

THE VISIT

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This dispatch is adapted from a chapter of *The Road Here*, a larger work chronicling the unlikely chain of events that carried one man from collapse to a village halfway around the world into a life he never saw coming.

The night before I was to arrive Chitra informed Willie she'd arranged for him to use Tuk's truck to drive into Sisaket. She handed Willie the keys. No fanfare, no explanation beyond the practical.

"You'll be more comfortable in the truck," she told him, matter-of-fact. "Take your time. All the time you want. This is an important visit."

And maybe it was the way she said it – this is an important visit – like she wasn't talking about me, not exactly. Like maybe she was talking about what Willie might remember in the space between now and when he had to drive back to the farm.

The train was due in at six sharp, which meant Willie needed to leave around

four. By 3:45, Chitra was already tapping gently on his door, her voice barely more than breath.

“Wake up, Win... you don’t want to be late.”

She had a tumbler of coffee ready – black and strong, no sugar. She pressed two folded notes of 1,000 baht each into his palm and smiled. “Don’t worry about anything,” she said. “This is an important day.”

He pulled her into a quiet hug – a language they’d begun speaking more fluently without words – and stepped out into the waiting dark.

The drive into Sisaket was mostly empty road and the company of early stars. That liminal hour between night and dawn has a strange sort of magic to it. The world

feels paused, like even the future is still asleep.

Willie arrived fifteen minutes ahead of schedule and parked the truck just off the station. He stepped out and breathed in the quiet, familiar shape of morning: the horizon beginning to yawn in a golden stretch, the low tin-roof shacks across the tracks just starting to stir. A few lights flickered on. A dog barked once, then thought better of it.

The train station was still, save for the rhythmic squeak of a ceiling fan trying not to fall apart. And in that moment, standing there on the platform, Willie was hit by a strange *déjà vu* – a ripple of memory from the morning he first arrived. The stillness. The air. The waiting. Like the world was handing him the same moment twice, just to see what he'd do with it this time.

Now, Thailand doesn't share America's hang-ups about alcohol and the hour of day. Nobody bats an eye if you have a beer with your rice and eggs at 6 a.m. It's not indulgence – it's just living.

And so, informed by local custom (and a deep understanding of who he is at his core), Willie scanned the market area across the tracks for a place that looked like it might serve something cold and fermented with breakfast. He spotted a man with a hose, washing down the stoop in front of a narrow shop, and the glow of a TV behind the window. Good sign.

Willie made a mental note to check it out after the train arrived.

And then, in the distance – a low hum. The train.

He felt it before he heard it. Like thunder miles off. Familiar, but not yet visible. It had been a long stretch since he'd seen me, and whatever we'd both been carrying around – grief, confusion, the weight of too many unanswered questions – it all softened a little in that moment.

Willie stood at the edge of the platform, hands in his pockets, eyes scanning the tracks, a quiet heat rising in his chest. Gratitude, maybe. Or just the strange joy of knowing that, for the next stretch of hours, he'd have someone beside him who knew his whole damn story and never asked for a rewrite.

And that?

That mattered more than he could explain.

The train hissed in like an iron ghost, slow and inevitable, dragging the early light behind it. Willie took a step closer to the edge of the platform, heart beating somewhere between anticipation and disbelief. It wasn't just that I was arriving – it was who was arriving. Someone who remembered him before the unraveling. Someone who could still see the man beneath the layers.

The train hissed to a stop. Doors opened. A small crowd dispersed across the platform, most of them locals returning from a city run, sleepy-eyed and loaded with plastic bags of goods they couldn't find in the village.

And then he saw me – standing there in the open doorway of the third car, squinting into the rising sun, one hand on

the strap of a beat-up duffel, the other hanging loose by my side like I'd just stepped off stage from a long-forgotten play.

Willie didn't wave.

Neither did I.

We just looked at each other.

Two men, both changed, both still the same.

It was Willie who stepped forward first. I followed.

