

Aldebaran

Volume 19 | Issue 1

Article 1

8-21-2009

Aldebaran Vol. 19, Issue 1

Follow this and additional works at: <http://docs.rwu.edu/aldebaran>

Recommended Citation

(1991) "Aldebaran Vol. 19, Issue 1," *Aldebaran*: Vol. 19: Iss. 1, Article 1.

Available at: <http://docs.rwu.edu/aldebaran/vol19/iss1/1>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at DOCS@RWU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Aldebaran by an authorized administrator of DOCS@RWU. For more information, please contact mwu@rwu.edu.



THE ALDEBARAN

The Staff

Alfred Levitt, Debbie Malewicki, George Hanlon,
Nancy Gabriel, Todd Rechler, and Jennifer Wilde.

Cover Art

William Logan

Faculty Advisor

Geoffrey Clark

Special Thanks

Lisa Shannon

The Aldebaran is published by Roger Williams College and completely operated by the students of said institution. Subscriptions are available for \$6/Year (Make checks payable to The Aldebaran). Submission deadlines are April 1 and November 1. No manuscripts arriving between April 2 and September 1 or between November 2 and February 1 will be read. Fiction less 3000 words — Poetry less 5 poems.

Please send all submissions to:
Aldebaran/RWC/Bristol/RI/02809.

(Copyright 1991 Hip-Hop Industries) Vol. 19 Num. 1

Darkness Visible

It is well-documented that a large percentage of major American writers have been, if not outright alcoholics, then boozers and drunks of rather formidable proportions—London, Lewis, O’Neil, Dreiser, Hart Crane, Fitzgerald, Hemingway, Faulkner come readily to mind—but seldom has alcohol’s inseparable blood-relation, depression, received its due (try to find one writer cited above who did not also suffer from depression, call it melancholia or at the very least, the blues) as a writer’s **bête noir**.

William Styron’s brief (84 pages) memoir-essay **Darkness Visible** takes depression as its central subject, and gives us a fascinating glimpse into, among other things, the alcohol-depression-creativity nexus which has characterized the lives of many writers.

Styron tells us of the depression which engulfed him at age sixty shortly after he suddenly became unable to drink even minute amounts of alcohol—he surmises his system, especially his liver, had become so saturated after forty years of what he admits was “abuse” it wouldn’t vouchsafe him another drop. The trigger, the cause for the effect of depression, was no personal cataclysm, but was found, at least in its first manifestation, in the physiological: suddenly, he could no longer drink; and depression followed since the alcohol which had provided a buffer between himself and his ever-present psychological anxieties, was no longer there to give him respite. Styron had been accustomed for years to see alcohol as “an invaluable senior partner of my intellect...a friend whose ministrations I sought daily,” and refers to alcohol as a “soothing, often sublime agent which had contributed greatly to my writing”—by which he means the conceptual part, since he has never, he points out, written under the influence. In fact, many drinking writers share with Styron a contempt for writing under the influence; Fitzgerald was at pains to assure Maxwell Perkins that even his hack work had to be done “in a state of complete sobriety;” it has been related that John Cheever could—or claimed he could—detect any sentence in fiction a writer had written while drinking; and Hemingway scoffed at Faulkner’s later work for being “sauce writing.” It may well be, indeed, that the booze-depression-creativity connection is a kind of Gordian knot unique to each writer snared within its coils and thus one cannot make the hoped-for generalization to help others so involved. Malcolm Lowry once suggested, not entirely facetiously, that the real cause of alcoholism was “ugliness and the complete baffling sterility of existence as it is sold to you;” his sardonic prescription for its cure was gin and orange juice.

In any event, Styron has offered some interesting insights into the mind of perhaps our greatest living novelist, and as well some notions on the nature of depression, whether accompanied by alcohol or not, that may be far more useful than all manner of recondite scientific treatises, or, at the other end of the spectrum, the Pabulum textured self-help books that seem to reproduce with the rapidity of Morel mushrooms. If there is a way to find deliverance from depression it is, Styron suggests, that you must first find the beginning of your own way out—and until that is done you may well be unreachable by the conventional influences of love and friendship or the conventional therapies and bromides.

In Styron’s case, a chance-heard snatch of music at a crucial time, “a sudden, soaring passage from the Brahms **Alto Rhapsody**,” was more useful therapeutically than the counsel of shrinks and the variety of pills they prescribed (all the medication Styron took seems to have been either useless or harmful). That passage of music, which “pierced my heart like a dagger,” is really the beginning for Styron out of the morass of his depression. And it was something which had to simply happen: friends and family, shrinks and pills, were incapable of inducing it. In short, something in him had to if not heal then knit together enough to let him start his first tentative rise from the depths of depression. Perhaps it was important that his basic impulse was always affirmative, for life over death. One recalls an epigraph (from Goethe) to Malcolm Lowry’s **Under the Volcano**, a complex and densely textured novel about a drunk by a drunk, where again one is hard put to come up with hard answers as to the origin of the malady:

“Whosoever unceasingly strives upward...him we can save.” The real beginning of any

remedy may be so bound up with other elements in the paradigm as to be inaccessible to and inextricable by the conventional probings of psychological analysis or therapy by medication or a combination of the two. Ultimately, as has sometimes been said of recovery from alcoholism, the subject must want to get better, and he may only achieve that when some internal something clicks into place, a something that cannot be willed or analyzed into being.

