

The Sound of Cicadas

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A man sits down with the man who violated his daughter, to hear his side of the story.



Published on
Booksie

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All roads, paved or unpaved, end somewhere. Running on them seems wise; especially when the stretch ahead appears to be endless. But they all reach a point where an absence of asphalt is present. Your conscience tells you to turn; but where is there left to go? All that remains is the truth. Telling it, and accepting it.

The father's footsteps swept through a rural area as he led himself to where he believed would be his endpoint. His boots crunched on dead grass as the cicadas vibrated tones throughout the trees. It was hot and sticky; the air was barely breathable, but he ignored it with a swipe of his wrist against his forehead to rid of the sweat. A single house stood constructed in the field; it was boarded up, meant to look vacant and out of its era of time. The father was not jaded; this walk was too long to turn back from an assumption that no one was there in that shack. He moved closer to it, with his hand tightly wrapped around a holster that hung around his waist. His eyes stayed low under the shade of his curved boonie hat and the eclipse from his tinted sunglasses.

He noticed movement in the house. Movement so subtle and discreet, but still noticeable. The shades flicked slightly, similar to how they do when someone is observing the outside. His footsteps became more rapid as he closed in on the property like a vulture smelling his carrion. The soles of his steel toed boots clicked along the porch as he pushed the door open without turning the doorknob. Dust and the scent of old wood entered his nose as he surveilled the room. It was quiet; only the redundant sound of cicadas that was heard the entire way there sounded in his ears. He looked to his left: an empty room with a table and a dirty cloth resting on top of it. He brought his head in front of him: a staircase that led only to darkness and the view of the kitchen that seemed to have nothing in it. He turned right: an old television resting on top of a stool with its antennae sprouting in different directions to provide reception when the television actually worked.

A new sound birthed from the room on the right. The sound of a rocking chair; one that was worn out and in need of repair. The father slowly stepped into the room, though his chance of being discreet was soiled due to his loud boots. He travelled further into the room and looked where he could not see at the time when he stood in the main entrance of the home.

“All the way out here huh?” He spoke to what appeared to him as a man rocking back and forth in the direction of the window.

The figure remained mute.

“Miles and miles away from New Jersey,” he pulled the television from the chair and set it onto the floor, “out here, into this abandoned house,” he continued with his southern accent as he sat down facing the man. “Now you won’t even give me the decency to turn and look at me? Can’t look a real man in the eyes?”

“You came all this way,” the man whispered, “for me? And for what?”

“Haven’t decided yet honestly. Didn’t think I’d find you to be honest.”

The man snickered, “Not as confident as your words then.”

“Oh no, no I am. I sure as hell am confident.”

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“So tell me, why'd you come here Byron?” He turned his chair towards the father, but kept his eyes on the floor.

“A lot of reasons. But you should know the real one.”

“You can't be serious. I know what I've done, or what I did I should say. You've come here, for what, to make me own up to what I've done?” He laughed loudly, “I know what I did. You coming here wasn't so smart.”

Byron took his hat off and slicked his brown hair back with the sweat that built up inside of it.

“Remember when it happened. After she told me, and I came looking for you? Yeah,” he squinted his eyes and turned his head, “yeah you remember. Every time you feel those gums where your teeth are supposed to be, you remember huh?”

The man stopped rocking in the chair as he seemed to finally be affected by words.

“I remember,” he said lowly.

“So I'm not here to make you confess; I'm not here to do what I did last time.” Byron placed his elbows on his knees and leaned forward, “I'm here to make sure you don't do what you did to my daughter ever again. To nobody else.”

“Listen, I already apologized. I sent you money, I left the school board, I left the goddamn state. What more do you want?”

“Apologize? That don't mean nothin'. Thanks for the money though,” he said as he pulled a black handled Colt Anaconda .44 Magnum from his holster, “it came in handy.”

The man shook, but tried to conceal it.

“Come on Byron. What do you need that for?”

“You deaf or somethin'? I told you. I'ma make sure you don't hurt no other families Chris.”

“What, so kill me?” He raised his voice, but through fear rather than anger.

Byron pressed his tongue against the inside of his cheek so that it was visible on his face.

“Not yet, no. I want you to explain. I wanna hear your side of the story.”

“What?” Chris replied.

“Shelby knows why you did it. And if my own daughter knows why, so should I.”

Chris fell silent as he remained undefended and revisited by his memories.

“Before I tell you, I have a question?”

“What is it?”

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“Am I going to die?” He shivered.

“That’s a gutsy question. You do remember what you did to get yourself in this situation right? You-you remember how you took the only thing Shelby could really call hers? The one thing she was born with?”

“Stop, I know. Stop talking about it.”

“Alright I will. Now your turn.”

“My turn?”

“To talk about it.”

Chris began to rub his chin as he tried to pull together the thoughts that lay scattered in his brain.

“Let’s see then. Well I first noticed her when your family moved into town. She came into my class for the first time, and all of the boys gawked at her. Blond hair, perfect curves—

“Watch your goddamn tongue,” Byron barked as he pulled the hammer back on the gun.

“Okay, okay. Just please put the safety on or something. I-I can’t concentrate with that damn thing pointing at me,” he said with his hands up.

Byron pushed the hammer back up and lowered the barrel to the ground.

“Thank you. Where was I?”

“Gawkin’ at my daughter.”

