

A Sip...



A Torquere Dress Short,

You Know Me
by Julia Talbot

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.The one time Ed Freeman didn't bother to check his email before he left the house on Saturday morning was the one time his old buddy Jake Foster actually sent a note that he would be in town. Naturally, he didn't have his fucking cell phone on him, either. It was in the charger the whole time, sitting on his dresser.

Damn it all.

Jake always had the worst timing; Ed always had the worst luck.

He missed Jake like a sore tooth sometimes. They'd been the best of friends all through college, even though he was a business major and Jake had been in agriculture. On the rodeo team, for heaven's sake.

When he got home from the bookstore and the coffee shop and found Jake's number on his errant cell phone and a message on his home answering machine, he could have kicked himself. Hard.

He dialed the number Jake had left, hoping against hope the man was still in town and not fast on his way to the next rodeo.

"Lo?"

"Jake! It's Ed. How's it hanging?"

"Hey, buddy!" That drawly voice made him chuckle; it was pure Oklahoma, which just didn't go with his own Chicago holdover, even though he'd been living in New Mexico for nearly ten years.

"How's it going? You still in Tucson?"

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"I am. I got a hotel, actually. Got a rodeo tomorrow days in Benson, but I'm here for now."

His heart leaped, starting up a nice, heavy beat. "Yeah? Where?"

"I'm at the Econolodge near your place. I was hoping you weren't out of town."

"You know me." Jake was the traveling man, not him. He just went and did his Saturday thing.

"Yeah, well, you coulda been off on one of those gay cruises."

"Oh, sure. Full of adventure and spontaneity. Look, why don't you come here? I have a much better bed."

"Oh, now. What if I got me a new man with me?"

The urge to throw up assaulted him suddenly. "Do you?"

"Hell, no. I came to see you. You're the only feller I got time for."

"Then come on. I'll order us some Chinese food." He was probably the only one who knew that Jake loved Chinese food. The man swore that it was against the Oklahoma cowboy code, or something, and that he couldn't eat it in front of his buddies.

Weirdo.

"I'll be there in a few, honey."

"I'll be waiting."

They hung up, and Ed went to dig out his Chinese food menus. Sweet and sour chicken, hot and sour soup and egg rolls.

Thank god some things never changed.

* * * *

Jake stood on Ed's front porch, wiping his hands on his back pockets. He'd taken the time to put on the smell good, a good shirt, and his best hat. Why on earth he had, he didn't know. Ed didn't care. The man wasn't some buckle bunny, all impressed with the rodeo trappings.

Ed was an old friend, and Jake knew Ed liked the way he looked without clothes better than the way he looked with them.

The door opened seconds after he knocked, Ed appearing and pulling him right inside for a bear hug.

"Hey, man. Damned good to see you."

Jake returned the hard hug, slapping Ed's back. "Hey, you. Shit, son, you been working out."

"And you're as skinny as ever." Ed laughed, pulling back to look at him. "You look good."

"So do you." Those dark brown eyes still had a bright sparkle, and Ed's black hair only had a slight hint of distinguished gray now. That body, though. It felt ripped, compared to what he remembered six months ago.

"Thanks. Come on in."

The house smelled like Chinese food, the heavy scent of grease and soup making his stomach growl. "Man, you remember the best shit. Thanks, Ed."

"No prob."

Ed led the way to the little dining room, and Jake looked around, seeing if anything had changed. Not much, really. There was a new couch, one of those fancy leather deals that

your butt would stick to if you were naked, or that the dogs would eat, if you had one.

"You need a dog, babe."

"Huh?" Ed was lifting lids on the food, setting things out neatly on the little island. "Oh, I don't have time to take care of one. I'm gone at work all day."

"So get two. They can entertain each other." Hell, Ed had a full, unfinished basement. He could make a doggie playground. Or put in a doggie door. Though in Tucson, that was asking for snakes, scorpions and maybe coyotes.

