

“It’s all set for tomorrow night then, right Nick?”

“What’s all set?”

“Come on, Mann! What have we been talking about it all day, Dude?”

“We haven’t been talking about anything all day, Paul. *You’ve* been talkin’ about goin’ out with your girlfriend and some other chick to some club. Hey Phil, sit in the back, will ya? After a full day of sweatin’ in this muggy weather, three of us across the front seat of this Bonneville is a bit much in our ripe condition. And put your shirts on. Don’t want you sweatin’ all over the Widow’s vinyl seats.”

“Aw, come on Nick, it’s hot,” complained Paul.

“All right. But lay your shirt on the seatback behind ya, so’s ya can lean back against it.”

“Gee, Nick, you’d think this was *your* car or something.”

“If it *was* my car, Paul, I wouldn’t let ya be ridin’ with me at all.” Paul shot Nick a hard glance and then Nick grinned at him to show he was only funnin’.

A week had passed since Matt Yikes and Ryz’n had tag-teamed Dixie, rendering new meaning to the term the “old one-two.” And while his clobbered face had healed, his battered heart had not. Despite their week apart, Dixie could not shake his wife’s irascible brush off. The pool boy, power trio had just finished a rough work day installing a Bilnor above ground four and a half-foot deep swimming pool. Paul held the passenger side, front seat pushed forward so Phil could slip into the back. Nick started up the Pontiac’s V-8,

“It’d be easier to get in if the top was down,” observed Phil wryly. Paul agreed.

“Hey Nick! Aren’t you ever gonna put the top down on this thing? Thought that’s why we brought it.”

“Sure, how do we do this?” Big Phil struggled down into the back seat.

“Get this guy, Phil. How do we do this? He drives this very car all throughout high school and now he don’t know how to do it. Sheesh! Maybe that’s why Ryz’n ain’t seein’ him.”

“Aw cut it out Paul,” muttered Phil through clenched teeth, as he finally plopped down. Then Phil turned and spoke kindly to his longtime friend in the driver’s seat.

“Take a hold of that clip above your head there and pull it out. Yeah, just like Paul is doin’ over there with his. Put the windows down. Yeah, yeah. Now just push that button down. Yeah . . . and there it goes. Nothin’ to it.” They all craned their necks backward and watched as the black top raised high up over their heads and slowly dropped safely down into its well behind the back seat, leaving them bathed in Southern Maryland sunshine.

“Hey, there’s Lou. He’s got the top down on the Mustang, too. CLASSIC! Sixty-Five, red Mustang with a white rag top. Will ya dig that?” observed Paul wistfully. Lou waved but Larry flipped them the bird, as Lou peeled out down the street, headed for the county road. Then Bax pulled up even with Dixie in his brown 280Z.

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“Eight o’clock tomorrow boys! We’ll finish by noon. Head back up to that job in Clairton after, OK? Pump should be in tomorrow morning!”

“Yeah, sure Bax. See ya tomorrow,” assured Dixie. Not to be outdone, Bax laid a patch of rubber up away from the dead end residential street out towards the county road. Nick had to go in the opposite direction, down to the dead end, and make a three-point turn in the big boat that was the widow’s Bonneville, but he laid no rubber when he left the valley’s newest development of single-family homes.

“Dang, ya see that? A 280Zeeeeee! He got the cash for that car doing these pools! What do we get? Three-fifty an hour and broken down Bugs! And broken down backs!”

“Yeah Paul, but remember fixin’ up those broken down Bugs helps pay our way through school. Hey Nick! You gotta be pretty well fixed for cash, Mann, with all them records you all sold.”

“I dunno Phil. I guess so, but I haven’t seen any of it. I told ya, Ryz’n won’t give me the time of day, let alone any cash. I don’t even know where she is for Pete’s sakes. She’s never home. Her mother says she’s working with the band on account of these, these—whaddaya call ‘em?”

“Gigs!”

“Yeah, gigs! That’s it. Guess they gotta practice pretty hard.”

Paul disagreed.

“Hey Nicky, no offense Mann, but you been away for three years and she can’t be with you now, cuz she’s gotta be with the band? Whoa! Something ain’t right there, Buddy.”

“Yeah, well we had a big fight. You saw that.”

“But we didn’t see what happened out in the street. Musta been a humdinger for her to stay all bent outta shape this long. Shoot! It’s been a week!”

“Which way do I go here?”

“Just keep straight, Mann.”

Nick gunned the engine across Rte. 225 and up the long hill that turned from Valley Road into Mitchell Road. As they left the valley, climbing the hill the scenery became ever more heavily wooded, so heavily wooded in fact, that the tall oak and maple shade trees grew out over the road and blotted out the scorching late afternoon sun. Immediately, as the Bonnie submerged beneath the overhanging shade trees, Dixie felt as if he had dived into a deep, cool pool of dark shaded water and told them so. The thick, heavy shade drenched them in welcome cooling relief from the oppressive, muggy heat.

“Ummm, does that feel sweet or what, fellas?” Paul crowed. “And we got this shade clear up to Three-Oh-One!”

“Hey Paul?” Phil piped from the back seat. “Whyn’t ya put your arms down? It might feel as cool as water, but you make it stink like a sewer!” Paul turned around towards his brother, who sat in the middle of the back seat like a lord.

“I see you got your arms up, Phil!”

“One of the privileges of sittin’ alone in the backseat, so why doncha drop ‘em?”

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“Yeah, Paul. It would go easier on all of us,” added their chauffeur.

Paul lowered his arms, but he stubbornly rested his right arm on the passenger door top and his left on the top of the seatback. Dixie changed the subject.

“Mann! That was something today at that bar. I seen segregation at work in the military like between officers and enlisted marines, but never anything racial. I never thought that kind of stuff still existed. That’s right outta Jim Crow.”

“That’s all right. Let them jigs have their own bar and we’ll have ours. After all, this is still *Southern Maryland*, Nick,” advised Paul.

“Hey, did you see the look on Bax’s face when he realized we walked into the wrong bar? On all our faces!”

“Yeah Nick, them black boys made me feel like I just committed a crime or somethin.”

“What gets me, is that the white bar is right next door and it’s exactly the same as the black bar—no different!”

“Yeah, Nick, except the black place had a picture of a naked, black chick over the bar and the white joint has a picture of a naked, white chick,” Phil yelled from his perch in back. “Same darned picture, just a different color paint for flesh tones! Ha!”

“Hey, Nick, tell us about that—how is that dark meat compared to white?”