By the time we met halfway across the platform, neither of us had spoken a word. Willie reached out, pulled me in, and for the first time in a very long time, I felt that rare kind of embrace between old friends who've walked through separate fires and come out still carrying the matchbooks.

I won't lie. My throat tightened. His eyes glistened.

“Jesus, Willie,” I finally said. “You look like the land grew you from scratch.”

He grinned, lopsided and soft.

“Feels that way.”

And it did. There was something in his eyes – clear, grounded, wide open. Not polished. Not enlightened. Just... planted. I swear, it was like he’d been standing on this soil since birth and only just now found his way back to it.

“I don’t know what you’ve been drinking,” I said, hoisting my bag over my shoulder, “But whatever it is, bottle it. You’re glowing like a damn Bodhisattva.”

“Come on,” he said, brushing a sleeve across his cheek. “Let’s grab a beer before we start talking nonsense.”

We crossed the tracks and headed toward the cafe he’d spotted – barely open,

fan spinning overhead, a TV playing a Thai soap opera no one would watch. The owner, still barefoot from washing down the steps, looked up and nodded. No words. Just recognition. Two men at sunrise, thirsty and curious.

We settled into plastic chairs at a metal table out front. He ordered a couple Leos and, after a moment of pause, two shots of Thai whiskey. The woman behind the counter brought them without question.

The beers sweated in the outside air. The whiskey glowed amber in the tiny glasses.

We clinked them together without ceremony.

“To whatever the hell this is,” I said.

“To making sense of it,” he replied.

And we drank.

In that moment I couldn't help but think: the two of us here – connected deeper than blood, stitched together by nearly five decades of scraped knees, broken hearts, half-baked dreams and moments of grace that never made the highlight reel. I've watched Willie's life twist and tangle in ways that would get a movie script laughed out of the pitch room – absurd, beautiful, tragic, and somehow always with a grin at the edge of the wreckage. And now here we were, 9,000 miles from everything we once called normal, sitting under a rusted tin roof at six in the goddamn morning, in a forgotten corner of Thailand, nursing boilermakers like it was the most natural thing in the world. Just the two of us and a day old soap opera flickering behind the counter. Only Willie. I swear to God – only Willie.

The whiskey bit like it always does,
but the beer followed easy, and for a few
long, quiet minutes, we just sat there.
Watching the sun rise through the haze.
Listening to a shopkeeper sweep her stoop.
Smelling the charcoal from nearby street
stalls coming to life.

Eventually, I leaned back, stared at
him, really stared. “Alright, Willie. I’ve been
patient. But what in God’s name happened
out here? The last I heard, you were
meditating your way through Japan and now
– now you’re barefoot in rural Thailand, with
a wife, a stepson, a buffalo, and a tattoo that
looks like it was inked by the Buddha
himself.”

Willie grinned, took another pull
from his beer, and looked out across the

market like the answer might drift in on the steam from a pot of rice.

“It’s a hell of a story,” he said.

And the way he said it. I could tell – it wasn’t just his story anymore.

“Oscar, my friend,” he said, steady now, voice soft but tuned with intention, “I could tell you the details of Japan and it would sound like I was making it up – and you *know* the outlandish shit I’ve rolled myself into, and out of. Wasum’s probably given you the broad strokes already, and I’ll fill in the colors when the time’s right. But what I want to share with you now, Brother, goes to the marrow. And you... you will hear it like no one else could.”

He paused, looked out across the waking market, then back at me. And right then, I saw it again – that glow in his face,

not performative or forced, but *placed*. Like someone had finally set him in the exact groove he was carved to rest in.

“You’ve been with me through it all,” he continued. “You know the haunting displacement I’ve carried around in my bones since we were kids. That constant itch just under the skin. Like I’d missed a turn somewhere early on and was damned to wander forever looking for it. And I *tried*, man. I really did. All the places, all the people, all the beautiful wreckage I left in my wake – and, Cave Creek, the desert nights, the fire pits and the friendships, that whole world I truly forged into family... I was convinced that was it. My place. My people. My peace. And it is... but...”

