

Standing perplexed and alone, and clad only in his silk suit slacks, Dixie was struck dumb by this inexplicable turnabout. He staggered pathetically for several yards across the dimly lit parking lot, watching the Starfire's quickly receding tail lights. He stopped with his hands, down at his hips, palms outward. What had he done that was so offensive to her that it had made her physically ill and caused her to divorce herself from him right there in the parking lot in such a mean-spirited manner? He had made a poor joke. OK, but ... surely she couldn't think he really believed her waist was too large? Shoot! He had never seen one so small. He was only *joking!* *That* was the joke.

While he hovered in a daze, he became aware of Rock music seeping from the motel's small lounge. He also heard some snickering from two guys, leaning against the wall in the shadows. They stood halfway between the side lounge exit and the outside stairs leading to the second floor of the motel. Dixie ignored their sarcastic comments as he headed for the stairs. Then he stepped heavily upon a sharp pebble, which caused him to hop around wincing on his good barefoot, as Ry had done just minutes ago.

Cursing under his breath, Dixie pogo-ed unsteadily towards the outside motel stairs. He grappled with both his sore foot and the knockout punch Ryz'n had just delivered. From the shadows close behind him, Dixie heard a deep bass voice call to him in a flirtatious tone.

"Couldn't cut the mustard, hey kid? Well, maybe you're lookin' in the wrong direction for some sweet affection." Dixie ignored this Bozo, but the guy persisted. "Hey! Princess! I'm talkin' to you. You don't need her, not with me and my boyfriend here."

Oh no! This is all I need. Even my moustache isn't deterring these jokers.

Dixie pretended he had not heard the man. Half naked, he hopped lightly now on his injured foot towards the outside, concrete stairs. However, a hand upon his bare left shoulder arrested him in mid hop, turning Dixie halfway around.

"Together, the three of us could have a really goo—"

Without warning, Dixie dropped to the asphalt parking lot on his right knee. Instinctively, like a Cossack dancer, he pushed hard off his one foot, quickly driving his right fist like a ramrod, shoving it hard into the man's gonads. The guy doubled over involuntarily, clutching at himself in pain, while Dixie again dropped into a deep squat before launching upward and clipping his adversary with a short, tight left hook, right on the button. The blow caught the big man flush on the temple, lifting him up off the pavement before felling him unconscious.

The man's shorter partner charged Dixie. Dix side-stepped deftly to his left, away from the prone man and stopped abruptly, as the other man tripped forward past Dix, leading with his pointed chin. Dixie fired a short chopping left catching the man right on the point of that jutting chin, ringing his bell like the close of school. The would-be attacker was out cold before he struck the black asphalt face first, splattering blood all about him when his nose rudely met the hard ground. The pavement looked like a red

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and black Rorschach blot. Again, instinctively, Dixie checked about him. His head swiveled like a periscope in all directions.

No one! No witnesses! Thank God for that! The lateness of the hour proved to be a boon. The champ extricated himself from the bodies entangled about his feet. Then he bounded up the stairs two-three at a time, without regard for his aggravated foot due to the adrenaline pumping throughout his system.

Safe in his room, Dixie, the conqueror, slammed the door behind him. He breathed heavily. He was shaking. His headache was back, but his aspirin was down in the faring of his bike. With his ear to the door, he listened for sounds of those who would uncover the evidence of the violence below. Yet, only the sounds of silence prevailed. He did not want any of the trouble he had had in Hawaii or Manila. Landing in the brig his second day back in his hometown, well, what would these people think of him then? He needed a smoke. Jittery, he fumbled over his suit coat on the bed hunting for his pack of cigarettes. As he searched bent over the bed, the nail he had hidden behind his ear earlier fell from its perch onto his suit coat laid out across the foot of the bed. With his hand shaking uncontrollably, Dixie picked it up and lit up nervously, inhaling deeply two or three times in a row.

“Ummm. Yes.” Despite the ache growing inside his head, Dixie began to relax.