“Why ask me, Paul? I don’t know. I did have a Polynesian girlfriend for a while over in the islands, but she was half white so that ain’t exactly dark meat.”

“Did ya make it with her?”

“What business is it of yours, Paul?”

“Well, I like to consider myself a connoisseur of shall we say, the feminine mystique, ya know?”

“Feminine mystique? Ha! I’ve heard that term before, but not like how you’re using it. Well, anyway, you’ll have to sample one for yourself. Everyone has their own personal taste.”

“Hey Paul,” yelled Phil from the back seat, above the rushing road winds. “Ya know Ma don’t like you talkin’ like that.”

“Like what?”

“Like girls are some kind o’ meat. How would you like it if you heard somebody talk about Livvi like that?”

“Well, crapssake Phil, I don’t talk like that around Ma or Livvi. It’s just us guys here, whaddaya want from me anyway?”

“For you to clean it up some, like Mom would want.”

“Well Mom ain’t here baby brother and she can’t always get what she wants, but (Paul breaks into song) ‘if you try sometime, ya just might find ya get what ya need. Oh yeah!’ Ain’t that right Nicky, boy?” Paul jabbed Nick playfully in the arm. Now, tell me Nick. You got what you wanted off that black chick in high school, didn’t ya?”

“Off what black chick?”

“That black chick you were with my senior year—that air force sergeant? Mann, you had everyone shook up about her. Everyone! The P.T.A. got her luscious butt transferred to Hawaii. Yeah Mann, you were really on a downer after that one!”

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“I don’t know Paul. You tell me, cuz I don’t remember.” Nick did not let on to them what Trish, Val and Dave had told him.

“Hey Phil, ya see how he pulls out that amnesia stuff whenever it suits him? That’s a good one. I gotta let somebody conk me on the head, so I can pull that crap!”

“OK!” cried Phil.

Phil reached forward with a ‘froggy’ fist and conked Paul on the back of his thick, curly-haired golden head.

“Now, d’ya lose your memory, Paul?”

Paul turned around and reached over the back of the seat. “Phil-pill! Phil-pill! Phil-pill!” He feinted high and away with his left and then stole Phil quickly in the chin with his right, before he turned around and sat back down again as if nothing had happened. Dixie thought he was watching a scene right out of a “Three Stooges” serial. He hoped he was not the third stooge.

“Hey Paul, fix that shirt back around behind ya, the way ya had it before.” Paul smirked, but fixed the shirt.

The trio came to the top of the big hill, doing a little more than fifty on the single lane, double yellow-lined country road. Still ticked, Paul swung around, reached over the low hump of the universal joint with his foot and stepped on top of Dixie’s, causing Dixie to floor the accelerator.

“Hey, Whaddaya doin’ Paul?”

Dixie took his right hand off the wheel to pry Paul’s leg off his foot. By the time they hit the bottom of their descent, the speedometer hit 80 mph in a 50 mph zone. One of two cars, descending from the opposite side of the hill, crossed the double yellow lines, trying to pass the car ahead of it on the single lane road. Dixie laid on his horn, swerving to the right, but there was little shoulder. The oncoming car just barely slipped back into his lane before the Bonneville passed it. Horns blared from all three cars. Dixie had taken his foot off the gas pedal, but he couldn’t brake for fear of swerving on this steep, hilly section of the rural road. However, seconds later, he had to slam on the brakes, because they had shot up over the rise that was leading across Route 301, one of the East Coast’s two main highways between Maine and Florida. The tires screeched and when the Bonneville fishtailed, Dixie turned in the direction of the skid. He couldn’t stop in time to keep from sliding right across the two southbound lanes of the major north-south artery. Fortunately, there was no oncoming traffic from the north, or it could have been very ugly. They came to rest on the median asphalt between the north and southbound roads.

What a miracle, thought Dixie! Normally, D.C. commuters were flying by here headed home this time of day. Now they were stuck on an abruptly pitched rise on Mitchell Road, which served as the median between 301’s north and south bound lanes. Dixie had stopped on the rise just before his front bumper inched out into the northbound two lanes. He reversed the car a few feet and straightened it out, after a speeding motorist passed by northbound, nearly clipping him. A forested curve loomed in the median a couple hundred yards back down 301 south, making it difficult to see oncoming traffic. Dixie had to wait until they were certain the road was clear and then

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gun the engine to head up over the rise and pull out safely into the northbound flow ahead of any hidden traffic, emerging from around the bend in the road. When he finally headed the convertible safely north on 301, Nick berated his buddy.

“Mann! What the Sam Hill are you tryin’ to do Paul, kill us all? You gotta learn to control yourself, Mann! You need to learn to stop and think. After all, it’s just a little thing to do! Shoooot!”

Paul had recovered enough from the near disaster to defend himself.

“It was my mistake, OK? You’re right. I didn’t think. OK, I’m sorry. But Hey! We made it, none the worse for wear.” He stuck his hand out and turned them over and back as proof. “See, not even a scratch! Come on Nick, you been through worse than this over in Nam or they wouldn’t have given you all them medals and with the Buzzbee boys, too ...”

Dixie started to respond, but Phil leaned forward from the back and beat him to it.

“He don’t remember Paul. Don’t you get that yet?” Paul frowned.

“Damned convenient is all I can say, damned convenient. He goes along fine for everything else and then Bam—‘I can’t recall, Paul.’” Paul intoned the last in a sing-song falsetto. “Well, I hope you can remember about our date tonight at *Mr. Rowdy’s*.”

“What date? You said that it was tomorrow night!”

“No, it’s tonight, Mann!”

“You did say ‘tomorrow night,’ Paul. I heard ya,” offered his brother in back.

“No, it’s tonight. And you can just shut the heck up back there Phil, you ain’t goin’ anyway.” He pursed his lips towards his brother in a prissy fashion.

“Well, so what? I got other plans.”

“Yeah, big plans. Whooooo! Hey, I fixed ya up with Tonya, Nicky – Ahh Nick me boy, just between the two of us, there’s nothing quite like the hot breath of the Cossack. Know what I mean? Take it from me, that one I do know about.”

“Yeah, now just exactly who is this Tonya, again, anyway, and why do I want to go with her when I’m a married man?” asked Dixie. “You’re going to have to explain that one to me very carefully Paul.”

“It’s like I told ya already, Nicky boy,” answered Paul. “She’s Tasha’s sister.”

In the rearview mirror, Dixie could see Phil, who was leaning forward, suddenly turn beat red. “Yeah her OLDER sister,” piped in Phil.