He leaned back, exhaled through his nose like he was finally letting something

loose that had been rattling around inside for too long.

“But even there, Oscar – in the middle of all that good – I’d lay in bed at night with that same weight on my chest. That low, dull hum of *nope*. Like I was playing the right song in the wrong key. Like I was close, but not quite... *home*.”

I didn’t say a word. Didn’t need to. Just kept my eyes on him and let him go.

“And then this happened,” he said, motioning vaguely around us, to the sunrise, the smells, the hum of early motorbikes and birdsong. “Thailand. This strange and holy turn I didn’t plan, couldn’t have predicted, and sure as hell didn’t understand. I woke up in it – literally – and for a while I thought it was another version of the chaos I always seem to attract. But it’s not.”

His voice dropped an octave, his eyes shining – not with sentiment, but truth.

“I’m not *trying* to belong here, Oscar. I *do*. From the second my feet hit this soil, I felt it. In the land. In the air. In the eyes of people I didn’t know who seemed to already know me. And especially... *especially* in Chitra.”

He said her name not like a man naming a lover, but like a monk naming a truth. Sacred. Grounded.

“I keep trying to frame it in something familiar, and I can’t. I don’t *want* to love her. I’m not deciding it. It’s just... *there*. Like a tether from another life. Something older than time. I look at her and it’s like recognizing your own handwriting in a letter you forgot you wrote.”

He pulled up his sleeve and pointed at the tattoo.

“Even this,” he said, brushing his fingers lightly across the ink, “This isn’t decoration. It’s not a souvenir. It was *given* to me. And not by accident. The ritual, the prayers, the monk – Oscar, this wasn’t ink. This was a key. It unlocked something. Even in the absence of any awareness it was even being given to me, I felt it. Like the world nudged a piece of me into place that had been floating just out of reach my whole life.”

I looked at it – the intricate lines, the faded swelling, the faint shimmer of oil still soaked into the skin. And I believed him. With every damn cell in my body.

He looked back out at the market, blinking against the light now creeping across the café floor.

“For the first time – maybe ever – I don’t want to go. I don’t need to look around the next bend for the answer. Because the ache is gone. That restless, ceaseless ache that’s followed me from birth... it’s just *gone*. I feel like I’ve come back to somewhere I was meant to be all along, but forgot how to find. And Chitra... she’s not the destination. She’s the compass. She was *always* pointing me here, even before we met.”

He shook his head, smiling, but there was a crack in the voice, a weight.

“I don’t know how to explain this to anyone else. Hell, I barely understand it myself. But you... *you*, Oscar... you’re the only one who’s known me long enough, deep enough, to understand what it means when I say: I’m home.”

And with that, the silence came – not awkward, not waiting, just present. Thick with truth.

I looked at him – my brother in everything but name – and saw a man who'd finally laid down a burden I didn't even know he still carried.

And in that moment, I didn't want to dissect it. I didn't want to offer analysis or metaphors or even a reply.

I just raised my glass, and he raised his, and we drank again.

Because sometimes, the holy thing to do when someone finds their center...is to sit in the sun beside them, and let it rise.

The silence remained, thick as temple smoke. The kind only two people who've lived *deeply* through the same fires can share without needing to speak.

I looked at him and nodded – not because I understood everything, but because I believed it. Believed *him*. And in return, he nodded back. That old look we'd exchanged a thousand times before any of this – through hangovers, heartbreaks, court dates, miracles, all of it. A simple truth passed between us: *I see you. Still. Always.*

And then the moment faded. Not lost – just placed on a shelf where it could glow quietly.

“C'mon,” Willie said, pushing his chair back. “Let's show you what home looks like.”

The days that followed moved like honey in the heat – slow, golden, and impossible to separate into clean edges. I couldn't tell you what happened first or last, just that it all belonged together.

