

The next morning, Dixie took the kids to their last day of school. The day was glorious, no fog, no clouds, just dry, warm sunshine and blue skies. Dixie shook his head. *Poor kids! The teachers oughtta do themselves and the kids a big favor and jes' forget the last day. Jes' let 'em go for the summer.*

When Dixie did not return after a couple hours, Donna became anxious. His gear remained at the house, so she knew he hadn't left to head east. And he had promised the boys he'd stay. Friday and Saturday were her two busiest days of the week. She had a couple cancellations around the lunch hour, which prompted an idea.

She postponed her two appointments for the one o'clock hour and for eleven-thirty. Then, without her husband's knowledge, she dug out her, powder blue and white striped bikini from her chest of drawers, grabbed a beach towel, and a few other items, including some snapshots, a cassette tape and a couple pieces of stationary. Concealing these items in a bag, Donna told her husband she had had some cancellations and needed to run some errands. Then, she hopped in her car and headed for the nearby beach. She knew this would be her last chance to reach Dixie, the last chance to change his mind.

Donna Dixon located Dixie just as she guessed she would at "their spot" in Coquille Cove State Park. She saw his bike at the far north end of the back parking lot. Did she know him or what? He was down at a remote section of the beach about a half mile from the public locker facilities, at the same place he used to take her and the kids. The parking lot was practically empty, with only two other cars parked at the opposite, south, end of the lot. School was not out yet and the beach was not well known to tourists. Donna changed into her halter top bikini in the women's shower room, before she jogged heavily over the half mile of sand to her fiancé.

She found Dix, sunning on an old woolen USMC blanket at the extreme north end of the beach where the sand tucked itself snugly under an overhanging cliff. At high tide, the waves came close to lapping against the base of the cliff, but it was not high tide now. This had always been "their spot." Subconsciously, Donna licked her lips as she eyed the handsome young vet lying on his back, beneath dark glasses. He was wearing only the dark blue, boxer swimming trunks with the tan trim, which she had given to him a year ago. His long, wet, jet black hair had exposed his bad ear, because he had removed the fake ear to swim. To Donna, he appeared to be a lean-bodied, broad shouldered, deeply tanned, muscular slab of Adonis. Donna almost salivated as she dropped her towel on his blanket and knelt down beside him in the sand. It had been a while.

"Hello, Baby," she purred.

Startled, Dixie woke to find this overexposed Venus before him. Though she had not needed to, when she had first bought the suit, Donna had shrunk the halter top in order to emphasize her finer points, just for him.

Dixie had been at peace here. He was not about to let her sudden appearance unnerve him and his smooth, distant speech reflected his calm.

“What are you doing here? Thought this was one of your busiest days?” asked Dixie mechanically contemptuous. Donna was happy to see his speech had improved, but she ignored his unfriendly tone. She did not make a big deal of it, smiling pleasantly, instead.

“Usually, it is, but I had a few, umm, last minute cancellations. You don’t look very pleased to see me, Honey?” Dixie looked away from her, up the beach, then out towards sea.

“Look, there’s plenty of beach and it’s a big ocean, so go ahead, knock yourself out.”

He turned his head to the other side, away from Donna, ignoring her. However, that was hard to do, because he could smell that lilac perfume which had come to mean something special for him. The beach was sparsely populated and there only on the opposite, south end. School was still in session for another couple of hours, although it was a short day, and this was not a beach frequented by tourists. Donna placed both hands flat onto the sand with the heels of her palms almost abutting one another, her fingers pointed outward. She used her biceps and the insides of her elbows both to support and push her bust out before her. Donna leaned forward in her shrunken top, hovering over Dixie.

“Baby? Hey, Ba-bee?” She purred huskily trying to gain his attention.

Dixie turned to behold her. His mouth dropped open in surprise at her audacity on a public beach. She took his response as a signal to resume her overtures, so she removed his shades, opened her mouth, and placed it over his, kissing him passionately. Like the other night, Dixie gave in, returning her passion. They kissed several times, until, once again, something akin to an alarm rang out in Dixie’s mind. When Donna came up for air, Dixie’s internal moral compass was gyrating as wildly as the pit of his stomach.

Without a word, the young man jumped up away from her to jog into the sea. Without explanation, he commenced a swimming marathon. Donna Dixon lay down on the blanket facing the sea, smiling, waiting patiently. She had seen this act before, when he had pulled a similar stunt to keep the boys from seeing the two of them together. She knew that he would tire, returning to the blanket, too exhausted to resist her charms. Yes, this scene had played out before. Out of deference to his concern for the boys then, she had backed off. However, today there were no boys and no one else within a mile, for that matter. Dixie had always selected this place for its remoteness. Tucked in beneath the overhanging cliffs, it was almost like a secret hideaway. She was glad of it, for she was a desperate woman, desperate enough to try anything to keep him with her and the kids.

Donna watched her fiancé swim. She had convinced herself that divorcing Big Jim was a real possibility. In fact, after their monstrous argument last night she thought Big Jim might even be in favor of a divorce. Of course, now Dixie knew he had a wife. That did complicate matters a bit. Yet, Dixie did not know his wife, not like he knew *her* anyway. Donna knew Dixie loved her. Of that, she had no doubt whatsoever. Before Dixie left them, the attractive blonde wanted to remind him of that fact one more time. In addition, she wanted desperately to hear Dixie proclaim his love for her one more time as well, for he was the only man who ever had. She was glad the beach was so deserted. However, frankly, it really would not have made any difference, no not now, not considering their desperate circumstances.

Besides, maybe Dixie's wife had given up on finding him by now? It had been almost five months since Ryzanna Sheeboom had come nosing around about Dixie. Maybe that shrimp rocker had become involved with someone else? Like that guitar player! *Fat chance!* Donna had thrown the rock star's phone number away, after Dixie had proposed to her. She was thankful for those noon hour cancellations today. The additional hair appointments she had postponed until that evening meant Donna would have to miss Andre's game and part of Jimmy's, too. She loved watching her boys play ball, but this could not be helped, not today, not with Dixie about to leave, maybe forever.

A slight, steady breeze blew sufficiently strong to keep both the sea and the flies at bay. Dixie swam and swam. He mesmerized her with his athletic grace. He was a terrific athlete. It seemed to her he was swimming longer than usual. Donna watched and waited. Patiently, she traced designs with her fingers on Dixie's wool USMC blanket. She glanced at a watch stuck in his shoe. He had been out there almost twenty-five minutes, swimming constantly with one stroke or another. He slowed to a stop. He was out beyond the breakers, beyond the sand bar. Donna noticed he was struggling. He couldn't get back. That was not like him, especially since the sea was so calm.

