

## -SYLVIA-

Sylvia Jenks

Mr. Williams 8<sup>th</sup> period English

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### My report on "As I lay Dying" by William Faulkner

As I lay dying is the story of a poor family in Mississippi who have to travel to a distant town to bury Addie who is the children's mother, and the wife of Anse. Opening with the agonizing narration of Addie struggling to breathe as she lay on her deathbed it becomes improbably more depressing as the family blunders their way across the magnolia state with corpse in tow. Every small success is met by greater tragedy, as the miserable quest powers on.

There is no set narrator in this story; rather the tale is told piece by piece by each member of the family, by friends, strangers, and locals. There is no pattern to the narrative trade offs, and it then seems fitting that the books culmination comes to an emotional train-wreck as it becomes clear that the entire family has become unraveled by the journey.

I want back every second I spent reading this book. It is that bad. There are three things about it that made me wish I could have been watching television: The confusing and uncontrolled method of narration, the lack of any meaningful intent of the plot, and the books climax which is nothing short of a total betrayal to both the reader, and to the narrative as a whole.

I have never experienced quite a level of frustration with a book quite like the difficulty I had with this one in trying to remember who was narrating what and why they were narrating it. Faulkners' writing style lacks variance from character to character. This means that the narrative voice of each particular character says pretty much the same. So you're left to decode who's who by disseminating their beliefs and opinions. Some characters have a signpost that Faulkner uses to identify them: Cash had a broken leg, Anse wants new teeth, Vardaman goes crazy and thinks his mother turned into a fish. But overall these minor POV tweaks don't amount to very much, especially considering some characters appear once, and then they're gone. No one is introduced, no one is described, there is no order, and no organization. The result is constant question 'who is narrating?' and just knowing the name isn't enough because these faceless vague shells of characters have to be re-constructed from the ground up with each new chapter. To each character there seems to be no difference in voice, only difference in approach. Motivation and emotions seem to win out over basic character descriptions which has it's place I suppose, but doesn't make for clarity. Until the last few pages of the book I thought the whole family was black.

The pointlessness of this book gives it the feel of a thick fog on what you know would otherwise be a clear, sunny day. The arranged plot of problem-disaster-proceed gives the overall story a constant redundancy that is echoed in the life and death wonderings of the wayward Bundren family. Things happen to them, they deal with them and move on pondering the life and death scheme of the world, all the while never hitting on anything big or of any outreach. The big ideas tossed around eventually come to nothing. All higher and sublime ideas culminate to just beating around the bush. The focus always shifts back to the

plot: getting it, and getting up and getting on with it. The profound concepts tossed against the mundane activity just leaves the story without any solid ground to stand on. To me it comes across as lacking in purpose.

Finally I will never forget that this book betrayed everything it stood for. By the end when it becomes clear that nobody in the family gets along, that Addie and Anse never loved each other, and the marriage was a lie. The end of this book leaves me here: with Jewel the only son Addie ever loved got his back roasted and sold off his hard-earned horse for a lazy man who wasn't even his real father, Darl shipped off to a mental institution, Cash with a rotten concrete leg and Anse stealing his daughters abortion money. Now what in the world could make this tale seem any more fruitless, pointless and needless? Faulkner found a way. The ultimate revelation of the book: The whole trip was intended to get Anse a new woman, and some wooden teeth. The whole point all along; all the suffering and grief and life and death and contemplation was nothing but a ruse. Anse wants to score on the rebound. That's it. Why did the Bundrens cross a county in Mississippi? To get to the other side. If you're looking for a book with little respect for the solemnness of death but everything to do with the miserable upset and constant confounds of life, look no further.

This book stands for and means absolutely nothing. I'm sitting here, writing this and for the life of me I can't think of anything it's trying to say. It is nothing but lies upon lies, macabre, and ultimately a punchline with 260 pages in front of it.

This book is a fish!

## -DAVE-

I twist and jam the knob to loosen it from the frame. I think the shaft is blocked. Fuck. The lights come on in the stairway behind me.

