

Dixie woke as rays of the dawn's early light poked between the motel's slightly parted, blood-red curtains. Like Big Jim, his buddy from Nam, Dixie could not sleep long after a drunk. He lay on his right side blinking, needing a few minutes now to orient himself to his surroundings. When he was able to make out the dust particles floating in the sunlight streaming through the parted curtains, he was ready to get up.

Placing his hand to his left to push off the bed, Dixie bumped something solid. Startled, he lunged somewhat upwards and rubbed his eyes hard, as if to remove the magic sleep dust that sometimes played tricks on him. Waking in a strange motel room was no novelty for Dix. However, waking next to a curvaceous, wavy-haired brunette like this sheet-shrouded creature lying beside him was definitely a most pleasant surprise. Dixie sat up and rubbed his forehead slowly but with increasing vigor, as if the very act would somehow not only massage away all the pain from his hangover, but would also restore his short-term memory. He leaned over this heavily sleeping female creature. A hint of sleep circles, cupped the underside of her eyes. However, even in sleep, this girl wore a little, gold chain necklace dangling a cross that stuck flatly upon her breastbone. That impressed him. Why? He could not say, but it did.

My wife! That's it.

It was all starting to come back to him. She had jumped on him out at the curb in front of her parents' home when they had first met late yesterday afternoon. He had met her family, had dinner with his in-laws, then met his own family and was feted in the impromptu block party afterwards. His family? Yes! He remembered. Oh, but his head was killing him. Now, what he needed most of all were some aspirin and some bubbles, both of which were downstairs.

Dixie tumbled out of bed, as did his fake ear, which had come off and smacked the floor ahead of him. He retrieved the prosthetic off the floor and replaced it by rote. Noticing his nakedness, he searched clumsily about the room for his pants. He looked around the room on the floor, before he accidentally walked into them, hanging neatly in the open closet. That was strange. Normally, he would have just tossed them on the other bed or one of the two chairs in the room, maybe even on the floor. Then he realized that *she* must have hung up his pants. *Very wifely of her.* Nevertheless, out of habit, Dixie anxiously checked his wallet on the dresser to make sure its contents were in tact. A similar check of his shoes found them empty.

He looked about the room anxiously for the three thousand dollars he had stashed in his Gucci loafers. Dixie was getting worried until he spotted the rumpled, folded bills on the nightstand next to the girl. Again out of habit, he counted them, every one of them. He had been rolled before and that had been an expensive lesson, one he would never forget. When it came to his finances, he trusted no one, not even a well-stacked angel who claimed to be his wife. Dixie put his pants on quietly and slipped half the bills into his wallet and the other half into his pants pockets. He buttoned down his wallet securely inside his back pocket.

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The room felt a bit stuffy. He checked to find the heat was on low, so he flipped the switch to LO-COOL, but nothing happened. He flipped the switch on and off a couple times, but there was nothing. He reached between the curtains and under the blinds to lift up the window several inches. The fresh, dawn air would soon cool the entire room.

Dixie tiptoed back to the nightstand beside the girl to pick up the room key. Perplexed, he paused perfectly still.

We didn't, did we? No! No, I foxed her. That's right. I remember, but now she knows everything there is to know about me. Well, we'll have to make the best of that.

His jaw dropped when he glimpsed the broad, balanced beam of her backside and the backs of her lovely legs. In the mostly dark motel room interior, he saw that she lay diagonally across the bed, legs together, knees bent at a forty-five degree angle with her butt stuck out starkly and her back arched past a right angle to her legs. A foot width of sunlight shot directly across the beam of her hips from front to back. The sheet and cover lay partly between her legs and completely covered her front side. The length of her backside and legs also lay uncovered, except for most of her beautifully pronounced round rump, which hid tactfully beneath the concealing, over-draping, triangular corner of the bed sheet. He giggled silently at the sight of the lower sheet corner dipping strategically over her round buttocks,

Now, that's what I call C.Y.A.

"Sleeping Cutie" clutched the hem of the red-ribbed bedspread in her left hand and had pulled the spread up under her collar bone, concealing all but the very top of her chunky chest, her wrists, forearms and her left shoulder. Her right hand was out of sight beneath the white pillow upon which the right side of her head rested peacefully. Her luxuriously dense, coarse, cocoa brown hair flowed well down over her shoulders in waves of ringlets, seemingly longer and curlier than what he had remembered from the previous night. Dixie did not want to wake her, but he did think he should cover her up, especially since he had just opened the window to draw in the cool dawn air.

The overwhelming starkness of her mostly nude backside suddenly struck him like a thunderbolt, stopping him dead in his tracks. Dixie kneeled on the floor beside her, between the two beds to survey her backside, literally from head to toe. *Incredible!* Had not he read or heard somewhere that after God had created Eve, the Creator had said that it was "very good?" If God hadn't said that, He should have, because it was T-R-U, at least in this girl's case. Her shapely figure reminded Dixie of those nineteenth century, semi-nude paintings in the old West saloons, hanging on the wall over the mirror behind the bar. Such artwork typically revealed the ultimate female of cowpokes' dreams as they slept around the campfire. Suspended above them in the air, majestically floating over the campfire reclined a beauteous, unclothed feminine form lying upon her side. Key parts of her frame would be cleverly hidden from view by prudent, upwardly curling edges of campfire flame and smoke or, in this girl's case, the corner of an overhanging white bed sheet. However, even as Dixie pondered that wondrous apparition, his imagination carried him beyond the smoke and the sheet, and he nodded his approval.

