

KIM NEWMAN
The Other Side of Midnight

Kim Newman is an actor, broadcaster, film critic, and author of some of the most remarkable fantasy tales being sent our way from his hometown, London. His vampire novels include *Anno Dracula*, *The Bloody Red Baron*, and *Judgment of Tears*, and the theme also surfaces in his novella, "Andy Warhol's Dracula." Other fiction includes *The Night Mayor*, *Bad Dreams*, *The Quorum*, as well as nonfiction books such as *Millennium Movies: End of the World Cinema*. His affection for the great filmmaker Orson Welles surfaces in "The Other Side of Midnight," at once a startlingly different take (pun intended) on vampire films, yet deep down a delightfully old-fashioned homage to the same.

AT MIDNIGHT, 1980 flew away across the Pacific, and 1981 crept in from the east. A muted cheer rose from the pretty folk around the barbecue pit, barely an echo of the raucous welcome to a new decade that erupted at the height of the last Paradise Cove New Year's party.

Of this company, only Geneviève clung to the old-the proper-manner of reckoning decades, centuries, and (when they came) millennia. The passing of time was important to her, born in 1411 she'd let more time pass than most. Even among vampires, she was an elder. Five minutes ago-late last year, last decade-she'd started to explain her position to a greying California boy, an ex-activist turned writer called "the Dude." His eyes glazed over with more than the weed he'd been toking throughout the party, indeed since Jefferson Airplane went Starship. She quite liked the Dude's eyes, in any condition.

"It's as simple as this," she reiterated, hearing the French in her accent ("eet's," "seemple," "z") that came out only when she was tipsy ("teep-see") or trying for effect. "Since there was no year zero, nothing, the first decade ended with the end of year ten a.d.; the first century with the end of 100 a.d.; the first millennium with the end of 1000 a.d. Now, at this moment, a new decade is to begin. Nineteen-eighty-one is the first year of the 1980s, as 1990 will be the last."

Momentarily, the Dude looked as if he understood, but he was just concentrating to make out the accented words. She saw insight spark in his mind, a vertiginous leap that made him want to back away from her. He held out his twisted, tufted joint. It might have been the one he'd rolled and smoked in 1968, replenished on and off ever since.

"Man, if you start questioning time," he said, "what have you got left? Physical matter? Maybe if you question that next, and the mojo won't work any more. You'll think holes between molecules will sink through the surface of the Earth. Drawn by gravity. Heavy things should be left alone. Fundamental things, like the ground you walk on, the air you breathe. You do breathe, don't you, man? Suddenly it hits me, I don't know if you do."

"Yes, I breathe," she said. "When I turned, I didn't die. That's not common."

She proved her ability to inhale by taking a toke from the joint. She didn't get a high like his; for that, she'd have to sample his blood as it channelled the intoxicants from his alveoli to his brain. She had the mellow buzz of him, from saliva on the roach as much as from the dope smoke. It made her thirsty.

Because it was just after midnight on New Year's Eve, she kissed him. He enjoyed it, noncommittally. Tasting straggles of tobacco in his beard and the film of a cocktail-White Russian-on his teeth and tongue, she sampled the ease of him, the defiant crusade of his back-burnered life. She understood now precisely what the expression "ex-activist" meant. If she let herself drink, his blood would be relaxing.

Breaking the kiss, she saw more sparks in his eyes, where her face was not reflected. Her lips were sometimes like razors, even more than her fang-teeth. She'd cut him slightly, just for a taste, even thinking, and left some of herself on his tongue. She swallowed: mostly spit, but with tiny ribbons of blood from his gums.

French-kissing was the kindest form of vampirism. From the minute exchange of fluid, she could draw a surprising sustenance. For her, just now, it was enough. It took the edge off her red thirst.

"Keep on breathing, man," said the Dude, reclaiming his joint, smiling broadly, drifting back towards the rest of the party, enjoying the unreeling connection between them. "And don't question time. Let it pass."

Licking her lips daintily, she watched him amble. He wasn't convinced 1980 had been the last of the old decade and not the first of the new. Rather, he wasn't convinced that it mattered. Like many of Southern Californians, he'd settled on a time that suited him and stayed in it. Many vampires did the same thing, though Geneviève thought it a waste of longevity. In her more pompous moments she felt the whole point was to embrace change while carrying on what was of value from the past.

When she was born and when she was turned, time was reckoned by the Julian calendar, with an annual error of eleven minutes and fourteen seconds. Thinking of it, she still regretted the ten days-the fifth to the fourteenth of October 1582-Pope Gregory XIII had stolen from her, from the world, to make his sums add up. England and Scotland, ten days behind Rome, held out against the Gregorian calendar until 1752. Other countries stubbornly stuck with Julian dating until well into the twentieth century; Russia had not chimed in until 1918, Greece not until 1923. Before the modern world those ten-day shifts made diary-keeping a complex business for a necessarily much-travelled creature. The leap-frogged weeks were far much more jarring than the time-zone hopping she sometimes went through as an air passenger.

The Paradise Cove Trailer Park Colony had been her home for all of seven years, an eye blink in time which made her a senior resident among the constitutionally impermanent peoples of Malibu. Her ancient history was Sonny and Cher and Leave It to Beaver, anything on the "golden oldies" station or an off-prime-time rerun.

Geneviève-fully, Geneviève Sandrine de l'Isle Dieudonne, though she went by Gené Dee for

convenience-remembered with a hazy vividness that she had once looked at the Atlantic and not known what lay between France and China. She was older than the name "America"; had she not turned up, she'd probably have been dead before Columbus brought back the news. In all those years, ten or twenty, it shouldn't matter, but supposedly significant dates made her aware of that fold in time, that wrench in the fabric which pulled the future hungrily closer, which had swallowed one of her birthdays. By her internal calendar, the decade would not fully turn for nearly two weeks. This was a limbo between unarguable decades. She should have been used to limbos by now. For her, Paradise Cove was the latest of a long string of pockets out of time and space, cosy coffins shallowly buried away from the rush of the world.

She was the only one of her kind at the party; if she took "her kind" to mean vampires-there were others in her current profession, private investigation, even other incomers from far enough out of the state to be considered foreign parts. Born in northern France under the rule of an English king, she'd seen enough history to recognise the irrelevance of nationality. To be Breton in 1416 was to be neither French nor English, or both at the same time. Much later, during the revolution, France had scrapped the calendar again, ducking out of the 1790s, even renaming the months. In the long term, the experiment was not a success. That was the last time she-Citizen Dieudonné-had really lived in her native land; the gory business soured her not only on her own nationality but humanity in general. Too many eras earned names like "the Tenor." Vampires were supposed to be obscenely bloodthirsty, and she wasn't blind to the excesses of her kind, but the warm drink just as deeply from open wounds and usually made more of a mess of it.

From the sandy patio beside her chrome-finished Airstream trailer, she looked beyond the gaggle of folks about the pit, joking over franks impaled on skewers. The Dude was mixing a pitcher of White Russians with his bowling buddies, resuming a months-long argument over the precise wording of the opening narration/song of *Branded*. An eight-track in an open-top car played "Home in California," The Eagles's upbeat but ominous song about a vampire and her victims. Some were dancing on the sand, shoes in a pile that would be hard to sort out later. White rolls of surf crashed on the breakers, waves edged delicately up to the beach.

Out there was the Pacific Ocean and the curve of the Earth, and beyond the blue horizon, as another shivery song went, was a rising sun. Dawn didn't worry her; at her age, as long as she dressed carefully-sunglasses, a floppy hat, long sleeves-she wouldn't even catch a severe tan, let alone frazzle up into dust and essential salts like some nosferatu of the Dracula bloodline. She had grown out of the dark. To her owl eyes, it was no place to hide, which meant she had to be careful where she looked on party nights like this. She liked living by the sea: its depths were still impenetrable to her, still a mystery.

"Hey, Gidget," came a rough voice, "need a nip?"

It was one of the surfers, a shaggy bear of a man she had never heard called anything but Moondoggie. He wore frayed shorts, flip-flops, and an old blue shirt, and probably had done since the 1950s. He was a legendary veteran of tubes and pipes and waves long gone. He seemed young to her, though his friends called him an old man.

His offer was generous. She had fed off him before when the need was strong. With his blood

came a salt rush, the sense of being enclosed by a curl of wave as his board torpedoed across the surface of the water.

Just now, she didn't need it. She still had the taste of the Dude. Smiling, she waved him away. As an elder, she didn't have the red thirst so badly. Since Charles, she had fed much less. That was how it was with many vampires, especially those of the Dracula line. Some nosferatu got thirstier, thirstier with passing ages, and were finally consumed by their own raging red needs. Those were the ones who got to be called monsters. Beside them, she was a minnow.

Moondoggie tugged at his open collar, scratching below his salt-and-pepper beard. The LAPD had wanted to hang a murder rap on him two years ago, when a runaway turned up dead in his back hut. She had investigated the situation, clearing his name. He would always be grateful to his "Gidget," which she learned was a contraction of "Girl Midget." Never tall, she had turned-frozen at sixteen. Recently, after centuries of being treated almost as a child, she was most often taken for a woman in her twenties. That was: by people who didn't know she wasn't warm, wasn't entirely alive. She'd have examined her face for the beginnings of lines, but looking glasses were no use to her.

Shots were fired in the distance. She looked at the rise of the cliffs and saw the big houses, dotted with lit by fairy-light UFO constellations, seeming to float above the beach, heavy with heavy hitters. Firing up into the sky was a Malibu New Year tradition among the rich. Reputedly started by the director John Milius, a famous surf and gun nut, it was a stupid, dangerous thing to do. Gravity and momentum meant bullets came down somewhere, and not always into the water. In the light of New Year's Day, she found spent shells in the sand, or pocked holes in driftwood. One year someone's head would be under a slug. Milius had made her cry with Big Wednesday, though. Movies with coming-of-age, end-of-an-era romanticism crawled inside her heart and melted her. She would have to tell Milius it got worse and worse with centuries.

So, the 1980s?

Some thought her overly formal for always using the full form, but she'd lived through decades called "the eighties" before. For the past hundred years, "the eighties" had meant the Anni Dracula, the 1880s, when the Transylvanian Count came to London and changed the world. Among other things, the founding of his brief empire had drawn her out of the shadow of eternal evening into something approaching the light. That brought her together with Charles, the warm man with whom she had spent seventy-five years, until his death in 1959, the warm man who had shown her that a vampire, could still love, that she had turned without dying inside.

She wasn't unique, but she was rare. Most vampires lost more than they gained when they turned; they died and came back as different people, caricatures of their former selves, compelled by an inner drive to be extreme. Creatures like that were one of the reasons why she was here, at the far western edge of a continent where "her kind" were still comparatively rare.

Other vampires had nests in the Greater Los Angeles area: Don Drago Robles, a landowner before the incorporation of the state into the Union, had quietly waited for the city to close around his hacienda, and was rising as a political figure with a growing constituency, a Californian answer to Baron Meinster's European Transylvania Movement; and a few long-lived movie or music people

the sort with reflections in silver and voices that registered on recording equipment, had Spanish-style castles along Sunset Boulevard, like eternal child rock god Timmy Valentine or silent-movie star David Henry Reid. More, small sharks mostly, swam through Angelino sprawl, battenning on marginal people to leech them dry of dreams as much as blood, or-in that ghastly no-thing-selling squirts of their own blood ("drac") to sad addicts ("dhampires") who wanted to be vampire for the night but didn't have the heart to turn all the way.

She should be grateful to the rogues; much of her business came from people who got mixed with bad-egg vampires. Her reputation for extricating victims from predators was like gold with distressed parents or cast-aside partners. Sometimes she worked as a deprogrammer, helping kids out of all manner of cults. They grew beliefs stranger than Catholicism, or even vampirism, out here among the orange groves: the Moonies, the Esoteric Order of Dagon, Scientology, Psycho-Plasma. Another snatch of song: "The Voice said Daddy there's a million pigeons, waiting to be hooked on new religions."

As always, she stuck it out until the party died. All the hours of the night rolled away, and the color of the horizon turned from navy blue to lovely turquoise. January cold gathered, driving those warmer folks who were still sensible from their barbecues and beach towels to their beds.

Marty Burns, sometime sitcom star and current inhabitant of a major career slump, was passed out facedown on the chilling sands in front of her trailer space. She found a blanket to throw over him. He murmured in liquor-and-pills lassitude, and she tucked the blanket comfortably around his neck. Marty was hilarious in person, even when completely off his face, but Salt & Pepper, the star-making show he was squandering residuals from, was puzzlingly free of actual humour. The dead people on the laugh track audibly split sides at jokes deader than they were. The year was begun with a moderate good deed, though purging the kid's system and dragging him to AA might have been a more lasting solution to whatever was inside him chewing away.

She would sleep later, in the morning, locked in her sleek trailer, a big metal coffin equipped with everything she needed. Of all her homes over the years, this was the one she cherished the most. The trailer was chromed everywhere it could be, and customised with steel shutters that bolted over the windows and the never-used sun roof. Economy of space had forced her to limit her possessions to a few after so long-to those that really meant the most to her. ugly jewelry from her mediaeval girlhood, some of Charles's books and letters, a Dansette gramophone with an eclectic collection of records, sides, her beloved answering machine, a tacky Mexican crucifix with light-up eyes that she kept on show just to prove she wasn't one of those vampires, two decent formal dresses and four pairs of Victorian shoes (custom-cobbled for her tiny feet) which had outlasted everything made this century and would do for decades more. On the road, she could kink herself double and rest in the trunk of her automobile, a pillar-box red 1958 Plymouth Fury, but the trailer was more comfortable.

She wandered towards the sea line, across the disturbed sands of the beach. There had been dancing earlier, grown-ups who had been in Frankie and Annette movies trying to fit their old moxie to current music. Le freak, c'est chic.

She trod on a hot pebble that turned out to be a bullet, and saluted Big John up on his A-list Hollywood deck. Milius had written Dracula for Francis Ford Coppola, from the Bram Stoker novel.

she was left out of. Not wanting to have the Count brought back to mind, she'd avoided the movie though her vampire journalist friend Kate Reed, also not mentioned in Stoker's fiction, had worked on it as technical advisor. She hadn't heard from Kate in too long; Geneviève believed she was behind the Iron Curtain, on the trail of the Transylvania Movement, that odd faction of the Baron Meinster's which wanted Dracula's estates as a homeland for vampires. God, if that ever happened she would get round to reapplying for American citizenship; they were accepting nosferatu now, which they hadn't been in 1922 when she last looked into it. Meinster was one of those Dracula wanna-bes who couldn't quite carry off the opera cloak and ruffle shirt, with his prissy little fangs and his naked need to be the new King of the Cats.

Wavelets lapped at her bare toes. Her nails sparkled under water.

Nineteen-seventies music hadn't been much, not after the 1960s. Glam rock. The Bee-Gees. The Carpenters. She had liked Robert Altman's films and *Close Encounters*, but didn't see what all the fuss was about *Star Wars*. Watergate. An oil crisis. The bicentennial summer. The Iran hostage crisis. No Woodstock. No swinging London. No one like Kennedy. Nothing like the Moon landing.

If she were to fill a diary page for every decade, the 1970s would have to be padded heavily. She'd been to some parties and helped some people, settled into the slow, pastel, dusty ice-cream world of Southern California, a little to one side of the swift stream of human history. She wasn't even much bothered by memories, the curse of the long-lived.

Not bad, not good, not anything.

She wasn't over Charles, never would be really. He was a constant, silent presence in her head, ache and a support and a joy. He was a memory she would never let slip. And Dracula, finally destroyed soon after Charles's death, still cast a long cloak-shadow over her life. Like Bram Stoker she wondered what her life, what the world, would have been like if Vlad Tepes had never turned. He'd been defeated before his rise to power.

Might-have-beens and the dead. Bad company.

John Lennon was truly dead, too. Less than a month ago, in New York, he had taken a silver bullet through the heart, a cruel full stop for the 1970s, for what was left of the 1960s. Annie Wilton, Lennon's killer, said she was the musician's biggest fan, but that he had to die for breaking up the Beatles. Geneviève didn't know how long Lennon had been a vampire, but she sadly recognised the dirge "Imagine" that copy-of-a-copy voidishness characteristic of creatives who turned to prolong their artistic lives but found the essential thing that made them who they were—that power their talent-gone, and that the best they could hope for was a kind of rarefied self-plagiarism. Maybe Annie might have done John a favour, making him immortal again. Currently the most famous vampire slayer in the world, she was a heroine to the bedrock strata of warm America that would never accept nosferatu as even kissing cousins to humanity.

What, she wondered as the sun touched the sky, would this new decade bring?

Count Dracula

A Screenplay by Herman J. Mankiewicz and Orson Welles
Based on the Novel by Bram Stoker

Nov. 30

Fade In

1. Ext. Transylvania-Faint Dawn-1883

Window, very small in the distance, illuminated All around this an almost totally black screen. Now, a camera moves slowly towards this window, which is almost a postage stamp in the frame, other forms appear: spiked battlements, vast granite walls, and now, looming up against the still-nighted sky, enormous iron gr work.

Camera travels up what is now shown to be a gateway of gigantic proportions and holds on the top of it a huge initial "D" showing darker and darker against the dawn sky. Through this and beyond we see the gothic mountaintop of Dracula's estate, the great castle a silhouette at its summit, the little window a distant access to the darkness.

Dis

(A series of setups, each closer to the great window, all telling something of:)

2. The Literally Incredible Domain of Vlad, Count Dracula

Its right flank resting for forty miles along the Borgo Pass, the estate truly extends in all directions farther than the eye can see. An ocean of sharp treetops, with occasionally a deep rift where there is a chasm. Here and there are silver threads where the rivers wind in deep gorges through the forests. Designed by nature to be almost completely vertical and jagged-it was, as will develop, primordial forested mountain when Dracula acquired and changed its face-it is now broken and shorn, with its fair share of carved peaks and winding paths, all man-made.

Castle Dracula itself-an enormous pile, compounded of several demolished and rebuilt structures, of varying architecture, with broken battlements and many towers-dominates the scene, from the very peak of the mountain. It sits on the edge of a very terrible precipice.

Dis

3. The Village

In the shadows, literally the shadows, of the mountain. As we move by, we see that the peasant doors and windows are shuttered and locked, with crucifixes and obscene clusters of garlic as further protection and sealing. Eyes peep out, timid, at us. The camera moves like a band of men, purposeful, cautious, intrepid, curious.

Dis

4. Forest of Stakes

Past which we move. The sward is wild with mountain weeds, the stakes tilted at a variety of Dutch angles, the execution field unused and not seriously tended for a long time.

Dis

5. What Was Once a Good-Sized Prison Stockade

All that now remains, with one exception, are the individual plots, surrounded by thorn fences, on which hostages were kept, free and yet safe from each other and the landscape at large. (Bones in several of the plots indicate that here there were once human cattle, kept for blood.)