Styron could save himself, but it has not always been thus for his characters. In his novels, with the exception of the novella **The Long March**, suicide, which in his depression he actually considered, even plotted, has been if not a major theme then a powerful preoccupation. Several of his characters have not wanted to get better. Peyton, Sophie, and Nathan all chose to answer negatively the central question posed by Camus (another depressive, according to novelist Romain Gary, himself a depressive and suicide, who is cited by Styron in the text) in **The Myth of Sisyphus**: "There is but one truly serious philosophical question, and that is suicide. Judging whether life is or is not worth living amounts to answering the fundamental question of philosophy."

Institutionalization can help—this is one clear message from Styron to us. In his case, it was necessary to get away from his family, his comfortable familiar surroundings, his beloved home of thirty years, all of which in his distress had become alien, even detestable to him.

Once institutionalized (voluntarily), Styron is rather astonished to discover that "the fantasies of self-destruction all but disappeared within a few days after I checked in, and this again is testimony to the pacifying effect that the hospital can create, its immediate value as a sanctuary where peace can return to the mind." (It is interesting if not instructive to recall that the manic-depressive Theodore Roethke, hospitalized, often enjoyed himself hugely and, freed from the necessity of teaching and reading student papers and manuscripts, wrote some of his best poetry.)

In spite of the gloom and dreck of its subjects and experiences, the scary near-palpableness of Styron's suicidal longings, and the vividness of his descriptions of the all-but indescribable sensation of depression, **Darkness Visible** is a hopeful book and its conclusions are hopeful: one **can** recover from depression and become whole again—once, that is, that the essential internal commitment is made, probably involuntarily, and perhaps in some subterranean part of the psyche, that one wants to get well rather than enter what Faulkner called the "wall of oblivion."

Helpful and hopeful as Styron's conclusions are, though, I find myself drawn to the haunting conclusion of a poem by Weldon Kees who left his car parked by the Golden Gate Bridge in 1955 and has not been heard from since. In "Covering Two Years" the poem's persona relates how after enduring a time of "nothingness that feeds upon itself...Pencils that turn to water in the hand...thoughts breaking in the mind like glass," he like Styron comes back: "Now in an older hand/I write my name. Now with a voice grown unfamiliar,/ I speak to silences of altered rooms,/Shaken by knowledge of recurrence and return."

Geoffrey Clark

The Jac Holzman Room

There's an interesting rug hanging on the wall near the window. The curtain is fanned out and the couch is slouched. The carpet is gray and flat. Spacious place with a cast of windows. Adobe fireplace, and a crinkled executive chair with many faces wrinkled into it. Totally dead green and orange colors taking their places in foot stools. Too much space in here. What do we do? It seems to like having "Sergeant Pepper" playing. So do I, but I don't think I can make it last forever.

Right outside the window I see a very vacant light blue. They even have a clock in here. Just watch the hands go around for a couple minutes and you don't need it anymore.

This album must be where it all comes from, because nothing else is going to have this effect...too early to say! Maybe I'll unwind and find myself nowhere when this music is gone, and no one will even notice that they're putting me back into the record jacket with the disc. The speaker sits there in the chair just like a friend of mine might. Sings like John, Paul, or George himself.

Obviously so far out from any big city. Very empty stuff.

Somewhere inside the decor is a small, warm object. It has many different parts, a funny shape flopping about on the dead green colored chair, commenting on the drugs. You must be playing "Sergeant Pepper." So what does this object have to do with the other material we've found in here? It differs somehow. Well, it's warm, living. Quiet, calm, kind of moving on the music. Outnumbered by all the empty space, but apparently music dissolves empty spaces.

Heavy door. Lights inadequate for any kind of education. Any kind. Thin, cheap, better if they weren't there drapes. are these marble windowsills? Let's jump out.

* * *

So I took one look at this room and it looked friendly. Not only that, but I got so drunk and made such a fool of myself last night that I'd better spend the first couple hours of today in here where I won't have to confront anyone. I came in here with my bagful of pens, and before I knew it I was travelling again. It's a Saturday; I guess I realized it was possible for something like this to happen. I don't mind, it's just that suddenly here I am, ten million miles away, staring out the window at everyone else.

Wow. It's getting to be one of those things that happens every Saturday. Sometimes it seems like all I have to do is turn on the music and that's enough to set me travelling. Today when I turned on the music I didn't realize what I was doing. It never occurred to me that with such a hangover as I had I might just disappear.

The dangerous thing about travelling is that I never know how long I've been gone. And sometimes I find myself dressed up in costumes and I know I couldn't have made it all up. Or sometimes I'll see someone a few days later, at the bus station, or somewhere, and I recognize them. Then that mysterious mood pervades the air and I realize it's someone I saw while travelling. But every time I try to say something to one of those people they just look at me like they don't know what I'm talking about. I wonder if they're afraid to talk about it or if they just don't remember.