“Hey Phil, you got no say in this, ya know? So keep your trap shut!” Dixie could see Phil, via the rear view mirror, sit back against the seat and roll his eyes.

“And you’re doin’ this as a favor for your ol’ buddy Paul here.” Paul patted his chest with both hands and grinned like a Cheshire cat. “It’s like I told ya. Tonya won’t let Tasha go out with me, unless she comes along as a chaperone, see? Guess, she don’t trust me or somethin’ Can you believe that?” Phil yelled from the back seat.

“Yeah, right on both counts.”

“Dammit Phil! Was I talkin’ to you? PHIL PIL!!!” he reached back over the seat and swiped at his brother’s knee, but Phil was too quick for him this time and moved out of harm’s way.

“All right, all right. So I’m doin’ ya a favor. What’s in it for me?” asked Nick.

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“Hey, sure there is Nick something in you Nick, my boy. Look, you’re doin’ yourself a big favor here, too. See, you use Tonya to make Ryz’n jealous enough so she’ll get mad enough to talk with you. Then you turn on the old Sheeboom charm, plead forgiveness and your sweet little wife will come jump back into your ever lovin’ arms. That’s the plan, right?”

“Well, if Ryz’n’s playing in a band before a crowded nightclub audience, I don’t think she’ll have much time to be getting jealous.”

“Anh, if that’s what you think Mann, then you don’t know chicks like you think you do or did, back when you could still remember!” The brothers laughed together.

“All right, all right. So I pick you up at eight. Then what?”

“Oh mann! You really hurt me Nick. You really do. You can’t remember crap! Seven-thirty, Mann! You pick me up at seven-thirty! Now, it’s like I told ya. We pick up the ladies—those hot Cossack women. Then we drive down to Small Springs for a romantic little Italian dinner at *Gusti’s*. After dinner, we ride the back country roads in this roomy, spacious Bonneville convertible, until around ten. Then we descend upon *Mr. Rowdy’s*, where GRT is playing, for the remainder of the evening. That’s all there is to it. If we happen to get lucky after that, then I guess we’ll have to manage somehow.” He put on a mocking, sad mask face.

“*Mr. Rowdy’s Loft*,” corrected Phil.

“Yeah, ‘Loft’, so big deal. The real *Mr. Rowdy’s* is uptown in Georgetown, Nick. But you didn’t know that because you forgot, right? You only just used to knock ‘em dead up there. That’s all.”

“Get lucky? Whaddaya mean get lucky? I’m a married man!”

“Ya hear that Phil? He’s a married man. Can’t remember anything else, but he can remember that! Well, I’ll tell ya what Nicky boy, if our plan works out you might just get lucky with your wife tonight! How’ bout that? And if ya don’t, well, you might get lucky with Tonya and keep her off balance while I get lucky with Tasha, see, how nicely that works? There’s a kind of poetical symmetry to it all.” Dixie heaved a resigned sigh.

“OK, but there’ll be no foolin’ around in this car, got it? The Widow Van Aiken is letting me use this car for a while, for reasons I don’t quite understand. And I don’t want no, no junk on her seats.”

“Ah, whaddaya worry for, Nick? The seats are vinyl, Mann. They wash right off, easy. No problem.” Phil admonished his gross older brother, lifting his voice to yell over the road noise.

“Hey Paul, why you gotta talk like that, hunh? Ma don’t like it.”

“I was just answerin’ the man’s question, Phil. Sheesh!”

Then Phil leaned forward again and pushed down the center arm rest so he did not have to yell quite so loud.

“Look Nick, the Widow Van Aiken feels guilty cuz she sold ya this very car once before and then she begged ya to give it back to her. You told her, that because she already had a car, she probably wouldn’t use this one and you were right. Then you

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went off to the war and went missin' and she felt bad about Indian-giving. So now, the old lady's trying to make it up to you. That's all."

Paul fired back. "Nick, I thought you were gonna reclaim your old Bonneville from your in-laws? Guess they weren't too happy about that idea, hunh?"

"Well, Bryson took it OK, you know. He was all set to hand over the keys to me. He thanked me for letting him use it all these years. But boy! That Sheena was sure pissed about it."

Paul grinned. "Yeah, I'll just bet she was."

"Yeah, she claimed I was only doing it to get even with Ry for ignoring me. Maybe, in a way, subconsciously, she was right. I dunno. I seen a lot of shrinks in my short time, but I still can't figure myself out. Ha! Anyway, once the widow across the street offered me the use of this car, I said what the heck and told my in-laws to keep the darned thing!"

Dixie braked for the red light at the main intersection in Woldorn, the one where Route 5A peeled off Route 301 to the Southeast. They let out a collective sigh, because the light was a long one. Phil took advantage of the break to lean over the front seat and speak candidly, in a normal tone, to his old buddy.

"You know Nick, you shouldn't get down on Ryz'n for the way she acted the other day. It was only natural under the circumstances."

"Ooh Mann. That girl was some kind o' hot, wasn't she?" offered Paul.

"What kind of a remark is that, Paul? I'm talkin' serious here, trying to make Nick feel better and you come up with something like that."

"Yeah, advice to the lovelorn, from the lovelorn! Brother! If that ain't the blind leading the blind, I don't know what is." Paul shook his head in disgust.

"What would you know about love, Paul? You only got one thing on your mind!"

"Yeah and usually I get it, too!"

"Forget you, Paul!" Tempers cooled as a bit of a breeze kicked up and blew over them.

Paul relented. "Well Phil's got a point, Nick. You're pretty lucky. A lot of guys, including the both of us would love to be in your shoes, where Ryzanna is concerned, that is."

"Don't feel so lucky," mumbled Dixie, sliding his right hand anxiously back and forth over the big, undulating grooves of the aqua steering wheel. Their conversation about his personal woes made him uncomfortable.

"Aw, don't let that little flare up last week bother ya none. That's just a temporary condition, Mann. She just loves ya too much to see ya with anyone else, Nick, no matter how innocent the circumstances are." Phil concurred with his brother,

"Yeah, if she didn't care she wouldn't be human, Nick, 'specially considerin' her history and all."

"What history?"

"Well, she's really a kind-hearted soul, Nick. I oughtta know, I've known her as long as anyone around here." Phil stared soberly at Dixie, who grimaced.

"Yeah? Real kind, hunh? She's sure got a funny way of showin' kindness."

