get there.

But I intend to get there.

I shake my head to keep it clear. It's been a long time since I've had any sleep. But I'm ready for him. I'm as ready as I'm going to be. And I've got a couple of aces up my sleeve. He doesn't know I know what he is. He thinks I'm just a jealous husband.

And I've got weapons. I've got all the weapons I need.

And I've got a plan. For what it's worth. We go to his place. I keep my eyes peeled. He's got a ... a casket or some sort of sleeping place there, probably in the cellar or someplace dark. I'll load it up with some of the crucifixes from the zócalo, so he can't get back in it. At sunup he fries.

So all I've got to do is make sure I keep myself alive till sunup. But I've got my hatchet and I've got my stakes, so all I've got to do is lock myself into one of the rooms, and if he tries to come through the door, he's dead meat. So all I've got to do is stay awake till dawn. That's all I've got to do. When he's dead, then I can sleep. I can sleep as long as I want. Or ... that's my plan.

I've got every pocket loaded with crucifixes, and in my toolbox behind the seat I've got my amulet from the *h-men*. I have to find a time when he's not looking to slip it around my neck. But the guy doesn't take his eyes off me. He's sitting over there watching every move I make, telling me to take a right here and a left there. The houses are getting farther apart. We're leaving town. This makes me more nervous.

"How much farther?" I say.

"Oh not long now," he says with that smiley voice of his. "I love a ride," he says. "Ah, feel that night air. It is nights like these which make one appreciate being alive. I feel I could cruise like this forever. And ever." He's toying with me. God damn him to hell. He says, "It's glorious, is it not, to have the entire world at one's disposal? To be at the very top of the food chain? To have no enemies except weaker enemies, less intelligent enemies, less resourceful enemies? To rule them? To feed on them?"

"Yeah," I say. "What a piece of work is man."

"Ah, Hamlet! Then you must be literate," he says. "Yes, man, what a piece of work, yes, yes indeed. I prefer, though, Macbeth. 'There's blood upon thy face! Thou art the best o' the cut-throats! Never shake thy gory locks at me!'" And he laughs. "Shakespeare was so very clever. If only he were around today. What a conversation we could have, he and I. About man."

He's trying to rattle me, catch me off guard. I play along. "You know, Lily-Annie, I wouldn't be too smug about that food chain business. One must never underestimate the power of one's enemies. Consider the shark. An ideal life, right? No enemies. Sharks live forever ... some say. They never sleep ... some say."

"And yet they have almost one hundred percent illiteracy," and he laughs. "What *do* they do with their time?"

"Well," I say, "they too are at the top of their food chain, except for one final link of the chain. Man. Man kills shark. Man eats shark."

He thinks about this just a second then says, "And vice versa, I am told. Turn right here."

I take the right too fast before I can think it out, and we leave the paved road for a dirt road. Mérida is far behind us, and there's nothing here but darkness. There's a crescent moon between the trees, but it's low on the horizon and its light is dim. I stop the Jeep and put it into neutral. I'm good and goddam nervous now. In the headlights of the Jeep I pick out some tall dark shapes looming up around us and I suddenly recognize the road. "This is the road to the pyramids."

"Yes," he says. "It's lovely. It's ancient. A good place, don't you agree?"

"I thought we were going to your place."

"Mark, did you really think I would take you there? No one goes there. No one. Ever."

He reaches across the seat and puts his hand on my shoulder, smiling at me. I whip around to face him, pulling a crucifix out of my pocket and holding it up between us. He recoils against the door of the Jeep, a look of terror and horror in his face. Then very slowly the expression melts, and I see that he's mocking me. He leans forward and kisses the crucifix, and he smiles! "Do you believe everything you read, Mark?"

I stare at him. Everything in my head crumbles. Then I scramble over the seat into the back of the Jeep and grab the hatchet out of the toolbox. When I face back around, he's gone from the passenger's seat. Nothing around but blackness. I listen. Nothing.

Watching all around the Jeep, I ease myself back over the seat, switch the hatchet to my left hand, slip the Jeep into reverse, and start to back out to the paved road. But the engine dies. I turn the key in the ignition. It won't start. It doesn't even turn over.

"Mark?" His voice comes from somewhere behind the Jeep. "Having car trouble?"

I slide out of the Jeep and fumble in the toolbox for the stakes. I get the *h-men's* amulet too and put it around my neck. I hear Constantin laugh. I back away, keeping my eyes where his laugh is coming from. I've got the hatchet in one hand and stakes in the other. I back into the center of the headlights from the Jeep. I'll stay here. If he comes at me, at least I'll be able to see him.

The headlights blink out.

"Oh, it appears to be an electrical failure, Mark. Perhaps a U.F.O." His voice comes from just to the right of me. I back away down the road. I can't see anything. "Ah, isn't the dark lovely?" Now his voice comes from just to the left of me, very near. Then a whisper, right into my ear. "There is no escape, Mark."

I swing out with the hatchet but there's nothing there but air.

Now from in front of me. "No escape."

Now from all around me, "I am everywhere."