The first time I travelled I thought it was a one-time thing. After a while it happened again though, on Christmas Eve, and now it seems to happen all the time. It's so distracting, makes it hard to stay on top of life back there. Like when we went to Albuquerque last weekend and my roommate had to remind me to wear shoes. I forget about things like that now, things I don't need when I'm travelling. Or sometimes I'll go into a restaurant and order something, and then all of the sudden I'll remember that I need money.

How odd to go travelling today, when it was the furthest thing from my mind. I was going to sit here and do translations, but I can't even reach my notebook now.

Usually when I'm travelling I go farther than this. Usually I get far enough away to come in contact with other people again, but right now I'm the only one out here. Sometimes it feels like I've just become part of the guitar work. That's definitely where my body is, but I can't figure out where my mind goes at these times. It seems to be

everywhere and nowhere, almost non-existent, but it's always on. Transplanted to where I can't reach it.

It's awfully lonesome here without any other people. I hope it doesn't keep happening like this or I really will worry about it. As long as I can see other people it's okay, but it's uncomfortable being way out here all by myself. I know I won't get back in time for dinner. Maybe when the music is over I'll get back, but I'm not even sure I can hear the music anymore. It doesn't look familiar out here. Maybe everything is out of balance because I had so much to drink last night. I wonder where I'm headed.

I remember one time when I was travelling, it must have been at spring break last year when I was home, my mom grabbed me and shoved me into the car. I got very upset at the idea of riding in the car just then, didn't like being enclosed in that machine, so I simply got out and started walking towards the backyard. It never occurred to me that my mom could tell I was having some sort of a strange experience, but the next thing I knew I was being tied up by policemen and standing in line at the psychiatric unit. For the first few hours I didn't see anybody, but when I stopped travelling and returned to wherever it is that I usually am none of the nurses would believe what I told them. They kept me there for weeks, giving me medicine for breakfast and locking me in with impatient doctors.

As far as my mother was concerned, all of the sudden I was some kind of an animal, and as far as the people at school were concerned I was one to be pitied. None of the people I met in the hospital seemed to be travelling, but I wonder if it's kind of the same thing with them, if their minds keep going other places and their bodies can't go along so they end up being captured and locked up somewhere.

At least when I go travelling I almost always come back feeling better. The people I'm with when I'm away are so different from everyone back there. They don't advise or criticize, they just observe me. No frantic competition and no one passing out bad feelings. I don't mind if they watch me curiously as long as they don't watch for shortcomings.

But I haven't seen any of those people and I wonder where I am. Lost somewhere. At least I can hear the music. I wish I could get closer to it. Oh, I don't know if I'll ever get back! I wonder if I could stay here. It seems like every time when I'm travelling and I finally feel alive I come back. Then, when I'm sure all is real again and I think how nice it might be if next time I didn't have to come back. I put on the music.

* * *

Something is hurting my arm — it's caught somewhere but I can't see... I'm almost there, but what's happening? I'm not moving! My legs are moving, I can see them walking, running, but I can't move! It's dark as a nightmare here and something's burning my face. Breath, the hot breath of an empty soul. Burning, gaslike breath of someone who sleeps in money and suburbs built of cheap, fake light.

It's like being in a grave. Someone far away has buried me the way my grandfather buried my dog. There's dirt in my mouth, and sirens — the most satanic sound. I'm bound too tight to tremble. I can't scream because the air in my lungs is dead.

They've taken my body. Now I understand the struggle. They stole my flesh and rushed it to an iron place while my soul travels on a star. Maybe if they'd left me alone that poor body could have gotten its life back instead of rotting in a cage.

Jenny Hoegler

Last Bus South

It was hot. He could feel his three dollar cotton shirt sticking to his back. He looked at the two small neon signs that hung over the sidewalk side by side. Bus station. Cafe. He pushed the glass door. It was marked pull. He pulled.

After the bright sunlight, it seemed dark inside. His eyes adjusted after he pulled off his sun glasses. Along the right side there was a long counter. A short man wearing a short-sleeved white shirt stood behind it. In the center were two long pews, back to back. Probably bought from the First Baptist Church. He looked briefly at each of them. An old man. Wino. Three or four kids in shirts and bluejeans. A black couple.

On the left were the dispensers. Coffee. Cokes. Sandwiches. Newspapers. The headline: RUBY KILLS OSWALD. He stepped over and pulled the paper from the stand. He took one step back, then forward again and put a nickel in the cylindrical coin box.

Folding the paper into thirds, he placed it under his arm and walked over to the counter.

"Afternoon."

"Afternoon."

"Hot, isn't it."

"Yes. Odd this time of year."

"Yes. How much for a one-way to Houston?"

"Twelve forty-five."

He took out some folded bills. He gave the man a slightly worn twenty. The man turned the key in the drawer. He placed the twenty in one compartment and handed him two quarters, two ones, and a five. "Leaves in an hour. Last bus south today."

"Good. Time to eat."

"Nice cafe next door."