We spent hours on the road, me riding shotgun in Tuk's dusty old truck or clinging to the back of Willie's motorbike, both of us laughing like kids dodging time. The sun chased us down red dirt lanes, the horizon wide and forgiving. Locals nodded as we passed, not with curiosity, but with something closer to recognition – like they'd known Willie for years and I was just a familiar extension of whatever he'd become.

There were roadside stands where the smell of garlic and oil floated heavy in the air, and Willie would point at a dish with that confident half-smile like he'd grown up eating it. We'd sit in plastic chairs too small for grown men, drink cold beer straight from the bottle, and let the sweat run down our faces while the old woman behind the grill

moved with the grace of a symphony conductor.

Sometimes Chitra would join us – quiet at first, but sharp-eyed and amused at our antics. She had a laugh like wind chimes – unexpected and bright – and when she let it out, it made the moment feel like it had been waiting just for that sound. She didn't try to keep up with us; she didn't need to. She belonged in every scene without ever having to announce herself.

One evening, we wandered out to a temple set back in the trees. The kind of place that seems to pulse with its own heartbeat. The monks said little, but watched us closely. One of them – old and deeply still – took Willie's wrist and tied a thread of white around it, murmuring something I didn't understand but felt. Willie didn't

flinch. He just bowed, deeply, and when he stood, I swear something invisible had been added to him. Or maybe just uncovered. Chitra motioned for me to kneel and receive the sacred strings of acceptance too. The moment... It moved me deeply.

There were long meals by lantern light, fireflies drifting in and out like lazy sparks. The three of us at a long wooden table, talking about everything and nothing. One night we'd drink too much and laugh too loud, and another night we'd just sit in the hush of the farm, the air thick with night sounds, saying nothing at all. I watched Willie move through it all with a kind of grace I'd never seen in him before – like a man who finally stopped asking if he belonged and started living like he *knew*.

And somehow, it felt like I was seeing him again for the first time. Not reinvented. Just... *realized*.

When it came time to go, we didn't rush. I packed up quietly, loaded my bag into the truck, and drove back to the train station in Sisaket just as the sun was beginning to flirt with the idea of setting. The sky had that golden-pink hue it gets when the day is already turning into a story.

We didn't talk much on the drive. We didn't have to.

At the station we stood on the platform, just like a few mornings before – but everything was different now.

The train was due any minute. I had my bag slung low across my back, the same one I'd arrived with, but heavier now. Not with things, but with *knowing*.

“I can’t explain it,” I said, looking off toward the horizon. “But I get it. I get all of it. You don’t need to convince me of anything, Brother.”

Willie nodded, chewing the inside of his cheek.

“You’re not lost, you’re *found*.” And I didn’t mean it in a loud, born-again way. Not in a Facebook-quote-on-a-sunset way. In the real way. The *earned* way. “And seeing it on you... hell, man, it makes me believe maybe I’ll get found too.”

Willie stepped forward, pulled me in for a long hug – the kind where you say everything you can’t say in words.

“You will,” He said into my shoulder. “And if not, you know where I’ll be.”

The train's whistle blew once – low and lonely.

I pulled away and looked him square in the eye.

“We’re good?”

“Better than ever,” Willie said.

“We’re *right*.”

A pause.

And with a smile, I said “See you soon”, turned and boarded.

Willie stayed right there on the platform, hands in his pockets, as the train groaned into motion. He didn’t wave. Just watched, steady, as the man who knew every scar and story slowly disappeared into the evening haze.

And when the last car passed and the rails went quiet, he stood for a moment longer.

By the time the train had made its first turn towards Bangkok, Willie had already started making his way back to the farm.

Seeing him standing on that platform as the train pulled away, hands in his pockets, looking like the final frame of a film no one else had the guts to make I felt good. I knew now. It all hummed just right.

And I know this, too:

He didn't go home that day.

He was already home.

Because by god, Willie Lyonsan – restless seeker, hell on wheels, walking contradiction – was no longer at a crossroads. No longer asking which way to go, no longer chasing the phantom of something better. He was found. Rooted.