I tell myself don't panic. But I can't stop myself. I turn and run. The whispering is all around me. And now I see him in front of me, right in my path, and I swing the hatchet, but the hatchet slices right through him and he laughs at me and is gone, and I hear the laugh now over to my right, so I veer to the left.

I break into a clearing, and in the dim light of the moon I see one of the ancient pyramids. I run to it and start up the stairs. When I reach the top I'll sit with my back to the altar. Then the only way he can get at me is up the stone steps.

The steps are steep. Halfway to the top I'm out of breath. I hear his voice in my ear again. "You run." I turn on the steps and swing, but he's nowhere. But his voice is everywhere, all

around me. "You gasp. Your lungs fill with air. The oxygen mixes with your blood. You excite me. My hunger is sharp, and you tantalize me."

I crawl up the stairs on my back, using my elbows, so I can face him if he comes at me up the stairs. I get to the top. I can't breathe fast enough or deep enough. I'm dizzy. I turn to the altar and he's standing there waiting for me, his black skin gleaming in the dim light of the crescent moon. "Welcome, Mark. You are so welcome."

I start back down the steps, but there's someone else there, a black haired guy who looks something like Orlando. Only I can tell it's Constantin. I turn to my left. There's a redheaded guy who looks like me.

"Yes, Mark, we welcome you."

I back to the edge of the pyramid. I look down behind me. It's a straight drop. More than a hundred feet to the rock courtyard below. I would be dead.

"Yes, Mark, you would be dead. It is certainly the thing to do. That way it would be over. As Macbeth so aptly puts it, 'The time has been that when the brains were out, the man would die, and there an end.' But you can't jump, can you. Try."

I try. I turn. I stand hunched at the edge of the pyramid. With every fiber of my will, I try to throw myself off, into the empty air, to fall, to die. Death. Anything would be better than what he's planning for me. But I can't move even a muscle.

Constantin comes to my side and puts his arms around me. His body is cool, strong, like steel hard up against me, his arms like coils winding around me. He turns me to face him and brings his mouth to my throat just below my ear. His breath blows coolly on my sweat, and my skin erupts in goose flesh. I wrap my arms around his back. If I can do it now, leap backwards into the void, I'll take him with me.

"Yes, Mark, you would be very noble. If only you could. But you can't. For you are ours now, Mark. We will enjoy having you. Your will is ours. Your thoughts are ours. Your blood will soon run through our body, and then your soul will be ours. One of us."

His breath smells of peppers and mint.

"Ordinarily we would leave you a sufficiency with which to make a life of your own, provided you choose wisely in the early hours after rising. Generosity, yes, but, ah," he laughs, "but also self-preservation. When the shrieking crowds come, they will hunt down the stupid and clumsy and careless and, feeling that they are once again safe, leave us free."

"Not so with you, Mark. Not so kind. You deserve punishment. You have been brutal with us, Mark. And you have kept Faye from us. You are in her heart. You mingle with her blood. Without you, she is ours. And we shall be hers. And we shall have our revenge on your petty human soul. Vindictive? Yes. Selfish? Assuredly. We are, alas, what we eat, Mark."

He sighs in my ear.

"And so as punishment, Mark, and as your fate, we will take from you everything, leaving you only enough to allow you to rise. Once. But with no mind. No intelligence. No direction. And with an all-consuming hunger, a convulsive gnawing that will eat you from the inside out. It will be the most intense and passionate pain in your human imagination, Mark. With your last human intelligence, we want you to know this."

He nibbles with his lips on my throat. "And now, my lovely, noble man..." He scoops a gash in my throat and tears open my jugular vein and takes my blood in great gulps.

Finally, ecstasy.

He draws away and I stand, empty, on the brink. I fall backward, the moon and stars and blackness my last image. I hear a scream, and recognize it as my own.

And that is the last I know.



ANGIE: We're in the airplane when we hear the scream. My mom's saying to the flight attendant, "If a man with light red hair—a kind of strawberry blond hair, not copper hair—if he comes late to get on the plane, that's my husband. Please tell him we're here. But if it is a man with copper hair—"

But she doesn't finish. She breaks off when the scream sounds in my head. It's the same as with the scream inside my head this morning at the roadside restaurant. The flight attendant doesn't hear it, doesn't flinch. The other passengers don't hear it, don't flinch.

But my mom hears it all right, just like this morning, hears it clear through my skull, or hears it inside her own head, loud, brain-piercing. We're crazy together, me and my mom, listening to a man scream inside our heads. And then the scream suddenly cuts off. Silence.

I look at my mom. She's clutching the arms of her chair with hands like white claws. She's got no blood in her face. The flight attendant watches her for a second, waiting for more, then says, "Yes? I'm sorry? A man with copper hair?"

My mom says, "Never mind. Thank you. Neither man will be coming on this flight. Thank you."

The flight attendant continues down the aisle toward the back, not knowing, not understanding, completely ignorant of all my mom and I are going through. I cover my mom's hand with my own. It's like cold bones.

And the plane starts its taxi.

San Francisco. Home.



MARGARET: For me, it started when I first set eyes on them at the San Francisco airport. Faye looked twice her age and Angie looked half hers, thin and waiflike with a wild and frightened look in her eyes. A feral child, she looked as though she had gone feral.