Ed gave him a look. "When you move in and help me take care of them, then sure."

"Uh-huh. What is it you always say? You know me." The longest he'd ever been in one place in the last ten years was in college.

"I do. Ta da." The plate Ed handed over was a work of art, complete with a little Japanese soup bowl and spoon for his soup.

"You know, babe, you're kind of fussy."

"Oh, fuck you." Ed grinned, though, settling across from him with a plate that had way more veggies on it. Broccoli and carrots and snap peas and shit.

"You made those yourself, didn't you?"

"Well, yes. I mean, unlike you, I have to have something without all the grease and sauce."

Jake rolled his eyes. Lord, lord, the man was as predictable as the sunrise. "I guess if it makes you look like that, I can handle it."

The pleasure in Ed's eyes made it all worth it. "Thanks, man."

"Uh-huh. You still need a dog."

* * * *

It was probably midnight before Ed even got to thinking about the main event. He'd spent hours watching Jake watch movies. That beautiful blond bastard had even shaved and put on Old Spice for him, which just made him happy deep inside. He might not be a cowboy himself, but he knew what all that meant.

Those blue eyes watched him a lot, too, studying him when Jake didn't think he was looking.

When he finally decided that Jake wasn't going to make the first move, Ed put the popcorn bowl aside and stood, yawning and stretching. "Well. Guess it's time to turn in, huh?"

"Why? You ain't got to work tomorrow."

"No, but you do, and the bed is way nicer than the couch."

"Oh. Oh!" Jake's eyes lit up. "Well, then. I get to share, yeah, not go to the guest room?"

"Hell, yes. Come on." Like he was going to pass up a chance to spend the night with his favorite cowboy. "Get naked, Jake. I've waited long enough."

"Hoo, yeah." Jake beat him to the bedroom, stripping out of starched shirt, boots and Wranglers faster than Ed could even pull his T-shirt off over his head. There was something to be said for a man who had to change clothes out behind a rodeo arena half the time.

He could do it fast.

They tumbled to the bed together, Jake struggling with his jeans, trying to get them on a level playing field. Ed pulled his belly in, holding his breath while Jake got him naked, and his eyes rolled back in his head when Jake grabbed his cock in one callused hand, pulling hard.

"Shit! Jake. Babe. I swear. Gonna set me off like a firecracker."

"Good. That's the idea. We got all night for slow."

"And how are you going to ride broncs with no sleep?" Not that he wanted to give up their one night. No way.

"I can nap at the rodeo. Now, come here and kiss me." Using his cock like a handle, Jack pulled him close for a kiss that singed his short hairs, making his toes curl.

"God," Ed gasped when they broke for air. "Missed you, Jake."

"Same here, babe. Now hush up and let's get busy."

They used their hands and their mouths, sliding against each other, fingers digging in to tickle and massage, rolling across the bed together. It was a damned big bed, with a pillow top, and it had taken him months to pay it off. Ed was damned proud of it.

Now, it was just another tool to get to Jake. Ed pressed Jake down on the mattress, hips rolling so their cocks rubbed together, and damn. Damn, that felt good. Hot and damp at the tip, Jake's prick felt like fire against him, so full and firm that Ed had to reach down and pull at it.

"Ed! Christ!" Jake pushed against him harder and harder, skin flushed, face screwed up in hard lines. "Need."

"I hear you. I do." Ed was so close he could feel it in his back teeth. "Come on. You were the one who said we had all night for slow."

"Oh, yeah." Jake gave him a wild grin and bucked against him like one of his broncs, liquid heat filling his hand as Jake came for him.

A low moan escaped him, and Ed pulled their cocks a few more times, making Jake yelp. Then he let loose, his balls emptying hard, the feeling running up and down his spine like lightning.

"Shit, babe. That was something else." Jake wrapped around him, pulling him down for a championship snuggle.

"Spontaneous enough for you?" Ed asked, letting himself be glomped.

"Almost, babe. Almost."

