Theme

The theme of "Bloodsuckers" by William T. Vollmann is that there will always be a third option, one thats not good or bad, the middle ground

Ex/ Not being sheltered or suffering, a bit of both

2.

OR

a small act of kindness can change someone's life.

Ex/ The man helping the woman who was left on the road.

GREAT CONNECTIONS + ANNOTATIONS, Comments

10/10

Lexi H

WILLIAM T. VOLLMANN

BLOODSUCKERS

someone that takes somethi from others.

harmful + dangerous to others.

You never know when you will be called to be the Good Samaritan.

protagonist (first person)

WHEN I HITCHHIKED FROM SAN FRANCISCO TO FAIRBANKS, mosquitoes surrounded me with the hymning hum of a graduation—not right away, of course; not until I got to Canada. As soon as I was safely in a vehicle they could not affect me anymore and I rode the familiar thrill of speed and distance, lolling in the back of the truck, with a beautiful husky kissing my hands and cheeks, and we slowed to let a moose get out of the road and at once I heard them again.—A mosquito bit me.—I was on the Al-Can Highway now. I forgot the night I'd given up, not even in Oregon, and stayed at a motel, my face redburned and filthy, my eyes aching; and it had felt sinful to spend the sixteen dollars on the room but it was raining hard as it had been all day, so no one would pick me up. In hitchhiking as in so many other departments, the surest way not to get something is to need it. The more the world dirtied me, the less likely someone would be to take me in.—But the next morning was sunny and I had showered and shaved, which was why a van picked me up within half an hour and

shelter is comforting + "safe"

society judges people on their past, their appearance etc.

In a sense, the mosquitoes could be seen as the antagonist

took me into Oregon, and as I rode so happily believing that I now progressed, I didn't even consider that the inside of the van was not so different from the inside of the motel; I was protected again. When I remember that summer, which now lies so far behind me, I must own myself still protected, in a fluctuating kind of way, and so a question hovers and bites me unencouraged: Which is worse, to be too often protected, and thereby forget the sufferings of others, or to suffer them oneself? There is, perhaps, a middle course: to be out in the world enough to be toughened, but to have a shelter sufficient to stave off callousness and wretchedness. Of course it might also be said that there is something depressing and even debasing about moderation—how telling that one synonym for *average* is *mean*!

This shows that always being sheltered or suffering are both equally dangerous, but there is middle ground

On the long stretch of road between Fort St. John and Fort Nelson, where the mosquitoes were thickest, we came to where the Indian woman was dancing. It was almost dusk, round about maybe nine or ten o'clock. The country was full of rainbows, haze and yellow flowers. Every hour or so we had to stop to clean the windshield because so many mosquitoes had squished against it, playing connect-the-dots with the outlines of all things. We pulled over and went to work with ammonia and paper towels. They found us as soon as we got out. The driver's head was a big black sphere of mosquitoes. There were dozens of them in the space between my glasses and my eyes. When we got back into the camper, mosquitoes spilled in through the open windows. We jittered along at fifty miles an hour over the dirt road until the breeze of our passage had sucked them out. By then the windshield was already turning whitish-brown again from squashed mosquitoes. The driver did not want to stop again just yet, but I noticed that he was straining his eyes to see through the dead bugs, and I was just about to say that I didn't mind cleaning

mosquitoes must be relevant as they are mentioned many times throughout the story

(Senior)

the windshield by myself this time (I was, after all, getting a free ride), when far ahead on that empty road (we hadn't met another vehicle for two hours) we saw her capering as if she were so happy, and then we began to get closer to her and saw the frantic despair in her leaping and writhings like some half-crushed thing's that could not die. Not long ago I thoughtlessly poured out a few drops of dilute solvent upon waste ground, and an earthworm erupted, stretched toward me accusingly, stiffened and died. But the convulsions of this woman went on and on. Just as her dance of supposed happiness had seemed to me entirely self-complete like masturbation, so this dance of torture struck me as long-gone mad, sealing her off from other human beings, as if she were some alcoholic mumbler who sheds incomprehensible tears. It was not until we were almost past that I understood behind our hermetic windows that she was screaming for help. I cannot tell you how terrifying her cries were in that wild place. The driver hesitated. He was a good soul, but he already had one hitchhiker. Did he have to save the world? Besides, she might be crazy or dangerous. Her yellings were fading and she was becoming trivial in the rearview mirror when he slowed to think about it, and it was only then that we both understood what we had seen, because protected brains work slowly: mosquitoes darkened her face like a cluster of blackberries, and her legs were black and bloody where the red shorts ended. The driver stopped. Mosquitoes began to pelt against the windows.

example of the bystand effect, the other car that drove by wouldn't help the woman.

People wan to be heroes, they want to feel good about themselves

We had to help her get in. She embraced us with all her remaining strength, weeping like a little child. Her fearfully swollen face burned to my touch. She'd been bitten so much around the eyes that she could barely see. Her long black hair was smeared with blood and dead mosquitoes. Her cheeks had puffed up like tennis balls. She had bitten her lip very

This shows how strong you can be, how long you can hold on in order to survive.

deeply, and blood ran down from it to her chin where a single mosquito still feasted. I crushed it.

That afternoon, no doubt, she'd been prettier, with sharp cheekbones that caught the light, a smooth dark oval face, dark lips still glistening and whole, black eyes whose mercurial glitter illuminated the world yet a little longer, shiny black hair waved slantwise across her forehead. That was why the man in Fort Nelson had decided to support her trade. Reservation bait, he thought. She got in his truck, and there were some other men, too; they used her services liberally.

But unlike slow mosquitoes, who pay the bill, if only with their lives, the men had their taste of flesh with impunity. They weren't entirely vile. They didn't beat her. They only left her to the mosquitoes. They let her put her clothes back on before they threw her out—

She'd tried to dig a hole in the gravelly earth, a grave to hide in, but she hadn't gone an inch before her fingers started bleeding and the mosquitoes had crawled inside her ears so that she couldn't think anymore, and she started running down the empty road; she ran until she had to stop, and then the mosquitoes descended like dark snow onto her eyelids. Two cars had passed her. She'd craved to kill herself, but the mosquitoes would not even give her sufficient peace to do that. I'll never forget how I felt when she squeezed me in her desperate arms—I'll never forget her dance.

William T. Vollmann's books include You Bright and Risen Angels, The Rainbow Stories, Whores for Gloria, *and* The Atlas, *from which this story was excerpted. He is the recipient of a Whiting Foundation Award, and lives in California.*

powerful imagery + wording

Another example of the bystander effect.

The men could be depleted as the mosquitoes because while th mosquitos take your blood, they drain you of lif just like the me had done to the woman, left on the road, drained of lif

You can feel the emotion in this sentence, she was weak, dirtied by the world, but now she had hope, she was savec

wow — well said