



## **The Sound of Cicadas**

*A Torquere Press Single Shot Classic by Tory Temple*

Jackson sighed and straightened his tie for the third time, ensuring the knot was tight and the crease was just off-center. “This is stupid. This is *so* stupid.”

“Yes,” Tyler agreed, lounging on the bed and watching Jack in the mirror. “It’s supposed to be.”

“Reunions are supposed to be stupid?”

“High school was stupid,” Ty said with a snort.

“High school wasn’t that stupid,” Jackson replied absently, wondering if he could get away with no tie at all.

“You played football,” Tyler said, the disgust in his voice making it completely evident what he thought of that. “Of course you didn’t think high school was stupid. I’m surprised you’re so against this reunion, seeing as how you were Mr. Jock and all. They practically begged you to come back for it.”

Jack blew out a breath between puffed cheeks and barely managed to restrain his eyeroll. Tyler was his best friend, had been for nearly fifteen years, but there was still a world of shit they didn’t see eye to eye on. Maybe that’s why they got along so well. “Whatever. It’s our ten-year reunion, let’s just go to this thing and then hopefully drop off the map. They won’t be able to find us for the twenty-year one.”

“I’ll tell ‘em where you are.” Tyler grinned, standing up and checking to see if he’d wrinkled his pants by sprawling all over Jack’s bed. “Don’t worry, Jackie. They’ll always be able to find you.”

“That’s great,” he muttered, but Tyler just laughed.

Jack fiddled with the stereo in Tyler’s sleek convertible – the job with the pharmaceutical company gave Tyler headaches, but paid him well – and was satisfied with the low, smooth sounds of jazz he found. He leaned his head back on the headrest and closed his eyes. Their reunion was in a local hotel and Jack didn’t expect the drive to take longer than fifteen minutes.

A valet greeted them at the front door, efficient and quick in his mannerisms. Tyler handed off the keys and came around to slap Jack on the shoulder. “Ready? They’ll all fall swooning at your feet, Jackie. Hell, I’d fall swooning at your feet if that was my thing.”

“It’s not your thing,” Jack reminded him. “I tried.”

Tyler burst out laughing, presumably at the memory of both of them getting drunk on his dad’s scotch when they were seventeen. Jack had foolishly groped him, letting the liquor cloud his judgment. If anyone really had any kind of judgment at seventeen.

Tyler had reacted well, fortunately for their friendship. He’d easily removed Jack’s hand from his jeans and wrinkled his nose. “Saw you under the bleachers with Kenny Desmond last Friday,” he’d slurred. “So it’s cool if you wanna get with guys or whatever. But I’m a breast man, personally.”

The initial embarrassment was soon eclipsed by their joint hangovers the next morning, and Jack was still grateful to Tyler eleven years later for not making it weird. “So, let’s go,” Jack said, leaning into Tyler with a nudge. “Show you how many people don’t give a shit anymore about Jackson Wilcox.”

“Right,” Tyler snorted, and followed Jack into the lobby of the hotel.

They found their nametags on the front table and both of them were displeased to see their high school senior picture on their tags. Jack stared at it, dismayed. What had made him think a flattop haircut in high school was the thing to do? Probably because the rest of the football team had done it.

“See?” Tyler sighed, pinning his tag to his jacket. “High school was stupid.”

Jackson made a noise of agreement and turned toward the open doors of the ballroom, ready to just get this whole thing over with. He had a six-pack chilling in his fridge for when this was done. However, an ear-piercing screech and a hand on his arm stopped him before he’d gotten more than two steps.

“Jackie!” A very, very, *very* blonde and made-up woman hurled herself into Jack’s arms.

He blinked and tried to pull back enough to look at her, or at least catch a glimpse of her nametag, but the cloying scent of her perfume was making his eyes water. Jack looked over at Tyler in desperation.

“Nice, Lucy,” Ty said with a grin. “How come Jack gets all the love?”

It clicked right then, just as the woman in his arms turned to regard Tyler. Lucinda Aylor, the cheerleader that had flung her underwear at him after a game one night and then offered him a lot more than that at Homecoming. Jack winced inside when he remembered her reaction to his refusal. Clearly, Lucinda didn’t recall it as well as Jack did.

“Oh,” Lucy sniffed, giving Tyler a once-over from head to toe. “You’re here, too.”

Jack used the opportunity to disentangle himself and put some good distance between him and Lucy. Her perfume, unfortunately, had already found its way into the fibers of his jacket. “It’s a reunion,” Jack said to Lucy, watching her look Tyler up and down. “Everyone’s allowed to come. Even Tyler.”

Lucinda ignored his thinly veiled sarcasm – or perhaps was too dumb to get it – and slipped her arm through Jack’s. “There’s room at my table,” she purred. “I want you to sit right next to me and tell me what you’ve been doing for ten years.”

It was on the tip of Jack’s tongue to say “men”, but a cough and a head shake from Tyler dissuaded him. “There are two of us,” Jack said instead. “So if you don’t have room, maybe I’ll see you –”

“There’s room!” Lucy interrupted. “But Jackie, you’re sitting next to me.” She began to propel them towards the mostly full ballroom.

“There’s room,” Jack said over his shoulder to a snickering Tyler. “Isn’t that great?”

Tyler just followed with the wide smile that had been on his face all night. “Sounds great to me.”

There did indeed prove to be room at the table, and Tyler immediately eased himself down into an empty chair. “Hi,” he leered at the nearest female, and Jack would have laughed if Lucinda hadn’t made a disgusted noise and pushed Jack into another chair across the table. Jack immediately noted the three empty liquor glasses in front of Lucy’s place and grimaced.

He barely had time to look around for the bar before Lucy was pressed up next to him, her breasts mashed against his arm and her perfume once again invading his space. “Jackie,” she purred, “I know you’re not married; the reunion book said ‘single’ next to your name. Is there someone special?”

Nights of bar pickups, quick hand jobs, and the occasional hurried fuck in his bed flashed before him. Sure, there was someone special. Her name was Right Hand and she knew exactly what Jack liked. “No,” he answered lamely, realizing too late that he should have protected himself and said yes. Not like that really would have been much protection, not with the way Lucinda was leaning into him like she was about to offer her underwear again. If she even had any on.

