

# Willie - No Past No Future Just a Now

By : Wilbur

Blown out mind, fractured memory, tragedy makes mockery. Willie - now back at Birches, childhood home, with Sara - ever a constant in his life since early childhood, and Jax, fellow musician, now companion and part-caretaker. Meet them all... Again, WARNING - not a short, short story. Some 3700 words, so again, if you like quick fixes, this will not be your cup of tea.

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*Willie - No Past, No Future, Just a Now*

A warm dusty country road with sunken rocks that scrape bare toes, leafy overhangs, lazy insect sounds. Slow moving air. Juicy grass stalks. No past. No future. Just a now.

Road rises. Grasses share space with Indian paintbrush and buttercups and small brilliant glossy yellow flowers. Top of hill. Land flattens. Tall trees. Open space. A field or small glen of some sort.

Willie kicks a loose pebble. Kicks it again. Whistles a no-tune tune. Scratches his ear. Wonders why he's here. Looks at his wrist to see the time and remembers he is not wearing a watch. That's right. No past, no present, no future - just a now. Small knot of panic. No. Not panic. Hunger. No real breakfast. No real dinner. Hell, no real ... . Say it. No real life. His breath caught and he thought he might puke. Oh, come on old son. Just because it didn't work? Just because you couldn't play the game? Couldn't play the game ... . Hell - I couldn't play the ... . No - my. I couldn't play my ... .

He throws himself into somersaulting. Three times. Then walks on his hands for a bit. Falling down into a comfortable crash-out on the ground, he lies flat and stares straight up at the sky. Couldn't remember the notes. Couldn't find the melody. Couldn't play the melody. Couldn't play the melody line to my own damn piece. Couldn't get it back. Could. Not. Kept bloody running away from me. Laughing. Taunting. Just beyond my reach. Gone. Out of my mind. Out of my mind? Out of my mind. Is that it? Is that what's happening? Something inside my brain is eating my memories? Taking me away from myself? One note at a time? One piece at a time? One at a time. Christ! What'll I do? What will I do? What can I do.

He rolls over into a ball. And weeps. Weeps for himself. Weeps for all the things that had ever hurt or scared him. When Benjamin broke his guitar. Dropped it. When his fingers got smashed in the car door and he thought he'd never play again. When Junie - lovely little loonie tunie junie moonie - told him she loved him and then left forever. When he lost that writer's grant with the Ronstein Foundation and had to get work, doing something he loathed.

But he'd always gotten back up. And found a way. Now he didn't even know if he knew a way when he saw one, or could remember it if he did. He sat up. Crying stuffs up your nose and makes your eyes blurry. It makes your head hurt, too. He blew his nose. Leaned back on his hands. Lifted his face to the sun. Wondered what came next. In this New World of No Past No Present No Future Just a Now.

Sara trudged down the road and up the hill. He'd be up there in the clearing. By now he'd already have cried and would be hungry. And angry. And getting a bit scared. Well, at least it was safe. He couldn't/wouldn't wander far. He was like a workhorse. Out to the field and back home again. She hitched the picnic basket up higher on her hip. Wondered if he'd accept the fried greens and cheese. Cider. He'd like that. And the rhubarb crumble. He'd want that first, of course.

Sara sighed. Reece should be doing this. His wife should be taking care of him. He'd been a faithful husband. A wonderful father. A fine provider. Famous! Well, her mother'd always said don't climb too high, one slip and the fall will kill you. Look at Himself. His fall had sure hurt him bad. Might've been kinder if it had killed him. She crested the hill. There he was. Down on his hands and knees. Looking at something. Looking at what? Looking at an anthill, bless his broken mind. Watching the ants. With all the delight of a five year old.

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“Willie,” she spoke softly so as not to startle him so rapt was he.

“Reece? Reece, is that you?”

Ah hell, she thought. Not in his miseries just yet, but they were hovering.

It was as if he could read her mind. His face fell and suddenly he was stiff and angular where before he had been as soft and loose as the child he had resembled.

No, Willie thought brokenly, it wasn't Reece. Reece wasn't here now. Reece was gone. He couldn't think where. But he knew. Gone. Along with Willem and Mirabelle. His kids. He had kids? No, not anymore. Lost them. Lost them, too. Couldn't exactly remember how. Or why. No. Not so. He did know why. Because something blew. No, Reece had said because he had blown it. Blown something. That's what Reece had said. “You've blown it.” And then -- and then, she had taken the kids and left. Isn't it? Is not that what happened? Something like that. Or, more? Something else, too? Something more? Something bad. He might not be able to remember the what but he could feel it. It was bad. Something that hurt.