I should have been alerted by Faye's telephone call from Mérida, of course, but that was so like Faye: there was urgency, and yet there was no urgency; she had something she was clearly desperate to say, and yet she would say nothing. There was nothing, of course, for me to do after hanging up, but wait. Clearly there was something very very wrong, but I would have to find out by my own means. That would be Angie.

It was more than the all-night flight; they looked as though they hadn't slept in days and hadn't eaten in weeks. I was stunned. But I said nothing. I learned long ago the best role as first mother, then mother-in-law, then grandmother was to say nothing that could be construed in any way as criticism. Supportive words, only these would pass my lips.

I hugged them both and said, "It's so good you've decided to come home." And Faye burst into tears. I looked at Angie. She looked away quickly.

As we drove along the Bayshore Freeway, the sun came up over the Berkeley hills. I said, "Oh, look, how beautiful."

Faye in the back seat burst into tears again. And these were not mere tears that fell silently, these were sobs. Angie kept her eyes out the window across the bay upon the rising sun.

It was clear something was very wrong between Mark and Faye. The explanation Faye gave for why Mark didn't come home with them was that he missed the plane. Well, their house in Santa Cruz had no telephone, and Mark's cell phone was somehow not working, so I could only wait for Mark to call me. In the meantime, I would have to find some way to get Angie alone to see if the truth could not be found out. I worried that it meant separation or divorce. I wondered if the love affair Mark suspected here in the Bay Area was the cause. In fact, I was sure of it.

Faye and Angie slept the day through. At sunset they both woke. I didn't know whether to feed them breakfast or dinner, so I suggested omelets. Faye said she couldn't eat anything, and Angie said she couldn't eat animal products. I fixed a salad for her, understanding better why she was nothing but a skeleton.

Faye was extremely nervous, rising from her chair every five minutes to look out the window toward the street. It wasn't Mark she was expecting, I knew, since if Mark were to come he would no doubt call from the airport. So it must be the other man. When I went to bed at ten o'clock, they were both still up, Faye still at the window. I had not yet had a chance to talk with Angie.

The next day, Sunday, they slept into the early afternoon. I created a great racket around the house to wake them, thinking they really should be making an effort to get onto local time. Giving in to jet lag is not the way to conquer it. But that, too, was like Faye. From the beginning of her acquaintance with Mark she was none too energetic. The first time he brought her home for a visit and they stayed the night —Mark in his own room, Faye in the guest room, you can be sure— she slept until almost nine o'clock in the morning. Mark, of course, was up with Ev and me. Mark seemed not to hold it against her.

And then, of course, for breakfast that morning when I offered her a choice of an omelet or pancakes, she waffled ... ha! ... she waffled for a full twenty minutes before finally ending up with a special request for French toast, which she, of course, called *pain perdu*, explaining that a literal translation from the French would be *lost bread*, which of course was not lost on me. And through all this, you understand, I smiled and nodded silently.

Ev always said that there was something rotten at the core of Faye. Well, to be fair to Ev, he never said exactly that, but he warned Faye of the danger of rot. She had those flowers she was always breeding, and the flowers have bulbs, and Ev told her that the bulbs could rot in the ground if Faye wasn't careful. She told him something about breeding them to be rot-resistant, but Ev knew. Ev seemed to know everything. That's why I loved him. That's why everyone loved him. You may not think much of me —a phenomenon I am quite used to, I assure you— but you must always remember that Ev chose me, and not without reason. My genes flow in Mark and Angie, and my influence on their lives is not to be underestimated.

I had my first opportunity alone with Angie that Sunday afternoon. She was up an hour or two before Faye. However when I started asking questions, she said, "Grandma, my mom and dad are going through this stage right now. It's a kind of a crazy stage. But they're going to get past it. But anyway, it's between my mom and my dad, and I don't think we should be talking about them behind their backs."

Well, the little girl had grown up. I would try a different tack with her, but for now I let it go.

Faye did come out for a while Sunday afternoon, but she said only a few words, again ate nothing, and went back into her room. Later I knocked lightly on her door. There was no answer, so I pushed it open. Faye was sitting in front of the window, a west-facing window in the back of the house which overlooks the Golden Gate Bridge. The sun was enormous and sinking between its towers. It was breathtaking. Faye's face was rapt in the red glow, as though she were watching it for the last time. I actually remarked that thought to myself at that moment.

"Faye?" I said softly, but she didn't stir. "Faye?" I called louder, but it was as though she was in another world. I closed the door and returned to the living room where Angie was watching television. Cartoons. She was giggling. How she must have missed this in Santa Cruz. It was lovely to hear her laugh again, and I sat down behind her and played with the hair on the nape of her neck. This was our favorite thing when she was a little girl, and I always told her that she was my kitten. Now she stretched her neck under my fingers, and I thought that perhaps, after all, we could make everything right. It was impossible to think that, whatever their troubles with each other, Mark and Faye could ever give up this treasure.

As I stroked Angie's neck, I noticed pink marks on her skin, light scars which extended onto her face, although these were faded. I leaned forward to examine them more closely. Perhaps some sort of rash, I thought. I was about to ask her about them when the telephone rang.