That line of thinking was definitely not where Jack wanted to go, so he tried leaning away from Lucinda and looking up to see who else was sitting around their table. Most of them were people he recognized but couldn’t remember their names, which was pretty much a statement about the whole night. Two girls he thought had been on the cheer team with Lucy, one other girl Jack remembered partying with a few times, and a couple of guys.

He tried to see who the guys were while simultaneously watching Tyler schmooze whichever girl at the table would pay attention to him, and trying to avoid Lucy’s wandering hand on his thigh. Jack recognized Grant Howard from eleventh-grade biology and received a nod, then turned his eyes toward the other man at the table.

The tensing of his stomach muscles had nothing to do with the way Lucinda’s hand was creeping further up toward his crotch and everything to do with the green, green eyes staring back at him across the table. “Well, I’ll be damned,” Jack said before he thought better of it. “Kenny Desmond.”

Jack heard Tyler choke on the cocktail he’d managed to obtain, but ignored him. He was too focused on the way the corner of Kenny’s mouth was lifting slightly, the exact same way Jack remembered. “Jackie Wilcox,” Kenny said. “What do you know.”

Jack blinked and tried to refocus at the exact same minute Lucy's hand found its intended target. He shot up out of his chair, knocking it back onto the carpet and causing raised eyebrows all around the table. Except for Tyler, who didn't look that surprised. "Excuse me," Jack said in a strangled tone. "I need a drink." He turned around immediately and walked away from the table, not sure if he was heading in the right direction for the bar but definitely not caring.

The bar miraculously appeared in front of him and Jack leaned both elbows on it while he waited for the bartender to look his way. He was glad it was busy; he needed the few minutes to compose himself and wonder why he was so surprised. It wasn't that he hadn't expected to see Kenny, it was just that... he hadn't expected to see Kenny. Jack shook his head and stared at the polished wood grain in front of him. Damn.

It had been several quick rendezvous under the bleachers for a couple of months. Jack had stupidly assumed no one had known they were there, but then came that night when Tyler had admitted to seeing them and Jack had grown paranoid. They'd taken to meeting in the woods near Kenny's dad's trailer, finding a secluded spot where the trees and brush hid any sexual activity they chose to engage in.

And there had been plenty of sexual activity, up to but not including actual intercourse. Hand jobs, blow jobs, heavy petting, rubbing off over each others' clothes, Jack could recall with perfect clarity how creative they'd gotten without actually fucking each other. He'd sort of assumed he and Kenny would get there eventually, but then the thing with Kenny's father had happened and... well, there was no fucking. No more anything, since Kenny had moved away halfway through senior year.

Jackson realized he was getting bogged down with unexpected memories and looked up to see how close the bartender was. He was about to do the obnoxious thing and snap his fingers, because *damn*, he really needed that drink, when a strong arm in an expensive dinner jacket leaned against his own.

He kept his eyes on the bartender. "Hey, Ken."

"Hey. Good to see you, Jackie."

Jack didn't dare look in Kenny's direction. "What the hell are you doing here? This is definitely the last place I'd ever expect to see you." Jack wasn't being rude; it was just true. High school and Kenny hadn't been a good mix.

Kenny made a low sound that Jack supposed was sort of a laugh, but Jack got caught instantly in the vibration traveling through Kenny's arm to his. "Oh, you know," Kenny said with a vague air. "Ten years is a long time. People change. Things happen."

It was a completely trite statement, and totally unlike the Kenny that Jack knew. Or had known, anyway. Maybe he was right. Ten years was a long fucking time. "Okay," Jack said, for lack of anything better, and then the bartender was standing in front of them.

“Bourbon and Coke,” Kenny said, and Jack nodded.

“Same.”

Their drinks were set down in record time and both men reached for them. A flash of gold caught his eye and Jack blinked at the simple, unadorned band on the fourth finger of Kenny’s left hand. “Oh,” Jack said, the word escaping before he could catch it, and Jack could swear he saw it just hanging there. “Uh. I guess you’re right. Things change.”

Kenny eyed Jack over the rim of his glass. He took a healthy swallow of his drink and Jack very purposely did not watch Kenny’s throat work, but his eyes still followed the hand with the ring. “That’s what I said.” Kenny smiled, and offered no further explanation.

“Right,” Jack said, draining his own glass and signaling for another one. Good thing Tyler was driving home.

“You look good, Jackie,” Kenny murmured, leaning in close enough for Jack to smell the scent he thought he’d long forgotten. Leather and spice and cigarettes, all of it blending together with whatever shampoo Kenny had used.

Jack nodded sharply and stepped back. “Twenty-eight doesn’t look much different than eighteen on you,” he said. It was true; ten years had done nothing to age the quick smile or the dark hair. A line or two around the jade eyes were the only indication that time had passed at all.

Kenny grinned at him. “Let’s ditch this place. Go get a drink that doesn’t cost six dollars.”

“Okay,” Jack said, before his common sense could kick in and scream NO at him in capital letters. “I gotta go tell Tyler.”

Kenny nodded and laid change on the bar for a tip before following Jack back to their table. Lucinda popped up out of her seat as they approached. “Jackie,” she whined, “did you bring me a drink?”

Jack wondered if she knew her lipstick was bleeding into the lines around her mouth. “They didn’t have any more,” he said with a fake smile, ignoring the snort from Tyler but feeling the quiet chuckle from Kenny as a soft vibration that went right to his cock.

He let Lucinda puzzle that out while he grabbed his jacket from the back of his chair. Jack caught Tyler’s eye and tilted his head toward Kenny, praying Tyler wouldn’t make any kind of remark that would cause Jack to have to punch him.

Tyler came through with flying colors. A raised brow and an upturned corner of his mouth was the only response he gave. Jack breathed a silent sigh of relief. "Don't drink any more," he said to Tyler, but the ex-cheerleader sitting next to Ty just laughed.

"I can drive him home," she said with a giggle. "If he buys me breakfast."

Jack kept from rolling his eyes until he and Kenny were out the front doors of the hotel. They waited in silence for the valet to bring Kenny's car around, both of them with their hands locked behind their back and their eyes on the circular driveway.