Shouts from the parking lot below pulled him to the window, where he peeked from behind the closed curtains and blinds. He could not see exactly what was going on, but apparently, a crowd from the night club was gathering in the parking lot near the foot of the stairs. Shortly, a county police squad car arrived with lights flashing. Dixie saw the men he had fought, cuffed and shoved into the back of the police car. Anxiously, he sucked on his unfiltered cigarette until it almost burned his lips. Dixie heard one of the cops yell, “Check upstairs for the other one, Bill.”

Dixie quickly flipped off all the lights. He tossed the cigarette butt into the toilet and lowered the seat. He threw off his pants, tossing them under the bed and jumped under the covers of the nearest double bed. Someone clambered down the upper balcony aisle checking in windows, knocking on doors. Two doors down, a man answered. Dixie could hear him clearly. The rudely awakened motel guest next door sounded groggy. He said he had been sleeping one off and had not heard a thing. There was a rap on Dixie’s door, but Dixie did not budge. The officer identified himself as “the police” and rapped once more. Dix answered him with silence. The officer moved on to the next door, but Dixie believed the rooms were vacant on down to the end of the balcony. In his dark room, Dixie remained silent. He dare not smoke another cigarette for fear the burning embers from the butt might somehow disclose his presence through the closed curtains to a passing cop. He was supposed to be a war hero and here he was shaking in bed, pulling the covers over his head as if he were a scared kid hiding from the bogeyman. The thought of ruining his new life right off the bat by going to jail for beating up a couple of homos had unnerved him.

Eventually, the police moved out. Dixie calmed down, pulled the cover from over his head and his thoughts returned to the ravishing Ryz’n. The visions she had planted in his brain a few minutes ago were indelible.

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Somehow, he would make it all up to her tomorrow. The only problem with that was he still did not know what he had done to cause such a severe outburst. He suspected it had something to do with their past, something to do with her overtaking her kid sister in the maturation department, or all that other garbage she was babbling about, but that was only a guess. *Overtaken? Shoot! She was so far out ahead of her sister and anyone else he had ever known, it wasn't even funny!* However, absent his memory of her, he had no way of knowing of the history between the two of them to judge what might have been offensive to her. He felt certain there was something between them in the past, which had triggered her emotional reaction and made her sick. What? He couldn't guess. Yes, he could.

Her outburst had come after his weak joke about her waist. It had to be something to do with her waist, that narrow funnel of a waist, which made her figure truly something spectacular, darn near gaudy! He merely had tried, albeit pitifully no less, to unseat her conceited opinion of herself on her "hourglass figure," of her "confidentially, I'm stacked" attitude. Of course, she was. Her figure spoke for itself and needed no promoting on her part. Well, he would put it right tomorrow. She sure wouldn't allow him to straighten it out tonight. That was certain. She was obviously fatigued and her nerves too strained by his unbelievable homecoming.

Despite the unseemly turn of events, Dixie, as was his custom, prayed in thanksgiving for all the blessings the Lord had bestowed on him that day. He asked forgiveness for striking those men. He thanked God for snatching him from the snare of the fowler, as well as for keeping him out of the hands of the police. He asked the Lord to keep thawing out that frozen void he carried in the pit of his soul. Coming back home and meeting his lovely wife had thawed him out some, but this disaster tonight with Ry was freezing him up all over again.

The cops had left and all was quiet once more on the eastern front of the motel veranda. Dixie lay on his bed and, as he looked toward the barren sink alcove, harking back to what had occurred right here in this very room just a few minutes ago. He began to relive the memory, hoping to set things right this time. He recalled how anxious he had been about the whole deal, how he had craved a smoke but had denied himself a nail because the smoke offended her. He had turned on the TV and caught the ball game, but he was so nervous he could not concentrate on the game. Thus, in the dark of his cloistered room, Dix turned on his own private replay machine and ran the tape, watching eagerly again, trying hard not to drool ...