“I wasn’t. They were. The boys her age. A year before they become adults, and they behaved that way. Anyway, for a week straight, I observed Shelby. But to be honest, I did that with every new student. I was only doing my job as a teacher. So after the week, I noticed that she was struggling with math, precalculus to be exact. She asked for my help, so I arranged a meeting after school.”

Byron tensed up, but continued to listen and kept the gun pointed at the wooden floor.

“The sessions were-protocol. I taught her what she needed to know, and she applied it. She improved so quickly, so I saw no need for the tutoring to continue, but she insisted. She continued to show up, claiming that it was still hard, though her grade was 5th highest in the class. She would walk in everyday, so happy, so-excited to see me.”

“Yeah I bet.”

“She would run over to my desk and say, ‘what are we learning today?’ and I’d reply, ‘stuff you already know.’ It was a process.”

“So what about the day it happened? Tell me about that day, because right now it seems like you two were the best of friends, which isn’t true.”

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“But we were close. She actually began to confide in me. She started to involve me in teen gossip, and all of the cliques she had merged into even after being there for only a month. I was somewhat interested, but one topic caught my attention particularly. A boy.”

“A boy? What boy?”

“His name is Alex. As the stereotype fit, he was on the Football team and she had a crush on him. She spoke highly of him each day for at least 10 minutes. Until one day; she came in with her eyes wet and her makeup smeared all over her face,” he recalled as his eyes focused on the floor, “I was so upset, for some reason. Maybe because I felt a connection with her, and she was becoming so close to me. When she told me that he only wanted her for sex, I went insane inside. Of course I couldn’t show her my anger; she’d think it weird of me. So I pasted a smile onto my face and pulled her tears to my shoulder. It felt so nice to hold her-and smell her rose scent-”

Byron pulled the gun back up, but kept the hammer still, “what did I say?”

“Sorry, sorry. So she continued to weep. And I rubbed her hair. I felt so important at the time. I was her decision; the person she chose to vent to. And I’m only 6 years older than her, so I relished in the possibility that she was attracted to me. I assumed that she was; coming to me everyday, to learn basically everything she already knew. That’s a sign right? Wrong,” he gritted his teeth and closed his eyes, “I felt so close to her. I lifted her head from my shoulder and looked into those oceans she calls eyes. So beautiful, she was-is I should say.”

“She was beautiful before she met you. She isn’t the same anymore.”

Chris ignored the remark, and focused back on the conclusion of the story.

“I thought that it was a moment, ya know? When the lead kisses his actress, and they fall in love; this was that moment. For me at least. I kissed those soft, pink lips. She didn’t feel the same, she-she struck me. I held the hot part of my face, where she hit me,” he rubbed his cheek to show, “I couldn’t believe it. Then, that anger from before; the anger from when she told me about that Alex kid? It came back, but worse than before. It wasn’t anger towards her; it was towards the fact that what I wanted, I could not have. So I struck her back. Harder, faster than when she did it to me.”

Byron began to tense up. A vein in the side of his neck shown through his skin as the vivid story played on.

“There she was, on the ground. Defenseless. Asleep. Beautiful. I-I don’t know what came over me,” his eyes began to swell with liquid as he pictured that day, “I truly don’t know. It was after class, so no one was there. I locked the door, and uh, and just took her to a part of the room where no one could see us through window in the door. It was exhilarating, to have her, alone, all to myself. And that’s when I did it. When I-”

“That’s enough,” Byron rubbed his hand over his face and sighed deeply, “that’s enough.”

Chris, now in tears and distraught, covered his face with both hands.

“Oh God, I never meant to-I never meant to hurt your family.”

“Shut up. Sympathy is for the weak, and I ain’t weak,” he pointed to himself, “now here’s what we’re gonna do Chris. I’m gonna have you turn around and look out the window. Make this as

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painless as possible.â

â No please donâ t,â he pleaded with a wet face and a sore throat, â what do I have to do? Tell me, anything!â

â You donâ t get it do you? You think if I just let you go, everything is gonna be solved? Naw man, itâ s bigger than that. You scarred Shelby, for life. She wanted to get married, to have kids and all that. Now she wonâ t even come out her room. You did that to her.â

â But Iâ m sorry. I truly am. Just donâ t kill me,â he fell to the ground, â God please donâ t kill me.â

Byron stood up and aggressively lifted Chris up to his feet.

â Have some goddamn dignity, will you? Now turn the hell around.â

Chris turned slowly and kept his eyes shut.

â This canâ t be happening-this isnâ t real-this isnâ t-â

â Youâ re startinâ my nerves boy. Make me wanna shoot both legs, both arms, then your head. I got 6 bullets in here, donâ t make me use â em all.â

â So this is it?â

Byron sighed.

â Killinâ someone ainâ t easy. In movies, they do it no problem, boom and itâ s done. But in reality, youâ re taking someoneâ s life. Itâ s sick.â

â Then why are you doing it to me? Youâ re no better than a murderer locked up in prison. No better than them,â he shouted with his forehead against the window, â why are you gonna take my life then?â

Byron pulled the hammer back on the gun and lifted it to the back of Chrisâ s head.

â Because you took my daughterâ s.â

The crows fled from the trees near the house as the booming sound of the gun went off. A crimson stain dripped down from the window as Byron walked out of the house. His hands shook as he cleaned the gun with a black cloth, then sheathed it. Night fell, the moon placed its light over the land of grass and wheat. He whistled as he crunched through the dead grass, listening to the sounds of cicadas.

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