A late-model black pickup, tires crunching on the gravel, rolled to a stop in front of them. The valet handed Kenny his keys and received a tip in return, opening the passenger door so Jack could slide into the seat.

"Music," Kenny said, as he got behind the wheel. "On the floor."

Jack looked down and retrieved a small CD holder. He began flipping through the CDs, most of them appearing to be classic rock with the occasional punk album. Selecting one, he put the disc into the player. The distinct sound of Rush filled the cab, making Kenny smile as he drove. "Good choice. Are you still a Rush fan?" he asked Jack, fingers drumming lightly on the steering wheel.

Jack nodded and cracked open his window. Warm night air, redolent with southern wind and the smell of magnolia streamed through. "Yup. You remember?"

Kenny smiled. "I remember."

They drove for a while, the silence not uncomfortable. Kenny eventually pulled into one of the hundreds of small diners that dotted the Carolina highway. "Good enough? Diner food has got to be better than the shit we paid eighty bucks a head for at the hotel."

"Good enough." Jack shrugged and got out of the truck. Food wasn't the reason he was here.

They wandered inside and were pointed to a small booth in the corner, so they went. Both of them took their jackets off and loosened their ties at once. A tired-looking waitress ambled over after a fashion, cracking her gum and searching around in her hair for a pencil. Jack ordered a soda and was mildly surprised to hear Kenny ask for an unsweetened ice tea.

"Spent some time on the west coast," he said with a shrug, when Jack raised an eyebrow. "Got used to drinking the stuff out there."

Again, no further information was offered. Jack had no idea whether or not he was supposed to ask for more, but he figured if it was important, he'd find out eventually.

They ordered food when their drinks were set down and then there was nothing left to do but eye each other across the table.

“So tell me,” Kenny said, playing with his straw wrapper. “Did you ever get out of Carolina like you wanted?”

Jack shrugged. “Nah. Least not yet. I told my old man I’d go in on the business for now, but not to plan on me sticking around forever. That was six years ago. We’re not at forever yet, right?” It sounded sort of bleak when he said it out loud.

Kenny laughed and Jack watched the little lines deepen around his eyes. “Not just yet. There’s still time. Hey, you should head west, man. I think you’d like it.”

“West? Like, to California?” There was plenty of coastline in Carolina, but maybe the Pacific Ocean or the palm trees were different out west. And there were the movie stars and stuff.

“Nah,” Kenny said, waving that idea off. “North. Oregon, Washington. Pretty up there.”

“Is that where you went?” Jack asked, knowing Kenny would understand what he meant.

“Eventually,” Kenny said quietly, his fingers twisting and folding the straw wrapper. “Soon as I turned eighteen. Went from Arizona on up to Utah. Worked horses for a stable up there before I went on to Seattle.”

“I hear it rains there.” Jack suddenly wanted more, much more. He wanted to know what had happened when Kenny’s father had yanked him so swiftly out of Jack’s life all those years ago.

“Over two hundred fucking days a year.” Kenny laughed. “But you know? I liked it. Different from here, that’s for sure. Maybe that’s why.”

Their sandwiches and french fries were set down and both of them dug in hungrily. There was more silence as they ate and Jack listened to the clink of silverware and conversations around them.

Once their plates were cleared and their glasses refilled, Jack took up where he’d left off. “So, Seattle,” he mused. “You been there this whole time?”

“Nah. Spent two years there, then I got kind of waterlogged. Hopped over to Colorado after that. Worked in a garage there.”

“You live there now?”

“Nope.”



It was disconcerting, the way he did that. Jack studied Kenny across the small space and wondered how he picked and chose what questions to answer. There had been no mention of his wife. Jack had no idea if the man had a family waiting for him. “Hey, Ken?”

“Yup.”

“Wanna go?”

“Yup.”

They left the diner, shoulders brushing, an unspoken agreement between them. Jack knew they were going somewhere together. He also knew it wouldn’t be wherever Kenny was staying; he’d been too private all night to reveal that. Jack didn’t care.

He started giving directions as soon as they pulled out of the parking lot and back onto the main road. Kenny followed them with a nod until they were pulling into the driveway of Jack’s house and then walking up Jack’s front path. Kenny stood close behind him as Jack unlocked his front door; close enough that his scent once again reached Jack’s nose. Or maybe it had never really disappeared.

The house wasn’t a complete disaster, Jack was relieved to note. At least he’d thought to pick up the piles of laundry that had been on his couch for three days. “Need a drink or anything?” he asked Kenny, dropping his keys in their usual place on the hall table. “Beer in the fridge.”

“Not just now,” Kenny said seriously, and when Jack turned around, he was right there. Right in Jack’s space, no more than three inches separating the buttons on their respective shirts. Close enough for Jack to see the tiny blue flecks among the green in Kenny’s eyes.

“All right,” Jack murmured. “Nothing to drink.”

It seemed like the natural place for a kiss, so one or both of them reached out for it. It could have been awkward, but wasn’t. It was just a kiss. The meeting of two mouths that remembered how the other one felt, what the other one liked, how their tongues tasted when mixed together this way, and Jack was eighteen again and hard inside his slacks.

It was only their mouths at first. No roaming hands, no wandering touches, no crotches pressed tightly together in an effort to find relief. Just mouths and tongues that licked and nibbled and it was okay that way. Jack tasted him and remembered everything all at the same time; the way that Kenny’s top lip curved and sloped and the way his tongue was always the softest thing Jack had ever felt. Jack remembered and savored it and kissed him.

The space separating them grew smaller and smaller until their chests were brushing against each other and their hands rested on each other’s waist. Even then, a slight

tightening of fingers was the only indication of want that they allowed themselves. Jack knew they weren't fooling each other at all; otherwise they never would have been here. Things weren't going to end with them standing up and making out in the hall. It would have been ridiculous to assume so. Ten years was gone in one meeting of mouths; it would be absurd to pretend they didn't know what the other wanted.