Donna's heart rose into her throat. The buxom blonde jumped up and ran into the surf, filled with anxiety for her lover. She ran, barely aware and uncaring that she heaved prodigiously to and fro in the salty sea air. She just couldn't deal with that now.

Donna swam out to her lover, who had trouble keeping his head above water. The water was unusually cold today. Donna was a strong woman, a good-sized woman at around five-foot ten inches, a hundred forty-five pounds. A native to the California beach scene, she knew how to swim and how to rescue. She employed her knowledge now, knifing through the gentle swells as she approached him.

"What is it, Baby? What's wrong?"

Donna called out to him with concern as she dogpaddled over the waves, keeping him in sight with cool seawater dripping down her face. She could see

that he was grimacing. Dixie was clutching at his right leg near the water's surface, as he tried to lay back on top of the sea. He was struggling to stay afloat.

"What is it, Dix?"

"Cramp—Right calf!" Dixie spat out the words between clenched, white teeth. He was obviously in pain, as the grimace across his red face plainly signaled.

"It's OK, Baby. I know what to do. The sea is calm. Here, let go of your leg. Lay back and float. Try to relax, Honey." She calmly reassured him.

She took hold of his calf, buoying herself by treading water briskly with her feet. The deep, blue water was cool, even cooler a foot or so below the sun-drenched surface. The two of them rose and fell with the widely spaced ocean swells. Yeah, she could feel it. The calf was all knotted up, like the upper and lower calf muscles were trying to reverse themselves in his leg. She placed her left hand firmly under his ankle and her right underneath the top of his calf. Cupping her right hand around the back of his calf, she massaged the muscles from top to bottom slowly, gently, then back the other way, searching for the right combination. Dixie's blonde lover, turned lifeguard, urged and guided the muscles back into their natural positions with her hands and fingers. Dixie lay back, floating and bobbing on the ocean's surface. She repeated the procedure. She could feel the muscles relaxing. The couple bobbed to the top of a swell, which separated them momentarily. Donna swam back to him.

"It's crampin' up again." Dixie struggled to get the words out before a close-following, secondary swell washed over him. He came up spewing ocean like a baby whale.

"It's all right Baby. I'm right here," Donna cooed. "We'll just do it again, like we always do," she teased and smiled at him reassuringly. Once again, she took hold of his leg and massaged his calf methodically from top to bottom and, once again, coaxing his muscles to relax. As the cramp dissolved, Donna could feel his muscles shift beneath the steady pressure of her hands and fingers. The sensation aroused her.

"Ahh, OK, thanks, Donna. Feels so much better, Baby."

Donna pulled him toward her. "Don't I always make ya feel good, Honey?" He had to admit that she did. She kissed him hard. "Come on Baby, I'll take you in. You just rest and lay back and let ol' Donn do all the heavy work, like you know I can. Take you all the way like I always do." She winked and took hold of him in a lifesaver's hold. "Now, don't kick that leg at all, Dixie. I mean it!" She spoke in a condescending, parental tone. "Don't try to help. Let me do it all. Dix, ya hear me? Don't want you crampin' up again, now. Won't take much. This water is unusually cold for the start of June."

"Yeah, OK, Mom," he grinned and held loosely onto her waist while floating on his back. She smiled back and went into action.

Donna got behind Dixie, placing her right arm under his right armpit and around his chest, while she dog paddled in towards shore with her left hand, scissor-kicking with her legs and feet. For the first time, she felt part of her

considerable bosom swinging free and easy in the cool, salt water. And she felt the goose pimple the cold caused. Donna sighed. She felt so free and so alive with Dix in her arms. The sea was colder beneath the surface, but she found the cool to be refreshing and it drew her taut. There was a bit of an angled undercurrent so she swam across it, angling in, opposite the current, toward shore. It took them a good ten minutes. Finally, a breaker washed them up onto the beach. She rolled him over onto his back to inspect the damage. He coughed up a little of the Pacific beside him. Donna was breathing heavily. She hadn't done anything that strenuous in a long while.

Donna could see Dixie was worn out, but he was OK. *OK? Why he looks positively appetizing!*. His dark, swarthy features and heavy tan had always made her think he was Chicano. The black moustache he was growing so quickly and thickly, matched his long sideburns and only served to enhance that perception. Of course, that inimitable lone blue eye tended to throw that Chicano theory out the window and served as such a powerful, attractive magnet to her. His tightly tanned, muscular chest heaved, as he drew deeply of the salt air.

They lay barely half inside the water's edge. Occasionally, the end run of a wave would gurgle up against them. Donna sat up on her knees with her toes dug into the wet sand behind her, her broad butt resting on her heels and her bounteous bust looming large before her. As Dixie raised one of those sculpted arms of his to flick the saltwater from his face, he reminded her of that drawing someone who—*DaVinci? Michelangelo?*—had made, depicting the anatomy of a perfectly sculpted man. Well, she thought, whoever the artist was, he must have used Dixie for the model.

"Thanks, Donn." Dixie nodded his appreciation.

Dixie dug his heels into the beach trying to push himself up out of the tide's edge. He winced when his leg cramped up again. He sat up and began to massage it himself, but Donna pushed him back down onto the beach. Turning her back to him, she applied the same technique on land that she had used in the water with the same satisfactory results. Resting on his elbows, Dixie curled around Donna's broad backside observing her therapy from the inward curve of her waist, while she concentrated on nursing his calf. Drops of saltwater tickled Dix as they dripped onto his legs from her overhanging long, blonde hair as well as from her looming bosom. She was oblivious to her overexposed status now, so intent was she upon relaxing Dixie's cramp. They both felt his calf muscles flip-flop once again back into place. Dixie sighed with relief.

"You need to warm up, Baby." She rubbed and massaged his calf briskly, trying to warm up the leg. Her titan-sized bust shook like jello.

Dixie observed her closely. He loved this woman, who had done so much for him, who meant so much to him. "OK, Mom," he replied again, pertly, feigning to notice the shaking jello. Donna looked crosswise at him.

"So I'm your mother as well as your lover, hunh?" She cocked her eyebrows suspiciously. "So what does that make you, hmmm?" She grinned.

"I'd say that makes me one mother-lovin', lucky, uh, guy. That's what."

"What do you always say to me, Dix?"

"I dunno. What?"

"I believe ya? Ha!" She grinned.

