

Beach Party Days: Chapter 3

Forty-five years earlier...

It was 1955, halfway through the decade that arguably was the last “age of innocence” in the two hundred plus years of United States history. One needs only to have lived through it and compare it to the last four decades of the twentieth century and the initial years of the twenty-first century to understand the special comfort that those years hold for the leading edge of the Baby Boomer generation that came of age in the fifties.

Most every generation looks back on its time of youth and vitality with a measure of nostalgia – a sense that those were the “good old days”, focusing through rose colored lenses on the good times, often forgetting or overlooking the not-so-good times. This is perhaps truer for those who came of age in the so-called “silent generation” of the fifties than for any decade since. It is a nostalgia that is inexorably hinged to selective memories somewhat clouded by the passage of time. These memories are stored in the synapses of the human brain; to be recalled in some mysterious way, whenever we are presented with a particular, all-too familiar visual image, sound, taste or smell.

After all, life can be hard. The vast majority of us feel fortunate to wake up yet another day to face yet another string of unpredictable events over which we often have little if any control. Thus, those stored memories (at least the pleasurable ones) give us an anchor to the past that helps us draw comparisons with the present, and perhaps with God’s grace, maintain some degree of hope for the future.

The fifties ushered in a period of dramatic growth and expansion that set America on a course of increasingly rapid change that was unparalleled in our short history. These changes ultimately have had even more of an impact on American culture than the Industrial Revolution. The engine of these changes was the Baby Boom that began in 1946 following the end of WWII.

The lubrication for this engine was the post war economy, which provided the wherewithal for the returning war veterans to demand and consume the goods and services developed by the captains of industry, who recognized and responded to those demands. During the war against Germany, Japan and Italy, Americans lived a life of sacrifice and denial, adapting to rationing and doing without. But once the war ended that pent up demand burst forth like the first flowers in spring.

The fuel that kept the engine humming was a renewed restlessness of the American spirit that took hold of Americans – restlessness not unlike that of the first pioneers who opened up the western frontier. It temporarily took a hiatus with the disillusionment of the mid-sixties, but is still there today in the American psyche. One result of this restlessness was the formation of large suburban areas surrounding the major cities, as people migrated out of the confining spaces of the cities in search of a more open and airy lifestyle. Some would even say a safer, quieter lifestyle. This mass migration set in motion events that forever changed the landscape of American culture. A complex mix of major and minor ingredients formulated this fuel – some seemingly positive and some seemingly negative. The most significant of the major ingredients are the following.

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First and foremost was a fervent hope for the future founded on belief in the “American Way” that was built on a rock-like foundation – the confidence that God was on our side and that therefore we were on the side of “Good”. America was a blessed land; “The land of the free and the home of the brave” was the catch phrase.

Secondly was a desire of parents, who had lived through the Second World War, to provide a better life for their children and grandchildren – a better life with respect to material welfare, yes, but also with regard to personal health, education and happiness.

Thirdly a weariness of war and its inevitable destruction – man’s inhumanity to man evidenced by the holocaust and the treatment of Allied POW’s at the hands of the Japanese. Then there was the necessity for dropping the atomic bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in order to end that “war to end all wars”. Yet despite this, or perhaps because of it, America was in the process of helping Germany and Japan rebuild. American financial and people resources came to their aid, something that in all probability no other country would do for its defeated enemies.

Fourthly an underlying, semi-conscious apprehension – an uneasiness fomented by the rise of Communism and the Cold War, the harnessing of nuclear energy with its awesome capability for potentially eradicating the human race, and a healthy distrust of unmitigated political power vested in a select few.

Lastly there was the indomitable American “can do” attitude – that optimism that led to numerous inventions and technological advances in the fifties and on into the following decades. In 1950, for example, electricity began to be generated by the first nuclear reactor, ushering in the peacetime use of nuclear energy. Early in the decade the first direct dial coast to coast telephone call was made. The jukebox was invented and mass-produced, expanding the availability of music to public places frequented by teenagers and helping to ignite the Rock and Roll phenomenon. As the decade advanced, American ingenuity produced the color TV and intercontinental broadcasting, TV dinners, the hula-hoop, Barbie dolls, the microchip, the shopping mall, the H-Bomb, the interstate highway system, and too many others to be listed.

The explosion in the availability of consumer goods and services led to an unprecedented level of affluence and disposable income for a large percentage of American teens. In an era that idealized American family life, through TV shows like “Father Knows Best”, “The Ozzie & Harriet Show”, “I Love Lucy”, and “Lassie”, the newfound affluence amidst the expansion and growth was sowing seeds of drastic, impending change. These were seeds that spawned the Civil Rights Movement, the Sexual Revolution, The Peace Movement and later the Women’s Movement. The forces of change that emerged would turn American culture upside down and inside out in a kind of gut-wrenching metamorphosis. That combined with the accelerated speed of change would leave Americans gasping for air and grasping or searching for answers that no longer seemed answerable by the traditional values of the fifties and earlier decades.

The boys and girls who made up the QHS class of 1959, along with their peers in high schools throughout the land, were born in 1941-1942 and were on the front cusp of the Baby Boom generation, known as the Pre-Boomers. This was the group to which Bo, Earle, James, and Rafe belonged and the fifties for them and many of their peers were “the good old days”.

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Monday Afternoon, August 15, 1955...

Rafe thought he was having a vision. She was just about the loveliest thing he had ever laid eyes on. Her medium length blonde hair, lightened from the summer sun, was gently curled and parted in the middle. It cascaded gently down along each side of her luminous face, hiding what he could only imagine were perfectly formed ears, and covering the sweet nape at the back of her neck, which was not too long or short.

She was sitting on a flat stone at the base of a large oak tree. Her hands loosely grasped the knees of her bare legs, which were pulled up towards her chest. She was wearing a pair of light blue mid-thigh length shorts with a plain, white blouse that was not tucked in, but worn outside the shorts and white cotton bobby sox in a pair of brown penny loafers. Rafe was standing directly in front of her, not more than a couple feet away, leaning on his baseball bat. From this angle he could see the top of her white bra and a bit of cleavage, since her blouse with the pointed collar was opened to the button just below the top of her breasts. At 13, she was still maturing and those breasts were not yet fully developed, but still Rafe had difficulty not furtively looking at them.

Rafe felt himself begin to blush as he became aware of a hardening in his loins. “Oh, God, no!” His mind fairly screamed at him. “What’s she going to think of me, if she sees that I have a hard-on?” Yet another part of him wanted so very much to hold her to him and kiss her...and yes, yes, yes, to make love to her and have mad, passionate sex with her!

But he was quickly brought back to the moment as he heard her asking him, “How about you, Rafe? Can you imagine how great it’s going to be?” They had been talking about a number of things: their recent graduation from North Kingsboro grammar school, the end of summer; and the anticipation of the start of high school.

In her excitement, she couldn’t hold on for Rafe to reply. “I can’t wait, Rafe! In just about two weeks we will be taking the school bus each day to Quaytown High School. Just think of all the new friends we will have! I’m going to get involved in as many activities as I can. It’s going to be *so* much fun! And just think of all the new things we will learn in high school classes. Oh, Rafe, we’re going to grow up and be bigger, stronger and smarter. We’re going to have a whole new world before us! I just can’t wait. It can’t come too soon for me.”

Rafe was mesmerized by her enthusiasm. She was looking up at him intently, her bottomless azure blue eyes sparkling, a slight smile playing at the corners of her perfect mouth. Her face was aglow. Her lips had just a hint of red lipstick, which reminded him about his desire for her. He shook it off as he spoke, “I’m looking forward to playing sports. Maybe I can win a scholarship to college after high school, if I do well in sports and keep decent grades.”

It occurred to him that he could not match her enthusiasm. In reality, he was somewhat apprehensive about high school, but he wanted to act “cool” about it. But high school! It was

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going to be another big change for him and in such a short time span. Just about 8 months ago his family had moved to North Kingsboro from Newark and he had to finish 8th grade with all new kids. It was difficult at first, because despite his outward “tough” city kid façade, he was by nature somewhat shy and uncertain in unfamiliar circumstances. Fortunately for him, he was good at sports and was able to gain acceptance from the boys after only a couple of touch football games during gym classes. And his “tough” guy act, with the short shirtsleeves rolled up, collar turned up, big wave of hair at the front, and two-toned, saddle-stitched, pegged-14 pants gave the girls something different to be curious about. More than a few of them angled to be noticed by him and looked on him as potential boy friend material.

But of all the girls, this vision of beauty looking up at him was the one to whom he was most attracted. Unfortunately his shyness and protective aloofness prevented him from making his feelings toward her known. The last thing he wanted was to have her sense his apprehension, because that would not only be *not* “cool”, but also might disappoint her and risk his losing her, once high school began. Sub-consciously, Rafe was vaguely aware of a fantasy that someday Cathy Wood would come to love him.

He was once more suddenly awakened from his internal thoughts, when he heard her Mom calling for her...her house was but a stones throw from the open field where Rafe had been playing baseball with a few other kids. Cathy slowly got up, brushed Rafe’s forearm with her gentle, soft hands, and said, “Bye Rafe, I have to go now. See you at the bus on our first day of high school, if I don’t see you before then. Enjoy the last of the summer.”

“So long Cathy. See you!” Rafe called after her as she headed off. Rafe then walked home to the little Cape Cod house several blocks away. His parents still commuted to work in the city, so he was alone in the house. It was times like this that he envied other kids who had brothers and sisters...someone to talk to or even argue with; it seemed kind of lonely in the house. Rafe went into his room, turned on the phonograph he had gotten last Christmas that his Mom had purchased with Green Stamps. He went through his stack of 45rpm records, put on “Earth Angel” by the Penguins, threw himself on his bed, and thought about Cathy. The lyrics were a perfect match for his feelings about her...

*Earth Angel, Earth Angel,
Will you be mine.
My darling, dear, loved you all the time.
I’m just a fool, a fool in love with you.
I fell for you, and I knew
The vision of your loveliness...*

Tuesday Afternoon, September 6, 1955...

Rafe boarded the school bus at the end of the first day of classes at QHS, along with all the other kids from North Kingsboro. He sat down in a seat next to Jack Pauley. Jack had also

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graduated from North Kingsboro grammar school. Unlike Rafe, Jack had grown up and lived his entire life in North Kingsboro. Rafe and Jack were beginning to form a friendship that would last beyond high school years and on into the early sixties, and would fade away after they went in different directions. It had really started that summer when they began to meet on the playground behind the grammar school to play baseball and basketball along with a group of other boys, some of whom had been in their grammar school class, some who were a year ahead of them and one who was a year behind them.

“How was the first day of high school for you, Jack?” Rafe asked.

“Eh, it was okay. I kind of knew something about what to expect, since my brother Brad is a senior and on the football team.” Jack replied. Jack was about an inch taller than Rafe, with a trim almost lanky body, and a brown crew cut on a face that a lot of the girls found attractive. He had blue-gray eyes, medium sized ears nearly flat against his head, a short thin nose, full lips and a strong chin.

“Boy, that one teacher, Miss Carbo seems like a real fruit case. I almost burst out laughing when she was talking about onomatopoeia, and giving examples like ‘The bee *buzzes* over the flowers’. Until she spelled the word out on the blackboard, it just struck me funny - I thought she was saying ‘on a ma toe pee ya’. And I pictured a guy peeing on her toe. Then she got into alliteration with examples like ‘Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers’ and doing stuff from Shakespeare.” Rafe was referring to the teacher they both had in English class. Rafe and Jack were in all the same classes and they were in the midst of comparing notes on the various teachers and subjects, when Cathy Wood entered the bus, and walked down the aisle to where Rafe and Jack were sitting.

She was wearing a rather tight fitting, mid-calf-length, red, white and dark blue checkered skirt and a pale blue blouse with a narrow rounded-ends collar. A white, lightweight button style sweater was draped around her shoulders, with only the top button engaged. Her arms were folded around two schoolbooks, which she held against her chest. She smiled that precious smile of hers that always made Rafe focus admiringly on her face – those deep blue eyes, the cherub cheeks, the soft rose petal lips, and the dainty chin, all surrounded by that golden blonde hair. She sat in the seat in front of Rafe and Jack, next to Amy Johnson.

“Hi Rafe! Hi Jack! How was your first day of high school?” She fairly bubbled.

When Jack gave his patented smirk and shoulder shrug, as if to say, “Who gives a shit”, Cathy’s eyes went expectantly to Rafe.

Rafe responded almost too quietly, “It was okay, I guess. It was only the first day; I’ll have a better idea after a few more days. What about you?”

Cathy could barely wait for Rafe to finish. “Oh, Rafe, it’s just like I imagined it would be!” She exclaimed. “There are so many extra-curricular clubs and such – It’s not going to be easy to decide which ones to join, but I’m pretty sure I want to join the Yearbook staff, and the Drama Club, and the Future Nurses Club.”

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“That seems like an awful lot to take on so soon”, Rafe offered. “How are you going to keep up with your class work?”

“Oh, well, I’m in the Commercial Track. The school work won’t be as demanding for me as for you, you being in the College Prep Track and all”.

“Maybe so”, Rafe said. Then Cathy turned to Amy Johnson and the two of them got into an animated discussion, comparing notes on their first day of school.

Jack had turned around to talk to Joey Melino, who was in the next seat to the rear. “Hey Joey, what are you reading?”

Joey held up what looked like a comic book. “Mad Magazine”, he said laughing. “They have Alfred E. Neumann as a write-in candidate for President of the U.S.”

Rafe let his imagination take wing. In his mind’s eye he was alone with Cathy and they were lying together on a blanket in a grassy field, holding each other and about to make love...

Friday Afternoon, September 9, 1955...

Earle Burnell had just closed his locker and spun the dial on the combination lock. He had the 2 textbooks and 1 spiral notebook he needed for homework tonight and he was hurrying to catch his bus outside Lakeview High School. He had not yet been given the nickname of “Burn” as yet...that would come about a year later in another town in another state, by yet more strange kids with whom he would have to try to fit in with.

His family had arrived in Battle Creek, Michigan in July, having moved from Baton Rouge, Louisiana. For the past few years the Burnells had moved almost annually, with Earle attending 10 schools in 8 years. Earle’s Dad was in the construction business and when one job ended they picked up stakes and moved on to where another job opened up. It was the Fifties, after all, and the construction business was booming. Expansion and growth were the order of the day. It had been kind of tough on Earle...coming into unfamiliar neighborhoods and schools, feeling like a stranger and trying so very hard to adapt to the new surroundings and make friends, so that he wouldn’t feel so alone and so on the outside looking in.

This move to Battle Creek seemed even tougher on him, because this was the first time the Burnells had moved north of the Mason-Dixon Line. Earle had grown up as a Southerner and he was damn proud of it. But ever since arriving here he had experienced things he had not had to face before. A lot of people, adults and kids alike, seemed to be so cold and distant, especially when he tried to talk to them, even when he just tried to say hello. His southern accent became immediately apparent and seemed to make these “Yankees” suspicious, like he was some kind of yahoo Rebel that was out to pillage and rape.

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But worse than that, there were several boys who had started to give him a difficult time. These boys belonged to a gang called “The Flames”. They all wore their black gang jackets with the imprint of a powder blue hot rod with red flames shooting out of the exhaust and little squiggly white lines to give the impression that the car was racing down a track. “The Flames” was emblazoned in wide, white letters in an arc over the top of the hot rod. They all wore their hair long with sideburns, a big wave and ducktails. They all wore black slacks. And they all smoked. Earle’s parents had forbidden him to smoke and having an interest in sports he really had no desire to start.

It all started innocently on that first day of school, on the 5th of September. Earle was still getting familiar with the layout of the hallways. He was walking down the main hallway looking for his locker, when he accidentally bumped into the “Flame” called Chino. Chino was the ringleader and the founder of the gang. Earle said immediately, “Oh, Excuse me. I didn’t mean to bump you. I was looking for my locker and was not paying attention.” Then he added as he smiled and offered his hand to shake, “Hi! My name is Earle Burnell. What’s yours?”

Chino, being a couple inches shorter than Earle’s six foot, at first looked up at Earle with his brow furrowed and a frown on his face. A smirk began to play at the corners of Chino’s mouth, as his glance briefly scanned two of his gang buddies and then turned quickly back to Earle. “What are you, some kind of hillbilly? Why don’t’cha watch where you’re goin’! I ain’t shaking no hands with no clumsy hillbilly who can’t walk straight!” Then Chino laughed and his two pals joined in. The three of them walked away laughing, leaving Earle standing there at first perplexed and then angry. Earle could feel the hair on the back of his neck begin to rise up. “Dumb ass white trash, if you ask me”, he thought to himself. But he let it go. He reined in his anger and went on to his next class. By the end of the day he had practically forgotten the encounter.

The very next day started off badly. Earle had his second encounter with Chino and his two “shadows”. Earle was the last one to step off his school bus because he liked sitting in the back of the bus. His mind was engrossed by one of the math problems he had for homework last night. It was one of those tricky word problems and he was going back over his solution. He was reasonably sure he had the correct answer, but he just wanted to double-check it in his mind to reassure himself. Math was his first class and he still had time in Home Room to change his answer prior to the class, if necessary. He walked up the path toward the big blue double-doors that opened into the school’s left side hallway. As he approached he noticed several kids standing at the bottom of the steps leading up to the doors. They were all wearing Flame gang jackets and surreptitiously smoking cigarettes...there weren’t any monitors or teachers at this side of the school. As he got closer, he recognized Chino and the two other boys that were with Chino yesterday.

One of the boys saw Earle approaching and said something to Chino, as he nodded his head in Earle’s direction. Chino turned his head, spotted Earle and flicked his cigarette away as his mouth formed an evil smirk. Earle instantly began to tense up. He had a sudden sense of foreboding – an apprehension that made his stomach do a little flip. It was as if there was a

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warning siren going off in his head, “Brrraap! Brrraap!” and a stilted, recorded voice blaring, “Danger! Danger!”

Just as Earle neared the stairway, Chino moved over to the center of the sidewalk, blocking Earle’s access. Chino’s two buddies stood on either side and slightly behind him. “Well, if it ain’t the newly arrived Rebel Hillbilly! I guess no one has told you that we are in charge of who gets to go in this here door” Chino said as he gestured toward the door behind him with the thumb of his right hand over his right shoulder. Earle stopped about three feet from Chino and let his eyes rest on each of the gang members in turn. He willed himself to appear calm, cool and collected. He gave them his best “What, me worry?” look. Then in a teasing manner Chino added, “If you want to go in this door, you goin’ to have to pay us a dollar a piece. Otherwise, you get to walk all the way around to the front door.”

Earle steeled himself. This was not the first time he’d had to face up to a bully or two. Seems like every school he’d attended had its share of guys who tried to demonstrate their position of power – guys who liked to taunt and intimidate those who were new or different – especially if they felt they held the upper hand. While Earle was a little taller than most kids in the 14-18 year old range, he had yet to fill out and was on the thin side with long lean legs, not much of a butt, and long lean arms. And of course there were his glasses. He’d had to start wearing glasses a couple of years ago due to myopia and for some reason all these bully assholes seem to think that guys with glasses were easy marks.

Yet he was a lot stronger than he looked and had learned to fight when he had to. There had been at least two prior occasions Earle recalled, when he had to fight some jerk in order to gain respect from them and the other kids. But those occasions had all occurred at schools in the South. He had heard that the kids in North, who belonged to gangs, were known to carry home made zip guns and switch blade knives, and thus, a bit of uncertainty arose in him. “Well, no turning back now” he thought to himself. So, he planted his feet, looked Chino straight in the eyes and said firmly, “No way am I walking to any other door and no way am I paying you to get into the school through this door!”