Ed chuckled. He'd never qualify as anything but a creature of habit. Good thing Jake was one of his habits.

* * * *

"Come to the rodeo with me."

"Huh?" Ed stared at him, mid sit-up, those amazing abs crunched into a hot display.

Jake pulled his other boot on, grunting a little. "Come on. Take Monday off and come down and spend the night."

"I can't do that. I mean, just call in."

Jake sighed, rolling his shoulders a little. They'd had an amazing night, and even gotten some sleep. He didn't want it to end; he wanted Ed to do something spontaneous for a change.

Hell, he wanted Ed to want him enough to make their time last a little. He'd always wanted that.

"Whatever, honey," he finally said, pulling on his shirt. "It's only an hour or so to Benson. You could come anyway, not spend the night. They sell tickets at the gate."

Ed tilted his head. "Yeah? Hey, you could come back up and spend tonight here with me. That way we could take just one car."

His heart thawed out a bit where it had been getting pretty cold. "That would be okay with me. I mean, I got to go this way when I head out, so it's not off the beaten path."

"Cool. How about we go to breakfast and then head out." Ed seemed genuinely excited, like he was looking forward to it. "I haven't seen you ride since..."

"Since college, when you was a captive audience." He knew that one, could count on one hand the times his fastidious lover had come to the show.

"Well, you know me."

"I do. Lord knows I ought to." There wasn't any sense in being bitter, and Jake really wasn't. Mostly just resigned.

"Well, come on. Let's go!" Ed popped up off the floor, heading for the door, and Jake grabbed his arm. "Clothes first, honey."

Blushing, Ed laughed. "Oh. Right. I'll even wear my one pair of Wranglers."

"Shit, do they still fit?" They were probably the same age as Ed's last rodeo ticket.

"They do. I got them at the boot store last month. I was hoping you'd be around during cowboy Christmas."

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He always tried to drop by at traditional Christmas and on the Fourth of July, so that stood to reason.

"Well, get them on and buy me breakfast, stud," Jake said, before taking a kiss. "I'm starving."

Lord love him, he shouldn't get his hopes up, just because Ed wanted to come to the rodeo. It was a start, though. Maybe the start of something spontaneous.

* * * *

Ed waited for Jake's ride on the edge of his seat. Saddle bronc riding wasn't the first event, but it wasn't the last, and he was excited enough that most everything else kind of slid by in a blur. It was brutal hot, and sweat dripped off his nose, his shirt showing signs of both the sweat and the dust.

The saddle bronc riding was finally called when Ed was on his third corn dog, which was one of those things he only indulged in during rodeos and fairs. When he indulged, though, he went all the way.

He was munching at the very bottom, pulling it up the stick, when the announcer called Jake's name.

"On Twister, folks, we have Jake Foster, from Norman, Oklahoma! This is a big, strong mare, but Jake is a fine rider, and he shouldn't have too much trouble with this old girl. Should be a good match up."

The announcer went on, but when the gate flew open, Ed tuned him out, counting the seconds. One, two, four, six ... Eight! Yes. Hot damn, that had been a good ride. He might not go to the rodeo much, but he knew a good ride when he saw one.

Which meant he knew it when things started to go horribly wrong, too. Jake reached for the pick up man, but that was the last thing that went right. The bronc shied away, Jake overbalanced, and he ended up ass over teakettle under the horse's hooves.

Ed swore he could hear the crack of a bone breaking from where he sat in the bleachers.

He was on his feet and down to the fence before he even blinked, straining to see what was going on.

There was a flurry of activity, EMTs and cowboys running to Jake, getting him checked over, then getting him up on his feet, well, foot, and out of the arena.

Shit. He had to go find them, let them know he was Jake's ride, and that he needed to go where Jake went.

Ed decided he would say that at this point even if Jake had driven himself.

* * * *

Jake opened his eyes, feeling the pain in his leg first off. Damn, that mare had stomped him but good.