Donna moved her massaging hands up to his thigh. Both of them were excited. It didn't take much. It had been three months. Donna became smugly conscious of the effect her disclosed womanhood had upon him. Once more, she began romancing her fiancé, slowly. She was making a thorough job of it, too, taking her time, enjoying herself immensely. More importantly, Donna wanted to make sure Dixie enjoyed her. This was her last shot at him, to make sure he would remember her when he was back East with the superstar, if it came to that.

Dixie did not resist, at first. After all, they were on a public beach, in broad daylight. He knew Donna. She would stop soon. However, Dix had neglected to notice the beach was deserted. Donna proceeded as if she did not care if it were. Almost too late, he realized his amorous, former fiancé had no intention of halting. But at this stage, he no longer cared. Dixie let her do the work. Then, just when he had laid his head back on the beach, resolving to let her have her way—

"What ... about ... your wife?"

Dixie sat bolt upright, quickly pulling her head up toward his chest, while she sat down upon his lap with the cool tide spilling into and around their feet. He had felt those words in his heart before, but he had usually sloughed them off as part of his mental condition. However, until now, he had been unaware that he had a wife. Now that he believed that he might have one, this small Voice scared him, scared him to death. It frightened him to think there was a silent Voice within him that had known something so real, so personal about him that he did not. He protested to Donna, as the tide ebbed and receded from their legs.

"No, Baby, no. We, we can't do that anymore. You know that!"

"But I just wanted to, to prove my love to you, Dix. Give you something to remember me by, so you'd never forget me. Maybe, maybe ... even come back to me, maybe?" Her voice and manner wavered, revealing her reverence for him.

"Donn, you don't have to prove anything to me. I know you love me. There's nothin' for either one of us to prove. Besides, if we were to make love now, we'd feel like heels afterwards. You know we would."

Donna slid up on him a little further, pushing his torso back down into the muck of the tide's wake. She lay down on top of him. With her elbows pointed out, she bent her arms, placed her hands, palms flat, left over top of one another up on his chest, feeling his rock solid pectoral muscles. Then the Amazon lover rested her chin in the gap between her left fore and middle fingers, as she smiled at Dixie and purred huskily. Dixie bore her weight without complaint.

"You love me, Dixie. You know you do, Hon. What's more, I know you do." Her smile broadened in triumph. Dixie raised up on his elbows again. He was relaxed with her and he spoke accordingly.

“I always said I did, didn’t I? Didn’t play no games with ya. We were going to be married a week from tomorrow, remember? I don’t go around marrying someone I don’t love.”

“That was a postponement, Baby. We were gonna be married a week ago tomorrow! The last Saturday in May, remember? But you had to go ahead and pull off that upset of LASU, practically all by yourself, and go to the College World Series! Mann, if LASU had won, do you realize we would have been married, already? Do you realize that? And we can still do it, Dix.” She stared at him anxiously.

“What are you talking about?” Dixie thought she was losing it. Donna became excited, as she raised her head up.

“I still have Big Jim’s death certificate. We can take that down to Tijuana and get married, just like that!” The woman raised her head and snapped her fingers for emphasis.

“Come on Donna, you can’t be serious. I couldn’t do that and live with myself. Neither could you. I know you couldn’t. I don’t know if I can live with myself after what we’re doing just now. Besides ... I gotta know where I’m from. I gotta know WHO I AM! Damn it!” Disgustedly, he lifted one forearm off the beach and smacked the sand with an open palm, splattering wet sand on both of them.

“Gee thanks, Dix.” Donna flicked some muck from just under her right eye. But Dixie ignored her and carried on as if nothing had happened.

“If I hadn’t promised those kids, I’d—”

“Yeah, yeah, sure. Dix? You know, you and me have got something special together. We love each other in body, soul and mind. Not many people ever have that. Most never do.”

It was as if Dixie had not spoken. Her train of thought remained unaltered. A couple of white and grey, hook-beaked seagulls screamed as they swooped down to the beach several yards from them. They hunted the ebb tide with heads bobbing asynchronously in a herky-jerky stroll.

Dixie’s head began to ache. He grabbed his forehead with his right hand, squeezing the temples in between his thumb and fingers, while he rubbed the deformed hand back over his head, squeezing the saltwater from his hair, forcing it to drain down his back.

“You better go Donna. You’re missin’ all your appointments. Friday’s a big day for you. Besides, you’re heavy.”

“Don’t give a damn about them appointments, Dixie! And since when has my weight ever bothered you?” Donna felt mildly insulted. “It never did before. I’ll stay here and make love with you ‘til you can’t take it anymore, just like we useta. OK, Baby?” He avoided her stare.

“Well, I can’t take it anymore already, so you can go on home now.”

Dixie turned on his side to look towards the sea gulls and the parking lot, forcing his passenger to roll with him. Like a bronco bull rider, she remained astride his waist.

“Dammit, Dixie! You don’t even know that little rich bitch back East! She probably only wants to fleece you out of your fortune. Did ya ever think of that?” He could feel her glare penetrating the bullet wounds in the back of his head. He had not given a single thought to a fortune. Then she softened. “But Dix, all I want is you, Baby, just you. I don’t care about your Rock’N’Roll money. Honest, Honey, I really don’t. You know I don’t mind workin’ for a livin’. I’ll take care of you, Dix, just like I took care of that cramp. And besides, YOU LOVE ME, not her! Well, DONCHA?” Seizing him by the chin, she turned his head back to her, tugging him once more onto his back. Dix replied angrily.

“Didn’t I just say so? And how could I possibly love someone I don’t even know? Even so, I don’t go ‘round committin’ adultery with women, even one as handsome and sunny as you, Baby. Even when I do love them! SHEEESH!

“Donna, please go, Honey, before I get sick again, like the other night. You know I love ya, but I’m leavin’ tonight and I ain’t coming back. NEVER! I shoulda left last night, like I had planned, and this would never have happened. Adultery!” He spat angrily. “Damn, I just can’t do that!” Undaunted, Donna persisted in pleading her case.

“What about all them other times?”

“They don’t count and you know it, ‘cause we didn’t know.”

“Before I got Big Jim’s death certificate? Even the first time in Hawaii, when I was still lookin’ for Jim?” Her voice raised more than usual as she put the question. Again, he looked away from her.

“Well ... that, that was wrong. I, I shouldn’ta done it then, either.” The idea flashed through his brain, that Dixie had felt the Voice in Hawaii, but he had ignored it, afraid he might be psychotic. He remembered his desperation at that time when he had first met Donna and added, “It’s just that I was so lonely, so, so lonely, I ...”