“Sara? Sara, what had I blow? I know I blew something? I know that's why they're all gone. Everyone's gone. But what was it, Sara? What had I blow?” Willie was getting up. Stiffly. Slowly. Like a badly strung puppet. One joint at a time. It hurt to look at him.

“You didn't blow anything, Willie. And, it's getting time to eat. Look. I brought you a picnic. We can spread out over there, near the brook. Eat our lunch.”

Sara hated the things he ate, just as he hated the things she ate. Contrary. Crosshatched and contrary. That's how they were, in so many ways. Just as always between them, but only in little things. There was real love at heart. Starting from when he was a little boy and she a bought-n-brought-in substitute for his dead momma. Oh, how he had hated her. And how she had disliked him. At first. Then? Then came love, soft footed and sure. Now? Now she hoped that love could keep his poor fractured self safe. And her? Well, it kept her here, that was for sure.

But Willie was nothing but crosshatched, now. Since the blow up. Nothing that he blew. Just wires connected incorrectly. Shorting out. Sparking. At the wrong time in the wrong place. BLOOEY. Whole recording studio. And three good men. Two dead on site, one lingering through five skin grafts before his heart gave out. All that talent, those good men, lost to fire. Fire and smoke. Flammable stuff, blocked hall, locked door -- all the things that made such tragedy possible. It had taken forensics days to properly identify who had been there when it went up.

And where was Willie? Late. You could count on it. Late for everything. Always. Got there just in time to hear the explosion. Seemed to sense how bad it was. Started running. Straight for it. There were flames by then but he had kept running. Set to bust his way in if he had to. Jax heard it blow, too. Saw Willie. Heading right for it.

Maybe Willie just wanted to be with them, with the guys he had played music with for the past twenty years. Even as ashes in a burned out studio. “Fair or foul weather, we're in it together.” What they always said before playing. Always. No matter if it was just jamming or rehearsing or if they were recording or performing live. Live. What they weren't now.

Except Willie. He didn't die. He just got a living death sentence. He never made it into the studio. One

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minute heâd been running full out and the next heâd been face down in the parking lot. Brain short-circuited, the docs said. Blew out. Howâs that for black humor? Jax had pulled him away. So the blowing embers or live-sparks or burning stuff didnât land on him. Jax. Also late. And a bit drunk. Sobered up fast. And been dry since. No more music for him. Not professionally. The heart of music for Jax had been Willie. And Willie - well, Willie was shorted out.

Willieâs music had been his life. That and his kids. He adored them. Five year old Willem, miracle child after nearly twelve sterile years, followed quickly by Mirabelle, bewitching girl-child. His marriage wasnât easy, his and Reeceâs. Troubles came and went and then they came and stayed. Figured. Two such volatile driven people. Reeceâd been jealous of Willieâs music, it was true. Called his music his mauky mistress. It wasnât that Willie was indifferent to her, just inattentive. Too often on tour or in the recording studio, or lost in his latest fascination, exploring forms of classical composition. Reece began doing various things to amuse herself. Including other men, but only twice that Sara knew of. And it didnât take. She really loved Willie.

When he was two, Willem fell hard for dragonflies - even as an infant he would coo and bubble at the sight of them - and Reeseâd turned to creating them for him, using whatever was at hand. Because Willem loved dragonflies, and Mirabelle, who copied Willem in everything, did, too -- Reece began making colonies of them to hang in the childrenâs rooms. Big, tiny, medium sized - in foil and net, mesh and wire. She discovered she had a talent for working with her hands. Then she got serious about it. She tried glass and then metal, but when she got into origami, what had been something for her children was noticed and the next thing she knew it was an art craze.

She and Willie had lived together, but led very separate lives. Following the horror of the fire and Willieâs breakdown, it all became moot. Reece was granted full custody of Willem and Mirabelle. And as soon as the ink was dry on the papers, sheâd taken the kids and headed for her parentâs home in the hills of Italy, where sheâd quickly set up the Dragonfly Studio and where the children were fast becoming bilingual. She asked no support for herself or the children. It hadnât been necessary. Willie was broke and her dragonfly pieces were selling for obscene amounts.

No, Willie it was who mightâve been left in the weeds. In the aftermath of the accident, heâd poured everything he had or been owed into lawyersâ fees and settlements and outright gifts to families of the men who died. If it hadnât been that heâd inherited Birches along with a generous trust heâd not touched before and which now was doled out in Spartan helpings annually by the law firm of his late father, Willie and Sara would have been camping out somewhere, trying to make do on Saraâs retirement money. Sheâd never have abandoned him. But thin soup and slim pickinâs, that wouldâve been.

