

The Night We Buried Road Dog

The
Night
We Buried
Road
Dog
Jack Cady



DreamHaven
Minneapolis, Minnesota

FIRST EDITION

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Kilroy Was Here

Jack Cady's Ghosts

I never thought I'd hear myself say this, but Jack Cady knows more about ghosts than I do.

Most of us who deal at all with phantoms in our work treat them in the traditional manner; as revenants, "doomed for a certain term to walk at night." Almost without exception, they are the shades of human beings: animals and inanimate objects can conceivably be *possessed* by perturbed spirits, but they can't *be* perturbed spirits—those are the rules, that's just how it is. But anyone who's read his novel *The Off-Season* knows that Jack Cady knows better.

In Jack's stories, *cars* can be ghosts, stone statues can begin as ghosts and slowly become human; a living man can even observe his own ghost reenacting a terrible turning point in his life; ghosts themselves can have ghosts, and the old men living out the last fragments of their lives in a veterans' hospital know dreadfully well that—in the words of the narrator of the novella *Kilroy Was Here*—"if ghosts are a metaphor for history, then belief is a leap into reality. If history is a metaphor for ghosts, matters get really serious."

And these are very serious stories, the ones collected in *The Night We Buried Road Dog*, even when they're suddenly flat-out funny in a deadpan, stoic, peculiarly American way. Jack himself

is very much in a certain classic American tradition: the sailor-man/truckdriver wandering laboring man who turns out to have read all the poets and philosophers he could get his hands on in the late watches and the long night runs. For all the casual grittiness of his stories' milieu and the unshowy authenticity of his working-class dialogue, Jack's style was forged far more by the great Elizabethans and the nineteenth-century American Transcendentalists than by Ernest Hemingway or Nelson Algren. For all that he's very much of his time and place, he's somehow distinctly out of time too. The best ones are.

What haunts Jack Cady, as it does the moribund veterans of *Kilroy Was Here*, is the terrible question of whether what we *do* is irredeemably what we *are*. Every tale in *The Night We Buried Road Dog* takes up this mystery in one manner or another: and just as there isn't one in which human beings don't display integrity and love and stubborn tenderness, so no story lets us off unscathed, unreminded that there is such a thing in the world as pure evil, and that it finds no dwelling place but in human beings. Even ghosts, who may be troubling and deeply deceptive, are powerless against it: they may warn or tantalize or cheer on the young high-plains roadrunners of the title story, but in the splendid *Kilroy Was Here* they become tremulous allies against the encroaching darkness of human history itself. It's a bad world, Cady says over and over, in this book and others, but there are good people in it. Some of them just happen to be more or less dead.

He's an impossible man to categorize or to package, in an age and an industry that thrives on packaging. He's always been capable of coming up with what Hollywood calls "the high-concept idea"—a storyline that can be encapsulated in one semiliterate sentence—and then he insists on blowing the movie deal by turning them into *literature*, for God's sake. In the title story, a man living out there somewhere in what George Bush once referred to contemptuously as "South Succotash" successfully establishes a graveyard—complete with flowers and tombstones—for the beloved old

cars of his friends, while becoming increasingly possessed by the desire to track down the legendary Road Dog, who always drives just a bit faster than you do, and always leaves enigmatic graffiti in the restrooms of wayside diners. There's a movie in that one, but it wouldn't be anything like Jack's story. Trust me.

And what a horror film could be made from that story about "The Best Left Neglected Library of Dry Facts," in which obscure archive there incubate, and in time engender—in the form of unspeakably beautiful and unspeakably hideous flying insects—the *facts*, from poetry, music and dance to atomic bombs and the Holocaust, that create our world, our time. Think what a special-effects specialist could do with that notion! and what suspense could build up as the wise, tough, scrupulous Boston librarian who oversees this uncanny hatchery at last determines to tamper with the seemingly endless spawning of monstrous facts: to force, in the gardener's sense the birthing of a benign species or two. Trust Jack on this one—he screws up the movie again, but in the process he provides us with a powerful and moving parable. Any number of people could turn it into some kind of Jurassic Park with bugs, but only Jack Cady could have written that story.