Dis

6. A Wolf Pit

In the f.g., a great shaggy dire wolf, bound by a silver chain, is outlined against the fawn murk. He raises himself slowly, with more thought than an animal should display, and looks out across the estates of Count Dracula, to the distant light glowing in the castle on the mountain. The wolf howls, a child of the night, making a sweet music.

Dis

7. A Trench Below the Walls

A slow-scuttling armadillo. A crawling giant beetle. Reflected in the muddy water-the lighted window.

Dis

8. The Moat

Angled spears sag. An old notebook floats on the surface of the water-its pages covered in shorthand scribble. As it moves across the frame, it discloses again the reflection of the window in the castle, closer before.

Dis

9. A Drawbridge

Over the wide moat, now stagnant and choked with weeds. We move across it and through a huge round archway into a formal courtyard, perhaps thirty feet wide and one hundred yards deep, which extends right to the very wall of the castle. Let's see Toland keep all of it in focus. The landscaping surrounding it has been sloppy and casual for centuries, but this particular courtyard has been kept up in perfect shape.. As the camera

makes its way through it, towards the lighted window of the castle, there are revealed rare and exotic blooms of all kinds: mariphasa lupino lumino, strange orchid, audriensis junior, triffidus celestus. The dominating is one of almost exaggerated wildness, sprouting sharp and desperate-rot, rot, rot The Hall of the Mountain King, the night the last troll died. Some of the plants lash out, defensively.

Dis

10. The Window

Camera moves in until the frame of the window fills the frame of the screen. Suddenly the light within goes out. This stops the action of the camera and cuts the music (Bernard Herrmann) which has been accompanying the sequence. In the glass panes of the window we see reflected the stark, dreary mountainscape of the Dracula estate behind and the dawn sky.

Dis

11. Int. Corridor in Castle Dracula-Faint Dawn-1885

Ornate mirrors line both walls of the corridor, reflecting arches into infinity. A bulky shadow figure-Dracula-proceeds slowly, heavy with years, through the corridor. He pauses to look into the mirror and has no reflection, no reflections, to infinity. It seems at last that he is simply not there.

Dis

12. Int. Dracula's Crypt-Faint Dawn-1885

A very long shot of Dracula's enormous catafalque, silhouetted against the enormous window.

Dis

13. Int. Dracula's Crypt-Faint Dawn-1885

An eye. An incredible one. Big impossible drops of bloody tears, the reflections of figures coming close, cutting implements raised. The jingling of sleigh bells in the musical score now makes an ironic reference to Indian temple bells-the music freezes-

DRACULA'S OLD VOICE

Rose's blood!

The camera pulls back to show the eye in the face of the old Dracula, bloated with blood but his stolen youth lost again, grey skin parchmented like a mummy, fissures cracking open in the wrinkles around his fang-teeth too large for his mouth, pouching his cheeks and stretching his lips, the nose an improbable bulbous flash-the descent of a guillotine-like kukri knife, which has been raised above Dracula's neck-across the screen. The head rolls off the neck and bounds down two carpeted steps leading to the catafalque, the camera following. The head falls off the last step onto the marble floor where it cracks, snaky tendrils of blood glittering in the first ray of the morning sun. This ray cuts an angular pattern across the floor, suddenly crossed with a thousand cruciform bars of light as a dusty curtain is wrested from the window.

14. The Foot of Dracula's Catafalque

The camera very close. Outlined against the uncurtained window we can see a form-the form of a man, he raises a bowie knife over his head. The camera moves down along the catafalque as the knife descends to Dracula's heart, and rests on the severed head. Its lips are still moving. The voice, a whisper from the grave

DRACULA'S OLD VOICE

Rose's blood!

In the sunlight, a harsh shadow cross falling upon it, the head lap-dissolves into a fanged, eyeless skull

Fad

Production Company: Mercury Productions. Distributor: RKO Radio Pictures. Executive Producer: George J. Schaefer. Producer Orson Welles. Director Orson Welles. Script: Herman J. Mankiewicz, Orson Welles. From the novel by Bram Stoker. Director of Photography: Gregg Toland. Editors: Mark Robson, Robert Wise. Art Director: Van Nest Polglase. Special Effects: Vernon L. Walker. Music/Musical Director: Bernard Herrmann.

Orson Welles (Dracula), Joseph Cotton (Jedediah Renfield), Everett Sloane (Van Helsing), Dorothy Comingore (Mina Murray), Robert Coote (Artie Holmwood), William Alland (Jon Harker), Agnes Moorehead (Mrs. Westenra), Lucille Ball (Lucy), George Coulouris (Dr. Walter Parkes Seward), Paul Stewart (Raymond Asylum Attendant), Alan Ladd (Quincey P. Morris), Fortunio Bonanova (Inn-Keeper at Bistritz), Vladimir Sokoloff (Szekeley Chieftain), Dolores Del Rio, Ruth Warrick, Rita Cansino (Vampire Brides), Gus Schiller (Skipper of the Demeter).

"Mademoiselle Dieudonné," intoned the voice on her answering machine, halfway between a growl and a purr, "this is Orson Welles."

The voice was deeper even than in the 1930s, when he was a radio star. Geneviève had been in America over Halloween, 1938, when Welles and the Mercury Theatre of the Air broadcast their you-are-there dramatisation of H. G. Wells's "The Flowering of the Strange Orchid" and convinced half the Eastern seaboard that the country was disappearing under a writhing plague of vampire blossoms. She remembered also the rhetorical whisper of "who knows what evil lurks in the hearts of men?," followed by the triumphant declaration "the Shadow knows!" and the low chuckle which rose by terrifying lurches to a fiendish, maniacal shriek of insane laughter.

When she had first met the man himself, in Rome in 1959, the voice hadn't disappointed. Now even on cheap tape and through the tinny, tiny amplifier, it was a call to the soul. Even hawking brandy or frozen peas, the voice was a powerful instrument. That Welles had to compete with W. C. Sullivan imitators for gigs as a commercial pitchman was one of the tragedies of the modern age. Then again she suspected he drew a deal of sly enjoyment from his long-running role as a ruined titan. As an actor, his greatest role was always himself. Even leaving a message on a machine, he invested phrases with the weight-a quality he had more than a sufficiency of-of a Shakespearean deathbed speech.

"There is a small matter upon which I should like your opinion, in your capacities as a private detective and a member of the undead community. If you would call on me, I should be most grateful."

She thought about it. Welles was as famous for being broke as for living well. It was quite likely he wouldn't even come through with her modest rate of a hundred dollars a day, let alone expenses.

And gifts of rare wine or Cuban cigars weren't much use to her, though she supposed she could redeem them for cash.

Still, she was mildly bored with finding lost children or bail jumpers. And no one ever accused Welles of being boring. He had left the message while she was resting through the hours of the day. This was the first of the ten or so days between the Gregorian 1980s and the Julian 1980s. She could afford to give a flawed genius-his own expression-that much time.

She would do it.

In leaving a message, Welles had given her a pause to think. She heard heavy breaths as he let the tape run on, his big man's lungs working. Then, confident that he had won her over, he cut in with address details, somewhere in Beverly Hills.

"I do so look forward to seeing you again. Until then, remember... the weed of crime bears bitter fruit!"

It was one of his old radio catchphrases.

He did the laugh, the King laugh, the Shadow laugh. It properly chilled her bones, but made her giggle, too.

She discovered Orson Welles at the centre of attention, on the cracked bottom of a drained pool behind a rented bungalow. Three nude vampire girls waved objects-a luminous skull, a Macbethian blooded dagger, a fully articulated monster-bat puppet-at him, darting swiftly about his bulky figure, nipping at his head with their Halloween props. The former boy wonder was on his knees, enormous Russian shirt open to the waist, enormous (and putty) nose glistening under the lights, enormous spade-beard flecked with red syrup. A man with a handheld camera, the sort of thing she'd seen on TV to make home movies, circled the odd quartet, not minding if the vampires got between him and the director-star.

A few other people were around the pool, holding up lights. No sound equipment, though: the film was being shot silent. Geneviève hung back, by the bungalow, keeping out of the way of the work. She had been on film sets before, at Cinecittà and in Hollywood, and knew this crew would be deemed skeletal for a student short. If anyone else was directing, she'd have supposed he was shooting makeup tests or a rehearsal. But with Welles, she knew that this was the real film. It might end up with the dialogue out of sync, but it would be extraordinary.

Welles was rumbling through a soliloquy.

It took her a moment to realise what the undead girls were doing, then she had to swallow astonished laughter. They were nude not for the titillation of an eventual audience, for they would be seen. Nonreflecting nosferatu would be completely invisible when the footage was processed. The girls were naked because clothes would show up on film, though some elders-Dracula had been

one-so violated the laws of optics that they robbed any costume they wore of its reflection also, sucking even that into their black hearts. In the final film, Welles would seem to be persecuted by malignly animated objects-the skull, the dagger, and the bat Now he tore at his garments and hair Lear, careful to leave his nose alone, and called out to the angry heavens. The girls flitted, slender and deathly white, not feeling the cold, faces blank, hands busy.

This was the cheapest special effect imaginable.

Welles fell forward on his face, lay still for a couple of beats, and hefted himself upright, out character, calling "cut." His nose was mashed.

A dark woman with a clipboard emerged from shadows to confer with the master. She wore white fur coat and a matching hat. The vampire girls put the props down and stood back, naked unnoticed by the crew members. One took a cloak-like robe from a chair and settled it over her shoulders. She climbed out of the pool.

Geneviève had not announced herself. The vampire girl fixed her eye. She radiated a sense of being fed up with the supposed glamour of show business.

"Turning was supposed to help my career," she said. "I was going to stay pretty forever and star. Instead, I lost my image. I had good credits. I was up for the last season of Charlie's Angel. I'd have been the blonde."

"There's always the theatre," Geneviève suggested.

"That's not being a star," the girl said.

She was obviously a newborn, impatient with an eternity she didn't yet understand. She wanted her presents now, and no nonsense about paying dues or waiting her turn. She had cropped blonde hair; very pale, almost translucent skin stretched over bird-delicate bones; and a tight, hard, cute face, with sharp angles and glinting teeth, small reddish eyes. Her upper arm was marked by parallel claw marks, not yet healed, like sergeant's stripes. Geneviève stored away the detail.

"Who's that up there, Nico?" shouted one of the other girls.

Nico? Not the famous one, Geneviève supposed.

"Who?" the girl asked, out loud. "Famous?"

Nico-indeed, not the famous one-had picked the thought out of Geneviève's mind. That was common elder talent, but unusual in a newborn. If she lasted, this girl might do well. She'd have pick a new name though, to avoid confusion with the singer of "All Tomorrow's Parties."

"Another one of us," the starlet said to the girl in the pool. "An invisible."

"I'm not here for a part," Geneviève explained. "I'm here to see Mr. Welles."

Nico looked at her askew. Why would a vampire who wasn't an actress be here? Tumblers worked in the newborn's mind. It worked both ways: Nico could pick words up, but she also set them out. The girls in the pool were named Mink and Vampi (please!), and often hung with Nico.

"You're old, aren't you?"

Geneviève nodded. Nico's transparent face showed eagerness.

"Does it come back? Your face in the mirror?"

"Mine hasn't."

Her face fell, a long way. She was a loss to the profession.

Her feelings were all on the surface, projected to the back stalls.

"Different bloodlines have different qualities," Geneviève said, trying to be encouraging.

"So I heard."

Nico wasn't interested in faint hopes. She wanted instant cures.

"Is that Mademoiselle Dieudonné?" roared the familiar voice.

"Yes, Orson, it's me," she said.

Nico reacted, calculating. She was thinking that Geneviève might be an important person.

"Then that's a wrap for the evening. Thank you, people. Submit your expenses to Oja, and be back here tomorrow night, at midnight sharp. You were all stupendous."

Oja was the woman with the clipboard: Oja Kodar, Welles's companion and collaborator. She was from Yugoslavia, another refugee washed up on this California shore.

Welles seemed to float out of the swimming pool, easily hauling his enormous girth up the ladders by the strength of his own meaty arms. She was surprised at how light he was on his feet.

He pulled off his putty nose and hugged her.

"Geneviève, Geneviève, you are welcome."

The rest of the crew came up, one by one, carrying bits of equipment.

"I thought I'd get Van Helsing's mad scene in the can," explained Welles.

"Neat trick with the girls."

The twinkle in his eye was almost Santa Clausian. He gestured hypnotically.

"Elementary movie magic," he said. "Georges Méliès could have managed it in 1897."

"Has it ever been done before? I don't recall seeing a film with the device."

"As a matter of fact, I think it's an invention of my own. There are still tricks to be teased out of the cinema. Even after so many years—a single breath for you, my dear—the talkies are not quite perfected. My little vampires may have careers as puppeteers, animators. You'd never see their hands. I should shoot a short film, for children."

"You've been working on this for a long time?"

"I had the idea at about seven o'clock this evening," he said with a modest chuckle. "This is Hollywood, my dear, and you can get anything with a phone call. I got my vampires by ordering like pizza."

Geneviève guessed the invisible girls were hookers, a traditional career option for those who couldn't make a showing in the movies. Some studio execs paid good money to be roughed up by girls they'd pass over with contempt at cattle calls. And vampires, properly trained, could venture into areas of pain and pleasure a warm girl would find uncomfortable, unappetising, or unhealthy.

She noticed Nico had latched on to a young, male assistant and was alternately flirting with him and wheedling at him for some favour. Welles was right: she could have a career as a puppet mistress.

"Come through into the house, Geneviève," said Welles. "We must talk."

The crew and the girls bundled together. Oja, as production manager, arranged for them to pile up in several cars and be returned to their homes or—in the case of Nico, Mink, and Vampi—to a nightclub where there were hours to be spent before the dawn. Gary, the cameraman, wanted to get the film to the lab and hurried off on his own to an all-night facility. Many movie people kept vampiring hours without being undead.

There was an after buzz in the air. Geneviève wondered if it was genius, or had some of the crew been sniffing drac to keep going. She had heard it was better than speed. She assumed she would be immune to it; even as a blood drinker—like all of her kind, she had turned by drinking vampire blood—she found the idea of dosing her system with another vampire's powdered blood, diluted with the devil knew what, disgusting.

Welles went ahead of her, into the nondescript bungalow, turning on lights as he went. She looked back for a moment at the cast-off nose by the pool.

Van Helsing's mad scene?

She knew the subject of Welles's current project. He had mentioned to her that he had always wanted to make Dracula. Now, it seemed, he was acting on the impulse. It shouldn't have, but it frightened her a little. She was in two minds about how often that story should be told.

Orson Welles arrived in Hollywood in 1939, having negotiated a two-picture deal as producer-director-writer-actor with George Schaefer of RKO Pictures. Drawing on an entourage of colleagues from the New York theatre and radio, he established Mercury Productions as a filmmaking entity. Before embarking on *Citizen Kane* (1941) and *The Magnificent Ambersons* (1942), Welles developed other properties: Nicholas Blake's just-published anti-Fascist thriller *The Smiler with a Knife* (1939), Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1902) and Stoker's *Dracula* (1897). Like the Conrad, *Dracula* was a novel Welles had already done for the Mercury Theatre on the Air radio series (July 11, 1938). A script was prepared (by Welles, Herman Mankiewicz and, uncredited, John Houseman), sets were designed, the film cast, and "tests"-the extent of which have never been revealed-shot, but the project was dropped.

The reasons for the abandonment of *Count Dracula* remain obscure. It has been speculated that RKO was nervous about Welles's stated intention to film most of the story with a first-person camera, adopting the viewpoints of the various characters as Stoker does in his might-have-been fictional history. Houseman, in his memoir *Run-Through* (1972), alleges that Welles's enthusiasm for this device was at least partly due to the fact that it would keep the fearless vampire slayers-Harker, Van Helsing, Quincey, Holmwood-mostly off screen, while *Dracula*, object of their attention, would always be in view. Houseman, long estranged from Welles at the time of writing, needlessly adds that Welles would have played *Dracula*. He toyed with the idea of playing Harker as well, before deciding William Alland could do it if kept to the shadows and occasionally dubbed by Welles. The rapidly changing political situation in Europe, already forcing the Roosevelt administration to reassess its policies about vampirism and the very real *Count Dracula*, may have prompted certain factions to bring pressure to bear on RKO that such a film was "inadvisable" for 1940.

In an interview with Peter Bogdanovich, published in *This Is Orson Welles* (1992) but held well before Francis Ford Coppola's controversial *Dracula* (1979), Welles said: "*Dracula* would make a marvellous movie. In fact, nobody has ever made it; they've never paid any attention to the book, which is the most hair-raising, marvellous book in the world. It's told by four people, and must be done with four narrations, as we did on the radio. There's one scene in London where he throws a heavy bag into the corner of a cellar and it's full of screaming babies! They can go that far out now."

Jonathan Gates, "Welles's Lost Draculas."

Video Watchdog No. 23 May-July 1994

Welles did not so much live in the bungalow as occupy it. She recognised the signs of high-end temporary tenancy. Pieces of extremely valuable antique furniture, imported from Spain, stood among ugly, functional, modern sticks that had come with the let. The den, largest space in the building, was made aesthetically bearable by a hanging she put at sixteenth century, nailed up over the open fireplace like a curtain. The tapestry depicted a knight trotting in full armour through forest greenery, with black-faced, red-eyed-and-tongued devils peeping from behind tall, straight trees. A piece was marred by a bad burn that had caught at one corner and spread evil fingers upwards. Around were stacks of books, square-bound antique volumes and bright modern paperbacks, and rickety towers of film cans.

Geneviève wondered why Welles would have cases of good sherry and boxes of potato chips stacked together in a corner, then realised he must have been partly paid in goods for his commensurate work. He offered her sherry, and she surprised him by accepting.

"I do sometimes drink wine, Orson. Dracula wasn't speaking for us all."

He arched an eyebrow and made a flourish of pouring sherry into a paper cup.

"My glassware hasn't arrived from Madrid," he apologised.

She sipped the stuff, which she couldn't really taste, and sat on a straight-backed gothic chair that gave her a memory flash, of hours spent in churches when she was a warm girl. She wanted to fidget.

Welles plopped himself down with a Falstaffian rumble and strain on a low couch that had a velvet curtain draped over it. He was broad enough in the beam to make it seem like a throne.

Oja joined them and silently hovered. Her hair was covered by a bright head scarf.

A pause.

Welles grinned expansively. Geneviève realised he was protracting the moment, relishing a role she even knew who he was doing, Sydney Greenstreet in *The Maltese Falcon*. The ambiguous mastermind enjoying himself by matching wits with the perplexed private eye. If Hollywood ever remade *Falcon*, which would be a sacrilege, Welles would be in the ring for Gutman. Too many of his acting jobs were like that, replacing another big personality in an inferior retread of something already got right.

"I'll be wondering why you asked me here tonight," she prompted.

