

Contents

Story 1	Hot Like a Pistol	9
Story 2	School Clothes.....	26
Story 3	Faith Learns a Lesson	34
Story 4	Skeeter Gets the Blues	45
Story 5	Faith's Bar Mitzvah	56

Faith pulled the drawer open. Looking around for any sign of his stepdad's pistol, he found his stepdad's pants. There it was! A .38 snub nose, its silver skin cold to the touch. He knew if anyone saw him touching the pistol he would be in a world of trouble, but its mystery was too hard to resist. Looking into the mirror as the gun hung loosely from his hand, Faith began to argue with his reflection. He thought of things one might say in a gun fight. "Say what, nigga?" "Don't you say another word!" "Because I said so!" "Because I'm the nigga with the pistol!" Faith had seen the power of a gun several times. Every New Year, his stepdad would step to the side of the house and point skyward, letting off a barrage of gunfire. He was not alone in this; the night would crackle with the sounds of gunfire. The deep, deafening boom reached a climax about ten minutes into the new year. Then it was back to the drawers and closets or wherever the guns were stored—until the next year if God said the same. But sometimes, one of their owners' need for respect would bring one of them out early, only to have tragic consequences. Always.

Like the time Faith and Baldwin were at the baseball park in the A&L Quarters. Each summer, the baseball and softball tournament would bring black people from all around north Louisiana to their small town. Teams' members brought their families, and soon the park was alive in blackness. This was a special time in Winfield. But even without the tournament, everyone from the Bottom loved going to the A&L. The neighborhood had evolved from a small railroad stopover to one of the largest black neighborhoods in north Louisiana. In its heyday, it had its own schools, shops, it even had a hotel. But by the time Faith came along, the A&L had