The more ya see, the more ya wanna see.

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A photographer or painter would have paid much for a subject such as this model in this position. Big Jim's words came to mind once more.

Nobody has a wife looks like that!

"That's for dang sure!"

He whispered hoarsely and the sound of his gruff voice roused him from reverie. Dixie decided to take a minute to inspect this goddess more closely. After all, had she not done as much to him when she had thought him to be sleeping last night?

For some reason, when he observed her, he thought of a broad, voluptuous, perfectly symmetrical, pink valentine heart, similar to the one that served as the signature of the "I Love Lucy" comedy TV show. As he cocked his head downward to view her round backside more judiciously, it occurred to Dixie that this woman was shaped like two of the "Lucy" valentine hearts with their points placed end-to-end and slightly overlapping one another. That narrow overlap served as the whimsical breadth of this goddess's super slim, semi-long, hair-breadth of a waist.

The contrasting wide breadth of her shoulders matched the round, curvy broad beam of her hips, but then that may have been an illusion based on her position. After all, her hips *were* covered by the white sheet. The gracefully sloping contour of the 'S' curves from her torso on down through her toes was like nothing he had ever seen on a woman. The surreally slim nature of her waist forged the truly emphatic hourglass figure that punctuated his incredulity. The fact that her lower back arched slightly, heightened the attraction her feminine curves held for him. He recalled from last night how her lower back had appeared to have been swayed inward, if only slightly.

Her skin was clear and silky smooth but olive in hue, and she was not as tanned as he might have expected for summertime. He chuckled lowly when he discovered two moles about a half inch in diameter on her upper left shoulder blade, spaced like a pair of eyes. Hmm! She has eyes on the back of her shoulder. Ha! Was that as good as having eyes in the back of your head? The girl exhibited solid over all muscle tone, but she was not overly muscular. Obviously, she was athletic, but not manly. She had the shoulders of an accomplished swimmer. He had observed such female shoulders previously in the university pool and he knew swimmer's shoulders when he saw them. Yet, her form was very feminine, very pleasantly feminine indeed!

He could have sworn her tan had been deeper last evening when they were out in the sun. Her lack of tan lines piqued his curiosity. From the back, he noted that her shapely legs could model nylon stockings or panty hose. He licked his lips and reined his hanging tongue back into his mouth before his insides ran out, trying not to slobber on her, as she had last night upon him.

The room was beginning to cool. From his knees, Dixie leaned forward to pull the covers back over her to keep her warm, pulling the spread up over her left shoulder. Then, from the foot of the bed, he reached down by her feet to slide the covers up over her legs, buttocks and back. Before he covered her back completely, Dixie caught sight of a fine, wispy, narrow column of sparse, faint, short, black hairs forming a downward V-shaped pattern, with her spine was the vertex of the multiple V's. The curious wisps faded in almost imperceptibly about waist-high and grew longer and darker the further

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his eyes tracked down her vertebrae. The dark wispy V's marched towards her tail bone, disappearing beneath the cleverly placed white sheet. The wisps brought to mind last night's dinner when he had observed similar, dark wisps along her forearms, as she sat at table next to him. He resisted a strong urge to lift that sheet and inspect her lower backside to learn what lay at the bottom of that dark, wispy rainbow, just as she had inspected him the previous night.

Yes, with a rush of embarrassment, he recalled her warm drool dripping upon him right here on this very bed, while she had inspected him as if he had been a bug under a microscope. Internally, he had screamed at her clinical inspection while, outwardly, out of her sight, he had grimaced shamefully. Humiliated, Dixie had wanted to melt away into the bed, invisible, never to be seen again. Yet, he could only play possum. It had taken every ounce of the military discipline he had acquired in the Corps to maintain his ruse. He never had thought he would be thankful for learning how to stand stock still at attention and drill in excessive heat and humidity, ignoring the stinging bites of sand flies and mosquitoes chewing on him as if he were the blue plate special. But now he was most thankful, most thankful indeed. Even so, last night she seemed to recoil from his wounds and that had hurt him terribly and made him glad of his deception.

Despite the welling desire within him for what lay hidden beneath the sheet, he pulled the cloth over her more completely, securing entirely from sight the imagined pulchritudinous treasure beneath. She did not stir, but her shallow, peaceful breath remained undisturbed. "What a gentleman, I have suddenly become," mused Dixie. From the nightstand, he picked up the room key, which he had nearly forgotten, before he slipped downstairs to his motorbike to retrieve a bottle of aspirins that he kept in the bike's faring. From the first floor vending machine, he obtained the bubbles he needed by buying a couple of Pepsi's to wash down about a half dozen aspirins. After taking care of his medicinal needs and stoking his personal early morning engine with carbonated caffeine, Dixie stealthily returned to his room. Afterwards, he threw on an old sweatshirt and quickly but quietly collected his duffle bag of dirty laundry. Shortly, the pain in his head gratefully began to subside, as his homemade remedy took effect.

