

“Lynn”
By Dirty Dawg

October, 1982

Walking back down to the old field brought back all the memories, all the wonderful moments of high school. I'd had a better time of it than most kids these days, and I remembered those autumn afternoons spent on the gridiron fondly. I guess the fact that I was the starting quarterback and captain of the team had a little bit to do with it. The memory of those years was running through my mind as I approached the field. There was another game going on today, one with different players and different opponents, but some things remained the same. Youthful enthusiasm, dedication, drive, determination, the hunger to win...it was all still there, out on the field and in the stands. I stopped down by the end zone and leaned over the waist-high fence that surrounded the football field. This was the same exact field I'd spent four years on as QB. I looked over at my high school team, in a huddle, and had to grin. The QB was wearing my old jersey, #15. Only, instead of my last name written across the back, it said "JENNINGS." I wondered who Jennings was, and if he was any good. I decided to stick around and watch a while. Looking over at the home crowd, I spotted the cheerleaders working the stands, their short, dark blue skirts swishing side to side as they went through their routines. I had to smile, and then I had to remember.

October, 1972

My breath was coming hard. I chanced a glance over my shoulder. The clock on the scoreboard, and the scoreboard itself, told the entire story. There was less than a minute in the game, the score was 28-0, and my team, the Falcons, were leading. I'd passed for four touchdowns and over 200 yards that day. It was the last game of the season. After coming off a perfect 8-0 undefeated season, I'd taken the Falcons first to sectionals, then regionals, and finally, to the state championships. Well, the Class III-C championships, but it was still the state championships. And we were winning. With less than sixty seconds to go, nothing could stop us. The clock was stopped, and I took a few seconds to catch my breath.

I looked at my teammates in the huddle and had to smile. We'd come far as a group, playing together for four years, first as the Freshman team, then as JV, and finally when we were Juniors, we were all promoted, en masse, to Varsity. And we'd kicked some serious ass all up and down the county. This was our crowning moment. I looked from face to dirty face, uniform to muddy uniform. And then my eyes came to rest on Todd. His uniform was spotless. His helmet unscratched. The back of my own helmet had sixty-three small football decals on it, one for every touchdown I'd passed, handed off, or run across the line myself. Todd's helmet was bare. In four years of playing football, Todd had been in on exactly six plays. This was his seventh.

Todd was my best friend, had been since the 2nd grade. Todd was a great guy, the absolute heart and soul of the team. Everyone liked him, a few of the guys might even have loved him. He was at every practice, giving 200 percent, doing everything the starters did, only slower and a little less gracefully. Hell, a lot less gracefully. Todd was a great guy, my best friend, but possibly the worst football player the world had ever seen. The six previous plays the coach had put him in on were all in games where we led by at least three touchdowns, and always late in the fourth quarter.

He'd played hard and sweet and honest, but I'd never given him a pass or a handoff. The coach called the plays, and as much as the coach knew Todd wanted to handle the ball just once in a game, he'd always called running plays or passing plays to the opposite side. I smiled at my best friend and he smiled back, excited to be playing in this, the state championship game. Something he would be able to tell his grandchildren about, I thought.

I glanced over my other shoulder and took the sign from the coach. He wanted me to fake a handoff to one running back and give it to the other. I nodded, turned back into the huddle...and set a completely different set of circumstances into motion. We were one, maybe two plays away from the end of the season, the end of our high school careers, the end of a championship year. I was captain and QB. I was taking control.

I looked at my teammates and said it. "Red right 39. Todd." Todd gulped. I looked from face to face, looking for dissention. At least three of the linemen had seen the sign, and knew that I'd changed it. All I saw were warm smiles and knowing looks. They wanted this, too. They wanted to give Todd the chance to catch a ball in a game, make a contribution. He'd earned it, and I knew that my teammates would give their all to make sure that it happened. We broke the huddle and assembled, Todd on my left, at tight end. The play was simplicity itself. A twenty yard run, then ten in. When he turned, the ball would be in his hands. He knew it, I knew it. He had only to catch it.