He could see Ryz'n clearly, leaning against the alcove partition, seductively inviting, posing for him like a proud peacock in all her wondrous glory. That cute little sundress suddenly took on new, ominously lurid dimensions.

Dang! What a fox!—what a shape this girl has!

Few people actually looked *better* unclothed than clothed, but his wife was one of them. Wife? Yeah, wife! And "Nobody has a wife that looks like that!" That's what Big Jim had said about her and he had been right. "And I'm 'nobody.' Sheesh!"

Observing her tempting actions and enticing attitude, Dixie thought Ryz'n must have seen too many of those popular *R*-rated movies. However, he was not about to say

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anything now, certainly nothing that could possibly ruin her performance. He wanted to enjoy her offerings and he had understood instinctively that she had wanted him to enjoy her, as well. Their understanding on that score was both mutual and implicit. Spying her up against the partition now, as she wriggled out of her panty hose, Dixie thought what a privilege it was to be her one-man audience. While he thoroughly approved of both her seductively lurid behavior and her fresh, innocent, cheerleader beauty, he remained cool and impassive intentionally. He did not want to fumble around like a jerk and, then too, Donna's memory remained fresh. Again, it took all his Marine Corps discipline to control himself, as it had the prior night during her detailed inspection of him. For he feared he would have jumped her bones in an unbecoming manner, if he let his emotions overcome him, embarrassing the both of them.

Yes, he saw her clearly there, backed up against the partition. Aside from the yellow ribbon still tied in her hair and that transparent slip and sparsely laced half brassiere, Ryz'n had discarded her last remnant of clothing. She reassumed her provocative pose against the corner of the partition, thrusting her head back and her considerable chest forward, with one foot raised and posed seductively in front of the other, providing him with an awesome three quarters view. The back of her hands rested upon her upturned rump at the base of her spine squeezed between her lower back and up against the corner of the alcove wall. She was posing purposefully for his express pleasure. Of that, he was certain. The alcove ceiling light had shone down upon her right side, leaving her left side in tantalizing shadow. Her arms rested akimbo, but were drawn back behind her allowing him a clear line of sight across her front side. Yes, he saw her again, as if for real, and wet his lips.

Able to glimpse her left side, via her alluring reflection in the alcove mirror, she had positioned herself so that he could gaze directly upon three sides of her at once. He ignored the drool that dripped on the back of his wrist now. The girl defied Newton's laws of gravity! Unlike Donna, there was not even a hint of sagging here, even though little Ry had much to cause such a phenomenon. Yup! The girl defied the laws of science, as hers remained as firm and upright as any pair he had witnessed. And that was saying something! He reasoned she must have super strong ligaments or something from all the exercising she did. Yes, her set brought to mind a brace of fat pineapples or even a pair of husky dolphin pups, soaring above the sea, arching their backs toward the ocean's swells with their tails disappeared beneath the sea's surface. Why he made that unusual connection, he did not know ...

Dixie rolled the tape in his mind and looked his nubile wife over slowly from head to foot and back again, licking his lips and trying hard not to drool any more. Her unblemished, velvety smooth, olive complexion was considerably lighter now than the deep tan he had seen by the light of day. Out of the sun, her naturally swarthy skin tone had dialed itself down several notches, surprising him. What was she really like, this so-called wife of his? The woman changed skin tones like a chameleon. He wondered why. She never stopped amazing him.

Dixie swallowed hard. Fascinated by her overwhelming sensual beauty, his hungry eyes followed her as she moved towards him like a fashion model at runway's end,

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showering him with an exaggeratedly slow, full three hundred and sixty-degree view. The crack of the bat and roar of the crowd resounding from the Orioles' game on the TV set did not faze him. His admiring gaze remained isolated upon her beautiful person. Ryz'n's actions permitted him to observe her front and both sides simultaneously due to her reflection in the large, wide vanity mirror. She was really putting herself out for him. He sensed that, but he also sensed her act was forced, unnatural for her. Certainly, she was fatigued. Her dreary eyes showed the wear. She had been short with him earlier in the car. He realized she had not slept much for several days. Yet, she had won him over completely.