He caught sight of Ryz'n's clothes, folded neatly on the mostly unused double bed. It was after six a.m. and they had gotten in after two last night. Dixie felt he could do Ryz'n a favor by washing and drying her clothes for her. If he returned from his errand before she woke, which was likely, she would never miss them. If he didn't, well ... He stuffed her things into his duffle bag on top of his own duds. In case she awoke before his return, he bent low over the desk and left her a brief explanatory note on the motel desk stationary.

R

Doing laundry—yours too. Back soon. D-

Due to his cerebral handicaps, the note took a few minutes of focused diligence for him to complete. After he reviewed the message, he noticed he had messed up. She knew him—well, they all knew him here, as "Nick" not "Dixie." Rather than take another five minutes to rewrite the entire note, Dixie sighed and merely crossed through the "D" and scribbled an "X" next to it.

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Dixie complained to the motel's desk clerk in the front office about the electrical problems in Room 222. However, he asked that no one disturb the room until after he went out later for the day, which would not be for a couple hours yet.

"Probably a fuse," offered the red-vested, desk clerk. "I'll take care of it, after you leave for the day, Sir."

When Dixie asked about a Laundromat, the ferret-faced clerk explained the Laundromat was behind the motel in a small shopping center called Fleischmann's Village, a couple blocks to the northwest. It should have just opened for business.

Satisfied with that response, Dixie left, toting his off-white laundry bag of dirty clothes over his shoulder like Santa Claus on Christmas Eve. The sun was well up when he reached the Laundromat, as the proprietor was opening up the place, almost a half an hour late, at six-twenty. There were a dozen washers and half as many dryers. Dixie filled three washers with his duds. Before he tossed her clothes into a washer, he could not help but inspect her tiny wardrobe, so small and delicate compared to his.

Her sleeveless, scoop-necked, yellow top was one hundred per cent cotton, a "Bobbi Brooks" size "L." The feminine top featured three horizontal pleats around the front and two midriff tucks on either side of the hem, from armpit to waist, which created a severely tapered look, but then she was one tapered girl.

"Machine wash/tumble dry-low. OK."

The cute summer blouse zipped from halfway up the back. He tossed the top in with his load of lights. Her dark green, high-waisted, cuffed shorts bore a *Ryz'n* label, with no size shown. *She must have made this herself. Be darned! This girl is something else!* There was no fabric or washing instruction labels on the shorts, either. Not knowing what to do with them, he gambled and tossed them into the washer with his lights. Noticing the one and half inch cuffs, the pleats and the high waistband on the shorts, he remarked aloud: "They're very classy." Happily, he found them completely different from the tacky, cuff-less, polyester, "hot pants" that were in vogue.

Alone in the Laundromat, Dixie forgot his earlier gentlemanly forbearance in the motel room and decided to inspect her undergarments, too. The brassiere was a yellow lace affair with a front slide fastener. Based on his limited experience, Dixie preferred back fasteners. His adroit left hand had learned to be very helpful to a damsel in need of some undress, specifically in removing a back-fastened brassiere. He checked the label - *38C Chantelle Balconette Hand Wash Cold Water/Line Dry 60% Cotton/30% Satin/10% Elastic - Hmm, definitely smaller than Donna, but much, much bigger than Lori Lei.* Dixie fingered the fine, pale yellow lace cups, viewing his fingertips through them. Very sheer, very feminine, he liked that look for her. Dixie laid the fancy bra aside on the sorting table. A similar inspection of her lace briefs brought similar information and satisfaction. A size *P*, the briefs were of the same delicate construction and style as the brassiere but with three curious, unfinished, backside, frilly, horizontal lace seams. This garment required hand washing, as well, so Dixie laid them aside also. He had never seen any *P* sizes on any of Donna's panties, that was certain, or any lacey frills, either for that matter.

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Dixie quickly filled two washers with his duds, including the sea green sweatshirt he was wearing. He sorted his clothes by color and fabric for warm or cold-water washing. He got change from the dollar bill changer, bought some detergent and started all three washers. Then he took her two undergarments down to the sink at the back wall of the building, where he washed them out by hand in warm water with some flaky Ivory soap that was nearby.

Other early bird customers ventured into the Laundromat. One matron spied him half-naked, with his exposed *Semper Fi* tattoo, hanging Ryz'n's underclothes on a line across the back of the building. As the older woman filled a couple washers, she studied Dixie curiously with one eyebrow raised. Suddenly conscious of her accusatory stare, he realized how he must look to her.

"Oh, th-these aren't m-mine, ma'a'aam." Her suspicious look questioned the veracity of his statement. "N-no, you se-see, these are ma-my friend's. Ah m-mean m-my wife's. Well, I mean. I, I jes' ...me-me-met her yester, ye-yesterd-da-da-day. Well, wha-wha, we're o-o-o, at the ma-mo-motel."

The more he spoke, the more he put his foot in his mouth, the more he stuttered and the more skeptical the woman became. Finally, he just gave up. *I'm pathetic!* Still, when the woman was not looking, Dixie admired Ryz'n's frilly, satin lace underwear that hung so finely, so delicately on the clothesline. Fine and delicate—like his newfound wife—and quite the opposite of Donna, he mused.

A dark, young mother entered the establishment with a babe in a stroller and a four-year old in tow. From her dress, they appeared to be Asian Indian. Dixie helped her with her clothing baskets and entertained the Mohawk-coifed, four-year old, while the woman loaded some washers. When Dixie commented upon the child's unique haircut, the kid said he was practicing to become an "American Indian." Dixie laughed, but the kid's mother frowned. Evidently, the kid had achieved the haircut somehow without her approval. The infant, asleep in the stroller, reminded him of the birth of his Marine buddy Miguel's baby.