He nodded and picked up the ticket the man had written out. At the left rear of the station was a swinging door marked restrooms and cafe. He smiled. Pushing through the door, he saw on the left a door marked ladies and on the right one marked men. Between the doors was a table. Around it sat three men eating hamburgers and drinking coffee. They were black. He nodded to them and turned about 170 degrees and walked through another swinging door into the cafe.

It was the same length as the station but only a third as wide. To his left was a row of four booths. One of the middle ones was occupied by two middle-aged women and two small babies. In the center was a row of tables. They were empty. On the right was a counter and on the wall behind it a mirror. He sat on a stool at the counter.

A waitress who had been talking to the cashier hurried over. Her nylons rubbed together noisily. "Help you, mister?"

"Coffee and a hamburger. Please."

She had turned around, picked up a mug from the dishcloth on the back bar and held it under the spout of the urn. She smiled as she handed him the coffee. Before he could decide whether or not to smile back, she had headed for the back of the room to turn in his order.

A bell rang. He looked casually up at the mirror. When the front door opened it rang a small bell. Two men came in. They sat on opposite sides of the front booth. He took another sip of the coffee and looked at them as the waitress hurried over to help them. They wore western boots, bluejeans, and light shirts. They also wore coats. Loose fitting coats.

He set down the mug. He reached inside his coat. The ivory was cold. He looked at the two men. Then he watched the waitress hurry to turn in their order. His eyes rested for a moment on the two women and the two babies in the adjacent booth. He gauged the distance to the front door.

Slowly he released his grip on the ivory. He unfolded the paper and read the lead article. Every few seconds he would sip his coffee. Every few seconds he would look up at the mirror. He never caught the two men looking at him.

She brought the hamburger on a white platter, surrounded by ripple potato chips. He

noticed the two men had ordered grilled cheese sandwiches. He ate slowly. They ate a little faster.

He finished the hamburger. The waitress brought him a refill. He savored it slowly. His eyebrows were knitted. He drank the last swallow, took a last look around the cafe through the mirror. No one had left. He fumbled into his trouser pockets and pulled out two quarters. He left them under his plate and got up. The waitress rushed over and handed a check to the manager.

"That'll be 57¢, sir."

He took out his roll of bills and handed the man a one.

"Thank you. Come again."

For a moment he seemed not to hear. Then he suddenly said, "sure."

As he walked out the front door, the two men got up, left a tip, and headed for the register. He took a look at his watch. Still nearly thirty minutes before the bus was to leave. He moved quickly along the street without seeming to do so.

As he reached the end of the block and stepped off the curb to turn left, he heard a car ignition. He took two steps. His hand eased inside his coat.

Just as he gripped the gun he realized he had left it a second too late. His leg crumbled. It hurt unbearably. He did not feel the pavement crush his head.

The car skidded around the corner, its tail spinning in a wide circle. Two middle-aged ladies were in the crowd that gathered around. Each carried a baby. One baby lying over a left shoulder beat its tiny fists upon the woman's back.

A white police car skidded to a halt. A thin asthmatic man got out of the passenger side. His gun was so large that it seemed to upset his balance as he walked. The driver was short. Four inches of belly protruded over his belt. A thirty-two snubnose was lost upon his massive hip. The single red light on the roof of the car swirled round and round as the thin man questioned witnesses and the other searched the corpse.

Later, at night, after the last bus south had pulled out and the crowd had dispersed and the police car and ambulance had gone their separate ways, a large yellow machine rumbled down the street. It had a sprinkler and two round brushes that went round and round.

G. Lee Haney

Suspension

Billy had been a real little fighter, right up till the bell sounded at 7:18 p.m., his fist still clenched around his "lucky" Indian head penny, the Matchbox cars lined up at the pretend gas-station pump which was the water glass on his tray table. Jesse stripped the bed later and the autographed baseball the Phillies had sent him fell from the sheets and rolled across the floor. Jesse was as tough as they came, but at 11:07 she pulled up the last vacant stool in Gus's and ordered a Manhattan.

She found solace in bars, not the drinks mind you, which she could take or leave, but the bars themselves. Semi-darkness and red neon, the dull slap of a cue ball against the eight relaxed her like a massage and a sauna. Gus's was always crowded on Thursdays. Workers from the GM plant across the street filed in, the second shift having just ended. Otis Redding's "Sitting' on the Dock of the Bay" played on the Wurlitzer, and overlapping conversations and raucous laughter became white noise for her own mental clatter.

Billy'd never had a break. He was rescued from drug-addicted parents and bounced around in foster care until his health problems made him too difficult to place. After that, he lived in a state-run children's home when he wasn't in the hospital, toughing it out alone until a local TV station made him a celebrity of sorts. For a while donations, toys and letters poured in, but the leukemia outlasted the public interest and he died in relative anonymity, but not without love from the staff, sometimes in spite of themselves.