“Who's there? Answer me, I've got a gun!”

“I'm packing too, man.” My heart is racing, but my voice is smooth as wax-paper. “Just do yourself a favor and stay where you are.” The paintings under my arms are slipping loose. I lay my hand on the pile, and they hold tight against the leather of my buccaneer gloves. I shift my weight to pull the door back from the Jam.

I'm such a dumb fuck. I work the streets, I never rob houses, why the fuck did I even do this? When I came to this house, I'd had a few drinks, and decided to check the door. It was unlocked. The silverware in my pockets jangle musically against the scuffing and rattling sound of me trying to get out.

“I'm gonna call the cops you asshole.”

“I'm just on my way out. Let's not do anything stupid.”

He shuffles his feet down the stairway and I set down everything and get to the blind-spot of the landing. He passes the threshold with his gun drawn, pointing it at the door. I only see his arm with the gun pointing at the door. I lunge for his wrist, as I draw my sword. With one motion, the gun is pointed upward, and my blade points right onto his chest. I move the blade to his neck and press his jugular.

“Drop it.”

The gun falls and push the man away with the sword. Reaching down I pick up the gun, and point it at him. I've never used one before. Sweat breaks on my hand the second I touch it.

“Get on the sofa and lay face-down. Do it.”

He complies, and I press my knee on his back, while I drop the gun into my pocket with the silverware. With chains that I added to complete my costume, I wrap up his wrists tight.

“I'll kill you, you bastard! He's a black-haired 34 looking fellow in teal green button-up pajamas, with a big oriental dragon on it in white thread.

“My friend, you are in no position to make threats.” I set him on his feet, while I have

his arms barred behind him.

“What are you supposed to be?” I lean over to his shoulder and tap my eye-patch.

“A Pirate of course. Yaar! Surrender me yer booty matey!”

“You're going to Jail. I shit you not. You'll go down for this.”

I glance into the kitchen, where I see a bolted door.

“That door in the kitchen. Where does it go?”

He says nothing, but breathes like a deep bellows. My sword I press into his back, and I force him forward into the kitchen with it. “Whoa. Whoa. Whoa. Hold on. Stop!” He screams. I push him against a wall, and hold him up against it with my cutlass.

“It's the cellar, OK? It goes down into the cellar.”

“That's where we are going to go.”

“NO!” he screams, and tries to struggle a bit, but just a little upward force on his chained arms bends his body and his will. I sheathe my sword, and drag him to the door. I un-bolt it, hit the lights and force him down the stairs. Down there I see some extension chords that I pull from the wall of his workshop. I then drag him to one of the metal pillars that supports the house. I quickly bind him up to the pillar. First I tie up the chains and his arms to the pole, then his chest and his body with another chord. I hop to my feet, and return to the workshop for some twine that I saw on the counter top.

“God-damn you! You shit-eating pencil-dicked son of a whore!”

When I come back with the twine he winds up a kick that knocks the feather-top hat off my head. I reach up fast enough to keep my curly red wig, though, and my beard is still tied tight around my chin. My gloves come off. I grab his flailing feet, and and I twine up his ankles, then his knees in a hog-tie. I do another round of twine around his wrists, just to be sure. I know it's not comfortable, but it'll work; the poor chump.

With my gloves back on I make another trip to the work-shop, and rummage through the drawers. In one I find a rag, and in another I find some electrical tape. With the rag in his mouth I bind up his head.

I walk over to my hat and place it on my head with the skull and cross-bones facing

forward. Then I turn, and face his angry, but defeated eyes.

“Confession time, my brother. I wasn't ever going to shoot you or stab you. I don't believe in killing people, but I had to deceive you, and for that I ask for your forgiveness.” While he struggles against the twine, chains and chords I make sure my beard is on straight.

“I'm only here to help rid you of material dependence. Have you ever thought that all of the things you have filled your life with will not bring you true joy?”  
He tries to shuffle to the other side of the pillar, I pin down his ankles with my foot.