Dixie completed his laundering and selected the same cut-off sweatshirt he had worn to the Laundromat to wear now on his return trip to the motel. On the way, he sniffed out a bakery and stopped off to buy some donuts and long johns. He chomped on part of his purchase on his way back to his room. Weather-wise, the day was warming and turning out splendidly. As he looked around, Dixie could not get over the greenery of this place, which was so unlike the dull, dusty brown of Southern California.

Upon his return to the motel, Dix found his wife facing him, sitting on the side of the near bed, awake, robed simply in a white bath towel, evidently fresh from the shower. Her long hair was yet dripping wet but, for the most part, combed straight down. The girl had parted her hair neatly but high on her head. She was still combing out some tangles with one hand; while, she spoke on the phone, holding the receiver to her ear with her other hand. Even so, she smiled pleasantly nodding toward him, as he entered the room toting his duffle bag of clean clothes. He noticed most of the sleep circles had faded miraculously from beneath her eyes. He hoped she had slept soundly.

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Of course, there were her *legs*, which were a phenomenon unto themselves. He could not avoid them in the bright sunlight that poked between the partly opened curtains. There was no getting around her legs. In his experience, girls short of stature and long of waist typically had short, stubby legs--not this girl. By the morning's light, he could see why. As she sat over the side of the bed, her right foot barely planted on the carpet, wearing only the white motel bath towel, she had crossed her left leg over her right at the knees. The sleek, graceful contour of her long calf and thigh muscles gave the impression of length that was not there. Her knees were neither knobby nor wrinkled, radiating a certain graceful charm of their own. Probably freshly shaved, her gams emanated a sheen that glistened in the morning sunlight.

Yeah! Good enough to eat. Wonder where she got the razor to shave 'em?

"Yes Wauneta. He just came in ... Unh-hunh." Again, she nodded toward him pleasantly as she spoke into the phone.

"Yes, Yes, I'm sure we can do that, Wauneta," she rasped into the mouthpiece.

Ryz'n placed her hand which held Dixie's comb, over the receiver and whispered a hoarse but congenial morning greeting to him. From the movement of Ryz'n's eyes, he assumed her mother-in-law was yet speaking on the other end of the line. Ryz'n covered the mouthpiece with the hand holding his comb.

"Your mother is reminding me that we promised to have breakfast with them."

Ryz'n lifted her left hand, which held his comb, from off the phone mouthpiece. Then she grimaced as she dragged the comb through some wet tangles over her right shoulder with her left hand, still holding the phone to her ear with her right hand beneath her hair. She listened intently to the phone. He thought her arms were a bit thick, as if she had retained some baby fat there, but he liked it. He liked a girl with a little meat on her bones.

Sunlight, streaming through the barely parted curtains, fell directly across her face and she squinted against its stark brightness. Dixie studied her. In the harsh light, she did not appear to be quite the gorgeous beauty he recalled from last night or even from the dusky, curtain-shaded room this morning. Wasn't that the way? Chicks always seemed to look better at night and then, by morning's light, something always happened to them. They seemed to develop a case of the ugly-muggies over night. He could never figure it out.

Now, in the light of day, he observed her critically. Ry's sunny, doubly thick cheerleader cheeks partly concealed her enviable high cheek bones and her square, angular jaw. The bone structure was there. It just wasn't always readily noticeable. You had to look for it. Thus, her double cheeks robbed her of the fashion model's face possessed by her kid sister, whom he recalled from their family dinner last night. Ryz'n raised her head and turned a bit away from him, concentrating on her telephone conversation. And, as his keen eyes had observed upon waking today when he had spied the dust particles dancing in the air, now he noticed the very faintest and briefest of dark hirsute wisps trickling along the back, underside of her jaw line, not unlike those he had spied along her backbone. While she squinted against the morning light, the hazel in her irises now overpowered the emerald, which had predominated there

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last night out on the veranda. And her eyes in general appeared tired, dark, and weary around the edges, sort of drawn to a fine edge, seemingly aging her a few years.

Her firm Roman nose was not indelicate, but, by dawn's early light, he thought neither was it the stuff of which goddesses were made, either. Could that possibly be an underground zit forming alongside her schnoz? No, certainly not. Watching her doggedly comb out straight the last of her kinky wet tangles, Dixie thought severely of her. She looked more like a drowned rat right now rather than a beauty queen. Then, what about her ears? Didn't they stand out farther from her head now with her hair all wet like that? They were not the size ears you'd expect from a delicate little creature like this. No, she had man-sized ears. And her hair was two-toned. The roots were black as pitch, matching her equally dark brows and lashes, but her kinky hair grew out into a cocoa-colored brown-grey, the color of cup of cocoa with a marshmallow in it, a color he had never before witnessed. *She probably dyes it.* And her eyebrows extended a bit too far for comfort into the center of her head above the bridge of her nose. He wondered if she plucked her brows over her nose just to keep the two brows from joining into one, as did his old nurse and Filipina friend Rose Rosario. But ... in all honesty, he could go on no longer cutting her down with such stinking, critical, negative, picayunish thinking.

