
HOLD MY BEER AND WATCH THIS

S. Elias Marx and J. P. Edwards

THE GOOD BOOK MENTIONS wars and rumors of wars. I think everyone thought that meant armies and soldiers, tanks and jets.

But anyone who was there that day in Noveau, Louisiana, a year or so after that mysterious accident on Highway 65, knew it meant keeping your cooler full of beer and staying away from Ned's front porch.

His real name was Bobby Joe LaFontaine, but everyone called him Ned. Mostly when they were talking behind his back.

"Oh, Gawd, here he comes. Good fer nothin' hillbilly."

No one knew why. It was just one of those things that happened, and people picked up on. Before that day, everyone in town was talking about Ned, more often than not between mouthfuls of beer and chewing tobacco. None of it was kind.

"He reeks. He oughta stay out in that trailer on the highway where he belongs."

Ned pretended not to hear the whispering as he walked toward the men playing front-porch dominos at the general store. Head low, his baseball cap pulled snugly down over his ears, Ned smiled a gap-toothed, crooked smile at the sudden hush, pushing open the wooden door and going inside.

"Hey, Neddy. More beer?"

"Yeah. And chips."

Rufus Ferman, the storekeeper, was the only person in town who was always nice to him. Ned grabbed a case of Natural Light and dropped it on the counter with a bag of

S. ELIAS MARX and J.P. EDWARDS

chips and another of pork rinds. He waited, wiping his nose on his sleeve, as Rufus stuffed them in to plastic sacks and handed them over.



Ned took the scenic route back to his trailer; on the Moped, it was only twenty minutes on the dirt roads. He avoided the paved road now, ever since the unfortunate accident last summer.

He didn't mind living out in the boonies. See, Ned was born to poor parents in a poor neighborhood in a poor Southern state, and with folks making fun of him all the time, day in, day out, well, it got kinda tiring on a fella. But Ned took it all in stride. He knew something those other yokels didn't. And he wasn't about to share.

"Hey, Otis," he said, patting a mangy black and white dog with a greying muzzle. "You don't know how lucky you are, living out here. Nothin' but assholes in town, except Rufus."

Otis looked at him with wise brown eyes, and Ned smiled down at him affectionately. Otis knew it, too, the secret that kept Ned sane. Ned poured a generous measure of beer into the dog's bowl.

"There ya go, bud. Every dog has his day, Otis. Did you ever have yours? 'Cause I'm sure as hell going to have mine."

Ned loaded the rest of the beer into the new fridge in the kitchen. Now, when I say new, I mean the ten-year-old Amana he kept most of his food and all of his beer in, not the thirty-year-old Frigidaire huddled in the tall grass in the front yard, next to the ancient porch. That was his fridge for barbeque beer in the summer and deer meat in the winter.

He tore into the bag of chips and popped open two Natural Lights. One he drained by pouring it down his throat right then and there. He'd won contests that way. Ned's throat didn't function the same way a regular person's throat does. He didn't swallow so much as open it and pour the beer down. Some foods, he didn't even have to chew; not

HOLD MY BEER AND WATCH THIS

that he chewed overmuch when he ate anyway. Figured it added to his mystique.

He took the other beer to the cluttered living room with him, frowning at the dog who now lay on the couch.

“Otis, move.” Without waiting to see if Otis was actually moving, Ned pointed his ass at the couch. The old dog poured himself off of the sofa and burped loudly as he settled on the carpeted floor at Ned’s feet.

Some days, like today, the talking and the pointing in town got Ned down. But Ned knew he was special. It came to him plain as the nose on his face every time he popped open a cold one, fresh picked from the refrigerator. Ned liked beer. It made him feel powerful.

It made him feel special – end of the world special. And he could do anything when he felt like that.

Which brought Ned to a decision he’d been working on for some time.

Decisions were hard for Ned. Certain things came easy for him. Drinkin’, couch potatoin’, Moped commandoin’. But thinkin’ wasn’t on his top five list of easy things, so believe me when I tell you, this decision was a long time in the making.

Ned decided he wasn’t going to take nothing from nobody ever again. Ever. And he’d fix it so he wouldn’t have to, and neither would any of his friends.

If he ever made any besides Rufus.

That’s when it all started, late last summer on a hot, sultry evening in August. Since then, the only time anybody sees Ned is when he comes to town to get beer, or when some unfortunate soul gets lost out past Rabbit Run Road.

But anyways, that day, Neddy’d polished off nine beers, he went to the kitchen for one more. He reached inside the 24-pack on the smelly, meat-stained second shelf of the fridge and grabbed nothing but empty air.

