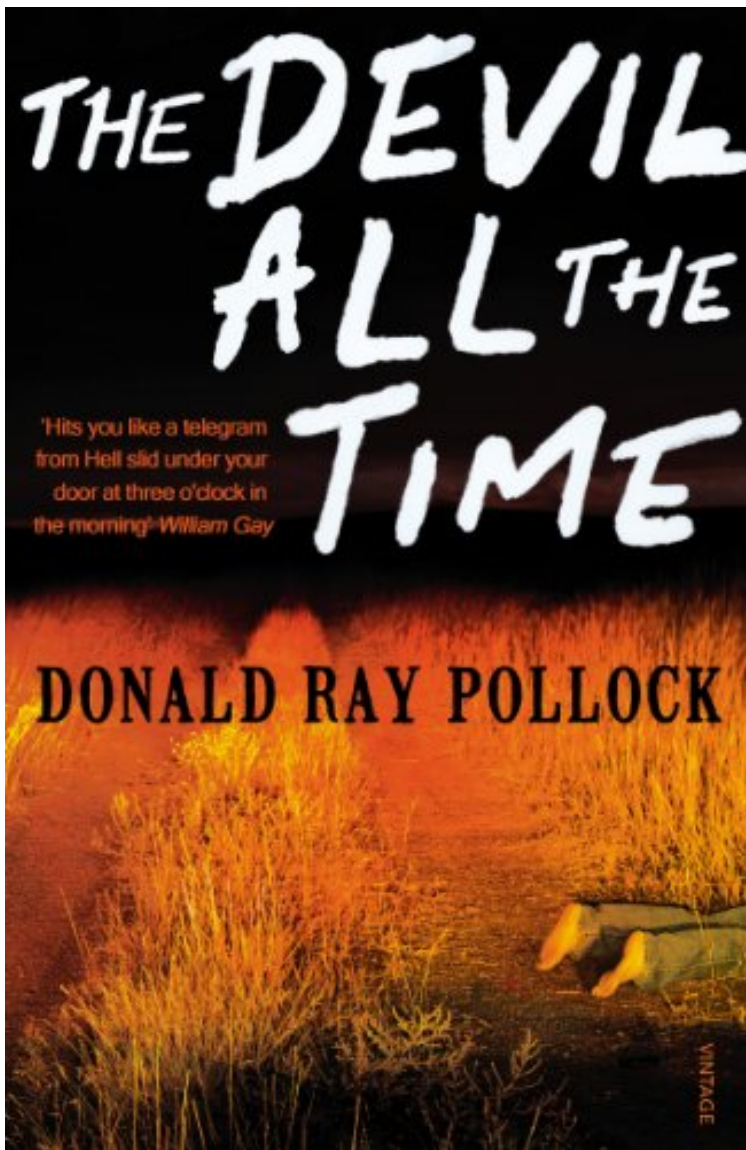


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The Devil All the Time



Par Pollock Donald Ray
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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurWillard is a tormented veteran of the carnage in the South Pacific who can't save his beautiful wife, Charlotte, from a slow death by cancer no matter how much sacrificial blood he pours on his 'prayer log'. Carl and Sandy Henderson, a husband-and-wife team of serial killers, trawl America's highways searching for suitable models to photograph and exterminate. The spider-handling preacher Roy and his crippled virtuoso-guitar-playing sidekick are running from the law. And caught in the middle of all this is Arvin, Willard and Charlotte's orphaned son, who grows up to be a good but also violent man in his own right.Extrait1It was a Wednesday afternoon in the fall of 1945, not long after the war had ended. The Greyhound made its regular stop in Meade, Ohio, a little paper-mill town an hour south of Columbus that