In truth, her eyes and mouth *were* of goddess material and if the rest of her features did not quite measure up to god-like beauty, they were nonetheless grand. Her expressive, long, broad, arched black brows along with her matching, fluttering, long dark eyelashes and her two wide, full pink lips could fetch any man from his sickbed or drive a grown, healthy man to his knees. Dixie particularly admired her lips, especially her air-brushed upper lip, located at the base of her wide philtrum, which appeared to Dixie as the signature mark of the Almighty upon his creation. God Himself had placed His fingertip there, as if to press the center of her upper lip back, sealing His awesome creation forever with a mark that shouted: "It is very good indeed."

In spite of her kinky tangles, Ryz'n spoke into the phone cheerily now, raising Dixie from his private study.

"Yes, Wauneta. A half an hour. Yes ... uh ... Yes, we'll be there. Yes. OK. Good-good-bye."

Ryz'n hung up the receiver with a sigh of relief.

"Wheewwee! Guess I forgot about that breakfast deal. You can get ready in that time, can't you, Baby? I hope you have my clothes or I'll look real cute in this outfit. She stood up to model cheekily her lone towel wardrobe. Ya like?" Smiling seductively, she pivoted languidly in a circle for his perusal with her slightly bent arms raised about chest high.

He liked. He liked very much.

Now he could see why he had thought of her as a gorgeous goddess last night. For, as she turned her attentions upon him, producing those multiple dimples, with smiling eyes, once again, more emerald green than hazel, a warm, infectious, golden glow overflowed from her being and shot like streaming sunlight into his heart,

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overwhelming him. And when he glanced downward from her face, well, no woman he knew had a chassis as classy as she. All those paltry negatives he had just conjured up about her physical appearance flew right out of his head. What could he have been thinking of? Dixie smiled and gave her the thumbs up sign. He offered her the bag of do-nuts as a self-imagined token of peace for ever second-guessing her so harshly.

“Oh, well thank ya Baby. I, I don’t usually eat pastry ... Usually, I’m swimming at this time of day, but ... ummm, these smell fresh-baked. I’ll make a special exception this morning, just for you, Honey. Thank you for the goodies, Sweetie. That was very thoughtful of you.” She wrinkled her nose and winked in gratitude.

The awesome-looking creature sat his comb down on the small breakfast table next to the bag of donuts. Ryz’n moved forward to peck him on the cheek in a wifely manner and pulled a long john from the bag to nibble on the maple-frosted pastry, but nibble was all she did.

“You do have my clothes, don’t ya Baby?” she asked hopefully with just a hint of scolding.

“Oh, oh yeah, Gu-gu-guess I forga-got.”

Dixie had taken special pains with her clothes by folding them and packing them last, on top of his. He gently pulled her garments from the top of those loaded in his bag and gracefully handed them to her with the delicate, yellow lace under garments on top. He felt his face warm as she took the dainty garments from his hand.

“Well, thank you again, Nicky.”

“You’re wa-wa-welcome, Ryzanna. I, I like your t-taste in clothes.”

He smiled broadly but self-consciously, realizing he was revealing the small gap between his front upper two dentures. Now, she blushed, ducking his smile. She said nothing about her disappointment from last night’s thorough inspection of him.

Thank God!

“Well, it pleases me that you do,” she said with a curt nod and a joking grin.

Ryz’n took the clothes from his outstretched hand as she headed for the bathroom. However, she stopped abruptly just short of the doorway with her hand on the bathroom doorknob, as if she had just remembered something. The young woman deliberately set her clothes down on the vanity counter against the wall next to the bathroom. Still clad only in her bath towel, the thought returned to Dix.

Yep. The more ya see, the more ya wanna see.

Noticing herself in the vanity wall mirror that ran the length of the eight-foot long sink counter, she seemed to read his mind. Ryz’n stepped just across the bathroom threshold, remaining half in his sight and unobtrusively yet deliberately removed her towel. As she did so, the girl inched forward a bit and turned to look towards the wall opposite the bathroom door, profiling herself both to him and simultaneously to the mirror on her left. Without warning, she dropped the towel on the vanity counter, picked up her clothes and modestly stepped butt-backward, just inside the bathroom doorway. They could see one another plainly via the reflection in the vanity mirror. Thus, she began to carry on a casual conversation with him while she dressed, as if this was just any other normal morning in their lives. Of course, it was not, but Dixie

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played along with her. Casually, she asked him if he was feeling better and sympathized with his hangover and all the indignities he had suffered the previous evening at the hands of all the well meaning friends and family members.

Dixie tried to listen and not to watch, but he could not help himself. He was seeing all he could hope to see without more of an up close and personal inspection. Mann! *This chick is some kind of put together.* She seemed to take her sweet time dressing, asking him to be patient with everyone, all the while studying him via the mirror as he tried unsuccessfully not to watch her. He merely grunted his assent, not really following all that she said. However, he did watch, as if he were mesmerized. It pleased him to do so and from her coy smiles and batting eyelids, he figured that she knew it pleased him also, which pleased him even more.

This chick is positively stacked. Those early morning swims she mentioned really firmed her up in all the right places.