“Tonight you will wish goodbye to many of your material things. It will be your job to rebuild what you have lost, and I ask that you build it up spiritually. Stop pursuing the trappings of this world. Seek the almighty God and Saviour.”

His mumblings muffle their way out from behind the rag.

“Three things, sir. One, even a thief is not beyond redemption. Two, rain falls on the unjust and the just alike. Three: I have taken nothing from you that you cannot get back. So what I am giving you is the opportunity to seek something that you have never sought before. Find your redeemer.”

I head up the stairs, and kill the lights as his screams go muted behind the closed door.

Two hours later I pull into the alley at my place. I get out, unlock and open the garage door at the back of the warehouse, and drive in with a gleaming black Lexus SUV.

I cleaned the place out.

All the valuables I could come off the walls, and table tops. His suits, his jewelry, a flat-screen TV, his computer, his DJ mixing equipment, his yuppie fine china and sculptures. Whatever would fit into his car. I'm only upset that I had to choose which of his three cars to steal. My other options were a Mazda RX-8 and a Mercedes CLK. Great cars but didn't have the trunk-space I needed. It was like an easter-egg hunt. I loaded it all into the truck and drove home.

After I shut the garage door, it finally sunk in.

Did that just fucking happen? Did that really just fucking happen? Holy shit.

I didn't seem real. It's like a dream. I keel backward and lay on the floor. The clang of metal comes from the silverware and the gun weighed heavily in my pocket.

Thank God that front door jammed.

Tomorrow I go online and open the first of a hundred Internet auctions I'll sell the gun and the china at the pawn shop, along with the rings and gold chains, then I'll drive out to a parking lot somewhere and abandon the Lexus. It's a crying shame, but it's too hot. I can't move it. After all that I'll meet up with Sylvia and and head to the Halloween party she invited me to.

I shut my eyes and laugh and laugh louder and deeper than before. I can hear the height of my ceiling in the darked warehouse with the echoes of my laughter. This is the best Halloween ever all because of one jammed door. I laugh and tears stream from the corners of my eyes back to my ears. The Lord works in mysterious ways.

## -ARTHUR-

The thirty-first of October. All-Hallows eve. The devilish gloom of the field in the side yard rests below a sinister sliver of the silver crescent moon. It is cold as frost.

I swallow a Diazepam.

Wind howls and gusts in the far distant bare field. It's winding icy bellows roll and rustle the twisted, crushed mat of dead tall grasses struck naked in the wintering autumn.

I pour myself a bloodvein. The red vile only as thick as my pinky goes up to my lips and I turn the glass all the way up, with the fluid shot quickly down my gullet.

A frosty cloud floats above the field casting a scant shadow that takes the shade of night darker by no more than a hint. I turn and put on my cape. This party is going to be excellent. Most of the guests are already here. I just came to my room for a quick hit of the strong stuff. I'm going to be tripping out of my head in a few minutes. I sit back and take in the view. It starts to work. There are tiny creatures running like dark flames through the field. They glitter in the moonlight, but I can't see their faces. They just run, and scurry amongst themselves like tiny demons, or gnomes. They are preparing for the winter.

I'm drifting upward. Outward. The two way rings in, and I know that it's the doorman that I hired.

"Sir?"

The little creatures aren't real. They're a dream. I'm dreaming.

"Yes, Charlie?"

"Sylvia and Loopy have arrived, Sir."

"Outstanding. Outstanding." I can feel the sweat broken on my forehead. "Keep them there. I'm coming down." I snap in the custom fangs and make my way out the door. As I leave the room, I see the first real spirit in my higher state. Chad. He is collapsed outside my room, leaning his head back and forth.

"Chad?" I ask "Are you OK?"

He can't even look at me.

"Triple drop." He says.

"Triple drop of what?"

"Triple drop."

"You gonna be OK?"

"Triple drop."

It's all he can say. It's all he knows. It's everything he is. This wandering essence has taken upon himself a three course meal. Extacy and acid and coke, Maybe speed or pills. If he had a bloodvein and then tapped it with anything he'll be fucked off his mind for the rest of the night. Even I'm going to be gone as hell in another few minutes. That's why I'm glad Ken arrived when he did.