"Yes," he said, amused.

"It'll be a long story."

"I'm rather afraid so."

"There are hours before dawn."

"Indeed."

Welles was comfortable now. She understood he had been switching off from the shoot, coming down not only from his on-screen character but from his position as backyard God.

"You know I've been playing with Dracula for years? I wanted to make it at RKO in '40, did a script, designed sets, cast everybody. Then it was dropped."

She nodded.

"We even shot some scenes. I'd love to steal in some night and rescue the footage from the vaults. Maybe for use in the current project. But the studio has the rights. Imagine if paintings belonged to whoever mixed the paints and wove the canvas. I'll have to abase myself, as usual. The children who inherited RKO after Hughes ran it aground barely know who I am, but they'll enjoy the spectacle of my contrition, my pleading, my total dejection. I may even get my way in the end."

"Hasn't Dracula been made? I understand that Francis-

"I haven't seen that. It doesn't matter to me or the world. I didn't do the first stage production of Macbeth or Caesar, merely the best. The same goes for the Stoker. A marvellous piece, you know."

"Funnily enough, I have read it," she put in.

"Of course you have."

"And I met Dracula."

Welles raised his eyes, as if that were news to him. Was this all about picking her brain? She spent all of fifteen minutes in the Royal Presence, nearly a hundred years ago, but was quizzed at that (admittedly dramatic) occasion more than the entire rest of her five hundred and sixty-five years. She'd seen the Count again, after his true death-as had Welles, she remembered-and been at his funeral, seen his ashes scattered. She supposed she had wanted to be sure he was really finally done.

"I've started Dracula several times. It seems like a cursed property. This time, maybe, I'll finish it. I believe it has to be done."

Oja laid hands on his shoulders and squeezed. There was an almost imperial quality to Welles.

but he was an emperor in exile, booted off his throne and cast out, retaining only the most loyal long-suffering of his attendants.

"Does the name Alucard mean anything to you?" he asked. "John Alucard?"

"This may come as a shock to you, Orson, but 'Alucard' is 'Dracula' spelled backwards."

He gave out a good-humoured version of his Shadow laugh.

"I had noticed. He is a vampire, of course."

"Central and Eastern European nosferatu love anagrams as much as they love changing their names," she explained. "It's a real quirk. My late friend Carmilla Karnstein ran through at least a dozen scramblings of her name before running out. Millarca, Marcilla, Allimarc..."

"My name used to be Olga Palinkas," put in Oja. "Until Orson thought up 'Oja Kodar' for me, a sound Hungarian."

"The promising sculptor 'Vladimir Zagdrov' is my darling Oja, too. You are right about the undead predilection for noms de plume, alter egos, secret identities, anagrams, and palindromes acrostics. Just like actors. A holdover from the Byzantine mind-set, I believe. It says something about the way the creatures think. Tricky but obvious, as it were. The back spelling might also be compensation: a reflection on parchment for those who have none in the glass."

"This Alucard? Who is he?"

"That's the exact question I'd like answered," said Welles. "And you, my dear Mademoiselle Dieudonné, are the person I should like to provide that answer."

"Alucard says he's an independent producer," said Oja. "With deals all over town."

"But no credits," said Welles.

Geneviève could imagine.

"He has money, though," said Welles. "No credits, but a line of credit. Cold cash and the Yankee dollar banish all doubt. That seems unarguable."

"Seems?"

"Sharp little word, isn't it? Seems and is, syllables on either side of a chasm of meaning. This Alucard, a nosferatu, wishes to finance my Dracula. He has offered me a deal the likes of which I haven't had since RKO and Kane. An unlimited budget, major studio facilities, right of final cut, control over everything from casting to publicity. The only condition he imposes is that I must not touch this subject. He wants not my Don Quixote or my Around the World in 80 Days, but my Dracula only."

"The Coppola-" a glare from Welles made her rephrase "-that other film, with Brando as the Count? That broke even in the end, didn't it? Made back its budget. Dracula is a box-office subject. There's probably room for another version. Not to mention sequels, a spin-off TV series and imitations. Your Mr. Alucard makes sense. Especially if he has deep pockets and no credits. Being attached to a good, to a great, film would do him no harm. Perhaps he wants the acclaim?"

Welles rolled the idea around his head.

"No," he concluded, almost sadly. "Gené, I have never been accused of lack of ego. My largeness of spirit, my sense of self-worth, is part of my act, as it were. The armour I must need haul on to do my daily battles. But I am not blind to my situation. No producer in his right mind would bankroll me to such an extent, would offer me such a deal. Not even these kids, this Spielberg and that Lucas, could get such a sweetheart deal. I am as responsible for that as anyone. The studio of today may be owned by oil companies and hotel magnates, but there's a trace memory of that contract I signed when I was twenty-four and of how it all went wrong, for me and for everyone. When I was kicked off the lot in 1943, RKO took out ads in the trades announcing their new motto: 'Showmanship, not genius!' Hollywood doesn't want to have me around. I remind the town of its mistakes, its crimes."

"Alucard is an independent producer, you say. Perhaps he's a fan?"

"I don't think he's seen any of my pictures."

"Do you think this is a cruel prank?"

Welles shrugged, raising huge hands. Oja was more guarded, more worried. Geneviève wondered whether she was the one who had insisted on calling in an investigator.

"The first cheques have cleared," said Welles. "The rent is paid on this place."

"You are familiar with the expression..."

"The one about equine dentistry? Yes."

"But it bothers you? The mystery?"

"The Mystery of Mr. Alucard. That is so. If it blows up in my face, I can stand that. I've come through that pass before, and I shall venture there again. But I should like some presentiment, either way. I want you to make some discreet inquiries about our Mr. Alucard. At the very least, I'd like to know his real name and where he comes from. He seems very American at the moment, but I don't think that was always the case. Most of all, I want to know what he is up to. Can you help me, Mademoiselle Dieudonné?"

"You know, Gené," said Jack Martin wistfully, contemplating the melting ice in his empty glass through the wisps of cigarette smoke that always haloed his head, "none of this matters. It's not important. Writing. It's a trivial pursuit, hardly worth the effort, inconsequential on any cosmic level. It's just blood and sweat and guts and bone hauled out of our bodies and fed through a typewriter and slosh all over the platen. It's just the sick soul of America turning sour in the sunshine. Nobody reads what I've written. In this town, they don't know Flannery O'Connor or Ray Bradbury, let alone Jack Martin. Nothing will be remembered. We'll all die and it'll be over. The sands will close over our civilisation and the sun will turn into a huge red fireball and burn even you from the face of the earth."

He didn't seem convinced. Martin was a writer. In high school, he'd won a national competition for an essay entitled "It's Great to Be Alive." Now in his grumbling forties, the sensitive but creative short stories that were his most personal work were published in small science-fiction and men's magazines, and put out in expensive limited editions by fan publishers who went out of business owing him money. He had made a living as a screenwriter for ten years without ever seeing anything written under his own name get made. He had a problem with happy endings.

However, he knew what was going on in "the Industry" and was her first port of call when a girl got her mixed up with the movies. He lived in a tar-paper shack on Beverly Glen Boulevard, wedged between multimillion dollar estates, and told everybody that at least it was earthquake-proof.

Martin rattled the ice. She ordered him another Coca-Cola. He stubbed out one cigarette and lit another.

The girl behind the hotel bar, dressed as a magician, sloshed ice into another glass and reached for a small chromed hose. She squirted Coke into the glass, covering the ice.

Martin held up his original glass.

"Wouldn't it be wonderful if you could slip the girl a buck and have her fill up this glass, not through all the fuss of getting a fresh one and charging you all over again. There should be infinite refills. Imagine that, a Utopian dream, Gene. It's what America needs. A bottomless Coke!"

"It's not policy, sir," said the girl. With the Coke came a quilted paper napkin, an unhappy edge of lemon, and a plastic stirrer.

Martin looked at the bar girl's legs. She was wearing black fishnets, high-heeled pumps, a tight white waistcoat, a tail coat, and tophat.

The writer sampled his new, bottomed, Coke. The girl went to cope with other morning customers.

"I'll bet she's an actress," he said. "I think she does porno."

Geneviève raised an eyebrow.

"Most X-rated films are better directed than the slop that comes out of the majors," Martin

insisted. "I could show you a reel of something by Gerard Damiano or Jack Horner that you'd swear was Bergman or Don Siegel. Except for the screwing."

Martin wrote "scripts" for adult movies, under well-guarded pseudonyms to protect his Writers Guild membership. The guild didn't have any moral position on porno, but members weren't supposed to take jobs which involved turning out a full-length feature script in two afternoons for three hundred dollars. Martin claimed to have invented Jamie Gillis's catchphrase, "Suck it, bitch."

"What can you tell me about John Alucard?"

"The name is-"

"Besides that his name is 'Dracula' written backwards."

"He's from New York. Well, that's where he was last. I heard he ran with that art crowd. You know, Warhol and Jack Smith. He's got a first-look deal at United Artists, and something cooking with Fox. There's going to be a story in the trades that he's set up an independent production company with Griffin Mill, Julia Phillips, and Don Simpson."

"But he's never made a movie?"

"The word is that he's never seen a movie. That doesn't stop him calling himself a producer. Are you working for him? If you could mention that I was available. Mention my rewrite on *Can't Stop the Music*. No, don't. Say about that TV thing that didn't happen. I can get you sample script by sundown."

Martin was gripping her upper arm.

"I've never met Alucard, Jack. I'm checking into him for a client."

"Still, if you get the chance, Gené. You know what it would mean to me. I'm fending off bill collectors, and Sharkko Press still hasn't come through for the Tenebrous Twilight limiteds. A development deal, even a rewrite or a polish, could get me through winter and spring. Buy me time to get down to Ensenada and finish some stories."

She would have to promise. She had learned more than the bare facts. The light in Jack Martin's eyes told her something about John Alucard. He had some sort of magic effect, but she didn't know whether he was a conjurer or a wizard. Now she would have to build on that.

Short of forcing her way into Alucard's office and asking outright whether he was planning on leaving Orson Welles in the lurch, there wasn't much more she could do. After Martin, she made a few phone calls to industry contacts, looked over recent back numbers of *Variety* and the *Hollywood Reporter* and hit a couple of showbiz watering holes, hoping to soak up gossip.

Now, Geneviève was driving back along the Pacific Coast Highway to Paradise Cove. The sun was down, and a heavy, unstarred darkness hung over the sea. The Plymouth, which she sometimes suspected of having a mind of its own, handled gently, taking the blind curves at speed. She twiddled the radio past a lot of disco and found a station pumping out two-tone. That was good, that was new, that was a culture still alive.

"... mirror in the bathroom, recompense all my crimes of self-defence..."

She wondered about what she had learned.

It wasn't like the old days, when the studios were tight little fiefdoms and a stringer for Louella Parsons would know everything going on in town and every current scandal. Most movies weren't even made in Hollywood any more, and the studios were way down on the lists of interests owned by multinational corporations with other primary concerns. The buzz was that United Artists might well be changing its name to TransAmerica Pictures.

General word confirmed most of what Martin had told her, and turned up surprisingly few exact details. Besides the Welles deal, financed off his own line of credit with no studio production company yet involved, John Alucard had projects in development all over town, with high-end talent attached. He was supposed to be in bed with Michael Cimino, still hot off *The Deer Hunter*, on *The Lincoln County Wars*, a Western about the vampire outlaw Billy the Kid and a massacre of settlers in Roswell, New Mexico, in the 1870s. With the Mill-Simpson-Phillips setup, he was helping the long-in-development Anne Rice project, *Interview With the Mummy*, which Elaine May was supposed to be making with Cher and Ryan O'Neal, unless it was Nancy Walker, with Diana Ross and Mark Spitz.

In an interview in the Reporter, Alucard said, "The pursuit of making money is the only reason we make movies. We have no obligation to make history. We have no obligation to make art. We have no obligation to make a statement. Our obligation is to make money." A lot of execs, and not a few directors and writers, found his a refreshing and invigorating stance, though Geneviève had the impression Alucard was parroting someone else's grand theory. If he truly believed what he said, it was not just laying down something the studios' corporate owners wanted to hear, then John Alucard did not sound like someone who would happily want to be in business with Orson Welles. Apart from anything else, his manifesto was a 1980s rewrite, at five times the length with in-built repetition to get through to the admass morons at the back of the hall, of "showmanship, not genius."

The only thing she couldn't find out was what his projects really were. Besides Welles's *Dracula* which wasn't mentioned by anyone she had talked with, and the long-gestating shows he was working with senior production partners, he had a half dozen other irons in the fire. Directors and stars were attached, budgets set, start dates announced, but no titles ever got mentioned, and the descriptions in the trades—"intense drama," "romantic comedy"—were hardly helpful. That was interesting and unusual. John Alucard was making a splash, waves radiating outwards, but surely eventually would have to say what the pictures were. Or had that become the least important part of the package? An agent at CAA told her that for men like Alucard, the art was in the deal not on the screen.

That did worry her.

Could it be that there wasn't actually a pot of gold at the end of this rainbow? The man was a vampire, but was he also a phantom? No photographs existed, of course. Everyone had a secondhand description, always couched as a casting suggestion: a young Louis Jourdan, a smart Jack Palance, a rough-trade David Niven. It was agreed that the man was European, a long time. No one had any idea how long he had been a vampire, even. He could be a newborn, fresh-killed, risen last year, or a centuried elder who had changed his face a dozen times. His name always drew the same reaction: excitement, enthusiasm, fear. There was a sense that John Alucard was getting things on the road, and that it'd be a smart career move to get close to him, to be ready to haul out the station with him.

She cruised across sandy tarmac into the trailer park. The seafood restaurant was doing a little New Year's Day business. She would be thirsty soon.

Someone sat on the stairs of her trailer, leaning back against her door, hands loose in his lap, in chinos, cowboy boots.

Someone dead.

Throughout Welles's career, Dracula remained an *idée fixe*. The Welles-Mankiewicz script was RKO property, and the studio resisted Welles's offer to buy it back. They set their asking price at the notional but substantial sum accountants reckoned had been lost on the double debacle of *Ambersons* and the unfinished South American project, *It's All True*.

When Schaefer, Welles's patron, was removed from his position as Vice-President in Charge of Production and replaced by Charles Koerner, there was serious talk of putting the script into production through producer Val Lewton's unit, which had established a reputation for low-budget supernatural dramas with *Cat People* (1942). Lewton got as far as having DeWitt Bodeen and then Curt Siodmak take runs at further drafts, scaling the script down to fit a straitjacket budget. Jacques Tourneur was attached to direct, though editor Mark Robson was considered when Tourneur was promoted to A pictures. Stock players were assigned supporting roles: Tom Conway (Dr. Seward), Kent Smith (Jonathan Harker), Henry Daniell (Van Helsing), Jean Brooks (Lucy), Alan Napier (Arthur Holmwood), Skelton Knaggs (Renfield), Elizabeth Russell (Countess Marya Dolingen), Sir Lancelot (a calypso-singing coachman). Simone Simon, star of *Cat People*, was set for Mina, very much the focus of Lewton's take on the story, but the project fell through because RKO were unable to secure their first and only choice of star, Boris Karloff, who was committed to *Arsenic and Old Lace* on Broadway.

In 1944, RKO sold the Welles-Mankiewicz script, along with a parcel of set designs, to 20th Century-Fox. Studio head Darryl F. Zanuck offered Welles the role of Dracula, promising Joan Fontaine and Olivia de Havilland for Mina and Lucy, suggesting Tyrone Power (Jonathan), George Sanders (Arthur), John Carradine (Quincey) and Laird Cregar (Van Helsing). This Dracula would have been a follow-up to Fox's successful Welles-Fontaine *Jane Eyre* (1943), and Welles might have committed if Zanuck had again assigned weak-willed Robert Stevenson, allowing Welles to direct in everything but credit. However, on a project this "important," Zanuck would consider only two directors; John Ford had no interest-sparing us John Wayne, Victor McLaglen, Ward Bond, and John Agar as brawling, boozing, fearless vampire slayers-so it inevitably fell to Henry King, a specialist in molasses-slow historical subjects like *Lloyd's of London* (1936) and *Brigham Young* (1940). King, a plodder who had a brief flash of genius in a few later films with Gregory Peck, had his own, highly developed, chocolate box style and gravitas, and was not a congenial director for Welles, whose mercurial temperament was unsuited to methods he considered conservative and dreary. The film still might have been made, since Welles was as ever in need of money, but Zanuck went cold on Dracula at the end of the war when the Count was moving into his Italian exile.

Fox wound up backing *Prince of Foxes* (1949), directed by King, with Power and Welles topping the cast, shot on location in Europe. A lavish bore, enlivened briefly by Welles's committed *Cesare Borgia*, this suggests what the Zanuck Dracula might have been like. Welles used much of his earnings from the long shoot to pour into film projects made in bits and pieces over several years: the completed *Othello* (1952), the unfinished *Don Quixote* (begun 1955) and, rarely mentioned until now, yet another Dracula. *El conde Dracula*, a French-Italian-Mexican-American-Irish-Liechtensteinian-British-Yugoslav-Moroccan-Iranian coproduction, was shot in snippets, the earliest dating from 1949, the latest from 1972.

Each major part was taken by several actors, or single actors over a span of years. In the controversial edit supervised by the Spaniard Jesus Franco-a second-unit director on Welles's *Chimes at Midnight* (1966)-and premiered at Cannes in 1997, the cast is as follows: Akim Tamiroff (Van Helsing), Micheál MacLiammóir (Jonathan), Paola Mori (Mina), Michael Redgrave (Arthur), Patty McCormick (Lucy), Hilton Edwards (Dr. Seward), Mischa Auer (Renfield). The vampire brides are played by Jeanne Moreau, Suzanne Cloutier, and Katina Paxinou, shot in different years on different continents. There is no sight of Francisco Reiguera, Welles's *Quixote*, cast as a skeletal Dracula, and the Count is present only as a substantial shadow voiced (as are several other characters) by Welles himself. Much of the film runs silent, and a crucial framing story, explaining the multinarrator device, was either never filmed or shot and lost. Jonathan's panicky exploration of his castle prison, filled with steam like the Turkish bath in *Othello*, is the most remarkable, purely Expressionist scene Welles ever shot. But the

final ascent to Castle Dracula, with Tamiroff dodging patently papier-mâché falling boulders and wobbly zooms into and out of stray details hardly seems the work of anyone other than a fumbling amateur.

In no sense "a real film," *El conde Dracula* is a scrapbook of images from the novel and Welles's imagination. He told Henry Jaglom that he considered the project a private exercise, to keep the subject in his mind, a series of sketches for a painting he would execute later. As Francis Coppola would in 1977, while his multimillion-dollar *Dracula* was bogged down in production problems in Romania, Welles often made comparisons with the Sistine Chapel. While Coppola invoked Michelangelo with some desperation as the vast machine of his movie seemed to be collapsing around him, Welles always resorted playfully to the metaphor, daring the interviewer with a wave and a wink and a deep chuckle to suggest the Pope probably did turn up every day wanting to know when the great artist would be finished and how much it was going to cost.

