

Dixie stood upon the Larrabee's front porch completely perplexed, wondering whether he had hurt the girl or helped her. Whatever the case, she had left him in a fix. A shout from a couple doors down caught his attention. A young man and woman were loading bags into what appeared to be an old, sea green, four-door Ford sedan. The tall man waved and motioned Dixie towards him. Dixie turned his back to them to right himself. Once he had taken care of business, he skipped down the Larrabee's front steps and, carrying his jacket out in front of him, sauntered across the two neighboring lawns where the young man met him.

"Little Nick! Damned good to see ya boy. Thought that was you. What—"

"Hey Nick, How are you?" Another short, taffy-haired girl with freckled cheeks and big green eyes bopped from around the Ford over to him. She moved like an athlete, thought Dixie, and reminded him of a smaller version of Ann-Margaret in her prime.

Geeze, what is it with this place, this street? These good-lookin' chicks seem to grow on trees back here. No wonder Little Nick liked delivering papers on this street!

Not recognizing either of the two, Dixie said hello rather docilely. However, the couple placed their arms around one another and descended upon Dixie together.

"Gee, Nicky. You act as if you don't even recognize us," exclaimed the disappointed girl. Dixie studied them. The young man was tall and lean with broad shoulders, a wide brown mustache, dark brown eyes thin, light brown hair, which flopped over his forehead, but he sported a razor cut on the sides and back and had one heck of a schnozzola. He wore a goofy-looking grin and a sweat-stained, battered, old baseball cap with an Olde English-lettered gold **P** on the front. The cap appeared to be an older version of the one Coach Shaughnessy had worn the other day. The young woman was about Ryz'n's height. Freckles covered her tanned face. Her nose was straight, her eyebrows dark and she had high cheekbones, movie star-like straight white teeth and shoulder length, sandy-hued hair, parted on the side of her head.

"Come on Nicky, you remember—Dave! Dave Morris and this is Valerie Vernier." Dixie chuckled nervously as he shook each of their extended hands in turn.

Valerie whimpered, "You don't remember, do you?"

"I, I'm afraid not." It was the same old story for Dixie. All he could do was feel like a jerk.

"For Pete's sake Nick, we were just at your house a couple nights ago. I thought your amnesia wasn't for current stuff."

"Well, that's true. But a couple nights ago, I was pretty well sauced and I had so many people thrown at me, I really don't remember any of them."

"Well, Nicky, I'm crushed to think you wouldn't remember your old girlfriend," chided Val playfully.

"Oh no! Not another one," moaned Dixie. "I can't deal with another one, not now. I need to get some rest." However, his latest, old girlfriend ignored his pleas and kept right on chugging.

Heeeeeeeere's Johnny!

“Why, if you hadn’t been so boring Nicky, I never would have dropped you and gotten together with Dave here. And we’re still together after five years—getting married next Christmas, as a matter of fact.”

“Oh! Thank God for that. Congratulations to both of you. I’m, I’m, ha, glad I was able to help out.” Dixie was relieved. Certainly, there would be no repeats of last night here. “And it’s quite refreshing to hear that I was *boring*.”

“For me too,” said Dave.

“Me three,” replied Val. They all chuckled nervously.

“What you said about me being boring, I find rather interesting though. That’s pretty much contrary to how others have described me.”

Valerie laughed. “Well, I found out why you were so boring much, much later, because you pulled the same stunt with Sheena.”

“Sheena? *My sister-in-law?!?*”

Dave and Val grinned. “Yeah, only she wasn’t your sister-in-law then. She was more looking to be your steady. She thought you were the answer to her prayers, until she dated you and then she found you even more boring than I did. We used to compare notes on you. Mann, you sure looked great, but what a dud!” She clucked her tongue and shook her head.

“Gee thanks. I don’t usually get such compliments till much later in the day.” Dixie replied, chuckling in spite of himself. “Well, I’m glad to think somebody at least thinks I was more like a typical high school kid.”

“Oh,” said Val, “Did I say you were typical? No, I didn’t say that. Oh no, far from it. You see, Ryz’n later informed Sheena and me that you had been boring on purpose.”

“Hunh? How’s that?”

“Yes, that’s right. Evidently, you had such respect for my older sister Vicky as well as for Ryz’n that you couldn’t bring yourself to be the slightest bit amorous with either me or Sheena, the two kid sisters, as we were. You kissed us goodnight on the forehead or the back of the hand! Thank God, you did, because that’s when I met Dave and Sheena met Bryson. Amazingly, we are all still together. It’s well over five years now.” She turned and tippy-toed up to kiss a grinning Dave on his cheek.