smelled like rotten eggs. Strangers complained about the stench, but the locals liked to brag that it was the sweet smell of money. The bus driver, a soft, sawed-off man who wore elevated shoes and a limp bow tie, pulled in the alley beside the depot and announced a forty-minute break. He wished he could have a cup of coffee, but his ulcer was acting up again. He yawned and took a swig from a bottle of pink medicine he kept on the dashboard. The smokestack across town, by far the tallest structure in this part of the state, belched forth another dirty brown cloud. You could see it for miles, puffing like a volcano about to blow its skinny top. Leaning back in his seat, the bus driver pulled his leather cap down over his eyes. He lived right outside of Philadelphia, and he thought that if he ever had to live in a place like Meade, Ohio, he'd go ahead and shoot himself. You couldn't even find a bowl of lettuce in this town. All that people seemed to eat here was grease and more grease. He'd be dead in two months eating the slop they did. His wife told her friends that he was delicate, but there was something about the tone of her voice that sometimes made him wonder if she was really being sympathetic. If it hadn't been for the ulcer, he would have gone off to fight with the rest of the men. He'd have slaughtered a whole platoon of Germans and shown her just how goddamn delicate he was. The biggest regret was all the medals he'd missed out on. His old man once got a certificate from the railroad for not missing a single day of work in twenty years, and had pointed it out to his sickly son every time he'd seen him for the next twenty. When the old man finally croaked, the bus driver tried to talk his mother into sticking the certificate in the casket with the body so he wouldn't have to look at it anymore. But she insisted on leaving it displayed in the living room as an example of what a person could attain in this life if he didn't let a little indigestion get in his way. The funeral, an event the bus driver had looked forward to for a long time, had nearly been ruined by all the arguing over that crummy scrap of paper. He would be glad when all the discharged soldiers finally reached their destinations so he wouldn't have to look at the dumb bastards anymore. It wore on you after a while, other people's accomplishments. Private Willard Russell had been drinking in the back of the bus with two sailors from Georgia, but one had passed out and the other had puked in their last jug. He kept thinking that if he ever got home, he'd never leave Coal Creek, West Virginia, again. He'd seen some hard things growing up in the hills, but they didn't hold a candle to what he'd witnessed in the South Pacific. On one of the Solomons, he and a couple of other men from his outfit had run across a marine skinned alive by the Japanese and nailed to a cross made out of two palm trees. The raw, bloody body was covered with black flies. They could still see the man's heart beating in his chest. His dog tags were hanging from what remained of one of his big toes: Gunnery Sergeant Miller Jones. Unable to offer anything but a little mercy, Willard shot the marine behind the ear, and they took him down and covered him with rocks at the foot of the cross. The inside of Willard's head hadn't been the same since. When he heard the tubby bus driver yell something about a break, Willard stood up and started toward the door, disgusted with the two sailors. In his opinion, the navy was one branch of the military that should never be allowed to drink. In the three years he'd served in the army, he hadn't met a single swabby who could hold his liquor. Someone had told him that it was because of the saltpeter they were fed to keep them from going crazy and fucking each other when they were out to sea. He wandered outside the bus depot and saw a little restaurant across the street called the Wooden Spoon. There was a piece of white cardboard stuck in the window advertising a meat loaf special for thirty-five cents. His mother had fixed him a meat loaf the day before he left for the army, and he considered that a good sign. In a booth by the window, he sat down and lit a cigarette. A shelf ran around the room, lined with old bottles and antique kitchenware and cracked black-and-white photographs for the dust to collect on. Tacked to the wall by the booth was a faded newspaper account of a Meade police officer who'd been gunned down by a bank robber in front of the bus depot. Willard looked closer, saw that it was dated February 11, 1936. That would have been four days before his twelfth birthday, he calculated. An old man, the only other customer in the diner, was bent over at a table in the middle of the room slurping a bowl of green soup. His false teeth rested on top of a stick of butter in front of him. Willard finished the cigarette and was just getting ready to leave when a dark-haired waitress finally stepped out of the kitchen. She grabbed a menu from a stack by the cash register and handed it to him. "I'm sorry," she said, "I didn't hear you come in." Looking at her high cheekbones and full lips and long, slender legs, Willard discovered, when she asked him what he wanted to eat, that the spit had dried in his mouth. He could barely speak. That had never happened to him before, not even in the middle of the worst fighting on Bougainville. While she went to put the order in and get him a cup of coffee, the thought went through his head that just a couple of months ago he was certain that his life was going to end on some steamy, worthless rock in the middle of the Pacific Ocean; and now here he was, still sucking air and just a few hours from home, being waited on by a woman who looked like a live version of one of those pinup

movie angels. As best as Willard could ever tell, that was when he fell in love. It didn't matter that the meat loaf was dry and the green beans were mushy and the roll as hard as a lump of #5 coal. As far as he was concerned, she served him the best meal he ever had in his life. And after he finished it, he got back on the bus without even knowing Charlotte Willoughby's name. Across the river in Huntington, he found a liquor store when the bus made another stop, and bought five pints of bonded whiskey that he stuck away in his pack. He sat in the front now, right behind the driver, thinking about the girl in the diner and looking for some indication that he was getting close to home. He was still a little drunk. Out of the blue, the bus driver said, "Bringing any medals back?" He glanced at Willard in the rearview mirror. Willard shook his head.