In 1973, Welles assembled some *El conde Dracula* footage, along with documentary material about the real Count Dracula and the scandals that followed his true death in 1959: the alleged, much-disputed will that deeded much of his vast fortune to English housewife Vivian Nicholson, who claimed she had encountered Dracula while on a school holiday in the early fifties; the autobiography Clifford Irving sold for a record-breaking advance in 1971, only to have the book exposed as an arrant fake written by Irving in collaboration with Fred Saberhagen; the squabbles among sundry vampire elders, notably Baron Meinster and Princess Asa Vajda, as to who should claim the Count's unofficial title as ruler of their kind. Welles called this playful, essaylike film-constructed around the skeleton of footage shot by Calvin Floyd for his own documentary, *In Search of Dracula* (1971)-*When Are You Going to Finish el conde Dracula?*, though it was exhibited in most territories as *D Is for Dracula*. On the evening Premier Ceausescu withdrew the Romanian Cavalry needed for Coppola's assault on Castle Dracula in order to pursue the vampire banditti of the Transylvania Movement in the next valley, Francis Ford Coppola held a private screening of *D Is for Dracula* and cabled Welles that there was a curse on anyone who dared invoke the dread name.

Gates, *ibid.*

The someone on her steps was truly dead. In his left chest, over his punctured heart, a star-shaped blotch was black in the moonlight.

Geneviève felt no residue. The intangible thing-immortal soul, psychic energy, battery power-which kept mind and body together, in *nosferatu* or the warm, was gone.

Broken is the golden bowl, the spirit flown forever.

She found she was crying. She touched her cheek and looked at the thick, salt, red tears, then smeared them away on her handkerchief.

It was Moondoggie. In repose, his face looked old, the lines his smile had made appealing turned to slack wrinkles.

She took a moment with him, remembering the taste of the living man, that he was the only one who called her "Gidget," his inability to put in words what it was about surfing that made him devote his life to it (he'd been in pre-med once, long, long ago-when there was a crack-up or a near-drowning, the doctor he might have been would surface and take over), and the rush of the adrenaline that came with his blood.

That man was gone. Besides sorrow at the waste, she was angry. And afraid.

It was easy to see how it had happened. The killer had come close, face-to-face, and stuck Moondoggie through the heart. The wound was round, not a slit. The weapon was probably a wooden stake or a sharpened metal pole. The angle of the wound was upwards, so the killer was shorter than the rangy surfer. Stuck through, Moondoggie had been carefully propped up on her doorstep. She was being sent a message.

Moondoggie was a warm man, but he'd been killed as if he were like her, a vampire.

He was not cold yet. The killing was recent.

Geneviève turned in a half circle, looking out across the beach. Like most vampires, she had above average night vision for a human being-without sun glare bleaching everything bone white, saw better than by day-but no hawklike power of distinguishing far-off tiny objects or magical X-ray eyesight.

It was likely that the assassin was nearby, watching to see that the message was received. Counting on the popular belief that vampires did have unnatural eyesight, she moved slowly enough that anyone in concealment might think she was looking directly at them, that they had been seen.

A movement.

The trick worked. A couple of hundred yards off, beyond the trailer park, out on the beach, something-someone-moved, clambering upright from a hollow depression in the dry sand.

As the probable murderer stood, Geneviève saw a blonde ponytail whipping. It was a girl, mid-to-late teens, in halter top and denim shorts, with a wispy gauze neck scarf, and-suggestive detail-running shoes and knee pads. She was undersized but athletic. Another girl midget: no wonder she'd been able to get close enough to Moondoggie, genial connoisseur of young bodies, to stab in the heart.

She assumed the girl would bolt. Geneviève was fast enough to run her down, but the killer opted to panic. In California, what people knew about vampires was scrambled with fantasy and science fiction.

For once, Geneviève was tempted to live up to her image. She wanted to rip out the silly girl's throat.

(and drink)

She took a few long steps, flashing forwards across the beach.

The girl stood her ground, waiting.

Geneviève had pause. The stake wasn't in the dead man's chest. The girl still had it. Her right hand was out of sight, behind her back.

Closer, she saw the killer's face in the moonlight. Doll-pretty, with an upturned nose and the faintest fading traces of freckles. She was frowning with concentration now but probably had a winning smile, perfect teeth. She should be a cheerleader, not an assassin.

This wasn't a vampire, but Geneviève knew she was no warm cream puff, either. She had killed a strong man twice her weight with a single thrust, and was prepared for a charging nosferatu.

Geneviève stood still, twenty yards from the girl.

The killer produced her stake. It was stained.

"Meet Simon Sharp," she said. She had a clear, casual voice. Geneviève found her flippancy terrifying.

"You killed a man," Geneviève said, trying to get through to her, past the madness.

"Not a man. One of you, undead vermin."

"He was alive."

"You'd snacked on him, Frenchie. He would have turned."

"It doesn't work like that."

"That's not what I hear, not what I know."

From her icy eyes, this teenager was a fanatic. There could be no reasoning with her.

Geneviève would have to take her down, hold her until the police got here.

Whose side would the cops take? A vampire or a prom queen? Geneviève had fairly good relations with the local law, who were more uneasy about her as a private detective than as a vampire, but this might stretch things.

The girl smiled. She did look awfully cute.

Geneviève knew the mad bitch could probably get away with it At least once. She had the whole Tuesday Weld thing going for her, pretty poison.

"You've been warned, not spared," said the girl. "My plan A was to skewer you on sight, but Overlooker thinks this is better strategy. It's some English thing, like cricket. Go figure."

The Overlooker?

"It'd be peachiest all around if you left the state, Frenchie. The country, even. Preferably, the planet Next time we meet, it won't be a warning. You'll get a formal introduction to the delightful Simon. Capisce?"

"Who are you?"

"The Slayer," said the girl, gesturing with her stake. "Barbie, the Vampire Slayer."

Despite herself, despite everything, Geneviève had to laugh.

That annoyed Barbie.

Geneviève reminded herself that this silly girl, playing dress-up-and-be-a-heroine, was a real life murderess.

She laughed more calculatedly.

Barbie wanted to kill her but made no move. Whoever this Overlooker-bloody silly title-was, or her creature didn't want to exceed the brief given her.

(Some English thing, like cricket)

Geneviève darted at the girl, nails out Barbie had good reactions. She pivoted to one side and launched a kick. A cleated shoe just missed Geneviève's midriff but raked her side painfully. She jammed her palm heel at Barbie's chin, and caught her solidly, shutting her mouth with a click.

Simon Sharp went flying. That made Geneviève less inhibited about close fighting.

Barbie was strong, trained, and smart She might have the brain of a flea, but her instincts were pantherlike, and she went all out for a kill. But Geneviève was still alive after five hundred and fifty years as a vampire.

Barbie tried the oldest move in girly martial arts and yanked her opponent's hair, cutting her hair open. Geneviève's hair was fine but stronger and sharper than it looked, like pampas grass. The rush of hot blood was a distraction, sparking lizardy synapses in Geneviève's brain, momentarily blurring her thoughts. She threw Barbie away, skittering her across the sand on her can in an undignified tangle.

Mistake.

Barbie pulled out something that looked like a mace spray and squirted at Geneviève's face.

Geneviève backed away from the cloud, but got a whiff of the mist. Garlic, holy water, and silver salts. Garlic and holy water didn't bother her-more mumbo-jumbo, ineffective against someone not of Dracula's bloodline-but silver was deadly to all nosferatu. This spray might not kill her, but it could scar her for a couple of centuries, or even life. It was vanity, she supposed, but she had grown used to people telling her she was pretty.

She scuttled away, backwards, across the sand. The cloud dissipated in the air. She saw the droplets, shining under the moon, falling with exaggerated slowness, pattering onto the beach.

When the spray was gone, so was Barbie the Slayer.

"... and, uh, this is exactly where you found Mr. Griffin, miss?" asked the LAPD homicide detective.

Geneviève was distracted. Even just after dawn, the sun was fatiguing her. In early daylight, on her gurney, Moondoggie-whose name turned out to have been Jeff Griffin-looked colder and emptier than another of the numberless dead stranded in her past while she went on and on and on.

"Miss Dew-dun-ee?"

"Dieudonné," she corrected, absentmindedly.

"Ah yes, Dieudonné. Accent grave over the e. That's French, isn't it? I have a French car. My wife says-"

"Yes, this is where I found the body," she answered, catching up.

"Ah. There's just one thing I don't understand."

She paid attention to the crumpled little man. He had curly hair, a gravel voice, and a raincoat that was working on the first cigar of the day. One of his eyes was glass, and aimed off to the side.

"And what might that be, Lieutenant?"

"This girl you mentioned, this-" he consulted his notebook, or pretended to, "-this 'Barbie.' Why would she hang around after the murder? Why did she have to make sure you found the body?"

"She implied that she was under orders, working for this Overlooker."

The detective touched his eyebrow as if to tuck his smelly cigar behind his ear like a pen, and made great play of thinking hard, trying to work through the story he had been told. He was obviously used to people lying to him, and equally obviously unused to dealing with vampires. He stood between her and the sun, as she inched into the shrinking shadow of her trailer.

She wanted to get a hat and dark glasses, but police tape still barred her door.

"'Overlooker,' yes. I've got a note of that, miss. Funny expression, isn't it? Gives the impression the 'Overlooker' is supposed not to see something, that the whole job is about, ah, overlooking. Like my profession, miss. Or yours either, I figure. You're a PI, like on TV?"

"With fewer car chases and shoot-outs."

The detective laughed. He was a funny little duck. She realised he used his likability as a psychological weapon, to get close to people he wanted to nail. She couldn't mistake the situation she was in the ring for the killing, and her story about Barbie the Slayer didn't sound straight in daylight. What sane professional assassin gives a name, even a partial name, to a witness?

"A vampire private eye?" The detective scratched his head.

"It makes sense. I don't mind staying up all night. And I've got a wealth of varied experience."

"Have you solved any big cases? Really big ones?"

Without thinking, she told a truth. "In 1888, I halfway found out who Jack the Ripper was."

The detective was impressed.

"I thought no one knew how that panned out. Scotland Yard still have it open. What with you living longer and longer, it's not safe to close unsolved files. The guy who took the rap died, did he? These days, the theorists say it couldn't have been him."

"I said I halfway found out."

She had a discomfiting memory flash, of her and Charles in an office in Whitechapel in 1888, stumbling over the last clue, all the pieces falling into place. The problem was that solving the mystery hadn't meant sorting everything out, and the case had continued to spiral out of control. There was a message there.

"That wouldn't be good enough for my captain, I'm afraid, miss. He has to answer to Police

Chief Exley, and Chief Exley insists on a clearance and conviction rate. I can't just catch them, I have to prove they did it. I have to go to the courts. You'd be surprised how many guilty parties walk away. Especially the rich ones, with fancy lawyers. In this town, it's hard to get a conviction against a rich man."

"This girl looked like a high-school kid."

"Even worse, miss. Probably has rich folks."

"I've no idea about that."

"And pretty is as good as being rich. Better. Juries like pretty girls as much as lawyers like rich men."

There was a shout from the beach. One of the uniformed cops who had been combing the sand held up a plastic evidence bag. Inside was Barbie's bloody stake.

"Simon Sharp," Geneviève said. The detective's eyebrows rose. "That's what she called it. What kind of person gives a pet name to a murder weapon?"

"You think you've heard everything in this business and then something else comes along and knocks you flat. Miss, if you don't mind me asking, I know it's awkward for some women, but, well, how old are you?"

"I was born in 1416," she said.

"That's five hundred and, um, sixty-five."

"Thereabouts."

The detective shook his head again and whistled.

"Tell me, does it get easier? Everything?"

"Sadly, no."

"You said you had-uh, how did you put it?-'a wealth of varied experience.' Is that like getting cleverer every year? Knowing more and more of the answers?"

"Would that it did, Lieutenant. Sometimes I think it just means having more and more questions."

He chuckled. "Ain't that the truth."

"Can I get into my trailer now?" she asked, indicating the climbing sun.

"We were keeping you out?" he asked, knowing perfectly well he was. "That's dreadful, with

condition and everything. Of course you can go inside, miss. We'll be able to find you here, if there are any more questions that come up? It's a trailer, isn't it? You're not planning on hitching it up to your car and driving off, say, out of state?"

"No, lieutenant."

"That's good to know."

He gallantly tore the police tape from her door. She had her keys out. Her skin tingled, and the glare off the sea turned everything into blobby, indistinct shapes.

"Just one more thing," said the detective, hand on her door.

The keys were hot in her fingers.

"Yes," she said, a little sharply.

"You're on a case, aren't you? Like on TV?"

"I'm working on several investigations. May I make a bet with you, Lieutenant? For a dime?"

The detective was surprised by that. But he fished around in his raincoat pocket and, after examining several tissues and a book of matches, came up with a coin and a smile.

"I bet I know what you're going to ask me next" she said. "You're going to ask me who I'm working for."

He was theatrically astonished.

"That's just incredible, miss. Is it some kind of vampire mind-reading power? Or are you like Sherlock Holmes, picking up tiny hints from little clues, like the stains on the cigar band or the dog not howling in the night?"

"Just a lucky guess," she said. Her cheeks were really burning, now.

"Well, see if I can luckily guess your answer. Client confidentiality privilege, like a lawyer or a doctor, eh?"

"See. You have hidden powers, too, Lieutenant."

"Well, Miss Dieudonné, I do what I can, I do what I can. Any idea what I'm going to say next?"

"No."

His smile froze slightly, and she saw ice in his real eye.

"Don't leave town, miss."

On rising, she found Jack Martin had left a message on her machine. He had something for her. "Mr. A." Geneviève listened to the brief message twice, thinking it over.

She had spent only a few hours asking about John Alucard, and someone had gotten killed. A connection? It would be weird if there wasn't. Then again, as the detective reminded her, she'd been around for a long time. In her years, she'd ticked off a great many people, not a few as long-lived as she was herself. Also, this was Southern California, La-La Land, where the nuts came from: folks didn't necessarily need a reason to take against you, or to have you killed.

Could this Overlooker be another Manson? Crazy Charlie was a vampire hater, too, and used teenage girls as assassins. Everyone remembered the death of Sharon Tate, but the Manson Family had also destroyed a vampire elder, Count von Krolock, up on La Cienega Drive, and painted blood symbols on the walls with his old blood. Barbie the Slayer was cutie-pie where the Family had been skaggy, but that could be a 1980s thing as opposed to a 1960s one.

Geneviève knew she could take care of herself, but the people who talked to her might be in danger. She must mention it to Martin, who wasn't long on survival skills. He could at least scurry down to Mexico for a couple of months. In the meantime, she was still trying to earn her fifty dollars a day, so she returned Martin's call. The number he had left was (typically) a bar, and the growling man who picked up had a message for her, giving an address in the valley where she could find Martin.

This late in the afternoon, the sun was low in the sky. She loved the long winter nights.

In a twist-tied plastic bag buried among the cleaning products and rags under her sink unit was a gun, a ladylike palm-size automatic. She considered fishing it out and transferring it to the Plymouth Fury but resisted the impulse. No sense in escalating. As yet, even the Overlooker didn't want her dead.

That was not quite a comfort.

The address was an anonymous house in an anonymous neighbourhood out in the diaspora-like sprawl of ranchos and villas and vistas, but there were more cars and vans outside than a single family would need. Either there was a party on, or this was a suburban commune. She parked on the street and watched for a moment. The lights from the windows and the patio were a few candles brighter than they needed to be. Cables snaked out of a side door and round to the backyard.

She got out of the Plymouth and followed the hose-thick Cables, passing through a cultivated harbour into a typical yard space, with an oval pool, currently covered by a heavy canvas sheet that was damp where it rested on water, and a white wooden gazebo, made up with strands of dead i

and at the centre of several beams of light. There were a lot of people around, but this was no party. She should have guessed: it was another film set. She saw lights on stands and a camera crew, plus the usual assortment of hangers-on, gophers, rubberneckers, fluffers, runners, and extras.

This was more like a "proper" movie set than the scene she had found at Welles's bungalow, but she knew from the naked people in the gazebo that this was a far less proper movie. Again, she should have guessed. This was a Jack Martin lead, after all.

"Are you here for 'Vampire Bitch Number Three'?"

The long-haired, chubby kid addressing her wore a tie-dyed T-shirt and a fisherman's waistcoat with pockets stuffed with goodies. He carried a clipboard.

Geneviève shook her head. She didn't know whether to be flattered or offended. Then again, in this town, everyone thought everyone else was an actor or actress. They were usually more or less right.

She didn't like the sound of the part. If she had a reflection that caught on film and were going to prostitute herself for a skin flick, she would at least hold out for "Vampire Bitch Number One."

"The part's taken, I'm afraid," said the kid, not exactly dashing her dreams of stardom. "We got Seka at the last minute."

He nodded towards the gazebo, where three warm girls in pancake makeup hissed at a hairy young man, undoing his Victorian cravat and waistcoat.

"I'm here to see Jack Martin?" she said.

"Who?"

"The writer?"

She remembered Martin used pseudonyms for this kind of work, and spun off a description: "Salt-and-pepper beard, Midnight Cowboy jacket with the fringes cut off, smokes a lot, doesn't believe in positive thinking."

The kid knew who she meant. "That's 'Mr. Stroker.' Come this way. He's in the kitchen, doing rewrites. Are you sure you're not here for a part? You'd make a groovy vampire chick."

She thanked him for the compliment, and followed his lead through a mess of equipment to the kitchen, torn between staring at what was going on between the three girls and one guy in the gazebo and keeping her eyes clear. About half the crew were of the madly ogling variety, while the others were jaded enough to stick to their jobs and look at their watches as the shoot edged towards go time.

"Vampire Bitch Number Two, put more tongue in it," shouted an intense bearded man whose

megaphone and beret marked him as the director. "I want to see fangs, Samantha. You've got a j for that throbbing vein, you've got a real lust for blood. Don't slobber. That's in bad taste. Just m nicely. That's it. That's colossal. That's the cream."

"What is the name of this picture?" Geneviève asked.

"Debbie Does Dracula," said the kid. "It's going to be a four-boner classic. Best thing Boris Adrian has ever shot. He goes for production values, not just screwing. It's got real crossover potential, as a 'couples' movie. Uh-oh, there's a gusher."

"Spurt higher, Mr. Jeremy," shouted the director, Boris Adrian. "I need the arc to be highlit. Thank you, that's perfect. Seka, Samantha, Desiree, you can writhe in it if you like. That's outstanding. Now, collapse in exhaustion, Mr. Jeremy. That's perfect. Cut, and print."