The man sitting next to Jesse caught her attention because she's never seen him in Gus's before and because he was drinking from a coffee cup, which seemed greatly at odds with his appearance; he looked like a hard drinker. His face was lined and furrowed and a deep scar ran from the outside corner of his right eye to the center of his cheek. He fidgeted with a salt shaker, spinning it around by the chrome top with his thumb and middle finger, and he frequently checked his watch, turning his wrist to catch the angle of the light. The big clock on the wall behind the bar was stuck at 6:15.

Jesse called out to Gus for a refill. When he set it down in front of her, she jerked her head in the direction of the stranger and whispered, "I hope you're not about to be robbed."

Gus shrugged his shoulders. "Says he's waiting for somebody. Seems harmless enough."

Jesse walked over to the Wurlitzer, dropped in a quarter and pressed E9, "Born In The USA." "You like this one?" she asked the man when she took her seat again.

"S'okay."

Jesse wasn't shy about striking up a conversation, nor did she worry about seeming an easy mark. She'd learned a long time ago that men weren't interested in women with her girth and plain features.

"You from around here?"

"No, I ain't from nowhere, lady." The man had a deep, gravelly voice, and he was missing at least two lower front teeth. He looked at his watch again and when he stretched out his arm, Jesse saw the tattoos, a smiling, bare-breasted mermaid with an elaborate multi-colored tail and, farther up, the name "Mick."

"That your name? Mick?"

"Yep."

"Well, Mick, if you're waiting for somebody, time's running out. Gus closes at one."

Mick raised his coffee cup and nodded at Gus, who promptly filled it. "My kid might be comin' in," he said.

"Yeah? It's a small town, maybe I know him."

"You don't know him, lady. Hell, I don't even know him." Mick quickly turned his head toward the door as a cold blast of fresh air swept through the smoky bar. "Ain't seen him in a long time."

"How long?"

Mick looked at her, and his gray eyes were hollow, empty. "Twenty years. Last time I seen him he was 12."

Twelve—Billy's age. Jesse's stomach knotted. "Where you been all his life?"

He seemed to be debating about whether to answer, took a sip of coffee, twirled the salt shaker, finally, "Prison. I been in prison."

Having worked so many years at the hospital Jesse knew his kind. Deadbeats. Alcoholic bums who beat their wives or kids and then whined about the cost to fix them up again, or the ones who didn't come to visit because they "can't handle it." She didn't take much to hard luck stories, especially today, especially with so many more Billys out there without dads, who were tough and sweet and without an ounce of self-pity.

"So now you're out," she said, "so now you're gonna pick up where you left off?"

"Ain't nothin' like that." Jesse had to lean closer to hear him. "I got no claim on 'im."

Damn right, she thought. "It's nice he agreed to meet you."

"Ain't 'xactly like that either. I wrote him I'd be here if he wants to see me. Don't 'spect he's comin' now." Mick looked at his watch.

Why should he? Jesse wondered. "How long you been sitting here?"

"I dunno, 'bout 3 or 4 o'clock."

"Maybe he was here and you didn't know who he was."

"Oh, I'd know 'im alright. Cute little guy, scrappy kid. Built hisself a go-cart, rode a dirt bike, loved that kinda shit. Kept a mess of frogs in a washtub out back the house and throwed 'em at the little girls on their way to school. Little hellraiser—just like his old man," he snickered.

Little chip off the old block, huh, real proud of that. "He hellraised himself into jail, too?" She didn't give a damn if she offended him, felt good to let off some steam—for Billy.

For a long minute he looked at her, a look more of surprise than anger. "His ma took real good care of 'im," he finally said. "She kep' his nose clean."

Yeah, and probably never had a night out or a new dress. "What became of him? What's he doing now?"

Mick eyed the door as it opened again.

"Always wanted to be a race car driver. Used to take him to the stock car races, he ate that up, stood in the pit once and then he wanted to work on 'em too. Always openin' the hood of my truck, drove me nuts askin' what's this? What's that do? Funny kid."

"He never came to visit you?"

"Hell, no, lady, ain't no place for a kid. I told his mother don't never bring 'im to the joint. Can't a done him no good. Figured it best he forget about me."

The bar was emptying now. Gus turned down the volume on the Wurlitzer and began to clear the tables.

"Maybe he didn't get your letter. How'd you know where to reach him?" Jesse looked at her watch.

"Sent it to his ma, said she'd see to it."

"Ever think maybe she didn't — see to it, I mean. Or even if she did, maybe he just couldn't make it or got the wrong night or something."

"Maybe. Kid never did have no sense of time. Late for everything. He'd find a stickball game or wander down to the creek and it's be dark 'fore he came in, I'd hafta tan him. Didn't do no good, though, he'd do it again next day. Crazy kid."

Jesse worked hard to push aside the pity she was beginning to feel for him. "Mick," she said, shaking her head, "he's not a kid anymore; he's what, 32 years old? I imagine he's put away his childish things by now."

"Last call folks," Gus said. Mick raised his coffee cup. Gus filled it and went back to his sweeping.

They sat in silence while Mick drank his coffee and twirled the salt shaker and looked at his watch. "I gotta get going," Jesse finally said. "I hope he shows, but I wouldn't hole your breath. Lots can happen in twenty years."

"Yeah, well, I'll wait just another minute or two. Say, lady, you got the right time?"