Jack stayed coherent enough to know that Kenny would make no further moves unless invited. Not that he wasn't sexually aggressive, because Jack knew the opposite was true. But this was Jack's house and therefore Jack's rules, and Kenny was merely abiding by that unspoken agreement. If Jack wanted to stop this right now, Kenny would do it.

"Bed or couch?" Jack asked, his fingers stroking the material of Kenny's shirt just where it tucked into his slacks.

"There's time for both," Kenny answered, his tongue darting out to lick at the dent in Jack's upper lip. "Are you asking where I want to go first?"

"Okay, that." Jack smiled, his cock responding nicely.

"Couch first. The second time can be in bed, then we don't have to get up for the rest of the night." Kenny grinned as he murmured it, a slow, lazy smile that spread its warmth all the way to the center of Jack's belly and then lower.

"Couch first."

Then they were there, sinking down into the sofa cushions and pushing jackets and shirts off each other's shoulders. There may have been a button or two that was unfortunate enough to get popped off, but it was so far down on Jack's list of important things that it seemed kind of funny. Higher up on the list, much higher up, was the way Kenny's fingers were mapping Jack's chest and stopping to explore Jack's nipples.

Jack let out a soft breath and watched as Kenny lowered his head to taste a nipple, teeth worrying it into a tight bud and blowing the lightest bit of air across it. Jack twisted beneath him when he felt it, trying to line them up in the most advantageous way possible, and Kenny chuckled and stretched out on top of him.

Jack groaned out loud when their dicks came into contact. The layers of clothing didn't make one bit of difference and he rocked upward, seeking pressure and eventual relief. Kenny let him for a time, grinding down as they kissed, and Jack thought maybe they would get off this way. They'd done it like that plenty of times, each of them gasping and grinding and opening their legs as wide as possible until they strained and shuddered with climax.

But it wasn't quite right; it wasn't what he wanted, and Kenny figured that out before Jack did. There was a brief struggle to get their pants unzipped and out of the way, and

then when they were skin to skin from chest to calf, Jack understood. “Bathroom,” he said, feeling his cock jump and leak a little bit. “Medicine cabinet.”

Kenny nodded and then was gone. The cool air in the empty space he’d vacated made gooseflesh rise on Jack’s skin. Jack closed his eyes and reached down for his erection, giving himself a tight, smooth stroke and thumbing away the fluid that had gathered at the tip.

“It’s rude not to wait,” came the whisper in his ear, and then Kenny was pulling Jack off the couch to kneel in front of it. A strong hand on his back pushed him into the seat cushions. Jack leaned his elbows there and bowed his head, his legs spread and trembling.

“Oh,” Jack said clearly when he felt a slick finger at his hole, and then “oh” again when he felt two. The carpet was rough beneath his knees as he slid his legs even farther apart. His cock begged for more than the quick brushes it was getting against the front of the couch, so Jack lowered his head even more and touched himself.

Strong fingers were replaced by something more blunt. “Okay?” Kenny said, asking for permission. Jack wanted to laugh; permission had been granted the moment he’d unlocked his front door, but he nodded his head sharply anyway and waited.

One long, heavy glide was all it took. Kenny was in him, was where Jack had wanted him to be ten years ago. He was thick and perfectly suited for Jack’s ass. Jack had known that years ago, even without them ever fucking each other. Just from touching and sucking and stroking, Jack had known that they would fit.

There was a hand on his shoulder and a twitching in his ass and Kenny moved, the other hand at Jack’s waist, fingernails digging in. Jack’s hand tightened around his own cock, gathering up more of the fluid that was a continual drip. “You,” Kenny ground out, and there was probably more to the sentence but it got lost in the grunt that followed.

Jack nodded and tugged harder. He recognized the warmth in his belly but was in no position to stop what was coming, not with Kenny like a steel pole in his ass and finding Jack’s gland on every upstroke. “I can’t,” Jack managed to say, “I can’t, it’s... I can’t.” One more quick, tight pull and he was bucking into his hand, his orgasm yanked out of him like a plug from the wall. He soaked his own fingers with warm liquid, eyes closing of their own accord and his breathing shaky.

A harsh panting in his ear and then absolute stillness. Kenny thrust in deeply and stayed there, frozen. Jack could feel the faintest of twitches as Kenny came and the stutter-tick of his heart as Kenny leaned on Jack’s back.

The house was dark and silent around them. They hadn’t turned on any lights and Jack wondered why the living room had a faint glow, until he realized the porch light was

shining in through the window. A moth danced around it and Jack watched the fluttering shadow while his heart slowed down.

When Kenny pulled out, the sense of loss was sharp and unexpected. Jack turned in time to see Kenny tie off the condom and use his boxers for a quick cleanup. "Dump it in the kitchen trash," Jack said. "It's, uh. On the way to the bedroom."

Kenny smiled at him. Quick glimpse of straight, white teeth that caught and shone in the outside light. "You can show me," he said. "You know, on our way to the bedroom."

There was relief that Jack hadn't known he was waiting for. There was no reason to expect Kenny to go. He'd said he was staying, so he was staying. Jack rose to his feet and held out a hand. "All right," he said with an answering smile. "It's through there."

Kenny took his hand and together they walked through the kitchen to the bedroom. They pulled down the bedspread and climbed in beneath pale blue sheets. "I owe you one more," Kenny whispered, moving close and tangling their legs together. "I want to know what it's like to have you in me." The last of his sentence got lost in a yawn and Jack grinned.

"I do too. Maybe we should recuperate first."

Kenny nodded, eyelids heavy. "Yeah, all right. After that."

They slept, and in the morning Kenny was gone.

\*\*\*

Jack found him again a week later. Or rather, Kenny found him.

Jack looked up from where he was restocking light bulbs in his father's store and sat back on his heels. "You're fucking kidding me."

He'd fully and completely expected to never see the man again. That had hurt, but it was nothing he hadn't felt before. Jack got past it after five days. So now that it was the seventh day, things were fine. Great. Fantastic. Jack was ready to go out and get married.

Kenny arched a brow and looked down at him. "Okay, so it wasn't my smoothest exit ever."

"You must make them a lot. You were good at it." Ooookay, maybe not *quite* past it.

The brow arched higher. "Yeah. You're pissed."