The defense lined up, and I checked it. They were expecting a run play, or perhaps even for me to fall on the ball and run down the clock. Everything started moving in slow motion. I could see my breath coming in soft white puffs as I leaned over the center and looked right, then left. My eyes met Todd's, and then unfocused a little more, and I saw Lynn standing behind Todd, on the sidelines, her pom-poms forgotten, her hands at her face, looking at her boyfriend.

Lynn and Todd had been going out since anyone could remember. He had asked her out in the seventh grade, when she was...well, not exactly ugly, but she was nothing to brag about. Kind of short, with dirty blonde hair she wore in a listless ponytail. Todd had shyly approached her and asked her to go out with him, and thrilled, she had accepted. They had been together ever since, and were a shoe-in to be named Senior Couple when the yearbook came out later that spring.

Lynn had changed a lot in the six years she and Todd had dated. Sometime over our sophomore summer, she had bloomed. She was gorgeous, tall and lithe and blonde and tanned and perfect. Her high, saucy breasts caught more than one eye as she walked down the hall, and the rear view was even better. Her tight, taut ass was something to behold. The boys had started coming around then, hanging around Lynn's locker, asking her out, trying to pry her away from Todd. To Lynn's credit, she had stayed loyal, remembering when none of the boys would even give her a second glance. Remembering that Todd had loved her when she looked just OK. ...and she loved him. Todd loved her. And I loved her.

My head swiveled back to stare at the opposing noseguard, and as I called out the count, I remembered...

June 1972

Three months earlier

The phone call caught my by surprise. It was the first week of summer vacation, and I was planning on sleeping in. My summer job wasn't scheduled to start for another week, and Todd was away at summer camp, working as a counselor. My own girlfriend and I had broken up about a month ago, so it couldn't be here.

"Lo?" I mumbled from under the covers.

“David? It’s Lynn.” There was something wrong, something in her voice that snapped me awake in a second. “Could you come over please? I... I...oh, God, David, please just come over!”

“I’ll be right there,” I said, and hung up. I jumped out of bed and threw on a pair of old, faded jeans and a t- shirt. I slid my naked feet into some topsiders and ran down the stairs, grabbing my car keys as I went out the front door. My new car, a 69 Mustang, sat in the driveway, sleek and silent. Dad had given it to me for my 17th birthday a few weeks ago, and it was the love of my life. I jumped in and fired it up, backed into the street and turned towards Lynn’s house. It was normally about a ten minute drive. I made in three.

I knew something was up when I turned down her street. Cars were parked everywhere. I parked in a neighbor’s driveway and made my across the street. Parked directly in front of Lynn’s house was an olive-drab Army staff car. Standing on her front porch were an Army Captain, a chaplain, and a woman, probably the Captain’s wife. It was a notification team, and I knew instantly what had happened.

Lynn’s brother, Kevin, was in Vietnam, with the Army. He was a LRRP (Long Range Reconnaissance Patrol), assigned to the 173rd Airborne Division near Chu Li. LRRP duty was among the most dangerous duty there was. Their name said it all. Long Range Recon; deep into enemy territory.

I ascended the stairs and nodded to the Army personnel. I tapped the Chaplain on the shoulder and motioned him over with my chin. “Yes, my son?”

“I’m a friend of the family’s. Actually, a friend of Lynn’s. She called me a few moments ago, but I don’t know what’s happening. It would help me a lot if you could give me some idea. I assume this is about Kevin?”

The padre nodded sadly.

“KIA?” I asked, and he shook his head.

“MIA. I’m sorry, son.”

I thanked him and went inside. Lynn was sitting on the couch in the living room, sniffing softly. I went to her, and she buried her face in my shoulder. I held her and stroked her back as she let it out, the sobs wracking her petite body. After about half an hour she straightened up, ran both hands through her hair and demanded that I take her somewhere... anywhere.

We jumped in my car and we drove out to the country. County Route Twelve is a long, windy stretch of driving with plenty of serene, beautiful scenery. I held Lynn’s hand as we drove, more to give comfort than anything else.