The smirk on Chino’s face changed to an angry frown and he took two short steps toward Earle. He poked his right index finger into Earle’s chest and pushed, but Earle held his ground. Chino said menacingly, “Are you getting smart with me, you Southern Hick? I don’t like it...we don’t like it, when some clown doesn’t do what we want!” Then he added, “Now...we can do this the easy way or the hard way!”

Earle took a half step back to be clear of the finger poking into his chest and quietly but adamantly said, “I’m going to ask you just once to kindly not put your hands on me again. And I intend to go in through this door”. Earle noticed that the other two guys had not moved forward with Chino, but had remained where they were with big grins on their faces. “Take out the leader and the followers will fall away”, Earle replayed in his mind this bit of advice his father had given him about defending himself against greater odds. Earle tossed his books over onto the grass to the right of the walkway. He removed his glasses and put them in the glass case that was in his shirt pocket.

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Barely had Earle gotten his glasses away when Chino angrily pronounced, “Okay, Hillbilly, it looks like we gotta do this the hard way – don’t say I didn’t warn you!” And with that Chino lunged forward and threw a right-handed haymaker toward Earle’s chin. Earle adroitly ducked under the blow and hit Chino in the solar plexus with a short, powerful right punch. He could hear the air immediately rushing out of Chino’s lungs and expelling from his mouth, as Chino clutched for his stomach and started to double over. While still in his crouch and with his weight on the balls of his feet, Earle propelled himself upward and outward as his left fist exploded from the arc of a vicious left hook and landed on the right side of Chino’s face just below and to the side of the right eye. The combination punches took less than a second. Chino’s body spun halfway around, his knees buckled, and he seemed to fall to the ground like one of those buildings that are dynamited to implode in on itself.

With both hands still balled into tight fists, Earle glared at Chino’s two buddies – they hadn’t moved. Their eyes were filled with surprise at the unexpected happening as they stared at Chino, who was still on hands and knees gasping for air and shaking his head to clear the cobwebs. It took several seconds before one, and then the other, of the two made any sort of move. They both went to Chino to help him get to his feet. Chino managed to get to his feet and although wobbly, he looked at Earle, gave a painful smile and nodded his head, as if to say, “I respect you, man!” A bluish shiner was already ballooning around Chino’s right eye.

Earle was surprised to see Chino standing. He had hit him hard enough to knockout cold all but a few guys. “Chino’s a tough son-of-a bitch”, Earle thought to himself. He unclenched his fists, fetched his books, walked past the three Flames and up the stairs, through the blue double doors, and into the school. The rest of the day proved uneventful, as there had been no witnesses and the fight was over in a flash.

One week later, following Freshman Football practice, Earle showered, dressed and left the school. As was his new routine since making the squad as a last minute walk-on, he started the walk to a public bus stop for his trip home. There were no school buses to pick up the high school kids who were involved in after school activities. He had to walk several blocks to get to the Boynton Street stop, where he could catch the # 6 cross-town bus. He had been warned early on by some of the other guys on the squad that some neighborhoods surrounding the school were not the friendliest of places to strangers. There were three competing gangs that claimed certain neighborhoods as their turf and anyone from the outside was looked upon with instant mistrust and subject to verbal and often physical harassing. Stories of people being robbed and beaten were numerous.

The entire area north of the school, from the Northeast to the Northwest, was the territory of the Flames, Chino and his gang. This territory took in half of the roughly square mile surrounding the John B. White Elementary School and Lakeview High School and included the small lake for which the high school had been named. The majority of the people in this section were white with mixed European heritage. While the Flames controlled this largest area and had the largest membership, they did not have the reputation of being the fiercest of the gangs. That

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reputation belonged to the Imperials, who controlled the neighborhood in the South/Southeast quadrant. The South/Southwest quadrant was the home of the Red Dragons.

The Red Dragons was a Chinese gang. Their neighborhood was dotted with Chinese restaurants, laundries, sweatshops and at least two brothels that catered to Asian clientele. The Red Dragons did not generally bother outsiders, unless provoked. They had a protection racket going in the neighborhood and they were smart enough to know that the businesses relied upon outside clients and that what was good for business was good for them. Thus, this was generally one of the safest of the surrounding neighborhoods.

The Imperials were another matter, however. Their neighborhood was predominantly Black, as were all of the gang's members. Their reputation as the fiercest gang stemmed from a recent gang "battle" between them and the Flames that occurred early in the summer of 1955. Like most stories of this nature, the retelling often leads to exaggerated legends. But there was no disputing at least the basic facts. A group of eight Imperials were able to hold their own against a larger group of twelve (some claim fifteen or sixteen) Flames. Both sides used knives, chains, and belts with brass buckles, in addition to bare fists in a melee that lasted about 20 minutes. It ended up with casualties on both sides, mostly minor cuts and nasty abrasions, but fortunately no deaths or permanent injuries. At the end a truce was declared, but it was evident that the Imperials could hold their own against superior odds. The enmity between the groups only increased.

Earle's bus stop on Boynton Street was near the "border" of the Imperials and the Flames turf, actually about a half city block into the Imperials zone. The street ran North and South. The intersection of Eighth Street and Boynton separated the two gangs' turf.

As Earle approached the bus stop, a group of five Imperials were sauntering toward him from the opposite direction on Boynton Street. It was evident that their paths would intersect before he reached the streetlight at the bus stop. Earle did not break stride, despite recognizing that the five boys heading his way were fanned out along the width of the entire sidewalk. Earle was tired from a full day of school followed by football practice. Given that Earle was used to living in the South, his normal tendency would be to not yield his right of way, but expect one of the Imperials to make way for him.

"Let one of those Negro boys move aside...Aw the hell with it...I'm tired and not in the mood for a confrontation. I'll just move to the curb and go around them", he thought to himself. When he was within about 10 yards of the gang, he angled toward the street to work his way around the 5 boys. But suddenly they stopped.

One of the guys in the middle of the pack spoke to Earle, "Hey, man, what you doin' here? This here is Imperial turf and you sho' ain't lookin' like you belongs here. You better get yo' white ass out of here, or we gonna mess you up."

Earle tried to sidestep his way around the group, but the one on the end slid over to block his way. "Look y'all, I'm not lookin' for trouble," Earle declared. He pointed toward the bus stop behind the Imperials and said, "I just want to get to the bus stop there."

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Earle's southern drawl was not lost on the boy in the center of the group, who appeared to be the leader. "Well! Well! Seems you not only on the wrong turf, but you also in the wrong part of this country. We don't cotton to no white boys treadin' on our turf, but southern white boys? No way, man!"

The other four boys chimed in with "Right on!"

Then the one closest to Earle said with a sneer, "Let's off this motherf_ _ _ _ , Duane!" He was addressing the leader.

Another one of the Imperials removed his belt and wrapped it around his fist with the brass buckle glistening in the light from the street lamp. Several of the boys exclaimed, "Yeah! Let's do him!" and they began to form a circle around him.

Earle's sense of danger was reaching the alarm stage. He had never before felt so threatened and afraid. His tiredness was gone as the adrenalin began to surge through his body. He thought to himself, "God dammit! Am I ever in a big heap of shit! Well, if I'm going down I'm going to take some of these black bastards with me!" And he began to turn one way, then the other, waiting for the first guy to move in on him. He had already sized them up. Three of the four were at least four inches shorter than he. One was about his height, maybe a little taller, but fat and soft. The leader, Duane, was about two inches shorter than Earle, but more muscular than the others.

But wait! What was that shouting coming from the North on Boynton? Earle and the Imperials stopped their circling and looked up the street. Running toward them yelling like banshees was a group of eight boys. It was the Flames! "Holy crap! Now I'm really in trouble," Earle said gloomily under his breath.

The Flames all came to an abrupt stop within a few yards of where Earle and the Imperials were standing. Earle easily recognized Chino and the two gang members from last week's incident at the school door. Earle noticed that the black eye was gone, as Chino stepped forward and demanded, "What's goin' down here!"

Duane stepped forward and responded, "What's it to you, Chino? It's none of your friggin' business. This here is Imperial turf. You ought to know better than crossing the line on Eighth Street."

Chino volleyed back, "I saw that this cat was in trouble and so I'm makin' it my business." Then he looked at Earle and queried, "what're you doin' on the wrong side of Boynton at this hour, Burnell?"

Earle replied, "I just finished football practice and have to get the # 6 bus at that stop. I've been doing this all week, but this is the first time I've been stopped." Earle checked his watch, and continued, "My bus should be here any minute now".

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“We’ll just wait here to see that you get on the bus without any more hassle”, Chino declared as he surveyed the group of Imperials. Then he looked directly at Duane and said, “No need for you guys to hang around. As soon as he’s on the bus, we’ll get off your turf. Promise!”

“This ain’t over, Chino! You got the odds tonight, but you and me are goin’ to do battle yet. Sooner than Later, I’d say. Then we’ll see who’s the Man! Next time you cross over Eighth Street, you better come with some fire power, ‘cause we is...you can bet your white ass on that!” With that Duane took a step back, then turned and sauntered down Boynton. The other four Imperials, eyes coldly glaring, turned on their heels and followed Duane.

As Earle watched them go, he saw the # 6 bus stopped to pick up passengers three blocks further down Boynton. He turned back toward Chino and said with relief, “My bus is coming. I don’t know why you stepped in, but thanks!”

Chino nodded, “No sweat. I ain’t all that fond of you, but I hate them niggers, no end.” Then he added, “But I’d advise you to start getting the # 6 at the next stop north. It’s another 4 blocks to walk, but at least you’ll be in my territory and not the Imperial’s”.

The bus was now arriving and Earle yelled over his shoulder, “Thanks, again!” as he ran to the bus stop and hopped on. From then on Earle heeded Chino’s advice.

By year’s end, Earle and Chino were almost friends.

That following summer Earle’s dad finished his construction job and the family packed up their trailer home, hitched it to the family car and headed for New Jersey, to a town they knew nothing about, except the name – North Kingsboro. Earle looked back on Michigan with less than fondness, mainly because of the weather.

As the Burnells drove off toward their next destination, Earle started to doze in the back seat of the car and he reflected on this most recent of many places he had been...

He remembered arriving in Battle Creek and thinking, “Now ain’t I in a hell of a mess. The short stay in Toledo, for the summer, had not been too bad, but Michigan. Who needed this? Definitely Yankee country! This was the place Mom & Dad decided would be home for a while. I never knew how long. By the time I learned who was the toughest or proved to be myself, it was time to move on. Sometimes I was ready; however the 3 years in Tennessee had been pretty nice. Lots of swimming, baseball, fishing, caves, girl dreaming and even a real date or two.”

Then he recalled his first experience with weather north of the Mason-Dixon Line. “Winter set in early and I was not quite ready. This was real winter. The first snow came in October. Then it seemed to come back about every three days. There was no way to know that this would be the worst winter in a hundred years. We didn’t see the ground again until March. Six months of the white stuff, which really was pretty the first day then ugly with all of the salt scum and road mess.”

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And lastly sports, “I went out for the football and basketball team. The JV teams were fairly easy to make and I enjoyed the physical contact. The JV football coach was an old guy of 35 or so, weighed over 200 pounds, short. I could’nt believe my ears on the first day of practice when he challenged the whole team to a 100 yard dash. No way was this old fart going to outrun this 14 year old. Well needless to say he out ran the entire team by about 5 yards. I never saw such short fat legs moving so fast. Evidently he had been a running back in some junior college and had kept in good shape. “

Saturday Evening, August 27, 1955...

James was on his way to Bo Orechio’s house for an end of summer party. Bo had invited a bunch of the kids who had graduated from Quaytown Grammar School in June. They were all headed for Quaytown High School next week, right after Labor Day. James and Bo were pretty good friends he thought. After all they were teammates on the grammar school baseball team for the past two years. And both had been in the Quaytown Drum and Bugle Corps this summer.

James was about 5’ 4” now and beginning to fill out, yet a bit gangly. He had a classic Germanic face, with a kind of rough-hewn look. He had a shock of dark brown hair that he had to frequently push back away from his forehead. James was outgoing and enjoyed telling funny stories. He had an unmistakable, infectious, hearty laugh that could be heard at a good distance. All of this combined to make him attractive to a lot of the girls.

His older brother, Jeremy was driving him. Jeremy was in high school and had just gotten his drivers’ license. Like all high school juniors he was a bit full of himself and like all big brothers he seemed to get a real kick out of teasing a younger brother. “Going to be a lot of hot babes at this party, James? Got your eye on one or two? When we get there, introduce me to a couple and I’ll show you how a real man operates. Nothing like young blood I always say. You sure you can handle it? If you want some pointers, Ole Jeremy will be glad to show you how it’s done.”

James shot back, “Stuff it, Jeremy! I can handle it by myself! I don’t need any help from the *big man on campus!*”

When they arrived at Bo’s, Jeremy said, “Okay, hot shot, what time is this shindig over, so I can come back to pick you up?”

“Eleven o’clock”, James offered, as he quickly got out of the family’s pale tan 1954 Ford and closed the passenger side door. Jeremy backed out of the driveway and took off, peeling rubber. “Dad better not see him doing that”, James thought to himself, as he tucked his shirt into pants, brushed the sides of his hair with his hands, and walked up the driveway to the garage. Bo’s parents had a large two-car detached garage and that’s where the party was being held. James was neither early nor late. Most of the guys and a number of girls were already there. He could hear the music playing on a phonograph...one of those songs they played on that Saturday

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night TV show, “Your Hit Parade”. Oh, yeah, it was the Four Aces singing, “Three Coins in the Fountain”.

James sauntered into the garage, found Bo and they shook hands. Bo seemed happy to see him. “Glad you could make it, buddy! Sodas are in that old wash tub over in the corner there”, Bo pointed to the right rear corner of the garage. “Food is on the table back there”, Bo waved toward the table set up along the back wall. Like most parties of 13 and 14 year olds in the Fifties, the boys were all standing together on one side and the girls all stood or sat on the other side of the garage. Sometime later, of course, things would warm up. They always did - you can keep those raging hormones in check for only so long.

James got himself a coke and started for the food table, when he spotted Sue. “Susan Brownell is a real cute girl”, James thought to himself. “No, she was more than cute; she was actually very pretty”, he corrected himself. “Hmm”, he corrected himself again, as he noticed her tight sweater, “With a set of tits like that to go with that face, she is one sexy babe! I think I’m in love!” He looked her over appreciably and mentally took inventory of Susan’s anatomy, “Nice wavy brown hair parted on the right side and flipped up at the ends at her shoulders; face like a movie star, with tweezed brown eyebrows, a pert nose that turns up ever so slightly, a blemish free face that has all things in such proportion that it reminds me of that advertisement on match book covers of a near perfect woman’s profile, that says, ‘Draw me’ and you were to mail your drawing in and they promise to tell you if you have talent.” Then he observed that Susan wore a pale yellow sweater, buttoned in the back; black Bermuda shorts cut just above the knees that failed to hide the eye-catching hips and ass; the checkered knee socks that came up over her calves, covering the lower portion of two well formed legs.

Sue noticed James staring at her and blushed. But she also smiled in a coy way that James couldn’t help but take as a reason to approach her and start a conversation. “Maybe I should ask her to dance”, James thought. But, feeling a tad nervous, he decided it would be best to hit the food table first for something to eat – he spied a plate of hot dogs. “One of them is calling my name”, he said to himself.

James snatched a hot dog, spread a little mustard on it, took a bite, chewed it and downed it with a swig of coke. Then, he headed toward Sue Brownell, who was talking with Emily Thurston, another, not so attractive, girl from their class. “What a dog!” he thought, as he took another bite of the hot dog. Another swig of coke and another stride and he came up behind Sue and ‘The Dog’. “Hi, Sue, how are you tonight? Enjoying the party? Hi, Emily.”

Sue and Emily turned around and looked up at James with instant smiles. Almost in unison, they said, “Hi James.” Then Sue said to James and Emily, “The party seems kind of juvenile to me now that we are going to start high school in another week. I imagine that parties with older high school kids will be more interesting...you know, more mature and adult like.”

James couldn’t decide if Sue was just pretending to be more sophisticated, or if she was really just stuck up. It occurred to him that Sue was from one of the old-line families in Quaytown and she lived in one of the largest homes on Ridge Street. He therefore surmised that now that grammar school was behind them, she was thinking that the kids gathered at this party

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were all somehow beneath her and she was priming herself to move on to ‘bigger things’ – like older guys who had cars. Well, James was never one to walk away from a challenge, especially when it involved matching wits with a stuck-up broad who was in need of a little attitude adjustment. All the more so, as she caught him with his eyes resting hungrily on the round swells of her sweater. So, he began to hatch his plan...

Bo had been one of the most popular guys in grammar school with both the boys and the girls. For a start, he was a good all-around athlete. But he also had the advantage of a particular handsomeness. He had wavy black hair and smooth, slightly olive skin from his Italian heritage. He was thin and wiry with a chiseled jaw, among the taller of the boys at this age, but not the tallest. In some photos, he could appear to be almost a double for a young Frank Sinatra.

In just about a week he would be starting his Freshman year at QHS and he was looking forward to this next big step in his young life. He was getting excited about two things...playing sports and girls, girls, girls. “There will be a whole new crop of tail coming in” he mused. They would be coming from sending districts in several surrounding towns, because QHS was the public high school that served these towns. But there was one thing he wasn’t exactly thrilled about. His parents and older sister, Mary Ann, had been harping about how he would have to knuckle down and study a lot more than ever before, if he wanted to maintain eligibility for sports and qualify for college.

Well, that was a matter for later. Right now Bo was enjoying himself at his party. It was 8:30pm and just about all the guys he invited were here and all but the one girl who he was really hoping would arrive soon. He had been anticipating this night for a week. He had been having fantasies about Judy Wallace ever since the last Drum and Bugle Corp competition a week ago.

It happened on the bus trip returning from the competition the previous Saturday night. He and Judy had been sitting together in the rear corner of the darkened bus and talking and laughing about a number of things, including the end of the summer, the end of the Drum and Bugle Corp competitions, and the beginning of a new school year. Bo had been surprised, when Judy had put his light summer jacket across his lap. He was a bit startled, when she reached her right hand under the jacket and started to rub his crotch. And then he was flabbergasted when she unzipped his pants, pulled out his hard-as-a-rock dick and began to give him a hand-job.

That’s one reason why he had invited Judy. Even though she was already a sophomore at Ruby Creek Catholic High School and he thought her more mature than the girls in his grade, he was hoping that he could walk her home, find a secluded spot and get into *her* pants this time. But she hadn’t shown up yet, even though she said she would.

He happened to glance over to the other side of the garage and saw Hein. He couldn’t remember when James was given that nickname or by whom, but just about all of the guys called him by that. “Hein is kind of a cool guy”, Bo thought to himself. “He’s always ready with a story that ends up with some funny punch line.” James was talking with Sue and Emily.

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Bo remembered how embarrassed he felt on that last day of school in June, when Sue had thrown his ring at him in the Science Lab. They had been dating throughout the last 6 months of eighth grade and he had given her his grammar school ring to wear so that everyone would know that they were going “steady”. But sometime in late May, a girl that was a Senior at QHS took notice of him and Bo found himself dating her on the side. Then all hell broke loose when Sue found out (he still didn’t know who ratted on him).

That day had to be one of the worst in his 14 years! “Damn!” He exclaimed to himself. “There must have been 15 kids in that classroom when she stomped in red-faced, called me a no-good two-timing rat, hurled that ring across the room and ran out like a shot”, he recalled. He had been totally stunned and couldn’t move for a couple of minutes and when he finally ran out after her she was nowhere in sight.

Remembering that experience reminded Bo of the other reason he had invited Judy. He thought that it might be a way to let Sue know that he could get along without her very well, thank you! He reasoned that when Sue saw him with Judy, she would realize what she had thrown away, and become jealous. “Not that I would ever ask her to date again”, he told himself. “But maybe if she begged just a little, I might give in,” he chuckled under his breath.