“And you all owe it all to me, hunh?”

“That’s right, Nick,” agreed Dave. “All to you!” Again, they chuckled uneasily.

“Funny, I didn’t get much sleep out in some park last night and got chewed up by half the bugs in Maryland. I was feelin’ kind o’ crummy actually, but now, I’m feelin’ better, much better.”

“And you owe it all to us,” countered Dave. He and Val clapped each other on the back happily.

“Say now, Nicky, what are you doing today?” asked Val cheerily.

“Well, I was going down to the beach to meet Ryz’n.”

“The beach? Well, that’s perfect! We’re going down to the beach, too. We’d be happy to give you a lift, wouldn’t we Dave?” Her fiancé nodded firmly. “And then you could ride back with Ry. You see, we’re taking Trish Allein for a day out.

Out at Home

Johnny—that's her husband—can't come. He's putting on a roof today. You wanna come along with us?"

"Gee, I guess so. Sure. Why not?"

As tired as he was, Dixie figured not riding the Honda to the beach would be a blessing. He was pretty much exhausted. And he could ride home with Ryz'n in the Starfire. So sure, why not?

Dave and Val ushered Dixie over to the Ford Falcon. When Dixie protested about leaving his bike there, they told him it was as safe for him to leave the Honda there as at the Sheeboom's house. They said the Larrabees would not mind, but he could pull the cycle into Val's driveway if it would make him feel better. Dixie left the bike parked against the curb. He took the saddlebags, sleeping bag and canteen he had packed on the bike with him. Dave and Val drove him first to his parents' place, so he could pack his duffle bag with a few things, dropping off the saddle bags, while he stuffed the sleeping bag in with his other duds. He told his mom that Dave and Val were taking him to see Ryz'n "at the beach." Then the young couple drove him to the Allein's apartment over on St. Bartholomew Road.

After pulling the up car to the Allein's apartment building in Canterbury Square, Dave and Val persuaded Dixie to go in and fetch Trish, because they wanted Dixie to meet Trish's husband "Johnny So Fine," privately. When Dixie asked why, Dave claimed Dixie and Johnny had been the best of pals. Their friendship had extended back to grade school. Dave explained Johnny had not come by the Sheeboom's place the other night, when the word had gone around about Dixie's return. Dave, who worked with Johnny installing roofs, knew Johnny expected Dixie to come to him first. There had always been a silent but understood contest ongoing between Little Nick and Johnny. The nature of the contest didn't matter of itself. What counted with Johnny was who won, whether it was pitching pennies or playing chess or a card game of pitch or one-on-one basketball or ping-pong. In Johnny's book there was only black or white, losers or winners and whites always had to be winners. Johnny respected the few people who could beat him occasionally and that is why he had always respected Little Nick.

Dave and Val claimed that Johnny felt now, in some twisted way, that if Johnny were to break down and went to see Little Nick first, he would somehow be losing the game, a stupid game of false pride. The difference of opinion between the two which had prompted this latest contest of wills had had something to do with Nick scolding Johnny for not joining up with the Corps when Nick did three and a half years ago. When Nick had gone missing, Johnny had felt real bad and kind of guilty about it, but he would not admit that to anyone, not even to his wife Trish.

Dixie listened, shook his head and chuckled. Some guy, whom he did not even know existed, was playing all these mind games and carrying all this crap on in Dixie's behalf? He found such nonsense hard to believe. Neither Dave nor Val seemed to comprehend that Dixie did not have a clue as to who Johnny was or what this silly battle of machismo was all about.

Heeeeeeeere's Johnny!

Dave and Val further explained that Johnny had been the Big Jock in high school. He was held in high regard by everyone. Johnny was a winner, simple as that. Football was king at Pocomoke High and Johnny was the all star quarterback in a pro style offense. He made it all happen on the gridiron and became king of football, ergo King of Pocomoke or Johnny "So Fine," as we called. Him. Nick, they claimed, was like one of Johnny's gridiron knights, who Johnny moved around the football field as he might move a knight on the chess board. "Or a rook," offered Dave, "since you would fly deep down the sidelines, catching Johnny's long bombs." Johnny had respected Nick, not only for his ability, but also for coming out for the team his senior year when Nick had never played for the varsity before and also, mostly because Johnny, well, had asked him to try out, when he knew Nick did want to play. Still, Johnny had never thought much of Nick's "sissy-assed Rock'N'Roll." Dave reasoned that, since Johnny wouldn't come to Nick now, this was Dave's way of bringing the two old friends together.