"Ed?"

It was the first word out of his mouth, and he hoped he wasn't an ass for thinking wherever he was, Ed was with him.

"Hey, man. We're at the hospital in Tucson. How are you feeling?"

"Hurt." His throat was dry as a bone, and he sure could wet his whistle.

"You want some water?" Ed held a little cup with a straw up to his mouth, like the man could read his mind.

"Yeah." He sucked that straw as hard as he could, feeling weak as a kitten. The water helped, though.

"There you go. You did it up right, Jake."

He focused, or tried to, on Ed's eyes, finally getting his own eyes to work. "Yeah? Broke it good?"

"You did. Snapped your femur."

"Shit." Jake lay back on the bed, his mind racing. "Did I do good in the round?"

"You did. In fact, you're in the money. They made sure you got your check. It's in your bag."

"Wow." Well, that would help pay the bills. "Are they gonna have to surge on me?"

"I don't think so. They did some amazing shit with your leg, apparently. Like sitting on your belly and yanking it up over your head."

"Now, now. That's your job."

Ed actually blushed, and Jake chuckled.

"They say six to eight weeks, at least, before you can really be too mobile. I mean, like traveling mobile."

"Damn, honey. I can't stay in the hospital..."

"No, no. Not here. Just, here. In Tucson." Ed wouldn't quite meet his eyes, which meant the man was either lying, or hoping he wasn't going to ask to stay at Ed's house.

"Oh. Well, I guess I can ask around, see if there's a rider relief fun place here."

"Well, I wanted to talk to you about that."

"Hey, son, how are you doing?" The doctor came in just then, or he figured it was the doc, not a nurse or something.

"Hurtin' some."

"I imagine. We'll give you something for the pain, but you've been out since you left Benson. They sedated you a little, and I don't want to mix things up too much."

"I guess that makes sense. Y'all got my treatment waiver from the sports medicine guys, right?"

"Yes. We were able to fix you right up. We didn't have to do as much invasive as I was worried about, but you do have a few incisions..."

The doc went on, telling him what all they'd done, and Ed just sat there, hands folded, all quiet and still. It was weird, the way Ed watched him like a hawk, focused on him like they were having sex.

Which was a strange thought, when he was on a hospital bed, with his leg all huge.

"When can I take him home, Doc?" Ed asked, breaking the monologue.

"We'd like to keep him overnight for observation," the doctor said, smiling at Ed. "But then he's all yours. If you need anything else, just push the buzzer."

"Thanks, Doc." Jake was starting to droop, his eyes feeling gritty, his leg throbbing with his heartbeat.

"Not a problem."

Once the doc left, Ed gave him a sympathetic look. "The nurse said you could have a pill in a half hour or so."

"Oh. 'Kay." Blinking, he yawned and winced when things stretched. "Wait. You're taking me home? Like to Norman?"

"No. Like to my house. I want you to stay with me while you recover."

"No shit?" Maybe he'd had his pain pill and was drinking. "Well, I can't pay you much, but I might be able to manage a little rent."

"Babe, I don't care about that. I just want you with me."

"I ... Damn." That sounded like heaven, but six to eight was a long time. "I don't want to upset your routine."

"Oh, fuck my routine." Ed reached out and grabbed his hand. "You scared me, man. I thought about not seeing you again, and it scared the crap out of me. Come stay with me."

He got a glinting grin, Ed's tense face relaxing. "How's that for spontaneous? Come on, babe. What do you say?"

Jake pondered it for maybe a half a second. Then he grinned back, nodding once. "Well, you know me, honey," Jake drawled. "I can't pass up a challenge."

Ed laughed, leaning up from the uncomfortable hospital chair to kiss him. "I know. Thank god for that, babe. Thank god for that."

God, or somebody. They might kill each other. Either way, it would be a hell of a lot better ride than the one he'd just had.

Besides, they'd know a hell of a lot more about each other by the time he healed. That alone would make it all worthwhile.

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