"Well, fuck, Ken!" Jack got to his feet and darted a quick glance around. "You let me take you home, you fuck me, you spend the night in my bed, and then you sneak out the

first chance you get. That's all supposed to be okay with me?" In truth, Jack hadn't known exactly how pissed he was. Not till Kenny walked into his dad's store and was standing here in front of him, looking contrite.

"No." Kenny sighed, shoving his hands into his jacket pockets.

"Damn right, no. You come back after all this time and don't tell me shit." Jack could feel the scowl on his face and amended 'pissed' to 'really pissed'.

Kenny tilted his head and regarded him. "You want to know?" he asked softly.

"Christ, of course I do." His eyes strayed again to Kenny's left hand, though it was hidden within his pocket.

"All right, Jackie. Here." Kenny flipped him a business card with an address on the back. "Tonight around seven."

Jack nodded and stuck the card in his back pocket and went back to restocking light bulbs.

\*\*\*

It was one of those extended-stay hotels. Jack looked up at it before entering the lobby. The only way to the rooms was through the front doors and then out into the courtyard, so he followed the lighted path and looked for room 127E.

The door stood open a little, so Jack rapped twice on the doorframe and poked his head around. "Hello?"

"In here," Kenny called. Jack pushed the door open and stepped into the tiny foyer of the room. Kenny stood in the kitchenette, his back to the door, stirring something that smelled awesome. "Stuck a couple beers in the freezer two hours ago," he told Jack. "Should be icy by now."

Jack glanced around the room. Small sitting area, itty-bitty kitchen, and another doorway leading to what Jack supposed was the bedroom. "You're staying here?"

"While I find a place to live, yeah. It's not so bad."

Jack retrieved the beers from the freezer and leaned against the counter, trying not to let his mouth water too much at the fantastic smell coming from the stove. "You're moving back, then," he tested. The beer bottle was chilling his skin and he set it on the table.

"My father died," Kenny said without turning around.

The abruptness of it was loud in the little kitchen. “Oh,” Jack said, not knowing exactly what he’d expected, but knowing Kenny’s quiet statement hadn’t been it. “Oh, man. I’m sorry.”

Kenny shrugged and turned off the flame under the pan. Jack had a brief moment of being impressed that a hotel this size used gas instead of electric. “I’m not. You think there was any love lost between us? You know better, Jackie.”

“I did,” Jack mused. “Was a long time ago, though.”

Kenny acknowledged that with a nod and deftly slid two seared steaks onto paper plates. He added a side of pasta to each one and handed Jack a plate. “Would have grilled for you,” he apologized. “But, y’know.” He paused and looked around. “No grill.”

Jack shook his head and took a seat at the table. “Nah,” he said, waiting until Kenny had gotten another beer and taken his place across from Jack. “Steak’s steak. Thanks.”

They talked about nothing at all of consequence while they ate. Old friends; who was still around, who’d skipped town right after high school. Movies and sports and cars and everything else that fell on the side of unimportant. It was sort of nice, Jack thought. Just a conversation.

They cleared the table after finishing and Kenny motioned for Jack to follow him into the bedroom. “Already?” Jack grinned, but Kenny just rolled his eyes and kept going. They ended up on a small patio just outside the sliding glass door in the bedroom, barely big enough for the two chairs they sat in.

Kenny took another pull of his beer and contemplated the courtyard. “So we ended up in Arizona,” he said, as if they’d been discussing it the whole time and he was merely continuing the dialogue. “Some second cousin of his. He worked on cars and sold pot, and I got a job as a bar back in this little hole in the wall place. Said he was gonna put me back in school, but he never did.”

“You never graduated?” Jack asked, starting to peel the label from his bottle. It seemed like high school was so much fucking work that to not be allowed to even graduate was like a slap in the face.

“Not that year.”

Jack was glad he hadn’t known. He remembered thinking about Ken on his own graduation day and how they’d planned to sneak off and have a celebratory blow job after commencement. Jack had settled for going home after the ceremony and jerking off in the shower, Kenny’s name on his lips. “Did you want to?”

“I wanted to enough to go out that summer and get my GED. I paid for it with the tips from work.” Kenny tapped the rim of his bottle gently against his lips.

“Oh,” Jack said, relieved. “Cool. Good for you.”

Another half-shrug, as if Kenny didn't care one way or the other. “Didn't really need a diploma to do the stuff I've done. Exercise horses, fix cars, pour beer for people who needed a bigger fix than a brew. Just did it pretty much to spite him. I remember he got the mail from the box the day my test results came to say I passed the GED. Boy, was he pissed that I'd gone behind his back. But I was a week past eighteen by then, so what the fuck did it matter? I took off after that.”

A long, curly strip of label peeled itself off and twisted around Jack's finger. “You went to Utah.”

“I did. Spent some time with racehorses. Got hired by a racing stable to exercise the horses between races. That was pretty cool; horses are goddamned smart.” He paused and finished his beer. “Met Kara there.”

A girl. The ring. A wife? Jack waited for more, all the while realizing he didn't want more. He wanted Kenny the way he'd been when Jack had jerked him off behind Connor's General Emporium on the Fourth of July. He didn't want Kenny to have a ring or a wife or family; it marred the picture that Jack kept carefully tucked away in the recesses of his mind. Kenny Desmond, fingers clutching Jack's wrist harder and harder as Jack had stroked and played and petted. That's what Jack wanted to remember. “Kara,” Jack said, repeating her name because he had nothing else to say except 'shut up now'.

“Yeah,” Kenny said, and Jack wondered if Kenny knew he was smiling. “Her family owned one of the horses. Man, she was a snotty little thing. At first.” The smile grew and Jack knew Kenny definitely had no idea he was smiling. “Courtied her right proper, just to piss off her family and my dad. Didn't know she was actually going to fall for it.”

Jack stopped himself from saying, “I fell for it,” and settled on a noncommittal “Mm,” instead.

“I married her,” Kenny mused. He was distant and thoughtful and Jack wished he was looking at Kenny's eyes instead of his profile. “I married her and took her to Seattle with me and her family cut her off. Her family was made of fucking millions and they cut her off and she didn't care. She laughed.”