Dixie asked how he could come to a guy when he didn't even know the guy existed. Dave said that now Dixie knew, because Dave had just explained it all and Johnny was right inside in the ground floor apartment. All Nick had to do was go knock on the door to Number One. Dave asked Dixie to humor him and go in and see the guy. Dixie shrugged his shoulders, conceded, and muttered this did not mean anything to him anyway. However, now he was a little bit curious about this curious cat called "So Fine" Johnny Allein, whose nickname they said had been earned from his quarterback play on the high school gridiron.

Dixie knocked on the Allein's basement floor apartment door. A guy who fit Johnny's description answered it. He was well-built, heavily tanned, about Nick's height with short-cropped, sandy blonde hair, swept down across a high forehead, brown eyes, prominent black eyebrows and a straight, blocky nose. Dixie thought the guy could have been a cousin to Elvis. Johnny's greeting to Dixie was lukewarm at best.

"Yeah?"

The guy studied Dixie for a minute before the light of recognition went on behind his eyes. "Well, well. The famous Little Nick Sheeboom has come back from the dead. Well, whaddaya know? I heard you was back, Nicky. Well, come on. Get your ass in here, boy! The A/C's on and I ain't payin' to cool no stairwell."

Dixie walked through the front door's metal frame, not knowing if this was a friendly or a hostile greeting. Johnny did shake Dixie's hand, firmly, very firmly and rubbed over Dixie's stubs repeatedly with his pinky as he stared Dix in the eye. Still clutching his hand, Johnny grinned.

"Lost them fingers, hunh? So what does that mean? You can't cut your hair now?" He reached out with his fingers and flicked the ends of Dixie's long, wavy locks. "Sheeee-itt! Is that your excuse for that horse's tail on top of your head, boy? No problem, Mario will cut that mane for ya. And sportin' a mustache and sideburns too, hunh? Damn! You look like a friggin' hippie, Nicky! You know that boy?"

Out at Home

Yes, Johnny looked a little like a blonde Elvis Presley or a dark James Dean. He wore a pair of green worker's pants, a serviceman's grey canvas belt, white T-shirt and brown, ankle-high construction shoes laced with gold cords.

"What's a matter, can't talk? Pussy's got your tongue? Ha! You wish! Boy! You're mouth's closed tighter than a duck's ass. Ha! And you know how tight that is, doncha Nicky? That's right. It's water tight! HA! HA! Guess, you're just too choked up to talk to your old buddy, hunh? Well?"

"What's your name again?" Dixie inquired innocently. "I think I missed it." Johnny broke up.

"HA! HA! HA! HA! HA! HA! Still got a sense of humor, hunh Nick? Was just finishin' off breakfast here. You want somethin', Mann?"

This guy seemed either unwilling or unable to grasp the fact of Dixie's amnesia. Johnny 'So Fine' strode with purpose and every movement he made had a certain compact, athletic flair that bespoke of a quiet confidence, enhancing, if possible, his direct, somewhat abrasive speech.

"I was looking for a woman named 'Trish'? Is that right? Does she live here?"

"Trish? That's my wife. Sheeee-itt! Who the Hell you think you're kiddin' with that act, Nicky? Now you must o' heard we got married a year ago, Mann! Our anniversary is tomorrow. Damn right she lives here!"

"Well, congratulations!"

Again, Dixie shook hands, but this time Johnny looked him more closely in the eye. Something clicked behind his brown eyes.

"You ain't foolin', are ya boy? You really don't know me. I heard you got hit on the head or some damned thing, but I thought that was all a bunch o' crap." Then he laughed it off. "So you come for my wife, to take her off to the beach, I suppose? Dave Morris put you up to this? I'll bet he did."

"Yeah, I thought she was supposed to be ready to—"

"Ready? Hell's bells! It's only twenty after seven, Nicky! Crap's sake boy! You should know Trish ain't much of one to rush into no day." He mentioned with mild disgust. Johnny strode across the room and threw the bedroom door open loudly. "Hey! Hey! Sleepin' Beauty! Your beach date's here. Get your fat ass outta there BUTT quick!" Johnny turned and grinned at Nicky and repeated, "Butt quick! Pretty slick hey Nick? Butt quick?" He chuckled at his pun.