Jesse looked at the old clock behind the bar. "Yeah," she said, "it's about 6:15."

Sandra Hickman

Transfiguration and Maybe a Raise To Boot

Harry leaned close to the steamy mirror and scowled at the drop of blood hanging like a tiny grape at the edge of his mouth. He daubed it with a finger, watched it renew itself, grow plump and roll down his chin. He cursed softly, reached down and tugged loose a wad of toilet paper.

"What kinda talk is that?"

Myra leaned against the doorjamb in a sagging housecoat and mules. Her arms were folded and she had that 'poor me' look on her face. Meaning, of course, 'poor me, married to this meek, docil, abjectly submissive gelding, Harry Graber.

Well, Harry wasn't in the mood for any crap this morning. A gray day's rain was rattling on the window, he felt as if he hadn't slept all night and he had a pile-driving headache, legacy of another evening spent in the cold, silent company of Mr. James Beam. He'd fallen asleep in front of the TV and his neck felt as if it had been pierced with railroad spikes. He for **sure** didn't feel like any of Myra's crapola this morning.

He copped a sideways glance at her weasel's face, potato nose, crooked teeth...and as he wondered how life had brought him to this abysmal impasse, he was seized by a vision: Myra was transubstantiated into an apparition from hell, skin squirming on her face as her mouth worked, her voice a slowed-down groan echoing up from the depths of her like a monster hooting in an empty vault.

"For Christ sake," he said, inwardly cursing the whine in his ready tenor voice, "will ya come on already? Gimme a goddamn break, wouldja? First thing in the morning you gotta start in?"

"Well, I don't see why you can't just **ask** him."

Harry blotted the newest blood grape, flicked a pea-sized wad of tissue at the commode. Missed...and devoted a long, awkward minute to scrabbling behind the tank to retrieve it while Myra looked on, lips pulled to one side in a wry smirk.

With all the aplomb he could muster, Harry faced himself once more in the mirror, brought the razor under his grainy block of chin and scraped dryly at a patch of stubble. "We been through this before," he muttered tightly.

"You see? That's what I mean. That's **exactly** what I mean. Old man Cooper's got you buffaloeed. Whatta you scared of? He ain't gonna bite ya. You think he's gonna bite ya? All he can say is no, ain't it?"

"Will you—"

"I mean if that stupid idiot Tony Sasperilla or whatever his name is—"

"Hey, c'mon willya, gimme a...gimme a damn...I can't take this crap, Myra, not first thing in the morning."

"He gets ten a week just for askin'."

"Yeah, but—"

"That's all he did, wasn't it?"

"What?" he turned to her, razor in one hand, faded hotel towel in the other, and shook both in exasperation. "**What** was all he did?"

"**Ask!**"

"Yeah, but that's because—"

"An' all **he** does is sweep the place out at night."

"Yeah, that's why Cooper gave him—"

"**He** asks, **he** gets the raise! So what's a matter with **you?**"

"You don't listen at all, do you?" He let her have it at full volume. The effort made him wince and cradle his eye in the palm of his hand.

Three heavy thumps from the other side of the wall rattled bottles in the medicine chest.

Keep it down in there, wouldja keep it fuckin' down?

Harry turned to Myra, his voice dropped to a threatening hiss: "All you wanna do is put me down. That's all you ever do and that's all you ever done." He glared at her, lips tight, eyes narrow. "But you know somethin'? I don't gotta take this...I don't gotta take this...I don't gotta take this bullshit at all."

Hangers clashed wildly as Harry yanked his leather jacket out of the closet and stalked toward the door.

"Whatta you, **leavin'?**" she brayed. "Honest to God, you're too much. For a minute there I thought you were gonna do something—something desperate, something violent and forceful and **masculine**, maybe. God forbid you should ever assert yourself. Everybody walks all over you, but do you care? Oh no, no siree, I don't care, I'm just Harry Graber, folks, 'scuse me for living."

"Will you shut **up!**" he bellowed, hurling open the front door, "Just shut the fuck up."

Hands stuffed deep in his jacket pockets, he leaned into the boreal wind that scoured the streets and whisked litter against his trouser cuffs. Squat brick buildings crowded the sidewalks, chimneys and water towers bathed in gray light under the morning's grimy overcast.

He trudged blindly through a maze of foggy lanes and lond industrial roads, past brooding, soot-covered warehouses with iron loading doors; edged carefully around wheezing fork-lifts, trucks and delivery vans lurching through teaming sprawls of cargo containers.

At the end of a long block of warehouses he saw a chipped enamel sign over a steamy window. On it was pictured a plank pier and, in faded fancy script, the words, "Wilma's Wharf." Suddenly ravenous, Harry quickened his step, patting his pockets for change.

It was a small place, a clutter of bagged candy, chip racks, advertisements for cocoa and decaffeinated coffee. A line of customers in faded pea coats and stocking caps perched on tilting stools in front of the formica counter. More customers crowded into rows of plywood booths along the window and wall. A radio on a shelf pumped Al Yankovic's accordion into the mix of crockery and silverware and the beelike hum of masculine conversation. There was an empty stool at the end of the counter. Harry hitched himself onto it.