Now, before any of you think me a cad and assume that I made moves on my best friend’s long-time girlfriend when she was vulnerable, let me just say here that I may have been a normal, hormonally-charged horny teenager back then, but I wasn’t that much of a cad. I was just there for her, when she needed a friend. As the weeks went by, we spent a lot of time together. She and Todd still wrote, and Todd wrote me a letter thanking me for being there for Lynn when he couldn’t. He’d wanted to quit his summer job and come home to be with her, but Lynn had insisted that he stay. Todd needed the money for college, and Lynn had me there for...comfort.

Neither of us was sure when it started. She slowly became accustomed to the fact that her brother was missing in action. The crying jags lessened, and she started to smile and laugh more. The first time I made her laugh after the awful news, she stopped in the middle and looked stricken. I took both her hands in mine and told her softly that it was ok to laugh, ok to have some fun, that Kevin would want (I was careful to always use the present tense,) her to go on with her life.

“Never forget him, Lynn...but live your life.”

She thanked me, and kissed me on the cheek, and I forgot about it.

About eight weeks after the awful news had been delivered, towards the middle of August, Lynn and I were spending most of our free time together. We went to the movies a few times, and out to the lake once or twice. I enjoyed her company, and she mine. She was a funny, intelligent girl, sexy as all hell. I can still remember how she looked in that bikini...and later, how she looked out of it.

How Lynn and I came to almost make love in the back seat of my car up at the lake is still a little cloudy. I knew from Todd that Lynn was a virgin, and that she was saving herself for her husband. Even in the aftermath of the sexual revolution, some girls still wanted to present their husbands with an untouched body. Apparently, Lynn was one of those girls, and it added, somehow, to her sexiness. Knowing that she loved to neck (also from Todd,) and that she'd let him touch her nubile breasts through her top, but never underneath, listening to Todd's accounts of her growing excitement and horniness under his hands had always turned me on. I'd been silently rooting for Todd to wear down Lynn's resistance and finally make love with her. For me, at that time, it was a forgone conclusion that they would marry after college. After all, they were applying to the same schools.

Lynn and I were up at the lake, one of the last weekends of summer before Todd was to return. She got all sentimental on me, thanking me for being there for her when she needed it, for being her friend. She was sitting in the passenger seat, turned slightly towards me, and I could see the crotch of her bikini stretched tightly across her mound. So tight, in fact, that the fat lips of her pussy were creating a channel in the material.

I leaned over and was planning to kiss her on the cheek, like I always did, when Lynn turned her head at the last minute and our lips met for the first time. It was a soft, lingering kiss, one that slowly grew in heat and passion. The shared experiences of the last two months surrounded and enveloped us, and before we knew it, we were necking like long-time boyfriend and girlfriend. Her arms came around my neck, and she pulled me against her, forcing my body on top of hers. My hands went to her hips, her soft, silken hips, and then around her back. We were sort of half on our backs, half on our sides...my hand gently cupped an asscheek and tested its firmness with my fingers.

Her buttock was perhaps the most perfect female teenaged butt I had ever felt, and I never wanted to let go. I pulled her against me, and she could feel my warm, aching need pressing into her belly from inside my swimsuit.

Suddenly, Lynn's mouth opened against mine, and I felt her tongue licking at my lips. I opened my mouth to hers, and we started Frenching deeply, adding more fire and passion and heat to the kiss. One of my hands came up and cupped a breast; I expected her to stop, and half of me knew that I'd grabbed her tit for exactly that reason. I was hoping that she would break away and slap me, tell me to behave myself, and then the moment would be over. But I wouldn't be honest if I didn't admit that the other half of me wanted to feel her breasts for the sake of feeling them, that I'd always wondered what it would be like to feel and taste her delicious looking, saucy little tits. Surprising me, Lynn groaned into my mouth and pressed her body harder against mine, crushing her right tit into the palm of my left hand. My thumb worked the nipple softly, slowly, arousing it to a hot, hard point in a matter of seconds. And then instinct took over. Unlike my friend Todd, I had enjoyed the pleasure of a woman, two women, in fact. I knew what to do. I'd fucked both my previous girlfriends, but I knew instinctively that this was not a fuck. I was going to make love to Lynn, and her to me, and it was going to be one of the most special moments of both our lives.