Bo was interrupted in his thoughts when he saw Hein leave his conversation with Sue and Emily and saunter over to where Bo was standing. James motioned with his eyes and head and Bo followed him out to the driveway where they could talk without anyone overhearing. In a conspiratorial tone James whispered, “Methinks your ex, Susan, is becoming really stuck up and could stand to be brought back down a peg. Are you still hurting from that day at the end of school when she embarrassed you in front of half the class?” Then he added with a wicked smile as he rubbed his hands together, “If you are, and you’d like to try and even the playing field a bit, I have a plan!”

Bo nodded and whispered in response, “Yeah! That’s one of the reasons I invited both her and Drum Corps Judy.” And Bo proceeded to tell James how he thought that Sue would get jealous when Judy arrived and they started holding hands and dancing together. He didn’t mention anything about his plan to walk Judy home and try to get a little action...just in case it didn’t come off. Then Bo added, as almost an after thought, “But, you know Hein, I probably deserved to have Sue get mad at me. After all, I did sort of two-time her. But I never thought she’d find out. And I never imagined in my wildest dreams that she would have made such a public scene. So, while I feel somewhat like a shit head, I still can’t forget how embarrassed and hurt I was. And to be really honest...but don’t repeat this to anyone...I sort of miss going steady with her.” Then he quickly followed with, “Not that I would go back with her even if she asked me...she’s just, Oh I don’t know...just too much a Goody-Goody, I guess, and I’m not ready for getting tied down, what with starting high school next week. So, what’ve you got in mind?”

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James nodded his head in understanding, and continued whispering, “We’re goin’ to need a little help.” He called over to Alan Elmstead, a classmate who lived two houses up the street from the Orechio’s. “Hey Alan! Come over here!”

Alan sauntered over and asked, “What’s up, guys?”

James put his arm around Alan’s shoulder to draw him close, so no one would over hear. “We need your help to have a little fun and teach Miss Goody Two-Shoes, Susan Brownell, a lesson. Are you in?”

“Yeah, count me in”, Alan responded enthusiastically with a giggle.

“Okay!” James continued, rubbing his hands together again. “Here’s what we do. We wait until Judy gets here and Bo starts to put the “moves” on her. Then”...

*Life could be a dream, Sh-Boom
If I could take you up in paradise up above, Sh-Boom;
If you would tell me I’m the only one that you love
Life could be a dream, Sweetheart...*

Several of the boys and girls were dancing the jitterbug to the Crew Cuts rendition of “Sh-Boom”. Suddenly all heads turned in curiosity as Bo, dodging the dancers, rushed from the rear of the garage toward the driveway. “Judy!” he exclaimed, “I’m so glad you could make it!” Even the dancers stopped and all eyes were now on Judy Wallace as she sauntered up the driveway toward Bo. While not an exceedingly attractive girl, she was still kind of cute and it was evident that she was physically more mature than the eighth grade girls, and even more so relative to many of the boys. When Judy leaned against Bo and kissed him on the lips, a couple of the boys made catcalls and whistled.

All this was not lost on Susan Brownell, particularly the kiss. “How unrefined! Kissing in public like that! She must be a cheap tart.” Sue thought to herself. She turned toward her friend Emily and whispered, “Am I glad that I broke up with Bo. He’s a real rat!” Emily nodded in agreement, but her eyes betrayed a hint of a question.

Bo and Judy were now dancing to a slow song. Sue wasn’t certain as to why she was annoyed, but she quickly convinced herself that it had nothing to do with being jealous. “All the more reason to look forward to high school and more mature boys who know how to treat a ‘good’ girl with respect”, she intoned more to herself than to Emily.

Just then Alan walked over to Sue and Emily. “Hi Sue. Hi Emily”, he said with a smile. Normally Sue wouldn’t give the time of day to Alan Elmstead...not only was he not handsome and not very athletic, but he was rather short with a face full of acne and a squeaky voice.

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But Sue knew that Emily sort of liked Alan, so she made a point of being polite and said, “Hello Alan”.

Alan then said rather matter-of-factly, “Hey, Sue, I was in the Quaytown Deli today and I overheard Billy Ballard talking about you.”

Susan’s face lit up like a child who sees all the presents under the tree on Christmas morning. “Really! What did he say about me?” she could barely disguise her excitement, though she made a conscious effort to not appear too interested.

Just about everyone in Quaytown knew of, or at least had heard of Billy Ballard. He was about to become a senior at QHS and was one of the most popular kids in town. He was tall and handsome, with dark brown hair and the air of the proverbial All American Boy. Billy came from an old-line family, much like Susan’s. The Yacht Club set, as they were often referred to with pride among their own group, and not without a hint of envy among the middle and lower classes in town. Billy could usually be seen riding around town in a powder blue 1954 Corvette with the hard shell roof removed. More often than not he had an attractive girl riding with him. Usually his closest friend Jimmy Howard would be following in his own jet black 1954 Corvette, also with a girl in the passenger seat, although somewhat less frequently than Billy.

Billy had a reputation as sort of a Playboy, but in the somewhat innocent, romantic sense of the 1950’s, not in a negative sense. Those who knew him or met him for the first time (guys as well as gals) were impressed with his easy-going nature. He was polite and soft-spoken, always quick to give a firm handshake and a welcoming smile. Billy was not into high school athletics, despite the appearance of a well-tuned body. Outside of his interest in cars, daily trips to the beach in the summer, and occasional winter skiing trips, he didn’t seem to have many other interests. Yet, there wasn’t a girl in town that wouldn’t feel like a princess if he stopped to talk to her. And to be seen riding in his car, well that was just the tops...it would make a girl’s entire high school career complete.

No wonder that Susan was thrilled to know that Billy had been talking about her to his friends. Could it possibly be that he was “interested” in her? She had seen him several times at Yacht Club functions this year and was only recently introduced to him when both their parents brought them to a Yacht Club social tea. At the time she was still sulking over Bo and didn’t give her introduction to Billy much thought. But now she couldn’t hold her curiosity in check any longer. She looked intently at Alan with raised eyebrows and impatiently willed him to answer her question.

Alan avoided direct contact with Susan’s eyes as he squeaked out a little nervously, “Ah, I, I, ah didn’t catch the whole conversation, but it sounded like, ah, like he was saying something about trying to get a date with somebody...and then I couldn’t quite make out some words, you know, but then I heard him mention your name. So, so I thought you’d like to know.”

The clumsiness of Alan’s reporting was lost on Sue, as her heart skipped several beats and her mind immediately leaped for the assumption that Billy Ballard was going to ask her out

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on a date. Billy Ballard...Billy Ballard...his name seemed to echo in her head. She looked over at Emily, who was staring wide-eyed at Sue with her mouth agape. Then Emily's hands flew up to cover her open mouth, as she attempted with some success to stifle an excited scream of "Billy Ballard!"

Then as Alan turned and began to sort of shuffle away, Sue remembered her manners and said as calmly as she could muster, "Thank you, Alan. I really appreciate your telling me." She turned again toward Emily and reflexively the two girls joined hands and began to talk excitedly at the same time...Emily offering congratulations and Sue countering with "Can it be True? Oh, I hope...I hope it is!"

Alan walked back to the driveway in front of the garage, where James was standing with Bo and Judy. He gave the thumbs up sign and then he and James set off out of the driveway. Judy asked Bo, "What's that all about?"

Bo replied as he struggled to withhold a grin, "Oh, nothing, really...Let's get a soda", as he took her hand and led her to the tub of soda at the rear of the garage.

About ten minutes later, Mr. Orechio emerged from the house, stood at the front of the garage and beckoned for Bo to come to him. Bo left Judy's side and went to his Dad. Mr. Orechio told Bo that there was someone on the phone for one of his guests, Susan Brownell. Bo turned to see where Sue was at the moment. She was dancing a jitterbug with Emily. Bo raised his voice over the music and called to her, "Hey, Sue!" He waved her over. Sue stopped dancing, walked to where Bo and Mr. Orechio were standing, with Emily trailing behind. Bo introduced his Dad to Susan. Mr. Orechio told her that there was a phone call for her and he led her into the house, by way of the side door off the driveway, to where the phone was sitting off the hook on a table in the hallway between the kitchen and living room.

Along the way, Sue asked, "Who's on the phone for me, Mr. Orechio? Is it my Mother or Father?"

"Sounds more like a young man. I think he said his name is Billy something", Mr. Orechio replied.

Sue was a bit perplexed as she picked up the phone and said, "Hello, this is Susan Brownell. Who's this?"

When a voice came back with, "Hi, Susan, this is Billy Ballard." She nearly dropped the phone receiver.

"Hell...Hello, Billy" she fairly stammered in reply. The shock was too great for her mind to think of anything else to say and so she held her breath and waited for him to pick up the

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slack. There was a short pause on the line, which to her seemed like an eternity, but was perhaps no more than two or three seconds.

Then the voice on the line said, "I've had my eye on you for some time and now that you'll be a freshman, I was wondering if you would like to go out on a double date...that is if your parents would allow it. Jimmy Howard and his date will double with us."

Sue was having difficulty finding her voice, despite an overwhelming desire to blurt out, "Yes! Yes! Oh, God, Yes!" Instead she replied in a quivering voice, "I would love to go out with you, Billy!" She took a deep breath, got control over her voice, then continued more hurriedly, just as the boy's voice on the other end began to clear his throat to begin speaking, "And I'm sure my parents will approve, since they know you and your parents from the Yacht Club." She paused to give him a chance to fill in the details of the when and where.

The voice then said, "Are you free next Saturday night?"

"Yes, I'm free", she responded, not too quickly she hoped.

"Good! How about I pick you up, er, call for you at your house around seven o'clock, Saturday night?" asked the voice.

"Yes, that will be fine...but where will we be going...so, I know what to wear?" Sue countered.

"Oh, right! I was thinking we'd go to the movies at the Palace on Front Street. If that's okay with you," said the voice. "Then after the movies we can go to the Quaytown Diner for a malted milk. Okay?"

"Great! It sounds absolutely wonderful", Sue cooed. "I'll be expecting you then at seven next Saturday night. Bye for now." And she hung up the phone, once he responded with his good bye. "This is just too fantastic! I feel like I'm going to die! Wait until Emily hears this!" She thought to herself as she walked half in a daze toward the door. "Oh, thank you so much!" she exclaimed to Mr. And Mrs. Orechio just before she exited through the screen door to head back to the party in the garage.

Then it struck her! She had been assuming that her parents would give their approval, but what if they wouldn't? How devastating would that be? They had been letting her date boys since the seventh grade, but it was always with an adult driving them to chaperoned affairs and parties. But this would be entering into a whole new frontier, dating a boy with his own car without a chaperone. She then began to search out arguments to counter her parents' objections...just in case. The first thing that came to mind was that she was now 14 and a freshman, no longer an immature grammar school girl. And it would be a double date, so she would not be "alone" with Billy. And they were going to public places...the movies and the diner. Now she felt a little more confident that she could get their approval. She had to hurry now to tell Emily...

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Meanwhile, at Alan's house, Alan and James were laughing so hard that tears were streaming down their cheeks. Just a few minutes earlier, James had removed his handkerchief from the talking end of the phone and placed it back in its cradle. Nearly choking with laughter, Alan managed to blurt out, "Can't you just see her face when she's all dressed up for her big date and Billy Ballard doesn't show up?" Still laughing convulsively he squeaked out, "I think I'm going to piss in my pants, if I don't stop laughing so hard!"

Hearing that, James started laughing even harder than at first and had to fold his arms around his stomach to keep it from hurting...it felt like he was about to bust a gut. After a minute or so, James was able to catch his breath and said; "I wonder how she'll react to Billy...what will she say to him when she sees him in school on opening day? Will she give him the evil eye and stick up her nose or will she wag her finger at him and call him a dirty lying rat for standing her up?" Then James felt a bit strange as he gave voice to a thought that suddenly popped into his mind. "Hey, what will Billy do if he finds out that someone pulled this stunt pretending to be him?" Both boys suddenly became quiet as they began to ponder the potential ramifications of what had started out to be a joke.

James was starting to feel a little guilty. Yes, he had played some jokes on people in the past, but up until now they were all kind of innocent, perhaps even a bit silly, yet he had never wound up feeling any remorse when they were over. But this was a major prank to his way of thinking and he was uncomfortable now that he had examined the potential outcomes. James was normally not the type of kid who would willingly be cruel to or deliberately try to hurt someone else. His conscience was bothering him! An image of a TV show danced into his head...it was about a man trying to decide between doing right or wrong. On one shoulder was superimposed a small image of an angel and on the other was a small image of the devil. James began to wrestle within himself about whether or not there was something he could do to soften the effects on Susan of their prank. It also had to be something that would keep Billy Ballard from finding out, thereby eliminating any other potential repercussions. He would have to sleep on it, he decided. It was time to get back to the party and fill Bo in on the outcome of the prank. After all, no matter what, they will have succeeded in bringing Susan's nose back down out of the clouds.

Beach Party Days: Chapter 4

Saturday Evening, September 17, 1955...

*One, two, three o'clock, four o'clock, Rock!
Five, six, seven o'clock, eight o'clock, Rock!
Nine, ten, eleven o'clock, twelve o'clock, Rock!
We're gonna rock around the clock tonight...*

The cartoons and newsreel were over. The 6:45 pm showing of the movie had just started and the song “Rock Around the Clock” by Bill Haley and the Comets was playing during the opening scene. The majority of kids in the theater were clapping to the beat of the music. Rafe Cerny and Jack Pauley were in the Palace movie house in Quaytown. They had ridden the bus from North Kingsboro. The twenty-five cent fare each way was worth it for the 6 mile ride to get them to the more happening town of Quaytown. There just was not that much to do in North Kingsboro, so the teens without “wheels” that lived there had only two reasonable choices: either hiking or busing down to the boardwalk area of Kingsboro or take the 25 minute bus ride to Quaytown.

During the past two days of school, a good deal of buzz was going around about this movie that was finally making the rounds to the Palace, *Blackboard Jungle*, starring Glenn Ford, Sidney Poitier and Vic Morrow. A lot of kids had heard about the movie and were intent on seeing it – the film had become somewhat notorious, since it had been banned in several towns and cities across America. That reaction to the movie was due to its disturbing representation of juvenile delinquency and life in an urban all-male high school. News reports about teenagers dancing in the aisles of theaters to ‘Rock Around the Clock’ only added to the fear that the movie might lead to violence and teenage excess.

Rafe was a bit shaken, yet mesmerized throughout the movie. Having grown up from early childhood through his early teen years in the state’s largest city, Newark, he immediately identified with many of the scenes in the movie. The high tension and fear that characterized school life amidst the backdrop of gang wars and juvenile delinquency came flooding back over him. He could feel the tension building within him, as if an inanimate, ghostly entity was oozing into his pores. Memories floated up out of his sub-conscious like air bubbles percolating in a coffee pot.

There was that time in the neighborhood store. Rafe was looking over the rack of Dell Comic books, deciding which to buy, when the storeowner suddenly rushed to close and lock the door. Outside the store, a gang of teens beat the crap out of a lone boy. Then there was that time when a gang of Negro youths surrounded the new white kid in school and took turns throwing punches at him when his back was turned. It ended once the boy’s big brother showed up and chased the gang off. Rafe also remembered seeing a hand-made zip gun that a classmate carried to school one day. Intimidation was a fact of life in the city, both in and out of the classroom.

Jack, on the other hand, had a very different reaction to the movie. Having lived his whole life in the very peaceful confines of North Kingsboro, Jack was somewhat bemused by the themes of violence in the movie. He just could not relate to it; it was more fantasy to him than reality.

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As the movie ended, the house lights came on while the credits rolled down the screen. The audience, which was predominantly teenagers, made their way to the two aisles to exit the theater. While shuffling along with the exiting crowd, Rafe spotted two boys merging into the aisle from an opposite row. Rafe recognized them as fellow freshmen from QHS. At about the same time, Bo Orechio also recognized Rafe and Jack and nodded. As the four of them headed up the aisle toward the exit, Bo said, "You guys go to QHS, right?"

"That's right", Rafe responded. "Jack, here, and I are both freshmen. And I recognize you two from school. I think your names are Bo and Jim. Did I get it right?"

"Yeah. I'm Bo Orechio and this is James Heinrich, but he's better known as 'Hein'."

"I'm Rafe Cerny, and that's Jack Pauley," Rafe said as he half turned back toward Jack who was just behind him.

James nodded, smiled and said, "Hi, nice to meet you", as he extended his hand for a quick handshake, first with Rafe and then Jack. Then Rafe and Jack shook hands with Bo. Within minutes they were outside of the theater and standing on the sidewalk.

Bo said, "That was a hell of a movie! I can see why it was banned in a lot of places. What did you guys think of it? I mean, can you imagine going to a school like that and living in a hell hole like those kids?"

"Makes our school seem kind of tame", James offered. "I guess you could say we got it made compared to life in the city."

Jack merely shrugged his shoulders, but Rafe, still a little unsettled said emphatically, "You can't know what its like unless you've lived through it. I grew up in Newark and I can tell you that that movie pretty much tells it as it is. I feel like I've died and gone to heaven, since moving down here."

"Well, as far as I'm concerned, the best thing about the movie was that song," responded James. "What was the name, 'Rock Around the Clock'?" he said seeking confirmation.

"Yeah, I really liked the beat," chipped in Jack. And they all nodded in agreement.

"Hey, let's all go to Stosh's diner and grab a malted milk!" Bo suggested. "How about it - you guys all up for it? That's where a lot of kids from town hang out. There should be a bunch of girls there tonight, too. Just thought I'd mention that," he added with a wink.

"I'm game," responded Rafe with a smile. "We've just got to make sure we catch the 10:30 bus back to North Kingsboro."

"Yeah, that's Okay with me," shrugged Jack

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“Maybe we can run into Susan Brownell on her date with Billy Ballard,” James said in a devilish manner, as he rubbed his hands together. Bo and James both broke out laughing.

“What’s that all about?” questioned Rafe.

“Come on! We’ll fill you in on the way.” Bo answered while still chuckling.

Saturday Afternoon, September 24, 1955...

The band was playing the QHS fight song and the home crowd was responding with a deafening chant of each chorus of “Go Bisons, Go! On to Victory! Go, Go, Go!” It was the second football game of the season and first home game for the QHS Bisons football squad. The team had lost the first game. Today they were favored by two touchdowns over the Ambrose Hills High School team. The Bisons were wearing their home uniforms of white jerseys with a deep blue numbering and with two red shoulder stripes surrounding a stripe of deep blue. The pants were a matching solid blue with a white stripe down the outside of each leg.

Rafe and Jack made their way up the bleachers on the home side of the field, searching for Bo and James. The four had agreed last night that whoever arrived first would save seats for the others. Rafe’s dad, Ron, had driven him and Jack to Quaytown and dropped them off at the high school. It was agreed that Rafe and Jack would take the bus back home after the game. Jack spotted Bo and James up on the top row of the bleachers, pointed toward them and yelled to Rafe over the crowd noise, “There they are! Up on the top row”.

Rafe & Jack made their way to the top, in the center section, just to the right of the 50-yard line. After sharing hellos, Rafe shouted above the roar of a cheer, “Great seats! How early did you have to get here to get them?”

“I got here about twenty minutes ago”, Bo yelled back. Noticing that James was absorbed with something down near the playing field Bo added, “And Hein got here about five minutes ago. What the hell are you so interested in, Hein?”

Just then the cheer ended and the cheerleaders who had led the cheer came running off the field. They took up station on the cinder running track behind the players’ bench and nervously milled about, waiting for their captain’s instructions. James turned his attention back to the other boys. He grinned in a way that suggested he was about to divulge a delicious secret. He leaned toward the other three and his eyes twinkled as he nodded down toward the field and said in a confidential tone, “Check out the Power twins!”