Now Donna’s voice softened and she placed two fingers over Dixie’s lips.

“Shhh. Shhh. I know Baby, I know. So was I Dix and, without you, I still am. Don’t ya, can’t ya see that, Baby?” Dixie averted her penetrating star blue gaze.

Donna drew herself up so that she sat across his lower abdomen. Dixie laid back, his head on the beach, resting his left forearm across his eyes, straining against the white glare from the noonday sun straight above, beating down upon them. She leaned over him, with her palms flat on the sand to either side of her lover’s head, trying to stare him straight in the eye, her bountiful bust gently brushing against his chin, like a pair of torpid torpedoes.

“Look, Dixie. Suppose, suppose you go back East and things don’t work out? Maybe she don’t want you now, since you’ve been all shot up? Since ya ain’t so pretty as she remembers? Hunh? Or maybe she’s got somebody else? There’s

been rumors about her, ya know? Maybe she jes' wants to get you back there to divorce ya, take your fortune from ya. Ever think of that? Hunh, Dix? Did ya?"

Dixie pretended to ignore her, but he wondered about the "rumors?"

"Ya know Baby, she's just a Rock'N'Roll brat. You know how they all are, goin' around dopin' and makin' each other all the time. And suppose Big Jim and I don't get along? Suppose we get divorced? Judgin' from last night, I'd say that's a real possibility. Ya think, you might wanna come back then? I'd be waitin' for ya Baby, the boys, too. They were right the other night ya know? He can't play ball with them, not like you. With me, either, for that matter." Donna peered into her lover's eyes, as she removed his forearm shield.

Dixie drew himself up on his elbows in contemplation. The tide swilled up around his legs again. He had not considered those possibilities. "I never thought about it like that Donn, really. I guess it's possible ... That is, if you and the boys still wanted me ... I guess. I do love you all, terribly. But why wouldn't you and Big Jim get along? You love each other, don't ya?"

"Still wanted ya? Are you kiddin'? You know Dix, one of the things, one of the many things I like about ya, is you're so darned modest. I could jes', why I could jes' eat ya up." She proceeded to try. They romanced for a while with Donna as the aggressor. Again, Dixie felt the Voice from within speak in gentle, evenly spaced words but softer this time. Again, it chilled him to the bone and, again, he stopped her short. They were both frustrated.

Donna was more than a bit miffed. She rolled off of him to sit in the muck by herself. "You sure don't act like you love me anymore James, but you're talkin' a good game." Hurt and ticked off, she tied her bikini top snugly behind her neck, reining in les grands tetons, as she sat in the surf with her heels in the sand, her legs bent slightly at the knees. Dixie looked out to sea, watching the sunlight dance over the lazy, slow rolling waves. They sat silently like that for a couple minutes before Dixie spoke tenderly what was on his mind, without impediment, as he had the entire meeting.

"That's unfair Donna. It really is. You know it is." When she responded only by making a sour face, he changed the subject to avoid a quarrel. Then he directed his gaze back to her.

"You know something, Baby? You'd make a hell of a swimsuit model. You know that?"

Donna brightened and posed for him, sitting with her feet together and flat on the beach, her knees slightly bent and her hands in the sand behind her, her chin up and dripping wet head tilted back. She put her chest forward, feigning one of those "come hither" looks the models use. They both laughed, because she was not a "come hither" kind of a woman. Dixie knew her more as a grab-you-by-the-hair-and-drag-you-into-bed kind of a woman.

"That's one of the reasons why I love you Donna, is 'cause you got such a great sense of humor. You don't mind laughing at yourself once in a while. And

you got guts, too, Baby, raising those kids alone, starting your own business and everything. You got plenty o' guts!"

"Oh, really! That's not what I thought you admired about me." Such frank compliments, which struck so close to home for Donna, embarrassed her. Now, it was her turn to redirect the conversation. The well-built former cheerleader with the sunny smile once again stuck out her dual torpedoes, allowing her womanly virtues to burst forward once more.

"Gee Honey, I thought you loved me, because of my finer points, here." She cast her deep blue eyes downward, batting her eyelashes at him.

Dixie rose to his feet, feigning insult, as he rubbed his hands together to knock the sand off them and then brushed off his elbows. He eluded temptation with a joke. Sticking his nose in the air, he, too, could play. Now he feigned offense and declared, as he walked away from her, "Never even crossed my mind." Then they both burst out laughing, as she jumped up, brushing the sand off her hands and butt, before smothering her strikingly handsome ex-fiancé with hugs and kisses. Donna felt wet sand on his back and butt, so she turned him around to knock it off of him.

After she had finished, she caught her breath when she viewed him from behind. Dixie's smallish rump was naturally tightly upturned. The boxer style trunks hung well on him despite his terrible wounds which hid the fact that he was missing the lower half of his right buttock. His waist was narrow. His athletic frame fanned out from that tight, narrow trunk. His heavily muscled, back, shoulders and arms reminded her of a strong oak's spreading branches. He looked like a ballplayer. Donna jumped him from behind to whisper in his ear.

"I'll never forget you, James, please don't forget me, please? When you're back there with your tiny, rich-bitch Rock'N'Roller?" Dixie turned back into her, encircling her with his left arm, slowly but effortlessly lifting her one hundred forty-five pounds off the beach in a show of machismo that did not escape her attention. (For he only weighed thirty pounds more than she.) Donna wrapped her strong, slightly tanned legs around his waist to help Dixie support her.

"I won't forget you, Donn. Honest Baby, I won't. How could I, after what you been to me? When I came over from the islands, I was just a shell of a person. You took me in and breathed life into me. You gave me a home and hope, a hope that I could be normal—whole. And see how good I'm talkin' now?" Suddenly, he gleamed. "Yeah, that's it, whole, a whole person. You and the kids thawed and filled that cold vacuum, that frozen emptiness I carry around inside of me--three times over."

"Does that mean you forgive me for holdin' out on ya 'bout your wife?"

"You mean about the record albums?" She nodded.

"Sure. Look, Donna Honey, you've been everything to me: a mother, a sister, a lover, a counselor, a friend, a fiancée and almost a wife. Now how could I not forgive you, hunh? How could I not?"

They paused for a minute, without either of them speaking. Dixie brushed her freckled cheek with the backs of his fingers, of his free, heavily calloused right hand, while he supported her back with his left hand. He had not been using the batting gloves she had purchased for him to keep his hands soft for moments such as this, because he had felt they had caused his early season slump. Donna ignored the rough calluses and turned pensive. She knew there was more to her cover-up than what Dixie knew about, more than just hiding the record albums, but she kept her silence. She did not want to risk changing his fine opinion of her, not at this moment, anyway.