The guy in the gazebo collapsed in real exhaustion, and the girls called for assistants to wipe off. Some of the crew applauded and congratulated the actors on their performances, which she supposed was fair enough. One of the "Vampire Bitches" had trouble with her false fang-teeth.

The director got off his shooting stick and sat with his actors, talking motivation.

The kid held a screen door open and showed her into the kitchen. Martin sat at a tiny table, cigarette in his mouth, hammering away at a manual typewriter. Another clipboard kid, a wide girl with a frizz of hair and Smiley badges fastening her overall straps, stood over him.

"Gené, excuse me," said Martin. "I'll be through in a moment."

Martin tore through three pages, working the carriage return like a gunslinger fanning a Colt, and passed them up to the girl, who couldn't read as fast as he wrote.

"There's your Carfax Abbey scene," Martin said, delivering the last page.

The girl kissed his forehead and left the kitchen.

"She's in love with me."

"The assistant?"

"She's the producer, actually. Debbie W. Griffith. Had a monster hit distributing Throat Sprockets in Europe. You should see that. It's the first real adult film for the vampire market. Played midnight matinees."

"She's D. W. Griffith," and you're... ?"

Martin grinned, "Meet 'Bram Stroker.' "

"And why am I here?"

Martin looked around to make sure he wasn't overheard, and whispered, "This is it, this is his Debbie's a front. This is un film de John Alucard."

"It's not Orson Welles."

"But it's a start."

A dark girl, kimono loose, walked through the kitchen, carrying a couple of live white rats in one hand, muttering to herself about "the Master." Martin tried to say hello, but she breezed past, deep into her role, eyes drifting. She lingered a moment on Geneviève, but wafted out onto the patio and was given a mildly sarcastic round of applause.

"That's Kelly Nicholls," said Martin. "She plays Renfield. In this version, it's not flies she eats, not in the usual sense. This picture has a great cast: Dirk Diggler as Dracula, Jennifer Welles as Mina, Holly Body as Lucy, Big John Holmes as Van Helsing."

"Why didn't you tell me about this yesterday?"

"I didn't know then."

"But you're the screenwriter. You can't have been hired and written the whole thing to be shot this afternoon."

"I'm the rewriter. Even for the adult industry, their first pass at the script blew dead cats. It was called Dracula Sucks, and boy did it ever. They couldn't lick it, as it were. It's the subject, Dracula. You know what they say about the curse, the way it struck down Coppola in Romania. I've spent the whole day doing a page one rewrite."

Someone shouted, "Quiet on set," and Martin motioned Geneviève to come outside with him to watch the shooting.

"The next scene is Dracula's entrance. He hauls the three vampire bitches-pardon the expression-off Jonathan and, ah, well, you can imagine, satiates them, before tossing them the bodies in a bag."

"I was just offered a role in the scene. I passed."

Martin harrumphed. Unsure about this whole thing, she began to follow.

A movement in an alcove distracted her. A pleasant-faced warm young man sat in there, hunched over a sideboard. He wore evening dress trousers and a bat-winged black cloak but nothing else. His hair was black and smoothed back, with a prominent widow's peak painted on his forehead. For a supposed vampire, he had a decent tan.

He had a rolled-up ten-dollar bill stuck in his nose.

A line of red dust was on the sideboard. He bent over and snuffed it up. She had heard of drac but never seen it.

The effect on the young man was instant. His eyes shone like bloodied marbles. Fang-teeth slid out like switchblades.

"Yeah, that's it," he said. "Instant vamp!"

He flowed upright, unbending from the alcove, and slid across the floor on bare feet. He was warm, wasn't a vampire, but something in between—a dhampire—that wouldn't last more than an hour.

"Where's Dracula?" shouted Boris Adrian. "Has he got the fangs-on yet?"

"I am Dracula," intoned the youth, as much to himself, convincing himself. "I am Dracula!"

As he pushed past her, Geneviève noticed the actor's trousers were held together at the fly and down the sides by strips of Velcro. She could imagine why.

She felt obscurely threatened. Drac-manufactured from vampire blood—was extremely expensive and highly addictive. In her own veins flowed the raw material of many a valuable fangs-on instant vamp fugue. In New York, where the craze came from, vampires had been kidnapped and slowly bled empty to make the foul stuff.

Geneviève followed the dhampire star. He reached out his arms like a wingspread, cloak billowing, and walked across the covered swimming pool, almost flying, as if weightless, skipping over sagging puddles and, without toppling or using his hands, made it over the far edge. He stood at poolside and let the cloak settle on his shoulders.

"I'm ready," he hissed through fangs.

The three fake vampire girls in the gazebo huddled together, a little afraid. They weren't looking at Dracula's face, his hypnotic eyes and fierce fangs, but at his trousers. Geneviève realised there were other properties of drac that she hadn't read about in the newspapers.

The long-haired kid who had spoken to her was working a pulley. A shiny cardboard full moon rose above the gazebo. Other assistants held bats on fishing lines. Boris Adrian nodded approval at the atmosphere.

"Well, Count, go to it," the director ordered. "Action."

The camera began to roll as Dracula strode up to the gazebo, cloak rippling. The girls writhed over the prone guy, Jonathan Harker, and awaited the coming of their dark prince.

"This man is mine," said Dracula, in a Californian drawl that owed nothing to Transylvania. "You all are mine, you vampire bitches, you horny vampire bitches."

Martin silently recited the lines along with the actor, eyes alight with innocent glee.

"You never love," said the least-fanged of the girls, who had short blonde hair, "you yourself have never loved."

"That is not true, as you know well and as I shall prove to all three of you. In succession, and together. Now."

The rip of Velcro preceded a gasp from the whole crew. Dirk Diggler's famous organ was bloodred and angry. She wondered if he could stab a person with it and suck their blood, or was that just a rumour like the Tijuana werewolf show Martin spent his vacations trying to track down.

The "vampire bitches" huddled in apparently real terror.

"Whatever he's taking, I want some of it," breathed Martin.

Later, in an empty all-night diner, Martin was still excited about Debbie Does Dracula. Not really sexually, though she didn't underestimate his prurience, but mostly high on having his words read out, caught on film. Even as "Bram Stroker," he had pride in his work.

"It's a stopgap till the real projects come through," he said, waving a deadly cigarette. "But it's cash in hand, Gené. Cash in hand. I don't have to hock the typewriter. Debbie wants me for the sequel they're making next week, Taste the Cum of Dracula, but I may pass. I've got something up at Universal, near as damn it. A remake of Buck Privates, with Belushi and Dan Aykroyd. It's between me and this one other guy, Lionel Fenn, and Fenn's a drac-head from the East with a burnout date stamped on his forehead. I tell you, Gené, it's adios to "Bram Stroker" and "William Forkner" and "Charles Dickings." You'll be my date for the premiere, won't you? You pretty up good, don't you? When the name Jack Martin means something in this town, I want to direct."

He was tripping on dreams. She brought him down again.

"Why would John Alucard be in bed with Boris Adrian?" she asked.

"And Debbie Griffith," he said. "I don't know. There's an invisible barrier between adult and I. It's like a parallel world. The adult industry has its own stars and genres and awards shows. No one ever crosses. Oh, some of the girls do bit parts. Kelly was in The Toolbox Murders, with Cameo Mitchell."

"I missed that one."

"I didn't. She was the chickie in the bath, who gets it with a nail gun. Anyway, that was a fluke. You hear stories that Stallone made a skin flick once, and that some on-the-skids directors take paying gigs under pseudonyms."

"Like 'Bram Stroker'?"

Martin nodded, in his flow. "But it's not an apprenticeship, not really. Coppola shot nudies, but that was different. Just skin, no sex. Tame now. Nostalgia bait. You've got to trust me, Gené, don't tell anyone, and I mean not anyone, that I'm 'Bram Stroker.' It's a crucial time for me, a knife edge between the big ring and the wash-out ward. I really need this Buck Privates deal. If it comes to it, I want to hire you to scare off Fenn. You do hauntings, don't you?"

She waved away his panic, her fingers drifting through his nicotine cloud.

"Maybe Alucard wants to raise cash quickly?" she suggested.

"Could be. Though the way Debbie tells it, he isn't just a sleeping partner. He originated the whole idea, got her and Boris together, borrowed Dirk from Jack Homer, even-and I didn't tell you this-supplied the bloody nose candy that gave Dracula's performance the added frisson."

It was sounding familiar.

"Did he write the script?" she asked. "The first script?"

"Certainly no writer did. It might be Mr. A. There was no name on the title page."

"It's not a porno movie he wants, not primarily," she said. "It's a Dracula movie. Another one. Yet another one."

Martin called for a coffee refill. The ancient, slightly mouldy character who was the sole staff member at the Nighthawks Diner shambled over, coffee sloshing in the glass jug.

"Look at this guy," Martin said. "You'd swear he was a goddamned reanimated corpse. No offence, Gene, but you know what I mean. Maybe he's a dhamp. I hear they zombie out after a while, after they've burned their bat cells."

Deaf to the discussion, the shambler sloshed coffee in Martin's mug. Here, in Jack Martin's head, there were infinite refills. He exhaled contented plumes of smoke.

"Jack, I have to warn you. This case might be getting dangerous. A friend of mine was killed last night, as a warning. And the police like me for it. I can't prove anything, but it might be that asking about Alucard isn't good for your health. Still, keep your ears open. I know about two John Alucard productions now, and I'd like to collect the set. I have a feeling he's a one-note musician, but I want that confirmed."

"You think he only makes Dracula movies?"

"I think he only makes Dracula."

She didn't know what she meant by that, but it sounded horribly right.

There was night enough left after Martin had peeled off home to check in with the client. Geneviève knew Welles would still be holding court at four in the morning.

He was running footage.

"Come in, come in," he boomed.

Most of the crew she had met the night before were strewn on cushions or rugs in the den, all with a few newcomers, movie brats and law professors and a very old, very grave black man in a bright orange dashiki. Gary, the cameraman, was working the projector.

They were screening the scene she had seen shot, projecting the picture onto the tapestry over the fireplace. Van Helsing tormented by vampire symbols. It was strange to see Welles's huge, bearded face, the luminous skull, the flapping bat and the dripping dagger slide across the stiff, formal image of the mediaeval forest scene.

Clearly, Welles was in midperformance, almost holding a dialogue with his screen self, and wouldn't detach himself from the show so she could report her preliminary findings to him.

She found herself drifting into the yard. There were people there, too. Nico, the vampire starlet, had just finished feeding, and lay on her back, looking up at the stars, licking blood from her lips and chin. She was a messy eater. A too-pretty young man staggered upright, shaking his head to dispel dizziness. His clothes were Rodeo Drive, but last year's in a town where last week was another era. She didn't have to sample Nico's broadcast thoughts to put him down as a rich kid who had found a new craze to blow his trust-fund money on, and her crawling skin told her it wasn't a sports car.

"Your turn," he said to Nico, nagging.

She kept to the shadows. Nico had seen her, but her partner was too preoccupied to notice anyone. The smear on his neck gave Geneviève a little prick of thirst.

Nico sat up with great weariness, the moment of repletion spoiled. She took a tiny paring knife from her clutch purse. It glinted, silvered. The boy sat eagerly beside her and rolled up the left sleeve of her loose muslin blouse, exposing her upper arm. Geneviève saw the row of striped scars she had noticed last night. Carefully, the vampire girl opened a scar and let her blood trickle. The boy fixed his mouth over the wound. She held his hair in her fist.

"Remember, lick," she said. "Don't suck. You won't be able to take a full fangs-on."

His throat pulsed, as he swallowed.

With a roar, the boy let the girl go. He had the eyes and the fangs, even more than Dirk Diggler.

Dracula. He moved fast, a temporary newborn high on all the extra senses and the sheer sense of power.

The dhampire put on wraparound mirror shades, ran razor-nailed hands through his gelled hair and stalked off to haunt the La-La night. Within a couple of hours, he would be a real live boy again. By that time, he could have got himself into all manner of scrapes.

Nico squeezed shut her wound. Geneviève caught her pain. The silver knife would be dangerous if it flaked in the cut. For a vampire, silver rot was like bad gangrene.

"It's not my place to say anything," began Geneviève.

"Then don't," said Nico, though she clearly received what Geneviève was thinking. "You're an elder. You can't know what it's like."

She had a flash that this newborn would never be old. What a pity.

"It's a simple exchange," said the girl. "Blood for blood. A gallon for a scratch. The economy is in our favour. Just like the President says."

Geneviève joined Nico at the edge of the property.

"This vampire trip really isn't working for me," said Nico. "That boy, Julian, will be warm again in the morning, mortal and with a reflection. And when he wants to, he'll be a vampire. If I'm not here, there are others. You can score drac on Hollywood Boulevard for twenty-five dollars a suck. Vampires, stuff, powdered, not from the tap, but it works."

Geneviève tidied Nico's hair. The girl lay on her lap, sobbing silently. She hadn't just lost blood.

This happened when you became an elder. You were mother and sister to the whole world of the undead.

The girl's despair passed. Her eyes were bright, with Julian's blood.

"Let's hunt, Elder, like you did in Transylvania."

"I'm from France. I've never even been to Romania."

Now she mentioned it, that was odd. She'd been almost everywhere else. Without consciously thinking of it, she must have been avoiding the supposed homeland of the nosferatu.

"There are human cattle out there," said Nico. "I know all the clubs. X is playing at the Roxy, you like West Coast punk. And the doorman at After Hours always lets us in, vampire girls. There are so few of us. We go to the head of the line. Powers of fascination."

"Human cattle" was a real newborn expression. This close to dawn, Geneviève was thinking

her cosy trailer and shutting out the sun, but Nico was a race-the-dawn girl, staying out until it was practically light, bleeding her last as the red circle rose in the sky.

She wondered if she should stick close to the girl, keep her out of trouble. Why? She couldn't protect everyone. She barely knew Nico, probably had nothing in common with her.

She remembered Moondoggie. And all the other dead, the ones she hadn't been able to help, hadn't tried to help, hadn't known about in time.

This girl really was none of her business.

"What's that?" said Nico, head darting. There was a noise from beyond the fence at the end of the garden.

Dominating the next property was a three-storey wooden mansion, California cheesecake. Nico might have called it old. Now Geneviève's attention was drawn to it, her night eyes saw how strange the place was. A rusted-out pickup truck was on cinderblocks in the yard, with a pile of ragged tires next to it. The windshield was smashed out, and dried streaks-which any vampire would have scented as human blood, even after ten years-marked the hood.

"Who lives there?" Geneviève asked.

"In-bred backwoods brood," said Nico. "Orson says they struck it rich down in Texas, and moved to Beverly Hills. You know: swimming pools, movie stars..."

"Oil?"

"Chili sauce recipe. Have you heard of Sawyer's Sauce?" Geneviève hadn't. "I guess not. I've taken solid foods since I turned, though if I don't feed for a night or two I get this terrible phantom craving for those really shitty White Castle burgers. I suppose that if you don't get to the market you don't know the brand names."

"The Sawyers brought Texas style with them," Geneviève observed. "That truck's a period piece."

The back porch was hung with mobiles of bones and nail-impaled alarm clocks. She saw a napping chicken, stuffed inside a canary cage.

"What's that noise?" Nico asked.

There was a wasplike buzzing, muted. Geneviève scented burning gas. Her teeth were on edge.

"Power tool," she said. "Funny time of the night for warm folks to be doing carpentry."

"I don't think they're all entirely warm. I saw some gross Grandpaw peeping out the other night, face like dried leather, licking livery lips. If he isn't undead, he's certainly nothing like alive."

There was a stench in the air. Spoiled meat.

"Come on, let's snoop around," said Nico, springing up. She vaulted over the low fence dividing the properties and crept across the yard like a four-legged crab.

Geneviève thought that was unwise, but followed, standing upright and keeping to shadows.

This really was none of her business.

Nico was on the porch now, looking at the mobiles. Geneviève wasn't sure whether it was primitive art or voodoo. Some of the stick-and-bone dangles were roughly man-shaped.

"Come away," she said.

"Not just yet."

Nico examined the back door. It hung open, an impenetrable dark beyond. The buzzing was coming from inside the ramshackle house.

Geneviève knew sudden death was near, walking like a man.

She called to Nico, more urgently.

Something small and fast came, not from inside the house but from the flatbed of the abandoned truck. The shape cartwheeled across the yard to the porch and collided purposefully with Nico. A length of wood pierced the vampire girl's thin chest. A look, more of surprise than pain or horror, froze on her face.

Geneviève felt the thrust in her own heart, then the silence in her mind. Nico was gone, in an instant.

"How do you like your stake, ma'am?"

It was Barbie. Only someone truly witless would think stake puns the height of repartee.

This time, Geneviève wouldn't let her get away.

"Just the time of night for a little leech-on-a-spit," said the Slayer, lifting Nico's deadweight so her legs dangled. "This really should be you, Frenchie. By the way, I don't think you've met Sim's brother, Sidney. Frenchie, Sidney. Sidney, hellbitch creature of the night fit only to be impaled and left to rot in the light of the sun. That's the formalities out of the way."

She threw Nico away, sliding the dead girl off Sidney the Stake. The newborn, mould already on her still-startled face, flopped off the porch and fell to the yard.

Geneviève was still shocked by the passing, almost turned to ice. Nico had been in her mind, barely and with tiny fingers, and her death was a wrench. She thought her skull might be leaking.

"They don't cotton much to trespassers down Texas way," said Barbie, in a bad cowboy accent. "Nor in Beverly Hills, neither."

Geneviève doubted the Sawyers knew Barbie was here.

"Next time, the Overlooker says I can do you, too. I'm wishing and hoping and praying you ignore the warning. You'd look so fine on the end of a pole, Frenchie."

An engine revved, like a signal. Barbie was bounding away, with deerlike elegance.

Geneviève followed.

She rounded the corner of the Sawyer house and saw Barbie climbing into a sleek black Jaguar. In the driver's seat was a man wearing a tweed hunting jacket with matching bondage hood. He glanced backwards as he drove off.

The sports car had vanity plates: OVRLKER1.

Gravel flew as the car sped off down the drive.

"What's all this consarned ruckus?" shouted someone from the house.

Geneviève turned and saw an American gothic family group on the porch. Blotch-faced teenage boy, bosomy but slack-eyed girl in a polka-dot dress, stern patriarch in a dusty black suit, and hulking elder son in a stained apron and crude leather mask. Only the elder generation was missing and Geneviève was sure they were up in rocking chairs on the third storey, peeking through the slatted blinds.

"That a dead'n'?" asked the patriarch, nodding at Nico.

She conceded that it was.

"True dead'n'?"

"Yes," she said, throat catching.

"What a shame and a waste," said Mr. Sawyer, in a tone that made Geneviève think he wasn't referring to a life but to flesh and blood that was highly salable.

"Shall I call the sheriff, Paw?" asked the girl.

Mr. Sawyer nodded gravely.

Geneviève knew what was coming next.