Planted in a soil that remembered him
before he remembered himself.

And the truth is, freedom like that
doesn't come easy. Not for a man like him,
living the story he lived.

He'd spent a lifetime wandering.
Through Midwest nights and broken-glass
mornings. Through border town alleys and
Tokyo blackouts. Through the arms of
women who tried to love him – and the arms
of women he tried to disappear inside of.
Through the firestorm of Maria, and the soft,
echoing memory of Lexi. Through Hui Ko's
grace. Through Nina Duval's untamed
passion. Through Stephanie's fearless,
patient caring. Through the strange and
sacred tether he shared with Louie –
something beyond explanation, beyond
blood.

And through it all – so much more,
so many more – he kept moving.
Crisscrossing open roads like a man chasing
whispers. Until he landed in Cave Creek,
where he built not just a life, but a soul
family. The kind that holds, even across
oceans. The kind that never lets go.

Through all of it.

Every misstep. Every scar. Every
inexplicable miracle.

It wasn't waste.

It was altar.

And now, standing in a village most
people couldn't find on a map, surrounded
by people who didn't know his past but
somehow still knew him, Willie finally
understood: all that madness wasn't the
detour. It was the design.

Because Chitra – that spirit woman
with eyes like still water and a soul that
hummed like a tuning fork – she didn't just
arrive. She was the gravity all along. The pull
he couldn't name. The silent thread through
every broken moment that somehow didn't
break him.

And the wildest part?

She found him after he'd been
completely undone, fully unraveled – in a
speck of time before his near demise. When
there was nothing left but truth and bone
and whatever pieces the gods chose to spare,
that's when she appeared.

And he didn't even know her name.

But something deeper did.

Thailand seemed to unstop some
deep, dammed river in Willie – a river that
had been pressing at the walls of him for

years, maybe decades. But it was Isaan specifically, that wide, rugged northeastern corner of the country, where something in the air – maybe the smoke from burning rice stalks, maybe the scent of garlic and diesel and red clay – hit his bloodstream like a chemical trigger of creative soul.

It lit him up.

I've seen Willie at the peak of his creativity – when he was wild with it, obsessed with building meaning out of chaos. But this... this was different. This was a few floors above peak. This wasn't a sprint. It was a flood.

He started writing again. Not casually. Obsessively. Said he dumped out fifty thousand words in the two months after I left – just poured it onto the pages like it

had been living in him all along, waiting for him to stop fighting gravity.

And the camera – his vision behind the lens was fully resurrected.

He fell back into photography like a man falling back into himself. Not to impress. Not to sell. Not even to share. Just because he had to.

He was out every morning even before the monks started their alms walk, meandering the village roads with that same quiet intensity I'd seen years ago when he and Stephanie were chasing cowboys through dust storms for Frank Rizzo's book. That version of Willie – the one with calloused hands, tired eyes, and a lens between him and the rest of the world – that version was back. Only this time, it wasn't

about the project. It wasn't about the work. It was about the seeing.

He shot temples wreathed in fog. Weathered farmers whose skin told longer stories than their words ever could. Little kids with bare feet and fierce stares. Market stalls. Motorbikes. Monks and mango carts. His portraits weren't just good – they were haunting. Like he'd finally tapped into that rare alchemy where talent meets truth.

There was vision now. Whole and matured. As if the noise in his head had finally cleared, and the lens could breathe.

“I've got something to say again,” he told me in one of his messages. “And I finally stopped asking who I need to say it to.”

He called me one night in the throes of a writing session. Usually we'd talk for just a few minutes, but this night, he had some

things on his heart. Seems like we talked for an hour. I swear I could hear him beam through the phone. He was recalling events and obscure stories that even I struggled to remember. Bones that had long since been buried.

And then he shifted gears, and got a little introspective. The conversation carried forward a ways.

“You know,” he said, voice low, “I’ve been thinking about them all lately.”