“She must have loved you,” Jack murmured. *Like I did.*

“She loved me,” Kenny answered, nodding. “Smartest girl I ever met, and she did the stupidest thing in the world and loved me.”

“Not so stupid.”

Kenny looked over, his finger tracing the rim of his bottle. “She died.”

Jack couldn't stop looking at him. "I'm sorry," he said, and meant it.

"The baby did, too. Both of them died right there in the hospital because she bled. 'No reason why it happened, Mr. Desmond,' they said. Her doctor came out and told me herself. No reason that she knew of why it should have happened. I went into that hospital with a pregnant wife and came out a widower. But there was no reason for it."

It was so far outside the realm of what Jack had expected to hear that nothing moved for a minute. Everything stayed very still and even the sound of the cicadas stopped for a brief instant. The curl of the label fell to the cement floor. "Ken," Jack said, and it wasn't anything close to what sympathetic should be, although Jack tried.

"It was five years ago," Kenny said, and the way he'd come to terms with it was quiet and sure and Jack could sense it. "It doesn't run my life any more. I had to stop letting it do that."

"What did you do, after?" Jack asked.

"Was relieved," Kenny said. "Moved to Colorado and was relieved that Kara never knew my heart wasn't in it. She was a good girl, Jackie. I loved her as best I could, but like I said. My whole heart wasn't in it."

Jack didn't ask why. It would be a stupid, self-serving question. Jack knew why. "That's a lot of guilt," he said quietly, peeling off another strip of label.

"It was, at the time," Kenny agreed. "But five years goes a long way in dulling pain."

"For some things." It came out before Jack even knew he wanted to say it.

Kenny looked at him for a long time. "Thanks for coming," he finally said in a low voice. "I'm glad you're here."

Jack rose from his chair and stuffed his hands in his pockets. He rocked back on his heels and waited until Kenny got up, too, then Jack turned and stepped back through the sliding glass door into the bedroom.

They left the door open because it was summer, and summer in the south deserved open doors. When Jack lifted Kenny's shirt over his head and then did the same with his own, the sweet jasmine-scented wind wafted in through the door and caressed them both.

"Please," Kenny murmured, and then again as a question. "Please?"

Jack nodded and then their jeans were puddles of denim at their feet. The bedspread was scratchy when Jack put a knee on it, but the sheets beneath proved to be high quality and soft and Kenny sprawled out on his back. Jack accepted the invitation to stretch out over him and tried to cover as much skin as he could. "Like this," Jack said, wanting to look at



him. It was personal that way; you could fuck anyone if you weren't looking at their face. Kenny wasn't anyone.

"Like this," Kenny allowed, the green in his eyes darkening to deepest jade. He pointed to the nightstand drawer and Jack reached up for condoms and lube.

Somehow the situation didn't lend itself to foreplay. Jack didn't know how he knew that, but one swipe of lube over the condom was enough. He put a hand under one of Kenny's knees and pushed his leg back as Jack lined up. "Like this," Jack said again, and then one long, smooth glide had him buried deep.

The cicadas made up for their brief moment of earlier silence. A chorus of buzzing floated to them from the open door. "Move," Kenny whispered, making Jack realize he'd been frozen in place for long seconds.

"Sorry," he whispered back, leaning up and over and cradling Kenny's head in between his arms. Jack angled his body and pulled out far enough to make Kenny's ass clench in response, trying to keep him where he was, and a small moan escaped from one or both of them. "Beautiful," Jack murmured.

It was. It wasn't like how Jack had thought it would be, all those nights alone in his room with the door shut and a chair jammed under the knob. His hand had been slick with Vaseline and he'd been desperate and straining, vague pictures flitting through his brain of what fucking Kenny would actually be like. He hadn't had enough experience to actually know.

Experience wouldn't have taught him this, though. It wouldn't have taught him that Kenny's stomach tightened every time Jack thrust in. It wouldn't have shown him that Kenny's cock lifted and pulsed each time Jack brushed against his prostate. And there was no way it would have shown him the soft sounds of pleasure and encouragement Kenny made when Jack changed his angle and began to drive against him with purpose.

Jack wanted to keep it this way. He wanted the moment to be frozen the way the pictures on his digital camera were so he could go back when his brain was less fuzzy and his cock wasn't so urgent. Unfortunately, there was no time for wishing. His balls were pulling up tight and he could feel little licks of fire right at the base of his spine, and Jack knew he better finish strong or he'd be in for a world of embarrassment.

"Almost," he whispered, looking down and reaching for Kenny's cock, finding it hot and hard and slippery with pre-come. Kenny made a soft noise and clenched. "Oh, shit, don't do that," Jack gasped, and Kenny grinned up at him.

"Why?" Kenny asked, doing it again.

Jack made a sound that came close to a whimper and shut his eyes. "Because," he groaned, feeling his own cock twitch. "Because I can't-- uh-oh." He'd waited too long

and Jack gave an involuntary full-body shudder. “Fuck,” he ground out in a half-grunt, half-moan. He threw his head back and squeezed Kenny’s dick, managing a couple of strokes before losing his rhythm when his orgasm hit.

Jack was coherent enough to know that they had both shot within seconds of each other, but that was about all he could think about as his climax rocked him. Kenny was trembling and shaking beneath Jack as he came, and then there was soft heat on Jack’s fingers and splashing on his chest.

He settled down into Kenny’s arms and buried his face in the hollow between neck and shoulder. The sky was fading from orange to indigo when he looked up again. Jack thought they might have napped; he wasn’t sure. He dropped a kiss on a bare shoulder and pushed up. “Maybe we should shower,” he offered. “Before bed.”

Kenny nodded and looked up at him, eyes wide and serious and green. “Okay,” he said, and right away Jack knew there was more.

“What?” Jack moved to the side and went about taking care of the condom.

Kenny watched Jack tie it off and pitch it in the trash. “Jackie,” he said softly, “it’s not... I didn’t come back here for...” He made a vague motion with his hand that Jack thought was meant to encompass both of them together.

Jack stood at the corner of the bed and looked at him. “Of course you didn’t,” he replied. His voice sounded even and that was good.