There was static on the line, a bad connection, long distance, no doubt Mark in México. Good, I thought. But it was another man's voice, very polite, very apologetic, a light Mexican accent, clearly educated in the United States. "Mrs August?"

"Yes?"

"Mrs. Faye August?"

"No, Mrs. Margaret August, her mother-in-law. Faye is sick. May I help you?"

When you get a call like this, you go either utterly mindless or keenly conscious. I knew from his first words what his final words would be. My concentration went entirely to making sure that Angie would suspect nothing. I kept my responses brief, my voice emotionless. "Yes.

Yes. Yes, I understand. Yes, I'll tell her. Yes, a mister Milo Frond. And, your name again, please, and may I please have your phone number? Mr. Frond will call you momentarily, I'm sure."

Mark was dead. He committed suicide. He threw himself from a high pyramid. His Jeep was found nearby, the key in the ignition.

I said, "Yes, thank you for your kindness," and hung up the phone. Angie was still squealing at the antics in the cartoon. I walked to the bathroom and vomited in the toilet.

For the call to Milo, I went into my bedroom and closed the door. Angie could hear nothing. Milo had been so helpful throughout Ev's proceedings, and he and I had become almost friends since then. His funeral home was just around the corner from my house. I trusted Milo. He would ask few questions, only the necessary ones. He listened, found out what he needed to know, and assured me he would take care of all arrangements.

We were there at the airport together the next afternoon, Milo holding my hand as they brought the coffin out of the bowels of the plane. I had not told Angie or Faye about Mark. Well, I couldn't tell Angie without first telling Faye, and I couldn't tell Faye in her present state of mind. Milo assured me the funeral could be postponed at least a week, perhaps longer if Faye did not improve soon. There is, after all—Milo told me with his customary delicacy and without using the exact phrase—cold storage. Arrangements would be made.

It wasn't until Milo drove us to his funeral home and unloaded the coffin and moved it inside, that I dared ask him to open it. A strange thing, hope. Hope that the coffin might be empty. Hope that the face I would find would be the face of a stranger and not that of my son. But it was my son. He was horrible, but he was Mark.

Back in my own car—why had I even driven there? this is what is meant, I supposed by the term "automatic pilot"—I cried myself out and reapplied my makeup before turning that corner to put the car into my garage. So many items of so much business, all quite unimportant as it turned out.

The sun was setting as I turned onto our street, and I pulled the car to the curb to watch the sun sink all the way beneath the span of the bridge and dip into the Pacific. The Golden Gate

turned from blood red to dark rust again, and I realized for the first time how different everything in life would be from this day on. Quite unimportant.

I thought of Faye the night before, sitting in the window much as I sat tonight in the car, watching the setting sun with new and different eyes. Perhaps she already knew that Mark was dead. Perhaps she knew more than that. Perhaps ... ?

Terrible, soap-operatic thoughts chased each other through my head. But why not? Murders have been committed before now. Murders by decent people. Women with children. Women with love affairs. And if so, I supposed she would get away with it.

I pulled the car into the garage, closed and locked the doors carefully behind me, and started to climb the stairs. I was only half way up when I heard his voice behind me. "Margaret?"

I turned and my breath was quite taken away. It was a young man standing on the lower steps, the image of Everett August the day I met him, the image of Mark himself twenty years ago. Rusty hair, medium build, fine, strong features. I felt certain this young man belonged to the August bloodline.

He said, "I would know you anywhere. You are exactly as Mark remembers you."

I said, "Oh?"

"Yes. Mark and I met in México."

"Oh."

"Faye is here."

"Yes."

He took a step up the stairs and said, "May I come in?"

I knew who this man was. No, he would not come into my house. I said, "I will tell her you're here," and climbed the rest of the steps, then turned back to the young man. "She's not been well. She may not want to see you."

He said, "She will."

I opened the front door, closed and locked it behind me, then proceeded down the hall to Faye's room, quite wretched. Angie came to the door of her room upstairs and looked down at me.

"Is it Constantin?"

"It's someone to see your mother."

"It's Constantin."

I knocked on Faye's door, expecting no answer. "Come in," Faye said. She was sitting in the same chair, watching the darkening Gate. She turned to me. "He's come, hasn't he?" She rose, went to the mirror and pulled a brush through her hair.

"Who were you expecting, Faye?"

She looked at me in the mirror, startled. Then she turned to me. She said, "Who is it?"

"You will have to tell me that."

She turned back to the mirror, brushed her hair two strokes more, tossed her head. And she smiled. The woman smiled. She put down the brush and left the room, grazing my sleeve as she passed me in the doorway. I followed her to the front door and watched through the screen as she descended the stairs to his side. They stood close to each other, she with her hand on his chest, he gazing into her eyes with such a look of rapture —him with his face of Ev— that I felt emotions I had thought were long dead. I couldn't bear it and turned away. When I turned back, the two of them were gone. There was nothing but darkness.

I looked upstairs where Angie still stood in her doorway. She shrugged and went back into her room.