A grave, bulky woman with tortoise-shell glasses on a lorgnette was balancing oval plates piled high with eggs, sausage, buttered toast, and pancakes. She dealt them onto a tray, rounded up a squeeze-bottle of syrup, a cold, sweating metal pitcher of cream, and a needle-thin bottle of Tabasco sauce. As she waddled around the end of the counter, she let Harry know she'd be right with him.

The cook put two more plates on the service window ledge. He was a short Filipino man with a pile of lustrous black hair, skin the color of laundry soap, deep-set liquid eyes shining over skull-like cheeks. Every time he served up an order he squinted through the service window, reconnoitering the dining room as if from an artillery bunker.

The waitress stood across from Harry, pencil poised, order book at the ready. Harry asked for a short stack with two eggs and sausage, then lifted his elbows to let her swab the worn formica in front of him.

It was better in the diner, he had to admit. The warmth, the smells of wet wood and food, the subdued clink and murmur of grazing humanity were having a calming effect on him.

The cook's thin, vein-wrapped arm deposited his order in the window. The waitress balanced her cigarette on the edge of a large glass ashtray, put her hands on her hips and sighed a long plume of blue smoke into the air. She stumped over to him with his breakfast. "No rest for the wicked," she chuckled. "Somethin' else for you?"

Before he could answer, a customer at the far end of the counter leapt to his feet and roared, "Jesus **Christ.**"

Conversations were suspended, eating ceased, background noise subsided as a cottony silence settled over the establishment. The only sounds to be heard were the sputter and snap of frying grease from the kitchen and tinny accordion cadenzas from the radio.

"Holy shit!" cried the man next to the first, stumbling backwards off his stool.

Everyone stared in horror at the rat that had dropped on the counter. A foot and a half long, the size of a small dog, its claws were ivory barbs that clicked and slithered on

the formica. Its heavy, pink tail skidded nervously from side to side, banging silverware and salt shakers, knocking a mustard jar onto its side. Quick as a piston, it snatched a piece of toast off a plate and hopped back. Skating its snout from side to side, it tore the toast, snapping at pieces that bounced away.

"Get **outta** here," the waitress screeched. "Beat it! Shoo!" She advanced sideways, with wide swings of her order book. The rat felt the draft and instantly hopped around to face her, red eyes glowing, whiskers awhirl. Tensely it raised its tail...

Suddenly it moved backwards, gliding uneasily down the counter, never taking its eyes off her.

Harry watched in fascination as the creature come closer, edgily crabbing sideways as if ready to make a sudden, berserk jump at someone. It hopped in quick circles, spiky bristles standing stiffly along its spine.

Whether it sensed that his was the last dish on the counter, or whether it was rendered helpless by the steaming fragrance of his just-delivered omelet, the rat abruptly hopped into Harry's plate, shoved its whiskered needle of a snout into the food and tore off a large chunk of omelet. Its mouth was a moist, nightmarish alligator clip opening wide as it desperately tried to chew the steaming eggs without scalding itself.

In the midst of his terror, Harry was visited by a miraculous, thundering call from the depths of his very bowels. The muscles of his body stiffened as he eased the metal napkin dispenser off the counter and slowly raised it above his head.

Look at them, he thought scornfully surveying the scene, all these rough, tough longshoreman types sitting like a bunch of dummies while he, Harry Kramer, the only man in the place capable of action, was on his feet to do what needed doing.

He never forgot the satisfaction of bringing the napkin holder down on the rat. It squealed shrilly, thrashed about with broken hind quarters, tried to jump at him but succeeding only in kicking up a shower a food scraps.

Harry struck again, this time with all his might, missed and shattered the plate.

"Ugh," grunted the man on the next stool, a scrawny Italian with a sallow face and droopy mustache. Frantically he brushed the front of his sweater. "**Ughughugh.**"

"Hey, sorry," Harry said.

The Italian opened his mouth wide, as if for the dentist, and gagged.

A beefyman in coveralls grimaced at the sight. The waitress covered her mouth and rushed into the kitchen, wetness shining between her fingers.

To Harry's horror, an acrid miasma of bile acids and partially digested food was enrobing the diner. A table of teenagers called him an asshole as they rushed out to the sidewalk to haul in large droughts of fresh air.

The cook dashed out of the kitchen in his t-shirt and stained apron. The knuckles of his bony hands bulged as he clasped the handle of a large knife with a triangular blade. He held it high over his head and shrieked, "A **kella.**"

Harry laid bare his teeth and raised the befouled napkin dispenser. "Get the fuck back in the kitchen, asshole." he barked.

The cook froze, t-shirt fluttering from the banging of his heart. It was the only part of him that moved.

"**Now**, Gah dammit!" Harry started toward him.

The cook found his legs and backed cautiously into the kitchen.

Harry stared after him, hunkering, breathing in snores...

Triumphant.

He twisted his lips into a smile, tossed the napkin holder away, pushed his way through the crush of groaning customers and marched out into the blustery drizzle.