“This won’t do,” he said, and, leaving his front door wide open, he hopped on his Moped without bothering to put on

S. ELIAS MARX and J.P. EDWARDS

a shirt and weaved his way into town. He got there in record time and fell off near enough to Rufus's store for it to count. It took him about ten minutes to dust himself off, but finally he stumbled up the wide steps.

And that's where he saw Amy Jo Rollins, the only woman he'd ever gotten close enough to for her perfume to tickle the hairs of his big nostrils. It was love at first sniff – er, sight. At least for Ned.

Now, I got to tell you, Amy Jo is not the greatest looker in Northern Louisiana. She's one of those pear-shaped women with too many freckles across her nose and too-thick glasses across her eyes. Twin braids on either side of her head completes the picture of an overgrown, oversized little girl wearing a stained white T-shirt with no bra and overalls with only one of the straps clipped on.

The domino-playing guys, whose names were Georges, Tito, and Reggie, were always giving Amy Jo a hard time, and there aren't too many truer bastards than these three. Dyed in the wool bullies all.

And these three were all givin' the worst they had to poor Amy Jo.

Tito shook up his Bud Longneck and sprayed it all over her, drenching her shirt and good overalls with beer.

"Hey, little girl, want some candy?" This from Georges, a Cajun gun-runner with two missing front teeth and a huge belly, fancied himself a down-home ladies' man. Funny thing, though, he never seemed to get any. Ladies, that is.

Reggie, coming up behind her, crushing up a bag of Nacho Doritos, and dumped the crumbs over Amy Jo's head. They cascaded over her, leaving huge orange stains in the sticky spots where the beer coated her face and clothes, giving her the appearance of a punk Raggedy Ann scarecrow.

Now, Ned was not only a little bit drunk, but madder than a sackful of bumblebees, every bit of his anger focused on the three men clustered around Amy Jo.

HOLD MY BEER AND WATCH THIS

And when Ned drank a few beers, then concentrated good and hard, things happened. Not necessarily good things, mind. But special things nevertheless. You could almost feel the buzzing in the humid air.

So there's Ned standing next to the three meanest bullies in Marigold County, and he's downed a six and a half of beer. Plenty enough to get his dander up, and more than plenty enough to do what comes naturally, because Ned is sweet on Amy Jo.

So Ned stands there, glaring, and a breeze kicks up, picking up the ends of his stringy brown hair and swirling the dust around his bare ankles. Still, it's kind of a creepy breeze, all concentrated just around Ned.

About this time, the three men, still making fun of poor Amy Jo, realize they're being watched, and they turn on Ned.

Reggie's the first one to let fly. "What you starin' at, boy? Get your oversize deformed ass away from here."

Ned kept on standin' there, not saying a word. No one living had seen Ned work his magic before, but they'd heard stories, and the people around the store quietly closed their doors or moved away down the street, as if the strange wind moving around the town freak frightened them.

Ned didn't budge, just stayed, dirt moving around him.

And so did the three. Just looked back at Neddy, arms at their sides.

Finally Georges, in that funny accent of his, said, "Reggie, why fuck you waste those Doritos on her? She not worth our party food, I guarantee."

"Don't you think you can holler at me, you no-count Cajun motherfucker," Reggie snapped back.

Tito looked nervously from one to the other, then over to Ned. "Come on, you two assholes. Let's get the hell outta here."

The others nodded and together they stalked off into the gravel that served as a parking lot for the little store, still

S. ELIAS MARX and J.P. EDWARDS

bickering like a bunch of teenagers with only one cigarette between them.

The air calmed almost immediately and Ned smiled, but his smile faltered when his gaze found Amy Jo, who was still trembling and covered with chips. There wasn't much that frightened Ned; he'd been born big – damn near killed his mama coming out – and he'd always been able to fight, but he had a terrible fear of women.

“Are – are you okay?” he managed to get out.

Amy Jo nodded her orange-powdered head. “Yeah.” It came out in a high whisper, with a hint of ‘go away’ to it.

Ned never took hints too well.

“You’re crying. They hurt you that bad?”

“Not on the outside,” she said.

“Bastards.” Ned clenched his fists and looked around. He'd need to find those boys and make them sorry. Make them pay.

“Why did they go away?” Amy Jo looked up at him with big, tear-filled eyes, and Ned felt his heart expand. He suddenly wasn't afraid anymore, not of Amy Jo. She was an angel and he wanted to spend the rest of his life making her happy.

“Amy Jo,” he said quietly, “would you like a beer?”



For the rest of that week, Ned rode into town every day whether he needed beer or not, and every day, Amy Jo would just happen to be down at Rufus's store. By the end of the week, Ned had decided to tell her his secret. He brought her out to the trailer, introduced her to Otis, and opened her a cold one. Then he set her down on the couch and just flat out told her.

