

ELOISE OU LETTRES DE DEUX AMANS HABITANS DUNE PETITE VILLE AU PIED D

Exactly. The shock. The devastating loss. Junior felt it now, anew, and was afraid he might betray himself with tears, although he seemed to be done with vomiting..No time for horror, disgust. Every second mattered now, and every minute might cost another life.."Two weeks to go. I'm not going to miss that. I've cleared all appointments off my calendar."Dr. Lipscomb inclined his head slightly toward the pianist, in the manner of a stem headmaster about to emphasize a lesson with a sharp twist of the offending boy's ear. "Miss White and the baby will have vacated these premises by the end of the week-unless you insist on bothering them with your chatter. For every minute you harass them, their departure will be extended one day."He found nothing especially gratifying, switched off the lights, and moved on to the living room. If Cain was coming home, he could glance up from the street and see lights ablaze here, so Vanadium resorted to a small flashlight, always carefully hooding the lens with one hand..With no job to return to, he dawdled over lunch. He was actually tumescent with a growing sense of freedom that was as thrilling as sex..He rolled his head back and forth on the pillow. "Nope. It's still just something you gotta feel."An SFPD patrol car swept past, its siren silent, the rack of emergency beacons flashing on its roof..THIS IS THE FIRST PAGE of the Book of the Dark, written some six hundred years ago in Berila, on Enlad:Whereas Paul had been confounded in his desire to express his admiration for Salk, he was able to speak about Perri at length and with ease. Her wit, her heart, her wisdom, her kindness, her beauty, her goodness, her courage were the threads in a narrative tapestry that Pad could have continued weaving for all the rest of his days. Since her death, he hadn't been able to talk about her with anyone he knew, because his friends tended to focus on him, on his suffering, when he wanted them only to understand Perri better, to realize what an exceptional person she had been. He wanted her to be remembered, after he was gone, wanted her grace and her fortitude to be recalled and respected. She was too fine a woman to leave without a ripple in her wake, and the thought that her memory might pass away with Paul himself was anguishing..He surprised himself by sitting up in bed and shouting, "Shut up, shut up, shut up!"Junior couldn't leave the dead man in the hall and hope to have any quality time with Celestina..Junior's attorney-Simon Magusson--insisted upon full disclosure of maintenance records and advisories relating to the fire tower and to other forest-service structures for which the state and the county had sole or joint custodial responsibility. If a wrongful--death suit was filed, this information would have to be divulged anyway during normal disclosure procedures prior to trial, and since maintenance logs and advisories were of public record, Hisscus and Knacker and Nork agreed to provide what was requested..He already had the pistol he had taken from Frieda Bliss's collection, but it didn't come with a sound-suppressor. He was preparing for all contingencies. Focus.."Retinoblastoma is usually unilateral," Dr. Chan continued, "occurring in one eye. Bartholomew has tumors in both."Holding on to the jamb with one hand, Barty leaned across the threshold, listening to the day. Birds. Softly rustling leaves. Nobody on the porch. Even trying hard to be quiet, people always made some little noise..Holding the pistol, fully extending his right arm in execution style, the gunman approached the fallen minister..Among themselves, the authorities spoke more often than not in murmurs. Or perhaps Junior was too distracted to hear them clearly.."I believe I'll just wait here until Mr. Cain wakes," Vanadium said. "I've nothing more pressing to do."Agnes held a smile as best she could, determined that her son's final glimpse of her face would not leave him with a memory of her despair.."I wouldn't just whack anyone, not even a worm bucket like Cain, any more than I would commit suicide. Remember, I believe in eternal consequences."Raise high the candlestick. In spite of the masking music, breathe shallowly and through the mouth. Remain poised, ready..Junior actually raised his trembling left hand to his ear, expecting to find the quarter tucked in the auditory canal, held between the tragus and the antitragus, waiting to be plucked with a flourish..As he said cards, the magician turned a knowing look toward Edom, eliciting from him a responding frown of puzzlement.."You look very, very handsome this morning, Mr. Barty, " squeaked Pixie Lee, who was something of a flirt. "You look like a big movie star."We want the scary one, 'specially if it has spiders, Pixie Lee said squeakily but defiantly..Finally sleeping, he had anxiety dreams of being in a public rest room, overcome by urgent need, only to find that every stall was occupied by someone he had killed, all of them vengefully determined to deny him a chance for dignified relief..In the motel office, Junior paid for another night in advance. His preference in lodgings