Forget that ridiculous dating suggestion I made earlier, Ry. You were right about that. As far as I'm concerned, I'll do whatever you want, but I don't want to break your spell just yet. So play this thing on out and we'll see where it leads.

As she pirouetted, he had observed her glorious backside. Her broad shoulders sloped gently out and downward to her well-toned arms. The two parallel, small beauty marks inside her left shoulder blade appeared to cry out for his touch. Her back tapered down and in over her rib cage, then more sharply and radically into the tuck of her so, so incredibly slim waist. Luscious S-shaped, swan-like curves flowed gracefully over, around and through her in all directions.

Beneath her wraith-like waist, the woman's firmly rotund bottom burst first outward, ever so slightly upward and then arced gently downward in all directions. Her pleasing bottom curved like bright falling, rounded tracers from a Fourth of July rocket, which had reached its zenith and burst wide open against a mid-summer night's sky. *Geeze! That's incredible!* Dixie gasped internally. Despite his persistent attentions to her comely person, he noted that she kept her weary eyes on him almost constantly, looking over her shoulders, even as she turned her back to him. However, Dixie failed to maintain her alluring gaze. He couldn't. She made that impossible, as she shimmed for an instant like some kind of a belly dancer. She shook with a tight control, as though she had reached inside the center of her gravity and quickly flipped on a switch that started a motor that reverberated from her navel outward to the tips of her fingers. Quickly looking back over her shoulder, Ryz'n flipped off her shimmy switch, stopping still as suddenly as she had begun, except for some involuntary after shocks rippling through her bust. With her backside to him and her knees together, she stooped over to turn off the television as if nothing had occurred.

Darn right! No need to watch that ball game now. Oooh! What's that? That's what I spied this morning. Never seen anything like that. "That's for sure. That's for dang sure!" But Dixie had refused to voice his thoughts to her. Instead, he checked his emotions, as painful experience had taught him to do, while the girl completed her stooping, titillating turn. Besides, maybe she would take it all off. Wouldn't that be something? So don't steal her thunder. Let the girl do her thing.

Dixie could scarcely breathe. His heart was pounding. Her beauty struck him hard now, like a thunderous heavyweight's blow to the solar plexus, knocking the breath clean out of him. Her large, almond eyes peeked through her long dark lashes and shone mostly green with only the slightest hint of hazel now. Her striking, long arched

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brows and full pink lips implored him to kiss her. Her coarse, wavy hair fell from the high part on her low forehead to close about either side of her oval face, partly covering her trademark cheerleader-like double cheeks. Close to her now, Dixie spied what appeared to be two distinct birthmarks, one about two inches long, in the shape of a crescent moon on her chest, partly obscured inside and under her left breast. The handful of sparsely spaced, dark wisps followed the contour of her sternum, similar to their sisters on her forearms and backbone. The wisps were scarcely discernible at three feet, but they spoke to her unique hirsute nature, which he found most appealing.

His stare descended from her midriff, noting with pleasure the same deep S-curves that created the narrowest of waists he had ever witnessed—the eighth wonder of the world. Her navel was disproportionately small in circumference but deep, and he approved. Her convex abdomen was flat and firm. There were no unsightly bulging curves here. He located her other birthmark, somewhat larger than the first, in the shape of a strawberry high up on the inside of her right thigh, playing peek-a-boo between her legs. As he leered at her, Ryz'n completed her turns with all due deliberation, elegantly displaying her wares for his prurient approval. The see-through slip, like her lace brassiere, obscured nothing. He wondered why she had retained them. He followed the mesmerizing lines of her lovely, inviting, well-toned legs—chorus girl legs. Once more, he noted that her legs were not short and stubby, as were those of most short girls he had known with longish waists. As with her arms, her legs were well-toned, but they were not muscular. No, there was nothing masculine about her. In fact, she was the most feminine creature he had ever observed. Fittingly, he had noted, as proof of her femininity, that her light pink and white-painted toe nails matched her French-painted finger nails.

