



BY
K. C.
WILSON

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

...I was annoyed
...I had a great time
...I still c

...I was never going to write her story, but I
...from the beach and b
...my eyes water.

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...my eyes water.

...no intention of even headcr
...and do it if I wanted
...but even that was more than

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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

VII. Daybreak on the Land

Kate came by early in the Cougar. Ingrid got up to see me off. Lyle was leaving to go to work. Susan slept. Russell sat on his couch on the porch, drinking beer and watching early morning TV on the portable black and white. The house was peaceful, calm. Ingrid waved a tender goodbye from the doorway. All I had to do was get in the car and go.

The moment of going provided a focus on the receding house. Inside the Cougar, reality and time were linked to no houses. The moment of going extended outward into a prolonged transition, like one of those endlessly changing Dead jams that segue in a hundred different directions before the full surging power of the band converges on a single resonating chord that announces the end of the song they were playing as it fades into the beginning of the next song, the next new song in the sequence. The music never stops.

Doc had fifty Dead tapes picked out, including four hours of the Cairo concerts. He plugged one into the boom box positioned between the seats and handed the box of tapes to me.

“Keep it going,” he said.

Thumbing through the cassettes, I recognized less than half the songs by name. I’d seen the Dead a couple of times, the last time three years earlier in Gainesville. I was familiar with the music, but had not kept up with the band. I’d never been swept away before by the scope and size of the canon.

A distant feeling, like the memory of another life, came slowly back to me in increments. The music embraced me, welcomed me back to the fold and

spread before me a banquet of songs.

The feeling gathered and coiled, growing with the collection of tunes. I looked out the window at the beautiful day and felt the first lump rising in my throat over one glorious line, "...she can make happy any man alive..."

Songs reached out to tease me with an eerie familiarity.

*That's why if you please
I am on my bended knees
Bertha don't you come around here, anymore*

It became increasingly difficult for me to retain the perspective I had left the house with only moments ago that morning. My well-timed exit was a plunging entry into a parallel world.

All the people in all of the songs, the named and the nameless, were real, as real as my friends and the characters that wove in and out of the stories they told. All of them merged together in a tapestry of infinite life and sound and legend. They came from life and they danced the dance of life and death in their own songs and stories, and in memories. The dead were all around me in my life, dying to be remembered.

I couldn't tell all their stories. I could only tell my own. In my thirtieth year, the world was changing, but the world is always changing. I felt it drawing me in, but I was lucky. I took a moment and stepped back. I got in the Cougar and entered a parallel world. Everyone should have that kind of luck at least once in life.

By Monday, the dust would settle. Ingrid always took care of herself. I had no more decisions to make after getting into the Cougar. The rest was out of my hands. I was going to get what was coming to me, if not what I deserved.

A normal life, with a wife of my own, kids and fidelity was probably more than I deserved. I might have been good at it, I thought, though it seemed idyllic at best to contemplate such a blissful situation for myself. Fear of commitment had all but paralyzed the faculty of hopeful optimism I was still pretty sure I was born with.

*Please forget you knew my name
My darling, Sugaree*

“Nico,” I sighed, my eyes out the window, “rest easy, girl, in your safe world.”

Tears fell then on the pages of notes I was scribbling in the car. The feeling overtook me.

Deadness, a misnomer, broke like Waimea shorebreak over my head as the song flooded over and through me in waves of relentless emotional release.

The actual shows would be anticlimactic, after fifty Dead tapes. I'd learned that word in college: anticlimactic, not how to play the guitar or sing or how to write a song like that. I wondered what of any real value I had learned in thirty years, besides how to cry unabashedly at songs and stay single.