didn't run to greasy carpeting, cigarette-scarred furniture, and the whispery scuttling of cockroaches in the dark, but though feeling better, he was too tired and shaky to drive..Dropped, the wineglass had shattered. But the bottle of Merlot had survived again, rolling across the vinyl-tile floor until it bumped gently against the base of a cabinet..AGNES ALWAYS ENJOYED Christmas Eve dinner with Edom and Jacob, because even they tempered their pessimism on this night of nights. Whether the season touched their hearts or they wanted even more than usual to please their sister, she didn't know. If gentle Edom spoke of killer tornadoes or if dear Jacob was reminded of massive explosions, each dwelt not on horrible death, as usual, but on feats of courage in the midst of dire catastrophe, recounting astonishing rescues and miraculous escapes..Barty read aloud as Agnes drove, because she'd enjoyed the novel only from page 104. He wanted to share with her the exploits of Jim and Frank and their Martian companion, Willis.."Wait," said Deed, holding out one hand either beseechingly or to block the door..He didn't allow himself to ponder why Vanadium had come here or what relationship might have existed between the cop and Victoria. All that was for later consideration, after he had dealt with this unholy mess.."I hope it will," the physician said, but his emphasis was too solidly on the word hope..As though the blush were transmitted by a virus, Junior caught the primrose-pink contagion from the pianist..Hope became easier to sustain when late 1966 and 1967 brought the biggest advance in women's fashions since the invention of the sewing needle: the miniskirt, and then the micromini. Already, Mary Quant-of all things, a British designer-had conquered England and Europe with her splendid

creation; now she brought America out of the dark ages of psychopathic modesty..On the fourth floor, at Dr. Klerkle's suite, the hall door stood ajar. Past office hours, the small waiting room was deserted..AFTER SPENDING Wednesday as a tourist, Junior began to look for a suitable apartment on Thursday. In spite of his new wealth, he did not intend to pay hotel-room rates for an extended period..Junior took one of the boxed guns, a 9-mm semiautomatic. Months would probably pass before she noticed the pistol missing from the back of her closet, and by then she wouldn't know who had taken it..Crossing Spruce Hills with John, Paul, George, Ringo, and dead Thomas, Junior headed back toward Victoria's place, where Sinatra was no longer singing.. "Love you," Wally said, and Celestina repeated it, and he said, "I'm gonna stand in the hall till I hear you set both locks." When the third knave of spades appeared, Edom said to Maria, "What kind of enemy does three in a row describe?". Turning in circles, he tipped his head back, presenting his face to the streaming sky, laughing..At the beginning of his third month, instead of at the end of his fifth, he was combining vowels and consonants: "ba-ba-ba, ga-ga-ga, la-la-la, ca-ca-ca." Into Barty's darkness came light that he had not sought. He saw his smiling Mary on his lap as she lowered her hands from his temples, saw the faces of his family, the table set with Christmas decorations and many candles flickering..Sometimes Barty could be fierce in his independence-his mother told him so-and now he rebuffed Angel too sharply. "I don't want to be waited on. I'm not helpless, you know. I can get sodas myself" By the time he reached the doorway, he felt sorry for his tone, and he looked back toward where the window seat must be. "Angel?". Celestina dropped to one knee in front of Angel, to tie the drawstrings of the hood under the girl's chin..Somehow, Vanadium's malevolent spirit was also to blame for Junior's failure to find a new heart mate, in spite of all the women he'd been through. Undoubtedly, when Bartholomew was dead and Vanadium vanquished with him, romance and true love would bloom..During the following ten days, he withdrew money from several accounts. He converted selected paper assets into cash, as well..Beautiful she was, both of face and form, even with her mouth gaping wide and her eyes rolled back in her skull. How bright her future might have been if she had not chosen to deceive. A tease was, in essence, a deceiver-promising what she never intended to deliver.. "Would you pretend to wake up if I tried to smother you?" asked Detective Vanadium..Sometimes he thought he walked for Perri, using the steps she had stored up and never taken, giving expression to her unfulfilled yearning to travel. At other times, he thought he walked for the solitude that allowed him to remember their life in fine detail-or to forget. To find peace--or seek adventure. To gain understanding through contemplation---or to scrub all thought from his mind. To see the world or to be rid of it. Perhaps he hoped that coyotes would stalk him through a bleak twilight or a mountain lion set upon him on a hungry dawn, or a drunk driver run him down..Junior had expected these singular creatures, and he needed them to be as monstrous as they had always been in the past. Nonetheless, he shrank back against his