Then, without warning, Dixie glimpsed something truly astounding. His mouth dropped. Noticing his gaffe, Ryz'n turned to hide her backside, both from his direct view as well as her reflection in the mirror. She tried to pretend as if nothing had occurred. Yet, Dixie caught her looking at him from the corner of her large, almond-shaped, hazel-green eyes, peeking out from under her sweeping, raven-hued eyebrows and through doe-like, up-curved, black lashes. His heart pounded like a sledgehammer upon an anvil, just as his heart had pounded in the cool, swift waters of the Smoky Mountain stream in which he had cavorted just the other day. He was by no means an expert on the female anatomy, but he was quite certain this girl's under sided features were foreign to his limited experience. They reminded him of ... of—that little kid's head in the Laundromat! Yes! And the sight of her piqued more than just his curiosity.

That is incredible! Never, ever seen anything like her. This girl is just full of surprises!

Despite all the testosterone flowing through his veins, Dixie calmed himself to the point to where he could chuckle slightly under his breath at how she clothed herself. While he absent-mindedly fiddled with his sea bag, she made not a sound and offered no acknowledgement of his discovery. However, he could not help but notice that she dressed completely bassackwards in his opinion. Ryz'n covered her top half completely first, then dressed her bottom half. He reasoned that if a fire or some other emergency were to occur in the midst of her dressing, she would be caught literally with her pants down. But who that spied her would complain? He chuckled silently, more in her defense. Of course, using her method during an emergency, she would avert a chest cold. Ha!

Dixie, on the other hand, dressed just the opposite, clothing his bottom half, first. That way he reasoned, no emergency would catch him with his pants down. He thought about passing his observation onto her, but decided against it. He did not know her well enough yet to joke around like that and she might misconstrue his naturally dry sense of humor for an embarrassing accusation. He forced himself to maintain a straight face, while she finished dressing and began to fix her hair. Dixie pulled some

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clean clothes out for himself and pushed past her into the bathroom. In passing her, he nodded with approval. If she had anything to say to him, she was keeping it to herself.

In the privacy of the bathroom, Dixie chuckled aloud and considered his situation while he short-showered. From all appearances, Ryzanna was one fine girl, one really fine girl! She had a pleasant disposition, with an easy smile and her angelic, oval face produced terrific dimples. She was eager to help others, eager to please. She was outgoing without being overly bossy. He must have misread her signals last night when she had inspected him so minutely. The girl did not seem to have any sexual hang-ups and was obviously more than willing to make love with him, whenever he wanted. In that regard, she had done everything except knock him over the head and rape him. However, he could not oblige her, not just yet anyway. Shoot! He had known her less than twenty-four hours. He just did not know her well enough, even if he had viewed nearly every single square inch of her backside and even though every inch had more than satisfied him.

She called to him through the closed door.

“Hey Sweetie? I, uh kind o’ borrowed your razor. Um, I think I left it on the side of the tub, OK?”

“OK, I see it. What did you use it for?”

“Oh, you know the usual things, girl things.” She giggled. “That’s all.”

The old armpit blade, reasoned Dixie. Great! But he lied to her aloud, “That’s OK, Ry, glad you fa-felt, uh fa-fa-free to use it—I . . . g-guess.”

Geeze-o-flip! She’s acting like Donna already, just like a wife.

Dixie had never been much of a one-night stand kind of a guy. Although in college over in Maui, he had had plenty of opportunity for that kind of thing. He had found after a bit of trial and error that he just could not do that without incurring what he called “post-sex complications” or “sexually active fallout,” which try as he might he could never escape. Besides, there had always been “the quiet Voice from within,” which usually became a sufficient deterrent for him. Maybe it was due to his deformities, but Dixie had to feel something very special, had to know someone well, before he could ignore those internal, gentle entreaties of restraint from the Voice inside him and carry on intimate relations with a female. He guessed his relations with her this morning definitely fell under the category of getting to know her better.

As fine a girl as his wife projected to be, and she projected to be super fine, he did not feel right about claiming his husbandly rights—at least, not now, not here. Living with her in a motel room was a volatile situation. Eventually, something would have to give. Dixie preferred that something would occur *after* he had regained his memory of her. Then it would be truly special, not just lust with a stranger on a motel room bed. He thought perhaps, if he were to move in with his parents, get to know them, then he could date Ryz’n. Then, the two of them could visit some of the same places and do some of the same things they used to do, which might spark his memory. It would give him a chance to become acquainted with her, as well as his family. It sounded like a plan worthy of trial. He hoped Ryzanna would agree. He dried off and dressed with the clothes he had brought into the bathroom.

Out at Home

Dixie emerged from the bathroom fully dressed to find her, clothed as smartly and fetchingly as she had been the previous night. It amused him to find her performing inclined push-ups on her fists and with the balls of her feet digging into the top of the bed and her fingertips pressed flush to the floor. That's how he did push-ups! It was a good way for a ballplayer to strengthen his wrists. How did she come by such an exercise? He watched, enthralled with her routine. After her last push-up, Ryz'n hopped to her feet, brushing her hands together.

"What are you looking at? Don't you think I can do a few push-ups?" She quipped lightly. It seemed as if she was stating a challenge more than asking a question. Before he could answer, she added. "I forgot to do them and my calisthenics, too, before I showered."

"Well, sure, that's how I da-da-do push-ups."

"No kiddin', Baby. Guess who taught me? Yeah, that's right—you!" She poked him in the chest for emphasis. "I still haven't done my pull-ups, because there's no bar here," she lamented, obviously in the hope of impressing him further. "Well, maybe at your folks' house."