The night was eternal. Angie went to bed early, but I heard music playing in her room. Then all was silence. I wanted to meet Faye at the door when she came in. I would tell her about Mark. I would be blunt. If she knew already, I would see it in her eyes. If she didn't know, then it was time she did. If she was well enough to take a night with her lover, she was well enough to take this news, to take responsibility for her husband's funeral.

It wasn't until almost dawn that I heard a noise on the front steps, a scraping sound ascending the stairs. I didn't know if her young man would be with her or not, but I opened the door. I was surprised at first into thinking that it was this Constantin alone on the landing, and that he had been injured in a terrible accident. His rusty hair was thick with blood, and he was dragging one leg behind him, moaning and sobbing as though in unendurable pain.

It wasn't until I came out the door and got a closer look that I realized it was Mark. I lost my breath. I thought I would faint. He was badly hurt, but he was alive. They had made a horrible mistake ... I thought.

I cried, "Mark! Come in! Let me help you!"

He took me by the throat, pushed me inside, back up against the wall of the entry hall, leaned over me, reeking of rotten meat, and bit into my left breast and tore away a mouthful of flesh and skin. I screamed. More than with the pain —I was beyond the pain— I screamed in horror at my son. In front of my eyes he chewed my flesh. He sucked at it, watching me, grinning. I screamed again.

There was another scream. From Angie, at the top of the stairs. Mark turned toward her, still sucking the last blood out of my breast. He spit out the flesh and grinned up at her. He said something. Or he tried to say something. But it was a growl starting deep in his throat gurgling out over his tongue and hissing into the air.

Then he turned back to me, leaned down again, tore again into my chest with his teeth, tore and dug until he reached my heart. That was the last I knew.

End of Disk 7 (64:51 mins)

*Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night;
nor for the arrow that flieth by day;
Nor for the pestilence that walketh in darkness;
nor for the destruction that wasteth at noonday.*

Psalm 91 5.6

King James Version of *The Bible*

DISK 8 — (37:33 minutes)

Anhelo

FAYE: Through my teenage years I had a lovebird —I, Faye— had a lovebird named Peachy. He was a great joy to me. I would let him out of the cage in my bedroom for hours at a time, and he would sit on my shoulder, nibbling my ear as I read in the window seat. I had put a mirror in Peachy's cage for company, which amused him greatly but which he obviously did not truly understand; it appeared as though he thought it was another lovebird in the cage with him because he would cuddle up against his reflection.

Once, however, when I had him on my shoulder as I went into the bathroom to wash my hands, he saw in the mirror both his reflection and mine, together. He grew suddenly still, utterly immobile as he watched our reflections while I dried my hands. When I put him back into his cage, he went straight to his own mirror and watched himself with that same mute, rapt expression. He finally knew who he was. An enormous breakthrough in a tiny intellect.

Such a breakthrough came to me —and my own tiny intellect— at the revelation of Constantin's being. It took time to process the thought and the emotions. It took concentration to smash previous conceptions and sort through mythologies of fact and fiction to find truth. It took fortitude I did not believe I possessed to make peace with my life and say goodbye to the day ... and to the sun ... and to everything I had known in the way that I had known it.

Angie ... I would deal with afterwards. Afterwards it would be easier. Afterwards I would have the knowledge to deal with her. I felt sure that must be true. Afterwards. After. Ever after, you see, a concept which blows the scientific mind but falls neatly into a spiritual context which was new to me. I could not have known, of course ... what was about to happen to Angie. Not even Constantin had the ability to read the future, however imminent.

As for Mark, his afterwards was a question I wasn't ready to address. In any case, it was moot, already decided. I knew that from the scream in the airplane in Mérida. That too was truth.

Could I forgive Constantin?

One day ... so many years ago, back when I was just a teenager, with my lovebird Peachy ... I found with horror that my beloved cat Alexander had been in the house while Peachy was out of his cage. All I found were a few feathers. Could I forgive Alexander? Forgiveness, you understand, I know that you must understand, had nothing to do with it. This too was truth.

So much became clear to me when I accepted this new level of truth. There are layers of truth and layers of living. The world mankind inhabits is not the only world on this planet or in this universe. There is the eldritch. There is the fey. There are other rules than the rules of science and the rules of religion. There are other lives. There are other births.

Yes, I had given birth to Angie, a new life, a new being, created of my own genes —and Mark's genes, and Margaret's, as she just told you, and Ev's— a unique individual on earth, yet the offspring of thousands of years of human breeding. I had reproduced, the natural goal of all living creatures, and in the end, so what?

Well, but yet how wondrous. I had created many new lives in my human lifetime. With my own hands and my own ingenuity I had created new plants with flowers never before seen on earth, well, very like other flowers but *new* flowers. I selected the genes with the greatest chance for survival, yes, which were most disease-resistant, most pest-resistant, with the healthiest foliage, yes, but I also selected those genes which most pleased me, with the largest blossoms of the purest colors, or the tiniest, most delicate beauties. These were my little births into the great world.

My own birth, then, into a greater world, should not after all strike terror or awe in me. And at the end of three days of peace-making and leave-taking, as the sun set for that last time for me, I was ready. I met Constantin on the steps of Margaret's house and asked him only one question.

"How will you do it?"

He said, "I can only show you. Do I have your consent?"