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“Look! Me and Paul were at her first mass up here in the Heights, up to Holy Trinity ten years ago. And I took catechism with her on Tuesday’s after school, and we were confirmed together in eighth grade, too.”

“Sounds like you and Ry have a real spiritual connection, Phil,” smirked Dixie.

“Yeah, I guess so.”

Paul supported his brother. “Yeah, and she rode the bus to Pocomoke with us until she got that old Monza and started driving to school. Phil had homeroom with her all three years and a couple of classes, too,” added Paul.

“That’s right, Nick. So did you. And you get to know a person over time when you see ‘em under a lot of different circumstances. Believe me, the way Ryz’n acted the other day is totally out of character.”

Paul snickered. “Course, ya gotta remember Nick, Phil had a big crush on your wife, still does.”

“Hey, cut it out Paul.”

“It’s true. Little Nick knew it, too, but he didn’t mind any.”

Phil’s blush told Dixie that Paul’s statement rang true. Dixie still smiled kindly at Phil to let him know it was still OK by him. Phil was the kindest, most gentlemanly guy Dixie knew around here. He felt his or anybody’s wife would be safe in Phil’s presence. Besides, Phil had his own true love now.

“Everybody had a crush on her it seems, you included Paul.” Paul made a sour face.

“Mann, this is one long motha of light, ain’t it Nick?”

Dixie glanced up to the red signal hovering over the road and nodded.

“But we caught it clean and green on the way down this morning,” noted Phil happily, trying to be upbeat.

“Guess we’re battin’ five hundred then, so we can’t complain too much,” noted Dixie.

“Aw, ya can always complain.” Paul smirked, but his brother scolded him.

“But it don’t do ya any good, Paul.” Nick interrupted the brothers to stave off a potential fight.

“Hey guys! Let’s get back to Ryz’n. Now, since you two have known her so long—”

“Ten years, to be exact,” interjected Paul.

“OK, ten years. Then you ought to know what makes her tick, right?”

“Oh Mann, don’t ask me that. Who can ever figure out what makes any woman do what she does, ‘specially a good lookin’ woman like Ryz’n.” Dixie considered Paul’s response and truer words were never spoken. He had never been able to figure women out and didn’t figure he ever would.

“Well, obviously in this case, Ry was jealous of Nick and the twins,” observed Phil wryly.

“No! You really think so, Phil? Sheesh!” Paul’s mocking remark hit home.

Again Dixie interrupted the brothers. “But seriously, ever since I got here, she’s been like a walkin’ volcano, liable to erupt on me at any time for no sound reason.”

Phil countered in a solemn, sincere tone. “Well, all I know is that she is the kindest, the most kind-hearted girl I’ve ever known.”

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“Prettiest, too, hunh Phil?”

Paul was pushing one of Phil’s buttons, but the husky guy refused to bite. Phil shrugged his shoulders and pulled his T-shirt on, having cooled down sufficiently to stop sweating.

“Maybe, but I’ve seen her take a lot of crap from a lot of people and never give nothin’ but a smile back in return.”

“That’s true, Nick” added Paul. “I seen her old man ream her at a CYO softball game once, ‘cause she was havin’ trouble blockin’ some wild pitches. The way he yelled at her was scandalous. All she did was nod and say ‘Yessir.’”

“No kiddin’?”

“I kid you not, Dude! Hey, that’s OK cuz you got even for her. When you two first started goin’ together, they had a picnic in their back yard, the Ryans’ back yard that is, just for your two families and you laid her old man out. BANG!”

“I don’t believe it!”

“Well, you better believe it, because it’s true. Mann.”

“Yeah,” added Phil. “That was when her old man refused her to see you anymore and Ry went on a hunger strike and locked herself in her room for four days, ‘til you broke in through the window and took her to the hospital.”

“Maybe, that’s why the old man is so stand-offish. I thought I had B.O. or something.”

“Hey Nick! I remember one time in home room—was our junior year, I think—yeah our junior year, because Ryz’n had just lost a lot of weight. Shoot, you were there, too, Nick, come o think of it.”

“I’ll take your word for that, Phil.”

“Yeah, well her kid sister Sheena comes stompin’ in, all hot and bothered. Seems Ryz’n had worn one of her kid sister’s dresses without Sheena’s OK. So Sheena stands over Ryz’n and just rains all manner of expletives down on the girl. Ryz’n just took it all with a smile, until Mr. Mac, our homeroom teacher, comes in from the band room. He had me escort Sheena the Jungle Cat back to her own homeroom. That Sheena has always been kind of a handful.”

Dixie smirked, but he refused to say anything negative about his sister-in-law.

“Hey Phil, what bout the time old Cal raped Ryz’n in the girls locker room?” This alarming revelation caught Dixie’s attention sharply. Phil noted the light had finally changed and tapped Dixie’s shoulder, so he stepped on the gas. Once again, Phil leaned forward, resting his forearms on top of the seatback.

“What are you talkin’ about, Paul? Cal never raped her. They say he tried but he didn’t rape her, didn’t know what to do. Even Ryz’n said he didn’t rape her.”

“Shoot, well yeah, I guess Cal didn’t know what to do anyway,” opined Paul.

Dixie asked the brothers to tell him about it. Paul took the lead.

“Well, it was after a basketball game, a home game up at Cathcart. Most everyone had left the gym. Ryz’n was a cheerleader. After the game, she went into the girls’ locker room late and alone. Me and Phil were shootin’ baskets in the gym with a loose ball the team had left behind. The stands had mostly emptied. Mr. Zook was

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confiscatin' our ball, when we heard this loud commotion echoing out from the girls locker room—screamin' and lockers getting' knocked around. You know. So Mr. Zook drops the ball and runs inside and me and Phil followed him."

"Yeah Paul, that's right, but Cal never raped her and Ryz'n backed him up on that."

"Well, he got expelled anyway and Ryz'n's old man, who worked out at Landrews, got Cal's old man transferred to some base over in Japan because of it."

"You don't know that for a fact, Paul."

"Well, Phil, I sure as hell know he got transferred and we ain't seen him or Cal since. That's what I know! Yeah, old Cal Newberry—what a doofuss! I had Shop with him and he never said a word!"

"Well, they say it's the quiet ones you gotta watch out for," observed Dixie.

"Yeah, Like Phil here, right Nick?" Paul reached over the seat back and smacked his brother across the forearm.

"Don't start, now Paul, just don't." He turned his attention to Dixie. "Still Nick, Ryz'n wasn't the same after that. She wasn't as outgoing as she had been. Her hair lost its sheen, lost its bounce and she put on weight."