“You know Baby, you never answered my question about you and Big Jim,” summoned Dixie gently. “Don’t you love him anymore?”

“HA! That’s a hot one! ‘Don’t I love HIM anymore?’”

Dixie let Donna slide off his left hip. From her tone and expression, he could tell this might take a while and he was worried he might cramp up again. Besides, she was too big of a woman to hold for any length of time. They strolled lightly back up the beach to Dixie’s blanket in the cove. Dix took it easy on his right leg as he walked. Donna stared at her feet, as she spoke of her painful past.

“Jim married me when I was four months pregnant with Little Jim, at the point of my old man’s shotgun and under the “unofficial orders” of the base commander over at Pendleton! Jim applied for every overseas assignment he could find, leaving the kids and me behind. I kept thinking he was just a gung-ho Marine, but three tours in Nam? Come on!

“Before he went over the last time, I found out the problem. ME! I was the problem. Do you believe that?” She stopped and looked up at Dixie for his shocked disbelief and got it. “I had tried my damndest to be a good wife and mother.”

Surprised, Dixie shook his head incredulously. They walked some more.

“Yeah, me. I was the dutiful homemaker, the mother, and I WAS THE PROBLEM! You see, it turns out Jim didn’t want no white wife. He wanted a black wife. He also didn’t want no Oreo kids, especially one with green eyes and light skin who bore his name. Big Jim was BLACK and he was PROUD! Well, he ain’t too proud now! No sir. He’s got to cling to me now. And it really tees him off!” Dixie stopped and touched her shoulder to halt her. His leg was bothering him a little. He didn’t want it to cramp up again.

“Hold on Donn. When you first made love with him, when you conceived Little Jim, you must have felt something for the man?”

“I’m ashamed to say what really happened there. Guess that’s why I never spoke of it before. Gee, it seems like a century ago now.”

She took a deep breath and started to walk back up the beach to his blanket, again with Dixie limply tagging along by her side. She noticed his limp.

“You gonna be all right, Baby? Wanna stop for a minute?”

“Nah, I be OK. G’ahead with your story. I wanna hear this.”

“Well then, you’re the only one who wants to hear my sad story. But then you’re the only one, period, Dix!” She dropped her chin and looked up at him for confirmation. When Dixie lowered his eyelids and nodded, Donna resumed walking slowly, with him alongside of her.

“Well, anyway, we were in a bar up by the naval air station, you know Miramar? Couple of girlfriends and me used to go up there evenings to dance, maybe meet some nice pilots, or sailors.” Donna paused to see if Dixie were tracking with her. He nodded that he was.

“Well, I was tryin’ to get over the loss of my high school sweetheart. The bastard! You know he went steady with me all through high school? He pledged me true love. Then he takes off for Oregon on a football scholarship, where he dumps me for some rich co-ed, whose father owns a couple car dealerships up there. Damn straight of him, hunh? Well, that’s another story!” She looked at Dixie but didn’t wait for his response.

“Anyway, this one Saturday night, I get a little carried away with the booze. I got a fake idea, you know?” Dixie nodded. “Well, hell, I was only eighteen, can you believe that?” Donna shook her head at the memory. “You had to be twenty-one to drink at that time. So, anyway, like an idiot, I got into this drinking contest with these Marines from up at Pendleton and I lost. Jim won. He won ME! I was too schnoekered to remember much, except he took me to some cheap motel, where I woke up alone the next morning sick as a dog. A few weeks later, I start missin’ periods and eight months after that Little Jim arrives.”

“Gee Donna, I, I never knew. I’m sorry, really sorry.” They had reached his blanket and stopped. She turned to him.

“Well, I don’t want your pity! Damn it! That’s why I never told ya. I just want YOU! Just you, James!” She grabbed both his arms.

“Baby, we can be in Tee-Jay in an hour. JAMES! Turn around and listen to me. Honey!” Desperate now, with an almost crazed look in her eyes, she grabbed him by his upper arms and jerked him back to face her. “Aside from the boys, you’re the best thing that ever happened to me, Honey. Gee Whiz! Jim and I weren’t together two years in nine. Hell, you and me have been together almost half as long ourselves. I love ya, Dixie. God help me. I love you so much.”

Donna threw her arms around him once again, pressing her cheek tightly against his and spoke past his ear.

“You’re the only man who has ever said he loved me, Dix. Did you know that? I ain’t countin’ that lyin’ schoolboy football player back in high school. And you’re the only man whoever proposed to me. You’re the only man that has ever taken pleasure in giving me pleasure.” She pulled back to look him in the eye. “Did you know that, Baby? Honest, the only one.”

Once more, she dropped her chin to her chest and looked up to him pleadingly beneath her golden sponge eyebrows. Dixie stared into her Pacific blue orbs and blinked to indicate he understood.

“And you’re the only man to take an interest in my kids. Hell! The other day, YOU were the one to ask about the kid’s ballplayin’, not their father.” She reached up to stroke his face gently. “James, Baby, it’s you and only you. Dix, you know that! I don’t care about money, like she probably does. Honest, I don’t. HONEY, I’d do anything, I mean ANYTHING to keep us together, Sweetie. Really, I would.”

Dixie felt her swaying him. Donna’s impassioned pleas had aroused him. Donna sensed her advantage and went for the jugular, grabbing him around the face and neck with both of her large hands.

“Please. You name it, Baby. I can make you feel good, Dix, you know I can. So-o-o go-oo-ood. Come on Baby, I know it’s been a while, but you haven’t forgotten, I’ll show ya, right here, right now, show ya just how much I care. And then we can go over to Mexico, get married. And it’s anything you want James Dean “Dixie” Todd Strickler. ANYTHING!” She kissed him with all the passion living within her, a desperately bold passion that strained to break out of her. Hers was a high voltage, electric ardor that demanded from him the same voltage in return.

However, once again pressed to the limits of his resistance, Dixie felt the accusatory fingers of the dual specters pointing at him, felt the internal stomach rumblings and so he gently spurned her advances. Then, once more, he felt that small, still Voice within him that he had learned so often to ignore, asking resolutely but impartially:

“What ... about ... her husband?”

What was happening here? This was a different twist on that sober remonstrance, which he had passed off so often previously as temporary insanity. But again, the Voice was right on. The strange Voice within him, which was becoming precipitously more familiar, had pierced him to the quick for the second time in the last few minutes.