Then, Ryz'n broke the heavy silence. Surprisingly, as she crept toward him, this perfectly lovely female specimen uttered the following words in an ominously threatening tone.

“Thirty-seven—twenty-two—thirty-seven! Don't forget me, Baby!”

She inched seductively towards him.

He didn't get it at first. He thought she was merely bragging some more. However, the second time she repeated that phrase, it registered on him. *Donna's picture! That's it!* Ryz'n had been quoting her own measurements to him and for the same reason, just as Donna had penned the 40DD-29-39—*Don't forget me, Baby*, note on the back of her photo in the powder blue and white bikini. Donna's pinup was the picture which Ryz'n had found earlier! *So?* So, it was Donna's photo which had prompted her anger earlier in the car as well as this unabashed display of perfect feminine pulchritude, the same pose against the wall, everything! *That had to be it!* Ryz'n had wanted to show him whose picture with measurements on the backside, he really should be keeping in the wallet of his mind! Earlier today, when Ryz'n had been so angry over discovering that snapshot, Dixie had cursed himself for even carrying the thing. Now, he thanked God that Ryz'n had found it. Yet outwardly, Dixie still held himself in check, revealing nothing. Ry's stunning beauty had frozen him in his tracks and touched him with lockjaw.

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Too late now, he thought, leaving his flashback behind. *I really blew it, Mann!* As he lay alone upon the lonely motel room bed surfacing from his reverie, he realized the stoicism he had learned as a way of life in the Corps and, as a means of self-defense because of his handicap, had served him ill here. He now understood that Ryz'n had sought, even hungered, for a generous, loving, emotional response. She had not been merely showing off. She was not the rich bitch, Rock'n'Roll brat Donna had made her out to be. But for some reason, Dix had been unable to give Ry what she had desired so desperately from him. Why had he felt an invisible chain about him, restraining him from her love? It only could have been his feeling Donna and the boys. Once more, he thought back to his unrequited tête-à-tête with Ry ...

Ryz'n had prompted him repeatedly, giving herself the compliments he had withheld, even flirting like a trollop with him. She had winked and told him, "Confidentially, I'm stacked"—as if she had needed to state the obvious to him. Now he understood that what he had taken for her vanity had in fact been her pitiful plea for his love for her over his love for Donna. Truly, it was a pathetic plea, all the more so because she had attempted to veil her dignity in a cheap joke. And he had failed to respond. She had asked him point blank:

"Well Nicky, can't you say anything? Has the cat got your tongue? You could at least clear your throat?" Her eyes had frowned and her voice had assumed a hard edge, which she had failed to conceal. And what had been his cute response?

"Well, I, I, ca-ca-couldn't Ry, my-my heart was in it-t." *Shoot!*

He had been playing with her open vulnerability. The truth was that she had stunned him with her gorgeous beauty, which conversely made his own marred flesh feel more inadequate than usual. What could he offer her in return for her perfection, a mutilated body? He was intimidated by her and believed her beauty to have been exceeded only by her conceit.

"Hourglass?"

He asked himself aloud in the dark solitude of his motel room. "The girl was more like a day glass or maybe a month glass! Sheesh! *'Nobody has a wife who looks like that!'*" Now why hadn't he told her that?!? However, outwardly, Dixie had maintained his stoic composure. The poker face that had served him so well in Vegas failed him here. Ryz'n was a brick house, a phat, brick house! The girl gave new meaning to the term. And she had had him tongue-tied. The slimness of Ryzanna's waist was simply overwhelmingly striking, perhaps more so than any of her other awesome anatomical features. And she had plenty of awesome anatomical features! And what had he done, when he had deigned to speak? He had disparaged her figure, mockingly, no less. Yet, her winsome waist in comparison with her broad hips and shoulders cut her figure as something truly, truly remarkable, almost, well almost obscene. Figures like that just don't come along everyday! Yet he had merely gawked.