"Yeah, that's right. I remember she got to be near as fat as Nick here when he had that rheumatic fever."

"Who me?"

"Yeah, you! It was the only time me and Phil ever saw you fat. It was on account of you had to stay in bed a lot and couldn't do no physical activities. Your mom stuffed you like a horse, figurin' you got sick in the first place on account of you were so skinny. But as soon as the Doc released ya to recreate again, you shed the weight like that!" Paul snapped his fingers for emphasis. "That's when Nick taught himself to play the guitar, remember that Phil?"

"Yeah, I remember. I also recall Ryz'n's hair got stringy and she broke out in pimples."

"Whoa Nick, listen to him. He's still mopin' about his dream girl. You believe it?"

"Look Nick! They don't come any finer than Ryz'n. She always helped with the CYO dances. And she cooked the Fathers' meals and baked desserts and took them over to the rectory. She always has been fiercely loyal to you, Nicky. She'd jump down the throat of anybody who bad-mouthed ya. She wouldn't do as much to defend herself, but she would for you. She's talented, smart and she's been faithful to you."

"Now, just how the heck would you know that, Phil" questioned Paul. "She's been all over the country tourin'. You been her body guard, twenty-four-seven?"

"Don't have to. I know the kind of character she has."

"Well, let me tell ya Phil, lonely people do some pretty desperate things if they get horny enough. I know."

"Yeah? Well everybody don't think with their genitals the way you do, Paul."

"Well, least I got gen'tals, Phil."

Paul backhanded his younger brother across the forehead. As Phil fell backward he responded with a shot to the back of Paul's curly head. Dixie took his right hand from the wheel and put it between them.

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“Hey, knock it off. You’ll kill us all for sure.”

The two sat back sullenly in their respective places and Dixie sighed in relief.

As they were about to exit Woldorn, Paul pointed out *The Loft* on the opposite side of the highway, their evening’s destination. *Good Rockin’ Tonight* blared in large letters from the roadside billboard. Nick ended the conversation by flicking on the oldies station. They rode on quietly. Dixie was meditating on how close they had come to meeting their Maker back on Mitchell Road, but he wouldn’t admit it. It was easier not to speak of it. A commercial for GRT’s scheduled performance tonight aired over the radio. And Paul nodded knowingly to Dixie. “Tonight,” he mouthed. Dixie frowned. They listened to the music and counted their blessings in silence. Elton John’s “Sugar Bear” played over the radio. Dixie hated that song. Dixie pushed the radio dial buttons and, with the powerful antenna Paul and Phil had installed on the Widow’s convertible years ago for Little Nick, was able pick up DC’s own WOL 1260 AM. They caught “Pick Up the Pieces.” How appropriate! Now that was more like it.

As they passed the Patio Center, Phil pointed out Ramon who was out on the lot, trying to sell some rocks, with Jill and the kids behind him. Nick honked the horn, long and loud. The sunken lot on the opposite side of the dual lane highway disappeared and then reappeared as they passed by gaps in high broken hedges, smothered in honeysuckle vine, which stood in the wide, grassy median between them and the west side of the road. They could see Jill waving.

“Mann, that honeysuckle stills smells good, even though this heat wave has just about killed it off for the summer,” admitted Paul.

“Yeah, smells a heckuva lot better than you Paul,” sneered Phil. Paul raised his arms for effect. Again, Dixie watched Phil roll his eyes and hold his nose.

“You know that Ramon must be a heckuva salesman,” observed Dixie, hoping to divert their attention from another fight and keep the car steady on the road.

“Yeah, he could sell an igloo to an Eskimo. That’s for sure,” concurred Phil.

“Anybody who can sell rocks and sand for a living, and I don’t mean no precious stones either, must be a pretty good salesman,” offered an admiring Dixie.

“That’s a weird arrangement there though, you gotta admit Nick,” noted Paul.

“What? He’s vice-president of the place and E. Z. Ospri has promised to make him a full partner since he introduced the whole pool business to the company. You know that.”

“Naw, that ain’t what I meant. It’s that whole deal with Jill and the kids livin’ there. All the customers think Ramon and Jill are married and those are their kids.”

“Yeah, well, they can think whatever they want. All they gotta do is buy the dang rocks and leave.”

“That Jill is something else. You gotta admit that at least, Nicky,” interjected Phil, yelling over the sixty mile an hour breeze, induced by the open top. “She kind o’ reminds me of that Air Force Sergeant you dated, really put together.”

“Oh!” interjected Paul loudly. “Now he wants to talk about the Air Force Sergeant, since Jill’s involved. Yeah, right! ’Cept Phil, Jill’s got three kids and her belly shows

## *Stop and Think*

it—not like that Air Force Sergeant in that respect. That chick was built like a brick house—some kind o’ phat! Mann, Nicky boy, you sure could pick ‘em.”

“The thing about Jill is she looks pretty goo even with her pot belly,” added Phil.

Dixie smiled briefly and let his mind drift, but he could not recall the Air Force Sergeant, except for what Trish and Val had told him. Yes, Jill was something else thought Dixie. She claimed to be a full-blooded Cherokee Indian, but her frizzy hair, dark skin and freckles across an upturned nose made Dixie wonder. Still, she was a marred jewel, a rough-cut diamond. The woman exuded a raw, earthy, coarse sexuality. Her husband Jock had married her right off the North Carolina Cherokee reservation, at the virginal age of fifteen. Jock had given her three kids, the oldest of whom at age ten was little Frank, who still rarely spoke. Jill kept Frank in line and he took care of his younger siblings. This left her time to “wait on” customers. She knew the prices and products almost as well as Ramon did. Her grammar and diction were poor, but she worked hard to improve and she was outgoing as anything. Her bright smile and personable nature more than overshadowed her lack of a formal education.

“Yeah, she’s got a way about her, all right,” mused Dixie. They stopped up at the red light by Duley’s Bar in TB. “Sure hope Ramon keeps his mind on his work and off his you know what.”

“Ha! Ha!! You got that right,” chuckled Phil, who had lightened up a bit.

“Ramon ain’t stupid,” countered Paul. He knows what he’s doin.’”

“Yeah, Ramon’s not stupid. Actually, I feel kind o’ bad for her though, Jill I mean. I like Jock all right. But he can get in some real bad moods in a hurry. Shoot! Jill’s only a couple years older than us. Think about it. If she was single without kids, she could be goin’ out with us tonight. She’d be a lot of fun too, I bet.”