Shaken, he stuttered, “Ba-Ba-Baby, there is s-s-something you can d-do for me.” She seized caressing him with her lips to reiterate.

“Anything, James, you just name it, Honey.” His stuttering, now, worried her.

“The b-boys?”

“Yeah, what about the boys?”

“K-Keep loving them, all of them and keep da-doin’ the great job you have been doing with them, ALL THREE of them. And remember, now my na-name is N-Nick Sh-Sheeboom ... not D-Dixie Strickler, not Ja-J-James.” He had spoken with a quiet strength of force that belied his true, mixed feelings.

Dixie felt like a heel. He sure didn’t feel like he was Nick Sheeboom. Just saying it, sounded like a gross lie. Totally deflated, Donna slumped away, down to the sand. That had been her last ditch effort. She could try no harder.

Dixie walked around the blanket to his beach towel where he picked up his pack of Lucky Strikes and lit up. He picked up her beach towel and tossed it to her, which she used to dry her face and then folded it beside her. Sitting

sidesaddle on the beach, below his towel but leaning on it with her left hand, her resolve lagged. Staring into the sand, Donna spoke just loud enough for her lover to hear her. Ashamed, Donna refused to look at him, but she was ready to confess all now.

"There's something else, something I didn't tell you," she called after him softly in a whipped, dejected tone so low, he almost could not hear her over the sounds of the surf. Defeated now, she thought she might as well tell him all, before he heard it from HER!

Dixie bent over his blanket to pick up his dark glasses. He put them on. Then he strolled casually back over to the deflated blonde to offer her a cigarette. She accepted it, as he leaned down to light her up and asked casually,

"Oh, what is that?"

"Your wife."

Donna inhaled deeply only to leave a loose fleck of tobacco on her tongue which she picked out of her mouth. She coughed. "These Luckys are strong, Baby. Much stronger than my Slims."

"My alleged wife, you mean. I know all about the record albums."

"No, I mean your true and legal wife. She, she ... she visited me this winter just after you went back to Peppermount." He pulled his shades down his nose.

Donna turned away from his incredulous stare.

"She what? You never mentioned that before!"

"Oh, really?" The jilted lover dripped sarcasm. She stared back at him, dragged on the unfiltered Lucky Strike and coughed. She was not used to its harsh taste.

Dixie walked closer to her, removing his shades. He knelt down on one knee beside his lover, with his left foot flat on the sand. Dix rested himself upon criss-crossed forearms, over his raised knee, as if he were posing for a team photograph. The ocean breeze blew into his face, ruffling his still damp hair. The pair of seagulls that had been hunting together down the beach, suddenly squawked at each other, fighting over a fish head on the sand.

More curious than angry, he questioned her.

"Why Donn, why? Tell me. Does she still want me? Did she say?"

"No, she don't want you so very much. She's just been searchin' all over the globe for ya. That's all. That's how she found me—through her investigations." Donna expectorated the last three words as though they left an unmentionable taste in her mouth. "Her private eye had been around when you were taking exams in December. She came after, late in January. I told both of 'em I didn't know ya." She spit another fleck of tobacco toward the ocean, but added dispassionately. "The PI said that was strange, because he had it on good authority from a Marine company commander over at Kaneohe, name of Pyle, that you and me spent a long weekend together in Honolulu in August of '73. I told him, the investigator, that the officer he had spoken with was mistaken."

"But why, Donna? Why did you lie like that?" She looked at him coldly.

“Because I didn’t want to lose you. DAMN IT!” She softened as she tilted her head. “Dix, I was desperate to keep ya, Honey. Then, after I met her, your wife that is, she was so, soooo nice, DAMN IT! Made me sick to my stomach, so syrupy sweet she was!” Donna flicked some ashes away angrily. “Well, I started thinking, how I’d feel if the situation were reversed. So, I called you up to school a couple times to tell ya, but the words stuck in my throat. They just, they just wouldn’t come out. Know what I mean? You know how that is, don’t ya, Baby?”

Dix thought of all the times he could not speak, for fear of the slurs and stutters. He took pity on her and responded softly.

“Sure Baby, I know, I know how that is. Of course, I do.” He became sullen, pensive. She assumed the offensive, sensing rightly that he would be susceptible to her defense.

“You remember the night you proposed to me right down the beach, right over there at the Top of the Cove?” With her cigarette between her fingers, she pointed southeasterly across the cove to the opposite La Jolla shoreline, where the famous restaurant stood on a bluff, looking out over the vast Pacific. Dixie nodded.

“You remember, how, after dinner, we both started to speak at the same time and we finally agreed that you should go first.” She paused for his recognition. “Aw, James, I’ll never forget it, NEVER! Except for bearing the kids, that proposal was the highlight of my life. It was just beautiful, so romantic ...” Her eyes trailed off dreamily to the horizon for a few seconds. Then she refocused.

“Everything about it was perfect: the setting, the meal, the wine, the orchids, the outdoor table overlooking the bluff and the rolling ocean below.”

Again, her gaze trailed off to the ocean breakers for a moment as she recalled one of the most joyous occasions of her life. Dixie looked at her now, also recalling that night. Then Donna resumed her explanation..

“And how, after I accepted your proposal, I told you I had forgotten what I had to say?” Recognition registered across Dixie’s brow.

“Yeah, now that you mention it, I believe I do remember that. Why?”

“Well, I lied. Because I was going to tell you about her, about her visit to me. I had her phone numbers for ya in my hand, but after that proposal—well, I threw them away. I know it makes me a heel. I guess, I didn’t cover up stuff any better than the President covered up Watergate.”

“Oh, well, I don’t know about that! I’d say you covered it up pretty DARNED GOOD!” Dixie rose off his knee and turned away, angry now. Standing up with him, Donna flicked her unfinished nail away and bounced after him.

“Don’t be angry with me, Dix. I told you I’d do anything to keep ya and that still goes.” Dixie hesitated.

“Does she really want me? Does she still want me, Donn, do ya think?”

“Oh not much, I suppose. She’s probably got only about a thousand yellow ribbons tied around her, old oak tree.” He wheeled into her.

“You’re kiddin’!” But Donna’s disgusted look told him it must be true. “But what about them rumors, you mentioned?”

“Them’s jes’ rumors, I guess. No Dix, I wish I were kiddin’. I’m only tellin’ ya now, ‘cause I’d rather have you find out from me, rather than from her. I don’t want you to hate me, Dix. I want you to love me, the way that I love you. Even, if we’re apart from each other. You’re the only love I’ve known, James, the only love I’ve had.” Her forlorn tone saddened him. She began to snifle.