My hands went to her neck, and I undid the knot holding her bikini top on. It was dark and deserted at the lake, but the moonlight gave me enough to see by as her top fell away to reveal two

breasts, perfect as only a teenager's can be, full and firm and round. They were stark white in contrast to her tanned chest and abdomen, and the difference really turned me on. Hadn't someone once said to me that white meat was the best part?

I dropped my lips to her breasts and circled one full, hard nipple with my tongue, taking it gently between my lips to suck and lightly bite. Lynn's fingers wrapped themselves in my hair as she tugged me tightly to her breasts. I went from one to the other, giving as much equal attention as I could manage.

"Oh....David....this feel so goooooood," Lynn moaned. I just grunted in response...and then I lifted my head, looked into her eyes and kissed her softly, almost brotherly, on the lips. "Are you sure?" I asked.

Lynn stared into my eyes.

"We're going to make love, aren't we?" she asked in a small, scared voice.

"If we keep this up, we are. But if you want to, I'll stop right now. I'd be full of shit if I said I never thought about doing this with you. I've been attracted to you for years. But..." I drifted off.

"Todd is your best friend," Lynn said softly. "And he's my boyfriend." I just nodded. Lynn kissed me again, and then buried her face in my neck, her hands lightly stroking my chest. My arms went around her back, and we held each other for about two minutes. Finally, Lynn pushed away from me, only a little, and then kissed me again, hungrily, like a woman would. "David," she said, "This is probably not going to make much sense. What Todd and I have is... separate from you and me. I love Todd and you can believe that. But, in a way, a different way, I love you, too. Not the way a girlfriend and boyfriend love each other, not romantic love...but love just the same. A special love. You were there for me when I needed you. You spent all your free time with me this summer. You helped me get through one of the toughest things in my life. I would have fallen apart without you. When Todd comes back... he and I will still be going out, and you and I will just be...over. It wouldn't be fair to Todd to... share me with you. This is my way of saying...thanks."

"You could have gotten a card," I teased, and then grew serious. "Lynn...it does make sense. You feel very close to me right now, very special and loved and protected, and I'm glad that I could do this for you. But...this is something special, something you should share with Todd, or the man you're going to marry. I love you kiddo...not in the way that a boyfriend loves a girlfriend, or a husband loves a wife...not even the way a brother loves a sister. The way two very special friends love each other. I'll always be here for you, Lynn...I'll always be your friend. Even if Todd and I aren't friends, which is pretty hard to believe, you and I will still be...because we've shared this night, this moment. Even though it's not going to end the way either of us planned...it will still be special, because we both realized that we love Todd more than we love each other, because we both know that we wanted to do this...but we didn't. We stopped in time." And with that, I picked up her top, retied it around her neck, gave her one last, soft kiss on the mouth, and sat up.

We were silent on the drive home, both of lost in our thoughts. I was sure that I was going to kick myself in the morning. When I dropped Lynn off, she got out of the car and walked around to my side.

"Walk me up?" she asked, and I got out and followed her. At her front door, Lynn took my hands and put them on her waist. "David... you have no idea how much I love you right now. What you said, up there, in the car, goes double for me. I'll always be your friend, and I'll always be here for you. All I can say is that the girl that gets you is going to be the luckiest girl I know. You're a very special guy, David...and I don't want you ever forgetting that." And then we kissed one final time. Softly, gently, on the lips, the passion overridden by tenderness. We hugged, and Lynn let herself in. Todd returned six days later.

October, 1972 - The Game

I saw Lynn standing there, on the sidelines, her pom-poms forgotten, hands at her mouth. I caught her eye, and she smiled at me for a half second before turning her attention back to Todd, back to the man she loved. Some of the other cheerleaders had teased her at first, for dating what was essentially the team loser. Lynn had defended Todd so ardently and, yes, viciously, that they had backed off. No one was looking at her as she watched Todd. They were working the crowd, the other girls taking up Lynn's slack as she watched perhaps the final play of Todd's high school football career. "This one's for you, Lynn," I thought as I called the last count. There was the briefest of pauses, and then the center shoved the ball into my hand. We were tired, it had been a long season, and I half expected the line to buckle. Had there been college or pro scouts in the stands that night, they would have signed every single lineman to a lifetime NFL contract. No professional team worked as well as those guys did that night. I had enough time in the pocket to do my laundry and make a sandwich before I had to worry about getting nailed.