pillows in dismay when they exploded into the hospital room. Their faces were as fierce as those of painted cannibals coming off a fast. They gestured emphatically, spitting expletives along with tiny bits of lunch dislodged from their teeth by the force of their condemnations..After a hesitation, she said, "You're the boogeyman, except when I saw you, I was hiding under the bed where you're supposed to be." Before he searched the bedroom, Vanadium walked quickly back through the rooms that he had already inspected, suddenly remembering the three bizarre paintings of which Nolly, Kathleen, and Sparky had spoken, and wondering how he could have overlooked them. They were not here. He was able to locate, however, the places on the walls where the art works had hung, because the nails still bristled from the pocket plaster, and picture hooks dangled from the nails..In the top drawer, in addition to the expected items, Tom Vanadium found a gallery brochure for an art exhibition. In the hooded flashlight beam, the name Celestina White seemed to flare off the glossy paper as though printed in reflective ink..While you're trying to decide, hand me a knife, and I'll cut your jugular you brainless medical-school dropout..Maria gathered up the four jacks and tore them in thirds. She put the twelve pieces in the breast pocket of her blouse. "I buy to you new cards, but no more ever can you to be having these." Eleven years later, a few months after marrying Agnes, Joey mysteriously invited Edom to accompany him on "a little drive," and took his bewildered brother-in-law to a nursery. They returned home with fifty pound bags of special mulch, jars of plant food, and an array of new tools. Together, they stripped the sod from the side yard, turned the soil, and prepared the ground for the rich variety of hybrid starter plants that were delivered the following week..Although to Paul this was no more than childish chatter, Tom knew at once that the girl referred to his explanation for why he wasn't sad about his damaged face: the salt and pepper shakers representing two Toms, the hit-and-run rhinoceros, the different worlds all in one place. "Yes, Angel. That's something like what I was talking about." "Really, Angel," Barty said with genuine concern, "it might be scary. I got another one we could listen to, if you want." "This momentous day," Thomas Vanadium said quietly, stiff gazing into the grave, "seems full of terrible endings. But like every day, it's actually full of nothing but beginnings." Both angry and mortified, yet still fearful, a walking multimedia collage of emotions, Junior left the gallery..Perhaps this particular worry was not ordinary maternal concern. If a sixth sense is at work in all of us, then perhaps subconsciously Apes was aware of the tragedy to come: the tumors, the surgery, the blindness.. "Salt water would be too cumbersome anyway. He'd have to drink a lot of it shortly before he heaved, but he was surrounded by cops with good reason to keep an eye on him. Does ipecac come in capsule form?" "We have dams, though," said Jacob, gesturing with his fork. "The Johnstown Flood, 1889. Pennsylvania, sure, but it could happen here. And that was a one, let me tell you. The South Fork Dam broke. Wall of water seventy feet high totally destroyed the city. Your tornado killed almost seven hundred, but my dam killed two thousand two hundred and nine. Ninety-nine entire families were swept from the earth. Ninety-eight children lost both parents." Needlepoint provided no sanctuary. Junior's hands trembled just badly enough to make accurate stitchery impossible..A shiver of awe traveled Celestina's spine, because she knew what the physician's next words would surely be..He hadn't lied to his mother. She assumed that by some quantum magic, he had regained his

sight permanently, and that this came with no cost. He merely allowed her to go to her rest with the comforting misapprehension that her son had been freed from darkness.. "Loved her? Of course I loved her. Naomi was beautiful and so kind ... and funny. She was the best ... the best thing that ever happened to me." In his apartment once more, enjoying a cognac and a handful of pistachios as Monday changed to Tuesday, he decided that he should make 'preparations for the possibility that he might one day leave incriminating evidence in spite of his precautions. He ought to convert a portion of his assets into easily portable and anonymous wealth, like gold coins and diamonds. Establishing two or three alternate identities, with documentation, also would be wise.. Although not quite as young as Bavol Poriferan, this artist was equally adored by critics and widely regarded as a genius. He went by a single and mysterious name, Sklent, and in the publicity photo of him that was posted in the gallery, he looked dangerous.. The poster announced an upcoming show, titled "This Momentous Day," by the young artist calling herself Celestina White. Dates for the exhibition were Friday, January 12, through Saturday, January 27.. At Tom Vanadium's request, the taxi dropped him one block from his new-and temporary-home shortly before ten o'clock in the evening.. Eye to