Joan and Jane Power were nearly identical twins. They were seniors on the varsity cheerleading squad and very attractive girls. The four boys looked on in appreciation at the twins’ shoulder-length, wavy blond hair, deep blue eyes set in velvety skinned ovular faces, and shapely figures. The conservative cheerleader outfits consisted of long sleeved, cream colored

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jackets and skirts over dark blue blouses and slightly baggy bloomers. The skirts were pleated and came to mid-thigh. Saddle shoes, bobby sox and little cream colored, Eton-styled caps bobby-pinned on the top of their heads rounded out the attire. Oh, and of course the pom-poms, but what boy gave much attention to those? These cheerleader outfits did little to hide these girls' obvious charms.

“Nice legs!” Rafe said admiringly.

“I’m in love with those tits”, responded James gleefully, as he gestured with his hands as if holding two melons. “Watch the next time they do a cheer and jump up and down”, he directed; “makes me dream of playing the windshield wiper kissing game with either of those sets of knockers!” Bo burst out laughing and then so did Rafe and Jack.

The boys continued to banter until the teams took the field for the start of the game and the playing of the “Star Spangled Banner”. Once the game started, the boys turned their attention primarily to the action on the field, except when the cheerleaders performed their routines. By game’s end the Power Twins Fan Club was born and lived until the end of basketball season in that school year of 1955-1956.

Oh, and yes, the Bisons won the game easily by three touchdowns.

Friday evening, October 7, 1955...

Rafe and Jack had gotten a ride back to the high school from Jack’s older brother, Brad. Up until now, Rafe had not seen much of Brad as he was rarely home whenever Rafe went to Jack’s house after school or in the evenings. Brad was a senior on the QHS football team, playing offensive and defensive tackle, and when he wasn’t at football practice, he was out on a date or driving around with his teammates and other high school buddies. To Rafe, Brad seemed real cool. There was a simple casualness about him, almost an indifference to anything going on about him. Like a lot of big brothers he liked to lord it over his younger brother and he would tease Jack a bit.

Tonight the annual Freshman Autumn Dance was being held in the high school gym. Rafe and Jack entered the school and took the side stairs down to the basement level. They entered the ramp by the boys’ restroom and lockers. Walking up the ramp toward the gym they passed two of the teachers who were acting as chaperones for the dance – Mrs. Purell and Mr. Fielder. Mrs. Purell was evidently into her teaching mode. Rafe overheard her explaining to Mr. Fielder the purpose of the dance. “First of all it is to provide a safe, chaperoned social setting to help the freshmen boys and girls get to know one another better. It is one of several school sponsored social interactions intended to mold the boys and girls, who come from the various towns, into a unified class.”

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Mr. Fielder was politely nodding, and saying “Yes, I see”, as if what Mrs. Purell was saying was the most profound thing he had heard all day.

Mrs. Purell continued “It is expected that each class will become more solidified over its four years of high school and as the boys and girls mature into men and women they will form lasting bonds of friendship.”

Passing beyond the teachers Rafe and Jack ambled into the gym. The band was playing “The Tennessee Waltz”, a song that was made popular by Patti Page in 1951, but hardly anyone was dancing. The gym was decorated in an Autumn Harvest theme, with hay stalks, clumps of corn ears, and a handmade string of cutout letters declaring “Class of ’59 Freshman Autumn Dance”. Crepe paper streamers ran the width and length of the gym forming a canopy high over the heads of the throng.

Boys were standing around hands in pockets in groups of two or three on the near side of the gym, occasionally talking to one another. It was as if there was an invisible chasm across the width of the basketball court and with one small step they might plunge into the depths, never to return.

On the far side all of the girls were also in small groups, some smiling confidently and some smiling nervously, but most were chatting away animatedly. Every once in a while a boy or girl would furtively scan the horizon across the gym floor, and shyly avert their eyes if they happened to lock onto another’s across the way. Only a few brave souls were out on the floor dancing. And a rare few locked eyes as if to say to the other “Well, how about it? I’m willing if you are”.

On either side of the gym two ramps ran up from the basement level to the basketball court. Along the near side of the court was the auditorium section that spanned the length of the basketball court and rose up to the main or first floor. Directly across the court from the auditorium section was the stage on which the 6-piece band was performing. The band members, all in their thirties and forties, played a piano, drums, base fiddle, trumpet, trombone, and tenor sax. It was certainly not a rockin’ band. Somehow they even managed to make a current pop song sound like elevator music.

“Undoubtedly our parents type of music”, Rafe remarked to Jack.

“Humph! This looks like a funeral in here”, responded Jack.

Rafe and Jack picked their way towards the ramp on the other side of the auditorium, the ramp that led to the girls’ locker room and rest room. That way they figured they could more easily check out the girls as they went back and forth to “powder their nose”. On the way they spotted James who was already standing just off the ramp checking over the girls going back and forth. James then spotted them and waved them on. As they neared that end of the gym, there was Bo out on the dance floor, dancing with Cathy Wood.

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Rafe's initial reaction was one of near jealousy. He felt a bit envious of Bo, because it was obvious by now that Bo was one of the most popular guys in the freshman class, equally among the girls and guys. On top of that he was handsomer than Rafe. But a bond of friendship had already begun between them and so Rafe shrugged off that initial feeling. Then a more puzzling feeling edged its way into Rafe's emotions. This feeling was stronger than the first and ultimately longer lasting. Rafe couldn't be sure what it was then, but years later he came to understand that it was the beginning of the realization that Cathy would never be his girl. He had lost her even before he had made a serious attempt to win her heart.

Cathy spied Rafe and Jack and waved hello. The slow dance ended as the band finished its rendition of "The Tennessee Waltz" and Cathy led Bo over to where Rafe and Jack were standing with James. After exchanging pleasantries and the introduction of Cathy and James, Cathy said cheerfully as her gaze panned among the four boys "I'm so glad you all are already friends. I want everyone in our class to be friends, don't you?"

Jack sort of snickered and shrugged. Bo, James and Rafe nodded their agreement, just to be polite.

Just then a very cute girl came out of the ramp. Cathy energetically waved the other girl over and they smiled at one another and hugged. "This is Martha Luchese from Holmvale" Cathy announced. "We were on the decorating committee for tonight's dance and we had so much fun doing it", she quickly added with a smile. Cathy then introduced Martha to Bo, James, Rafe and Jack. The four boys eyed Martha over with obvious appreciation. She was five foot three with a well-rounded proportional figure. Her hair was thick, dark brown, nearly black and fell just above her shoulders showing a small amount of the nape of her neck. Expressive Brown eyes leaped out from behind feminine-styled eyeglasses and dark brown eyebrows. Martha with her exotic Italian beauty was at least a year advanced in physical maturity than the majority of girls in the freshmen class.

The band started to play a cha-cha number. Cathy and Martha excused themselves and rushed out onto the floor to dance. James smiled and said, "That's about as fine a looking gal as I seen. I'd stack her up against any of our girls from Quaytown; and that Cathy sure is cute, too, but not as developed in the all important chest area as Martha".

"I could go for that Martha myself. In a *big* way, if you catch my drift", Bo added as he slyly grinned.

"How big", challenged Jack.

"Big Enough", Bo shot back with a chuckle.

Rafe didn't say anything. He was intent on watching Cathy as she turned and moved forward and backward to the cha-cha rhythm. He felt a sadness tug at his heart - sensing but not really understanding this sudden feeling of loss. Yet he could not quite give up hope that maybe someday...

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Thursday evening, December 8, 1955...

The football season was over and basketball season had begun. It was 5:30pm. Bo had just finished showering after the freshman basketball game and was getting dressed in the boys' locker room. He had had a good game, leading the QHS frosh with 17 points, 6 rebounds and 7 assists. But he was even happier at the fact that they had beaten the Barton Hall squad by 12 points, 44 to 32. Bo played one of the guard positions, along with Whizzie Grant, one of the two Negro boys on the squad. Bo and Whizzie had successfully executed a freeze for the last 2 ½ minutes of the game, taking turns dribbling the ball around the court, forcing the other team to foul in order to try and get possession of the ball. There was no shot clock in those days, so basketball games generally had lower scores.

After dressing, Bo went out through the double doors to the lockers in the basement hall that were set-aside for the boys on the team. He opened the combination lock, flung open the door and hung up his sweat stained basketball uniform, towel and soggy jockstrap on the hooks. Then he tossed in his sneakers and sweat socks to the bottom of the locker. Lastly he retrieved from the upper shelf his schoolbooks, which he had carried down from his regular school locker on the first floor. There was another game scheduled for after school tomorrow and then he would bring home his uniform and other gear for his mom to wash.

Bo closed the locker door, snapped the combo lock shut and spun the dial. He looked over to the right and saw Whizzie walking away down the hall toward the exit. "Great game, Whizzie, see ya tomorrow!" Bo called after Whizzie, who did not turn around, but merely raised his right arm and waved his hand goodbye. Bo wasn't sure what was on Whizzie's mind. He wondered if it had anything to do the current events of the last few days. Something about a Negro woman in Mississippi, name Rosa Parks, who had refused to give up her seat to a White person and move to the rear of a bus. Then just today in Miss Remson's civics class, she brought up a news story from the morning newspaper about a Negro minister, named Martin something King organizing a boycott of the busses in whatever town this was happening.

"Oh, well" he thought to himself as he headed toward the exit, "no big deal. It really has nothing to do with us here in Quaytown. After all, this is the North and there are no restrictions on Negroes here in Quaytown. They can do just about anything that we can. Well, I guess that's not completely true. The Palace movie house requires Negroes to sit in the balcony. But they don't have to sit in the rear of the busses or use separate drinking fountains or bathrooms. And they can eat in just about any restaurant or diner, except for the Quaytown Yacht Club. But, hell, a lot of us White folks are not welcome there, either."

Bo left the school and walked the eleven blocks to his home on Kinnelon Street. As he walked into the house, the aroma of Italian food filled his nostrils and he suddenly became aware of just how hungry he was. Mrs. Orechio was in the kitchen, but she sensed, more than heard the side door off the driveway open and close. "Get washed up, Bo. Dinner will be ready in a few minutes," his mom said, as she half-turned to smile at him in that special way that mothers seem to reserve for their sons.

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She had previously cooked and added Italian sausage, peppers, and onions to the tomato sauce in the large four-quart pot, and was stirring the ingredients to keep it from burning at the bottom of pot. In a separate pot the spaghetti noodles were just about cooked al a dente and so she turned off the gas.

Bo's older sister, Martha was in the kitchen helping Mrs. Orechio by setting the large kitchen table with five place settings. "Hi sis", he said.

"Hello, Bo", she replied rather distractedly. Then she added in a commanding, almost curt tone, "Hurry up, so we can have dinner...I have a date with my dreamboat tonight!"

"Right. Be ready in a flash. I'm starved!" Bo responded as he headed for the bathroom. The radio on the kitchen counter was turned on at a reasonable volume so as not to infringe on any conversation. It was tuned to WABC AM in New York City. Mary Ann began singing along to the song, "Only You" by the Platters. The Disk Jockey had just announced that the song was still in the top ten after being number one for weeks.

Younger brother, Chet was leaning against the doorway between the kitchen and the living room as Bo passed by. "Oh, I just can't wait to see my dreamboat, tonight", Chet teasingly mimicked Mary Ann.

That comment drew a huff from Mary Ann, who put one hand on her hip and glared at Chet with a look that could kill. "You had just better watch your mouth you little twerp, or I'll tell that little Adriana that you have a crush on her", she shot back mockingly.

"You wouldn't!" Chet yelled back.

"All right children! That's enough of that!" Mrs. Orechio said gently, but firmly. "Chet, tell your father that dinner is ready, as she finished ladling the tomato sauce into a large serving bowl. "Mary Ann, empty the pot of spaghetti into the colander to drain and then put it in that serving bowl and onto the table", she directed, "and turn that radio off".

At Chet's signal, Mr. Orechio put down the newspaper, got up from his favorite chair in the living room, turned off the TV and the nightly CBS News Hour with Walter Cronkite, and made his way to the kitchen. He sat down at his customary place at the head of table, followed by Chet and Bo, who had returned from washing up. Mary Ann and Mrs. Orechio placed the serving bowls on the table in front of Mr. Orechio and then they, too, took their seats. After a short blessing of Grace, the family took turns filling their plates and started to eat. Chet was the first to ask Bo how his basketball game went and Bo related the highlights. During the remainder of the dinner, conversation ebbed and flowed around various topics until it was time to clear the table. Mary Ann hurriedly helped Mrs. Orechio, so that she could get ready for her date. Mr. Orechio returned to the living room to finish reading the newspaper and watch the start of the evening shows. One of his favorite shows, "You Bet Your Life" with Groucho Marx would be starting soon. Bo and Chet retired to their respective rooms to do homework. Later, at 9:00pm, the family would congregate in the living room to watch "Dragnet".

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Friday, April 20, 1956...

“Hit that S.O.B.!” yelled one of the opposing team players.

“Yahoo! Go get him Coach Costello!” yelled one of the QHS players.

The baseball game between the two freshmen squads was being interrupted by a fistfight between the two coaches. The players on both squads surrounded the two combatants in a ragged circle. Some of the boys on both sides were jumping up and down, shouting encouragement; some were mimicking the two brawling coaches by flailing away at the empty air; a few were just laughing and enjoying the spectacle. Rafe had walked rapidly off the mound toward the fight in disbelief. Bo held his catcher’s mask in his left hand and had dropped his catcher’s mitt at home plate as he joined up with Rafe along the first base line where the fight was moving back and forth in front of the visiting team’s bench. Bo’s right fist was opening and closing. He was ready if one of the opposing teams wanted to get into it. Jack had ambled over from third base and Whizzie from second base. The shortstop and first baseman were among the first at the scene. James had run in from left field and came up along side Bo. He was grinning. The rest of the outfielders came running up, too.

“Holy Toledo!” exclaimed Rafe to no one in particular. Then he turned first to Bo and James on his right and then Jack on his left and yelled to them above the noise of the crowd, “I don’t believe this! What the hell got into Coach Costello?”

“This isn’t the first time he’s gotten into it with the other team’s coach”, yelled back Bo. “He did it once last year in one of our eighth grade games.”

Events had started innocently enough. A batter on the opposing team had hit a slow ground ball to third that Jack had bobbled and then threw to first. The first base umpire had called a runner safe and it was a good call although quite close. Coach Costello had called timeout and charged out to argue with the umpire. Upon losing the argument, Coach Costello started back toward the visiting team bench. The opposing coach had walked up to the home plate umpire and with arms folded, yelled something to Coach Costello like “Are you satisfied? He was safe by mile!”

Coach Costello then ran up to home plate, nearly bumping the other coach, who was at least seven inches taller, and fairly spitting out (small specs of spittle were shooting out from his mouth like projectiles), “When I want your opinion, I’ll ask for it!” This led to first one, then the other yelling and jabbing their fingers at one another and progressively getting angrier. Within a heartbeat Coach Costello threw right and left combination punches at the other coach, the right one grazing off the shoulder and the left one missing wildly as the other coach moved back and to his right. Then it was the opposing coach’s turn. He landed a right punch that glanced off the

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top of Coach Costello's head, knocking off his baseball cap. Almost without hesitation the two men grabbed fistfuls of each other's baseball jackets and started to half wrestle and half push and pull one another, twisting around in circles as the taller man's advantage of leverage caused them to end up along the first base line in front of the visitors' bench. After letting go of one another and both missing with wild haymakers, the plate umpire was able to step in between and warn them that the game would be forfeited if they didn't stop immediately. Obviously tired and having spent their anger, both dropped their hands, glared at each other, and walked back to their respective benches. The game proceeded without further altercations, but neither coach would shake hands after the game. The QHS freshman team won, however, 9 to 7.

The following night...

Rafe and Jack were approaching Susan Brownell's house. Rafe was immediately awed by its immense size. You could fit four or five of his cape cod house in Susan's. Not only that but it was on a large corner lot that was at least three-quarters of an acre with lots of grass all around. The house fronted on Ridge Street, the Nob Hill of Quaytown. It had two stories with a basement and an attic under a green gabled roof. The house itself was sided with clapboard and painted white. A full-sized two car detached garage was behind the house facing Carter street on the side. A covered porch ran the full length of both Ridge and Carter streets. The front entrance was at the corner of the house, where Ridge and Carter intersect.

"I feel a bit nervous", Rafe confided to Jack. "All of the Hoi Polloi, wealthy freshmen kids from Quaytown will be here. I hope I can make more friends", he added expectantly. "I mean, after all, Sue and her crowd and most of the kids from Quaytown are the most popular kids and already the recognized leaders in our class." Then to himself he continued, "Maybe some of that popularity can rub off on me. I'd like to be with the In Crowd for once in my life."

Jack looked at Rafe as if to say, "What are you worried about?" But instead he shrugged his shoulders and said, "Yeah, I suppose. But I'll reserve judgment until I get to know some of these kids better. I sure would like to get to know Susan Brownell a lot better...like maybe in a dark, secluded spot somewhere."

Rafe said, "I second that! I also kind of dig that other Susan, Sue Barlow" And they both laughed. "Come on, Jack, let's find Bo and James. Maybe they can smooth the way for us with a couple of girls named Sue". By now they were walking up the front steps toward the front door. Small groups of guys and gals were mingling on the far ends of the porch. Music was streaming out from within the house through the partly open first floor windows. It was evident that the party was well underway...

*Oh-oh, yes I'm the great pretender
Pretending that I'm doing well
My need is such I pretend too much
I'm lonely but no one can tell*

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*Oh-oh, yes I'm the great pretender
Adrift in a world of my own
I've played the game but to my real shame
You've left me to grieve all alone*

*Too real is this feeling of make-believe
Too real when I feel what my heart can't conceal...*

The Platters had scored another Top 10 hit with “The Great Pretender”, following right on the heels of “Only You”. The record was playing on a phonograph built into a console that housed a radio and a TV, all in one piece of hand-rubbed maple furniture. This was not your average teenager’s Hi-Fi phonograph, but an expensive item, known as an entertainment console. The cover was up and Rafe sauntered over to check out the stack of 45’s that were on the spindle. Except for the Platters, it was mostly goody-goody pop music; no R&B or real Rock & Roll. James walked up alongside Rafe and whispered “You won’t find anything hot in that stack of old folks’ music. Ain’t nothing there to get the blood boiling, or the hips to swayin’, or the boobs to bouncin’, or the thighs wet.”

“You got that right! How’s it goin’ Hein? How’s the party? Cookin’ yet?” Rafe said as he put the records back on the player stack. As he did so, it jostled the turntable and the pick up arm jumped ever so slightly causing a skip in the play of the Platters record.

James responded by saying with mock seriousness, “You’re in the house of Snow White. You can’t expect this to be a steamy and torrid affair. It just wouldn’t be proper, don’t you know?”

Just then a rather mousy looking girl charged up to Rafe. She had a look of annoyance on her face. “Please, don’t handle the records; you’re liable to scratch them. Susan has put me in charge of them!” The word please sounded more like “pull ease” with two syllables drawn out in an exaggerated way.

“Hey, I’m sorry” Rafe pleaded, as James pulled him away. Rafe thought he heard the girl respond with a “Humph”.

“You have just had the pleasure of being tongue-lashed by the highly undesirable, Emily Thurston. Don’t you feel the better for it?” James said quietly with a hint of his trademark sarcasm. “Come on; let’s go meet the hostess with the mostess. Then we’ll find Bo and see if we can’t scap up a few lovelies.”

Rafe followed James out to the kitchen, and asked, “What does ‘scap’ mean?”

James whispered, “It’s like picking and choosing, or better yet picking up a girl.”

“Oh,” Rafe replied understanding what James meant with this word Rafe had never heard before. As they entered the kitchen, there was Sue Brownell talking with several obviously

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enthralled boys from the freshman class. He recognized a couple of them; they were guys from Holmvale, one of the three surrounding towns that sent their high school age kids to QHS, since neither of these towns had the wherewithal, or the population at this time, to justify building their own high school.