“Yeah, she’d be a lot of fun. Shoot! You bet she would.” Then, out of the blue, Paul turned to Dixie and changed the subject.

“Hey! You know Nicky, you better watch yourself around Larry. He don’t like you at all, Mann! Remember how he flipped you off today when him and Lou left? Or have you forgotten that, too?”

“Oh? With my excellent recall in tact, I seem to remember that he was flippin’ *you* off, Paul, not me.”

“Yeah, right! You’re jokin’, but I’m tellin’ ya, you better watch out for him.”

“He’s right Nick,” agreed Phil. “Larry thinks you’re a spoiled brat. He don’t have much high regard for Ramon either.”

“Aww, he’s just jealous. Without Lou, Larry’s nothin’ anyway.” Dixie turned up the radio to listen to Ben E. King and the Drifters singing “There Goes My Baby” on the FM oldies station WMOD. Thereafter, they drove home in silence, each to his thoughts, enjoying the sunny, breezy convertible ride and the oldies on WMOD.”

Dixie dumped them in front of their door about six.

“All right Nicky. Pick me up about seven-thirty now. And dress sharp! Got it? None of them baggy, Fifties clothes now, hear? ”

Dixie raised his right thumb up from the steering wheel and nodded.

“OK, Nick see ya then. You’re gonna be in for a real surprise,” Paul reminded him.

## *Out at Home*

“Oh yeah, you’ll be surprised all right,” mocked Phil.

Paul winked and nodded with a smirk to Nick, “You’ll see Buddy.” He patted the top of the passenger side door twice and Dixie took that as his cue to motor. As he pulled away from the curb, Dixie checked the rear view mirror and witnessed Paul smack Phil upside the back of Phil’s head, probably to even up the score from Woldorn, Dixie figured. Dixie could just picture those two when they were kids.

\* \* \*

At home, Dixie’s grandmother, who was visiting from her home in Iowa, scolded him for being late to dinner. Dixie’s Mom was holding their meal for him and Grandma was hungry. Over dinner, each of his relatives asked about their own particular concern for him. His mother asked about Ryz’n. When Dixie said he would be seeing her that night, she seemed relieved. His grandmother told him to treat that girl right because she was a fine girl and deserved right treatment. His dad asked if Dixie had returned Sergeant Major Lattimore’s calls about background information for the military decorations. When Dixie admitted he had not returned the calls, his father chastised him and told him to do that first thing tomorrow. Only Uncle Bill held his tongue, but Dixie felt strongly the paraplegic probably had something on his mind for Dixie as well. If he did, he was considerate enough not to mention it.

Dixie answered each question politely, in turn. He had never had a family, so he wanted to do things right, offending no one. However, after two weeks of such well-meaning concern from his family, his patience had worn thin. He was used to being on his own. Even Donna, who could be quite bossy at times, had seen him only for brief stretches at a time. This new-found, Maryland family of his was just suffocating him.

Since he was eating out later, Dixie merely sat through dinner with them and picked a bit at his plate. After dinner, he showered and shaved quickly, too quickly, for he cut himself under his left jawbone. Uncle Bill asked if Nick thought he would return too late to play some cards that night. Dixie smiled and said that he hoped so. Bill said that he hoped so, too, and grinned. He was the only family member who treated him as a regular person because he did not have any ulterior motives.

Dixie had gone shopping recently, so he dressed in the latest styles. He wore a dark green pair of beltless, flared, double-knit, cotton slacks. His tapered European-styled shirt was a white, clingy, thin, cotton print, featuring a long collar and long sleeves with French cuffs. The repetitive mint green, print pattern consisted of trees and the outline of the Parthenon. The sport coat was a grey-green “Ratner” make, with deep cut lapels and a wide collar, consistent with the style of the day. Both shirt and coat had to be tailored specially to fit Dixie’s tapered, athletic frame. The one problem area was the sleeves. The tailor had focused on the thirty-inch waist and forty-four inch chest, ignoring Dixie’s bulging lower as well as upper arms. Dixie hoped he’d be all right. He was going to dine and dance, not participate in a weight lifting contest. The tight sleeves should hold up.

Mostly, Dixie was concerned about Ryz’n. It had been two weeks since he had returned home and, after the second evening, he could count on one hand the number of hours he had been awake and alone with her. Most of that time had transpired on the

## *Stop and Think*

beach, before little Paulina had found them. Dixie was beginning to doubt the wisdom of Paul's plan, but Dix was getting desperate. He felt Paul's plan would force the issue with Ryz'n. However, if making Ryz'n jealous unintentionally had been unsuccessful and, in fact, had been the cause of their present estrangement, what would this plan do? "Stop and think" is what he had told Paul earlier.

Dixie figured he was going through with this crazy scheme for two reasons. First, he had promised Paul that he would and, secondly, he didn't think Ryz'n could afford to give him the cold shoulder in public. And, if she did, it would not hurt to have a potentially warm shoulder nearby to soften the blow, now would it? Besides, running into Angie Picket and her GTO in peanut land, *had* forced Ryz'n to pick him up again. So maybe Paul was right, maybe the same thing would happen tonight with this Tonya sister person. Then maybe he was thinking too much, too. Time will tell. That, he recalled, was also the title of a GRT hit.

Dixie had attempted several times to get in touch with his lovely but irate wife; however, she was never available. Her mother had told him that Ry had holed up with the band to work on some material for their local tour, which they had planned earlier in the spring for July. She explained that GRT had certain contractual obligations they had to fulfill. Her mother claimed Ryz'n was just taking care of business. Mrs. Ryan had promised to relay his messages and apologized that she was not free to divulge her daughter's whereabouts. Confidentially, Mrs. Ryan had told her son-in-law that while Ryz'n had been a little upset over recent events, Dixie should be patient with her. She assured him that Ryz'n would come around before long. Mrs. Ryan said she knew her daughter. Ryz'n was not typically a jealous person. Only where Nick was concerned did Ry exhibit such erratic, emotional behavior. She told Dixie that Ryz'n needed some time to think things through and get her mind straightened out. However, the matron promised Dixie her daughter would come around and he should not worry.

"Just hang in there, Nicholas," she had advised. "You'll see. Ryzanna has waited too long and cried too many tears to let you get away again."