eye with Tom, Celestina herself did some clear-seeing. "You're special, too, in lots of obvious ways. But like Angel, you're special in some secret way ... aren't you?" "Sometimes it's sad here, Mommy. But it's not sad every place you are. Lots of places, Daddy's with you and me, and we're happier, and everything's okay." The maniac kicked once more, but because of the bracing dresser, the door wouldn't budge, so he kicked harder, again without success.. Unobtrusively, Junior followed the musician across the large front room, but by an indirect arc, using the babbling bourgeoisie for cover.. He'd listened to the message and thought it incomprehensible, of no import. Suddenly, tardy intuition told him that it could not have been any more important to him if it had been dead Naomi calling from beyond the grave to leave testimony for the detective.. "Tame him or bury him," said Losen, and turned to more important matters.. Junior considered slipping quietly around the house, peering in windows, to be sure she was alone, before approaching directly. If she saw him, however, his wonderful surprise would be spoiled.. Junior worried that he might not locate the correct Dumpster among the many. Yet he didn't switch on the flashlight, suspecting that he would be better able to find his way if the conditions of darkness and fog were exactly as they had been earlier. In fact, this proved to be the case, and he instantly recognized the hulking Dumpster when he came upon it.. For a long time, she stood beside the bed, holding his hand, confident that on some level he was aware of her presence, though he gave no indication whatsoever that he knew she was there.. "Take care you don't beat evil into him," said his aunt.. When she tried to say bow, the how of speech eluded her, and she sat as mute as if no words had ever passed her lips before.. Although he was seventy-six, Tom still worked for Pie Lady Services. They had no set retirement age for staff, and Father Tom expected to die at his work. "And if it's a pie-caravan day, just leave my old carcass where I drop until you make all the deliveries. I won't be responsible for anyone missing a promised pie." Junior shuddered. Vanadium hadn't invented the name. It had genuine if inexplicable resonance with Junior that had nothing to do with the detective.. He'd never taken too much from any one game. He was a discreet thief, charming his victims with amusing patter. Because he was so ingratiating and seemed only mildly lucky, no one begrudged him his winnings. Soon, he was more flush than he'd ever been as a magician.. THOUGH OTHERS MIGHT see magic in the world, Edom was enthralled only by mechanism: the great destructive machine of nature grinding everything to dust. Yet wonder suddenly bloomed in him at the sight of the ace bearing his nephew's name.. Celestina, Grace, even Tom himself, had taken extraordinary measures to leave no slightest trail. Those very few authorities who knew how to reach Tom and, through him, the others, were acutely aware that his whereabouts and phone number must be tightly guarded.. Caution discarded, Junior went inside, for the same reason that a dedicated opera aesthete might once a decade attend a country-music concert: to confirm the superiority of his taste and to be amused by what passed for music among the great unwashed. Some might call it slumming.. By the time the family was ushered out, protesting, at the end of evening visiting hours, Junior hadn't succumbed to their pressure. If his conversion was to appear convincingly reluctant, he would have to resist them for at least another few days.. After nudging the door shut with his shoulder, Barty carried the sodas out of the kitchen and forward along the hall. Pausing at the livingroom archway, he said, "Uncle Jacob?" Junior continued east, weaving through the horde, convinced that he could hear the ghost cop's footsteps distinct from the tramping noise made by the legions of the living, penetrating the grumble and the bleat of traffic. Hollow, the dead man's tread echoed not only in Junior's ears but also through his body, in his bones.. Every mother also believes that her baby is smarter than other babies. Sadly, time and the child's choices in life usually require her to adjust her opinion as she never will in the matter of physical beauty.. Besides, even before he had fully turned on his charm, before he had shown her that a ride on the Junior Cain love machine would make other men seem forever inadequate, Renee was so hot for him that it might have been wise to open a bottle of champagne to douse her when spontaneous combustion destroyed her Chanel suit.. "It's there even when you read to me now. The sad feeling, I mean. It changes the story, makes it not as good, because I can't pretend I don't hear how sad you are." When he woke, he was in a hospital bed, his upper body slightly elevated. The only illumination was provided by a single window: an ashen light too dreary to be called a glow, trimmed into drab ribbons by the.. He could recall clearly when he had known that he would marry her: during his first year of college, when he'd returned home for the Christmas break. Away at school, he had missed her every day, and the moment that he saw her again, an abiding tension left him, and he felt at peace for the first time in months.. In the bedroom once more, before poring through the contents of the nightstand drawers, the dresser drawers, and the closet, he looked in the adjacent bathroom, switched on the light because there was no window-and found Bartholomew on a wall, slashed and punctured, disfigured by hundreds of wounds. Wally parked the Buick at the curb in front of the house in which he lived, and when Celestina slid across the car seat to the passenger's door, he said, "No, wait here. I'll fetch Angel and drive the two of