“It doesn’t mean I don’t like it. Or that I’m not happy about it. Because I do. I am.” He was talking in the same tone Jack would use to calm an animal. “I guess I should have said so before.”

“Maybe,” Jack said, not liking how five minutes ago he’d been blissed out and mellow and now he could feel his shoulders bunching up of their own accord. “Said what?” He was still sort of unclear on what was happening.

“That I didn’t come back to Carolina for this.” Kenny was patient and calm, watching him. “I don’t have a place to live. I don’t have a job. Everything I own fits in that closet.” He pointed to the narrow door next to the bed. “I’m sorry, Jackie, I just don’t want you to think I can give more.”

“I didn’t want more.” Jack blinked. Did he? How could he want more from someone he’d only been reacquainted with for a week?

“Okay.” Kenny nodded, sitting up in bed and letting the sheet pool in his lap. “If we’re clear on that, then that’s good.”

“Good,” Jack echoed. “Do you want to shower?”

“I could, yeah.” Kenny scratched the back of his head and flipped the sheet off. “Coming in?”

Jack nodded. “Give me a minute. Get the water warm.”

“All right.” Kenny paused to kiss Jack on his way past.

When the bathroom door had nearly closed all the way and the sound of the shower could be heard, Jack stepped into his jeans, put on his shirt, and left.

\*\*\*

Early summer turned into late summer and the scent of jasmine grew strongest at night. The sound of cicadas had just been background noise before Kenny, but now they were always loud in Jack’s ears when he tried shutting his eyes to go to sleep. The music he put on never drowned them out.

Jack had known Kenny wouldn’t call him. It was still a disappointment when the phone didn’t ring. Despite the fact that Jack had never even given the man his phone number, he still knew that Kenny could have reached him if he’d wanted to.

Why did it matter? He asked himself the question ten times before lunch on a good day. Why had Jack walked out?

*Because he did the same to you, that fucking obnoxious whisper in his head would always answer back. Because he did the same to you with no way for you to know why or when or how.*

Jack ignored the whisper for all he was worth. To acknowledge it would admit to the passive-aggressiveness of it, and that wasn’t a part of his personality he was comfortable with. He didn’t really know what he was comfortable with, at the moment, since he’d known that he’d made a stupid mistake about thirty seconds after walking out the door of Kenny’s hotel.

And now here he was, three weeks to the day later, and Tyler was watching Jack with a disgusted expression. “The fucking fuck is wrong with you?” Ty asked him.

Jack dropped the aluminum baseball bat and leaned back against the chain-link fence. “So? I missed a pitch.”

Tyler raised a brow and watched another baseball lob towards them from the machine. “You usually do better when we come here. You’re always all fired up about the batting cages.”

He wasn't much fired up about anything these days, was the problem. Jack gestured toward the batter's circle. "Then you go," he said dully, sliding to the ground and leaning back against the fence. "Wear the helmet, though. I'm not driving you to the hospital again with a lump on your head."

Tyler narrowed his eyes. "Whatever's eating you, bud, I wish you'd figure out what the hell to do about it. And if you hadn't mentioned that the twins were back in town, I would have been paying more attention to the ball last time," Tyler informed him. "Betty Ann and-- dang. What's her sister's name?"

"Annabeth," Jack supplied, bored. Not of Tyler, just of... everything else. "Hit the damn pitch."

Tyler did, and the pitch after that, and the next one, too. Jack was glad Ty was on a roll; it kept Tyler's attention away from Jack and allowed Jack to just sit and watch without making any kind of effort. That was the way it was for a lot of Jack's life these days.

They were out of pitches and out of quarters by four o'clock. Tyler climbed into his car with a wave and a shake of his head. Jack had a flash of guilt. It wasn't Ty's fault that Jack was so out of it. Jack made a note to make it up to him with a beer and possibly a whiskey chaser. That was usually all it took.

The only places to go were either home or his father's store. Jack chose home, knowing he'd get a phone call later from his dad anyway. At least at home there was leftover pie from dinner last night. He drove with all the windows down, the rush of air drying the light sweat he'd built up at the batting cages.

A shower preceded dinner. The water was lukewarm, edging into cool, and Jack relished it. He leaned both hands on the tile and let the spray pour down over his back and shoulders, feeling it trickle into the crack of his ass and then down his inner thighs. A fast shampoo made the sharp tang of green apples fill the shower. Jack wondered if it clung to his hair like the bottle said it did. There was really no one around to ask.

He lifted a handful of shampoo suds to his nose to sniff it again. It was nice, reminding him of autumn and crisper, colder days. Jack folded his hand into a fist and watched the white soap ooze out from between his fingers. Without a real conscious thought, Jack brought that same hand down and closed it gently around his cock.

He actually had to look down in surprise when he realized he was hard.

His soapy hand slid easily over his erection and Jack didn't insult himself by pretending not to think of Kenny. It was the fantasy that sprung to his mind most easily these days, whether Jack wanted it to or not. Those grass-green eyes and the half smile were always just below the surface of Jack's consciousness, and Jack's dick really didn't care if the image was real or not.

Jack palmed himself and squeezed. It would be shameful how close he was to coming just from picturing Kenny's face, but the shower walls really didn't give a damn and at this exact minute, Jack didn't either. His hand moved faster, playing and teasing and pressing into the slit at the head of his cock. Jack held his breath and reached for climax, pretending just for a fraction of a second that it wasn't his own hand.

When his orgasm slammed into him, it was hot and sharp. Jack threw back his head and cried out. The sound mingled with the water and the steam and Jack opened his eyes to watch his spunk hit the tile. He stayed there until the arm that was bracing him began to tremble and he was forced to turn off the water and reach for a towel.

Jack dried himself and wondered why each time he jerked off alone, it became increasingly less satisfying.

\*\*\*

Autumn came and the leaves turned. The magnolia scent wasn't as strong, but the cicadas were louder than ever. Jack had to shut his windows at night even though the weather remained just as warm as the summertime.

He found himself down at the field more often than not. It was football season and he supposed it didn't really matter that he'd been out of high school for ten years. The whole fucking town lived for the damn game and Jack's name was permanently etched on one of the plaques in the school trophy case. He had a right shoulder that ached when it rained, too, but that reminder wasn't as much fun.