Dixie held up a forefinger. He produced an expandable pull-up bar from his USMC sea bag in the corner, which also contained his wooden baseball bats. He mounted the bar near the top of the bathroom doorframe. Then he invited her to use it.

"I'd like to se-see a ga-ga-girl do a pa-pull-up, never seen that be-be-before."

His stuttering had raised its ugly head again in the presence of this girl's overwhelming charm and beauty. Yet, she carried on as if nothing were amiss.

"Oh, ya haven't, hunh? I beg to differ. You taught me, Baby. We used to work out together in high school, before we ever were going together. After we got married, of course, we worked out together, too, in a number of ways." She winked. "You even swam with me." She smiled perkily.

Dixie found it all difficult to believe. While he pondered, she stretched and rolled her shoulders and neck. Ryz'n bent over at the waist, stretching her hands to the floor with her shoulder-length light brown hair tumbling down on either side of her double-cheeked face. Her bulbous, round ball back end protruded proud as a peacock behind her. Remaining bent over; Ry raised her hands out to arm's length at either side of her. Rising erect, she raised first her left arm and then her right over her head, pulling on the elbow of the raised arm with her opposite hand. Then, for ten seconds which she counted off aloud, she hung on the bar by her hands, arms fully extended, legs bent at the knees to keep her feet off the floor, before she curled up seven times without touching the floor once. Then, without rest or touching the floor, she re-gripped the bar to pull up over hand seven times behind her neck. Dixie was floored. As she pulled up each time, the formerly slight muscular contour of her biceps, triceps and forearms suddenly burst into the flaming definition of full, stark muscles!

"I'll be d-d-damned. Most ga-guys I know can't do that! Maybe all of 'em."

"Oh, don't say that, Sweetie. You're Christian; you know that, don't ya? You won't be damned." She perked her eyebrows and smiled slightly.

"Uh, well, I ga-ga-guess, if you say so."

Eye of the Beholder

“Sure you are, Baby. You’ve been baptized and everything, twice even, once for good measure. Ha! Ha!” Then she pulled up overhand on the bar five times, as if there was nothing to it.

“How ca-come you only did five re-reps of the last-t-t when you da-did ... seven of the others?” (Her comment about his Christian baptism had meant nothing to him, so he did not reply to it. Besides, he was too enthralled with her incredible exercise routine to respond.)

“There’s a fine line between tone and unsightly muscles, Honey. I find those extra couple reps cross the line. My chest is plenty big enough now. I don’t want to have to increase my bra size again.” She winked slyly. “Maybe it’s too big, as it is, or maybe it’s too small. What do you think?” She peered at him guilelessly.

He gagged.

“Uh yeah, sure. I, I, I mean, na-na-no. No, it’s, it’s pa-perfect, you know?” She looked blankly at him, so he continued. “I mean, it’s not ta-ta-too big and not, not ta-ta-t-too small, definitely, not ta-too sma-small.” He returned her wink with the briefest of shy smiles. *This girl sure liked to wink.*

“Kind of like Goldilocks—just right, hunh?” She chuckled. “Come on, let’s go for breakfast, Honey. Your Mama is waiting to feed her baby bear.”

“Ju-Just a second, Ry.” He held up a forefinger. “Gotta finish dre-dressing.”

Dixie walked over to the dresser to collect his protective hardware. He sat down on the edge of the bed, placed his left foot on the bed, rolled up his pant leg and began to fasten the pistol holster above his left ankle. She scowled.

“Oh Nicky, no. You don’t need that here, Baby. Please, please don’t. I just wouldn’t feel comfortable with it—the knife, either.”

“Are you sh-sh-sure?” Dixie halted, holding the holstered weapon before him.

“*Sure*, I’m sure. Please Sweetie; just stick them in the drawer, there.”

He hesitated. She arched her brows, licked her glossy pink lips and nervously clasped her hands together, as she twirled her engagement ring about her finger.

“Please?”

“Alright, I’ll do it for you, ba-b-but it’s against my be-be-better judgment.”

He relented with a grimace and reluctantly stuck the weapons in the drawer as she had requested. Then he bounced off the bed towards her.

“Oh, thank you so much, Nicky. You don’t realize what a relief that is for me.”

Smiling gratefully, Ryz’n pecked him on the mouth, hooked her arm in his and escorted him out the door and down the outside concrete stairs to his motorcycle. He liked this girl. And she was trying very hard to be liked. He understood that. He paused on the stairs, two steps below her, to wait for her. He framed her in his mind. Her presence was deceptive. Due to her infectious three-dimpled smile and the breadth of both her upper torso and her hips, she appeared larger than life. However, in reality as they descended the stairs side by side, the crown of her head barely rose up past his chin, even in her platform sandals.

“Ya know Ryzanna—”

“Call me Ry, Nicky. Please?” She smiled the dimpled smile again.

Out at Home

How could anyone refuse that smile?

“O-Ok. Ry ... Well, Ry, you shouldn’t do so many of the French ca-ca-curl ups and maybe do ten reps of the other two instead. In fact, you mi-mi-might wa-wa-wanna da-drop ‘em ‘em’, the French ca-ca-curls that is, all ta-together or ja-just da-d-do a co-couple.”