Her assurances had helped at first, but now it had been a week and Dixie was beginning to wonder. Dixie had lived with his mother-in-law's promise as he went about his business during the last week. Childhood memories had returned to him by the score. Although he had yet to recall his adolescence, Dixie learned from others that his brother had sold pools when Dix was a teen and Dixie along with the Salvarano brothers and the Suggs boys had worked for the school teachers to help install the pools all over Southern Maryland, just as they were doing now. Yet, so far, he did not recall any pool construction memories.

All the while, Dixie had remained in Coach Mullins' doghouse on the bench of the DC Printer's amateur baseball team, not to mention in Ryz'n's heart as well. At home, he slept in the little kid's room and got to know his parents, grandmother and uncle. He even had played flag football with Johnny Allein and Dave Morris. He didn't sit on the bench with them. When it came to winning, that Johnny "So Fine" always went for the jugular every time.

## *Out at Home*

One bright spot was that the Widow Van Aiken had loaned him the use of her 1967 aqua Pontiac Bonneville convertible on a trial basis. Like Phil, Dixie's dad had told him that Mrs. Van Aiken had sold the car to him when he was in high school, but then she had asked to buy it back for sentimental reasons. Her husband, who had died of a heart attack the very day Dixie had contracted rheumatic fever, had adored the Bonnie. The couple was childless and Mr. Van Aiken had treated the convertible (whose top her husband had never lowered) like his baby. The widow had bought the car back to preserve the memory of her late husband. Dixie was told that he had not wanted to sell it back to her, but he did so under pressure from his father. Undaunted, Dixie's father related that his son had enlisted the aid of some friends to help him find and buy another car exactly like it. That Bonneville was the convertible he had totaled the following summer on the Beltway in the accident that nearly cost him and Ryz'n their lives. However, with the royalties starting to pour in that summer of '71, Dixie had bought yet another Bonneville, this one a gold trimmed, navy blue 1963, three-speed, automatic, Hydramatic convertible—the car his in-laws were driving around town now. After Dixie's disappearance in Viet Nam, the Widow Van Aiken suffered pangs of conscience about having forced Dixie to return the Bonnie. Now, to assuage her conscience the widow, who had another car of her own to drive, had leased Dixie her Bonneville for the summer, with an option to buy.

Dixie had settled into a routine of working, watching his Printers' teammates from the pine, and becoming reacquainted with old friends. He was encouraged that his memory had expanded up into his junior high school years. He had even gone to visit the Ryans to explain himself. Rose had listened sympathetically, while her husband Roy had watched television. Nevertheless, reuniting with Ryz'n was the single, uppermost subject on Dixie's mind. He heard GRT had played at a dinner-night club over in Annapolis. And they were going to be playing some clubs in the DC metro area and Southern Maryland. The local papers had complimented GRT highly upon their Annapolis performance. Evidently, the band's "tour" had been well received by the public and critics alike. The music critics had extolled the virtues of GRT's new lead vocalist and guitarist, adding that the Ryan girls were in fine form as well. Dixie was thinking he might catch their act some night and now tonight was that night. So deep in thought was Dixie, as he prepared for his evening out with the Slutskaya sisters and his buddy Paul, that he absent-mindedly cut himself shaving. He hoped the shaving accident was not an ominous portent.

Dix was so anxious about the evening that he arrived at Paul's house fifteen minutes early. When Dixie knocked at the Salvarano's door, Schickelgruber, the family's black cocker spaniel, greeted Dixie rudely, snarling and scratching angrily at the bottom of the screen storm door. Mrs. Salvarano came running and berated the dog.

"Phil," she cried, "Get hold of this animal."

Phil hooked the mutt to a leash, and led the pet over to Mr. Salvarano, who sat on the end of the couch next to the kitchen door. The dog quieted. Mrs. Salvarano opened the front door for Dixie.

## *Stop and Think*

“Don’t know what it is about you, Nicky, but Schickelgruber never did care much for you. The older he gets, the nastier he’s getting with more outsiders.”

“That’s kind o’ funny,” quipped Dixie. “The dog remembers me, but I can’t return the favor.” He chuckled.

“I guess so, but he shouldn’t behave like that. You were never mean to him.”

Livvi, the youngest Salvarano and a classmate of Natasha Slutskaya, Paul’s date for the evening, walked into the living room from the kitchen.

“Hey Nicky, how ya doin’?”

Dixie rose to greet her as she walked across the room and gave him a hug. Livvi was a sweet lookin’, wide faced, blue-eyed blonde Scandinavian type with lovely long, tanned legs, which her summer shorts showed off well. She was the baby of the clan at seventeen. “Boy, you’re lookin’ good tonight Nicky, all spiffed up like that,” said Livvi. Her smile turned to a frown though when she noticed his shaving cut. The young blonde pulled a tissue from her pocket, tore it in half, folded the tissue, dabbed it against her tongue and stuck it on his bloody wound under his jawbone.

“That’s what the boys do, when they have a mess up,” she quipped pleasantly.

Dixie was a little surprised at her forward manner, but he took no offense. He sat back down on the couch. The girl sat down next to him. Dixie figured he was receiving these small attentions because he was supposed to have been some sort of a celebrity. He had received similar treatment from most of the well-meaning people in the Heights. Sitting in his corner chair across the room, the silent Mr. Salvarano sneezed. The dog, lying calmly now, at his master’s feet, sneezed also. The pattern was repeated. Dixie laughed. “Guess it’s contagious,” spoofed Dixie. Phil chuckled, as he returned from settling the dog with Mr. Salvarano.

Mrs. Salvarano acknowledged that her husband had asthma and allergies.

“To dogs?” asked Dixie innocently. Mrs. Salvarano spoke for her husband as if he weren’t there.

“Oh no—to moulds, pollen and ragweed. The heavy humidity in this area doesn’t help, either.”

“Oh? I see. Ever consider moving to, say, the Southwest where the air is clear and dry?”

“Yes, we’ve thought of it. We want to see Livvi finish high school here, first.”

“Ah, I see.”

Mr. Salvarano went into a sneezing fit. The dog imitated his master again. When they stopped sneezing, Dixie suggested the dog was allergic, also.

“THAT’S A FACT JACK!” deadpanned Mr. Salvarano unexpectedly in the driest of high-pitched, nasal tones. It was the first time the head of the family had spoken. The totally unexpected remark, no less the dry manner in which he had delivered it, struck Dixie odd, so he laughed in spite of himself.

Phil turned on the television to watch Hollywood Squares. They watched for a few minutes in silence, before Mrs. Salvarano spoke.