He was a good, gentle being with eyes that were profound with innocence and truth. "Yes," I said. "You have all my consent."

We spent the night together in what—to my discomfiture—he referred to as his lair, one of many residences, he explained, that he maintains in the Bay Area. Seeing the expression on my face at that word *lair* he said, "Are you not an animal? Is not your home your lair?"

His voice was soothing. "We must always have many lairs around the world, my dear," he began to tutor me, "for retreat when they come howling after us. We must use different names in each, and different personas. The people are easily confused, don't worry. It gives you time. But now I am worrying you, and you needn't worry, my dear. You will learn from me, in time, in *time*."

Throughout the night he took my blood into his body in small increments, pausing to stroke me, to give me time to catch up with him, explaining every detail step by step as he proceeded. It ... it was ... pleasant ... I liked it. He told me he had spent the past three nights purging himself of everything but the purest elements. That is all we would share, he explained, nothing base or contaminated.

He had fed well Friday night. On Mark, I knew. Mark was all about him, inside and out, in every particle of Constantin's being. Mark and I had never been so close as we were this night, our very cells, our very souls intermingling, joined together by Constantin in a synergy that made me weep, so full of Mark that I ached in every fiber of my being. Seeing my pain, Constantin would simply smile and say soft, kind words. "I know, oh, yes, my dear, I know."

It was so intense, so intimate and so right that I knew I would have no regrets. The symbiosis would not be complete, Constantin said, in only one night. The first step would be a three night and day process. During the nights, Constantin would take my entire corpus of blood and filter the cells through his body, giving only half back to me in the morning before the sun rose. My human body, in a deep sleep during the days, would then process the new blood, adapting to the metamorphosed cells gradually. It ... it seemed as though I had some knowledge of this process ... through studying viruses ... but, no, of course, it's nothing like that, more like the microbiome, and for example, the glycans in mother's milk ... but, oh, it's not anything like

any of that ... but I had ... some understanding and ... somehow and in some way, I was comforted. In fact, it was heavenly.

On the third night, Constantin warned me, I would wake ravaged by a dreadful hunger. "Expect this. Don't let it surprise or dismay you. It will be excruciating pain, my dear, excruciating thirst. But do not worry, I will be by your side. You will not yet be forced out to feed."

Feed. Another at first discomfiting, base word for an ordinary human concept. But Constantin assured me that when the time came, I would be ready.

"And is it, after all," he asked, "so very different from the way you feed now? You go to the butcher and survey the meat—it is very amusing, the fish particularly with their dead eyes, or the lobsters and crabs, often still alive and very amusing—you make a purchase, some sort of animal, and take it home and cut it up, perhaps filet it, perhaps pound it. Perhaps it bleeds. And you cook it, and you feed."

My expression must have betrayed ... I suppose ... repugnance ... for Constantin became immediately solicitous, assuring me again that I would never have regrets of any kind. He told me of his own conversion, of the early years in which survival was precarious because he was a novice and made many mistakes. "But you will be wise. I will share everything with you, my accumulated knowledge, all the histories of all the dear ones. For you it will be easy. Not like the others."

"What others?"

"You must not concern yourself about them now." For the first time I saw his gleam of humor and good nature leave his eye. "You will meet them in due time. But do not be afraid of them. You will be stronger than they, wiser than they. Foul things. Their origins violent, like myself with no one to guide them and forced in early years to forage in blinding hunger, they chose unwisely. They have grown grotesque. At first, lonely and frightened I sought them out, you understand, but I learned, too cruelly, when I found them in my vicinity, to move on quickly."

Again my expression must have given away my fear for he bent close to me and laughed and whispered, "Really, my dear, you must not concern yourself."

I said, "And what happens, then, on that third night when I wake with the excruciating hunger?"

"You will have me by your side. For the next three nights you will take back from me your blood, drop by drop. And with it my being. We shall be two as one. Never again alone."

"And then? After the six nights?"

"On the seventh night we rest."

"And afterwards?"

"Eternity. Oh, my dear, trust me."

... And ... if only ... but ...

How could he know? How could we know?

And ... now ...



ANGIE: I'm upstairs in my grandma's house lying in bed and trying to figure what to do about my mom and Constantin, how to find my dad and how to keep my grandma from nosing in and ruining everything, when I hear someone coming up the outside steps and the front door opening and my grandma saying, "Mark, come in! Let me help you!"

I'm like so happy! I mean, my dad's here, he's going to make everything right again! So I jump out of bed and come out to the top of the stairs and there's my dad covered with blood with his face in my grandma's chest. I'm thinking he's hurt and crying into her chest and holding on to her for support when he pulls his head away and I see he's all bleeding from his mouth. Then my grandma starts screaming.

I start down the stairs to help, and that's when I see what he's got in his mouth and I stop dead in my tracks and open my mouth and out comes this scream. My dad looks up at me, and he's grinning and chewing with long strings of skin and stuff hanging off his teeth, and then he

turns back to my grandma, who's screaming right into his face, and he bites into her chest and rips her heart out with his teeth. Her feet go out from under her but she doesn't fall because the artery is still connected, so her body dangles on it like a puppet ... like a puppet ... out of my dad's mouth until he chews through it, and it snaps and she falls to the floor.