Dixie merely shook his head.

Johnny waited for a few seconds in the living room, but when he heard no stirring on the other side of the kitchen wall, he walked around the recliner, picked up a football that was sitting on top of the television and tossed it into the bedroom out of Dixie's sight. Dixie heard a scream penetrate the apartment's early morning stillness, followed by an irate female voice filled deeply with sleep.

"Damn it, Johnny! Why the hell did you do that?"

"It's my new alarm clock, Baby. Don't try hittin' the snooze button or you'll get another shot right in that beautiful ass of yours and it won't be no soft screen toss next

Heeeeeeeere's Johnny!

time. Don't ya know you got people waitin' on ya out here? Take ya to the beach? Now move your big, beautiful behind. Let's go, now! Let's go! Hubba! Hubba!"

Johnny rattled the door knob back against the bedroom wall a couple times, but he left the bedroom door wide open. Dixie could see the uncovered, pink-white backside of a curvaceous woman with long, blond hair rising lazily from under the covers, stretching and rubbing her butt. Dixie averted his gaze as quickly as he could recover his wits.

Johnny stepped briskly past the recliner and around the couch back towards the dining room.

"She'll be out shortly. Hit her right in the ass! Ha! How could I miss that big target at such close range?" He giggled. "Come on and have some cereal. Sit down here." He tapped the dining room table twice, indicating the place across from his own.

Dixie heard water running in the other room, on the other side of the small kitchen wall. It occurred to him that Johnny had wanted Dixie to see his blond wife's, curvy backside in the same manner as he might display a hunting or a fishing trophy. Perhaps Dave Morris had been right about the competition thing between Nick and Johnny. Maybe Johnny was showing Dixie that, like Ryz'n, Trish had curves, too. Well, if that were the case, Johnny lost that contest hands down. His wife's curves were decent, but Ryz'n's figure would blow that woman out of the water any day of the week and twice on Sunday. Johnny thrust a wooden bowl and a spoon on the table for Dixie. Then his abrasive host poured some shredded wheat into the bowl and filled it with milk.

"Juice?" He raised a pitcher along with his questioning eyebrows. Dixie nodded.

"I squeezed 'em fresh myself this morning. Ha! Oh! Here, pour your own. Shoot! I ain't your damned waitress, boy!"

Although Dixie wasn't all that hungry after his early breakfast with Lena at the IHOP, he chose not to offend his host's hospitality. Frankly, he did not know how this madman might respond, if he did refuse him. Dixie poured his own OJ and cereal and ate slowly while Johnny talked.

"I know I only wrote ya that one letter while you was over there, but shee-it! You know how it is, Mann. I ain't much of a writer, more of a doer, see? Yeah, me and Trish got hitched. She made an honest man out of me finally! Ha! HA!"

Suddenly his brown eyes narrowed and he became angry.

"You was so stupid though Nicky. Damn it! I told ya not to volunteer with the Marines. If you would have just let the Army draft ya--aw Mann! Ya never would have had to go over there in the first place! I knew a guy down at Tech whose draft number was two—TWO! And he never had to go in at all, let alone go to Nam. He graduated college and everything already. Shee-it Nicky, you always was such a damned hardhead!"

Dixie heard the shower water had stopped running on the other side of the kitchen wall. He said nothing, using the cereal and juice as an excuse to remain silent. Momentarily, Johnny's wife came out of the bedroom, wearing only a shower cap, complaining loudly, "Johnny, there's no clean tow-ANH!" Again, she screamed, this

Out at Home

time, when she saw Dixie and backpedaled back into the bedroom, dripping water all over the floor.

Johnny yelled after her.

“There’s a clean towel on top o’ the hamper, but ya gotta OPEN YOUR EYES TO SEE IT, DAMN IT! WAKE UP, GIRL. THAT’S A HELLUVA EXHIBITION YOU’RE GIVIN’ OUR GUEST HERE—QUITE AN EYEFUL! I MIGHT HAVE TO START CHARGIN’ HIM A FEE FOR THAT KIND OF ACTION—” He turned to Nick—“and before breakfast too!” Laughingly, he shook his head in mock disgust again. Then he confided to his old pal, by way of explanation or apology, Dixie wasn’t sure which.

“See, she ain’t exactly on the ball in the mornin’s, but—” and he grinned rakishly, “She sure as shootin’ is at night.” He winked at Dixie and nodded his approval. “She ain’t bad though, hey Nicky boy? Hell, you oughtta know. You introduced us.”

