

Duley's was an old country roadhouse built, probably, sometime not long after the repeal of Prohibition. Replete with a high wooden bar, upholstered in red plastic, the joint was the place to be in rural Badenton. The opposite end of the short side of the wooden L-shaped bar also doubled as a service area for the drive-thru window. Duley's sold food as well as liquor, cigarettes and entertainment of your own choosing. Booths lined the walls around the rest of the establishment and there were a couple of individual tables with dark brown Formica tops and wooden chairs. The joint's floor was a dirty, dingy, lusterless, light green linoleum.

A couple of pool tables and a pinball machine served to entertain customers and consumed much of the floor space. The bathrooms were the kind where the odor from the small, white, Lysol cakes in the urinals hits you right away when you step inside the door. The usual graffiti lined the rest room walls and stalls. Toilet paper was scarce. The bathrooms had those rolling, white cloth, hand towel devices, where you rolled the hand towel down to locate a clean spot. However, here, the thing was busted, so the dingy, white towel remained rolled out and mostly grimy. Two different vending machines advertised cheap condoms, the kind with all the gnarls and rifts, guaranteed to "pleasure her all night long." *Yeah, guaranteed to knock her up, you mean.*

Back at the bar, Dixie ordered a cheeseburger and then waltzed over to shoot a game of rotation while he waited for his order. The bartender recognized him as Ramon's brother. Another guy, a customer, recalled Dixie as the legendary vanquisher of the notorious Buzzbee Boys, who had scourged Southern Maryland some five years back. Though Dix had learned about the Buzzbee incident, he had no recollection of it. Still the warm welcome temporarily helped Dixie overcome his blues. He finished his lunch and left Duley's amid the dozen or so well-wishers who were frequenting the tavern. Dixie headed half a mile down the famous Route 301 to the Patio and Pool Center. "Polk Salad Annie" was playing on the car radio. That old tune warmed his spirit.

"Mann, that's one tough song." *Wish I had written that one!*

When he pulled into the Center, his brother was busy inside the office with some customers, so Dixie parked up under the elm trees next to the rest room to wash Matt Yikes' blood off the back of the Bonneville. But he let the song finish before he turned off the engine and went to work. He did the best job he could with paper towels, Windex and Tidy bowl toilet cleaner which he had liberated from the rest room. Dixie was pleased to notice that the widow's car was hardly damaged by last night's little run-in with the Dodge. There was a dented scrape on the right front bumper, which had been knocked a little cockeyed, and an easily removable dent in the trunk lid made by Yikes' body. That was it—no further harm. Pontiac had built that car like a tank! At least in that respect, he had been lucky.

I'll have to square it with the widow, but I hope she understands it's a small matter compared to what might have occurred.

Ramon knocked on the side office window and raised the sash a bit, to tell Dixie to restack the pallets, emptying as many as possible before the storm hit. He yelled that

Out at Home

Jock was coming in with a big truckload that afternoon to restock the inventory for the holiday weekend.

Dixie followed instructions. Soon, little Frank Henson joined him. Another admirer of Little Nick, Frank, although a half breed, looked like a full-blooded Cherokee with his dark copper skin, dark features and big brown eyes and long lashes. The boy's eyelids hovered about half mast over his pupils, making him look as if he were perpetually only half awake. Frank's hair was thick, long and unruly and he had a girl's lips, thick, red and fat. Dixie could identify with the kid there. Frank's black eyelashes, like Dixie's, were unusually long. His quiet manner, for he rarely spoke, reminded Dixie of himself before he had arrived on the east coast. Frank could not lift the heavy concrete patio blocks and Lincoln logs, though he tried gamely to emulate Dixie. Dix had the kid work with the lighter concrete lawn edging and the smaller pieces of slate. The kid worked hard. He wanted to please. Dixie envied him his eager innocence.

They were just about finished when Bax's predicted thunderstorm, which had been threatening to strike for a couple hours, finally arrived. The barometer dropped precipitously. Big, fat, cold raindrops and a few bits of hail preceded the actual downpour of waterworks. The wind gusted from ten up to twenty-five miles per hour. Dixie stopped work and faced into the wind with his hands stretched out from his sides. *Mann, this is like a sweet breath from heaven.* He found it darn near erotic and thought of Ryz'n. Out of the corner of his eye, Dixie caught little Frank emulating his stance, prompting Dixie to chuckle involuntarily.

Hope the kid doesn't find it erotic, too.

Dixie tapped Frank on the top of his head and they jogged to Dixie's convertible. The boys jumped in and Dixie backed the car in a semi circle, placing the rear of the car into the wind. Then, with little Frank's help, Dix raised and closed the top. The trunk would receive the full effect of the storm and a hard rain should wash off the bloodstains from the rag top that he had been unable to remove. He sprinkled Tidy Bowl cleaner, which he had usurped from the rest room, over the stains for a little extra assistance.

The fury of the storm increased, replete with thunder and lightning, but the regular drops had yet to strike them. The wind blew hard now. Dixie and Frank ran to cover under the overhang of the office's gabled front roof. The roof extended a few feet from the office over two rows of 18" x 18" patio blocks that served as a kind of poor man's porch. A refrigerated, dark red, soda pop machine and a three-piece, three-foot long, concrete-cast bench were the main porch attractions. The bench sat beneath the window, between the office door and the large pop machine.

From across the dirt and gravel drive, Frank's mother called for him to come inside their tan house. She leaned out the open, southeast bedroom window of her rectangular sandstone home, which was about twenty yards away. Aside from the patios and pools and the small pond fountain Nick and Ramon had built, the office, the sandstone house and the wooden barn or shed were the only structures on this long, oddly shaped, triangular lot. The place wedged in between the main highway out front and a highway access road behind. Frank refused his mom, shaking his head and wagging those long

Brotherly Heart to Heart

dark locks about his face. Dixie felt he looked more like a Cherokee than did his full-blooded mother.

“Frank James Henson! If you don’t get yoah butt in here quick, I’m gonna wail yoah hide, boy!” Frank refused to budge. Like Dixie, the kid knew his mother would not venture out in the lightning. She had a healthy fear of the stuff.

“Hey Frank,” suggested Dixie. How about a cold drink for you and one for your sisters, too? Grape. Ain’t that your preference?”