I brewed the last batch of this myself, and it is potent.

I am Dracula. My home is the night. I cannot enter your residence unless I am invited, and I may not cross any flow of moving water. By day I must sleep in the consecrated tomb of my burial earth. By night I command all the forces of the unseen and the undead.

I am made whole by feasting on the blood of the living. Nosferatu.

I don't walk down the stairs, I float. I can fly. I can feel the touch and smell perfumes of the aromas of my surroundings. I know warmth and cold, love and hate and thirst. I feel nothing of pain.

At the base of the stairs, the colors and the shapes of everyone surrounding me blend into a sea of bodies locked in orgies of sensuality that they do not know, but I see. Faces go dead, as masks come to life. Their music throbs, and their speech is but moaning and laughter. I see through them and I may drink their blood. From behind I am embraced by brilliant white and downy feathers.

Martha.

The maiden of darkness, my newest addition of blushing brides. She is wearing white and wings for my all-hallows festival. The bloofer Lady.

Lucy.

"I'm having a great time, Arthur. Let's go someplace alone."

"My dearest Lucy, there is business I must attend tonight."

She comes around away from her embrace, and she faces me.

"What do you mean Lucy? Who's Lucy?"

Is it a dream or is it real. What I can't remember, I can't tell. There is a blooming of rainbows coming from her dress. Light, almost like the sun comes from her wings.

"You are Lucy, of course." I say "You invited me to drink of your blood. You did so freely, as you have bidden me to yourself and so you are as undead as I am. Yes, you are of the undead, and you love your cursed count. Surely you love me and you wish only to be with your Dracula, but away I command you, for greater things are astir." I take her by the shoulders and smile my sharp teeth at her. "Wait for me."

So, thus she stares into my eyes.

"Whoa. What are you on? I want some."

"Wait for me." I turn and float for the front door. They await.

"Charlie. So good of you to greet our esteemed guests."

Ken is dressed as a Kung-fu Tibetan monk, though his head is not shaved. This is good because I like his long hair. Sylvia arrived dressed as a mechanic, complete with oil stains, a tool belt and a jump-suit.

Now I must be very careful to focus on this moment. The world is melting away around me and before I leave it to go to open a higher spiritual chakra I will make my mind known. The stars were so beautiful tonight.

"Hi, Arthur." Sylvia says sweetly. "I'd like you to meet Loopy."

"Loopy," I reply, "of course." My hand is outstretched, and I grip him firmly by the hand, and then by the elbow. I have him. His eyes glance side to side as though he feels trapped and indeed he is.

Poor, dear Ken Harker. Lured to castle Dracula.

"I bid you welcome. Sylvia, enjoy the party for a bit." I take Ken by the shoulder. "I have a long discussion in mind for our mutual friend Loopy, here."

"But Arthurrrrr! I thought we'd--"

"I shall not be long. I vow. Help your tastes, and fancies to themselves, and do enjoy my guests for a bit."

Many of these guests are children, or college kids. Teenagers may be stupid, but they know how to party. My father is across town at a separate Halloween party. He may return to find my surprise mess, but that can be dealt with at the proper time. I do have security, so nothing of major wrong will occur. Of all the people in this house, even within the great expanse to the city, there is only one with which I must speak.

I usher Sylvia into the main room with Rap-beats bellowing. I send her to the boys with plastic cups of booze, and half-smoked cigarettes hanging off their mouths.

Ken I keep all to myself, and I fly him up the stairs in a whirl of mist.

"Hello, Arthur." he says.

"Ken it is so good to see you again."

"What is it you need to talk about, Man?"

"Only everything."

We pass Chad who shifts his head. "Triple drop." He says, furthering his experiment into human consciousness.

I lead Ken into my private chambers and sit him on my bed. I look at him, while lounging in my chair across the room.

"Would you like a drink?" I ask to break the silence.

"No, Arthur, I just want to hear it. You got me here. Say what you want to say."

