



BY
K. C.
WILSON

...and she was still having hard times, but she was better than
...relief that it was over

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ALSO BY K. C. WILSON
The Route

Doing the Dead -1983
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DOING THE DEAD
1983

A Novella

by

K. C. Wilson

V. Ingrid

Meanwhile, in Arkansas, Ingrid Smythe, nee Thorvald, was embarking on a separate vacation from her third husband, Andre'. She had relatives to visit and various friends to look up in Florida, and if she had time in five days, she also planned to drop in on me.

On the next to last day of her vacation, she knocked on my door. I hadn't seen her for five years, not since the lost weekend we spent together in a Flagler Beach motel.

"Surprised?" she asked, flashing her megawatt smile. She did a little pirouette on my doorstep. She'd kept her figure.

"Very."

"I thought you would be."

I opened the screen door for her. "How's married life?" I asked.

"Like being married."

We spent a few hours unraveling the pretense of resisting our physical attractions to each other. I expected no other visitors, yet remained wary of her intentions and kept nodding toward propriety all along, until it grew late and Lyle and Susan had gone to bed and the last question between us was whether I would kiss her first or continue to wait for an unmistakable word or gesture from her before succumbing to her allure.

We were leaning side by side against the countertop in the kitchen, not touching, observing the glare from the bare bulb overhead on the grimy yellow linoleum floor at our feet.

“So,” I said, vapidly, “still married.”

“Yes,” she said. “Maybe not for long.”

“I don’t want to be a factor in your marital dispute,” I said.

She turned her arch and foolproof gaze my way and challenged, “What do you want?”

I could not resist her any longer. She was warm for me and suddenly next to me, her arms around me, her lips hungrily on mine.

“I wasn’t going to let this happen,” she said later, in a languorous after-glow. “I know you don’t believe that.”

“Me either,” I said. “I had the best of intentions.”

She had until noon the next day before she had to go. She began to sigh and reminisce over the years of brief encounters that we’d strung together and called a relationship. There was something on her mind that she could have told me then, that she wanted to tell me, but instead, she gushed on about how in all the years she had known me she had never had me to herself for more than a weekend or a week, and now, once again, her heart was fluttering at my very touch.

She had given me up for the last time, she said, when she married Andre.’ Perhaps that had been a mistake . . . If I loved her now . . . If I still loved her . . .

Love, that splendid standby, I thought. I was amazed at the avid faith of her perspective, and more than a little leery of its single-minded intensity. A shadow flitted across her features, a reaction to my indifferent response. It was neither necessary nor possible for her to understand the way I felt, about love, about anything. She was not staying. I could keep her visit short and pleasant, joke good naturedly about her library donations, see her again in a couple of years. It did not have to be love. Couldn’t we be friends and lovers too, that sort of thing? That was how it always was before. She wasn’t always so serious.

In the morning, she informed me that she had not slept well, that my snoring had made such a racket she had barely managed to close her eyes. I scoffed that she did not know what real snoring was if she thought I snored, and furthermore, if I ever did snore, at least it was a tolerable, refreshingly normal kind of snore and not a rusty oil derrick, sump pump, constant death rattle sleep apnea snore. And she could thank her lucky stars for that, because woe betide the woman who could not tolerate my snoring, after what I’d endured

getting used to Brenda. There was no comparison. None.

Ingrid wondered quietly about Brenda, the subject of my diatribe. She did not like the idea of her or the casual use of another woman's name as a means to dismiss her complaint.

But she let it pass.

We spent a pleasant morning with Lyle and Susan, the four of us in the back porch sunshine. Some hasty packing, then Ingrid had to go.

"I have this feeling I'll be back soon," she said. "Will you write to me? Don't worry, Andre' never opens my mail."

I told her I would. She said she loved me one more time, then pulled out for Arkansas. She was gone a couple of days before I wrote her a letter full of crass references to dented headboards and well oiled springs.

Upon her departure, Lyle sat me down like the younger brother he often pretended to regard me as and initiated a man-to-man talk with me.

"Floyd, I'm telling you," he said, "that Ingrid, she's the one for you."

"She does make a good first impression," I conceded.

"You are so incredibly shallow," he said. "You wouldn't know real love if it walked up and bit you on the ass."

"Is that what we're talking about, real love?" I said.

"If you really don't see it, I feel sorry for you. I do," said Lyle. "I always thought you had a brain, even if you do lack integrity. But you just want to slut around with your eyes closed, feeling bodies in the dark."

"You don't even know her," I said.

"I'm just telling you," said Lyle. "She's the one."

A crisis of conscience was not what I needed right then. It was not as if I had led Ingrid on or astray. None of that applied. If she did leave her husband, it would not be because I had asked her to or suggested that maybe the two of us might someday live together again in some abstract fantasy of love. No, it would be because she had damn well decided on her own to leave her husband. It had nothing to do with me.