The boy nodded. Dixie pumped forty cents into the Coke machine twice to retrieve two grape sodas. He uncapped one using the machine’s bottle opener. Then Dixie inserted another two quarters and punched up a Coke. He gave the uncapped grape to Frank as his own. While Little Frank gulped on his grape soda, Dixie showed the boy how to carry the three bottles by holding two, one in each hand and caressing the third against his chest. Then he handed Little Frank the other two capped bottles for his sisters and his mother. Frank’s mom Jill had stopped yelling for a minute to watch what Dixie did. Dixie knelt down before Frank and looked the boy in the eye.

“OK, Buddy. Now take those other two soda pops to your Mama and sisters, OK?”

Frank’s face revealed that he understood Dixie had duped him. However, Dixie smiled appealingly to win the boy over. It worked. Cradling the pop bottles against his chest, the kid took off like a jackrabbit, when the storm was just about ready to cut loose in sheets. “And dodge those raindrops,” Dixie yelled after him. Frank started zigzagging down the dirt and gravel, oblong driveway as he headed for the front door at the opposite end of the house. Dixie laughed. Jill watched her boy run past her window and glanced back to Dixie. Dixie yelled to her.

“OK, now Mom. He’s coming and he’s bringing you a present, so take it easy on the boy. OK?”

She waved, smiling, and turned back inside the house. By the time, Dixie had bought himself a root beer and popped off the cap, he was out of change. Jill and Frank and his two sisters had their noses pressed up against that same bedroom window screen Jill had occupied alone previously. Now all four were sucking on their cold drinks.

Returning to the bedroom window, Jill cried, “Thanks, Nick.” She raised her Coke bottle to him. In return, he raised his bottle and toasted her.

“Here’s to the working mother,” he shouted over the storm. They drank together.”

“Hey! Nicholas!” The screen door slammed open. Dixie turned towards the noise.

Ramon was sticking his head through the opened front doorway. The wind’s fury blew the screen door wide open, back against the outer office wall. “Sheesh,” cried Ramon, as he jumped to grab the screen door handle. He struggled to pull the defiant door against the wind. His hair and his loose-fitting, Hawaiian shirt flapped comically in the breeze. Ramon stepped back from under the gabled roof across the threshold, pulling the door around with him. He held it open for Dixie. Dixie knew Ramon’s customers had left before the storm had hit, because he had seen them drive off. Alone in the office, Ramon beckoned to Dixie, who turned to him.

“Hey, come in out of the rain, Mann. Wanna talk with you for a minute.”

Out at Home

He propped the front screen door open for Dixie. Ramon possessed an open, friendly manner, thought Dixie. No wonder, he was a first-rate salesman. He had the gift.

"Come on in. Step into my office."

Dixie's blond, blue-eyed half brother grinned that irresistible gap-toothed grin of his, as he looked out from under his girlish, densely up-curled, blond, eye lashes. Ramon was wearing a festive, blue and green, Hawaiian floral print shirt. Dixie followed him back through the outer retail area, back into his inner sanctum, to his office, which was the second and smaller of the two rooms in the wooden frame structure. The room was no more than about ten feet square.

"You bribin' little Frank with a Coke?" he asked jokingly.

"No. A grape," retorted Dixie.

"Oh! Yeah, well times haven't changed much," conceded Ramon. "That's what you used to do, when ... well, what Little Nick used to do, anyway."

Dixie eyed his half brother up and down because the guy always struck him as odd. His Aryan features contrasted oddly with the Sheeboom's swarthy, dark-haired, dark-eyed genes, making his half brother look out of place. Perhaps more shocking, was Ramon's affable, laid-back nature in a family, known for its preponderance of A-type personalities. Certainly, Ramon was an anomaly in the Sheeboom clan; however, he never let his unique nature bother him. He always made himself right at home, but then Dixie had observed he seemed to do that wherever he went. The guy had gained Dixie's grudging admiration. Nothing seemed to bother him.

"Hey Ramon, I gotta question for you."

"Shoot!"

"How come the Suggs call you 'Tommy' and Mom calls you Tommy, and Dad and everyone else calls you 'Ramon?'"

"Well, my grandparents took to callin' me Tommy after a colored fella, I knew as a kid. They said I used to follow him around. I dunno. And since I lived with my grandparents until you came along, the name stuck. I dropped it when I went into the Air Force. Here, have a seat. Didn't I explain all this before, up at my grandparent's place that day?" He pulled one of the room's two visitor chairs from out of the corner towards the front of his desk.

Ramon's office had fake, wooden paneling along the walls, a dirty grey carpet, pocked with cigarette burns and a greying, acoustical ceiling. Dix figured at one time, the ceiling might have been white. Two identical, small sash windows faced one another on opposite walls, allowing views both north and south. The two metal visitor chairs and his metal desk looked like government surplus from twenty years ago. The chair cushions were green plastic. The furniture appeared to be ex-government issue, circa 1960. Ramon had a phone, some papers, telephone books and an ashtray on his desk. A five-foot grey, metal filing cabinet stood near him, next to the north window, tucked in the corner. One of the drawers lay open, part way. Some odds and ends cluttered the floor in the other corner behind his desk. The back wall was bare.

"Sit down, Nicholas. Rest yourself. Looks like you've been working hard today." Dixie offered his brother a sip of the root beer.

Brotherly Heart to Heart

“Nah. I’m good,” replied Ramon.

Dixie sat in the guest chair while Ramon sat behind his desk opposite Dix. The storm raged outside against the northwest wall of the place. Protected from the driving storm, the southeastern window remained wide open.

“Talk to me buddy. How’s it hanging?” Ramon bellowed.

Dixie glanced down at his lap and felt the lonely bull. He nodded seriously.

“Still there, Mann,” he deadpanned. His brother laughed heartily.

“Guess there’s something to be said for that.” Dixie’s eyes got wide.

“Darn right. There’s a lot to be said for that!” Again, his brother chuckled.

“Yeah, I forget you had a bit of a close call there.”

“That’s one way of puttin’ it, I guess. So what’s on your mind, TOMMY? You got some new special, crap job for me? Want me to take a pay cut or something?”

“No. Now whatever gave you that idea—How much of a cut?” He asked in mock sincerity, and then his laugh bubbled out of him as in multiple burps, which he tried but failed to suppress.

“And you’re cute, too.”

“Yeah, I’m real abstract.”

That was the first time anyone had quoted James Dean back to Dixie. Dix was favorably impressed.

“What’s the matter Nicholas? You look surprised. James Dean was in my time, Mann.”

“He’s for all time. Cool is cool.”

“Yeah, I suppose so, except I hear he was a big asshole in real life.”