The defense, expecting a run play, was caught off guard when they saw me drop back, rolling right. Todd was off like a shot, making his twenty yards in the blink of an eye. He planted his left foot and came across the field, turning at the ten-yard-in mark. The ball had left my hand on autopilot, a thirty-yard frozen rope that hung there like a brown, fat bullet and hit Todd right in the numbers. There was a tiny, pristine moment when it looked like he was going to drop it, and then Todd found the handle, planted his other foot, and blazed past his stunned defender. It was thirty yards to the end zone, and as Todd gained speed, I looked over at the sidelines. The coach was smiling at me, and he gave me the thumbs-up, saying that he understood. I chanced a quick glance over at Lynn. She was jumping up and down, this incredible smile on her face. I looked downfield, and Todd was just crossing the goal line. He ran into the endzone like a man with a rocket strapped to his ass; his nearest pursuer was ten yards away. He ran across the width of the endzone, holding his forefinger in the air. It was a meaningless touchdown in a blowaway championship game, but for Todd...for Todd it was the culmination of four long years of hard work. A touchdown in the final seconds of the state championship game. I felt my heart welling, and tears in my eyes as the whistle went off, the crowd emptying onto the field. Todd made his way through the crowd, through the backslaps, tearing his helmet off. He didn't let go of the ball, though. Not until he got to Lynn.

She stood, waiting for him, her hands clasped across her breasts. Todd stopped short in front of her and looked down at her proud, tear-streaked face. He just smiled wider, and then shyly, he handed her the ball. Lynn took it in her left arm, and threw her right arm around Todd's neck. As my teammates lifted me onto their shoulders, the entire scene was framed for me like the final shot of a sports movie. The cheering crowd on the field, Todd and Lynn kissing like a returning war hero and his bride, and above them, above it all, the scoreboard, with the 00:00 blinking and the score screaming at me in six-foot high white bulbs: 34-0. It was a perfect ending to a perfect season.

Later, in the locker room, the guys drifted out until it was just Todd and me. He sat in front of his locker, still in his gear, as if he was reluctant to take it off. He just stared into the interior of his locker, breathing slowly and evenly. I'd showered and changed, and was preparing to leave. I sat on the bench next to Todd.

"Great catch, man," I offered.

“Yeah.” His voice was distant. “Great throw,” he added after a minute. “Just like we practiced...since I was seven.” He laughed, a hollow laugh that made me feel suddenly wary. A little voice in the back of my head was screaming that something was up.

“I wanna thank you, man. You didn’t have to do that. You took a big chance. I could have let you down, you know.”

I clapped him on the back. “Nah,” I said. “I knew you wouldn’t.”

“Yeah.” Again, that hollow laugh. “Just like you didn’t. Let me down, I mean.” And then I knew. Todd knew. She told him. I looked at the floor, feeling my jaw clench. Was this the end of our friendship?

“I want to thank you again, man....” He let his breath out in a huge, long rush. “Lynn told me. About what happened up at the lake. She told me everything.” I waited for the other shoe to drop. “And...” Todd stopped, searching for the words. “And...I’m not sure I could have done what you did, if the situations were reversed.” Todd turned and caught the look on my face, and quickly moved to clear his position. “I mean...I probably couldn’t have...stopped. I understand how it happened, and why it happened. And I want to...thank you...for letting me keep my girlfriend.”

That stunned me. “Todd!” I started. He held up a warning hand.

“No, David...no. Don’t. You’re the starting QB. Captain of the team. BMOC. Handsomest guy in class. Straight-A honor student. Friend to all, enemy to none. You can stop me anytime.”