"... there's just one thing I don't understand, miss."

"Lieutenant, if there were 'just one thing' I didn't understand, I'd be a very happy old lady. At the moment, I can't think of 'just one thing' I do understand."

The detective smiled craggily.

"You're a vampire, miss. Like this dead girl, this, ah, Nico. That's right, isn't it?"

She admitted it. Orson Welles had lent her a crow-black umbrella which she was using as a parasol.

"And this Barbie, who again nobody else saw, was, ah, a living person?"

"Warm."

"Warm, yes. That's the expression. That's what you call us."

"It's not offensive."

"That's not how I take it, miss. No, it's that aren't vampires supposed to be faster than a warm person, harder to catch hold of in a tussle?"

"Nico was a newborn, and weakened. She'd lost some blood."

"That's one for the books."

"Not any more."

The detective scratched his head, lit cigar end dangerously near his hair. "So I hear. It's called 'drac' on the streets. I have friends on the Narco Squad. They say it's a worse blight than heroin, it's not illegal yet."

"Where is this going, Lieutenant?"

He shut his notebook and pinned her with his eye.

"You could have, ah, taken Miss Nico? If you got into a fight with her?"

"I didn't."

"But you could have."

"I could have killed the Kennedys and Sanford White, but I didn't."

"Those are closed cases, as far as I'm concerned. This is open."

"I gave you the plate number."

"Yes, miss. OVRLKER1. A Jaguar."

"Even if it's a fake plate, there can't be that many English sports cars in Los Angeles."

"There are, ah, one thousand, seven hundred and twenty-two registered Jaguars. Luxury vehicles are popular in this city, in some parts of it. Not all the same model."

"I don't know the model. I don't follow cars. I just know it was a Jaguar. It had the cat on the bonnet, the hood."

"Bonnet? That's the English expression, isn't it?"

"I lived in England for a long time."

With an Englishman. The detective's sharpness reminded her of Charles, with a witness or a suspect.

Suspect.

He had rattled the number of Jaguars in Greater Los Angeles off the top of his head, with no glance at the prop notebook. Gears were turning in his head.

"It was a black car," she said. "That should make it easier to find."

"Most automobiles look black at night. Even red ones."

"Not to me, Lieutenant."

Uniforms were off, grilling the Sawyers. Someone was even talking with Welles, who had let that Geneviève was working for him. Since the client had himself blown confidentiality, she was in an awkward position; Welles still didn't want it known what exactly she was doing for him.

"I think we can let you go now, miss," said the detective.

She had been on the point of presenting him her wrists for the cuffs.

"There isn't 'just one more thing' you want to ask?"

"No. I'm done. Unless there's anything you want to say."

She didn't think so.

"Then you can go. Thank you, miss."

She turned away, knowing it would come, like a hand on her shoulder or around her heart.

"There is one thing, though. Not a question. More like a circumstance, something that has to be raised. I'm afraid I owe you an apology."

She turned back.

"It's just that I had to check you out, you know. Run you through the books. As a witness, yesterday. Purely routine."

Her umbrella seemed heavier.

"I may have got you in trouble with the state licensing board. They had all your details correct but it seems that every time anyone looked at your license renewal application, they misread the date. As a European, you don't write an open four. It's easy to mistake a four for a nine. They thought you were born in 1916. Wondered when you'd be retiring, in fact. Had you down as a game old girl."

"Lieutenant, I am a game old girl."

"They didn't pull your license, exactly. This is really embarrassing, and I'm truly sorry to have been the cause of it, but they want to, ah, review your circumstances. There aren't any other vampires licensed as private investigators in the state of California, and there's no decision on whether a legally dead person can hold a license."

"I never died. I'm not legally dead."

"They're trying to get your paperwork from, ah, France."

She looked up at the sky, momentarily hoping to burn out her eyes. Even if her original records existed, they'd be so old as to be protected historical documents. Photostats would not be coming over the wire from her homeland.

"Again, miss, I'm truly sorry."

She just wanted to get inside her trailer and sleep the day away.

"Do you have your license with you?"

"In the car," she said, dully.

"I'm afraid I'm going to have to ask you to surrender it," said the detective. "And that until the legalities are settled, you cease to operate as a private investigator in the state of California."

At sunset, she woke to another limbo, with one of her rare headaches. She was used to know what she was doing tonight, and the next night, if not specifically then at least generally. Now, she wasn't sure what she could do.

Geneviève wasn't a detective any more, not legally. Welles had not paid her off, but if she continued working on John Alucard for him she'd be breaking the law. Not a particularly important one, in her opinion... but vampires lived in such a twilight world that it was best to pay taxes on and not park in towaway zones. After all, this was what happened when she drew attention to her

She had two other ongoing investigations, neither promising. She should make contact with her clients, a law firm and an Orange County mother, and explain the situation. In both cases, she had turned up any results and so would not in all conscience be able to charge a fee. She didn't even have that much Welles could use.

Money would start to be a problem around Valentine's Day. The licensing board might have sorted it out by then.

(in some alternate universe)

She should call Beth Davenport, her lawyer, to start filing appeals and lodging complaints. That would cost, but anything else was just giving up.

Two people were truly dead. That bothered her, too.

She sat at her tiny desk, by a slatted window, considering her telephone. She had forgotten to switch her answering machine on before turning in, and any calls that might have come today were lost. She had never done that before.

Should she rerecord her outgoing message, stating that she was (temporarily?) out of business? The longer she was off the bus, the harder it would be to get back.

On TV, suspended cops, disbarred private eyes, and innocent men on the run never dropped a case. And this was Southern California, where the TV came from.

She decided to compromise. She wouldn't work Alucard, which was what Welles had been paying her for. But, as a concerned-indeed, involved-citizen, no law said she couldn't use her talents unpaid to go after the Slayer.

Since this was a police case, word of her status should have filtered down to her LAPD contacts but might not yet have reached outlying agencies. She called Officer Baker, a contact in the Highway Patrol, and wheedled a little to get him to run a license plate for her.

OVRLKERI.

The callback came within minutes, excellent service she admitted was well worth a supper and cocktails one of these nights. Baker teased her a while about that, then came over.

Amazingly, the plate was for a Jaguar. The car was registered in the name of Ernest Ralph Gorse to an address in a town up the coast, Shadow Bay. The only other forthcoming details were that Gorse was a British subject-not citizen, of course-and held down a job as a high-school librarian.

The Overlooker? A school librarian and a cheerleader might seem different species, but they swam in the same tank.

She thanked Baker and rang off.

If it was that easy, she could let the cops handle it. The Lieutenant was certainly sharp enough to run a Gorse down and scout around to see if a Barbie popped up. Even if the detective hadn't believed her, he would have been obliged to run the plate, to puncture her story. Now he was obliged to check it out.

But wasn't it all too easy?

Since when did librarians drive Jaguars?

It had the air of a trap.

She was where the Lieutenant must have been seven hours ago. She wouldn't put the crumpled detective on her list of favourite people, but didn't want to hear he'd run into another of the Sharkey brothers. Apart from the loss of a fine public servant who was doubtless also an exemplary husband, it was quite likely that if the cop sizing her up for two murders showed up dead, she would be even more suitable for framing.

Shadow Bay wasn't more than an hour away.

Welles's final Dracula project came together in 1981, just as the movies were gripped by a big vampire craze. Controversial and slow-building, and shut out of all but technical Oscars, Coppola's Dracula proved there was a substantial audience for vampire subjects. This was the film era of Werner Herzog's Renfield, Jeder fur Sich und die Vampir Gegen Alle, a retelling of the story from the point of the fly-eating lunatic (Klaus Kinski); of Tony Scott's The Hunger, with Catherine Deneuve and David Bowie as New York art patrons Miriam and John Blaylock, at the centre of a famous murder case defended by Alan Dershowitz (Ron Silver); of John Landis's Scream, Macula, Scream, with Eddie Murphy as Dracula's African-get Prince Mamuwalde, searching for his lost bride (Vanity) in New York-best remembered for a plagiarism lawsuit by screenwriter Pat Hobby that forced Paramount to open its books to the auditors; of Richard

Attenborough's bloated, mammoth, Oscar-scooping Varney, with Anthony Hopkins as Sir Francis Varney, the vampire Viceroy overthrown by the Second

Indian Mutiny; of Brian DePalma's remake of Scarface, an explicit attack on the Transylvania Movement, with Al Pacino as Tony Sylvana, a Ceausescu cast-out rising in the booming drac trade and finally taken down by a Vatican army led by James Woods.

Slightly ahead of all this activity, Welles began shooting quietly, without publicity, working at his own pace, underwritten by the last of his many mysterious benefactors. His final script combined elements from Stoker's fiction with historical fact made public by the researches of Raymond McNally and Radu Florescu-associates as far back as D Is for Dracula-and concentrated on the last days of the Count, abandoned in his castle, awaiting his executioners, remembering the betrayals and crimes of his lengthy, weighty life. This was the project Welles called *The Other Side of Midnight*. From sequences filmed as early as 1972, the director culled footage of Peter Bogdanovich as Renfield, while he opted to play not the stick insect vampire but the corpulent slayer, finally gifting the world with his definitive Professor Van Helsing. If asked by the trade press, he made great play of having offered the role of Dracula to Warren Beatty, Steve McQueen, or Robert DeNiro, but this was a conjurer's distraction, for he had fixed on his Count for some years and was now finally able to fit him for his cape and fangs. Welles's final Dracula was to be John Huston.

Gates, *ibid.*

She parked on the street but took the trouble to check out the Shadow Bay High teachers' parking lot. Two cars: a black Jaguar (OVRLKER1), a beat-up silver Peugeot ("I have a French car"). Geneviève checked the Peugeot and found LAPD ID on display. The interior was a mess. She caught the after-whiff of cigars.

The school was as unexceptional as the town, with that faintly unreal movie-set feel that came from newness. The oldest building in sight was put up in 1965. To her, places like this felt temporary.

A helpful map by the front steps of the main building told her where the library was, across a grassy quadrangle. The school grounds were dark. The kids wouldn't be back from their Christmas vacation. And no evening classes. She had checked Gorse's address first and found no one home.

A single light was on in the library, like the cover of a gothic romance paperback.

Cautious, she crossed the quad. Slumped in the doorway of the library was a raincoated bun-

Her heart plunging, she knelt and found the Lieutenant insensible but still alive. He had been bitten badly and bled. The ragged tear in his throat showed he'd been taken the old-fashioned way—a stranglehold from behind, a rending fang bite, then sucking and swallowing. Nonconsensual vampirism, a felony in anyone's books, without the exercise of powers of fascination to cloud the issue. It was hard to mesmerise someone with one eye, though some vampires worked with whispers and could even put the fluence on a blind person.

There was another vampire in Shadow Bay. By the look of the leavings, one of the bad uns. Perhaps that explained Barbie's prejudice. It was always a mistake to extrapolate a general rule from a test sample of one.

She clamped a hand over the wound, feeling the weak pulse, pressing the edges together. Whoever had bitten the detective hadn't even had the consideration to shut off the faucet after glutting themselves. The smears of blood on his coat and shirt collar overrode her civilised impu her mouth became sharp-fanged and full of saliva. That was a good thing. A physical adaption of turning was that her spittle had antiseptic properties. Vampires of her bloodline were evolved for gentle, repeated feedings. After biting and drinking, a full-tongued lick sealed the wound.

Angling her mouth awkwardly and holding up the Lieutenant's lolling head to expose his neck, she stuck out her tongue and slathered saliva over the long tear. She tried to ignore the euphoric if cigar-flavoured buzz of his blood. She had a connection to his clear, canny mind.

He had never thought her guilty. Until now.

"Makes a pretty picture, Frenchie," said a familiar girlish voice. "Classic Bloodsucker 101, vampire and victim. Didn't your father-in-darkness warn you about snacking between meals? You won't be able to get into your party dresses if you bloat up. Where's the fun in that?"

Geneviève knew Barbie wasn't going to accept her explanation. For once, she understood wh

The wound had been left open for her.

"I've been framed," she said around bloody fangs.

Barbie giggled, a teen vision in a red ra-ra skirt, white ankle socks, mutton-chop short-sleeved top, and faux metallic choker. She had sparkle glitter on her cheeks and an Alice band with artificial antennae that ended in hobbling stars.

She held up her stake and said, "Scissors cut paper."

Geneviève took out her gun and pointed it. "Stone blunts scissors."

"Hey, no fair," whined Barbie.

Geneviève set the wounded man aside as carefully as possible and stood up. She kept the gun trained on the Slayer's heart.

"Where does it say vampires have to do kung fu fighting? Everyone else in this country carries a gun, why not me?"

For a moment, she almost felt sorry for Barbie the Slayer. Her forehead crinkled into a frown, her lower lip jutted like a sulky five-year-old's, and tears of frustration started in her eyes. She had a lot to learn about life. If Geneviève got her wish, the girl would complete her education in Tehachap Womens' Prison.

A silver knife slipped close to her neck.

"Paper wraps stone," suaved a British voice.

"Barbie doesn't know, does she? That you're nosferatu?"

Ernest Ralph Gorse, high-school librarian, was an epitome of tweedy middle-aged stuffiness, his stage English that he made Alistair Cooke sound like a Dead End Kid. He arched an elegant eyebrow, made an elaborate business of cleaning his granny glasses with his top-pocket hankie, and gave off a little I'm-so-wicked moue that let his curly fangs peep out from beneath his stiff upper lip.

"No, 'fraid not. Lovely to look at, delightful to know, but frightfully thick, that's our little Barbara."

The Overlooker-"Yes," he had admitted, "bloody silly name, means nothing, just sounds 'cool' to you, you're a twit"-had sent Barbie the Slayer off with the drained detective to call at the hospital ER and the Sheriff's office. Geneviève was left in the library in the custody of Gorse. He had made her sit in a chair, and kept well beyond arm's length.

"You bit the Lieutenant?" she stated.

Gorse raised a finger to his lips and tutted.

"Shush now, old thing, mustn't tell, don't speak it aloud. Jolly bad show to give away the game and all that rot. Would you care for some instant coffee? Ghastly muck, but I'm mildly addicted to it. It's what comes of being cast up on these heathen shores."

The Overlooker potted around his desk, which was piled high with unread and probably unreadable books. He poured water from an electric kettle into an oversize green ceramic apple. Geneviève declined his offer with a headshake. He quaffed from his apple-for-the-teacher mug, and let out an exaggerated ahh of satisfaction.

"That takes the edge off. Washes down cop cut nicotin very nicely."

"Why hasn't she noticed?"

Gorse chuckled. "Everything poor Barbara knows about the tribes of nosferatu comes from me. Of course, a lot of it I made up. I'm very creative, you know. It's always been one of my skills. Charm and persuasion, that's the ticket. The lovely featherhead hangs on my every word. She thinks all vampires are gruesome creatures of the night, demons beyond hope of redemption, frothing beasts fit only to be put down like mad dogs. I'm well aware of the irony, old thing. Some cold evenings, the hilarity becomes almost too much to handle. Oh, the stories I've spun for her, the things she'll believe. I've told her she's the Chosen One, the only girl in the world who can shoulder the burden of the crusade against the forces of evil. Teenage girls adore that I'm-a-secret-Princess twaddle, you know. Especially the Yanks. I copped a lot of it from Star Wars. Bloody awful film but very revealing about the state of the national mind."

Gorse was enjoying the chance to explain things. Bottling up his cleverness had been a trial for him. She thought it was the only reason she was still alive for this performance.

"But what's the point?"

"Originally, expedience. I've been 'passing' since I came to America. I'm not like you, sadly. I can't flutter my lashes and have pretty girls offer their necks for the taking. I really am one of those hunt-and-kill, rend-and-drain sort of nosferatu. I tried the other way, but courtship dances just bore me rigid, and I thought, well, why not? Why not just rip open the odd throat? So, after a few months here in picturesque Shadow Bay, empties were piling up like junk mail. Then the stroke of genius came to me. I could hide behind a Vampire Slayer, and since there were none in sight I made one up. I checked the academic records to find the dimmest dolly bird in school and recruited her for the cause. I killed her lunk of a boyfriend-captain of football team, would you believe it?-and a selection of snack-type teenagers. Then, I revealed to Barbara that her destiny was to be the Slayer. Together we tracked and destroyed that first dread fiend-the school secretary who was nagging me about getting my employment records from Jolly Old England, as it happens-and staked the bloodlustiest bitch. However, it seems she spawned before we got to her, and ever since we've been doing away with her murderous brood. You'll be glad to know I've managed to rid this town almost completely of real estate agents. When the roll is called up yonder, that must count in the plus column, though it's my long-term plan not to be there."

Actually, Gorse was worse than the vampires he had made up. He'd had a choice, and decided to be evil. He worked hard on fussy geniality, modelling his accent and speech patterns on Masterpiece Theatre, but there was ice inside him, a complete vacuum.

"So, you have things working your way in Shadow Bay?" she said. "You have your little puppet theatre to play with. Why come after me?"

Gorse was wondering whether to tell her more. He pulled a half-hunter watch from his waistcoat pocket and pondered. She wondered if she could work her trick of fascination on him. Clearly, he loved to talk, was bored with dissimulation, had a real need to be appreciated. The sensible thing would have been to get this over with, but Gorse had to tell her how brilliant he was. Everything from now had been his own story; now there was more important stuff, and he was wary of going

"Still time for one more story," he said. "One more ghost story."

Click. She had him.

He was an instinctive killer, probably a sociopath from birth, but she was his elder. The silver-bladed letter opener was never far from his fingers. She would have to judge when to jump

"It's a lonely life, isn't it? Ours, I mean. Wandering through the years, wearing out your clothes, lost in a world you never made? There was a golden age for us once, in London when Dracula was on the throne. Eighteen eighty-eight and all that. You, famous girl, did your best to put a stop to it and turned us all back into nomads and parasites when we might have been masters of the universe. Some of us want it that way again, my darling. We've been getting together lately, sort of like a pressure group. Not like those Transylvania fools who want to go back to the castles and the mountains, but like Him, battenning onto a new, vital world, making a place for ourselves. An exact place. He's still our inspiration, old thing. Let's say I did it for Dracula."

That wasn't enough, but it was all she was going to get now.

People were outside, coming in.

"Time flies, old thing. I'll have to make this quick."

Gorse took his silver pig sticker and stood over her. He thrust.

Faster than any eye could catch, her hands locked around his wrist.

"Swift filly, eh?"

She concentrated. He was strong, but she was old. The knife point dimpled her blouse. He tilted back her chair and put a knee on her stomach, pinning her down.

The silver touch was white hot.

She turned his arm and forced it upwards. The knife slid under his spectacles and the point slipped in his left eye.

Gorse screamed, and she was free of him. He raged and roared, fangs erupting from his mouth, two-inch barbs bursting from his fingertips. Bony spars, the beginnings of wings, sprouted through his jacket around the collar and pierced his leather elbow patches.