“Yeah, well, I only know what I see up on the silver screen.”

“Yeah.”

“Yeah. Hey, you sure you got time for this, Ramon? Don’t you have to work on them papers or something important?” Dixie waved the back of his hand towards the desk top, filled with invoices and checks.

“Nothing more important than you, Nicholas. Nothin’ more important than you.”

Ray’s half smile and his sincerity touched Dix. The guy had a way about him and he seemed to understand Dixie’s dilemma. Lately, nobody else had really seemed to want to know how he felt. Sure, they all wanted to tell him how great it was to see him or what they wanted him to do for them, Ramon included, but they didn’t seem to care about what *he* wanted. Dixie settled back into the visitor’s chair, a little more relaxed and slurped on his root beer, waiting for his brother to speak.

“Say, when was the last time you shaved, Nicholas?”

“*That’s* what you wanna to talk to me about? My shaving habits?”

“Nah, it just looks like it’s been a couple o’ days, so I just thought I’d ask. You know, with the long hair and Wild West moustache, ya got goin’ there, you’re beginnin’ to look like one of them wild, biker guys.”

“Like Hell’s Angels, ya mean?” Dixie arched his brows in a suspicious manner.

Ramon shook his head yes. “Well, it was just an observation. That’s all. Let’s skip it.”

Out at Home

“All right, let’s do.”

“Look Nicholas, I, uh, saw your name in the paper today, our name, I should say.”

“Oh? What paper, what for?”

“*R.G. Chronicle*. You were listed in the box score as a pinch runner in the ninth.” He tapped part of a newspaper resting off to the side, on top of his desk. “It looked like you scored a run, looked like the tying run, if I read it right, and y’all won it in the bottom of the ninth too—against the Mercs! Not bad!”

“Yeah, big deal.”

“Still not gettin’ any playin’ time, hunh?”

“You just saw it, pinch-ran in the ninth.” Dixie sucked on his root beer. “That’s what you wanted to talk about, my lack of playing time? Gonna put in a good word for me with the coach, are ya?” Dixie cracked a sarcastic smile then he straightened upright.

“Say, you said they, the box score had our name, Sheeboom? That’s funny. That jerkwater manager promised Dad he’d used Strickler, you know until I got myself ‘straightened out’? Those are Dad’s words, not mine.”

Ramón widened his eyes. “Well, maybe the manager thinks you are straightened out now? Or maybe he considers your honeymoon with the club to be over.”

“Ha! You got that right!”

“Well, who reads the box score anyway?”

“You did.”

“Yeah, but you might say I have a vested interest.”

“Yeah, what’s that?”

“You!”

“Me? Ha! Right, more like my strong backside, is all.”

Ramon was patient. He did not respond to Dixie’s back-handed slap in the face. He seemed to want his brother to open up to him. He let Dixie’s snide remark pass. The storm pattered in gusts against the northwest window.

“Look Nicholas, I know things have been rough on ya since you got back. You know a lot of vets have similar problems, trying to readjust to civilian life.”

“Yeah, that’s cuz their memories of the war are so bad, it causes them to foul up. But since I got no war memories, I got no excuse, I guess.”

“No, that’s not what I mean.”

“Well, what do ya mean then?”

Ramon leaned forward in his chair, over the desk.

“What was that red stuff you were washin’ off Mrs. Van Aiken’s car out there?”

Dixie became nervous. Could his brother know that the cops might be looking for him? He thought Ramon had been too busy with his customers to notice. Dix leaned forward and set what was left of the root beer on Ramon’s desk to fumble for his new pack of cigarettes, the pack he just purchased at Duley’s.

“I dunno, what?” Dixie mumbled, as he broke out a nail and struck a match to light up his Lucky. He tossed the match in the ashtray and inhaled deeply on the cigarette. Suddenly, a sense of relief flooded over him. He took another long draw, exhaling

Brotherly Heart to Heart

slowly. Umm, he felt better. The Lucky was hitting that spot. Ramon observed him keenly.

“You need *that* to talk to *me*?” asked his brother with concern.

Dixie held his hand away from him to study the cigarette between his fingers.

“Hmmm. Never thought about it quite like that. Usually, I don’t smoke much—a pack every other week or so; sometimes just a pack every three weeks.”

“That’s all, hunh?”

“Well, usually, I’ll smoke a nail at night before a go to bed, sometimes two if I can’t sleep. I will smoke more if I go to a club or casino, but that’s just for socializing.”

“You sound just like me or how I used to sound, anyway, when I got started.” He shook his head negatively.

“But you don’t smoke.”

“Not now. I quit six months ago, but it ain’t easy.”

“Oh, sorry. Here I’ll just put this out.”

“No, exhale out the window over there and only smoke the one, if you don’t mind?”

Dixie inhaled deeply once more and extinguished the cigarette in a brass tray on Ramon’s desk. Dixie walked back over to exhale out the opened south window through the screen and watched the driving rain knock down his exhaust smoke. The storm, which came from the west, did not require Dixie to close the window. Then he turned back to Ramon and rested his rear end on the low windowsill, with his back to the open window. He crossed his right foot over his left.

“All gone.”

He grinned, as he held up his outstretched hands, palms up, flipping them around as would a bare-knuckled fighter before a fight. Outside, the storm’s fury mounted and seemed to shift in direction. The overhead office light flickered. They both glanced up at it.

“All right now, tell me about the blood stains and that dent on the bumper.”

His brother, the rock salesman leaned back in his chair, studying his brother intently. Dixie hoped he had changed the subject with the cigarette deal. He was wrong.

“How’d ya know they were blood stains? You didn’t micro inspect the car, did ya?”

“Well, they were, weren’t they? Sure looked like blood stains.” His sober expression gave no hint that he knew anything about the matter.

“Well, yeah, they were.”

“Well?”

“Well ...” Dixie took another deep breath and folded his arms across his chest.

“Well, well it was kind of, uh, strange thing, ya know? I mean really surreal. I just said that I didn’t have any memories of Nam, but I guess I lied. Because last night, I had one and I hope it’s the last, cuz it was a real doozy.” Ramon settled back into his chair again to absorb what Dixie had to say.

Dixie stepped forward to pick up his half empty bottle of root beer and took a swig. Then he retraced his steps to look out the window. Ramon waited.

Staring out the window now with his back to his brother, Dixie spoke slowly, but, at least, he was not stuttering.

