

With spring came heavy rain. It was in the muck and mud of six days of downpour while milking Li'l Belle that I heard him approach. I waited and listened to the rain hitting the tin roof of the lean-to and the sound of his boots. With each step his boots made an air-sucking sound as he pulled them free of the mud. I counted the sound of his footsteps one by one 'til I knew he was a few yards away. Only then did I rise from the milking stool and turn to him. He stood there outside smiling and pulled one boot free of the mud, his arms outstretched, balancing himself like a tightrope walker.

"Hey, Lorraine. Look what you made me do. Made me ruin my best shirt and good pair of boots trying to sneak up on you. I just want to ask you some questions. You know what I'm talking about, girl? That little queer, Johnny Redboots?"

He took off his shirt, held it up, attempted to wring the rainwater from it then laughed and threw it in the mud near the lean-to. I stood quiet with one hand on the rope strap of the shotgun and the other hand resting on Li'l Belle's back. Li'l Belle moved from side to side, restless and wanting free of the lean-to.