“No, no, not bad at all.” Dixie finished his breakfast quickly and thanked his host, who waved him off.

“Forget it, Mann.” Then out of the blue he asked seriously, “Say, how fast you running these days, Nicky?”

“What?”

“How fast? What’s your forty time?”

“Well, I got to first under three point four, couple o’ times. I kind o’ suspect the timer might’ve been givin’ me a break there though.”

“Three point four to first? From what side of the plate?”

“Right side,” retorted Nick indignantly. “But they once clocked me at three point three flat from the left side.”

“So you still got the good wheels, hey Nick? Damn! That’s nigger speed Nicky. Big League speed! Hey that’s great, just great!” He snapped his fingers and his eyes caught fire. “Look! My flag football team is playing in a summer league down on the polo grounds. We sure could use ya, Nicky boy. Be like ole times, Mann. That damned Brothers Furniture team got some fast niggers. You remember how them niggers get that fast, doncha?”

Dixie shook his head in the negative. He could not believe the racist garbage he was hearing. In his two years or so of existence, he had never heard such unabashed bigotry.

“I da-dunno—genetics, I s’pose.”

“NAW! It ain’t genetics! It’s cuz they all been running from cops since they was old enough to walk. They had to get fast just ta stay out o’ jail.”

“Oh, I didn’t know that,” quipped Nick, but his words dripped sarcasm.

“Oh yeah, you can take that to the bank, Buddy. Come on Mann! I taught you that! Guess that knock on your noggin really did somethin’ to ya after all. But seriously, a guy with your quicks could help us out big time. We’ll kick their shiny, black asses all the way back across the river.”

“Black asses? What difference does it make what color their asses are?”

Heeeeeeeere's Johnny!

“Cause they're niggers, Mann, that's why. Spear chuckers, jungle bunnies. 'Coons! Come on Nicky, you know that.”

Dixie shook his head. “You gotta be kiddin' Mann. They're just like us! I'm tellin' you, in the Corps, everybody was treated the same and we all reacted the same and we all stunk the same. But I tell you the truth, there are niggers though. You're right about that. But they are of all colors, black, white, brown whatever because there are jerks in every race. But, in my experience, which only amounts to about two years now, there are more good people of every race than there are jerks.”

“Aw, come off that liberal crap, Nicky. You speak for yourself on that. I thought you lost your memory when you got clunked on that noggin. You sure ain't soundin' like it now. No, now it sounds like you lost your frickin' good sense, too. But then you always did love 'em niggers so. Sat with 'em at lunch all the time in the cafeteria. That's why your lips are so fat now— from datin' that nigger Air Force sergeant. Sheesh!” He chided his old buddy with a sinister twinkle in his brown eyes. “Yeah, I know you didn't remember that one, did ya? Writin' that stinkin' song about that interracial crap!” Dixie's blank stare gave Johnny his answer without Dixie needing to reply. “Look Mann, I gotta go to work, Nick. Are ya gonna play or not?”

“What song?”

“O, come on Nicholas. I ain't talkin' songs here. I'm talkin' Football, Mann!”

“Well, I, uh, I dunno. I got a lot goin' on right now, but give me a c-call in a co-co-couple weeks after things settle down and I'll see. It's just fa-flag, right?” The thought of making a commitment to this guy flustered Dixie a little. Johnny ignored Dixie's stuttering as though it hadn't happened.

“Yeah, that's right, just flag. But it's fun. You could help us out, sure. All the guys are playin' R.C., Bernie, Dave, Skip. Mike Goodspeed. MANN! With you on one side and Goodspeed on the other, we'd give them niggers fits! Look Mann, love to chat all day Nicky, but I gotta put on a roof and pay some bills. Rinse off these dishes and throw 'em in the washer, OK? And tell Trish, I'm playin' poker here late tonight anyway, so she shouldn't expect no heavy bangin'. And, besides, I could use a break after last night.” He winked and chuckled again. “But, tell her, I expect to celebrate our anniversary tomorrow night in style, got it?”

“Got it.” Johnny picked up his wallet and keys from the lamp stand.

“Ya know, if ya get back in time tonight, you're welcome to sit in, Nick. Sure would love to take some of that big time record money from ya.” He sneered. As they stood up together, Johnny remarked:

“Damn, if you didn't grow some Nicky. You look me right in the eye now. Actually, I believe you're just a shade taller. Little Nick taller than me, well, I'll be damned! All right! And don't go screwin' my wife now, OK? I know your reputation. That shower cap show is all you get.” He grinned like a devil. “We'll be in touch about that football. Bye.” And he was out the door and gone.