Out at Home

“Last night, see? I got into it with this guy, who lives up next to Ry’s folks? Well, I accidentally hit his parked car, smashing his left tail light and rear fender. I knocked off his rear bumper, too.” Dixie swung his upper torso quickly back to face his brother. “But the bumper was already messed up, kind o’ like this, before I hit it though.” Dixie held his right forearm horizontal to the ground. “Kind o’ cockeyed.” Then he lowered his hand to indicate how the bumper listed down to the left. He looked over his shoulder at his brother. Ramon nodded. Dixie turned back to look out the window as sheets of rain pummeled the lot. Huge puddles had formed everywhere. They could hear the rain pounding hard on the roof, too.

“Well, I jumped out of the car, while he picked up the bumper and came at me, pointing it toward me like a sword or something. Suddenly, my mind like snapped, Mann.” Dix snapped his fingers sharply for emphasis. “All of a sudden, I was like back in the jungle, ya know—at night?” Dixie again turned half way around to his brother to catch his nod. Then he turned back to the window, watching the rain pour down. He spoke away from his brother now, but he could see Ramon’s visage reflected in the window pane, so he knew Ramon could see him, as well. “All I saw was Charlie coming at me with a bayonet. I had no weapon, so I attacked him with my hands.” Dixie made the motions with his hands as if he were reliving the experience. “I parried his thrust, clobbered him a few times and was about to shove his nose up his brain, when my mind snapped again. I saw the face of a round eye in front of me.”

“A round eye?” Ramon asked, confused.

Dixie turned back around to face his brother and this time he rested his butt on the window sill again. He brushed his cheek with the back of his knuckles.

“Sure, you know a white girl, not a slant eye, not a gook.” Ramon nodded.

“Anyway, I was about to clobber her, too, when I recognized her as a former classmate called Lena, who is this guy’s wife and I smelled those acrid boxwoods. She was sitting over top of him on the trunk to protect him.”

“Boxwoods?”

“Yeah, the hedge in their yard. Nam don’t smell like that, that kind of musty.” Dixie took a deep breath. He bounced his head up and down. “Freaky. Darned freaky! If she hadn’t done what she did when she did it, I’d have killed the gook sure as shootin.”

Shaken by the recollection of the incident, Dixie turned around to face out the window again.

“There were a bunch of neighbors out there who saw the whole thing, too. And the guy was spittin’ up black blood, right in front of all of ‘em. It was nasty ugly. Ya know?”

“Yeah, sounds like it. Sounds like you busted him up pretty bad.”

“Yeah. I might o’ broke a couple o’ ribs. I dunno. I know I broke his nose, cuz I felt it crunch under my fist. They took him to the hospital.”

“Well, I guess so! Dang, Nicholas! This is *serious*. He might press charges against you and, from what you said it sounds like there are a lot of witnesses on his side, too.”

“Well, his wife Lena has a soft spot for me. I guess we were good friends in high school, or so she says. And I spent some time with her after I came home and, well, she

Brotherly Heart to Heart

still likes me a lot, ya know? It's like one of them things, ya know? So I'm hopin' she can convince her husband to let me slide."

"A soft spot? Sheesh! You gotta be kiddin' me! She may have a thing for you, but you better hope her old man's gotta soft spot in his head. Cuz if he don't, he'll probably have the law after you. Even if the guy comes out of it OK, fixing the whole mess will be a darned expensive proposition."

"Yeah, I know, I know. It's been buggin' me all day. I can't think o' nothin' else. I been hearing police sirens in my head wherever I go."

"Well, you should. You know hospitals ask questions about how is it people come into them all beat up. It's the law. And when they get answers that describe a crime and a criminal, they usually turn those answers over to the police.

"I know. Crap!" Dixie punched his right fist into his left palm in frustration.

"Whadda *you* think I should do?"

"Well, you could turn yourself in or—"

"Turn myself in?!? Whaddaya mean turn myself into the police when I don't even know if a complaint has been lodged against me? What the heck kind of advice is that? Turn myself in ...?" Dixie shook his head in disbelief.

"OR! You didn't let me finish Nicholas. I was sayin' ... OR you might want to get hold of that defense attorney who got you out of that Buzzbee jam about five years ago.

"Yeah? Who's that?"

"Guy's name is Vamia, V-A-M-I-A. I forget his first name. But he works in that professional building down Indian Stone Highway between Oxon Mill and Ft. Washington. Criminal law is his specialty. You can't miss it. It's the only ten-story building down there, stands out like a sore thumb."

"OK. Now *that's* what I'm talkin' about! That's some advice I can use."

"Yeah? Well, I'm glad to hear it, cuz you're gonna need it, after they get through chargin' you, Mann!"

"Yeah, I know, I know. Assault and battery is bad news!" Dixie acknowledged.

Ramon chuckled involuntarily. Dixie blinked and a disingenuous Ramon asked.

"Assault and battery, that's it? Yeah, riiiiight!" He shook his head in disbelief at his brother's naiveté.

"Yeah, right. I mean what else could there be?"

Again, Ramon coughed up a couple of laughs.

"Well, let's see." He began to count on his fingers. "Assault and battery is one or is that two? Anyway, disturbing the peace is two. Committing mayhem is three. Maiming or intent to main—we'll have to see how bad the guy is hurt for that one, but that's four and how 'bout attempted murder? That could very possibly be five, you think?" Ramon smirked and held up his right hand so that his fingers and thumb were spread apart, easy to count.

"Aw that's bullspit, Mann. Attempted murder??? Come on!"

"Well, you said yourself you would have killed the guy if his wife hadn't stepped in, didn't you?"

Out at Home

No, I said, the *gook*—I would've killed the *gook*—not the guy. There's a difference. See, I didn't know it was Lena's husband at the time. I told ya I was back in Nam."

"Oh, excuse me. That's a very fine distinction, one which a jury might have trouble distinguishing."

"A JURY!? Mann, you already got me in front of a jury for attempted murder. Crap Ramon! How much more bullshit you can pile onto all this?"

"All right, since you asked. How 'bout reckless driving or leaving the scene of an accident?"

"Aha! I got ya there." Dixie slammed his right fist into his left palm again for emphasis. "I didn't leave the scene of the accident. I stayed right there. They left, not me. It was the other way around." Dixie nodded forcefully.

Ramon leaned forward over the desk and looked Dixie straight in the eye.

"Well, you think maybe they'll overlook that since you beat the guy to such a pulp he had to go to the hospital?"

Dixie slumped and dropped his head.