When Susan saw Rafe enter the kitchen with James, she smiled and waved for him to come over to where she was encamped. James meanwhile headed for the snacks that were placed on the center island counter, and said over his shoulder, “I’ll go round up Bo and meet you back here”.

“Gosh, she really is very pretty”, Rafe thought as he headed toward Sue. He still had that bit of a tough guy saunter that seemed to resurface whenever he felt uncertain or shy. It was an automatic defense mechanism that he imagined made him appear non-chalant and cool. There was only one class subject that Rafe had with Sue. It was American History on the main floor. Sue sat several seats behind Rafe and he had only a few minutes to get to his next class on the second floor so he rarely got to appreciate her fine looks or try to say more than hello.

Rafe was now admiring her silky brown hair, deep brown eyes, cute little turned up nose, and full sensual lips. Her friendly smile for him as he stopped across from her was a bit disarming but made Rafe feel somewhat more confident. He nodded to the two boys from Holmvale. The third boy had moved on as Rafe was approaching. Sue performed the introductions so adroitly that Rafe wondered if her parents had sent her to a charm school or finishing school of some type. Regardless, he was impressed – no, it was more like enamored. So much so that two minutes later he couldn’t remember the names of the Holmvale guys. “So glad you could come tonight, Rafe!” Sue remarked in a bubbly way. “I so much wanted to get all of the top students in our class together and I’ve been looking forward to this party for weeks. So, tell me, Rafe, how do you like QHS?”

Rafe hesitated for a second before answering. He was suddenly aware that he wanted very much to impress Sue and therefore he wanted his reply to be something more than a short sentence fragment like “Okay, I Guess”, accompanied with a shrug of the shoulders. So, instead he responded, “I’m very happy with school. I like most of the teachers, and just about all of the kids are friendly, even the upperclassmen. It’s a lot better than having to go to high school in Newark, where I lived before moving down here. How about you, Susan? I suppose that you pretty much knew what to expect, you being from Quaytown. ”

“Well, good!” Sue said with a big friendly smile. “I’m glad you like it at QHS. And as for me, you’re correct; the kids from Quaytown are familiar with the school system. Several of the high school teachers used to teach in the grammar school. And I hope you are enjoying the party and getting to meet a lot of people.”

Just then the two boys from Holmvale excused themselves, nodding at Rafe and saying almost in sync, “Nice to meet you”, as they headed off to the living room.

Sue’s smile suddenly began to fade and she became perceptibly more serious as she watched the other two boys move off and then turned her gaze back to Rafe, while inching closer

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to him. “Thanks for rescuing me, Rafe”, she whispered. “I’m sure they are very nice, but all they could talk about was farming – planting and harvesting zucchini, tomatoes, other kinds of vegetables and that sort of thing. It just got terribly boring after awhile.” Her smile returned as she continued with a low voice, “I’ve noticed in our American History class how you always seem to know the correct answers when Mrs. Cortese asks a question. You obviously keep up with the homework. I’ve tried to talk to you several times, but you always rush off after class.”

Rafe felt himself beginning to blush at the compliment, and fought to keep from stammering. “My next class is Algebra and...and it’s clear up on the far end of the second floor, and I have to get to my locker to exchange text books.” He added rather earnestly, “I don’t like to carry extra books around if I don’t have to”. Then attempting to smile and trying to add a little flirtatiousness to his voice, he said somewhat glibly, “I’ve wanted to say more than hello for months now. But you’re such a popular girl, especially with the guys, that the opportunity somehow didn’t seem to come up.”

“Well, we’ll just have to find a way to get better acquainted!” Sue stated coyly as she winked and smiled deliciously. “But now I have to play hostess and circulate with the others.” Almost too quickly the coyness disappeared and the smile changed back to her less intimate version as she started to move off toward the adjoining family rec room.

As she was doing so, Bo and James, with Jack trailing entered the kitchen from the rec room. James had apparently found both Bo and Jack while Rafe was talking with Sue. Bo called out, “Hey, Rafe, where’ve you been?”

At that Sue stopped in her tracks, looked first at Bo and then back at Rafe. The friendly smile was gone and in its place was a look of mild annoyance as if to say, “So you two are friends, huh?” Then she and Bo exchanged polite “hellos” and Sue scurried on.

Bo, James, Jack and Rafe then went into the living room at Bo’s suggestion. Emily was still taking charge of the music and “Heartbreak Hotel” was playing. Elvis Presley’s first recording for RCA Records had literally zoomed to the top of the charts faster than just about any song in history. A group of girls from Quaytown were gathered with Emily, not far from the entertainment console, all chatting vociferously. Rafe only recognized one of the other girls...it was Sue Barlow and Rafe was instantly alert to the opportunity to finally get to talk with her. He had mentioned his interest to James earlier and James had promised to arrange an introduction.

As they approached the group of girls, it sounded as if there were two or three different conversations going at the same time. The boys could only catch snippets of sentences.

“Don’t you just adore Elvis Presley?” they overheard one of the girls say.

“Oh, yes! What a dreamboat! Did you see the article and picture of him in *Seventeen*?” chirped another.

“He’s okay, but I still drool over James Dean, even though he died in that terrible car crash!” said a third.

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That was one conversation. The other revolved around the hot news of the day...the marriage of the actress Grace Kelly to Prince Rainier. It had been *the* major news story on TV and the newspapers since the wedding two days ago, on Thursday.

“Wasn’t it just the most beautiful wedding?” one girl exclaimed dreamily.

“Absolutely the most! It was so extravagant and royal-like. It’s like a real life story of Cinderella! Can you imagine? Couldn’t you just die?” responded another rhetorically.

A third subject of conversation or stream of consciousness was ending as the boys approached, so they were unable to overhear more than something about some boy that one of the girls had evidently taken a fancy to.

To Bo and the other boys the amazing thing was not just that these subjects were all being discussed simultaneously, but that several of the girls seemed adept at rapidly switching from one then the other subject without losing the context.

“Hi!” announced James in order to break into the girls’ multi-level conversation. “Girls, you already know Bo, but I want you to meet two of the coolest guys to ever come out of North Kingsboro, Rafe Cerny and Jack Pauley.” Then he added, still with that grin that looked like the cat that ate the canary, “Guys, meet Sue Barlow, Dana Sloane, Carol Matthews, Heather O’Brien, Betty Armstrong, and last but not least Emily Thurston. Here we have assembled the crème de la crème of Quaytown freshmen girls”, he added with a hint of mock superiority in his voice, followed by a chuckle that bordered on a guffaw. Everyone laughed as the nervousness of being introduced to relative strangers was eased by James’s playful presentation.

The group of girls now imperceptibly opened up their ranks to allow the four boys to join with them into a larger circle. Cautious chatting went on for a few minutes. Rafe found himself next to Sue Barlow. He had observed her to be very talkative when she was among just the girls, but now she seemed a lot more reserved, if not demure. He asked her some innocuous questions about school and she answered in a straight-forward manner, though not effusively. Sue asked Rafe a few questions about his likes and dislikes, sort of feeling him out to see if perhaps there might be some things they had in common. Rafe began to feel that his quiet shyness was a bit of a hindrance, but after another minute or so of light conversation, Sue seemed to relax and that in turn helped Rafe to feel a little more confident. He made up his mind that he would ask her out on a date sometime soon. He had etched in his mind a replica of her figure... narrow waist, full hips, smallish breasts, and nice legs despite appearing to be ever so slightly bowed – it was a bit difficult to tell despite the tight skirt, because it came down to just below the knees. Sue had a cute, angular face with a narrow chin, brown wavy hair with no apparent part, blue eyes, a long delicate nose and somewhat thin but well-shaped lips.

Meanwhile Jack was talking it up with Betty Armstrong, who was cute but not overly attractive. The other four girls were laughing and joking with Bo and James. During a lull in his conversation with Sue Barlow, Rafe couldn’t help but notice James lean over and whisper something in Dana Sloane’s ear. Dana had been busily looking through the stack of 45’s during

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the introductions and only now did Rafe see what a stunning looking creature she was. She was as tall as James, stately and had the face and body of a fashion model. Rafe watched bemused as first Dana and a few seconds later James excused themselves. The rest of the group didn't seem to notice, but Rafe watched out of the corner of his eye as Dana and James walked through the kitchen and out the side door to the back yard.

Rafe turned his attention back just as Sue was talking to him about a movie she liked. "Didn't you just love that movie, *On the Waterfront*, with Marlon Brando?" she said animatedly.

"Yeah", Rafe responded kind of half-heartedly. Then he added with more seriousness, "I thought it was very good acting by all of the stars in the film. But it was also kind of a downer - sort of depressing. I kind of like more upbeat movies. I guess I'm a sap for the happy ending kind of movies."

"Well, sure, I like a happy ending, too", agreed Sue quickly, with a smile and a twinkle in her eye.

Rafe sensed that this was a sort of signal and gathered up the courage. "Well, so...how about going to a movie with me. I mean would you like to, you know, ah, go to the Palace movie house with me sometime?"

"Well, I suppose if we could go with another couple it would be OK with my parents. Do you think one of your friends would like to double date?" Sue inquired somewhat coyly.

"I'll ask", Rafe said almost too quickly. Then he added, "I'll let you know in school".

Just then James showed up and sidled up to Bo. He whispered something in Bo's ear and they both started to chuckle. Rafe caught a hint of a red mark on the side of James's face and wondered what had transpired in the back yard with Dana.

After about ten minutes, Bo and James turned to Rafe and Jack to signal it was time to move on. The boys said their goodbyes and headed out to the porch. Bo and James wanted a cigarette (they had started smoking recently) and wanted to get some air. Besides Susan Brownell's parents forbade smoking in their house. Out on the porch the boys shared their opinions about the girls and the party. Bo couldn't hold on to the secret and blurted out how James had gotten Dana to kiss him and then tried to cop a feel. James was laughing as he explained how he had French kissed Dana and then stealthily slid his hand up under her sweater to cup her right breast, and how she then pulled away from him and slapped him on his right cheek. "She was more surprised than angry about me touching her tit", he chuckled.

After that James entertained with his impression of Emily Thurston, which brought rollicking laughter from the other three boys. By then it was time for Rafe and Jack to head for the bus stop to catch the 10:30pm bus home. Beginning in March the bus line had started running busses every hour after 9:30pm, up until 3:30am, but Rafe still had a curfew of 11:00pm, so he and Jack said goodnight.

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On the bus trip home Rafe and Jack talked idly about the party and the kids they met. When they got off the bus, they made plans to play basketball at the North Kingsboro grammar school the next day. On his mile walk home from the bus stop, Rafe passed by Cathy Wood's house and wondered how she had gotten home. He had seen her at the party and they had shared some small talk. She seemed a bit distant with him, but thoroughly alive and engrossed with a lot of kids from the class he didn't know very well. Martha had not attended the party, much to Bo's disappointment. Rumor was that she had very strict parents – the “old world” Italian type.

Rafe reached home, said goodnight to his parents, who were already in bed but not asleep, washed up, undressed and lay on his bed replaying the events of the night in his mind. As he slipped off to sleep, he began to have an erotic dream about running around in a grassy field with Sue Barlow. Well, at first it was Sue, but the girl kept changing back and forth between Sue and Cathy. And then it was morning...

Tuesday, June 7, 1956...

Rafe was in the freshmen boys' Phys Ed class. The teacher in charge was the varsity football coach Harold “Ruffy” Cook. With the exception of a few of the more nerdy freshmen boys, the boys in the school addressed him as either “Coach” or “Ruffy”. The girls used the slightly more formal title of “Coach Cook”. Only the nerds used the formal title of “Mr. Cook”. Ruffy was a legend in the entire central New Jersey shore area. He had been head varsity football coach at QHS for over twenty years, and despite having a only a few truly successful teams over that time – an overall winning percentage just above fifty percent - he was well respected by most and adored by many. It was not unusual for a former player to visit with him at practices or in the school to seek his advice on a problem or opportunity they faced. To a lot of young and adult men, including some who never had the skills to play football, he was like a surrogate father. While he had this gruff outward persona, it didn't take long to figure out that underneath that exterior this man had a very big soft heart.

Coach Ruffy was a pear shaped man in his fifties, about five foot, six inches. He had a ruddy face with full cheeks, a good head of salt and pepper hair that was just beginning to thin out, bushy eyebrows, and a wide short nose on which hung a pair of black framed thick eyeglasses which he frequently pushed back up on the nose. He wore a pair of tan slacks and a white dress shirt with a red tie loosened at the neck.

When the bell rang, Rafe started to file out of the classroom along with the other boys. Ruffy was standing just inside the doorway on the left and as Rafe reached the doorway and nodded goodbye, Ruffy delivered a jab to Rafe's gut with the back of his right hand. It wasn't all that hard of a blow and Rafe absorbed it easily, but it did force him to stop and look up with surprise at Ruffy, as if to say, “What was that for?”

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Ruffy smiled and extended his left arm out to block Rafe from moving on. His left hand rested on Rafe's shoulder gently but firmly folding over the collarbone. With his characteristic make-believe gruff voice and stern look Ruffy said, "You passed my test, son. I expect to see you come out for football next season. What's your name again?"

"Rafe Cerny", Rafe responded obediently, while still trying to recover from the surprise "test".

"Okay, Cerny, practice starts in mid-August...Monday, August 20th at 10:00am to be exact. Team Physicals will be held here at the school on Friday, August 17th from 10:00am to Noon. You must pass Dr. Runyon's physical in order to try out for the team. You must also have your parents sign a permission slip, which you can get from the school office. If you know any of the football players on the freshmen team, JV's or Varsity, ask them for details. Otherwise stop in my coach's office before school ends for the summer and I'll answer any questions. Okay, now get going." Ruffy removed his hand to let Rafe exit the classroom.

"Okay, bye, Coach", Rafe said. As he hurried down the hall he thought to himself, "Wow. I can't wait to try out for the football team. I wonder if I will make it". It never occurred to him that his parents might not sign the permission slip; he was confident they would.

After his next class, Rafe ran into Bo in the hall and told him about his encounter with Ruffy. Bo laughed and said, "So, you evidently passed Ruffy's patented test or else he wouldn't have invited to come out for football".

"Hope I can make the team", Rafe said pensively.

"No sweat! No one gets cut unless they are a pussy or totally uncoordinated or can't pass the physical, which by the way isn't any more difficult than an army physical. As long as you don't have a hernia, a heart condition or no fingers or toes, you'll pass. Take my word for it."

Rafe felt relieved. He reflected on the fact that since the beginning of school last fall, he had grown from five foot-two to five foot-six and had started to slim down from his former chunky build. He moved on to his next class, but for the rest of the school day he had trouble concentrating. He kept imagining running through the line with the ball and scoring a touchdown. The crowd in the stands was cheering and pretty cheerleaders that looked like Susan Brownell, Cathy Wood, and Martha Luchese were all yelling "Go, Rafe, Go!"

"Mr. Cerny, are you here today or somewhere else?" Rafe was startled back to reality by the voice of Mrs. Cortese. The school period for American History had been in session only about five minutes at this point. "Do you wish me to repeat the question, Mr. Cerny?"...

Saturday, August 11, 1956...

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*You-oooh send me; darling you-oooh send me.
Darling you-oooh send me, honest you do.
At first I thought it was infatuation,
But oooh it's lasted so-o-o long.
Now I find myself wanting
to marry you and take you home...*

The 1956 black and white four-door Ford Fairlane was heading North on the New Jersey Turnpike, approaching exit 9. Rafe was in the center of the front bench seat between his grandfather, Len, who was driving and his mom, Millie, who was on the passenger side. Rafe's grandmother, Beth, and father, Rick, were sitting in the back seat. They were returning from a ten-day vacation in Florida. All the way from Florida Rafe had been working the AM radio finding stations that played Rhythm and Blues or Rock and Roll. The song "You Send Me" by Sam Cooke had become an instant hit and was being played on stations all the way from Florida through the Carolinas, Virginia, Maryland, Delaware, and on into New Jersey. Rafe's father had several times said, "What, that again?" But by now he was beginning to hum the tune and sing along.

Grandmother Beth was a consummate backseat driver, frequently requesting grandfather Len to slow down or watch out for a driver in another lane. Occasionally Len would snap back, "Relax, Beth, will you? I know what I'm doing". But mostly he just smiled, nodded, and continued on with the speedometer hugging the 70 mph mark.

After what seemed like the hundredth time that day of "slow down, Len, you're too close to that car in front", Beth turned to Rick and started to talk about her favorite TV shows. After running through a litany of her favorites, like "I Love Lucy", "Dragnet", and "The Colgate Comedy Hour" (with Milton Berle), she rather wistfully stated, "But, you know Rick, I think what I'll miss the most is Dean Martin and Jerry Lewis. It's too bad they broke up their act last month. They were so good together. Don't you think?"

Rick responded in his quiet way, "Yes. Lewis is a very funny slap-stick kind of comedian and Martin is a good crooner of love ballads. They had a unique act. I read in the paper that they were the most financially successful comedy act in history. But I think I still like Abbott and Costello more."

Millie joined in the conversation at this point, but Rafe's mind was tuning out. It had been a busy summer. Rafe had played baseball along with Bo in the Quaytown's entry to the Babe Ruth League. The Quaytown Giants were being coached by two college guys, one of whom was a Quaytown alumni and the other, a friend of his who had graduated from Mason High, the neighboring town school that was Quaytown's arch rival in all sports.

Rafe recalled one game where he was pitching and Bo was the catcher. Bo gave Rafe the sign for a fastball and he positioned the catcher's mitt as a target for Rafe to throw inside to the right-handed batter. Rafe took his windup and threw a fastball that instead of it going straight and off the inside corner, it suddenly darted across the inside corner for a strike. Bo pulled off his

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mask, called timeout and walked quickly out to the mound. He had a look of disbelief on his sweat-stained face, but a shit-eating grin as well. “What the *hell* was that pitch you just threw? It must have jumped a foot at the last second. I almost didn’t catch it and I think the batter lost his jock...maybe shit his pants, too!”

Rafe could only laugh, shrug his shoulders, and reply, “If I knew I’d bottle it and make a fortune. That sucker really had some action to it, didn’t it?”

When he wasn’t playing baseball with Bo, Rafe and Jack hung out at the swimming pool in Kingsboro during the day or at the boardwalk at night. They played a lot of basketball, too. But now it was getting close to the start of football and Rafe was beginning to get excited. He was looking forward to school this year much more so than last year. After all he was no longer a lowly freshman. He had gained another inch over the summer and grown five inches in the past year; he was hitting the five foot, seven inch mark and had become leaner and more mature looking. He was feeling a lot more confident and optimistic about life these days, but there was still a bit of awkwardness and shyness when he thought of girls, especially the pretty ones like Susan Brownell, Sue Barlow, Martha Luchese, and Cathy Wood, who could still get him excited with just her smile.

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Friday afternoon, August 31, 1956...

Summer was over and school was starting the following Tuesday, September 4th. This was the last day of student led football camp; the last day of practicing without helmets and pads. The Seacoast Conference High School Interscholastic Athletic Council (SCHIAC) rules dictated that High School football teams could not officially begin “organized” football practice until after Labor Day. That meant that coaches were not permitted to conduct football practices before Labor Day. This rule was supposed to ensure that every school that fielded a football team would not start practice before any other, thereby putting all teams on an equal footing. Any school that got caught breaking the rule could be penalized by forfeiting the entire football season. Of course this rule was impractical in that teams only had at best two weeks to conduct organized practices under the direction of their coaching staffs before the first game of the season.

Consequently, every school resorted to some form of cheating. At QHS the coaches would select two seniors to be co-captains for the coming season and have these boys lead the other players in conditioning exercises and drilling the team on plays from the playbook. This had to be made to look like an informal gathering of boys on the high school football field, just in case someone from the HSIAC, or a “spy” from a rival school, came around checking up. Obviously the boys could not be wearing the school’s helmets or pads, so these practices involved practically no blocking and tackling, but the players could work out blocking on the seven-man and two-man sleds, albeit without the pads.