My dad turns my way again, and his eyes climb the stairs one by one until they get to me. He makes this sound. His mouth is full and he doesn't seem like he can talk anymore, but I think he's trying to say his pet name for me. Angel.

And then he starts coming toward me. It's like his legs are broken the way he's limping, dragging one leg behind him. And he's in terrible pain. But he keeps coming, keeps making that sound. "Angel. Angel." There's no back way out upstairs, and it's a three story jump to the pavement with no fire escape, so the only way out is past my dad as he starts pulling himself up the stairs, step by step.

I go, "Dad, no. Stay downstairs, Dad. I'll call 911 and get some help, but you stay downstairs. Stay downstairs, Dad!"

But he keeps coming. So I back into the bedroom and close the door, but there's no lock. So I pull the dresser in front of the door. I know that's not going to keep him out, so I pull the bed across the room and push that up against the dresser. That leaves just room enough so that if I sit down on the floor with my back to the bed and my feet up against the wall, giving me a good angle with my knees, I've got my strongest position.

I hear my dad get to the door, and he keeps going "Angel. Angel. Angel." And I go, "No, Dad, you can't come in," and suddenly I remember that those are the very words my mom said to Orlando outside the window in Santa Cruz de K'u, "You cannot come in." And I remember Orlando's face and the look in his eyes and the blood and the smell, and suddenly for the first time everything starts making sense. I'm dealing with a whole different animal here! That thing's not my dad at all!

I feel him pushing on the door, and I yell at him, "Civateteo! Abandoname!" I yell, "In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost, I command you to go!" I yell, "Get thee behind me, Satan!"

But he keeps pushing. I push back with all my might. The bed frame is digging into my back. And then he gives this heave and the bed flips up in the air and the dresser goes slamming across the room, and the door slams open.

"Angel! Angel!"

The bed comes crashing down on me when it overturns, but the mattress protects me, so I'm still thinking pretty clear. I crawl out from under the bed and I see him there standing in the doorway, slobbering blood and grinning at me. I look around the room for some help. It's my dad's old bedroom, and it's got a shelf running along the wall with his track trophies on it. I pick up a good heavy one.

"Don't come near me, Dad. I'll do it, I'll bash your brains out, I swear to God."

But he keeps coming, dragging his leg behind him. I go, "Please don't make me do it, Dad!" But he keeps coming. The smell of him! When he's right in front of me I swing the trophy as hard as I can into his face. Out of his head comes this noise like it's a watermelon and blood comes spraying over me. But it doesn't phase him, doesn't even slow him down. He grabs me and goes to bite into my chest like I saw him do to Grandma, but I take the trophy sideways with both hands and shove it into his mouth and push at either end of it with all my might and drive him back to the wall.

But he's so strong! He puts his arms around me in a bear hug and starts crushing the breath out of me. I fall backwards and he falls on top of me, trying to get at my throat with his teeth. I've still got the trophy jammed in his mouth, but his teeth are so long that he reaches me with them and they make gouges in my neck. His saliva drips into the wounds and it burns like acid.

I'm reaching for something to grab onto so that I can pull myself out from under him. My hand hits the hem of the curtain. I pull as hard as I can and the curtain pulls off the rod and

comes falling down. A shaft of sunlight sprays into the room, hits him in the eye, and he's transfixed. There's this long minute when he just lies there on top of me, like he's paralyzed, as the sun spreads out over his face and then down over me, too. Then he jerks with all these spasms. Then he lets out that scream. That scream. That same scream again.

And his eye, where the sun pierced it, splits open and starts to bleed. I'm right under him. His blood drops into my eyes. Then his head splits open, and all the blood and brains and stuff leak out all into my face. I go to scream and it gets all into my mouth. I can't breathe. I have to swallow it and turn my head under him and gasp and cough to clear my mouth to breathe.

I'm pushing at him to get him off me. And his whole body starts breaking up, and all his insides flood out all over me, cold and stinking.

I'm heaving as I get out from under the mess. And I've got pieces of him, and clots of blood and slabs of rotten meat and tissue dripping down my face and arms and hands.

I back up against the window and look out. And there's the sun, the good old sun, rising up over the hills across the bay. It's so beautiful. Heavenly.



ANHELO: It is not long before I realize that I am a new being. As with the waking in Santa Cruz de K'u after the bat attack, only amplified and refined, I understand things without thinking about them, I know things without having learned them, and I have extraordinary new abilities which I can neither enumerate nor define.

I take a last look at the August Victorian, brilliant and shimmering in the red glow of sunrise. Margaret in her pool of blood on the lower level, the drops of blood leading up the stairs and into the bedroom where Mark's remains still burble—they fascinate me.

Within me Angie quails and shudders.

The threat here is imminent but will probably in the end not amount to much. The director of the funeral home will find Mark's coffin open and empty, will try unsuccessfully to get in touch with Margaret, will ultimately bring in the police. The police will find the two

bodies—one so exploded and disintegrated that it will be hardly even recognizable as a human body—and they will begin a search for Faye and Angie.