He's a moralist, in the honorable New England tradition, crossed with the equally noble pattern of the American tall tale. He has something to say, something profoundly worth the effort of framing and shaping and inhabiting and telling—something more worth the hearing now, this minute, than perhaps ever before.

Peter S. Beagle
Davis, California
19 September, 1997

Preface

Sometimes in early morning when most of the world around me lies asleep, and when the only sound is the whir and tap of my electric typewriter, the story or novel I'm working on hesitates before memories. Faces and voices surround; even, sometimes, voices echoing over centuries and living in my mind only as they rise from the printed page.

Such was the voice that started the story, "Our Ground and Every Fragrant Tree is Shaded". Those words came from a man named Baruch who was companion to the prophet Jeremiah of Old Testament days. That story, so dark and unhappy, is my own small testament to Baruch; a man who wished and sometimes howled for a better world.

Mostly, though, the faces and voices are close. When a story titled "The Bride" began to inch from this typewriter, I knew it could only come from two dear friends, Rick and Julie Jones. Rick is a poet, not an entrepreneur, and Julie is certainly not a statue, and all of that is okay. The story isn't about hardware and statues, anyway. It's a love story, and a story about art. In those fields Rick and Julie are experts.

"A Sailor's Pay" came from voices long past, when, as a young man I made about every mistake that young men make. This story of tribulation and forgiveness remembers the men of the Cutter

Yankton, and George Hupper; the captain who, when I was a young sailor, I feared and hated; and who, after I grew up and understood what the word ‘competence’ meant, I loved. He is dead now, but lived long enough to know of my thanks and admiration.

The Night We Buried Road Dog came from my son, Don Cady, who turned out to be the sort of man who becomes kinder and stronger when things get tough. Don has certainly seen his share of road.

Other stories hold a lot of voices, and their origins are more complex. They ask for a particular voice, and particular strengths because they are rooted so deeply in my personal history.

When the Berlin Wall came down I did not bawl like a kid, but did weep quietly like a man. That damnable thing stood as a symbol of alienation and hatred through most of my adult life. My tears of relief were mixed with those of fear and sorrow. I know enough about history to predict what would happen next. There are too many old hatreds, and too much ignorance behind the broken site of that wall. Plus, the world seems always bountiful when it comes to supplying tyrants.

The story needed a voice stronger than anger and fear. It needed a voice stronger than the seemingly indifferent dictates of history. When “The Best Left Neglected Library of Dry Facts” began, my model for the characters of Elizabeth, Amanda, and Theresa was Audrey Eyley. She is intellectually tough, but also just. She is compassionate, kind, and beautiful. The perfect model.

And last, a word about *Kilroy Was Here*. When I was a kid, World War II raged, and courage was so common it was assumed. As one who is not afraid to admit to having heroes, I will say that the generation who fought that war has shown me more about integrity and valor than my own generation, or any born since. The story is for James B. Hall, Corsica campaign, and southern France; Bill Deen, paratroops, D-day; Don Farmer, wounded in action, Battle of the Bulge; Wesley Baker, Army Air Corps, the

Preface

Blitz; Frances Ross, Women's Army Corps, San Diego; and Mieko Riggleman, who, as a girl, survived the American bombing of Japan.

Kilroy contains a story about five Korean patriarchs. The tale is adapted from a personal record titled *The Last Campaign*, by Glen Ross, Harper & Bros. 1962. Kilroy also contains a Japanese phrase, 'shiranu ga hotoke' which translates as, "The Buddha is dead", and not, "aw screw it" as reported. The phrase is used by the Japanese when something incredibly stupid or vulgar has happened.

Finally, the stories are for my readers, whose faces I may never see. I may never hear their voices, either, although sometimes it seems I do. Without those readers the stories could never come fully alive.