I laughed, and then he laughed, and some of the tension was broken. “Seriously, David...if you and Lynn... had ended up making love up at the lake, it would have been over for her and me. A girl’s first....that’s something special. Something that can only happen once. My dad told me that women need a reason to have sex, and men just need a place. She gave you a reason, and you...did the right thing. The right thing by her, by me, by all of us, and I’ll never forget it.” He paused, as if he was thinking whether or not to finish it, and then he went ahead anyway. “Part of me wants to...hate you for what happened. But...I was there, you were here, she needed someone, and I couldn’t be here... you were. You grew close. It happens. But...it all came out ok. Lynn and I are still together, and I trust her more, now, than I did. I know she loves me, and I know I love her. And for that, I want to thank you. I’ll never forget it.”

I stood and clapped him on the back. “Talk to you later man. Go find Lynn, go up to the lake, and enjoy yourself. I’m going home and going to bed.” I was almost out of the locker room when his voice reached out to me.

“David?”

“Yeah, pal?”

“How was it man?”

“How was what?”

“Lynn. I still haven’t gotten my hands on those tits!” He laughed, and I knew he was kidding. Sort of. I walked back over to him. “Todd...they’re just bags of fat and skin. It’s not her tits you want, it’s what’s under them that you want. Her heart. And that, that my friend, you’ve already got.”

“Yeah, “ Todd agreed, “but she let you see them. And touch them. She let you touch her places she won’t let me. How do you think that makes me feel?”

I sighed. “Todd...this may sound strange, but here goes: When Lynn and I were up at the lake, it was the right time and place for... what happened. You and her just haven’t gotten to that time and place yet. It has nothing to do with you...specifically. She’s just...waiting until the right moment. Believe me, man...she loves you more than any man has a right to expect. Me, you...anyone. When the time and place are right...she’ll give herself to you in a way she could have never given herself

to me, or any other man. What you two share is...perfect and special and wonderful. When the right time and place come along, you'll understand what I mean."

"Yeah, I guess," Todd said softly. I clapped him on the shoulder and left.

June, 1973

The prom was winding down when I felt a tap on my shoulder. I turned around to face Todd. He took my date's hand from mine and escorted her to the dance floor. As Todd left my line of sight, I saw Lynn standing there, looking gorgeous in her special dress. She held out her arms, and I walked over and escorted her to the dance floor after Todd and my date.

It was a slow song, but not an overly romantic one. Lynn and I stared into each other's eyes. I was leaving the next week for the Naval Academy. This was probably our last chance to be together. Midshipmen didn't get a lot of time off.

"Looking forward to the Navy, David?" Lynn asked, and I just nodded. "Aren't you glad the war is over?"

"Well, we've still got guys over there..." I started, and immediately regretted it. Lynn saw my stricken expression and smiled softly.

"It's ok. You can talk about it. If anyone has the right to talk to me about Kevin, it's you." Her hand came down from my shoulder and found my right wrist. A sterling- silver MIA bracelet was around that wrist. It said simply "Lt. Kevin Walker" and below that "USA 6-23-72 Laos" I'd gotten it from the Association of POW and MIA Wives in Washington DC, and I'd sworn to myself that I'd wear it until either Kevin came home, or his body was accounted for. I hadn't made a big deal out of the bracelet; as a matter of fact, I hadn't told anyone. Lynn had just...noticed it. "I can't tell you how much it means to me that you...made the effort to remember my brother."

There wasn't anything to say, so I didn't say anything. We just danced the rest of the number, staring into each other's eyes. I knew something Lynn didn't know I knew. She and Todd were going to be spending the night in a hotel room that I'd helped him bankroll. Tonight, as Todd had solemnly informed me, was "The Night." I'd even grabbed a couple of condoms for him; he was too embarrassed to buy them himself.

As the music ended, I leaned in and kissed her softly on the cheek. Then, unable to resist, I whispered in her ear, "Have fun tonight," and straightened up. Lynn was blushing to the roots of her naturally blonde hair. She punched me on the arm and then gave me a wicked smile.

"I will!" she promised, turned and returned to Todd's side. My date came back to me, and we spent the rest of the night in each other's arms. I took her to the lake in my Mustang that night, and yeah, I fucked her in the backseat of the car. As I rose and fell above my date that night, I wondered what Lynn and Todd were doing, and if they were having as much fun as I was.