What a character! True he was an abrasive bigot. Still, there was something likeable about the guy, the way he did things, always had the air of a mischievous leprechaun.

Out at Home

Dixie started to load the dishwasher when the front door popped open and Johnny poked his head back inside and spoke solemnly this time. "It's good to have ya back, Nick." Then he yelled toward the bedroom loud enough for the entire building to hear. "IF PATRICIA BEVERLY AIN'T OUT HERE IN FIVE MINUTES, JUST LEAVE HER FAT ASS BEHIND!" Then to Dixie, he shook his head and repeated "Fat ass BEE-HIND, get it?" He snickered and observed philosophically, "as bodacious beautiful as it is." He winked and disappeared, gone for good this time.

Dixie finished his work in the kitchen when he heard a sharp rap at the door. He opened it to let Dave and Val inside.

"We thought we'd give ya a couple minutes alone with Johnny. Did ya remember him?"

"No, sure didn't. HA! He's quite a character though."

"That's one word for him," complained Val out of the side of her mouth, "but it's not the one I was thinking of."

"Now, now. Be nice, Baby," cooed Dave. "He's lettin' me off today so we can go to the beach, ain't he?" Val countered slyly.

"Yeah, I guesso. So we can take his wife to the beach cuz he don't wanna go himself. Besides, he's got Bernie helping him today and he pays Bernie less than he pays you, especially seein' as you were due time and half for Saturday." Before Dave could respond to his wife's logic, Trish appeared from the bedroom, all dressed and fresh-faced.

"Well, gang, I'm ready to go or almost as soon as I find my sandals." A tall, sunny, shapely, athletic-looking woman with whitish blond hair and eyes the color of the Pacific Ocean and faint girlish freckles under a deep tan, had emerged from the bedroom, carrying a large, floppy straw handbag. She was dressed in a short, blue denim skirt and a halfway unbuttoned red and white, checkered, sleeveless blouse over a blue bikini top. The woman reminded Dixie a lot of what he surmised a younger Donna would have looked like. Only she was not nearly as big as Donna was anywhere, but she was not too far "BEE-hind." No, she wasn't bad at all. She looked almost as good with her clothes on. The blonde hunted for her shoes but stopped abruptly, when she spied Dixie, who was standing around the corner in between the kitchen and the dining room.

"Don't tell me. Don't tell me! This? This is Little Nick?" Nicky! Come here, Baby! She dropped the handbag and hurtled across the living room and around the couch to tackle Dixie standing up. She hugged him so hard that he both heard and felt his upper vertebrae crack.

"Ohhhh, that was OK," cooed Dixie, after having slept awkwardly on the ground all night.

"I can do it for ya again." She reached around behind him and repeated the pleasurable experience now on his lower back. "How was that? I do it for Johnny all the time. Why, you're just about the same size as Johnny now. You grew some, Nicky."

Dixie nodded. "So they've been tellin' me."

Heeeeeeeere's Johnny!

"So, was it OK for ya?" She half grinned while Dixie smothered a smile.

"Just hope it was as good for you as it was for me," he joked. She laughed but got right up into his grill and said in an overly sexy voice.

"Ummm. It sure was Baby, always better the second time when ya gotta work harder for it." He didn't know if she was kidding or not. Then she spanked his butt and laughed heartily. "I'm Trish, Nicky. I know you don't remember me, but that's OK cuz I sure remember you." Her wink and southern simper oddly matched her sly side-to-side rocking motion. There was a tinge of Texas twang to her voice.

"So that was you I ran into wearing nothing but my shower cap?" Dixie nodded sheepishly. "Well, I don't feel so bad about it then. Kind o' like keepin' it all in the family." She grinned and winked at Dixie.

Dixie relayed Johnny's message to her and she nodded.

"Johnny's always got to be givin' out orders, even when he ain't here to give 'em himself. Yeah, that's Johnny."

Then she picked up the floppy handbag and turned to the others.

"Come on, let's get on the road. We're wasting good beach time."

"What about your sandals?" asked Dave.

"Oh, yeah." She looked around the tiny living room.

"They're under the TV stand," offered Val.

"Oh yeah, right!" She picked up the sandals. "Let's move. I'll put 'em on in the car."