The Friday night games were all right. He and Tyler went together. Tyler ogled the cheerleaders, despite Jack's frequent reminders that they were ten years younger and also under eighteen. "I'm just looking at them," Tyler said, exasperated. "Not touching. Looking."

Jack just snorted and watched the town's new darling running back score another six points.

He preferred coming to the field when it wasn't game time. Jack liked the early evening hours just before full darkness. The dusk was calming. He sat in the stands and watched practice, if it was practice day. He sat in the stands even if there was no one on the field. Jack was aware that anyone who knew him would think perhaps he was reliving glory days, but it wasn't true. He'd sort of forgotten about his glory days after graduation anyway. Jack just liked the quiet, so he went.

It wasn't a surprise when he came down to the field one night and saw a figure in the stands. The man was sitting up in the far left corner, the spot where Jack had been sitting for several weeks now. Jack didn't know why it wasn't a shock. He crossed the grass as he'd done so many times before and stood looking up at the concrete bleachers.

When Kenny didn't make a move to come down, Jack started up. The stairs were wide and he flashed back to the thousands of times the coach had made Jack run them in full uniform and pads. Boy, his momma had been pissed the day he'd passed out from the heat. Coach hadn't made them run the stadium steps after that.

Step after step, one foot over the other, and then Jack was at the top and the sinking sun was turning things yellow and rose and peachy-violet. He didn't look at Kenny, preferring to watch the sunset. "That's my seat," Jack said.

"I know," Kenny answered, and Jack knew Kenny wasn't looking at him either. "That's why I sat in it."

"How do you know that?" Jack hooked his fingers through the chain-link fence that backed along the edge of the bleachers. The fence made criss-cross lines through the sun.

"I saw your car parked on the street a while back," was the confession. "But I didn't go looking for you until I saw it again a couple of weeks later. Then I stood just inside the gate down there and watched you sit here."

"Oh," Jack said, unable to come up with something more clever. "That still doesn't tell me why you're in my seat."

"Because if I stood down there at the edge of the grass, I couldn't talk to you."

Jack tightened his fingers around the metal of the fence and leaned back a little bit. The fence leaned with him and then held his weight. He turned his head to look at Kenny. "I'm sorry I walked out on you," he said, not expecting the words to come out of his mouth until they were there.

"I was sorry, too. And for what happened to make you do it." Kenny was still focused on the field in front of him. It was nearly dark and Jack knew the yard lines would be starting to glow dimly on the field of green.

"I made me do it," Jack answered. "Not what you said." That part was essentially true. The words had stung, yes. They'd sliced like a paper cut, but they hadn't *made* him leave. Jack had decided to do that on his own.

"I'm not leaving Carolina," Kenny said. "I got a job and a place to live."

"Mm," Jack replied. What was the point of this conversation? "Okay. Uh... you were waiting for me to tell me that?"

"Yes." Kenny nodded, and finally broke his gaze from the football field to focus on Jack's face. "But that part was supposed to be after."

"After?"

“After I told you I lied. I said I didn’t come back to Carolina for this. It was a lie, except I didn’t know it until I walked out of the bathroom and you weren’t there.” Kenny watched him in the fading light and his eyes were wide and serious.

Jack tilted his head and considered Kenny for a minute before letting go of the fence. He ran his thumbs over the indentations in his fingers and sat down on the cold cement. “How did you not know it was a lie?” The conversation was getting a little confusing.

“Because I’d said it to myself for years and thought it was true. You know what the first thing I thought was when they told me my father died? It wasn’t ‘good’ or ‘the bastard deserves it’ or even ‘now I have to deal with his debt’. It was ‘if I go home, Jackie will be there’. I should have known right then that the only fucking thing I was coming back here for was to see you.”

Jack regarded him in the last remnants of daylight. “So you have a job.”

“I have a job. Pat hired me on as a part-time mechanic, but then his full-time guy quit. So now I’m the full-time guy.” Kenny was still watching Jack’s face, searching it for something.

“And you have a place to live.”

A nod. “Sold the trailer. Used the cash for a down payment on one of those little places up near Wolf Creek.”

“And you came back here to see me.”

Another nod. “Yeah, Jackie. Been on my mind for damn near ten years.”

Jack settled back against the fence and looked toward one of the goalposts on the field. It stood tall and white in the darkness. “Ken?”

“Yeah?”

“Might be good if you kissed me now.”

Kenny let out a small, nearly undetectable sigh that Jack chose to interpret as relief.

“Hey, Jackie?”

“Yeah?”

“That’d be easier if you looked at me.”

Jack smiled at the field and then turned on the stone seat. Kenny was leaning back against the fence, too, hands folded across his stomach. When Jack turned, Kenny sat up and moved to face him. "I'm looking," Jack said.

They moved into each other at the same moment. Hands came up to touch each other's faces and Jack sighed when he felt Kenny's thumb brush across his cheek. Their mouths opened tentatively and then Jack tasted him. Tongues slid and brushed against lips and teeth and it was sweet like chocolate, sweet enough for Jack to make a small sound of pleasure and move closer.

The late autumn darkness was velvety and soft. "I want to go," Kenny whispered. "I want to show you where I live now. I want you to know."

Jack understood what it meant and tightened his hold on Kenny's shirt before letting go. "Yes," he said, and stood. Kenny stood with him. "I want to see where to find you."

They descended the steps and crossed the red clay running track to the grass. When Kenny's fingers brushed his own, Jack accepted the invitation and reached out for his hand.

A chorus of cicadas followed them.



The Sounds of Cicadas

Copyright © 2007 by Tory Temple

All rights reserved. No part of this eBook may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever without written permission except in case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles or reviews. For information address Torquere Press, Inc., PO Box 2545, Round Rock, TX 78680

Printed in the United States of America.

ISBN: 978-1-60370-500-4, 1-60370-500-7

Torquere Press, Inc.: Single Shot electronic edition / April 2007  
Single Shot Classic electronic edition / October 2008

Torquere Press eBooks are published by Torquere Press, Inc., PO Box 2545, Round Rock, TX 78680