I figured they were probably having more. Discovering each other's body for the first time was an incredible experience, and I was glad that Lynn had managed to save herself for Todd. I'd given Todd some quick lessons on what to do, aided by my parent's copy of "The Joy of Sex." He'd been simply amazed at all the different positions two people could twist themselves into, and I'd cautioned him into going slow, taking his time. I explained how a girl needs much more foreplay than a guy, and told him that Lynn would enjoy herself much, much more if he went slow and was patient with her. I left for Annapolis the next week. I said goodbye to Todd at the train station. Lynn didn't attend, but Todd sent her regrets and her goodbyes. That was the last time I saw Todd.

October 1982

The voice caught me by surprise. It was the same. Honey-sweet with a touch of huskiness. “Hey, stranger!” I turned, and Lynn was standing there. She was older, more mature, as was I, but she still held the youthful beauty that had attracted me to her in the first place.

“Hey yourself!” We ran into each other’s arms and hugged like old friends do. Separating, we took stock of each other and smiled even wider. As a teenager, Lynn had been cute and sexy. As an adult, she was a knockout. Her hair was longer now, held back in a saucy, bouncy ponytail that made her look great. Her body was the same, a little fuller through the hips, and through the bust, but it was still a powerful male-motivating figure, and I knew that I was still powerfully attracted to her. Hell, you’d have to be dead not to be! She held my hands in hers and then looked down. My right wrist was sticking out of my jacket, and she saw the silver bracelet. It was a little scarred, little nicks and grooves testifying to the years I’d worn it. I’d been true to my word; I hadn’t taken it off but twice in the intervening ten years. I had a permanent tan line on that wrist, something I was very proud of.

“You dear sweet man,” she said softly, lifting one palm to cup my cheek. We locked gazes for a long moment, and then she dropped her hand back to mine. “So? Tell me? What are you doing with your life? Judging by that haircut, you’re still in the Navy! What should I call you? Admiral?”

I laughed. “Hardly. Lieutenant is more like it. I’m up for Lieutenant Commander, but I probably won’t make it this time. I’m still a little young. And I’m not due for a command quite yet. But...I’m back. I’ve been assigned to the hospital up near Pave Creek.”

At the mention of the word ‘hospital,’ Lynn’s eyes clouded, and she looked a silent question at me. “Oh, I’m sorry. I forgot to explain. I was in an accident during my Junior Cruise. Fell off the flight deck of the USS Nimitz onto an aircraft elevator. Broke my leg in three places. Jets went out the window, couldn’t pass the flight physical. The doctor that flunked me told me to consider medicine. I went to medical school on the Navy’s dime, and I’ve got four more years of my six before I can retire. I probably won’t though. Being a Navy sawbones is kind of a nice way to make a living.”

“You’re a doctor?” Lynn asked, and I nodded. “What kind?”

“Trauma surgeon. Flight surgeon, actually. I can pass the flight physical for crewman, but not pilot.”

“What does that mean?”

“That means that every six months I threaten one of the reserve pilots into taking me for a spin in an F-14D or F/A-18 so I can get some jet time. What happens up in the cockpit is the pilot’s decision, and you wouldn’t believe how cooperative they get when I threaten to flunk them on a flight physical! So, I get to fly...some times, and I get to stay in the Navy...and everything worked out for the best, I guess.”

She just smiled. A little sadly, I thought. “So,” I asked. “How... did things work out for you and Todd?”

Lynn held up her left hand and wiggled her bare ring finger at me. “They didn’t.” She saw my expression and burst out laughing. “Oh, no! That night in the hotel was...very special, and it went off without a hitch.” She laughed even harder. “Todd told me all the...help you gave him.” She paused. “I guess you didn’t hear.”

“Hear what?” Her face clouded again, and I felt that same feeling in my stomach.

“Todd died. About two years ago.” I felt the world start to spin, and I had to sit down. The crowd was cheering now, but the game was forgotten for me. At least, the game that was happening here, now.

“How?” I asked softly. Lynn sat next to me and wrapped her hands up in mine. Leaning her head against my shoulder, she spoke softly and evenly. “He started getting headaches and he had problems with his vision. The doctors found...a mass...in his head. Inoperable. He went fast, about six months. I was with him to the end.”

