

# Get Outta Town

A Tale of the Dead, the IRS and Coffee

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A Tale of the Dead, the IRS and Coffee

by **Ted Ringer**  
Illustrations by the author

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From THE SPACE SHUTTLE OPERATOR’S MANUAL

By Kerry Mark Joels, David Larkin and Gregory P. Kennedy

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## Sitting On Top Of The World

This was the day. The show. The first of two and Minnie had a backstage pass that would let him in free and allow him access anywhere, except on stage, in front of the microphones.

He had to pick up his pass at a special ticket booth on the east side of the big football stadium where the concert would take place. It took him an hour to find a parking place. The traffic was unbelievable. Even though it was only eleven in the morning, at least half of these people should not have been driving. You could see their dilated pupils from the sidewalk. He finally found a place in the driveway of the National Guard Armory, across the street from the stadium. He thought it was odd that there would be such a prime spot free, but wasn't about to pass it by.

He walked through the swirling crowd admiring the outrageousness of it all. He looked for people he might have met before, and stopped to buy a brownie from a beautiful girl with a ring in her nose. It seemed like every other person was after a ticket.

“Need two tickets.”

“One for Sunday.”

“Just one.”

They repeated their requests patiently and endlessly, waiting for a miracle. The people moved lazily and were mellow. It was another hot day and Minnie was glad he had brought his hat.

He saw a pay phone up ahead and went to it. A young man with stringy hair was talking.

“Yes, Mom. Don’t worry. I’m eating well. You know, tofu. The car still works. I’ll be home in two weeks. Uh huh, well, I could use a little more money...”

Finally, it was Minnie’s turn and he punched in the required numbers and after a moment, he heard a ring.

On the other end, a voice answered, “Moonbeam Tavern.”

He recognized it.

“Catherine, darling. Minnie here. How’s every little thing?”

He got a short report.

“Is Cowboy working the kitchen? Let me talk to him.”

There was a long pause as Cowboy was summoned to the phone. A very long pause. Minnie looked around in the hot sunshine. His feet hurt. The people who passed by in an endless flow were smiling, laughing, and talking in a friendly way. He couldn’t believe the tie-dye. Everyone seemed so young. For a moment, he felt like someone’s father.

Cowboy finally got on the line and said, “Boy, am I glad you called. This place is falling apart. Slider had a bike accident and can’t work. The fryer cuts in and out. It’s hot here and we’re getting slammed. Dutch is breaking up with

his girlfriend and is burning the burritos. The order from Kraft is...”

Minnie held the phone at arm's length and shook his head.

He said, “Cowboy, enough already. You're making my ear ache. Talk to Beaver about all that stuff. I just wanted to see how you were getting along. Everything sounds great.”

Cowboy asked, “When are you coming back?”

“Oh fuck, Cowboy. I'm on vacation. You remember what Superman said to Lois Lane, when she asked him when she would see him again? He said, ‘Perhaps tomorrow, perhaps never.’ Okay?”

He hung up the phone, bought a beer from an enterprising guy standing next to the sidewalk with a cooler, and walked toward the stadium.

Minnie had the inside track on a backstage pass because of an old grade school friend of his named Buddy Levine. Buddy had come back from jail in Thailand and, because Minnie had a bad back and had suggested it, he had gone to school to become a chiropractor. At the time, it seemed like a good idea. In school, Buddy had been the friend of a guy, another Deadhead, who became the chiropractor for the guy who was the Dead's doctor. It's a little complicated. Over the years, Buddy and Minnie had been to many shows with these guys. They had all become friends and so, now, when Minnie wanted to go to a show, he simply called The Doctor and he put Minnie on the list. That's the way things worked. It was who made sense. Who you could relate to.

With his pass visible, Minnie waded with the line into the back of the stadium. It was beautiful day. Blue sky with



big puffy white clouds on the horizon, promising eventual relief from the heat. As he came up even with the top of the lower level of seats, Minnie saw a sea of bodies, a blur of colors and movement, both in the seats and on the field. At one end, was a huge stage anchored by 50 tons of equipment.

The speakers towered 40 feet over the stage and, out in the crowd, there were four more speakers on the top of huge cranes, just in case anyone missed the sound from the others. Huge tie-dyed banners draped the stage. Recorded music drifted over the dense crowd. People had staked out their spots on the field with blankets and baby carriages and coolers. There was barely room to get by, yet there was constant movement.

Minnie thought it best to be close to the stage and he made the long hike across the field. He wanted to check out the scene and, besides, it would have taken him about an hour and a half to go around the other way. Even though it was all familiar, he never tired of this kind of crowd. They were friendly, generous, and everyone was in a state of great anticipation. Excited, but endlessly patient. This hanging out was a part of the whole experience. Beach balls and balloons bounced through the crowd. Frisbees sailed, as if on independent missions. People were looking toward the stage, waiting, or they were embracing or toasting each other or lying back, getting the beginnings of a sunburn.

Minnie found a place halfway up in the stands on the left side of the stage. The sound would be good, he could see everything, and he calculated that in about two hours he would be in the shade. He was already soaked from his trek

across the field and his face was even redder than its usual high color.