“Oh, why is that, Sweetie?”

“‘Cause ta-too many of ‘em will screw the heck outta your ro-ro-rotata-tator ca-ca-cuff.”

“Ya don’t say? Well thanks for tipping me off, Sweetie. That’s exactly what I’ll do then.”

She flashed a set of bright white teeth and three of her dimples his way. He returned her warm smile.

Yes, mused Dixie, this girl was very likable, even lovable. True, she was a bit too clingy, but that was understandable and, hopefully, just a temporary condition. He helped her climb up behind him onto his Honda and they took off. Like last night, he had reminded her of his rules of travel: squeeze him around the waist once to go and twice to stop; tug on the left arm to go left and the right to go right. He gave her his chopped off baseball batting helmet as protective headgear.

Dang! She even looked good wearing that ugly thing. The girl is a marvel!

Dix deepened his thoughts of her as they rode through the Crest Hill suburbs, comparing her to the past women of his two-year existence. He noted Ryz’n was a little bit pushy but in a polite way, much like Rose Rosario had been, when she had nursed him back to health after his head surgeries at Subic Bay.

He recalled the cute, Filipino-born American navy lieutenant had taught him how to fend for himself as kindly and patiently as a mother would have with her first-born. As a specialist in physical therapy, that had been her job and she had helped rehabilitate all the boys, not just him. Still, the two of them had flaunted navy regulations, when they had developed a mutual fondness for each other outside of the hospital. When it came to giving him directions Rose did not distinguish between the medical and the personal. She had told him what to do, as well as how and when and where to do it, in a firm but gentle way that he had found appealing. As his rehabilitation nurse, it was her job to tell whacked out sailors and marines what to do, no matter how painful it may be for them. For her, they would have done anything or died trying. Yes, Rose had known what was best for him and now, this girl, this Ryz’n, had that same happy, positive air about her. He thought that was funny. Had not Ryz’n gone out of her way last night to explain to him that her name—Ryz’n was a bastardized version of the Gaelic name for Rose, which is Ryesin or Roisin? Meaning little rose? As they crossed over Veer Avenue, Ry tugged on his right arm in front of the Gulf Station, so he leaned to his right, following her instruction, heading down the suburban Fairgrass Street

The sunny day provoked his mind to wander back to the Islands, even as he drove the cycle through the cool, shady, neatly plotted suburban neighborhood of red brick homes with manicured green lawns, bisected by white concrete driveways and sidewalks. On the rebound from Rose, he had run into the undercover Honolulu police

Eye of the Beholder

detective Lori Lei. Posing as an undercover hooker, Lori had arrested him falsely after entrapping him on the very day the Corps had discharged him. A native Hawaiian of mixed white and Polynesian parentage, Lori Lei was wild and incredibly aggressive. There was nothing she would not do: from rappelling down active volcanoes to surfing thirty-foot waves. She even baited sharks from inside one of those submerged metal cages. He shook his head and wondered why she even bothered with the cage. When he had joked about that, she thought that she might try it without the cage next time. Yes, she was something else! Because of her prodding, he had gotten hooked on motorbikes. She pushed him into things, things he would never have considered doing alone. Likewise, she had pushed him into bed and then had pushed him out again. Yet, in the end, he had left her. That was when he had gotten the opportunity from Coach Trahorn for a free college education in return for playing baseball for Peppermount on the mainland.

However, first Dix had been scheduled to play summer ball in San Diego. And that's where he had run into Donna. She was another domineering woman, whose husband, by his voluntary, continual absence, had forced her into providing for and raising her two cute, little boys alone. Dixie and Donna had shared a mutual physical attraction for one another. Yet he also admired her for the way she persevered as a single mom and sole support for her family. He had grown to love her and her kids even though she was several years older than he was and even if, when things did not go just right for her, she would stoop to treat him like her oldest son. On those infrequent occasions, she would tongue-lash him mercilessly. He never responded. He simply got up, got on his bike and took off for a few days. Upon his return, she was always apologetic and wanted to know everything he had done during his absence, particularly whom he had visited. She would become most solicitous of him after these absences. Donna would make sure the boys went to bed early on those nights of his homecomings.

Then Donna would put on that bright blue negligee he had given her for Christmas and go far out of her way, deep into the night, to apologize to him. He never had realized how desperate she had become to keep him—until that last day. She had never let on until the end, after Dixie had learned the truth. That was after Big Jim, her paralyzed MIA husband, had come home. He, too, had been missing in action for over two years, but that was because, as a paralytic in a comatose state, he had been listed as a John Doe in VA hospital. His revival from the coma and his subsequent shocking return had occurred just a couple of weeks ago. That was when Dixie had broken it off with Donna. He guessed those excessive, all night, apology sessions of Donna's, in which she had begged him to stick, should have tipped him off that something was wrong. Why had she been interested in a kid like him? She had confessed she loved him and he had believed her, but now that he thought about it ... well, shoot!

What an idiot he was, thinking of his past loves, when "Nobody's" wife was riding behind him, clinging tightly to his backside. He just hoped she would give him a little breathing room and that she would not try too hard to control him, as the others had.

Out at Home

He had had enough of controlling females, even if they had claimed to have his best interests at heart.

The girl behind him tugged on his left arm and he turned the bike left onto Elliot Way, in obedience to her suggestion.