"Don't worry Nicholas. Vamia's good. He's real good. He's made a name for himself as being one of the top criminal lawyers in the state. Do yourself a favor and go see him. Shoot! We can call him right now." Ramon picked up the Yellow Pages from his desk, but Dixie motioned negatively with his hand to stop him.

"I need to ... to turn this over in my mind for a while first."

"Before the cops pick you up, I hope."

Dixie looked up at his brother using his poker face.

"You mean ... uh, before I go turn myself in to the police first?"

Ramon picked up the pen and dramatically dropped it onto the desk top, threw up his hand and slouched back into his chair with his arms folded over his chest. Then Dixie grinned widely.

"Well, I'm glad you still have a sense of humor about all this, Nicholas."

"Who's laughing?"

"Yeah, well, Vamia's real good, but he can be expensive. In fact, this whole mess could get real pricey, but you got plenty o' dough. That ain't a problem—*for you!*"

"Well, I thought of that. I plan on givin' Lena some cash to cover the damages, hospital bill, car repair, her husband's time lost from work and stuff. I figure a couple, maybe three, thousand ought to do it. I've still got most of the cash I came east with, so I'll be all right."

"Oh? And how much is that?"

"Oh, about fifty-five hundred."

"And that's all the money you think you have?"

"Aw, heck no."

Again, Dixie turned back to his brother, taking him into his confidence. Dix leaned forward and whispered proudly, "I've got ten thousand in a savings account back in a bank back in Santa Monica."

"Oh, I see," retorted a calmly smug Ramon. "Ten thousand *whole* dollars, too. My, my." He whistled low.

Brotherly Heart to Heart

Ramon leaned forward to rest his right elbow on the desk, while supporting his chin with his thumb and sliding his fore and middle fingers alongside his nose.

“Don’t you know you’re a frickin’ millionaire, Nicholas?” His brother regarded Dixie with an incredulous expression.

“Well, Ryz’n said something, but I figured that was her money, not mine.”

Raman rolled his eyes and asked, “Not yours? Unh-hunh. By the way, when are you gonna give me my cut of the royalties for “So What’s Left?”

“What the heck are you talkin’ about?”

“I’m talkin’ about my challenge to you being the inspiration for you to write that number one country song.”

“Mann, I haven’t got a clue as to what you’re talking about.”

Dixie shook his head blankly at his half brother and let the hand that had been supporting his chin drop to the blotter on the desktop

“Right here in this very office about five years ago, I told you I had been driving around with Jolynne and her friend Donna. You remember her?”

“I remember a Donna but not the one you’re thinking of unless she looks like Valerie Perrine.”

“No, no. Anyway, we came up with this hook for this country western tune: ‘You’re right, I’m wrong, so what’s left?’ But we couldn’t come up with any more words to it. And I issued you and Jose a challenge to come up with the rest of the lyrics to make it a song. You did and Jose did but, well, let’s just say I liked yours better. And *our* song was a country-western smash. Did pretty well on the pop charts, too.”

“Guess, you must have written the music, too, hunh Ramon?”

“No mann. I’m no musician.”

“And you want royalty dough off of that, coming up with a hook line?”

“Sure, why not?”

“I dunno, Mann. You better talk to Ryz’n about that.” Dixie shook his head in wonder at his brother’s gall. “Say, who’s this Jose dude?”

“Oh, he’s a good friend of mine. We go way back. His wife and Jolynne were good friends from way back before that. Jose—he’s our accountant. He takes care of our books and advises us in our finances, yours and Ry’s, too, by the way.”

“Oh? So, why’d you challenge him to write a song?”

“Well, he dabbles with the guitar. He’s kind of a Renaissance man or likes to think he is. Jose’s cool. Actually, you and Ryz’n share a resort penthouse up in Ocean City as a rental investment with him and his wife. Of course, you and Ry have your own penthouse up there, too—all to yourselves, ya know, just as they do.”

“Yeah? Yeah. I think I heard somethin’ about that.” Dixie nodded.

“Well, look Nicholas, let’s get down to business and afterwards, I suggest you go to Vamia and then back to that fellow you creamed last night and make things right. That’s my advice to you on that matter.” Ramon pulled himself closer to the desk and shifted gears to press on to the matter which evidently had prompted his desire for this conversation in the first place.

“Now Nicholas, what about this Scrachi deal, beatin’ his kid and all? Did you mistake her for a slant-eye, too?”

Dixie chuckled in spite of himself. “Baxter tell you that?”

“No, Scrachi. I sold him the pool, remember? And you’re my brother. He called me this morning all pissed off.”

“Well, that figures, then. I get it now. That’s why it was *our name* you read about in the paper today. You’re a local businessman and I’m sullyin’ your good name and business reputation. Yeah, I see what this all about.”

Ramon sloughed off his brother’s negative connotation.

“Nah! That’s not it at all. That’s how the old man thinks, not me.” He leaned forward, again. “Now, come on Nicholas, tell me about it.”

“I already told Bax.”

“Well, tell *me*.”

Dixie rolled his eyes and paced across the room, in front of his brother’s desk. Ramon’s eyes followed him. Dixie stopped in front of the closed window and turned to confront his brother, while the rain crashed against the outside window pane.

“Looook, Mann! She’s just a kid who’s got a crush on me, see? She’s always comin’ on to me, in her bikini, no less. She might be only sixteen up here”—Dixie tapped his temple with his forefinger—“but the rest of her is more like twenty-six.” He made the hourglass shape with his hands.

He looked for some recognition from Ramon, who nodded slightly. “I’ve met the girl,” he stated, nonplussed.

“So you understand?”

“Go on.”

“OK, well anyway, yesterday, she invites me to attend her sixteenth birthday cookout, but I had a game, right?” Dixie gestures toward the newspaper. His brother nodded again. He was listening intently. He seemed to care what Dix was saying.

“So I tell her, I can’t attend because of the game. Well, she gets her boyfriend, that Gary, you know, to bring her over to the Park. And, they start hasslin’ each other and get into this big argument up in the third base stands, right behind me. I’m just sittin’ on the bench, in my typical spot, see? So I hear the whole flippin’ thing, but I’m actin’ like I don’t know her, right? Sheesh!” Dixie throws one hand down in rejection and takes a couple steps back and forth, as he warms to his story. “Well anyway, he gets ticked, this Gary I mean, and he leaves her there in the stands by herself, without any way home. So after the game, she attaches herself to me. Some of the ballplayers want to go out for a beer, like we usually do, so we go. Then, when the place close--”

“What place?”