Willie was back down on his hands and knees, following a trail of ants through the sand and grasses. Sara patted him on the back, rewarded by a quick grin, and set herself to wait. No, she thought, guilt might have driven Willie towards that holocaust. Guilt for all the things heâd put off doing or tending to. The upkeep and maintenance of the studio being a prime example. Sara thought Jax suffered guilt for not having died, too. If so, heâd overcome it in his own way. Or learned to live with it, maybe. Gotten out of the music business, taken up his carpenterâs tools again, and moved back to Squamtec so heâd be there if Sara needed help with Willie. Or just to be with Willie, when Willie could tolerate being with anyone. Except Sara. Or Gordie. Another blessing - he could be around little children. Somehow they were separate from his own in that broken mind of his. He didnât remember Jax most of the time. Which was why Jax could be around. He didnât stir Willie up. On the contrary, he seemed to help him stay calm. Except when rage or fear took over. Sara felt no fear of Willie or anger at Willie, even when he was in his blackest, meanest moods.

Willie rolled over to sit. Sara reached for his hand but he pulled away, scowling. Sara sat down beside him

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and he put his head in her lap. Idly plucking grass stems she tickled his nose until he giggled and buried his face to escape. Nothing could help the fact that Willie's father, Morton, had not been a warm man. Never was. Certainly did not find small children to his liking. Nor had Margery. Margery, Willie's stepmother. After Willie's mother, Lila, died of cancer when Willie was little, Morton, in the fullness of time married Margery, a local widow, a bit older than Morton, but of good reputation. He did so because marriage, he believed, was the correct and natural way for a man to live.

Margery didn't cotton to children anymore than Morton did. She'd wanted Morton's social standing and the security of his wealth, but was far from a social butterfly. Or butterfly of any sort by any standard. Short, stocky, and staid. A closed woman. Comforted by the idea of social correctness and wealth but with no interest or aptitude in either. Never purchased a thing not absolutely needed. Certainly never for beauty or joy. Never went out or asked anyone in. She and Morton were more like portraits of themselves than living beings. Hung on a wall and dusty.

So, Willie'd never known family warmth, once Lila die. Until Sara. There'd been no animus from Morton. Not even animus. Just the same inattention and indifference Willie'd been guilty of, Sara thought with a nod to the grim irony of it. She'd been brought in to care for Willie when he turned five. At the time of Morton marrying Margery. Before that, there'd been a series of nursemaids, followed by nannies, followed by sitters. A cold and lonely home for a little boy. She and Willie had found they way to each other and together had made themselves into a family of two, keeping mostly to Sara's rooms.

Sara had known quite well her chief duty to her employers, which had been to keep Willie from getting under the feet or up the noses of Morton or Margery. When Willie outgrew his young childhood, he was sent away to board at a private academy. Sara had been asked to stay on to make what home Morton and Margery demanded. Preparation of healthy food and maintenance of all house needs and necessities. She was invited to remain in her rooms at the back of the ground floor, rooms she'd been given to live in when she'd arrived to take care of Willie. A short hallway that backed onto the kitchen further separated those rooms from the rest of the house and there was a side door that let out next to the garage. Sara'd been well content to stay.

Willie decamped from the academy at 16, displeasing but not discomforting his father as he'd not stayed in Squamtec but headed for Chicago and the music scene there, so would bring no undue attention to the family. Some years later Margery went into a private nursing home where, shortly thereafter, she had died. Four months later, Morton was killed in a multiple car crash on the highway that had had nothing to do with him other than to randomly end his rather pawky life and times. Willie'd sent word to Sara. He retained a love of both Sara and the old place. He asked that Sara stay on as a kind of glorified house-sitter, saying he would pay all the expenses for the running and upkeep of the house along with a rather generous stipend for her. Despite the childhood with a father's distant manner and a step-mother's complete disregard, somehow Birches and Sara had become a source of love and safety for Willie.

And Sara was glad to stay on and manage the house and grounds, not only as her own home but as a home for Willie and his family when they came to visit. Besides, Birches was the only home of Sara's adult life and as both orphan and only child, Willie her only family. She loved both. She had come to like and respect Reece as a good mother to Willie's children. Now? Neither she nor Willie had seen hide or hair of Reece or the children in - what? More than a year now. Reece sent pictures. To Sara. She never showed them to Willie, only Jax. Now Willie was back permanently. Sara was still there to see to him as she had seen to him so many years ago. And happy that she could offer him her love and Birches, both. She bent and pulled at Willie's shoulder until he looked up.