When Ryz'n had felt the chill from the A/C unit, no less from her husband's reception, goose bumps had stolen over her otherwise smooth, lightly tanned skin. Again, he had made a feeble attempt at a joke of the effect of the cool air upon her breasts and his humor had seemed to perk her up a bit, making him think that joking

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was the way to go, the path out of this awkward situation. Even now, he could see her standing right up there with the goose bumps growing upon her generous porpoise pups under the A/C's chill And the noses that sprouted on those pups! My gosh! Purple-pink, red and orange-brown, in color they radiated outward like sunbursts. He could hardly keep from staring at her pair of colorful bull's eyes.

She had responded by explaining how she had been physically retarded growing up, compared to her kid sister. And she had asked him how she had turned out. Once more, he had thought her conceit was begging the obvious. However, now he thought differently. Could she truly have believed she was less awesome than her sister? Then, because of Donna's picture, Ryz'n had had gone out of her way to assure him that her true bra size was more like a D-cup than the lesser size he may have envisioned from the bra he had laundered. Trying to avoid an unfair comparison of bust sizes between her and Donna, Dixie had made his grand faux pas with that phony crack about her waist! He had stepped over one land mine, only to tread upon another and gotten royally fragged. What an idiot! And that is why he was here all alone now, drooling, subconsciously playing with himself while he replayed his grand faux pas, and wondering what might have been. He should have said nothing and taken her in his arms and kissed her, but the apparition of Donna's love loomed over him, weighing on him and watching him like a hawk.

Silently now, he wondered how many other guys in the past three years had seen Ry's little private show and who they might be. Hadn't she said as much or, at the very least, implied there were a lot of guys who would like to have been in his shoes with her? How many were there? He wondered. Dixie thought the whole scene must have been some kind of crazy bedroom game, which perhaps they had used to play and he was not getting it. And now it was his move and he couldn't pull the trigger. He had not wanted to screw up or offend her, but that's exactly what he had done. His wife was a drop-dead, gorgeous, milk-fed cheerleader and she must have known it—prancing around like an East L.A. hooker! He could not conceive of this awesome Aphrodite coveting his or any other guy's courtly adulation. With the way she looked, she could have anyone she wanted, least of all a beaten up, scarred-up nobody like him. It just didn't figure. Maybe it was the money, like Donna had said. Her Dad sure had seemed concerned about his daughter's fortune. Tonight at dinner, hadn't Dixie made it plain that he didn't give a hoot for her fortune? Then too, embarrassment over his unseemly war wounds had discouraged him from dropping his pants for her. Well, that was part of it. Even though last night, when he had faked being unconscious, he knew she had studied inch of him as if he had been a bug under a microscope. After all, as the so-called husband, shouldn't he wear the pants in the family and say when he should take them off or on?

Then, they had kibitzed about her having to strap herself down and thankfully, he had resisted telling her that Donna was the one who truly had to worry about that. Was that a backhanded form of conceit on her part? He had wondered.

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So big, she has to strap them down, hunh? Right. You're all right kid; you take after your mother obviously, but Donna, now there is someone who has to strap them down! Donna's torpedoes were more like nuclear weapons.

Yet, Dixie had thought he had done well to keep those thoughts to himself and so he had moved on to the subject of Ryz'n's waist and BAMM! She had gotten sick and taken off and told him off and here he was all alone.

He kept returning to that poor waist joke as he would a bad penny. All his efforts to apologize, to humble himself before her and plead for her forgiveness had proved fruitless. It was as though she had suddenly frozen over like a glacier and her icy presence had morphed the room into a freezing meat locker. And, to be sure, he had felt the ice. Oh yes. He had definitely felt the cold! In fact, he was still feeling it—frozen out that is. That ever-present, thawing void inside him had just iced over again, hurting him more deeply now than before Ry first had partly de-iced it. He asked the Lord for peace to sleep. Within a few minutes, too tired and too defeated to stay mad, Dixie received his request.