“The Do Drop, you know?” Again, Ray nodded. “So they want me to introduce them to the Kirsche twins. You remember them, too, right?”

“Oh, yeah.” Ramon grinned. He made the hourglass shape, only with larger curves.

“Yeah, you got it. Right, so now we go over there and swim and hey! Do you know I played the guitar? Yeah, I never played it before that I can remember. But last night they all practically forced me to play it. They said I could do it. And dangd if they

Brotherly Heart to Heart

weren't right, because I see this image in my mind of this little, chubby kid lookin' in the mirror in Mom and Dad's room, playing the guitar, and then I realize I'm that chubby kid. All of a sudden, I remember how to do it. I couldn't believe it. It's like my music memories are compartmentalized away from the other, the social stuff, ya know? Cuz I remembered bein' in junior high up to Studdard and getting sick and all, but I didn't remember playin' the guitar. Not until I picked it up and started actually playin' the thing, kind o' like that time with the harmonica in the car with you up in D.C. Heights, remember?"

"Yeah, I remember. I also remember when you got rheumatic fever, too. You learned the guitar for something to do. I remember very well. you got pudgy cuz Lenarduzzi wouldn't allow you out of bed and Wauneta was feeding you like crazy, thinking the lack of meat on your bones had caused you to get sick in the first place. Yeah, I remember. Jolynne and me weren't getting along too well, then. Sure, I remember."

"Well, I dunno about you and Jolynne. I don't remember that, that's for sure. I got enough trouble, just tryin' to recall my own junk! But I do remember, the day I got sick, I had to walk home from school after baseball practice and I couldn't make it. I had to stop and sit down on the curb up in front of the Gasch's house. And you came whizzin' by in your Opel Cadet. Anyway, you waved at me and whizzed right on by. Hey! I needed a ride bad, Mann. I couldn't walk and you just ignored me."

"Shoot! How can you remember *junk* like that, *anyway*?"

"Ha! You gotta be kiddin' me. Well, it ain't easy, let me tell ya! Probably it's all them shrinks I seen. They can do things to ya that can make ya remember whether you want to or not."

"Well, it hasn't worked out with you completely, *yet*, anyway. Hopefully, it will. So go on with your story about the Scrachi girl." Resting his elbow on the desk, Ramon rolled his hand over a couple times to spur Nick back to the original topic.

"Yeah well, they were all swimming while I'm playing the guitar, see, when she, little Miss Sweet Sixteen that is, jumps out of the pool. Sherri, I mean. Yeah, she comes over, kisses me and bites my lip on purpose and drew blood, the little devil." Dixie reached up and felt the wound. The lump on his lower lip was yet tender. He shook his head and asked with some concern. "Ya think I should get a tetanus shot or somethin'?"

Ramon shook his head negatively and rolled his eyes, as well as his hand, prompting Dixie onward, again.

"No?" Dixie shrugged. "OK, well, so I threaten to turn her over my knee and spank her. Well, she goes for that big time, Mann. I mean big time."

Dixie gets excited with his storytelling and starts to pace again, back and forth across the room. He stops to stare at Ramon only when he wants to emphasize a point.

"So she asks me to spank her sixteen times on account of it's her birthday, see? Well, I don't want to, but she's begging me for it and the others are egging me on, so, so I spank her. Darn if the kid don't start joanin' on me. Can you believe that?"

Dixie stopped pacing.

Ramon rocks back in his chair and shakes head in the negative.

Out at Home

“Yeah. Stuff like: I ain’t spankin’ her hard enough. I’m a sissy if I don’t spank harder. Her grandmother can spank harder than that. I got no hair on my butt, if I don’t spank harder. That kind o’ junk, you know? And the others are all loaded and they’re all laughin’ and agreein’ with her, see?”

Ramon nodded again, intrigued by his brother’s tale, again holding his face, with his left hand and his forefinger alongside his nose. He rested his elbow on the desk and his free hand cupped over his left bicep with his right forearm resting on the desk as well. Dixie resumed pacing.

“So I spanked harder and harder, cuz she wants it harder, and, finally, finally, well, after she called me out one last time, I, well I really let her have it. WHAMM!” Dixie smacked his to hand together with a smart clap. “Yeah, as hard as I could, see? Stung the heck out of my hand, Mann.” He shook his right hand at the memory. Dixie stops to stare his brother in the eye. “And guess what?”

Ramon shrugged and placed both his palms face down on the desktop.

“I dunno, what?”

“She’s gettin’ off on it, Mann. You’da thought I was makin’ it with her or somethin.”

Ramon’s jaw dropped open. “Yeah! That’s kind o’ sick, isn’t it?”

Dixie nodded in response to his brother’s question. “You darned right it is! So when I’m done, she’s all glassy-eyed and she lays on the ground in this fetal position, rockin’ back and forth and purring. Do you believe that schtuff?”

Ramon shook his head slightly in the negative and answered

“Well, it’s kind of hard to believe. I’ve heard of that kind of thing, but with a sixteen year old girl...? Yeah, right! And that’s probably what the old man is thinking, too.”

“The old man! Ooh! Now, he’s the real sicko, Ray! Lemme tell ya, that bastard must be where she gets it from. Cuz he beat the livin’ daylights outta her after I brought her home last night. You oughtta see the right side of her face, like raw meat.” Dixie clapped his hands and shook his head violently. “MANN! Just forget about that whacko!” Then Dixie calmed himself and spoke in a kinder, gentler tone.

“The thing is Ray—” (Dixie recalled Little Nick had always addressed his brother as “Tommy” or “Ramon.” To call his brother ‘Ray’ now sounded strange to his ear.)

“I’m beginning to feel a little like a Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, Mann.”

“What do you mean?”

“Well, what I mean is, I’m like becoming two different people. The guy who has done all these crazy things recently is the Mr. Hyde character—Little Nick. The guy I usually am, who takes getting chewed out by the coach for no good reason in front of the team, without saying anything, is me, Dixie, Dr. Jekyll if you will. I feel like I’m two different people sometimes. It’s kind o’ scary.”

“That’s really heavy, Mann. I mean really deep. Maybe you ought to see a psychiatrist. Mom and Dad said the Marine Corps is after you to go up to Bethesda Naval Hospital and see some psychiatrists.”

Dixie disdainfully waved off that suggestion.