I was silent.. ..and then I started to cry. I felt horrible. I should have been there. I should have known.

“Ah, shit,” I said.

Lynn just stroked my arm and hand. “Listen,” she said, “Come by my place tonight, OK? I’ve got something I want to show you. And we can play memory lane, and catch up on all our news. About eight, OK?” I just nodded, and Lynn stood. “See you then.” And she was gone.

I sat for a while, thinking about my best friend, glad that Lynn, at least, had been there for him when he needed it, just like I had been when she needed it. It all made sense, somehow.

Later that night, I went to Lynn’s house. She answered the door dressed in jeans and a T-shirt. After a minute, I recognized the shirt. It was the T-shirt that Todd had worn underneath his jersey during The Game. It had been washed a thousand times since, but still bore our high school crest.

Lynn invited me in, and I could see that she’d been crying. We moved to the living room, and she sat next to me on the couch. “This is gonna be rough, David. Todd asked me to hold something... something for you. He wanted me to give it to you if I ever saw you again. We tried to contact you through the Navy, but it was during the whole Iran Rescue thing, and...well, no one at the Pentagon was talking. So, he wrote this,” Lynn handed me a sealed envelope, “and asked me to give it to you.”

I turned it over in my hands. It said, simply, “Scooter” on the front. My old nickname. I heard the name coming out of Todd’s mouth a thousand times in my head, when we were kids, playing War and Cowboys & Indians and Cops & Robbers... I tore open the envelope. It was a single handwritten page, and just like in the movies, and on TV, I heard Todd’s voice as I read the words:

Scooter-

It’s funny how things work out, buddy. By now, Lynn has probably told you what’s happening to me, and by the time you read this, I’ll be gone. I wanted to say goodbye to you in person, but since we can’t, I wanted you to know a few things. First, you are the best friend I ever had, and I’ll always love you. For what you did for me all those years, and what you did for Lynn when I couldn’t be there. Most of all, for that one spectacular moment in my life that wouldn’t have existed if it were not for your kindness and generosity. That touchdown was the most perfect moment in my entire life, short as it is turning out to be (haha), seconded only by my first night with Lynn, another gift from you. You’ve enriched my life, and showed me what it means to be friends, and I’ll never forget you, buddy.

Goodbye.

Love always,

“Red Right 39” Todd

I was crying openly by the time I finished it, and I carefully folded the note and returned it to the envelope. I placed it inside my shirt pocket and tapped it once, feeling the painful thumping in

my chest. Lowering my head to Lynn's lap, I let it all out as she held me and stroked my hair. We stayed that way for about an hour, and I finally managed to pull myself together.

I sat up, and Lynn moved into my arms. She kissed me once on the cheek, and then on the nose...and then on the lips. And then it happened. We were both fighting against death, against the monster that had taken Todd...we wanted to feel alive and vital and human. Grasping, sweaty hands made short work of clothes, and before either of us knew it, we were naked on the couch, straining towards each other, feeling that long-denied passion growing and feeding on itself. I could feel Todd in the room, watching and smiling and cheering us on, as Lynn and I became one for the first time, enveloping each other in warmth and love and passion. It was a bit of unfinished business for us, something that gave closure to the entire affair, and it was the most spectacular, intimate, tender moment of my entire life.

We spent the night together...and then the rest of our lives. It wasn't ever announced or discussed. I just moved in. The drive to Pave Creek every morning took about an hour, but it was worth it to return home and into Lynn's arms and bed every night. The night I proposed still stands out in my memory, and we were married seven months later. Eleven months after that, Lynn gave birth to our son, David Todd Clark.

In the fall of 1991, my seven-year-old son started playing Pop Warner football. The day uniforms were issued, David Jr came home proudly wearing number 43. Todd's number. Lynn and I stood and cried and held each other while our son looked at his parents as if they'd lost their mind. We both knew that it was a cosmic joke from Todd, that he'd reached out from whatever is after this life and told us that he was still with us, that he still loved us, and that he was still thinking of us.