The QHS senior co-captains selected this year were Gerry Rome and Hap Clooney. Both boys hailed from the town of Ulster Beach. Of the three sending districts to QHS, Ulster Beach had the lowest economic status. The town was known for its many bars – practically one on every corner of the main drag, Ulster Ave. A number of the boys that came out of Ulster Beach had garnered reputations as good fighters. A fair-sized group of boys were also among QHS’s finest athletes. As to the girls from Ulster Beach, well there was an implicit sense among the boys at QHS that in general the Ulster Beach girls were “hot to trot”, that is, faster and looser than the supposedly more prim and proper girls from Quaytown or the other two sending districts. This perception, of course, was not always warranted or justified. It was merely one of those myths from which teenage legends mysteriously emerge.

Hap Clooney was to be the starting quarterback on offense and safety on defense. Gerry Rome was to be the starting left halfback on offense and right cornerback on defense. Hap was a natural leader and pretty much ran the conditioning practices and drills for the two-week football camp. Hap was a tough task master and everyone on the team, varsity and jayvees alike, quickly got into shape.

At the end of this day’s practice, the players all headed for the water fountain next to the field house, which was about thirty yards off the South end zone. Bo and Rafe and the other jayvee players got in line behind the varsity guys, waiting their turn to get a drink. They found themselves just behind two other about-to-be sophomore boys who had just transferred into QHS. One boy was Earle Burnell, who had moved into North Kingsboro from Michigan. When they first met Earle two weeks ago at the start of football camp it seemed odd that a guy from Michigan would have a southern accent, but Earle had explained that he was originally from

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Louisiana. His family moved around a lot because his dad was in construction. He told them his nickname was “Burn”.

The other new boy was Tommy Slade. He had moved into North Kingsboro from Oklahoma. Bo and Rafe, being five foot, seven inches had to look up at the new guys. Earle was six foot, one inch and Tommy was a shade over six foot. Earle and Tommy lived in the same development on the opposite side of North Kingsboro from where Rafe lived. They were just over the town border from Quaytown and walked to the high school, just over a mile away.

While the four boys were waiting their turn for a drink of water, they struck up a conversation. Bo said, “I can’t wait to get to the school and get my helmet, pads and practice uniform. How about you guys?”

“Me, too,” replied Tommy in his Oklahoma twang. Rafe and Earle followed suit.

“Clooney said that Coach Cook and the assistant coaches will be waiting for us at the school, right after this practice to hand out the equipment. We’re supposed to go to the hallway behind the gym, by the boys’ dressing room,” added Rafe. Then he asked, “Hey, Burn and Tommy, do kids here tease you about your accents? I can imagine that they might call Tommy like, ‘Hey, Okie’ or ask you where you left your ten gallon hat.”

“Naw, I haven’t gotten any of that”, responded Tommy. “Maybe once school starts. I haven’t met too many kids beyond you guys on the football team. I imagine some prick will try to have sport with me, but he’ll be sorry when I sock him one.”

“I can see that you don’t take no shit!” Bo chimed in.

“Me neither!” Earle stated emphatically. “I had a run-in with some gangster in Michigan, but I whupped his sorry ass. He was damn tough, too! But in the end we became almost friends...not quite friends, but more like respect for one another. You know what I mean?”

They all nodded their assent. “Too bad summer is over, but I’m looking forward to school starting and football season”, Rafe said. Then he asked, “When did you two arrive in North Kingsboro and what has your summer been like?”

Earle responded for both of them, “I got here around mid-June and Tommy arrived about a few weeks before me. We got to know each other pretty quick, since we have a bit in common, what with transferring in and being from the South. We had some fun raiding the peach orchards, watermelon patches and strawberry fields on the other side of the highway in Holmvale.”

“Yeah, how about that time when that ole farmer came after us with his shotgun?” Tommy laughingly said. “Damn near shit my pants! You should have seen Burn and I hightailin’ it through the peach orchard!”

At that the four boys had a good laugh. They were now at the front of the line, so they took their drink of water and headed to the school to collect their equipment.

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Thursday evening, September 13, 1956...

The click-clack of metal cleats scraping on the asphalt street sounded like some strange discordant symphony. Bo, Rafe, and the newly arrived sophomores, Earle Burnell and Tommy Slade, collectively felt physically drained. Despite being in good condition the double practices were strenuous. The boys on the Jayvee football squad were making their way from the football field back to the school to hit the showers. The school was a long block's walk from the field.

The Jayvees had the dubious pleasure of practicing against the Varsity squad and then after the varsity beat up on them and left the practice field, they then got to scrimmage among themselves. Against the Varsity they first had to simulate the offense of the Ambrose Hills team that the Bisons Varsity would be battling in the season's first game on the coming Saturday. Then they had to simulate that opposing team's defense. As they dragged their tired bodies along the street, the four boys discussed but could not decide whether playing offense or defense against the QHS Varsity was the tougher thing to do.

"Man, my ass is draggin'" Rafe pronounced. "Playing defensive cornerback and tryin' to tackle that Gerry Rome coming through the line is a nightmare! One time it's like tryin' to tackle a Mack Truck that runs over you, knocking you flat on your ass. The next time he makes a feint and cuts away on a dime, leaving you grasping at air with your jockstrap down around your ankles. He's one hell of a halfback!"

"Hell!" exclaimed Earle. "I was playing defensive end and that quarterback, Hap Clooney, would fake a handoff and roll around my end like a race horse. I'd fight off the blocker and go to tackle him, but he'd shove a stiff-arm in my face and all I could do was stumble and fall on my face. Then I'd wind up picking grass out of my facemask, spitting dirt and lookin' like a fool. What gets me is that I could overhear the plays being called and knew what to expect. Several times I busted up the plays, but that Clooney has a mean stiff-arm."

"It's no picnic trying to quarterback a strange offense against our Varsity defense either", declared Bo. "This year's Varsity looks to be awfully good. They may not be the biggest team overall in the conference this year, but damn are they ever so fast and they all like to bang heads", he added.

"You got that right! Every muscle in my body aches", responded Tommy, as he put his hands up under his practice jersey and loosened the straps on his shoulder pads under each arm.

"Good idea" Rafe said as he too pulled up his jersey and loosened the shoulder pad straps. "Hell's bells, I can't wait to get this soggy uniform off and hit the showers."

The sun was already low on the horizon, as it was nearly 6:00 pm, when the boys walked through the rear schoolyard, clambered through the outer doorway and down the six steps to the

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boys' dressing room. The lack of horseplay and just a few muffled conversations attested to the fact that the boys were physically spent. The football cleats came off first, then the jerseys and shoulder pads, next the pants with the inserted thigh and kneepads, then the buckle-on hip pads (only the varsity players were issued the new light-weight "girdle" trunks), and lastly the jockstraps and sweat socks. Several boys sat naked or nearly so on the benches with their backs against the lockers trying to will their aching bodies to get up and move to the shower room on the far side of the large dressing room. The shower room was rectangular, separated from the dressing room by an entrance on either side of the four foot high concrete block wall with grouted tile covering. There were only eight showers in the tiled room, so the boys had to wait their turn to get under an available showerhead.

Earle and Tommy were among the first to get under a vacant shower, followed seconds later by Bo and Rafe. Getting the water adjusted to the right temperature was a bit of a challenge, as each additional shower that was turned on or off required every other shower to be re-adjusted. An occasional yelp issued from one boy or another as their water suddenly became too cold or too hot. While lathering up, Earle simultaneously urinated and exclaimed, "Man, what a relief; been having to take a healthy pee since we left the practice field!"

Bo, under the adjoining shower, in order to be heard over the hissing of the cascading water and the echo effect on the concrete walls and ceiling, yelled toward Earle, "Hey, Burn! Where the hell have *you* been all summer? You look white as a ghost...makes those long, skinny legs look like two sticks of chalk." Everyone in the shower area except Earle laughed. Just about all the other boys were still sporting their summer tans, particularly Bo, whose Italian heritage naturally allowed him to sport a deep golden bronze.

Earle had removed his sports glasses before showering and his pale blue eyes initially flashed with real anger. Bo did not notice as he had turned around toward Rafe still laughing, and lathering up under his armpits. Rafe saw Earle's initial reaction and was about to say something to calm the situation, when Earle evidently realized that Bo was just doing some friendly teasing. Earle saw the concern on Rafe's face and winked at him as he stepped up behind Bo with a now mock look of anger on his face and motioning with his index finger over his mouth for Rafe to not let on. Rafe couldn't help but smile at the anticipated surprise that Bo was about to get. When Earle got to within about two feet of Bo, Bo sensed it and turned around. He let out a loud shout and jumped nearly out of his skin. The soap dropped out of his hand and hit the tile floor. "Don't do that! You damn near gave me a heart attack, sneakin' up on me like that!" he exclaimed, as his right hand reflexively went to his chest over the heart. Now everyone was laughing uproariously, including Bo after he got his breath back under control. Suddenly all the tiredness, aches and pains seemed to melt away in the silly hilarity of the moment.

Tuesday, November 6, 1956...

...Well she's the girl in the red blue jeans.

She's the queen of all the teens.

She's the one that I know

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She's the one that loves me so.

*Say be-bop-a-lula she's my baby,
Be-bop-a-lula I don't mean maybe.
Be-bop-a-lula she's my baby
Be-bop-a-lula I don't mean maybe
Be-bop-a-lula she's my baby love,
My baby love, my baby love...*

James was singing silently to himself the big hit by Gene Vincent and the Blue Caps while he made his way through the lunch line. He had packed his tray with a grilled ham and cheese sandwich with French fries, a slice of apple pie and a half pint carton of milk. He paid the cashier and headed out the door into the large school lunch room looking for his pals. He chuckled to himself as he recalled an event that happened here yesterday. The cafeteria was sometimes used for co-ed gym classes on occasions when the weather didn't permit outdoor activities. It rained like hell yesterday, so Miss Gill, the girls' Phys Ed teacher convinced Coach Ruffy to hold a joint class to teach the sophomore boys and girls the social graces of square dancing.

"What a hoot!" James thought to himself, as he recalled how flabbergasted Miss Gill got with the boys. Many of the boys began acting like this was the last thing in the world they wanted to do and had to be coaxed and cajoled into pairing up with a girl. A small group of boys purposely acted in an over zealous manner literally swinging their girl partners faster than was proper and causing them to get so dizzy, they had to sit down; one girl ultimately barfed on the floor and had to be taken to the nurse's room. Coach Ruffy tried to bark and bully the boys into behaving, but by the time the fifty minute class was over Miss Gill looked totally exasperated. A few of the girls were angry at the boys, a few were trying desperately to not laugh, but most were taking it in stride, recognizing the difference in maturity of some boys at this age.

James saw Bo and Rafe waving at him from a table over at the far end of the lunch room near the windows. He could see that Earle, Tommy, and Jack were also at the table. He made his way over and sat down in an empty chair across from Bo and between Rafe and Earle.

"We saved you a seat," Earle and Rafe said almost simultaneously. James said "Thanks", then grinned devilishly at Bo, looked furtively about and queried in a low voice, "Have you told these guys yet?"

Bo chuckled and smiled broadly, "No, I was waiting for you. I'm not sure I can talk about it without falling out of my chair and rolling on the floor laughing so hard I'd split a gut!"

Curiosity grabbed at Rafe and the others and they all slid their chairs in closer and looked at James expectantly. James looked at each of the boys in turn, holding them in suspense. Then he rubbed his hands together, smiled impishly and began to relate what had happened that morning.

"You guys know Freddie Malcolm, right?"

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Jack, nodding his head, was the first to respond. “He’s that little whinny twerp that looks like a cross between a mouse and a bird and talks with an annoying voice that makes you want to shout at him to shut the hell up. He bugs the shit out of just about everyone.”

“You got it. Well, Bo and I were in shop class this morning and Freddie was doing his usual whining to Mr. Willey, the shop teacher.” James continued with a fairly good imitation of Freddie “Oh, Mr. Willey, I need your heellp. I can’t seem to get this dowel into the base of the wooden traay. Oh, it is sooo hard for mee.”

“So, after Willey helps Freddie, he steps out of the room for a bit, probably to laugh his balls off so the rest of the class wouldn’t see. Then Bo walks over to me and whispers something to me about how freakin’ tired he is with Freddie and his whining voice, and that it’s about time to do something about it. So, I asked Bo if he had any ideas and he said, ‘Yeah, let’s put him somewhere where he won’t have to do any more work on his project today.’ So, we look around the room and we both focus on the wood closet; we nod at each other, walk over to that little piss ant, pick him up bodily with his feet off the ground, carry him over to the locker, stuff him in and nail the door shut with a two by four.”

At this the boys at the table all erupted in laughter. Bo laughed so hard that he had trouble breathing for several seconds. Tommy was slapping the table and laughing with loud guffaws. James caught the laughing bug, too, and with difficulty, finished up the story with, “Freddie was in there yelling and banging to get out. Mr. Willey came back and demanded to know what the fuss was, but no one squealed on us and then the bell rang. As we walked out of the shop class, Mr. Willey was prying the two by four away, and yelling, ‘You boys have to stop screwin’ around in Shop Class!’” More laughter burst from the boys and now people at nearby tables were staring and wondering what was so funny.

Thursday evening, November 22, 1956...

The school year had seemingly been flying by. It was already Thanksgiving. The leaves on the trees had turned to a variety of glorious colors and were falling to the ground at an increasing rate. High School football was now over and basketball was about to start the first week in December. The boys and girls in QHS, as in most high schools across the land, were pre-occupied with their idyllic lifestyle, far removed from the events taking place elsewhere in the world...events that would ultimately affect that idyllic existence and impact the way people thought about America and its place in the world community. After World War II, we had rebuilt Japan and Germany (historically something no other powerful nation had done following the defeat of an enemy) and helped a number of other third world countries with our money, talents and ingenuity. For the most part, with the exception of the Communist countries, America was looked upon with respect and favor.

Just last month Russia, the U.S.S.R., had invaded Hungary. The United Nations demanded that Russia remove her troops. Of course they didn’t and the U.N. was powerless to do anything.

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Egypt had closed the Suez Canal in July and in October, Britain and France bombed Egypt and then in November they sent in troops. Meanwhile, Israel was mopping up Egyptian forces in the Sinai desert.

But most Americans were more interested in the perfect game that Don Larsen pitched for the Yankees in the World Series, or Eisenhower winning his second term as President, by defeating Adlai Stevenson, or for New Yorkers, that Brooklyn had stopped its street car service. But foreshadowing internal strife to come, the Supreme Court on November 13, struck down segregation of races on public busses.

This golden age of innocence, this period of safe isolation and sense that all is well in America, would fade away, replaced by a much harsher reality within a matter of seven years, almost to the day. But for now, life for the students at QHS was arguably as good as it gets.

Thanksgiving dinner at the Heinrich house had just completed and James was feeling pleasantly stuffed, after just finishing his second piece of pumpkin pie with a scoop of vanilla ice cream. He watched contentedly while his kid sister, Cheryl and his Mom busily began clearing the table. Older brother Jeremy had already left to drive over to his girl friend's house – probably to play kissy face and sticky finger, James chuckled to himself. Mr. Heinrich had excused himself from the table and gone to his study to look over some papers...he had just been elected to the Quaytown school board earlier in the month. Despite being the only male left at the dining room table, James felt obligated to help clear the table, so he pushed back his chair, got up a bit leadenly with his full stomach, stacked up his plates and his brother's and brought them over to the sink where his Mom was preparing to wash them by hand. He went back to the table and gathered as many glasses as he could, but his Mom turned and said, "That's OK, James. Thank you for trying to help, but Cheryl and I can manage. You go catch up on your homework, or watch something on television". James didn't need to hear it again.

James went into the living room and turned on the TV, but as he got comfortable on the couch his mind wandered over the events of the day. The day had started with a typical blustery wind following a rainy evening, but by the time the traditional Turkey Day Game got underway at 10:30 am, the wind had subsided, yet the sky remained overcast. This was the biggest game for QHS in many years. The rivalry with Mason High went back decades and more often than not Mason came out the winner, but this year the Bison squad entered the game undefeated, while Mason had only lost one game. Whoever won this game would be the conference champs and the excitement had built to a fever pitch over the preceding days.

This was an away game, played at Mason's field. Aside from being a bit muddy the field was reasonably playable – not in as good a condition as the Quaytown field, however. The first quarter ended in no score, as neither team could sustain a drive. But at the beginning of the second quarter, Mason was forced to punt. The kick was not that high, but was deep and over Hap Clooney's head. Hap ran back, caught the ball over his shoulder, turned and headed toward the right sideline. After a few strides, Hap quickly changed direction and headed straight up the middle. At first the Mason players slanted toward the right sideline, trying to converge on the best angle to intercept Hap's path. When Hap turned up toward the center the Mason players adjusted their paths, but not enough, because a wall of Quaytown blockers was forming on the

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left side of the field and when Hap suddenly cut to his left, the Mason players were unable to adjust and the wall of Quaytown blockers began to mow them down. Hap ran like a stallion down the left sideline and would have gone all the way for the TD, if not for the final Mason player who got by the wall and tackled Hap at the 11 yard line.

On the first play from scrimmage, Gerry Rome took the handoff from Hap Clooney, flashed through a hole between right guard and tackle, made what seemed like an impossibly fast cut to his left, got a block from the left end on the linebacker, and literally steamrolled over the Mason Safety at the goal line. Touchdown! The QHS side of the field was electrified. The band played the QHS fight song and the away crowd screamed and yelled. The point after was good and the Bisons were on top 7 to 0.

The score remained that way until the middle of the fourth quarter, when the QHS defense recovered a Mason fumble near the fifty yard line. On the first play, Jerry Rome swept right end and reeled off thirty-five yards. Then Hap Clooney hit the left end, Larry Gilten, with short pass over the middle for nine yards. Next Hap faked a handoff to Gerry on a quick slant off right tackle, and ran a naked end around to the left and waltzed in for the score. The extra point was good and QHS was up 14 to 0, and the game was all but over. Mason tried valiantly to score in the final minutes, but could not break through the Bison defense.

James smiled as he recalled seeing his buddies, Bo, Rafe and the new kids, Earle and Tommy celebrating on the sideline. They were on the Jayvee squad, but dressed for the varsity game. They even got to play offense on the last series in the final minute, so James was happy for them.

It was time for James to go to his room and do some homework, even though the thought made him feel like he'd rather swallow a worm. After all, it was Thanksgiving and there was no school again until Monday. But he knew that he had to get decent grades in order to be able to get into college, so he reluctantly closed the door to his room, sat at his desk and opened his math book. But he still wasn't in the mood. He turned on his radio, which was always tuned to WNJR, a Rhythm and Blues station from Newark. Daddy Sears was the Negro disk jockey and he just introduced a hit song, "Long Tall Sally", by Little Richard.

*Gonna tell Aunt Mary 'bout Uncle John,
he says he has the blues but he has a lotta fun.
Oh baby,
ye-e-e-eh baby,
woo-o-o-oh baby,
havin' me some fun tonight.*

*Well, long tall Sally has a lot on the ball
and nobody cares if she's long and tall.
Oh baby,
ye-e-e-eh baby,
woo-o-o-oh baby,
havin' me some fun tonight.*

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*Well, I saw Uncle John with long tall Sally.
He saw Aunt Mary commin' and he ducked back in the alley...*

Wednesday evening, January 16, 1957...