I didn’t need to ask who.

“Maria,” he started, name falling like a note from a forgotten piano. “She hollowed me out. God, she wrecked me in a way I didn’t think I could come back from. But you know what? She also cracked me open. She made space. She carved out a place I didn’t know I’d need for Chitra.”

He took a breath.

“And Lexi... hell. That girl could’ve set the ocean on fire if she wanted to. Those eight days...you know what, fuck it, I loved her with my fists clenched and my jaw tight. She showed me what it meant to want something so badly – no matter how wrong – you lose yourself in the chase. I’ll always carry that one.”

A long pause.

“Hui Ko,” he said, a smile in his voice. “That was lightning. And weird. Gone too fast, never meant to stay, but she showed me that the world was bigger than I thought. That love didn’t have to speak the same language to be real.”

His voice lowered slightly.

“And Nina – Nina Duval! My god, what a mirror she held up in a lot of ways.

Thank God she's in it." We laughed. "No kidding! She showed me things I didn't want to see. And in doing that, she gave me the choice to change a few things in myself. She didn't stick around for the change, of course – but she didn't need to."

"Stephanie?" I offered.

Willie laughed. "Stephanie was a detour I never saw coming and wouldn't change for the world. Two polar universes colliding like asteroids. She did lend comfort and a soft landing after Nina, though. What an adventure. You know, I've never did see that book. Forgot about it. Hope ol' Frank got what he wanted."

"If he didn't you'll find out eventually, even 9,000 miles away." We laughed.

“And Lou?” I asked, knowing the weight behind the name.

Willie paused. I could hear him swallow.

“Lou was the brother I didn’t choose – but would’ve. He kept me standing more times than I can count. We lit a thousand fires and burned through even more one-sided stories. He didn’t see the world the way I did, at least I don’t think he did – but he saw me. Lou knew how to carry my load even when I didn’t. One of a kind. I miss him every single day.”

A silence stretched.

“You spent more years in Arizona than anywhere after you left Beaverton...” and before I could continue he said,

“Arizona was the dress rehearsal. It was love and loss and a hell of a lot of

almosts. It was red rock and cigarette nights and learning how to break and build at the same time. That desert carved me just like the river carved those canyons. I thought it was the end of the road, in more ways than one. But, in truth, it turned out to be the edge of the map.”

“All of them – all of it and every one of em’ – was a verse in the song that led me here. I don’t carry bitterness or regret. Not a drop. I carry gratitude. I carry honor. Because it was all pieces of the puzzle. And without them...”

He paused. I could faintly hear Chitra’s soft laughter echoing in a conversation in the distance. I could tell he was listening to it too.

“...I might’ve missed the one piece that made the whole thing make sense.”

We were sharing a dram of George Dickel 9,000 miles apart.

He said, “Let’s raise a glass my friend. To the ghosts. To the ones who broke us open so we could finally let the truth in.”

I raised mine, too.

We drank.

And I swear – just for a second – the wind shifted in that moment, like it was carrying names we hadn’t spoken aloud in years.

He said, “You feel that, Oscar?”

Astounded, I responded, “Yes I did, Willie.”

“Now that’s how you honor the past and launch the soul forward. The roots and the wings”, he said.

You know, he never did take that the ring off, either. Never did. Not even when

he thought it was madness. Not even when he wasn't sure what it meant. Because some part of him did know.

That he wasn't married to a moment. He was married to a miracle.

It was just a few weeks after that phone call. They didn't send out invitations.

There was no save-the-date, no registry, no hashtag.

Just word-of-mouth through the village and a sunrise that burned a little brighter than usual – like even the sky knew something sacred was about to unfold.

By mid-morning, the whole damn village had gathered. Children in school uniforms, grandmothers in bright silk, monks in their saffron robes, neighbors who hadn't left their land in weeks. They came

barefoot, on mopeds, by cart, some just walking hand-in-hand from across the fields.

There must've been two hundred people by the time the drums started.