He was going to get his raise this morning or damn sure know the reason why.

End.

by Allan Izen

"Come Here Bitch (giggle) I Got a Doghouse For You"

hand over mouth razor (so slight, almost polite) to the face where did her knees go??? Dragged... shoes abandoned like dead alley cats cloth tear the zipper sweat a soul slit as something wet warms plops Jesus Jesus "can't you hear me??" comin like shriveling worms crawling frantic between her legs eyes unblinking cunning insane with rapid breath he is a dependable nightmare taking her from this world into his...a Sick Sick motherfucker throwing the monkey off his back and pushing it between her legs while whispering out crazy ambitions with fresh warm blood goals hissing promises not to hurt not to hurt means: not death and leaving no scars that others could see she would live dead and because self preservation demands amputation before she lost her mind she throws it away far and never never again would an insect die.

from the sole of her shoe.

Lucinda Mason

"All I Have"

I've got to say this.
I come to these readings all the time
and I've got to say this:

I'm not a pretty face.

I'm not going to stun you with my good looks,
with my perfect tits,
my high, round ass,
cinched in worn jeans,
my lush skin, tan and peeking
through slits in the cloth.

I'm not going to attempt intimidation
with my pseudo-revolutionary garb,
my rebel stance,
my slick voice,
my raised fist,
my youth.

I'm not going to bring out any props,
tell any jokes,
dedicate my work to all the unborn children
who might have been conceived
between June 4, 1960 and August 10th
of the same year
but weren't.

I'm not a member of an oppressed minority
so I'm not going to castigate the audience
or the rest of the poets
for their lack of social concern,
for their confessional poetry,
for their self-indulgent poetry,
for their punchline poetry,
for their poetry which seems to have no connection
with the "real" world as I see it.

I'm not going to insist that I am better than you
because I've suffered for my art,
because I was born poor
and I'm still poor,
because I have an accent
because my pain is the only true pain
because my suffering makes me see more clearly than you.

I'm not going to read
while someone plays the guitar,
I'm not going to read
to the grumble of a sax somewhere off stage,
I'm not going to read
to a flute's trill,
or a violin
or a piano
or a tambourine.

No one will dance while I read,
juggle fruit or flaming torches,
eat fire,
make smoke,
swallow swords,
light any candles,
rip up paper,
throw metal sparkles in the air,
pull out walkie talkies,
ramble on in Spanish,
wear sunglasses,
turn out the lights,
set off sparklers,
spray the audience with flashlights,
beat on their chests like a drum.

None of that will happen when I read.

I'm just going to give you the poem.
I'm just going to tell you what I think.
I'm just going to tell you how I feel.
That's all.
Because that's all I have.
All I have
are my words.

by Randy Wilson

"All Boys Do Good Deeds"

I'm not going to tell you my secrets
and you can't make me.
So don't ask because
I'm not going to tell you
that I stole money as a bartender
from three bars on Cape Cod.
Obviously, I never got caught.
I'm not going to tell you
how I steal postage and pens and envelopes
and xerox and long distance calls
from my office and feel entitled
and no, I never get caught.
I'm not going to tell you
how I jacked off Manny Goldman
at summer camp when I was 13.
We were just boys experiencing.
how I beat up my cousin Kimberly and it felt good.

I'm not going to tell you
how I dropped Linda Boyer
my first college girlfriend
by telling her she wasn't Jewish
so I couldn't see her anymore.
I'm not going to tell you
how I smashed into a telephone pole
when Josey broke things off.
I made up some story for the police
about bad breaks and poor lighting.
I'm not going to tell you
how I jerk off four times a day.
that I keep a collection of skin mags
under the bathroom sink
which Germaine found
and complained that all the picture girls
had bigger tits than her.
She was right.

I'm not going to tell you
I've got herpes.
I'm not going to tell you
how I blamed Eileen for giving them to me
even though I wasn't sure.
how I fucked my cousin Carol,
left a family party to do it, everyone knew,
then I got drunk at her wedding and told her husband
right after the toast.
I'm not going to tell you
how I hit Susan in bed
right across the face
and she liked it,
so did I.
how I used Melissa for interim sex
then told her I was seeing someone else.
I made her cry.
I'm not going to tell you
how I fucked Sara and Lisa and Cindy
and Robin and Drake and Leann and Lori
and Laura and Ellen and Mindy and Carolyn
and Amy and Kathryn and Beth
and kept the cumulative total
of the girls that I screwed.
I'm not going to tell you
that I lost interest in sex
after tying them up,
using vibrators
licking their asses
and having them do mine
fucking in elevators
in airplanes
on the beach
in airplanes on the beach
in a cave
in a car
on the floor
on a bar top
on a pool table
on the back stairs
on the roof of my fraternity
in the middle of Winter
with another man.
I'm not going to tell you

that things changed
that I snorted cocaine in front of my parents
just to show them who was in charge.
how I smoked crack because I wanted
because I wanted
because

 I wanted
 to die.

I came close a couple of times
just couldn't finish the job.

I'm not going to tell you
that I can't cry.

by Randy Wilson