Brotherly Heart to Heart

“Anh, those shrinks just want to restore my recollections of Nam, so I can confirm some firefights I was in. Why do I want to remember that crap? Don’t I have enough problems? They jes’ want The Corps to make me out some kind of hero to save face for the lousy Republicans.”

“Republicans? Ha! Mom and Dad aren’t Republicans. But the Republicans sure can use all the help they can get, right now. Besides what’s wrong with that?”

“With what? The lousy Republicans?”

“No, with meeting with the Navy, er Marine, officials to get the medals?”

“What’s right with it? Nobody wants to hear anything about that danged war, let alone hear about some trumped up hero, way after the fact! You know when I was stationed at Kaneohe, if I went to town in my uniform, people cursed me, called me ‘pig’, ‘baby killer.’ They even spit on me a couple times. Yeah, that’s right. And besides, I don’t want to remember what happened over there, Mann. I saw some of those guys who did remember, in the VA hospital out to Long Beach. Mann, they were some sad, sad cases. I mean really sad. Half of ‘em kill themselves.”

At a silent impasse, the odd-looking pair of brothers stared at one another for a minute. Then Ramon spoke up soberly.

“You tell Mom and Dad all this?”

“What? Are you kidding? Heck, no!” Dixie looked angrily to his right. Then he turned back to Ramon.

“Why not?”

“Why should I worry them with my problems?” Dixie thrust his hands up into the air even with his head and let them drop to his sides. “I don’t even know them, for cryin’ out loud. They may be ‘Mom’ and ‘Dad’ to you, but to me they’re just a couple of well meaning, middle-aged folks who are trying to run my life.”

“So why are you telling *me* all this?”

“Because YOU ASKED, because it’s raining and because, I dunno. I guess, I guess I ... should tell someone before I leave.”

“LEAVE? Where are you goin’? Ya just got here.”

‘Ahhh.’ Dixie grinned widely. “Gonna hop on my bike, see some of the country before school starts. Make it back to Vegas for a payday, replenish what I spend, you know. Maybe see that rich and famous uncle out in California.”

“Richard?”

“Yeah, that’s the one.”

“Well, don’t expect much help there.”

Ramon sounded as if he had already gone down that road. He put his left hand up to support his face as before.

“So you sound pretty cocky about Vegas. You that sure you’ll win?”

“Oh, I always win, always. The trick is not to win too much.” Dixie winked.

“Yeah, right,” replied Ray sarcastically. He leaned over the desk, letting his right hand fall from his face, slapping his hand and forearm down against the desktop. He shifted gears again as his manner turned somber.

“You know, you’re gonna break Mom and Dad’s heart if you leave.”

Out at Home

“Yeah, I know.” Dixie hung his head, a little ashamed.

“And what if this guy presses charges against you?”

“Hey, all the more reason to get the heck out of Dodge, wouldn’t you say?”

“Hmmpf!”

Ramon looked down and played with a pen that had been lying on his desk. He rolled the pen around and repeatedly picked it up and dropped it. Then he picked up the pen and looked up squarely into Dixie’s eyes.

“And what about Ryz’n? You know there isn’t a single guy in America who wouldn’t want her for a wife. And you’re just going to throw her away?”

To underscore his point, Ramon tossed the pencil aside and leaned back in his chair, folding his arms across his chest, resting his case.

“Looook, Ray.”

Dixie leaned forward with his hips against the desk, pleading his case with his arms and hands outstretched toward his brother.

“I’ve thought about her a lot and I’ve tried with her, Mann! I really have. She’s special. I know that. I have no doubt about that. I, I’ve never kissed anyone who makes me feel like she does. But our stars are crossed, Mann! Our circumstances have ranged from the ridiculous to the sublime. It’s as if God is blocking us from each other, on purpose. I, I think I could love her, sure, but I never get the chance. She’s always running away from me. She might be the Silhouette Girl, I don’t know. But I’m gonna try one more time with her though, at least say goodbye. Goin’ down to the *Surf’s Well* this weekend. GRT is playing down there. If we can’t work it out, well, I’ll say goodbye and I won’t be back. That’s for sure! What was that old Ray Charles song? ‘Hit the Road Jack!’? Well, I’ll be Jack.”

“What was that about a Silhouette Girl?”

Dixie explained the whole elusive, illusory vision to his older brother. He also told of the vision’s corollary, the frightening frozen vacuum he felt ever widening in his soul.

“Well, Ryzanna sure sounds like she fits the description of that silhouette girl to me. She could be the one to fill in that cold hole with a warm love.”

“She does in a lot of ways, but the girl in my vision, seems to be much bigger than Ry, larger than life actually. That throws me. But one thing makes them alike though.”

“Yeah? What’s that?”

“They both slip away from me.”

Ramon sighed deeply in exasperation, once again sitting back in his swivel chair. The storm was abating outside.

“Nicholas, I know you’ve had some tough breaks. You’ve got, what, two months before school starts? You’ve only been back here for not even three weeks. If I were you, I’d stay the two months and try to work things out. You have to give things time, son. After being away for three and a half years, well, life isn’t just slam, bam, thank you ma’am.”

“That’s easy to say from where you sit. But when you’ve only been alive for two years and ten weeks and you’re twenty-one years old, you want to make up for lost time. And you don’t want to make up for it in jail, either. But, I *am* gonna try with

Brotherly Heart to Heart

Ryz'n once more. Really, Ray, I am. If I could just remember her, it sure would help matters a whole lot. But I'm not throwing myself at her feet, no matter, how beautiful, how rich or how talented she is."

"Well, those bullets in the brain didn't shoot out your stubborn, false pride any, that's for sure."

Sighing, Dixie replied dejectedly, "Ramon, you just don't understand, Mann."

"Yeah, I guess not. I guess I just can't imagine how it would be to have a wife like Ryz'n and a few million dollars to boot."

"Anh, what are you talkin'? You got a good wife, three healthy kids, a dog, and a mortgage. What more can you want? You're livin' the American dream, Baby!" They both chuckled and Dixie reached across the desk with his right hand to slap Ramon in the upper arm.

"What more? Hey! Wouldn't mind splittin' your millions with ya, that's for sure."

Dixie thought it was kind of a funny remark, but Ramon did not smile.

"Yeah, I jes' bet you wouldn't." Dixie smiled for the both of them.

"You know Nicholas; you don't remember this right now, but about five years ago—yeah, five years ago this month as a matter of fact, and in this very office, too." Ramon tapped his right knuckles twice, hard upon the desktop. "You were in here just like you are now, havin' a heart-to-heart with me about Ryz'n. In fact, you were even parked in the same dang spot outside, with the same car, only Ryz'n was sittin' in it, playin' with Little Frank and Loretta. Only difference now is that it wasn't rainin' then. It was just hot as Hades. I'll never forget it. She was the perfect picture of motherhood."