The doors opened, and people came in. Barbie and two crucifix-waving sheriff's deputies.

The Slayer saw

(and recognised?)

the vampire and rushed across the room, stake out. Gorse caught the girl and snapped her neck, then dropped her in a dead tangle.

"Look what you made me do!" he said to Geneviève, voice distorted by the teeth but echoing from the cavern that was his reshaped mouth. "She's broken now. It'll take ages to make another. She hadn't even got to the full initiation rites. There would have been bleeding, and I was making up something about tantric sex. It would have been a real giggle, and you've spoiled it."

His eye congealed, frothing grey deadness in his face.

She motioned for the deputies to stay back. They wisely kept their distance.

"Just remember," said Gorse, directly to her, "You can't stop Him. He's coming back. And though my best beloved, you will be as sorry a girl as ever drew a sorry breath. He is not big on forgiveness, if you get my drift."

Gorse's jacket shredded, and wings unfurled. He flapped into the air, rising above the first tier of bookshelves, hovering at the mezzanine level. His old-school tie dangled like a dead snake.

The deputies tried shooting at him. She supposed she would have, too.

He crashed through a tall set of windows and flew off, vast shadow blotting out the moon and falling on the bay.

The deputies holstered their guns and looked at her. She wondered for about two minutes whether she should stick with her honesty policy.

Letting a bird flutter in her voice, she said, "That man... he was a v-v-vampire."

Then she did a pretty fair imitation of a silly girl fainting. One deputy checked her heartbeat while she was "out," and was satisfied that she was warm. The other went to call for backup.

Through a crack in her eyelids, she studied "her" deputy. His hands might have lingered a little too long on her chest for strict medical purposes. The thought that he was the type to cop a feel from a helpless girl just about made it all right to get him into trouble by slipping silently out of the library while he was checking out the dead Slayer.

She made it undetected back to her car.

In her trailer, after another day of lassitude, she watched the early evening bulletin on Channel 4. Anchorpersons Karen White and Lew Landers had details of the vampire killing in Shadow Bay. Because the primary victim was a cute teenage girl, it was top story. The wounding of a decorated LAPD veteran-the Lieutenant was still alive, but off the case-also rated a flagged mention. The newscast split-screened a toothpaste commercial photograph of "Barbara Dahl Winters," smiling under a prom queen tiara, and an "artist's impression" of Gorse in giant bat form, with blood tastefully dripping from his fangs. Ernest "Gory" Gorse turned out to be a fugitive from Scotland.

Yard, with a record of petty convictions before he turned and a couple of likely murders since. Considering a mug shot from his warm days, Karen said the killer looked like such a nice fellow, even scowling over numbers, and Lew commented that you couldn't judge a book by its cover.

Geneviève continued paying attention, well into the next item-about a scary candlelight vigil by hooded supporters of Annie Wilkes-and turned the sound on her portable TV set down only when she was sure her name was not going to come up in connection with the Shadow Bay story.

Gorse implied she was targeted because of her well-known involvement in the overthrow of Count Dracula nearly a century ago. But that didn't explain why he had waited until now to give her a hard time. She also gathered from what he had let slip in flirtatious hints that he wasn't the top of the totem pole, that he was working with or perhaps for someone else.

Gorse had said: "You can't stop Him. He's coming back."

Him? He?

Only one vampire inspired that sort of quondam rex que futurus talk. Before he finally died, pulled out of his misery, Count Dracula had used himself up completely. Geneviève was sure of that. He had outlived his era, several times over, and been confronted with his own irrelevance. His true death was just a formality.

And He was not coming back.

A woodcut image of Dracula appeared on television. She turned the sound up.

The newscast had reached the entertainment roundup, which in this town came before major news on other continents. A fluffy-haired woman in front of the Hollywood sign was talking about the latest studio craze, Dracula pictures. A race was on between Universal and Paramount to get their own biopics of the Count to the screens. At Universal, director Joel Schumacher and writer-producer Jane Wagner had cast John Travolta and Lily Tomlin in *St. George's Fire*; at MGM, producer Steven Spielberg and director Tobe Hooper had Peter Coyote and Karen Allen in *Vampiregeist*. There was no mention of Orson Welles-or, unsurprisingly, Boris Adrian-but another familiar name came up.

John Alucard.

"Hollywood dealmakers have often been characterised as bloodsuckers," said the reporter, "but John Alucard is the first actually to be one. Uniquely, this vampire executive is involved in both competing projects, as a packager of the Universal production and as associate producer of the MGM film. Clearly, in a field where there are too few experts to go around, John Alucard is in demand. Unfortunately, Mr. A-as Steven Spielberg calls him-is unable because of his image impairment to grant interviews for broadcast media, but he has issued a statement to the effect that he feels there is room for far more than two versions of the story he characterises as 'the most important of the last two centuries.' He goes on to say, 'There can be no definitive Dracula, but we hope we shall be able to conjure a different Dracula for every person.' For decades, Hollywood stayed away from this hot subject but, with the Francis Coppola epic of a few years ago cropping

on Best of All Time lists, it seems we are due, like the Londoners of 1885, for a veritable invasion of Draculas. This is Kimberley Wells, for Channel 6 KDHB Update News, at the Hollywood sign."

She switched the television off. The whole world, and Orson Welles, knew now what John Alucard was doing, but the other part of her original commission—who he was and where he came from—was still a mystery. He had come from the East, with a long line of credit. A source had told her he had skipped New York ahead of an investigation into insider-trading or junk bonds, but she might choose to put that down to typical Los Angeles cattiness. Another whisper had him living another life up in Silicon Valley as a consultant on something hush-hush President Reagan's people were calling the Strategic Defense Initiative, supposedly Buck Rogers stuff. Alucard could also be a Romanian shoe salesman with a line of great patter who had quit his dull job and changed his name the night he learned his turning vampire wasn't going to take in the long run and set out to become a new Irving Thalberg before he rotted away to dirt.

There must be a connection between the moviemaking mystery man and the high-school librarian Alucard and Gorse. Two vampires in California. She had started asking around about one of them and the other had sent a puppet to warn her off.

John Alucard could not be Count Dracula.

Not yet, at least.

On her way up into the Hollywood Hills, to consult the only real magician she knew, she decided to call on Jack Martin, to see if he wanted to come along on the trip. The movie mage would intimidate him.

The door of Martin's shack hung open.

Her heart skipped. Loose manuscript pages were drifting out of Martin's home, catching on the breeze, and scuttling along Beverly Glen Boulevard, sticking on the manicured hedges of the million-dollar estates, brushing across the white-painted faces of lawn jockeys who had been coal-black until Sidney Poitier made a fuss.

She knocked on the door, which popped a hinge and hung free.

"Jack?"

Had Gorse gotten to him?

She ventured inside, prepared to find walls dripping red and a ruined corpse lying in a nest of torn-up screenplays.

Martin lay on a beat-up sofa, mouth open, snoring slightly. He was no more battered than usual. A Mexican wrestling magazine was open on his round tummy.

"Jack?"

He came awake, blearily.

"It's you," he said, cold.

His tone was like a silver knife.

"What's the matter?"

"As if you didn't know. You're not good to be around, Gené. Not good at all. You don't see but you're a wrecker."

She backed away.

"Someone tipped off the Writers' Guild about the porno. My ticket got yanked; my dues weren't accepted. I'm off the list. I'm off all the lists. All possible lists. I didn't get Buck Privates. They went with Lionel Fenn."

"There'll be other projects," she said.

"I'll be lucky to get Buck's Privates."

Martin had been drinking, but didn't need to get drunk to be in this despair hole. It was where he went sometimes, a mental space like Ensenada, where he slunk to wallow, to soak up the misery and turned it into prose. This time, she had an idea he wasn't coming back; he was going lower than ever and would end up a beachcomber on a nighted seashore, picking broken skulls out of bloody seaweed, trailing bare feet through ink black surf, becoming the exile king of his own dark country.

"It just took a phone call, Gené. To smash everything. To smash me. I wasn't even worth killing. That hurts. You, they'll kill. I don't want you to be near me when it happens."

"Does this mean our premiere date is off?"

She shouldn't have said that. Martin began crying, softly. It was a shocking scene, upsetting to her on a level she had thought she had escaped from. He wasn't just depressed, he was scared.

"Go away, Gené," he said.

This was not a jaunt any more. Jack Martin was as lost to her as Moondoggie, as her license.

How could things change so fast? It wasn't the second week of January, wasn't the Julian 1980s, but everything that had seemed certain last year, last decade, was up for debate or thrown away.

There was a cruelty at work. Beyond Gorse.

She parked the Plymouth and walked across a lawn to a ranch-style bungalow. A cabalist firmament of star signs decorated the mailbox.

The mage was a trim, fiftyish man, handsome but small, less a fallen angel than a fallen cherub. He wore ceremonial robes to receive her into his sanctum sanctorum, an arrangement of literal shrines to movie stars of the 1920s and '30s: Theda Bara, Norma Desmond, Clara Bow, Lina Lamont, Jean Harlow, Blanche Hudson, Myrna Loy. His all-seeing amulet contained a long-lashed black-and-white eye, taken from a still of Rudolph Valentino. His boots were black leather motorcycle gear, with polished chrome buckles and studs.

As a boy, the mage-Kenneth Anger to mortals of this plane-had appeared as the Prince in the 1935 Max Reinhardt film of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. In later life, he had become a filmmaker but for himself not the studios (his "underground" trilogy consisted of *Scorpio Rising*, *Lucifer Rising* and *Dracula Rising*), and achieved a certain notoriety for compiling *Hollywood Babylon*, a collection of scurrilous but not necessarily true stories about the seamy private lives of the glamorous gods and goddesses of the screen. A disciple of Aleister Crowley and Adrian Marcato, he was a genuine movie magician.

He was working on a sequel to *Hollywood Babylon*, which had been forthcoming for some years. It was called *Transylvania Babylon*, and contained all the gossip, scandal, and lurid factoid speculation that had ever circulated about the elder members of the vampire community. Nine months ago, the manuscript and all his research material had been stolen by a couple of acid-headed the employ of a pair of New Orleans-based vampire elders who were the focus of several fascinating, enlightening, and perversely amusing chapters. Geneviève had recovered the materials, though the book was still not published, as Anger had to negotiate his way through a maze of injunctions and magical threats before he could get the thing in print.

She hesitated on the steps that led down to his slightly sunken sanctum. Incense burned before the framed pictures, swirling up to the low stucco ceiling.

"Do you have to be invited?" he asked. "Enter freely, spirit of dark."

"I was just being polite," she admitted.

The mage was a little disappointed. He arranged himself on a pile of harem cushions and indicated a patch of Turkish carpet where she might sit.

There was a very old bloodstain on the weave.

"Don't mind that," he said. "It's from a thirteen-year-old movie extra deflowered by Charlie Chaplin at the very height of the Roaring Twenties."

She decided not to tell him it wasn't hymenal blood (though it was human).

"I have cast spells of protection, as a precaution. It was respectful of you to warn me this interview might have consequences."

Over the centuries, Geneviève had grown out of thinking of herself as a supernatural creature and was always a little surprised to run into people who still saw her that way. It wasn't that they might not be right, it was just unusual and unfashionable. The world had monsters, but she still didn't know if there was magic.

"One man who helped me says his career has been ruined because of it," she said, the wound still fresh. "Another, who was just my friend, died."

"My career is beyond ruination," said the mage. "And death means nothing. As you know, it's a passing thing. The lead-up, however, can be highly unpleasant, I understand. I think I'd opt to skip that experience, if at all possible."

She didn't blame him.

"I've seen some of your films and looked at your writings," she said. "It seems to me that you don't believe motion pictures are rituals."

"Well put. Yes, all real films are invocations, summonings. Most are made by people who don't realise that. But I do. When I call a film *Invocation of My Demon Brother*, I mean it exactly as it sounds. It's not enough to plop a camera in front of a ceremony. Then you only get religious television, God help you. It's in the lighting, the cutting, the music. Reality must be banished, channels opened to the beyond. At screenings, there are always manifestations. Audiences might not realise on a conscious level what is happening, but they always know. Always. The amount of ectoplasm poured into the auditorium by drag queens alone at a West Hollywood revival of a Joan Crawford picture would be enough to embody a minor djinni in the shape of the Bitch Queen, with turban and razor cheekbones and shoulder pads out to here."

She found the image appealing, but also frightening.

"If you were to make a dozen films about, say, the devil, would the *Prince of Darkness* appear?"

The mage was amused. "What an improbable notion! But it has some substance. If you made twelve ordinary films about the devil, he might seem more real to people, become more of a figure in the culture, get talked about and put on magazine covers. But let's face it, the same thing happens if you make one ordinary film about a shark. It's the thirteenth film that makes the difference, that makes work the trick."

"That would be your film? The one made by a director who understands the ritual?"

"Sadly, no. A great tragedy of magic is that the most effective must be worked without conscious thought, without intent. To become a master mage, you must pass beyond the mathematics and become a dreamer. My film, of the devil you say, would be but a tentative summoning, attracting

notice of a spirit of the beyond. Fully to call His Satanic Majesty to Earth would require a work of surpassing genius, mounted by a director with no other intention but to make a wonderful illusion of von Steinberg or a Frank Borzage. That thirteenth film, a Shanghai Gesture or a History Is Made at Night, would be the perfect ritual. And its goaty hero could leave his cloven hoofprint in the cement outside Grauman's Chinese."

In January 1981, Welles began filming *The Other Side of Midnight* on the old Miracle Pictures lot, his first studio-shot-though independently financed-picture since *Touch of Evil* in 1958, and his first "right of final cut" contract since *Citizen Kane*. The ins and outs of the deal have been assessed in entire books by Peter Bart and David J. Skal, but it seems that Welles, after a career of searching, had found a genuine "angel," a backer with the financial muscle to give him the budget and crew he needed to make a film that was truly his vision but also the self-effacing trust to let him have total artistic control of the result.

There were nay-saying voices and the industry was already beginning to wonder whether still in-progress auteur movies like Michael Cimino's *The Lincoln County Wars* or Coppola's *Dracula* follow-up *One from the Heart* were such a great idea, but Welles himself denounced those runaways as examples of fuzzy thinking. As with his very first *Dracula* movie script and *Kane*, *The Other Side of Midnight* was meticulously preplanned and precosted. Forty years on from *Kane*, Welles must have known this would be his last serious chance. A boy wonder no longer, the pressure was on him to produce a "mature masterpiece," a career book-end to the work that had topped so many Best of All Time lists and eclipsed all his other achievements. He must certainly have been aware of the legion of cineastes whose expectations of a film that would eclipse the flashy brilliance of the Coppola version were sky-rocketing. It may be that so many of Welles's other projects were left unfinished deliberately, because their creator knew they could never compete with the imagined masterpieces that were expected of him. With *Midnight*, he had to show all his cards and take the consequences.

The Other Side of Midnight occupied an unprecedented three adjacent soundstages, where Ken Adam's sets for *Bistritz* and *Borgo Pass* and the exteriors and interiors of *Castle Dracula* were constructed. John Huston shaved his beard and let his moustache sprout, preparing for the acting role of his career, cast apparently because Welles admired his predator-patriarch *Noah Cross* (*Chinatown*, 1974). It has been rumoured that the seventy-four-year-old Huston went so far as to have transfusions of vampire blood and took to hunting the Hollywood night with packs of newborn vampire brats, piqued because he couldn't display trophies of his "kills." Other casting was announced, a canny mix of A-list stars who would have worked for scale just to be in a Welles film, long-time associates who couldn't bear to be left out of the

adventure and fresh talent. Besides Welles (*Van Helsing*), the film would star Jack Nicholson (*Jonathan Harker*), Richard Gere (*Arthur Holmwood*), Shelley Duvall (*Mina*), Susan Sarandon (*Lucy*), Cameron Mitchell (*Renfield*), Dennis Hopper (*Quincey*), Jason Robards (*Dr. Seward*), Joseph Cotten (*Mr. Hawkins*), George Coulouris (*Mr. Swales*) and Jeanne Moreau (*Peasant Woman*). The three vampire brides were Anjelica Huston, Marie-France Pisier and then-unknown Kathleen Turner. John Williams was writing the score, Gary Graver remained Welles's preferred cinematographer, Rick Baker promised astounding and innovative special make-up effects and George Lucas's ILM contracted for the optical effects.

There were other vampire movies in pre-production, other *Dracula* movies, but Hollywood was really only interested in the Welles version.

Finally, it would happen.

Gates, *ibid*.

Geneviève parked the Plymouth near Bronson Caverns, in sight of the Hollywood sign, and looked out over Los Angeles, transformed by distance into a carpet of Christmas lights. MGM used to boast "more stars than there were in the heavens," and there they were, twinkling individually, a fallen constellation. Car lights on the freeways were like glowing platelets flowing through neon veins. From up here, you couldn't see the hookers on Hollywood Boulevard, the endless limbo motels and real estate developments, the lost, lonely, and desperate. You couldn't hear the laugh track, or the screams.

It came down to magic. And whether she believed in it.

Clearly, Kenneth Anger did. He had devoted his life to rituals. A great many of them, she had admit, had worked. And so did John Alucard and Ernest Gorse, vampires who thought themselves magical beings. *Dracula* had been another of the breed, thanking Satan for eternal nightlife.

She just didn't know.

Maybe she was still undecided because she had never slipped into the blackness of death. Kate Reed, her Victorian friend, had done the proper thing. Kate's father-in-darkness, Harris, had drunk her blood and given of his own, then let her die and come back, turned. Chandagnac, Geneviève's mediaeval father-in-darkness, had worked on her for months. She had transformed slowly, coming alive by night, shaking off the warm girl she had been.

In the last century, since *Dracula* came out of his castle, there had been a lot of work done on the subject. It was no longer possible to disbelieve in vampires, even in a country like the United States.

which was still comparatively free of them. With the nosferatu in the open, vampirism had to be incorporated into the prevalent belief systems, and this was a scientific age. These days, everyone generally accepted the "explanation" that the condition was a blood-borne mutation, an evolutionary quirk adapting a strain of humankind for survival. But, as geneticists probed ever further, mystery deepened: vampires retained the DNA pattern they were born with as warm humans, and yet they were different creatures. And, despite a lot of cracked theorising, no one had ever convincingly adjusted the laws of optics to account for the business with mirrors.

If there were vampires, there could be magic.

And Alucard's ritual-the mage's thirteen movies-might work. He could come back, worse than ever.

Dracula.

She looked up from the city lights to the stars.

Was the Count out there, on some intangible plane, waiting to be summoned? Reinvigorated spell in the beyond, thirsting for blood, vengeance, power? What might he have learned in hell, that he could bring to the Earth?

She hated to think.

She drove through the studio gates shortly before dawn, waved on by the uniformed guard. She was accepted as a part of Orson's army, somehow granted an invisible armband by her association with the genius.