## *Out at Home*

“Nicky, it’s good to have you home son. I never, ever thought I’d see you sitting in our living room again, like this.” She pulled a tissue out of her pocket, dabbing it at her eyes. Her husband repeated his previous remark in the same dry tone.

THAT’S A FACT, JACK!

Livvi looked at Dixie rather sorrowfully, nodding in agreement.

“Well, I’m happy to be here ma’am. Still, it certainly is strange, to come back to this part of the country where everyone knows me, yet I know no one. It’s, well, it’s just weird.”

“Don’t that take the hair off a frog?” Mr. Salvarano had blurted out again, like a parrot, in his inimitable, high-pitched nasal twang.

“Yes sir, it most certainly does. Look, umm, if you’ll excuse me, I’m gonna step outside and smoke up. I’m sure the smoke wouldn’t do Mr. Salvarano any good, not to mention Schickelgruber there.”

Dixie rose abruptly, smiled politely and stepped out the front door. The air had been getting a little thick inside for him, a little too maudlin. Thank God for Mr. Salvarano’s sense of humor. Dixie strolled over towards the setting sun, under the huge, thirty-year old maple tree that shaded the western side of the house and yard. He struck up a Lucky and inhaled deeply, as he relaxed and leaned his shoulder against the broad tree trunk. Dixie gazed down the street in the direction of his parents’ home. The Lucky was just what he needed. He could not smoke at home or he would catch an earful of well-meaning abuse. He thought about the Salvarano’s. They were a fine Christian family, meek and humble, real salt of the earth types, except for Paul. Humility was not his strong suit. He was the lightning rod, a real character. Dixie smiled quietly at the thought of the lean, animated, curly blonde.

He could recall the summer of 1963 when Paul had died his hair with green food coloring to impress a girl. When his ruse failed, Paul felt like a jerk and tried but was unable to rid himself of the green evidence of his love lust. So he had his mother shave his head with a buzz cut. And Paul had set a new, old trend in hairstyles, as others at their school copied his cut, during the mop head craze set by the Beatles. Dixie could remember, as a kid, the tiffs among the Salvarano family members. It was always Paul and someone: Paul and his older sister Nann (who, Dixie learned, had since moved to Minnesota where she had gone to school, married and started a family); Paul and Phil; Paul and his mother. However, Dixie had never heard Paul argue with Livvi or his Dad. Though no matter what or how severe the argument, the Salvaranos never had taken it out on Dixie. The family had always treated him like a prince. Although both his Dad and Mr. Salvarano worked for the federal government in D.C. and now lived in the same neighborhood, Dixie had the distinct impression the Salvaranos were of more modest means than his family, but they were a fine family nonetheless. Dixie liked them. He imagined that he always had.

His older memories were flooding back with increased frequency and duration. He recalled all the stories they had told about him a few weeks ago under this very tree. He chuckled at the recollections. Yes, now he knew what had happened with Mrs. Ready that night she had saved him from the savage jaws of Topsy, but Dixie still

## *Stop and Think*

wasn't telling. He remembered stuff up through his second year at Studdard Junior High when he had rheumatic fever, but that was it. Of course, there probably were gaps in his recollections. How could he know what he did not know? One thing, one person, he yet did not know, was his lovely wife. If there was anyone he longed to remember, it was she. His progressive recollections thus far inspired his hope for recalling all his lost memories. Dixie finished his cigarette, flicked the butt out into the street and fired up another.

From the corner of his eye, he saw Livvi come to the front screen door and start to open it. Over the soft summer evening air, Dixie heard her mom mildly rebuke her youngest from yet deeper inside the house. Dixie looked away and acted as though he heard nothing.

"Leave him alone, Livvi. If he had wanted company, he would have asked for it. Men need their space some times. You need to understand that."

"Gee Mom. I feel so bad for him. He's such a sweet guy and such a cutie, too, I don't know what's goin' on with that Ryz'n, but if she's not careful, she's gonna lose him."

"He's only been home two weeks, Honey. They'll work it out, don't worry. They have been through more in five years than most couples go through in twenty-five. Now, go check on your brother. See if he turned into a stone in front of that mirror." There was a pause and Dixie heard.

"Phil, why don't you throw your suit on and go along with them?"

"I told ya Ma, I'm going up to Roy's. Deenie's on her break in fifteen minutes."

Dixie was halfway through his second cigarette when Paul strode out of the house grinning like a Cheshire cat, ready to party. Paul wore a pale blue, cotton, double knit, leisure suit with flared pants, a broad, white leather belt and a pink cotton dress shirt with a wide pointed collar, which he wore over the collar of the leisure coat. He had opened the top two buttons on his shirt, revealing a small gold link chain necklace strung snugly around the base of his throat.

"Hey Nicky, how do I look, boy?"

"Like a dang used car salesman!"

"Ha! Hey come here, let me fix that collar for you."

Paul fixed Nick's wide shirt collar like his, to fold over the collar of his sport coat. "Now you're ready, Mann. Do the 'Hustle!'" Paul hummed the tune to the current number one song sensation, as he mimicked the dance steps that had become a craze across the nation. The Salvarano family, less Shickelgruber, had come out on the porch to watch as Paul "hustled," sidling over the front lawn to the sidewalk. They laughed and joked at Paul's expense, but he paid them no mind.

"Whaddaya think, Champ? Not bad, hunh?"

"So that's what they mean by 'do the Hustle'? Guess I'm outta tune with the times or outta time with the tunes."

"What? You mean you never done this dance? You! The Prince of Rock'N'Roll, you never done the Hustle?"

"No, guess not, at least not that kind of hustle, anyway."

## *Out at Home*

Livvi came skipping down the sidewalk, offering her hand to Dixie.

“Here Nicky, take my hand. I’ll show you how to do it?” Dixie lowered his chin, tilted his head and rolled the eyes to the top of his head, as he looked at Paul, who replied,

“The dance boy, do the dance. Go ahead.” Livvi showed Nick the basic step, instructing him to follow her, which he did.

“It’s all in the hips Nicky; just loosen up a bit.”

Once he got the hang of the basic step, she put his right arm around her waist and placed her right hand in his left, holding his hand even with her head. They danced as Paul whistled the tune. Livvi got a little fancy leading Dixie into some spins, but Dix took to it easily. He was a natural dancer. He just never danced much. You dance when you’re happy and he had not known much happiness in his two-year existence. Dixie thanked Livvi for the lesson. Then he and Paul jumped in the Bonneville and split. Phil followed in the Bug on his way to visit Deenie, who was working the late shift at Roy’s.