The Jayvee basketball game had turned out to be an easy QHS victory over arch rival Mason High at the Bison home court. Bo was a starter on the Jayvee squad and substituted on the Varsity squad. Rafe, Earle and Jack Pauley had made the Jayvees as second stringers, but before the season ended, Earle was bumped up to starting forward, due to his height and rebounding ability. James wasn't one for basketball and typically joined the QHS fans in the bleachers on the stage area above the court, cheering on the team and working his charm on the sophomore and freshman girls in the crowd. After showering, Rafe, Earle and Jack joined James when the varsity took to the court.

The varsity basketball game proved a much more rowdy event than the Jayvee game. Rowdy is probably an understatement. It was more than just a hotly contested game which QHS barely won by a point on a disputed call. The bitter rivalry had been inflamed by the loss Mason had suffered to Quaytown in football last fall, because a number of players from both teams also played football. The nature of basketball with the battle for position under the basket led to a lot of bumping, jostling and heated words.

As the last seconds ticked down on the clock, Mason had just taken the ball out of bounds in the front court and were running a play to set up their top scorer, Paul Brenner. The crowd was in a frenzy and the noise was deafening. With three seconds remaining, Brenner ran around a pick behind the foul line, caught a pass and elevated into a jump shot. A sudden hush came over the crowd, in anticipation of the result of this last second chance to win the game.

One of the QHS guards called "Switch" when he saw the man guarding Brenner was picked off and leapt across in front of Brenner barely grazing the ball with the tip of his finger as it left Brenner's hand and then on follow through getting a piece of Brenner's shooting hand. The ball fell just short and to the right of the basket where the QHS center leaped and came down with the ball. The Mason coach was screaming for a foul practically apoplectic as a cacophony of sound erupted from the crowd. The buzzer went off signaling the end of the game, as Brenner was gesturing wildly to the referee, claiming he was fouled.

No one knew for sure what had started it, but suddenly the QHS center and a forward from Mason began throwing punches at one another (the QHS player later reported that the Mason player had cursed at him and tried to wrestle the ball away). Within an instant both benches cleared with the players all running on the court swinging at the nearest guy in the other teams' uniform. Then the bleachers emptied and all hell broke loose.

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Gerry Rome had been standing in the ramp when the Brenner shot was rebounded by the QHS center. He smiled, pumped his arm in a sign of triumph, and then turned to walk down the ramp toward the hallway behind the gym. As he reached the hallway, a student from Mason who had followed Gerry down the ramp overtook him and purposely bumped into him as he passed by Gerry. Gerry gave the guy a scowl and said, "Hey, watch where you're going."

The Mason student sneered at Gerry and said, "Kiss my ass!"

Gerry sort of smiled and said gently, "I don't think so. I'm not lookin' for trouble, but if that's what you want, you can have it." With that the guy from Mason took a step forward and reached out to push Gerry, but before his hand made contact, Gerry let loose with left and right combination punches that were so quick, it was like a blur of lightning. The left punch landed on the right eye of the other guy and the right connected with his jaw. His head snapped back, his knees buckled and he went down like a sack of potatoes. It happened so fast that hardly anyone noticed. Gerry quickly turned and walked away. He could hear someone saying with a shocked voice, "What happened to you, Sam?"

At almost the same time in the ramp on the other side of the gym, Larry Gilten was accosted by another Mason student. Larry, being a Negro, rightly took offense when the White Mason student sneered, "Get out of my way, Nigger!"

"I don't like being called that!" Larry replied angrily.

"Tough shit, 'Blackie', what are you going to do about it?" countered the Mason guy.

Bam! Like a shot Larry shot out a left jab that caught the other guy in the Adam's apple. The boy grabbed his throat and dropped to his knees, gasping for air. As Larry turned to walk down the ramp, two other boys who were with the guy on his knees backed off with their hands up as if to say, "We don't want any part of this".

By now the two police officers on duty and the coaches from both teams had separated the players and brought order back to the scene on the gym floor. The players from both teams were making their way to their respective dressing rooms. When Larry got to the hallway he ran into Gerry and they walked out of the school together sharing their personal encounters of the past few minutes.

But their collective exploits did not go totally unnoticed. In Gerry's case there were two Juniors from QHS that happened to be in the hallway and witnessed the fight, while James, Rafe, and Jack had observed from the bleachers on the stage the single punch thrown by Larry. Earle had climbed down the bleachers and attempted to join the brawl on the floor, but by the time he got there the action was just about over. By the end of the school on the following day, everyone, students and teachers alike, knew about the two fights and the outcomes. And so among the students at least, Gerry's legend as a fighter was elevated to the level of hero status and Larry became a new prodigy to go down in the annals of QHS folk lore.

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Friday evening, February 15, 1957...

The second annual Valentine's Dance was underway at the QHS gym. Rafe and Jack Pauley had taken the bus into Quaytown from North Kingsboro and walked the mile from downtown. As they neared the school both declared they needed to take a leak. They arrived at the side door that led upstairs to the main floor, or downstairs to the basement level. They took the stairs down to the basement, went past the girls locker room and down the hall into the boys locker room.

As they entered the "In" side of the double doors, they immediately saw Earle and heard him yell softly, "It's OK, just two of the guys!" They quickly learned that Earle was standing guard for Bo and James, who were in the bathroom area in front of the locker room smoking cigarettes.

"Hey, Burn, these two juvenile delinquents are going to get your ass in trouble, if one of the chaperones strolls in here to check up," Rafe jokingly said to Earle, as he and Jack walked past Earle and headed for the urinals. "Hi, Bo. Whaddya say, Hein." Rafe said as he unzipped and stepped up to relieve himself. Jack just grinned and shook his head at the two smokers, as he ambled over to a urinal.

"You guys want a drag on our cigs before going into the dance," Bo inquired?

"Yeah, how about it guys? A couple of puffs will get you ready for the Senioritas. The freshman and sophomore babes like the smell of tobacco breath. Makes them think we're big upperclassmen and know how to make a girl happy. Might even help us get into one of their hot panties", James added with a chuckle.

Just then, Earle excitedly exclaimed in a voice well above a whisper, "Chickie! Someone's coming...sounds like a teacher!"

Bo and James quickly doused their cigarettes in a commode, flushed it and ran to a sink to turn on the cold faucet and started combing their hair. Jack and Rafe had just finished their business, zipped up and also headed to one of the sinks to wash up.

The door to the locker room burst open and almost caught Earle in the arm as he headed to the "Out" door. Mr. Willey, followed by Mr. Fielder, stormed in and started sniffing. "I smell cigarette smoke! How about you Mr. Fielder, don't you smell it, too?"

"Yes, I most certainly, do," responded Mr. Fielder, nodding his assent. "Have you boys been smoking in here, against school rules," he continued.

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“Oh, don’t be so easy on these trouble makers!” Mr. Willey said somewhat impatiently, with a quick look at Mr. Fielder, who had moved in alongside and blocked Earle from exiting. As Willey stood menacingly, with clenched fists on hips, he eyeballed Earle, Rafe, Bo, James and Jack, looking from one to the other. “So, what have we here? The five of you could not only get a suspension, but four of you could be benched from the basketball team, or worse, kicked off the squad for the rest of the season.”

“Maybe it would go easier on you if whichever ones of you who were smoking admitted it,” Mr. Fielder added rather courteously. At this, try as he might, James could not hold back a chuckle. It escaped from him sort of like a muffled squeak.

Mr. Willey lashed out, “Are you trying to be funny, Heinrich? Do you think this is a joke? Just because your father is on the board of education, doesn’t mean you can get special privileges!” After a hesitation and seeing a more serious look on James’s face, he continued, “Now I want to know which ones of you were smoking in here; and I don’t want to wait all night for an answer. Well?”

Earle was the first to talk. In his southern drawl he said, “Mr. Willey, Sir, none of us here was doing the smoking. None of us smoke. It smelled that way when we all came in to go to the bathroom. Honestly, Sir.”

Mr. Willey seemed to settle down a bit. “Is that so?” he asked as he made eye contact with each of the boys. And each nodded in turn. “Well, I’m not so sure about some of you. But Burnell here is new to the school. I’m willing to give him, and by extension the rest of you, the benefit of the doubt. But if I ever catch any of you smoking, I’ll know you lied to me and I will have your butts up before Mr. Hunt, the Principal, before you can say ‘Jack Rabbit’. Do I make myself clear?” Seeing the boys nodding, he added, “Now get out of here and don’t do anything to cause me to look cross-eyed at you again during the dance tonight.”

The boys quickly exited and walked up the ramp to the gym. James quietly said to Earle, “Whew! That was fast thinking, Burn!”

When they reached the floor of the gym, Bo put his hand on James’s shoulder to draw him closer and asked with a subdued chuckle, “What the hell made you almost start laughing in there? I almost pissed my pants trying not to laugh aloud when I heard that weird squeaking sound coming from you.” The other three boys moved in closer to hear James’s answer.

“It just struck me that it was like watching an episode of Dragnet on TV, James responded. “You know the two cops playing Good Cop, Bad Cop with a suspect”. Then all five of them started to laugh, but turned nervously to be sure that the two chaperones were not looking their way. There was a band playing (rather badly) one of the popular songs, recorded by Pat Boone.

*On a day like today
We passed the time away
Writing love letters in the sand*

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*How you laughed when I cried
Each time I saw the tide
Take our love letters from the sand....*

Bo spied Martha Luchese on the other side of the gym. She was very obviously of Italian heritage, with her olive skin, high cheekbones, dark full brown eyebrows which did not appear to have ever seen tweezers, and full lips with only a hint of red lipstick. Above all she had a pretty face, pert nose, and a trim but nicely formed body – smallish but firm breasts, thin waist, nice hips, dark brown hair that was a few hours out of curlers and cut just above the collar of her white blouse, and all packaged on a five foot, three inch almost perfectly proportioned frame.

He sauntered over to her and asked her to dance. It was a slow dance and once he got out on the floor and had her in his arms, he thought for a moment he was in heaven. Bo didn't know exactly why, but there was something about this Martha Luchese that attracted him more than any girl since Susan Brownell. "Wow", he thought to himself as he danced with Martha, "I haven't thought about Susan since last summer, when she told me her parents were sending her to a private school. Well, this Martha has got me interested...very interested. I wonder if she will take a walk with me outside. Maybe I can get a kiss or two. Hmmm. It's worth a try."

Meanwhile, James had gone off to dance with Sue Barlow and then a freshman girl that Rafe and Jack didn't know had come over to talk to Earle and they went off to dance. Rafe was scanning the gym looking for Cathy Wood, while having small talk with Jack about the Jayvee basketball games coming up next week. There she was! He spotted her, but quickly saw that she was dancing with a senior, Brian Arnswagger. Brian lettered in football and basketball. He was a blond haired, blue-eyed, somewhat boyish, yet handsome guy, judging from the way the underclass girls reacted.

Rafe nodded to Jack, "There's Cathy over there dancing with Brian Arnswagger. I'm not sure I like that guy. He seems to swagger when he walks, like he's the toast of the town, or some kind of hot shot."

"He thinks he's hot shit is more like it", snickered Jack. Then Jack proceeded to relay a conversation he overheard. One day recently, towards the end of football season, Jack got a ride to high school with his older brother, Brad. Brad had graduated last June, but he was still hanging around with a few of the guys from Ulster Beach, who were seniors this year and with whom he had played football the prior year. He had kicked around all summer and most of the fall, then enlisted for military service. He was biding his time, awaiting his call to go into the Army.

Brad had had his own car since his Senior year, and since the beginning of this school year he had established a routine of picking up Hap Clooney, Gerry Rome and Brian Arnswagger and driving them to school, then he would go and work at Flynn's City Service gas station at the Five Corners in Quaytown, where he pumped gas and did some minor repair work. Five Corners was so named because three streets intersected the highway that separated Quaytown from the neighboring town of Mason.

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On the day that Jack got a ride to school with Brad and the three guys from Ulster, Brian Arnswagger was bragging about his dates with Cathy. According to Brian he and Cathy were making out “hot and heavy”. The other guys listened earnestly, with occasional comments like, “Just stick to the facts, Brian, did you or did you not get laid?” And, “Did you at least get in her panties?” Brian apparently would not be specific, other than to say that he and Cathy had played “Back seat bingo”, which *implied* that she had put out.

Upon hearing this from Jack, Rafe felt suddenly devastated. This was utterly shocking to him. How could this girl he had believed to be so pure and virginal act like some common slut? But he could not let on. He had never revealed his own desire, his fantasies, about Cathy to anyone, and he was not about to do so now. In truth he was envious of Brian and felt cheated.

To cover his disappointment, Rafe eyed a freshman girl he had seen in the halls. She was standing with three other girls. He quickly walked over and asked her to dance. She said, “Yes, I would like that.” He did not initially ask her name, but it did not seem to matter as it was a fast song to which you could only do the jitterbug dance and the band was playing quite loudly. Rafe was not much for talk normally when it came to the opposite sex, but after what he had just heard, he felt even less talkative. When the music ended, he politely thanked the girl, and almost as an after-thought, he told her his name and asked her what hers was. He only half listened, when she said, “Mary Beth Gardner”.

“Nice to meet you, Mary Beth”, Rafe said. “Again, thank you for the dance”. And he walked back to where Jack was now talking with a couple of girls. When he got there, he recognized them from one of the classes that he, Jack and they had together. Jack was into his routine of being sarcastic and cynical, yet the two girls seemed to be fascinated with his curt remarks and the sort of smirk Jack had when he smiled. Jack had a way of making sport with girls and they seemed to like it. Rafe suspected it was a defensive mechanism for Jack to cover up his shyness.

But for Rafe, the night and the dance had lost its attraction. The Cathy thing had left him feeling a bit blue. The two girls left, giggling and went off to join up with a few other girls across the gym. First Earle, then James made their way back to where Rafe and Jack were standing. They were comparing notes as they approached.

“Did you see the tits on the babe I was dancing with?” Earle was saying to James. “Hot damn, but she could pose for the bullet front bumper on a ’54 Buick, by golly! She said her name is Sarah Stevens.”

“Yeah. Not bad. But I was too busy paying attention to that Sue Barlow I was talking with. That tight skirt was not hiding much of her sweet looking ass!” responded James. “I tried sliding my hand down her back onto the top of her ass, and she just smiled and lifted my hand back up. But then the damn song ended; otherwise I would have given it another try. I might still do that before the dance is over,” he added rubbing his hands together and laughing.

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Earle looked at Rafe and inquired, “Hey, Rafe, what’s with you? You look like something crawled up your ass and died? Some little chickadee give you the brush off?”

“No, nothing’s wrong. I’m just getting a bit bored and a bit tired from basketball practice after school today. Running up and down those steps got to me today. I was a little woozy after”, Rafe replied, as he nodded to the auditorium area behind them that extended up from the gym floor to the main floor above, with stairs on either side.

“Hey, where’s Bo? Anyone seen him since we got here?” asked James.

Rafe replied, “Last I saw him he was dancing almost every dance with Martha Luchese and working his charm on her, trying hard to impress her. Maybe he and she skipped out for a little ‘exploration.’”

Just then Jack said with a smirk, as he nodded toward the opposite side of the gym, “I see them coming up the ramp over by the girls’ locker room. Maybe you’re right Rafe.”

They all turned to watch Bo and Martha walking hand-in-hand onto the gym floor, then separating as they said goodbye, with Martha rejoining a group of her friends from Holmvale, and Bo heading back toward the four guys.

When Bo rejoined them, no one said anything, but they all were grinning with a quizzical look, as if waiting for him to say something. “What? What? Why are you looking at me like that?” Bo asked, trying not to smile too much.

“Well?” asked James. “How did it go? Let’s have the ‘skinny’ on the fair maiden, Martha Luchese. And don’t leave out any details.”

Bo could not hold back a broad smile, followed by a deep sigh. “I think I’m in love, guys.” A few catcalls and boos followed.

“You’re not serious, Bo! You getting measured for a ball and chain? I don’t believe it” Rafe laughed.

“No really, guys! I really like her. But her parents are strict and she can’t go on dates until after this school year ends; and then only on double dates. She’s definitely a virgin, but she kisses like she’s hot to trot,” Bo excitedly whispered.

“So what are you goin’ to do, wait four months to get a date with Miss Virgin Hot Pants?” asked Earle.

“Well, and don’t go spreading this around...she’s invited me to her house to meet her parents. If they like me, they might just let her double date before June. After all, I’m Italian and so is she. That’s one thing in my favor.”

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“Ha!” Jack chipped in. “But wait till they see that look of lust in your eyes. You’ll need a crowbar to get past the chastity belt her parents will lock around her.” They all laughed at that and then realized that the music for the last dance had just ended. Time to go home! The five boys parted with handshakes and goodbyes until school next Monday.

Thursday May 16, 1957...

*In my diary,
A lot of things I’m gonna’ write;
Write about the moon
And that lonely night.*

*In my diary,
I’ll tell all about you;
Tell of all your charms
And the things you do...*

Rafe had a stack of 45’s spindled on the phonograph his parents had purchased for him with some cash and green stamps his mom collected from myriad other purchases. “In My Diary”, by the Moonglows was on the turntable circling around under the needle.

Spring was in full, inevitable march toward summer! Yet the re-awakening of new life was still permeating the air, even as the scent of re-born grass and flowers had become an everyday occurrence that was threatening to become predictable and taken for granted. Long gone was the snow of winter, the blustery winds of March, and the rains of April. Youthful hormones were erupting like the accelerated elapsed time photography of the blooming of a rose in the morning sun. It was a glorious time to be and feel alive, especially as a teenager in the Fifties.

Billy Westman, the starting Varsity catcher had not made his grades last term and so he was ineligible for baseball this year. After Basketball season, Bo had decided to get a part-time job after school at the Quaytown Delicatessen on Front Street, but when Westman became ineligible, Bo was called on to be Varsity catcher, so the job at the Deli had to take backseat until the season was over. Earle had decided he wanted to try Track, not without some encouragement from Coach Ruffy, who was also the head football coach. James, like Bo decided he needed to get a job after school to get some work experience, but more so to have some spending money for dating girls and to pay for the cigarette habit he had picked up last year; through Bo he also got a job at the Quaytown Deli. Rafe had moved up from the Freshman baseball team to the Jayvees and occasional starting pitcher on the Varsity squad.

On this day, The Quaytown Weekly newspaper had just been published and Rafe excitedly turned to the Sports section. There it was! The headline read, “Quaytown Varsity Nine defeats Bayshore Highlands 15 – 4, behind Sophomore Cerny”.

Beach Party Days: Chapter 5

Rafe had been picked by Coach Zino, the varsity coach, to be starting pitcher against the Bayshore Highlands School squad. Coach Jerry Zino was a no-nonsense guy in his forties, who was firm and serious about the game. But he was an excellent teacher of the game, who willingly worked with any player who wanted to improve. He would get on a player's case, if he thought the player was giving it less than he was capable of, and he used his deep sharp voice like an instrument to both skillfully criticize and encourage, in order to get the best from his team. Coach Zino was a squat, powerful, muscular man about 5'4". He looked like someone who you would not want to wrestle with.

As Rafe read the story written by sportswriter, "Scoop" Woodsall, he began to replay the game in his mind...

It was an away game, and as he stood on the mound at the bottom the first inning, Rafe felt more nervous than he had ever felt in his life. From the time he was a twelve year old in Newark, when he first became a pitcher for one of 6 teams in the Little League sponsored by the Boys' Club, he had mostly considered himself a good pitcher. Yet he never felt so nervous before. His first varsity start and only a sophomore!

Rafe got off to a good start by holding the Bayshore Highlands squad scoreless for the first eight innings. Meanwhile the QHS team, led by Hap Clooney, who went four for five with a home run, triple and two singles, and Gerry Rome who chipped in with three hits, racked up fifteen runs to give Rafe a most comfortable lead going into the bottom of the ninth inning. Rafe himself had a double and a single.

Now in the bottom of the ninth, with a shutout in the offing, after getting the first batter out, Rafe suddenly lost a bit of control on his pitches and began missing the strike zone...not by much, but enough that he walked two straight batters.