The Miracle Pictures lot was alive again. "If it's a good picture, it's a Miracle!" had run the self-mocking, double-edged slogan, all the more apt as the so-called fifth-wheel major declined financing mounting Technicolor spectacles like the 1939 version of *The Duelling Cavalier*, with Errol Flynn and Fedora, to financing drive-in dodos like *Machete Maidens of Mora Tau*, with nobody and her un. In recent years, the fifty-year-old soundstages had mostly gone unused as Miracle shot their product in the Philippines or Canada. The standing sets-seen in so many vintage movies-had been torn down to make way for bland office buildings where scripts were "developed" rather than shot. There wasn't even a studio tour.

Now it was different.

Orson Welles was in power, and legions swarmed at his command, occupying every department, beaver- ing away in the service of his vision. They were everywhere: gaffers, extras, carpenters, managers, accountants, makeup men, effects technicians, grips, key grips, boys, best boys, designers, draughtsmen, teamsters, caterers, guards, advisors, actors, writers, planners, plotters, doers, movers, shakers.

Once Welles had said this was the best train set a boy could have. It was very different from naked girls in an empty swimming pool.

She found herself on Stage 1, the Transylvanian village set. Faces she recognised were on the crew: Jack Nicholson, tearing through his lines with exaggerated expressions; Oja Kodar, handing down decisions from above; Debbie W. Griffith (in another life, she presumed), behind the craft services table; Dennis Hopper, in a cowboy hat and sunglasses.

The stage was crowded with onlookers. Among the movie critics and TV reporters were other directors-she spotted Spielberg, DePalma, and a shifty Coppola-intent on kibbitzing on the master, demonstrating support for the abused genius or suppressing poisonous envy. Burt Reynolds, Gene Hackman, and Jane Fonda were dressed up as villagers, rendered unrecognisable by makeup, so desperate to be in this movie that they were willing to be unbilled extras.

Somewhere up there, in a platform under the roof, sat the big baby. The visionary who would give birth to his Dracula. The unwitting magician who might, this time, conjure more than even he bargained for.

She scanned the rafters, a hundred feet or more above the studio floor. Riggers crawled like pirates among the lights. Someone abseiled down into the village square.

She was sorry Martin wasn't here. This was his dream.

A dangerous dream.

The Other Side of Midnight

A Script by Orson Welles

Based on DRACULA, by Bram Stoker

Revised final, January 6, 1981

1: An ominous chord introduces an extreme CU of a crucifix, held in a knotted fist. It is sunset, we hear sounds of village life. We see only the midsection of the village woman holding the crucifix. She pulls tight the rosary-like string from which the cross hangs, like a strangling chord. A scream is heard off camera, coming from some distance. The woman whirls around abruptly to the left, in the direction of the sound. Almost at once the camera pans in this direction, too, and we follow a line of peasant children, strung out hand in hand and dancing, towards the inn, of the Transylvanian Village of Bistritz. We close on a leaded window and pass through-the set opening up to let in the camera-to find

Jonathan Harker, a young Englishman with a tigerish smile, in the centre of a tableau Breughel interior, surrounded by peasant activity, children, animals, etc. He is framed by dangling bulbs of garlic, and the village woman's crucifix is echoed by one that hangs on the wall. Everyone, including the animals, is frozen, shocked. The scream is still echoing from the low wooden beams.

harker: What did I say?

The innkeeper crosses himself. The peasants mutter.

harker: Was it the place? Was it [relishing each syllable] Castle Dra-cu-la?

More muttering and crossing, harker shrugs and continues with his meal. Without a cut, the camera pans around the cramped interior, to find mina, harker's new wife, in the doorway. She is huge-eyed and tremulous, more impressed by "native superstitions" than her husband, but with an inner steel core which will become apparent as Jonathan's outward bluff crumbles under assaults. Zither and fiddle music conveys the bustle of this border community.

mina: Jonathan dear, come on. The coach.

Jonathan flashes a smile, showing teeth that wouldn't shame a vampire, mina doesn't see the beginnings of his viperish second face, but smiles indulgently, hesitant Jonathan pushes away his plate and stands, displacing children and animals. He joins mina and they leave, followed by our snakelike camera, which almost jostles them as they emerge into the twilight. Some of the crowd hold aloft flaming torches, which make shadow-featured flickering masks of the worn peasant faces. Jonathan, hefting a heavy bag, and mina, fluttering at every distraction, walk across the village square to a waiting coach. Standing in their path, a crow-black figure centre-frame, is the village woman, eyes wet with fear, crucifix shining. She bars the harkers' way, like the Ancient Mariner, and extends the crucifix.

village woman: If you must go, wear this. Wear it for your mother's sake. It will protect you.

Jonathan bristles, but mina defuses the situation by taking the cross.

mina: Thank you. Thank you very much.

The woman crosses herself, kisses mina's cheek, and departs. Jonathan gives an eyebrows-raised grimace, and Mina shrugs, placatory.

coachman: All aboard for Borgo Pass, Visaria, and Klausenburg.

We get into the coach with the harkers, who displace a fat merchant and his "secretary" zita, and the camera gets comfortable opposite them. They exchange looks, and mina holds Jonathan's hand. The coach lurches and moves off-it is vital that the camera remain fixed on the harkers to cover the progress from one soundstage to the next, with the illusion of travel maintained by the projection of reflected Transylvanian mountain road scenery onto the window. We have time to notice that the merchant and zita are wary of the harkers; he is middle-aged and balding, and she is a flashy blonde. The coach stops.

coachman (v.o.): Borgo Pass.

Jonathan: Mina, here's our stop.

merchant: Here?

mina (proud): A carriage is meeting us here, at midnight. A nobleman's.

merchants: Whose carriage?

Jonathan: Count Dracula's.

Jonathan, who knows the effect it will have, says the name with defiance and mad eyes. The merchant is terror-struck, and zita hisses

like a cat, shrinking against him. The harkers, and the camera, get out of the coach, which hurries off, the coachman whipping the horses to make a quick getaway. We are alone in a mountain pass, high above the Carpathians. Night sounds: wolves, the wind, bats. The full moon seems for a moment to have eyes, dracula's hooded eyes.

Jonathan (pointing): You can see the castle.

mina: It looks so... desolate, lonely.

Jonathan: No wonder the Count wants to move to London. He must be raging with cabin fever, probably ready to tear his family apart and chew their bones. Like Sawney Beane.

mina: The Count has a family?

Jonathan (delighted): Three wives. Like a Sultan. Imagine how that'll go down in Piccadilly.

Silently, with no hoof or wheel sounds, a carriage appears, the driver a black, faceless shape. The harkers climb in, but this time the camera rises to the top of the coach, where the driver has vanished. We hover as the carriage moves off, a large bat flapping purposefully over the lead horses, and trundles along a narrow, vertiginous mountain road towards the castle. We swoop ahead of the carriage, becoming the eyes of the bat, and take a flying detour from the road, allowing us a false perspective view of the miniature landscape to either side of the full-side road and carriage, passing beyond the thick rows of pines to a whited scrape in the hillside that the harkers do not see, an apparent chalk quarry which we realise consists of a strew of complete human skeletons, in agonized postures, skulls and rib cages broken, the remains of thousands and thousands of murdered men, women, children, and babies. Here and there, skeletons of armoured horses and creatures between wolf or lion and man. This gruesome landscape passes under us, and we close on castle Dracula, a miniature constructed to allow our nimble camera to close on the highest tower and pass down a stone spiral stairway that affords covert access to the next stage...

... and the resting chamber of Dracula and his brides. We stalk through a curtain of cobweb, which parts unharmed, and observe as the

three shroud-clad brides rise from their boxes, flitting about before us. Two are dark and feral, one is blonde and waiflike. We have become Dracula and stalk through the corridors of his castle, brass-bound oaken doors opening before us. Footsteps do not echo, and we pass mirrors that reveal nothing-reversed sets under glass, so as not to catch our crew-but a spindle-fingered, almost animate shadow is cast, impossibly long arms reaching out, pointed head with bat-flared ears momentarily sharp against a tapestry. We move faster and faster through the castle, coming out into the great hallway at the very top of a wide staircase. Very small, at the bottom of the steps, stand Jonathan and Mina, beside their luggage. Sedately, we fix on them and move downwards, our cloaked shadow contracting. As we near the couple, we see their faces: Jonathan awestruck, almost in love at first sight, ready to become our slave; Mina horrified, afraid for her husband, but almost on the point of pity. The music, which has passed from lusty human strings to ethereal theremin themes, swells, conveying the ancient, corrupt, magical soul of Dracula. We pause on the steps, six feet above the harkers, then leap forwards as Mina holds up the crucifix, whose blinding light fills the frame. The music climaxes, a sacred choral theme battling the eerie theremin.

2: CU on the ancient face, points of red in the eyes, hair, and moustaches shocks of pure white, pulling back to show the whole stick-thin frame wrapped in unrelieved black.

the count: I... am... Dracula.

Welles had rewritten the first scenes-the first shot-of the film to make full use of a new gadget called a Louma crane, which gave the camera enormous mobility and suppleness. Combined with breakaway sets and dark passages between stages, the device meant that he could open *The Other Side of Midnight* with a single tracking shot longer and more elaborate than the one he had pulled off in *Touch of Evil*.

Geneviève found Welles and his cinematographer on the road to Borgo Pass, a full-size mock dirt track complete with wheel ruts and milestones. The night-black carriage, as yet not equipped with a team of horses, stood on its marks, the crest of Dracula on its polished doors. To either side were forests, the nearest trees half life-size, and those beyond getting smaller and smaller as they stretched out to the studio backdrop of a Carpathian night. Up ahead was Dracula's castle, a nine-foot-tall edifice, currently being sprayed by a technician who looked like a colossal man, grime and fogging the battlements.

The two men were debating a potentially thorny moment in the shot, when the camera would be detached from the coach and picked up by an aerial rig. Hanging from the ceiling was a contraption that looked like a Wright brothers-Georges Méliès collaboration, a man-shaped flying frame with a camera hooked onto it, and a dauntless operator inside.

She hated to think what all this was costing.

Welles saw her, and grinned broadly.

"Gené, Gené," he welcomed. "You must look at this cunning bit of business. Even if I do say myself, it's an absolute stroke of genius. A simple solution to a complex problem. When *Midnight* comes out, they'll all wonder how I did it."

He chuckled.

"Orson," she said, "we have to talk. I've found some things out As you asked. About Mr. Alucard."

He took that aboard. He must have a thousand and one mammoth and tiny matters to see to, one more could be accommodated. That was part of his skill as a director, being a master strategist as well as a visionary artist.

She almost hated to tell him.

"Where can we talk in private?" she asked.

"In the coach," he said, standing aside to let her step up.

The prop coach, as detailed inside as out, creaked a lot as Welles shifted his weight. She wondered if the springs could take it.

She laid out the whole thing.

She still didn't know who John Alucard was, though she supposed him some self-styled last disciple of the King Vampire, but she told Welles what she thought he was up to.

"He doesn't want a conjurer," Welles concluded, "but a sorcerer, a magician."

Geneviève remembered Welles had played Faustus on stage.

"Alucard needs a genius, Orson," she said, trying to be a comfort.

Welles's great brows were knit in a frown that made his nose seem like a baby's button. This too great a thing to get even his mind around.

He asked the forty-thousand-dollar question: "And do you believe it will work? This conjuring Dracula?"

She dodged it. "John Alucard does."

"Of that I have no doubt, no doubt at all," rumbled Welles. "The colossal conceit of it, the enormity of the conception, boggles belief. All this, after so long, all this can be mine, a real char to, as the young people so aptly say, do my thing. And it's part of a Black Mass. A film to raise devil himself. No mere charlatan could devise such a warped, intricate scheme."

With that, she had to agree.

"If Alucard is wrong, if magic doesn't work, then there's no harm in taking his money and making my movie. That would truly be beating the devil."

"But if he's right..."

"Then I, Orson Welles, would not merely be Faustus, nor even Prometheus, I would be Pandora, unloosing all the ills of the world to reign anew. I would be the father-in-darkness of a veritable B Lucifer."

"It could be worse. You could be cloning Hitler."

Welles shook his head.

"And it's my decision," he said wearily. Then he laughed, so loud that the interior of the property carriage shook as with a thunderbolt from Zeus.

She didn't envy the genius his choice. After such great beginnings, no artist of the twentieth century had been thwarted so consistently and so often. Everything he had made, even Kane, was compromised as soon as it left his mind and ventured into the marketplace. Dozens of unfinished, unmade films, unstaged theatrical productions, projects stolen away and botched by lesser talents, often with Welles still around as a cameo player to see the potential squandered. And here, at the end of his career, was the chance to claw everything back, to make good on his promise, to be a boy wonder again, to prove at last that he was the king of his world.

And against that, a touch of brimstone. Something she didn't even necessarily believe.

Great tears emerged from Welles's clear eyes and trickled into his beard. Tears of laughter.

There was a tap at the coach door.

"All ready on the set now, Mr. Welles," said an assistant.

"This shot. Gene," said Welles, ruminating, "will be a marvel, one for the books. And it'll come under budget. A whole reel, a quarter of an hour, will be in the can by the end of the day. Months of planning, construction, drafting, and setting up. Everything I've learned about the movies since 1915. It'll all be there."

Had she the heart to plead with him to stop?

"Mr. Welles," prompted the assistant.

Suddenly firm, decided, Welles said, "We take the shot."

On the first take, the sliding walls of the Bistriz Inn jammed, after only twenty seconds of exposure. The next take went perfectly, snaking through three stages, with more than a hundred performers in addition to the principles and twice that many technicians focusing on fulfilling the vision of one great man. After lunch, at the pleading of Jack Nicholson—who thought he could do better—Welles put the whole show on again. This time, there were wobbles as the flying camera wobbled momentarily out of control, plunging towards the toy forest, before the operator (pilot?) regained balance and completed the stunt with a remarkable save.

Two good takes. The spontaneous chaos might even work for the shot.

Geneviève had spent the day just watching, in awe.

If it came to a choice between a world without this film and a world with Dracula, she didn't know which way she would vote. Welles, in action, was a much younger man, a charmer and a tyrant, cheerleader and a patriarch. He was everywhere, flirting in French with Jeanne Moreau, the peasant woman, and hauling ropes with the effects men. Dracula wasn't in the shot, except as a subjective camera and a shadow puppet, but John Huston was on stage for every moment, when he could have been resting in his trailer, just amazed by what Welles was doing, a veteran as impressed as parvies like Spielberg and DePalma, who were taking notes like trainspotters in locomotive heaven.

Still unsure about the outcome of it all, she left without talking to Welles.

Driving up to Malibu, she came down from the excitement.

In a few days, it would be the Julian 1980s. And she should start working to get her license back. Considering everything, she should angle to get paid by Welles, who must have enough of John Alucard's money to settle her bill.

When she pulled into Paradise Cove, it was full dark. She took a moment after parking the car to listen to the surf, an eternal sound, pre- and posthuman.

She got out of the car and walked towards her trailer. As she fished around in her bag for her keys, she sensed something that made quills of her hair.

As if in slow motion, her trailer exploded.

A burst of flame in the sleeping section spurted through the shutters, tearing them off their frame and then a second, larger fireball expanded from the inside as the gas cylinders in the kitchen caught.

rending the chromed walls apart, wrecking the integrity of the vessel.

The light hit her a split-second before the noise.

Then the blast lifted her off her feet and threw her back, across the sandy lot.

Everything she owned rained around her in flames.

After a single day's shooting, Orson Welles abandoned *The Other Side of Midnight*. Between 1981 and his death in 1985, he made no further films and did no more work on such protracted projects as *Don Quixote*. He made no public statement about the reasons for his walking away from the film, which was abandoned after John Huston, Steven Spielberg and Brian DePalma in succession refused to take over the direction.

Most biographers have interpreted this willful scuppering of what seemed to be an ideal, indeed impossibly perfect, setup as a final symptom of the insecure, self-destructive streak that had always co-existed with genius in the heart of Orson Welles. Those closest to him, notably Oja Kodar, have argued vehemently against this interpretation and maintained that there were pressing reasons for Welles's actions, albeit reasons which have yet to come to light or even be tentatively suggested.

As for the exposed film, two full reels of one extended shot, it has never been developed and, due to a financing quirk, remains sealed up, inaccessible, in the vaults of a bank in Timisoara, Romania. More than one cineaste has expressed a willingness to part happily with his immortal soul for a single screening of those reels. Until those reels, like *Rosebud* itself, can be discovered and understood, the mystery of Orson Welles's last, lost *Dracula* will remain.

Gates, *ibid.*

"Do you know what's the funny side of the whole kit and kaboodle," said Ernest Gorse. "I don't even think it would work. Johnny Alucard has big ideas, and he is certainly making something of himself on the coast, but this 'Elvis lives' nonsense is potty. Then again, you never know with the dear old Count. He's been dead before."

She was too wrung out to try to get up yet.

Gorse, in a tweed ulster and fisherman's hat, leaned on her car, scratching the finish with the claws of his left hand. His face was demonised by the firelight.

Everything she owned.

That's what it had cost her.

"And, who knows, maybe Orson wasn't the genius?" suggested Gorse. "Maybe it was Boris Adrian. Alucard backed all those Dracula pictures equally. Perhaps you haven't thwarted him after all. Perhaps He really is coming back."

All the fight was out of her. Gorse must be enjoying this.

"You should leave the city, maybe the state," he said. "There is nothing here for you, old thing. Be thankful we've left you the motor. Nice roadboat, by the way, but it's not a Jag, is it? Consider the long lines, all the chrome, the ostentatious muscle. D'you think the Yanks are trying to prove something? Don't trouble yourself to answer. It was a rhetorical question."

She pushed herself up on her knees.

Gorse had a gun. "Paper wraps stone," he said. "With silver foil."

She got to her feet, not brushing the sand from her clothes. There was ash in her hair. People came out of the other trailers, fascinated and horrified. Her trailer was a burning shell.

That annoyed her, gave her a spark.

With a swiftness Gorse couldn't match, she took his gun away from him. She broke his wrist, tore off his hat, too. He was surprised in a heart-dead British sort of way, raising his eyebrows as they would go. His quizzical, ironic expression begged to be scraped off his face, but it would just grow back crooked.

"Jolly well done," he said, going limp. "Really super little move. Didn't see it coming at all."

She could have thrown him into the fire, but just gave his gun to one of the onlookers, the Dude, with instructions that he was to be turned over to the police when they showed up.

"Watch him, he's a murderer," she said. Gorse looked hurt. "A common murderer," she elaborated.

The Dude understood and held the gun properly. People gathered round the shrinking vampire, holding him fast. He was no threat any more: he was cut, wrapped, and blunted.

There were sirens. In situations like this, there were always sirens.

She kissed the Dude good-bye, got into the Plymouth, and drove north, away from Hollywood along the winding coast road, without a look back. She wasn't sure whether she was lost or free.