Even though she had wronged him, Dixie took compassion upon the poor woman. She had always treated him like a king, like a king of kings. Nobody else had done for him what she had, nobody. Nobody else had filled that cold void in him with warm love like Donna and her kids. He could not help but love her.

Dixie took her chin in his hand to turn her ruggedly handsome, freckled face towards him. He looked deeply into her Pacific blue eyes.

“Baby, that’s something you’ll never have to worry about. I will always love you, ALWAYS!”

Donna broached a smile that broke apart as her lip quivered and she began to cry. Donna was a tough woman. Her forced marriage, the years of single parenting, the war, and developing her own business had all combined to make her tough. She was not the kind to cry easily. However, now unashamedly, she did cry softly. Once more, Donna slumped back down dejectedly upon the sandy beach, smoke curling upward from the cigarette between her fingers. Dixie inhaled deeply on his nail and flicked the butt away onto the sand.

He sat down next to her to hold her in his arms, rocking her gently. Dixie parted his legs, sliding his right leg over her lap and his left thigh wrapped around her lower backside, as she faced north up the beach, while he faced into her. Donna finished her cigarette, trying to regain her composure. Dixie embraced her and rocked her, kissing her tear-stained cheeks softly, whispering endearments into her ear, tasting her salty tears. He repeatedly told her the words she longed to hear. His tender, gentle reassurances assuaged her guilt and fear, but she allowed him to go on for several minutes. She wanted to burn this moment into her memory, for she knew it would have to last her a lifetime. She understood what lay ahead for her.

The seagulls squawked, separated and flapped away. One headed down the coast, while the other flew up towards L. A. Finally, and regrettably, Donna interrupted him, because she really did need to get back. She had missed far too many appointments already. Partly to buoy her flagging spirits, partly for real, he complimented her again on her figure. He shook his head and whistled.

“Havin’ kids sure agrees with you, Donn. You really could model swimsuits, Honey. In fact, I believe that blonde country singer, what’s her name? Dolly Parton? She’d envy what you got, Baby.”

Donna laughed sarcastically, thinking of Big Jim and her situation, as she looked out towards the surf. “Oh yeah, she’s just pea green with envy, I’m sure.” Nevertheless, his flattery had its intended bolstering effect.

“Well, I think you look like that famous sculpture of, uh, uh, you know, David—very athletic and muscular. Remember the one in your art history book?” She nodded once for emphasis.

“David, huh?”

Dixie frowned. He wished she had kept that thought to herself. Her intended compliment recalled to him last night’s nausea and the biblical tale that had prompted it. He didn’t know if he looked like David, but he sure as hell felt guilty like David.

Dix retrieved his cheap shades and walked her the half mile back to the shower and locker rooms, waiting to kiss her when she came out. Before Donna left, she reminded him that the boys wanted Dixie to take them to the ball field and they had to be there by 5:30 p. m. She suggested the boys might like to get some soft ice cream afterwards. For a few minutes, they reacted remarkably like any husband and wife communicating about the chores of the day and their kids’ schedule, almost as if nothing had happened.

Then her tone changed, becoming edged with drama. “James, you’re the only man I ever loved or whoever truly loved me. We were like two lost souls wandering in the dark, when we found each other over in the Islands. I’ll never forget you, Baby.” Dixie removed his dark glasses.

“I know. I know, Donn. I, I feel the same.” He kissed her gently good-bye, but Dixie did not watch her leave. He felt bad enough as it was. Instead, he replaced his sunglasses on their usual perch and meandered back to the beach to think.

When he did leave the beach a few hours later, he found some strange gifts on his motorcycle standing in the beach parking lot. Tied across the cycle’s handlebars was Donna’s drying, light blue and white striped halter bikini. Inside the bikini bottom, Dixie found a ninety-minute tape cassette, labeled in Donna’s handwriting with *Lest We Forget* on one side with *Still More GRT* on the other. These were the two *GRT* albums Dixie did not have on tape. Also in the bikini bottom, Dixie found an envelope, containing several photographs of Donna and the kids as well as the diamond engagement ring he had given her. He also discovered the following note.

My Dearest Dixie,

Because I wanted you to remember me, and the boys, in the best possible light, I leave these trinkets for your pleasure. The bikini speaks for itself. I had bought it especially for you and, with your leaving, I no longer have any need of it. Besides, it works rather nicely as a pouch, don't ya think? Ha!

Seriously now, you may recall a couple of these pictures we took are not for public consumption! The photo of me posing in the bikini—well, it would mean a lot to me, if you could keep it handy somewhere. I know it's korny but, really, it would give me some consolation, at least.

The ring is for you, too, Baby, a reminder of just how close we came. In all conscience, I cannot keep it. It is far too expensive and you've already given the kids and me much more than you ever should have. Thank you for everything, James. WE REALLY WERE almost there, Baby—just one lousy ball game kept us apart. God bless you, Dix, and keep you, always.

ALL MY LOVE,

Donn

P. S.

Really like the new moustache, Honey. Makes you look as distinguished as you truly are.

That night after the boys' baseball games, Dixie and the Dixons stopped to pick up some ice cream at the local Arctic Circle on their way home. Donna had finished her late appointments early. She had brought a chocolate sundae back for Jim, who had not gone to the ballpark. He joined the others for ice cream around the tiny, dining room table. They finished their cones and sundaes, guffawing over the boys' play earlier that evening.

Dixie's impending departure hung across the small room like a thick curtain. The boys asked for him to put them to bed, but he declined, saying that was a special privilege reserved for their mom or dad. He suggested Big Jim might want to try it, since he had never put them to bed before. Big Jim hesitated, but he followed Dixie's advice.

Dix picked up each boy, one in his left and one in his right hand, giving each one a big hug and kiss, for he knew he might never see them again. Then he placed a boy on either arm of their father's wheel chair with their legs dangling over his lap and watched as Big Jim operated his motorized chair, rolling them all into the boys' bedroom.

Dusk had fallen. Dixie left the Dixon house to pack up his bike for the cross-country trek, with Donna tagging along behind, trying to help without crying. As Dixie was tying down his gear on the cycle, Donna, like a loving wife, placed bananas, apples, peanut butter crackers and a couple of candy bars in his saddlebags. She handed him his canteen which she had filled with cold water. Then, she backed off in silence so Dix could finish packing. He was ready to go.