When Ned drank, he could just look at folks, concentrate, and turn them in to the nastiest, most spiteful, arguinst brawlers you could hope to lay eyes on. And from there, it only got uglier. Bad things happened.

HOLD MY BEER AND WATCH THIS

“It ain’t true.” Amy Jo looked at him with her big brown eyes and giggled. Ned thought it was kinda cute.

“Swear to Jesus, it’s true,” he said solemnly, holding his right hand up like he was swearing in court. “I could tell you something ‘bout those Dobson boys you’d never believe.”

Amy Jo leaned closer, the top of her overalls gaping enough for Ned to get a good long look down them. “Tell me, Neddy.”

Ned shook his head. “No, I can’t. It ain’t right and I should be ‘shamed.”

She smiled and laid one small chubby hand on his arm. “Come on, Neddy, you know you want to.”

Heat swept up from his toes to the hair on top of his head. Ned swallowed hard, and then he said, “You ain’t gonna believe me anyways, so I guess it won’t hurt nothing.”



Chuck and Harvey Dobson had a nasty habit of driving drunk and chasing people and animals in their hopped-up Ford F150. In the summertime, they filled up their tank and drove around all day, drinking beer and looking for targets for their little game. Their game usually involved guns, too, and any other nasty little surprises they could think of when they’d been drinking for days.

Two years ago, Ned lost Otis’s brother Mike to the Dobson boys and their shootin’ ways, but Ned had been too scared to take the Dobson boys on. Until they’d come looking for him, all the way past Rabbit Run Road, down to the trailer park where Ned’s trailer sat by itself, and up onto the porch where he kept his beer in the summer.

Ned’s porch was kinda sacred to him. And Otis lived on that porch in the summer. Otis had tried valiantly to defend his home, but the Dobson boys tied his paws together and dragged him off the porch with a rope connected to the back of their truck. If Ned hadn’t been coming home from

S. ELIAS MARX and J.P. EDWARDS

Rufus's store, he might never have known what happened to poor old Otis.

But he caught them, and he cut Otis free before they could do more than gun their engine. And then he got on his Moped to chase them. They'd found it real funny, Ned chasing them down the gravel road on his little machine. They let him catch up to them on highway 65, a little two-laner, in spite of it's modern-sounding name, and then they turned their truck around, like to run him down.

With more than a twelve-pack in him and steaming mad, Ned stood his ground and focused real hard. Before they could get near him, they began to fight, screaming at each other about who was going to run him down. He imagined everyone in a ten-mile radius heard them.

"Dammit, Chuck, let me over there. It's my turn to drive."

"Yeah, right, Harvey. I'm gonna let you drive?"

"You slimy bastard, you know you killed the last one. Now, let me drive, dammit." Harvey climbed across the seat and into his brother's lap almost before Chuck realized what was going on, and the truck went careening out of control, down the center of the highway, head on into a loaded semi barreling past Ned who was already driving back the other way.

The explosion destroyed vegetation in the whole area. That tractor/trailer was hauling petroleum to Rufus and some of the other gas stations. Only its driver escaped with his life, and he reported that Harvey and Chuck could still be heard fighting as their truck burned around them, until at last they were quiet.



When Ned finished his story, Amy Jo sat real still. He hoped she wasn't scared of him, now that she knew what he could do – his mama had told him one day his talent could end the world – apocalypse, she told him. He swallowed

HOLD MY BEER AND WATCH THIS

another beer, waiting. After several long minutes, she sighed and looked up at him with a smile.

“Let’s go back to town, okay?”

Ned nodded, and they climbed on his Moped and motored back into Noveau. Once there, they sat side-by-side on the steps of Rufus’s store, sharing a freshly purchased six-pack in silence.

“I bet with you around, no one would ever hurt me,” she said softly.

Ned felt his chest expand with pride. “Not ever, Amy Jo. I promise.”

“I bet you were gonna do something to those boys who hurt me the other day, weren’t you, Neddy?” she whispered, snuggling in close to him.

He looked down into her trusting eyes, and hesitated just a minute before nodding. “I was. They deserve to be hurt back.”

“Do you still want to hurt them, Neddy?” Amy Jo lifted his arm and ducked under it, so she was tucked up against his broad chest.

Ned almost couldn’t speak, his nostrils filled with the smell of Amy Jo’s fragrance. But he said, “Yes, Amy Jo. I do.”

“Show me, Neddy.” Amy Jo smiled, showing her two crooked front teeth. “Please.”

Ned smiled, and sucked in his breath real hard. “All right, Amy Jo. Hold my beer and watch this.”

Nobody’s quite sure what happened in that tiny country town in Louisiana that day, but old Reverend Smith said it was a sure sign of the end of the world.