Not the thundering Western kind, but soft, deliberate rhythms played on ancient hide – heartbeat music. A sound that said we are here. A sound that said the spirit is listening.

The ceremony was called Bai Sri Su Kwan, and if you've never seen it, let me tell you – it's not a wedding in the way you're used to. There's no aisle, no "here comes the bride," no exchanging of polished vows while some bored cousin records it on their phone.

No. This was different.

This was spiritual reclamation.

They called it a "calling of the kwan" – the spirit essence, the soul force, the thing

in you that sometimes wanders during trauma or chaos or heartbreak. And now, finally, the community had gathered to call it all back to Willie. To anchor him. To complete him.

Willie and Chitra sat on woven mats at the center of a circle of monks and elders, wrapped in white, knees bent beneath them. A ceremonial pyramid of flowers and candles stood between them – green and gold and wild with meaning. Her father sat front and center, his posture impossibly straight, his hands folded with such grace it almost looked like prayer.

And his face. I saw the pictures.

My god, his face.

This man, who had watched his daughter carry quiet strength through the years, now beamed like the sun had chosen

to rise just for her. Not a single doubt in his eyes. Not one.

Willie was barefoot, calm, eyes steady. There was no script. He didn't need one. He looked like a man who had finally remembered the words to a song he'd been humming his whole life.

The Phram placed connected strings over each of their heads to bond them together and proceeded with a very long prayer followed by sacred chanting. The elders circled them, chanting softly, rhythmically. One by one, they tied white strings around their wrists – over and over – until their arms looked like holy tapestries.

The strings weren't just symbols.

They were bindings. Of spirit to body. Of past to present. Of broken man to healed soul. By tradition, you kept them on

your wrists for three days following the ceremony.

At one point, a monk held Willie's hand in both of his and whispered something that made Willie nod, eyes glassy. I don't know what was said. Doesn't matter. It landed.

Then came the final blessing.

The Phram – his voice more gravel than air now – spoke into the hush of the circle. He said Chitra's name. He said Willie's. He touched their joined heads.

And the room didn't just grow quiet.

It grew still.

Like time had paused. Like the entire universe had stopped mid-breath to say: Yes.

And when it ended, there was
applause and cries of joy – full-bodied,
whole-hearted joy – rice was flying
everywhere.

Children danced. Men sang. Old
women hugged Chitra like she'd just come
back from a war. Food appeared like magic.
Beer flowed. Laughter echoed.

And in the middle of it all, Willie
stood next to his bride – not smiling for a
camera, not playing to the crowd – but
steady. Radiant. Home.

I haven't heard from Willie in a
while. But I don't worry. Not like I used to.
Because I know where he is. He's not drifting
through cities anymore. Not losing himself in
neon nights or dusty backroads or the arms
of women who never asked for the whole

truth. He's not chasing ghosts or dodging the quiet.

He's on the farm. He's making pictures for the ages with his trusty old fujifilm, of Isaan and of its people. He's writing.

He's with Chitra.

He's in a place where the language still escapes his mouth, but not his heart. A place where he wakes to the sound of roosters and monks and rain on a tin roof, and knows, down to the marrow, that he belongs.

He still wears the ring. Not out of obligation. Not because of law. But because something bigger than both whispered this is it, and he finally had the courage to listen.

Every story, every stumble, every
godforsaken sideways turn – it all bent
toward this.

Not a fairytale.

Not a finish line.

Just truth.

Real, raw, blistered truth. The kind you only
find when you dig past the surface, past the
distractions, past the noise – into the dirt of
it. Into the soul of it. With courage and
unrelenting seeking.

Willie dug that deep.

And the truth – by god – found
him.

So if you're reading this, wondering
if he made it, wondering if a man like him
could ever find peace, let me answer it plain:

He did.

He did.

Because sometimes, the story
doesn't end with answers, or even a return. It
ends with arrival.

And Willie Lyonsan?

He arrived.

Right where he belongs.

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