She threw her arms around his neck, holding onto her man tightly. She was an incredibly strong woman. She kissed him passionately, as if her kiss could hold him, disregarding any curious neighbors.

"Remember Dix, remember. In the future, it could be you and me, Baby. Maybe?" She smiled wistfully. Though her eyes were moist, Donna arched her golden eyebrows hopefully.

"Donna, Honey." Dix's tender tone sounded a bit exasperated. "Don't get your hopes up on that one 'cause it's just a pipe dream, Baby. It ain't gonna happen."

"What do you mean, it ain't gonna happen? We talked about it today, on the beach." Indignant and defensive, Donna's tone was clear.

"We said, if Big Jim divorces you and this, this Rock'N'Roll girl don't want me. Well, she may not want me, all right, that I don't know, even though you seem to think she does. If only long enough to, what did you say—fleece me? But Big Jim will never divorce you now, not based on what I've seen the last couple of days. He needs you, Donn. He won't divorce you. You and the boys are all he's got."

"But he don't love me, James. Hell, I don't believe he ever did. In fact, I'm sure of it. I told ya, we got married after I was four months pregnant!" Dixie turned away to mount the Honda. This was old news now that Dixie had absorbed, digested and evacuated. He did not want to digest it again.

Desperate, Donna cried out, "James!" She took hold of his arm, turning him toward her. She stared hard into his eyes.

"Anytime, anything you want, you call me, you hear? I LOVE YOU, DIX!"

"I b'lieve ya, Baby." Dixie whispered, "Honest, I do and I won't forget you, ever!" She reached to embrace him. As they kissed, the two became aware of the hum of Jim's motorized chair approaching the street, tooling up the slight incline

of the driveway. Dixie whispered, "I got that picture in my wallet, Baby, where I can't miss it." He winked. Donna smiled through misty eyes.

"Pretty slick move, Kid. Have me put the kids to bed while you pop my wife in the street in front of all the neighbors." Jim's gruffness caught them off-guard.

"Loo- ... Ba-Big Jim I ... did' mean any—"

"Hey, it's OK. That's all over, right? Isn't that what you said?"

"Well, su-sure—"

"Well, su-sure, of c-c-course, it is." Big Jim sarcastically imitated Dixie's stutter briefly. "I tr-trust you K-Kid—like I'd tr-trust a live gr-gr-grenade!"

"Lo ... oo', Bi' Ja-Jim—"

"Stow it! What's done is done." Peeved, Jim's words had assumed a surly tone, hushing all response to the contrary. "What's past is past. Once you're gone down that street, it's over. As much as I like you Nicky boy, as much as I 'preciate what you done for me and the boys and for settin' Donna up in business—after this, no more kissin' and foolin' around with Donna. In fact, just stay away from her altogether, Mann. Or you're liable to wake up one mornin' with no balls, instead of just one." Jim's glare was pure and Dixie knew it.

Dixie leaned over his bike, sticking out his hand to shake with Jim's only one.

"All right, B-Big Jim. That ... seems ... fair ... to me."

They shook, prompting the usual battle of machismo. Finally, a relaxed Dixie said "Ja-Jim, if you d-don't let go of my hand s-soon, I won't b-be able to op-op'rate this cycle-cle. Then I'd have to st-stay here and make goo-goo eyes at your lovely bra-bride." Dixie grinned devilishly, raising his eyebrows spasmodically. Jim released Dixie's hand and laughed derisively. Then he laughed in a more relaxed manner.

"Now you're startin' to sound like the old Nick."

Dixie grinned. He sighed and produced two business envelopes from his back pocket. Each bore the return address of the motel where the two war buddies had lodged in Vegas and each contained twenty-five one-hundred dollar bills a piece. Dixie handed the envelopes over to Big Jim. One was marked "Little Jim" and the other "Andre."

"Whoa! What's this?" asked Big Jim, incredulously.

"It's m-my sh-share of the Va-Vegas trip, less expenses of c-course. It's for the b-boys. You c-can st-start an account, a co-college account, f-for each of them."

"But, I can't take this."

"You c-can and you will, else you m-might wake up one m-mornin' with na-no arms ... inst-st-ead of je-jes' one." Dixie glared at Big Jim mockingly.

Big Jim replied with a hearty laugh. "Well, that ... seems ... fair ... to me, Nick," mimicking Dixie's reply of a minute ago. "Goodbye, Nicky boy. Once you get hold of that luscious, knockout wife of yours back East, you're gonna forget all about Donna and her big tits here." Dixie stared through Jim.

Donna smiled weakly as her lover prepared for takeoff. Ignoring her husband's feelings, Donna ran over to Dix once more to hug him, kiss him on the cheek and

whisper once that she loved him. Patiently, in a low whisper that only she could hear, Dixie pressed his cheek to hers and promised he would always remember her. Her eyes shut tightly. He added, jokingly, as long as he didn't lose his memory again, that is.

Then he roared off, but stopped abruptly and turned around at the entrance to the court. He had forgotten something. Dixie reached into his left pants pocket to retrieve the engagement ring, which she had returned to him, and he had wrapped in a receipt. He rode back to her. Big Jim and Donna were waiting and watching.

Whether it was the fact he had left and returned or that he had just made Big Jim laugh or that he was talking directly to Donna, ignoring her husband, Dixie spoke perfectly. Sudden, perfect speech never ceased to amaze and gratify him. "Almost forgot about this, Baby" he declared as he reached out to return the ring to her. "I bought this for you. You can do what you want with it. Cash it in, return it if you want or throw it down the toilet. I don't care. Maybe you can buy one of them fancy hand control vans so Big Jim can drive more than that wheelchair? Or you can pay off the station wagon? Or both. It's up to you, Donn. Can't use it where I'm headed. You know, I'll just scuff it up or lose it. What a waste that would be!

"Here! Here's the receipt for it. Got it at that fancy jewelry store over on Prospect." Donna hesitated. She bit her lip and stopped her hand from accepting the ring back. Dixie encouraged her. "Go ahead, Honey. Look Donn, if you don't want to use the money for yourself, add it to the kid's college accounts. Go ahead now, Baby. Let's not make a big deal of this now. I got plenty to remember you by. You saw to that." He smiled broadly at her, paying no heed to Big Jim. She took the ring from his hand, but she never took her eyes off his.

Dixie revved up his engine again, as the final glows of the early June dusk faded into darkness. He gave his James Dean-Jett Rink wave, starting his right hand as if to salute and then sliding it in a downward plane to his waist and out away from him. Then he roared out of their court once more, for the last time.

His destiny beckoned.