"Come, Willie," she said. "Let's go and eat."

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Willie studied her face a moment longer. Searching for something. Sheâd say it was truth, only Willie was -- well, absent was the kindest way to put how Willie was when he was in the place where he was now. Heâd left his broken memories and the hurts they scraped in his mind and gone blank. What was it Jax said? â Willie has no past no present no future - just a now.â

Willieâd picked that up. Heâd say it sometimes. Like a kind of brace against bad thoughts. In some manner, he recognized it as his reality. Just as he recognized her. He knew her. Knew Sara. Right from the first. Knew Sara and knew the land. The property and its great house. Willie even knew music when things fell into place just right. Then he would play, if Jax was there. They would play together. A small mercy, Jax. Sometimes, Willie would even solo. With true aching beauty. It made her weep inside, his lost music. The day of the fire, Willieâd run away from the hospital and back to the studio. Jax had found him there. In the ashes. Riffing. On charred instrument pieces balanced on his thighs. And howling. His mind as burnt out and ruined as the studio.

Sara smiled into his serious eyes and took his elbow, helping him to rise. â Come on, Willie, letâs not let the food get any colder.â Guiding him by slight pressure on his arm, she led him to the spot by the brook where he always sat to eat. Now he was docile as a child. And hungry as one, too. He began digging into the hamper, bringing the contents out in a jumble, half unwrapping one thing before picking up the next. Sara lifted his hands and gave him a napkin to play with while she restored order.

He didnât remember the fire. Or much of anything about the year before. It hovered just out of reach, dark and filled with uneasy fears. But he had no fear of fire. Somehow, fire didnât trigger anything in Willie but pleasure. Sara and Jax had been unsure what his reaction would be, but there wasnât one - except for the same old magic and delight. As an infant, he was entranced by the play of light and shadow from within the deep fireplaces at Birches. He was the same now, thankfully.

When Jax had set out to rake the grounds clear that fall, Willieâd gone out to follow him. When Jax had methodically begun building small brush fires to burn off the piles of leaves and brush, Saraâd been worried. But Willie, drawn by the bluish columns of wonderful smelling smoke just stayed, watching the leaves slowly burn down. When heâd seen how Jax was kicking dirt to cover and put out the embers, heâd taken on that job for himself, proud to be part of what Jax was doing. Together theyâd cleared the grounds around the house that afternoon and Willie had been very proud of the work heâd done. Taking heart from this, Sara had had cords of wood laid in, and this past winter, when snow had blocked the roads and icicles hung from all the eaves, Jax or Sara would build a roaring fire in the great stone fireplace of the massive front room and theyâd all gather.

While Willie entertained them with stories conjured out of the shapes made as fire ate its way through the shifting logs, Sara would work a crossword or jigsaw puzzle and Jax would work on his latest hooked rug. He designed his own patterns. This one made Sara think of water both still and moving, with deeps and shallows and shadows, all with touches of light - sun or moon, Sara didnât know which. Sheâd treasured those long winter days. Willie had been content in their snowed-in house.

Jax stayed the winter and it had been good. For Willie. Who could be so attentive sometimes. In the moment. Very present. In his â now.â The same kind of fragmentary focus he would show when he was able to play. His music was as wonderful as ever. Sara thought he might be composing whether he knew it or not. Sometimes melody lines seemed to recur. Keyed differently. Treated differently. But melodically the same. Sometimes a classical form seemed to be there. Briefly. She wondered. Once sheâd caught Jaxâs eye and heâd raised a brow in silent acknowledgment, so she was sure heâd heard it too. But they never discussed it. They never discussed Willie. Not since theyâd all scabbled their way out of that first awful month. Truce, theyâd seemed to say to each other then. Truce. Some truce. She shook her head, lines around her mouth deep as knife cuts.

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â Sara? Sara?â Willie was plucking at her arm. â Can I eat all the crumble now? Can I?â Telltale crumbs in the corner of his mouth, berry juice on his lips, eyes alight.

â No, Willie,â she said softly. â You know dessert comes last.â

â But Sara,â he whined, just as when he was little. Not a real whine, but a fake poking-fun-at-it-but-still-getting-to-whine whine.

â No, Willie.â And as he opened his mouth she uttered a word that could most always stop him.

â Truce, Willieâ she said. â Truce.â

He looked down, frowning mightily. â Truce,â he said finally.

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