Dairy Queen Lust

by Diane D. Gillette

The first time I heard *Slow Hand* by Conway Twitty, I was at the Dairy Queen eating ice cream with Jake Hartell. We were sitting side by side on the bench out front, trying to lick the drips of soft-serve from our cones before they could reach our fingers and make our hands even stickier. The ice cream and saliva mixed with the scummy film of sweat and humidity. In western Kansas, this film coveres everyone from June to September, making us all look a bit damp and wilted, no matter how recently we've tried to freshen up. As we worked on our cones, we didn't bother to look at each other or talk, pretending it was the heat and humidity that made us ignore each other. I had barely managed to squeak out a thank-you when Jake bought my ice-cream cone for me. It wasn't that I didn't appreciate the gesture, but we both knew why he had shown up on my doorstep that afternoon when every right-minded kid within a ten-mile radius was at the public pool.

We'd just finished up seventh grade, the year that all my peers almost unanimously decided tonsil hockey was the new American pastime. Two by two my classmates began pairing off and spending their daily recess looking for opportunities to sneak behind the school and lock lips. By the time the hellish year of seventh grade drew to an end, there were only a select few of us that for one reason or another that had yet to take our turn behind the school. I, personally, just had no interest in having some pimply-faced moron stick his tongue down my throat. Jake Hartell was one of the boys who were just too shy to talk to most girls. He and I, at one time, had been pretty good friends, until he started getting picked on for hanging out with a girl all the time. Then he dropped me like a wormy apple.

So when Jake showed up and asked if I wanted to go to the Dairy Queen with him, I figured he'd decided it was time to get this whole kissing business over with if he was going to be able to show his face on the first day of eighth grade. Perhaps he figured I was of the

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same mind. I can assure you I was not. But the ice cream sounded good and I had missed hanging out with Jake the last couple of years. I thought he was a sensible enough guy that I could change his mind if he came at me with his lips puckered.

We were nearly finished with our cones, and I was getting nervous about what I would do when Jake decided to make his move. I was almost ready to just bolt, when a couple in a battered, red pick-up pulled up in front of our bench. They were just teenagers, maybe recent graduates at the high school. The guy put his truck into park and leaned over to kiss his girlfriend. It was a gentle kiss, as if he was afraid she might break if he came at her too hard. I watched her hand come up to the back of his neck and curl her fingers in his hair for just a moment before he pulled away. I snuck a peek at Jake to see if he saw the kiss, afraid it might give him ideas, but he was obliviously licking his cone. The cowboy smiled at his girl and brushed a stray curl from her face before climbing out of the truck. He was wearing tight jeans and a cowboy hat. His skin was bronzed, and from the muscles that rippled under his black T-shirt, I could tell he'd spent more than a few hours working the fields. He left the truck running, the radio playing, and the windows open. As I watched him take long strides towards the entrance to the Dairy Queen, Conway Twitty began to sing in his deep, gravelly voice, telling me how much he'd love to make love to me. His words spoke to desires I didn't even know I had, and it didn't even matter that I lacked a complete understanding of what it exactly was that I desired. It was pleasure enough just to want something mysterious. An odd feeling was growing inside me, and I had to squirm, comfort just beyond my grasp.

The bronzed cowboy came back out with an ice-cream sundae, and I noticed the way his blond hair curled out from under his hat. I wondered what it would feel like to curl my own fingers in it as his lips gently caressed mine. Before sliding into the truck next to his waiting girlfriend, he saw me staring and gave me a quick wink. My heart dropped right into my stomach.

Jake seemed in no hurry to finish his ice cream cone, and I continued to study the beautiful cowboy and his lover. He fed his girlfriend heaping spoonfuls of ice cream and hot fudge. Once a bit of ice cream brushed against her cheek, and the cowboy leaned in close to lick it off. She laughed and kissed him, their ice cream momentarily forgotten. I felt the temperature somehow must have crept even higher, and I couldn't sit still. As they pulled apart, the cowboy turned his head in my direction and winked again. He puckered his lips in my direction then smiled. I felt my face grow hotter at being caught watching the couple and immediately looked down in my lap. I noticed I had shredded the ice-cream dampened napkin that had come wrapped around my cone into a hundred little pieces of sticky confetti.

Jake was looking at me as if I'd suddenly sprouted horns, “Jesus, Jeri. You got a snake in your britches or something? What are you squirming around for?”

I didn't bother to reply as I watched him pop the last bite of cone into his mouth. I turned in time to see the cowboy's truck pull out of the lot, and as he stuck his hand out the window and slowly rippled his fingers in my direction, I swallowed hard and tried to ease the rush of blood that had set my face on fire. I quickly turned to Jake and clamped my hands on either side of his face. Before he could protest, my lips were on his. He tasted of chocolate, and his lips were softer than I had thought they would be.

The kiss only lasted a few seconds before we pulled apart. Jake looked a lot like a deer caught in the headlights of an oncoming truck and he had a piece of my shredded napkin stuck to his cheek. He opened his mouth to say something, but the words didn't emerge. Finally he just stood up and bolted from the Dairy Queen. I watched him take off down the road for a moment, but then turned to look in the opposite direction — the direction the cowboy had driven off in. My kiss with Jake hadn't been quite what I imagined it would be, but I couldn't help but wonder if it wouldn't improve with time. I went inside the Dairy Queen to ask for a glass of ice water,

certain we had reached record high temperatures that day, Conway's words still echoing inside my head.