I don't reflect in mirrors or cast a shadow.

"David Simon Fisher. You made an attempt to steal from me \$80,000. Nothing came of it."

"How'd you get my name?"

"How do you think?"

He sneers, tensing his cheeks.

"I think it was Sylvia."

I rotate my view above. The ceiling is beginning to move. It pulsates like water in a creek. It's mesmerizing.

"She's got a horrible poker face. Seducing her to tell me all about you was child's play."

He slams his fist on the bed. "Fuck."

"So there was your downfall, your ruin. You sent her to spy on me."

"What do you mean I sent her to you? You sent her to spy on me!"

"Let's just call her a double agent, then." I'm still watching the life of my roof.

"Tell me about the doomsday fund, Arthur."

This is the most real sounding word I've head for a while. I look at him, and he seems so far away, but he's just across the room.

"You know about the doomsday fund?"

"All 10-million of it."

I stand up quickly, and suddenly the distance between us is so much smaller.

"I can only prove that 80 grand was from insider trading, but that may be a snowball that cuts loose an avalanche."

"My, how resourceful." I say sitting down. "You seem to be a religious person. You mentioned to me the wrath of God once. Do you think yourself to be very faithful?"

"I do."

"Well, I don't. Not myself anyway. Because God is supposed to be able to do anything. Have you ever heard this riddle: Can God make a mountain so big that he himself could not move it?"

"I have heard that riddle. The answer is no."

"I see, so I ask you if this is one thing that God cannot do, how can he exist?"

"You've missed the point. By saying no I've identified that he CAN'T NOT do something. It's a double negative. Basically it's saying he can do it. He can make it, he can move it. He can

do anything.”

It's very warm here now, but it doesn't feel like sunlight. It feels holy.

“No, Ken, you've missed the point. The idea that God can make any mountain, and can move any mountain means that there is still something he cannot do. He cannot out-do himself. He cannot be more than God. He cannot be greater, he cannot go further. We are born small, and we grow old to rule the world, and we outdo ourselves daily. We do what God can never do, we get better. That is what keeps me away from the religious shit. Doing what God cannot. That is why I am a demon of the night.”

He thinks to himself for a bit, then gets up.

“Fuck you, Arthur. I'm out.”

“I'm certain you've been stealing things for years, but my contact in the force tells me your name only comes up once in a statutory rape case. So you've never been busted and your lawyer must have been good for keeping you out of the can for jail-baiting.”

“You don't have your facts straight.” He heads for the door, and I stand in front of it. The room is flying away. I think we're going into outer space.

“Don't leave, Ken. I just want to talk.”

“What are you going to do? You can't touch me. I told you. You go after me and my associate will release the trading information.”

“Oh, right. Your associate. What was his name again” I lean forward into him, well into his comfort zone. “Loopy was it?”

He tries to push me away and open the door. “You're a dead man.”

I spring back, and slam the door shut. “Undead, actually. Don't cross me.”

“Arthur, get out of the way or I will fuck you up.” I grab him by the shoulders and lift him up off his feet, pinning him to the door, as I turn.

“Will you? You need to know something, Dave.”

I have the strength of ten men. He struggles in my grip

“What the Hell?”

"I like you, Ken. I'm glad when you're around. Let's be together for a while."

I lower him down to his feet.

He wrestles his hand out of my grasp and punches me, first in the ribs, then across the face, I toss him back, and he scrambles a bit. I didn't feel a thing.

"Oh, my God. You're a sodomite! I'm gonna fucking kill you."

"You can't do anything to me, Ken."

"Oh, yeah?"

He charges me in the splendor of flowers and lightning bolts, and I grab him, and throw him down on the ground, and get right back in his face.

"For three reasons: One, I know everything about you. Where you live and what you do. Two, Because just a few minutes ago I had a bloodvein, which is peyote pressed and pickled in scotch for a month, and then mixed with PCP. Third is because I am undead. I'm the count of the Carpathians. I'm the evil creeping in the darkness. I am Dracula!"

Send questions, Comments, thoughts to  
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