The newspaper headlines will be accompanied by photographs of Faye and Angie: "Bloody Rampage in Grandmother's Victorian: Mother and teenage daughter still missing."

Or "At Large" they will probably say, "Mother and Teenage Daughter At Large." Within me Angie giggles at the notion, and she does like the idea of her own folder in the X-Files.

Meanwhile, we will be long gone.

I hear Constantin's screams.

In his lair Constantin knows I exist. He probably cannot understand what has transpired here, but he knows that I have come into being. So does Faye, in the same way. We are connected through Mark, a direct blood lineage, and our minds interplay. I am not yet sure how this is possible, but I understand it in a way that is inexplicable, like a memory surfacing.

Constantin is far more evolved than I, far wiser. But at the moment, he knows that I have the advantage for, born in the rising sun, I move in the day. And this terrifies him. It is entirely outside his ken. Scream on, Constantin.

I rise up out of the house, carrying with me all of Angie, the heart of Margaret, and that part of Mark which Constantin left him, good, strong people all. Survivors. I home in on Constantin. He will be easy now in the middle of the day. He tries to block his thoughts from me, to hold back his scream, but I am stronger than he imagines, and his terror is infinite.

How I travel I am not sure; I have much to learn. I am certainly no longer in human form for I am high above the city and looking down. Within me Angie is gleeful at the sensations of flying without effort or fear, remembering her dreams. Margaret is somber and in awe. Mark has much to regain.

We cross land, we cross water, and we arrive now at a smallish house deep in a woods, inauspicious and isolated. It would draw little attention from anyone passing by. The morning breeze is blowing pleasantly, and I am feeling very much alive. But there is a great dark area in my mind. Voices mingle in the darkness, Angie's voice loudest among them, telling me, of

course, "Get the flock out of here!" Margaret's voice is dimmer, confused, cautious. Mark's voice is mute inside my head, but I feel his essence pounding in my temples, and I hear a murmuring of his voice coming to me from inside the house, also, persistent under Constantin's scream. From Faye, I hear no voice at all. Except, perhaps, that thin descant of hope? What are you trying to tell me, Faye? I'm listening.

I enter the house by a means I do not understand; nevertheless, it is effortless. Inside the house, all is soft blackness. Constantin is lying on a bed, still screaming, his mouth closed but his eyes wide open and staring. It is the end of a long reign, he is looking into eternity, but in a new way that terrifies him. This is understood. Faye is lying on the bed beside him—or rather the human body of Faye—the eyes and mouth closed, the skin a pale husk, the vessels and tissues bloodless, alive but little more than a corpse as the real Faye resides now almost wholly within Constantin.

Within me Angie shudders, and she admonishes, "Now, don't do anything stupid." Her voice is insistent and persistent. "We've got to be careful, I mean, like, that's my mom inside him," she goes. "And look at my dad, my dad's all over him, all over his face," she goes. It's true. Mark is very great within Constantin.

Margaret wells, too, within me as Angie's voice continues. "The decision we make now, dear, is going to have to last us a long time," she says. Angie goes, "Like, eternity! And you can put an exclamation point after that!"

I need more knowledge. For what I must now do, I need more knowledge. And there, resident in Constantin, is an accumulation of knowledge from generations of mankind, vistas opening up forever backwards and forwards in time and space. If we destroy him, all that is lost. Constantin screams on. Hush, hush, you.

"And what happens to my mom?" Angie goes, and Mark's voice joins in under Constantin's screams.

Yes. Faye. What Constantin and Faye have begun cannot be turned back and cannot be interrupted. Too much that is too dear to us would be lost.

A certain ... what? ... emotion, Margaret would say, recognizing something like it ... need, want, Angie would say ... love, it's called ... a certain love tugs somewhere at certain fibers of my being, long fibers which intertwine with those of Faye and Mark.

To lose them is to lose the essence of myself, that is clear.

To destroy Constantin is to destroy Faye and Mark.

On the other hand, to flee Constantin is unthinkable. He is stronger, and he will find and destroy us. Eternity then takes on a far different aspect.

What happens when the sun goes down? I don't know. Must I, creature of the day, take to my bed while the creature of the night has *me* at *his* mercy? And what sort of mercy can we expect from Constantin?

What sort of mercy did he show Mark? Within me Angie and Margaret weep. Hush, you.

We do have another option, an option which neatly preserves the knowledge of Constantin and the essence of Faye and Mark within him as it preserves our own safety, and Angie and Margaret within me.

Within me Angie moans, "A hell of a thought for a vegetarian." Hush, you.

A great hunger descends upon me. I lie down beside Constantin beside Faye. I place my mouth to his throat. I feel and hear his pulse alongside his scream —hush, you, and a bitter laugh comes now.

And as I bite down, and their essence begins to flow into me, I perceive a murmuring, a quartet of voices that begin the telling of a tale, our tale, the gospel according to Mark and Faye and Angie and Constantin: for me, it was the bite; for me, it starts here; for me, it started centuries ago; for me, it doesn't start till we get home. A fifth voice enters, Margaret: for me, it started when I first set eyes on them.

Then finally, Anhelo: and for me, it starts now.

End of Disk 8 (37:33)

THE END