"Just this skinny old carcass I'm walking around in." "I wanted to go, but they wouldn't take me." "You're lucky," Willard said. The day they'd come across the marine, the fighting on the island was nearly over, and the sergeant had sent them out looking for some water fit to drink. A couple of hours after they buried Miller Jones's flayed body, four starving Japanese soldiers with fresh bloodstains on their machetes came out of the rocks with their hands up in the air and surrendered. When Willard and his two buddies started to lead them back to the location of the cross, the soldiers dropped to their knees and started begging or apologizing, he didn't know which. "They tried to escape," Willard lied to the sergeant later in the camp. "We didn't have no choice." After they had executed the Japs, one of the men with him, a Louisiana boy who wore a swamp rat's foot around his neck to ward off slant-eyed bullets, cut their ears off with a straight razor. He had a cigar box full of ones he'd already dried. His plan was to sell the trophies for five bucks apiece once they got back to civilization. "I got an ulcer," the bus driver said. "You didn't miss nothing." "I don't know," the bus driver said. "I sure would have liked to got me a medal. Maybe a couple of them. I figure I could have killed enough of those Kraut bastards for two anyway. I'm pretty quick with my hands." Looking at the back of the bus driver's head, Willard thought about the conversation he'd had with the gloomy young priest on board the ship after he confessed that he'd shot the marine to put him out of his misery. The priest was sick of all the death he'd seen, all the prayers he'd said over rows of dead soldiers and piles of body parts. He told Willard that if even half of history was true, then the only thing this depraved and corrupt world was good for was preparing you for the next. "Did you know," Willard said to the driver, "that the Romans used to gut donkeys and sew Christians up alive inside the carcasses and leave them out in the sun to rot?" The priest had been full of such stories. "What the hell's that got to do with a medal?" "Just think about it. You're trussed up like a turkey in a pan with just your head sticking out a dead donkey's ass; and then the maggots eating away at you until you see the glory." The bus driver frowned, gripped the steering wheel a little tighter. "Friend, I don't see what you're getting at. I was talking about coming home with a big medal pinned to your chest. Did these Roman fellers give out medals to them people before they stuck 'em in the donkeys? Is that what you mean?" Willard didn't know what he meant. According to the priest, only God could figure out the ways of men. He licked his dry lips, thought about the whiskey in his pack. "What I'm saying is that when it comes right down to it, everybody suffers in the end," Willard said. "Well," the bus driver said, "I'd liked to have my medal before then. Heck, I got a wife at home who goes nuts every time she sees one. Talk about suffering. I worry myself sick anytime I'm out on the road she's gonna take off with a purple heart." Willard leaned forward and the driver felt the soldier's hot breath on the back of his fat neck, smelled the whiskey fumes and the stale traces of a cheap lunch. "You think Miller Jones would give a shit if his old lady was out fucking around on him?" Willard said. "Buddy, he'd trade places with you any goddamn day." "Who the hell is Miller Jones?" Willard looked out the window as the hazy top of Greenbrier Mountain started to appear in the distance. His hands were trembling, his brow shiny with sweat. "Just some poor bastard who went and fought in that war they cheated you out of, that's all." Willard was just getting ready to break down and crack open one of the pints when his uncle Earskell pulled up in his rattly Ford in front of the Greyhound station in Lewisburg at the corner of Washington and Court. He had been sitting on a bench outside for almost three hours, nursing a cold coffee in a paper cup and watching people walk by the Pioneer Drugstore. He was ashamed of the way he'd talked to the bus driver, sorry that he'd brought up the marine's name like he did; and he vowed that, though he would never forget him, he'd never mention Gunnery Sergeant Miller Jones to anyone again. Once they were on the road, he reached into his duffel and handed Earskell one of the pints along with a German Luger. He'd traded a Japanese ceremonial sword for the pistol at the base in Maryland right before he got discharged. "That's supposed to be the gun Hitler used to blow his brains out," Willard said, trying to hold back a grin. "Bullshit," Earskell said. Willard laughed. "What? You think the guy lied to me?" "Ha!" the old man said. He twisted the cap off the bottle, took a long pull, then shuddered. "Lord, this is good stuff." "Drink up. I got three more in my kit." Willard opened another pint and lit a cigarette. He stuck

his arm out the window. "How's my mother doing?" "Well, I gotta say, when they sent Junior Carver's body back, she went a little off in the head there for a while. But she seems pretty good now." Earskell took another hit off the pint and set it between his legs. "She just been worried about you, that's all." They climbed slowly into the hills toward Coal Creek. Earskell wanted to hear some war stories, but the only thing his nephew talked about for the next hour was some woman he'd met in Ohio. It was the most he'd ever heard Willard talk in his life. He wanted to ask if it was true that the Japs ate their own dead, like the newspaper said, but he figured that could wait. Besides, he needed to pay attention to his driving. The whiskey was going down awful smooth, and his eyes weren't as good as they used to be. Emma had been waiting on her son to return home for a long time, and it would be a shame if he wrecked and killed them both before she got to see him. Earskell chuckled a little to himself at the thought of that. His sister was one of the most God-fearing people he'd ever met, but she'd follow him straight into hell to make him pay for that one. From the Hardcover edition. *Revue de presse* "Hits you like a telegram from Hell slid under your door at three o'clock in the morning" (William Gay, Author of *Provinces of Night* and *The Long Home*) "Donald Ray Pollock redefines the term 'American Gothic', taking Flannery O'Connor and William Faulkner and turning them up to 11...once you start reading it doesn't let go" (Herald) "One of the most adventurous and significant writers of our time If the Coen Brothers want their next Oscar they should buy the rights to this book now" (Scotland on Sunday) "Terrifying ... an unsettling masterwork" (GQ) "Superb" (The Times)