you home." He was a pretty good detective, but as regarded the minutiae of daily life, he wasn't as organized as he would like to be. He never remembered to set aside his holey socks for darning; and once he had worn a hat with a bullet hole in it for nearly a year before he'd at last thought to buy a new one. "If you don't, your feeling gland isn't working. Want me to read you to sleep?" Junior had hoped not to be recognized by anyone at this affair. He regretted that he hadn't stuck to his original plan, maintaining surveillance of the gallery from his parked car. This was not a ghost. This was not a walking dead man. This was something else, but until he knew what it was, who it was, the only person he could possibly look for was Vanadium. After she flushed, Angel stood on a stepstool and washed her hands at the sink. The word need, instead of want, moved Paul to follow the doctor across the coffee shop. Minutes later, once more in a corridor conference with Dr. Daines, she was forced to temper her new optimism. "You should call San Francisco police, have them put your place under surveillance and nail him if he turns up." even allow himself as much as a lascivious wink or a quick caress of Victoria's hand. Vanadium's wounds were too grievous to pass for accidental injuries. Even if there were some way to disguise them through clever staging, no one would believe that Victoria had died in a freak fall and that Vanadium, rushing to her side, had slipped and tumbled and sustained mortal head injuries, as well. Such a strong whiff of slapstick would put even the Spruce Hills police on to the scent of murder. So runs the water away, away, Junior had thought the news was the lab report, which had found no ipecac in his spew. All that had been distraction. Now, here, lying on a bed in the emergency room of a Sacramento hospital, on a Saturday afternoon only six weeks before the camellia festival, Junior suffered under the care of a resident physician who was so young as to raise the suspicion that he was merely playing doctor. The night of Barty's birth, when Joey actually lay dead in the pickup-bashed Pontiac, as a paramedic had rolled Agnes's gurney to the back door of the ambulance, she had seen her husband standing there, untouched by that rain as her son was untouched by this. But Joey-dry-in-the-storm had been a ghost or an illusion fostered by shock and loss of blood. Shortly after six o'clock, Saturday morning, she stirred from a fretful dream and saw Barty sitting up in bed, reading. When he located the new grave, approximately where he'd guessed that it would be, he was surprised to find a black granite headstone already set in place, instead of a temporary marker painted with the. Caring for her, in every sense of that word, had made him a far happier man than he would otherwise have been-and a far better one. For a finder's fee, Junior was put in touch with a papermaker named Google. This was not his real name, but with his crossed eyes, large rubbery lips, and massively prominent Adam's apple, he was as perfect a Google as ever there had been. That was all right, for she had done the same for Otter's elder sister, and so his parents sent him to her in the evenings. But she taught Otter more than the song of the Creation. She knew his gift. She and some men and women like her, people of no fame and some of questionable reputation, had all in some degree that gift; and they shared, in secret, what lore and craft they had. "A gift untaught is a ship unguided," they said to Otter, and they taught him all they knew. It wasn't much, but there were some beginnings of the great arts in it; and though he felt uneasy at deceiving his parents, he couldn't resist this knowledge, and the kindness and praise of his poor teachers. "It will do you no harm if you never use it for harm," they told him, and that was easy for him to promise them. Agnes remembered the blood, the awful red flood. Excruciating pain and such fearsome crimson torrents. She'd thought her baby had entered the world stillborn on a tide of its own blood and hers. twenty-eight pounds. Typically, seven to eight pounds of this is the fetus. The placenta and the amniotic fluid weigh three pounds. The remaining eighteen are due to water retention and fat stores. OF THE SEVEN NEWBORNS, none was fussing, too fresh to the world to realize how much was here to fear. The bow business had started a few months ago. Angel said she wanted to look pretty in her sleep, in case she met a handsome prince