He looked out over the sea of people. The stadium was filling up and he saw thousands of bodies moving as if one huge organism, with uncountable arms, and the whole mass of it appeared to be breathing in its multicolored outfit. It was as if he were having a flashback. He wasn't tripping, but it was one of those hallucinations. He ran a hand over his red dome and took a long gulp of water from the bottle in his pack. The show hadn't even started and he was already getting off.

Just then, three young girls, about 18 years old, made room for themselves right in front of him. They were giggling and talking and had on shorts and tank tops that could only stimulate an imagination like Minnie's. They arranged themselves for the long afternoon. As he took a deep breath of early afternoon air, everything started to feel right—the weather, the vibe, the entire day. And the show was about to begin. Minnie leaned forward smiling and introduced himself.

## Now That I Can Dance

**M**innie and the girls got to jive around and talk long enough for him to find out that the cute one, with the flower painted on her bare stomach, was named Susan. Minnie thought that she was really something, though he feared that that something might be too young for him. Hell, he could have been her father.

It didn't seem to matter. He was just a guy sitting behind her and she was cute and friendly. She offered him a joint. It was a promising start. The girls and Minnie were in the middle of smoking it and Lisa, sitting next to Susan, was coughing like crazy, when the band came on stage.

Even though the seats were fairly close, when the Boys walked on, they looked pretty small. They were dwarfed by the equipment and seemed a long way from each other on the huge stage. It was Jerry who stood out. He was wearing shorts, his white bird legs holding up a rather large and relatively old torso. His black shorts, black socks, and black high-tops set off his white skin, as if shorts were a discovery new to him. The black t-shirt and dark sunglasses emphasized

the mass of white hair and white beard and were a reminder of his age and recent bad health. He looked fragile, but that impression faded quickly as he struck a few warm-up chords on his guitar.

This sound was raw power. From his place in the stands, Minnie could feel it in his chest. It was that loud. The towers of speakers were transmitting the notes directly to each member of the audience with a clarity that was personal and impossible to overlook. Jerry nodded at the other members of the band, counted off the beat, and launched into *New Minglewood Blues*.

*I was born in the desert  
Raised in a lion's den*

Forty-seven thousand people rose to their feet, screaming. Arms were thrust upwards in an effort to express something that words couldn't contain: a joyful release of all the anticipation that had been leading up to that moment.

This was a vacation, not only for Minnie, but also for everyone else at the show. They were being taken on a trip and they willingly let go of any worries they might have had about where they were going or when or how they were going to get back. Everyone was giving themselves to the music, just like the band was. They were all partners in this beautiful sunny afternoon. A typical city involved in a typical daydream.

The band was in good form and when Jerry went into a solo and it really began to take off, the rock-and-roll energy of it could be felt by everyone. Thousands of arms waved in

the air. The crowd reacted with their own wild sounds and wordless exclamation, answering the series of notes that Jerry was playing. Each note seemed to rearrange their DNA. The music was loud. It was one of those days where everything was working together. People danced with each other. They danced with themselves. They sang along. It got better and better. Twirlers twirled, joints were passed, and the tunes rolled on. All through the crowd, people turned to each other to make sure they weren't dreaming and to confirm the fact that the unbelievable thing they had just heard had really happened.

At moments throughout the afternoon, there was an overwhelming poignancy when Jerry sang certain lyrics like "*I will survive*" or "*When I'm gone*" or "*I'll stay with you.*" Everyone knew he had been in a coma and had almost died. Everyone knew these guys had been playing together like this for 30 years and they knew that nothing lasted forever—not Jerry, not the band, not themselves, not this moment—and it made it all the more urgent and powerful. When Jerry sang these words, the crowd felt it and sent him a love that was undisguised and immediate. He responded with the music. They loved him and he loved them and this love expanded outward from all of them. These were the words and the feelings that had kept the scene alive for so long.

The first few notes of *China Cat Sunflower* flew out towards the crowd and the level of excitement went even higher. Everyone was dancing.

*Look for a while at the China Cat Sunflower  
Proud-walking jingle in the midnight sun*

Minnie hadn't sat down since the show had started. He had his air guitar going. The girls were dancing in an innocent yet completely sensual way that warmed his heart.

*Krazy Kat peeking through a lace bandana  
Like a one-eyed Cheshire  
Like a diamond-eyed Jack*

Minnie's burly self was moving in its own world. The band was cooking. Minnie, by definition, was taking up space. His dancing had escalated along with the music and those in the seats next to him gave way to his effort and to his controlled recklessness. Carried away, he turned it on and turned it loose. His eyes were closed and he shook and he shimmied, while his feet described the indescribable. His entire body became suggestive and ecstatic. Time stood still, but the dance continued.

The band moved flawlessly into *I Know You Rider* and to anyone who turned to watch him, it wasn't really Minnie they saw. He had become something else, bigger than just a big guy dancing. He had become love, sex, music, breath, movement and there it was, right in front of them, exulting in itself and in the fact that all of them were there together.

As the song came to an end, Minnie dipped once more and, in perfect time to the music, he reached upward and shot out of his body. He didn't need wings to propel him. The air became thinner, the stars popped out of the sky, which had turned a deeper blue, and, for a moment, everything was still. Then, slowly, he floated back down to Earth and to

Susan and to those around him, who could only applaud and smile in wide admiration.

Meanwhile, the band played on.



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