

SOMETIMES

by Ramon Collins

Shadows circled around the backyard as chickens scampered for safety under gooseberry bushes. Tommy looked up at the screen door and yelled, "Mom! Chicken Hawk -- and here comes Sue Ellen and she's barefoot. Can I go barefoot?"

Tommy's mother walked out onto the porch, shaded her eyes and searched the sky, then looked down the gravel road. "It's kind of early for bare feet."

"Sue's barefoot and she's a girl. Can I?"

"Oh, I guess so."

Tommy untied his shoes and pulled them off. He stood, folded the bottom of his pants legs up and wiggled his toes. "We're goin' down to the pond to look for frogs."

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Sue Ellen and Tommy walked between the tool shed and the pump house, helped each other through a barbed-wire fence, then onto a worn cow path that cut through the south pasture, toward the pond. She walked ahead, stopped and turned. "You were thinking about me on the backsteps just now."

"I was watchin' a Chicken Hawk."

Sue Ellen walked on. "You were thinking about me -- I saw you."

"Was not. Well, sometimes I do."

"When?"

"Mostly when we're catchin' frogs."

Sue Ellen ducked under a willow branch and held it back. "You were thinking about me and that means you're in love."

"Ah, I'm not in love."

"You are."

"Nuh-uh."

"You are."

They scrambled down the bank and sat down on the cow-mowed grass. Willow trees, tall marsh grass and brambles bordered the pond. Clumps of clear jelly with black dots clung to the stalks of marsh grass in the limpid water. Soon the dots would wiggle out and hundreds of tadpoles would sprout arms and legs and become baby frogs.

Sue Ellen dangled a switch in the water. "My sister told me you're in love when you can't stop thinking about a person."

Tommy rolled his eyes.

Sue looked at him. "Do you think about me in the morning?"

"When we walk to the bus, sometimes."

"After school?"

"Sometimes."

Sue Ellen stood up, threw the branch in the water and watched the

ripples spread in ever-larger circles. Tommy frowned. "What did you do that for? Now they know we're here."

"Because you love me and won't say it."

"You scared the frogs."

"I don't care about your dumb ol' frogs -- I'm going back."

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Sue Ellen started back up the bank. Tommy stood, brushed off the seat of his pants and followed. She led the way past the pump house but didn't stop by the backsteps. At the road she turned toward town and peeked over her shoulder. Tommy waved as her head spun back ahead.

He trudged up the backsteps and plopped down.

"Back already?" his mother asked through the screen door.

"Sue Ellen scared the frogs off. Don't matter, we just throw 'em back, anyway."

Tommy turned his head and looked up. "Mom, am I in love with Sue Ellen?"

"It's kind of early for that, too."

"Mom, can I go barefoot tomorrow?"

His mother looked at the road. "We'll see."

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