Dix took a load off his feet by sitting in the visitor chair, by the rain-battered window.

"Yeah? So what happened?"

"Well, I believe I gave you the same advice then as I'm giving you now. Ya see, you and her had been out together all night, for the first time, too. Her family was out of town, down at their beach resort, as I recall and Ryz'n was on her own. You didn't come right out and say so, but I think you two had been foolin' around and it was her first time—spending the night with a guy. I believe you said she had been all happy and excited and that she had been all over ya. You couldn't have beaten her off with a stick. Yeah, you two had some kind of 'magical experience' together. Those were your words and I could read between the lines. Didn't take no genius to figure it out. That's for certain.

"Then, the next morning, you said she had done a 'one-eighty' on ya. She was distant and irritable. And you came in here to ask my advice on how to deal with her."

"Yeah, and what did you say?"

"Well, I said Ryz'n's a good Catholic girl, Nicholas. And good Catholic girls have got great, big consciences and I said you needed time for her to work all that stuff out. So, pretty much, it's the same as what I'm sayin' now. *You've got to give her time, Nicholas. You can't fix three years in three weeks!* You two need to get together by yourselves off somewhere for a couple of weeks or a month, even. Go off somewhere just the two of you, where there's not a lot of people, where there's no distractions—

Out at Home

like—” He snapped his fingers and leaned forward over his desk. “—like the Ryans’ place down in North Carolina!”

Dixie stood up straight and looked out the window. The rain outside was letting up, but the puddles left by the storm were deep and widespread. He turned and walked over to the other visitor chair and slumped down in it. He stared into the corner, thinking. After a couple of minutes, he turned to his brother.

“I thought of that, but this darned band thing is in the way. They got another couple of weeks on this comeback tour deal and I got my own troubles.”

“Comeback tour? Shoot! They ain’t been away long enough to comeback from anywhere. Comebacks are for guys from my time like the Del Vikings or somethin.”

“Ryz’n doesn’t seem to think so. And she’s signed contracts. She’s got deadlines and commitments.”

“Well, you can wait two weeks, Nicholas. Geeze!”

“But if they get a new contract deal out of it, which is what I think she’s hoping to get, then And with that new guitar player, they might just swing it. Well then, who knows how long it could be? And she seems like she’ll do anything to get it done. She’s hooked on that stage love, Mann.” Ramon grunted and leaned back in his chair.

“Yeah, I heard about what happened the other night down at *Mr. Rowdy’s*. Ya know, this buddy of mine, a competitor actually, name of Will Billups, ever hear of him? He sells pools for Tahitian?”

Dixie shook his head no.

“Well, he was up to *Mr. Rowdy’s* the other night when Ryz’n did the hoochie-coochie number with the microphone? He said he never saw anything like it. He’s been around, too, to Nam, Korea, Vegas, East Baltimore, etc. He said he got off just watching her.”

Dixie thought. *Guess she ain’t such a good Catholic girl anymore.* But he said nothing. He merely stared at his brother with disapproval.

“Anh, but don’t worry about it, Nicholas. She’s under a lot of stress with you back, makin’ her, her ‘comeback’ and all. Shoooot!” His disdainful expression mirrored his derision for the term. “Probably, she’s just doin’ some of those diet pills again to pump her up.”

“What diet pills?”

“Ahhh, some prescription medication she took a few times out on the road with GRT to get her up for the show—caused some trouble out there, too, when she took too many. Probably, that’s what happened the other night. Guess her blood is so pure with all that right eatin’ and exercisin’ she’s always doin’, that she can’t handle the stuff.”

Dixie thought back to “*The Loft*” and the balding bum in the white leisure suit with the braided pigtail. He gave Ryz’n something and she swallowed it and later he stepped out on the stairwell with her. When she came back inside, she wasn’t right ...

The phone rang. The brother’s eyed each other suspiciously. *Could it be the cops or Dixie’s mom saying the cops were on their way?* His brother answered the next ring.

“It’s for you.” He handed the receiver over to Dixie.

“Hello?”

Brotherly Heart to Heart

“Nick? It’s Johnny. Don’t forget to be at my place by five tonight. We got the big game at six-thirty.”

“Johnny? Johnny who?”

“Oh Mann, you tear me up with that crap. Come on, Nicky. It’s me. You know, ‘So Fine,’ Johnny Allein.”

“Oh, Oh yeah, Johnny ‘So Fine,’ football—Trish’s husband.”

“Yeah, right, Trish’s husband. Shee-ittt boy! You gonna play ball tonight or what?”

“Well gee, Johnny, I dunno. I got some heavy things on my mind.”

“Hey, me too! Look! We’re playin’ Brothers Furniture tonight, Mann. They’re in first place, but we’re gonna beat their black asses this time. And all I need to make it happen is you. I’m countin’ on ya, Nicky. It’ll be just like old times, with me pitchin’ and you catchin’. Now don’t let me down, Buddy.”

“Awwww, all right, I’ll be there, I guess. Where’s the game?”

“Same place. Down on the polo grounds next to Independence Avenue, across from the Lincoln Memorial, but don’t worry about that, you’re with me. Just be at my place by FIVE! Game’s at six-thirty. Oh and after, there’s a poker game at my place, so bring some cash. Make that a lot of cash, because you’re gonna need it, you candy ass! HA!”

“All right. I’ll see ya.”

“Right on!”

Dixie hung up the phone. The rain had stopped, so he walked over and opened the north window to let n some fresh air. Jill’s husband Jock drove up shortly with a truckload of stone and garden products. With the help of the forklift, Dixie and Jock made quick work of unloading the heavy-laden pallets off the flatbed truck. Before he left the Pool and Patio Center, Ramon advised Dix once again go see Vamia. Dixie said he would, but instead, Dixie drove right to Johnny’s place. Thankfully, the heavy thunderstorm had cleaned the Widow’s convertible like the White Tornado, as if God Himself had washed away Dixie’s sins. There were no blood stains anywhere. Taking that for a good omen, and Unwilling to face the music yet, Dix headed for Johnny’s. Dixie wanted to take his mind off his troubles and release his frustrations and, quite possibly, hide out a little longer. Playing football sounded like the ideal solution to resolving his mental stressors.