in her dreams. Joey was not illuminated by the light of this world. Agnes realized that he was translucent, his skin like fine milk glass through which shone a light from elsewhere. Thrusting his finger toward the table with each repetition of the word, Barty happily insisted, "Pie, pie, pie, pie, pie, pie, pie, pie." In the passenger's seat, Barty was cushioned in his mother's arms. At times, the boy cooed or gurgled, or made a wet chording sound. On October 15, Junior acquired a third Sklent painting: The Heart Is Home to Worms and Beetles, Ever Squirming, Ever Swarming, Version 3. When all were gathered on the porch, lined up across the head of the steps and along the railing, in chill damp air that smelled faintly of ozone and less faintly of jasmine, Barty said, "Mr. Vanadium, your quarter trick is really cool. But here's something out of Heinlein." Blue fire flashed across the top of the range and followed drips down the baked-enamel front to the floor. Blue flared to yellow, and the yellow darkened when the blaze found the cadaver. "I really am sorry about this," Junior said, regretting the necessity to deny her the right to look good at her own funeral, "but it's got to appear to be a crime of passion." The traffic light turned green. Now onward home. Rolex recovered and bright upon his wrist, Junior Cain drove his Mercedes with a restraint that required more self-control than he had realized he could tap, even with the guidance of Zedd. The revolving beacons dwindled, casting off blue-and-red pulses of light that shimmered-swooped through the diffusing fog, as if they were disembodied spirits seeking someone to possess. The study was the size of a bathroom. The cramped space barely allowed for a battered pine desk, a chair, and one filing cabinet. At the next corner, instead of continuing south, Junior angled aggressively in front of oncoming pedestrians, stepped off the curb, and headed east, traversing the intersection against the advice of a Don't Walk sign. Horns blared, a city bus nearly flattened him, but he made. Although, to her eyes, the natural world had an ominous cast this morning, she was also aware of its great beauty. She wanted Barty to store up every magnificent vista, every exquisite detail. The previous day, Jacob and Edom had driven back to Bright Beach, to prepare for Barty's arrival. Now they hurried down the back porch steps and across the lawn, as Maria followed the driveway past the house and parked near the detached garage at the rear of the deep property. "Well, the blood wasn't dark and acidic, so it didn't come from his stomach. It was bright and alkaline. It could have arisen in the esophagus, but most likely it's pharyngeal in origin." Frankness and tough talk pleased her, because

too many people dealt with her as though her spirit were as frail as her limbs. She laughed with delight-but still refused him..As she struggled to cope with her loss, the last thing Agnes needed was the reminder posed by that empty chair. Maria's intentions were good, however, and Agnes didn't want to hurt her feelings.."Come with me," Paul Damascus said at once. "To Bright Beach. It is far away from San Francisco, and he'd never think of looking for you there. Why would he? You've no connection to the place. I've got a house with enough room. You're welcome. And you wouldn't be among strangers."Fascinated by this strange new realm, Angel returned to her chair periodically, between explorations, to sip apple juice and to reveal her latest discoveries: "They got yellow shelf paper. They got potatoes in a drawer. They got four kinds of pickles in the refrigerator. They got a toaster under a sock with pictures of birds on it."At the back of the second gallery, on the left, there's a corridor. The rest rooms are at the end of it, beyond the offices."The purpose of life was self--fulfillment, per Zedd, and Junior was so rapidly realizing his extraordinary potential that surely he would have pleased his guru.."Oh, it doesn't mean you're nervous in that sense. Nervous in this case means psychologically induced. Grief, Enoch. brief and shock and horror-they can have profound physical effects."Slamming through the door, letting it bang shut behind him hard enough to crack the glass, crossing the porch, Tom took the beauty of the day like a fist in the gut. It was too blue and too bright and too gorgeous to harbor death, and yet it did, birth and death, alpha and omega, woven in a design that flaunted meaning but defied understanding. It was a blow, this day, a hard blow, brutal in its beauty, in its simultaneous promises of transcendence and loss..Yet the most enduring relationship he had all year was with the ghostly singer. On February 18, he returned home in the afternoon, from a class in spirit channeling, and heard singing as he opened his front door. That same voice. And the same hateful song. As faint as before, repeatedly rising and falling..This house was similar to the Kleftons'. Though stucco rather than clapboard, it had gone a long time without fresh paint. A crack in one of the front windows had been sealed with strapping tape.

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