Coach Zino made a trip to the mound to encourage Rafe. "You've got a fifteen run lead, so throw strikes and get those final two outs", he said firmly. "Follow through on your delivery to the plate", the coach added, as he turned to walk back to the bench.

Rafe got the next batter to hit a short fly to the outfield, holding the two runners, but then walked the very next batter to load the bases. Yet he still had a shutout possible. But struggling with his control, he got behind 3-2 on the next batter, a left handed hitter. He did not want to walk in a run to ruin the shutout, so he took a deep breath and looked in to get the sign from the Bo. "A fast ball. good!" he said to himself. He did not trust his curveball with a 3-2 count and apparently Bo didn't either. Rafe went into a full windup and let go with a fastball, aiming for Bo's catcher's mitt which was positioned on the inside of the plate around thigh high.

The pitch did not make it to Bo's mitt. It headed for the center of the plate and a bit higher than the target, right down the middle about waist high. The batter swung and hit a long drive to left center, between the Left Fielder and the Center Fielder. By the time the left Fielder chased the ball down and relayed it into the Shortstop, the bases were cleared and the batter was rounding third on his way to home plate...a bases-loaded homerun.

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Rafe felt horrible. He punched his right fist into his glove several times and growled loudly at himself. “Shit! Damn! Fuck!” He nearly screamed under his breath to himself.

Coach Zino came running out to the mound. He stopped on the mound in front of Rafe, arms folded, and quietly, but forcefully said, “Ok, you’ve got one out to get. Forget about those walks and the last batter. Focus on getting that final out. You’ve got the bottom of the order up now, so throw strikes. No more walks! Do you think you can do that? Or do I have to bring in someone to relieve you?”

Rafe, still angry with himself, gritted his teeth and said, “But I lost the shutout, Coach!” Then quickly added, “Let me finish it Coach...let me get that last out.”

Coach Zino grasped the anger exuding from Rafe and simmering just beneath the surface. “You need to stop fighting yourself, son! Put aside your anger and do your job! Do I make myself clear?”

Rafe lowered his head, inhaled a deep breath and let it out slowly, then looked up into Coach Zino’s eyes and said, “I’m ready.”

By this time Bo had come out to the mound, and as Coach Zino walked back to the bench, he said to Rafe, “You already struck out this batter last time with mostly fast balls. He was way behind on his swing. Let’s go after him, but keep the ball on the inside part of the plate around the letters. Just throw to my target...throw to my glove and we’ll finish this and go home”.

Rafe nodded, “OK, Bo.” Bo returned and set up behind home plate. The batter stepped into the box and the umpire signaled for Rafe to start pitching. Rafe looked in to get the sign. Bo put one finger down between his thighs. Rafe nodded, went into his windup and fired a strike. Then he fired two more strikes and the game was over. The batter waved weakly at all three pitches.

After the customary handshakes with the opposing team’s players, Coach Zino gathered the QHS squad near the visiting team’s bench and congratulated the team on the victory. Then he looked over at Rafe and said, “Good job! Your first Varsity win!”

Everyone slapped Rafe on the back and congratulated him. Bo gave Rafe the game ball, and it was then that Rafe realized how good it felt to be a winner. “My first Varsity win. I can’t hardly believe it, but God it sure feels good”, he thought to himself and he smiled for the first time since the team had boarded the bus for the pre-game ride to the Bayshore Highlands field.

Friday Noon June 14, 1957...

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*A white sport coat and a pink carnation
I'm all dressed up for the dance
A white sport coat and a pink carnation
I'm all alone in romance*

*Once you told me long ago
To the prom with me you'd go
Now you've changed your mind it seems
Someone else will hold my dreams*

The Marty Robbins song was playing on the juke box at the store across from QHS. The owners of the store, Jim and Jane, catered to the QHS kids, especially at lunch time and after school. They provided fresh made sandwiches, along with cold sodas and snacks, some benches on which to sit and a juke box that held fifty 45 records. A number of kids, more girls than guys, hung out there listening to the juke box with all the latest 45 Rock and Roll and R and B hits. A few of them hung out there to smoke cigarettes.

What was special about today was that tonight was the Senior Prom and you could just see from the expressions on the faces of the girls in the store who was going and who was not. Occasionally, on school days, James, Bo, Rafe, Earle and Jack would pass up the school cafeteria and congregate at the store to have a quick lunch.

On this day, Rafe met Bo in the upstairs hall and they decided to walk over to the store. As soon as they entered the store, the boys saw Cathy Wood excitedly talking with Martha Luchese. As the boys approached, Rafe overheard Cathy say to Martha, "Oh, Martha, I wish you were going to the Prom tonight, then we could double date. As it is now, I'll be going with Brian Arnswagger and the other couple is Gerry Rome and his girlfriend, a senior from Mason, who I don't know. I'd feel better if I knew the other girl". As the boys drew up next to them, Martha shrugged her shoulders as if to say, "Gee, you are going to the prom with one of the best looking guys in the senior class and you're complaining?"

Rafe didn't know why, but when Cathy turned to greet him and Bo with blue eyes twinkling and a smile that showed her excitement, he felt a twinge of resentment. Was it jealousy? He couldn't be sure, but he stammered a "Hello" to both girls, and quickly decided to not show any reaction.

Bo leaned up against Martha and whispered something in her ear that neither Rafe nor Cathy could hear. Martha grinned sheepishly and a blush rose on her neck and cheeks that was evident even with her dark complexion and light makeup. After a few minutes of idle chatter about the end of the school year and who had what plans for the summer, Cathy and Martha said so long and headed back across the street to the school.

Rafe and Bo ordered sandwiches and a coke and while they wolfed down their lunch, they looked over the girls in the store and made a few comments and observations that sixteen year old boys typically do. Like "Nice ass, on that June over there."

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Rafe then asked Bo what he had said to Martha that made her react the way she had. Bo winked, laughed and said, “I just told her I came here for lunch and she looked good enough to eat”. With that they both laughed and headed back over to the school.

Final exams were finished and Bo and Rafe were anxious to get their report cards which were to be handed out at the last class of the day. Summer vacation was about to begin!

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1957 was proving to be an eventful year. 4.3 million Boomers were born this year, more than in any year before... or since. Over 1,000 computers were built in 1957....up from 20 in 1954. In September, President Eisenhower used federal troops to control demonstrations against integration in Little Rock, Arkansas. Doctors began testing the birth control pill to prevent unwanted pregnancies.

Ford spent \$250 million to market the Edsel, which became one of the most infamous bad decisions ever made by an American car manufacturer and the butt of many jokes over the ensuing years. The city of New York took its last trolley car out of service. Israel rejected a United Nations resolution calling for it to withdraw from Egypt's Gaza Strip and other occupied Egyptian territory unless she received more UN assurance that its own territory would be protected – a request that has been repeated many times since.

On July 6, Althea Gibson became the first black tennis player to win Wimbledon. Don Bowden became the first American to break the four minute mile. On July 12, President Eisenhower became the first president to fly in a helicopter. On July 29, the International Atomic Energy Agency was established by UN and the Tonight Show debuted with host Jack Parr. And on Aug 29 Congress passed the Civil Rights Act of 1957.

The world was undergoing changes that for the most part were ignored by the pre-Baby Boomers that were fumbling their way through their teenage years, unsure how they were to relate to the changes in their own bodies, let alone the changes in the world. War II and the Korean conflict were in the past. The atomic age and the cold war seemed so remote. America had the luxury of being far removed from the turmoil of Europe and the other continents.

Saturday afternoon, July 6, 1957...

*Dum, dum, dum, dum, dum, de, doobe, dum
Dum, dum, dum, dum, dum, de, doobe, dum
Dum, dum, dum, dum, dum, de, doobe, dum
Wah, wah, wah, wah wah*

*Love, love me darling, come and go with me
Please don't send me way beyond the sea
I need you darling so come go with me*

*Come come come come, come into my heart
Tell me darling we will never part
I need you darling so come go with me
Whoa whoa whoa whoa...*

The Del Vikings hit song was playing on the Jeep's radio and Earle and Tommy Slade were riding around the new housing project. Tommy had gotten his driver's license near the end of the sophomore school year and had a summer job as a guard watching over the new housing

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project. A developer was building homes in a cleared field across the highway from the trailer park where he and Earle lived in North Kingsboro. Earle was still only fifteen – not yet old enough to get a driving permit. But when Tommy suggested that Earle take the wheel in the jeep, Earle said enthusiastically, “Hot Damn! Pull this sucker over and switch seats with me!”

Now Earle had only driven his Dad’s four-door hardtop 1956 Pontiac Star Chief car a few times around the trailer park and therefore had little driving experience. So, when he took over driving the jeep, he was surprised by how stiff the steering was, since it did not have power steering like his Dad’s car. But in his excitement he didn’t think too much of it. As he maneuvered the car slowly around the subdivision, Tommy said, “Come on slowpoke, give it a little gas, I can run faster than you’re driving.” Then he egged Earle on, “Don’t be a pussy, Burn, get this dang jeep moving!”

Earle didn’t need too much egging on, as he was enjoying the feel of power behind the wheel, but the long shaft of the three-speed stick shift coming up from the floor was a bit sloppy and when he let out the clutch a little too late after stepping on the accelerator, the jeep literally jerked forward. But in short order, he got into third gear and was up to forty miles an hour. This was OK initially while he drove around the perimeter, but then Tommy said, “Turn left up here between the next two rows of foundations. I’m supposed to travel down each of the future roads a few times each day to make sure no one is trying to steal any lumber or concrete block.”

“OK”, Earle said. He downshifted as he made the left turn, but he forgot that without power steering the steering wheel would not return to center on its own. The jeep, instead of heading down the future street, kept heading left toward the foundation of the future house on the left corner. Tommy let out a frightened yell, “Holy Shit, Burn, turn the wheel back!” Earle’s heart leapt like it was going to burst out of his chest. He stepped on the brakes and started to yank the wheel to the right, but it was almost too little and too late. The jeep slid on the dirt road before it came to a stop, but not before the left front wheel was hanging over the precipice of the large, ten foot deep, thirty foot by forty foot hole where the foundation had been laid. The jeep was precariously situated with its driver’s side front hanging over the hole.

Both boys sat there for a minute, hardly breathing. Then as the reality set in of how close they came to possibly a fatal accident, they both began to nervously laugh, at first cautiously. Then Tommy, trying to control his breathing, said “Burn, here’s what I want you to do. Throw it in reverse, give it just a little gas and let the clutch out real slow like. Can you do that or do you want me to switch with you?”

“I’ll try”, Earle said still a bit shook up. He did as Tommy had directed and slowly the back wheels of the jeep moved the jeep back until it was fully on the road again. Tommy got out on the passenger side and Earle slid over, as Tommy got behind the wheel. They looked at each other and burst out in a hardy laugh, but underneath the boys felt a deep sense of relief. Both boys felt like they had looked death in the face and survived. Earle let out a whistle and said, “Wow, holy shit that was close! But if we survived that, we’ve got an angel lookin’ out for us and this could be one helluva fun summer”. And they both laughed again, this time with zest.

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Wednesday afternoon, July 10, 1957...

Rafe was lying face down on a bath towel on the deck of the Kingsboro public pool. This was the second summer that he had joined the pool along with Jack Pauley. While North Kingsboro was a township, Kingsboro was a borough that was nestled on the Jersey Bayshore. The pool was owned by Lou Cerrito, who also owned the adjoining ice skating rink. The pool was opened from Memorial Day through Labor Day. The vast majority of people who became members were residents of Kingsboro borough, eastern areas of North Kingsboro Township, and north eastern areas of Middlebury Township.

Rafe was in love, or most definitely infatuated. Rosemarie Cippo was an exotic Italian girl from the Bronx, with long, jet black hair, deeply tanned olive skin, high cheek bones on a narrow face with full but firm lips, and a classic Roman nose. It was Jack Pauley who first struck up a conversation with Rosemarie at the public pool, but Jack's wry, sarcastic humor was lost on Rosemarie. She was a city girl who was accustomed to more direct interactions with boys. It wasn't long before she began to initiate conversations with Rafe. Rafe was somewhat taken back by the sudden attention from this olive skinned girl.

Lying there on the deck, sunning himself, Rafe was trying to understand what Rosemarie was after. He realized that she was flirting with him, but wondered how sincere it was. Did she really like Jack and was merely trying to make Jack jealous, or was she really interested in Rafe? Was she only looking for a summer romance and then go back to a boyfriend in the Bronx?

Now Rafe was still a bit shy around the opposite sex, especially girls he did not know that well, and that led him to appear aloof and disinterested. It was a defense mechanism that was a hangover from having grown up in the city of Newark, during those blackboard jungle days. So, he wondered, was it that fake aloofness that attracted Rosemarie? But good lord, he mused, there was surely something very sexy about this Rosemarie. She had that jet black hair tied in a big pony tail that showed off her thin delicate neck. Over the bottom of her two piece bathing suit she typically wore form fitting white short shorts that accentuated her shapely ass and darkly tanned muscular but smooth legs that tapered to slender ankles and firm feet with red toenail polish. On top she usually wore a tight fitting cotton pullover that did justice to a pair of ripe, round breasts – not overly large, just about right. He had heard and observed that many Italian girls matured earlier than most. And damn if Rosemarie wasn't a great example of this.

Just behind him was the covered area that housed the snack bar and a small section with a juke box and room enough for a half dozen couples to dance to the Rock & Roll songs that blared from the 45 records in the juke box. Rafe was awakened from his reverie by the sound of The Dells harmonizing to...

*Oh, what a night (to love you dear)
Oh, what a night (to hold you near)*

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*Oh, what a night (to squeeze you dear)
That's why I love you so...*

Rafe shook off his reverie, looked up over his forearms on which his face was resting and he saw that Rosemarie and her mom had arrived and taken a place on the deck about ten feet from him. Rosemarie saw Rafe and gave him a smile that would melt chocolate in a freezer. Then somewhat casually, and not without a bit of purposeful playfulness, she began to remove her short shorts and cotton pullover. In his mind's eye Rafe imagined holding her close, kissing her, and gently moving his hand down between her thighs into that luscious crescent. "Shit", he grumbled to himself, "now I can't get up, lest everyone see that I have a hard-on. I just hope she doesn't decide to walk over here. Oh, hells bells! Here she comes!"

"Hi, Rafe. How are you today? Isn't it just a perfect day for the pool?" Rosemarie said with that same smile that could melt frozen chocolate (seductive, Rafe thought).

"Ah, it's OK, uh, really nice and warm and sunny", Rafe clumsily ventured. Then he offered, "Is that a new bathing suit?"

"Oh, this old thing? No, I bought it last year. But do you like it?" Rosemarie countered, as she slightly rotated her body left, then right.

"Yes, and I like what I see in it. Uh, I mean I like the way you look in it. Uh, no, what I really mean is that I like the suit just fine, it, it sort of just looks good on you," Rafe fumbled.

Rosemarie giggled and flashed that smile again and it was then that Rafe knew that he was hooked.

Friday evening, August 23, 1957...

Another summer was drawing to a close. The three major TV stations were showing reruns of shows like *Gunsmoke*, *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet*, *Perry Mason*, and *Our Miss Brooks*.

Bo was getting ready to go out on his date. He was looking forward to seeing Fabiana. Fabiana was Martha Luchese's younger sister, by one year, and she was the wild one. Bo was a bit amazed at his luck – dating two sisters at the same time. Martha also had an older sister, Theresa, but she was a bit stuck up and Bo didn't care too much for her. While Bo had a strong crush on Martha, she was not as "available" as Fabiana. Martha always obeyed her parents' instructions and would not dream of hiding anything from them. She always let them know her whereabouts. And while Martha liked to make out, she would not let Bo get beyond the kissing and petting stage. She would immediately back off whenever Bo tried to cop a feel.

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But Fabiana, on the other hand, was not above sneaking off to have a secret date with Bo and telling her parents she was going to the library or to a girl friend's house. And best of all she knew that Bo was also dating her older sister, and did not let on that she was also dating Bo. So Martha, and more importantly her strict Italian parents, did not have a clue about Bo and Fabiana. While Martha was a "goody two-shoes" type of girl, Fabiana was a lot more adventurous. She would let Bo undo her bra and touch her tits and let him rub her between the thighs over her clothes, but that was as far as she had let him go thus far. "Maybe tonight would be different", Bo hoped as he finished combing his black wavy hair and splashing on a bit of Canoe after shave. On his way out of the door, he told his Mom that he would be home by midnight (that was his curfew on weekends even though it was summer and school had not yet started).

Despite being a year younger than Martha and three years younger than Theresa, Fabiana was about an inch or so taller. While Martha wore her hair cut to just before above her shoulders, Fabiana let her hair grow down to the middle of her back. And it was a shade lighter than Martha's, and much straighter. Her skin tone was whiter and her lips were tantalizingly fuller and when she was away from her parents, she put on a full covering of dark red lipstick, which would have earned her a smack on the rear end from her Dad and a good talking to from Mom Luchese. Fabiana was not as pretty as Martha, but her free-spirited vivaciousness, animation, and flirty smile more than made up for it.

Bo had just turned seventeen and had his driver's license. He had borrowed the keys to his Dad's 1953 four-door, tan Ford for his date. He was to meet Fabiana at the Holmvale public library. They would go to the drive-in, have some hot dogs, fries and coke while the cartoons were shown, and then get into the back seat and make out during the movie. As he drove out of the driveway, Bo was already imagining that he was going to get "lucky" this night. He reached down into his left pants pocket and double checked that he had a rubber. "Yep, good ole Trojan ready for service", he smiled to himself. He tuned the radio to 770 AM to listen to one of the DJs on WABC. A Chuck Berry song was playing and Bo tapped his fingers on the steering wheel as he drove toward the Holmvale library.

*Just let me hear some of that rock and roll music
Any old way you choose it
It's got a back beat, you can't lost it,
Any old time you use it
It's gotta be rock roll music
If you wanna dance with me
If you wanna dance with me*

*I've got no kick against modern jazz
Unless they try to play it too darn fast
And change the beauty of the melody
Until they sound just like a symphony...*

Fabiana was waiting for Bo outside the library. He pulled the car over to the curb, put the shift lever on the steering column in park, jumped out and went around the front of the car to

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open the door for Fabiana. Fabiana gave him a delicious, sly smile, and then slid into the front bench seat. Bo closed the door behind her, then went around and got in the driver's seat. He leaned over to give Fabiana a kiss, but she shook her head and said urgently, "Not here, Bo. There are neighbors over there that know my parents. Let's go, before they see us". Fabiana shifted her body so that she was facing toward Bo, with her back to the passenger door as Bo shifted the Ford into drive and quickly pulled away from the curb, after checking that no cars were coming.

Ten minutes later, Bo pulled into a row in rear of the drive-in theater, rolled down the window, pulled in a speaker from the pole, and rolled the window up as far as it would go with the speaker hooked over the window. After turning up the volume knob as far as it would go, he asked Fabiana, "Hot dog, fries and a coke Alright?"

Fabiana smiled and nodded yes and Bo opened the driver's door to get out. Just then Fabiana said, "Wait up, I'll go with you and visit the ladies room." Fabiana got out on the passenger side and she and Bo walked to the refreshment stand holding hands. Bo ordered the food and held it on the cardboard trays until Fabiana came out of the ladies rest room.

About a half hour later the cartoons were finished, the movie had begun and Bo and Fabiana were making out heavily in the back seat of the car. Bo had tried several times to get his hand into Fabiana's panties under her skirt, but each time she said, "No", and dug her nails into the back of his hand and he had to remove it or risk suffering further pain. After the third time, Bo decided that it was not going to happen and not worth the pain. He sat up, straightened his shirt, and lit up a cigarette. "Light one for me, Bo", Fabiana asked as she straightened out her red, green and blue plaid skirt and blue blouse.

Bo took out another Lucky Strike, put it in between his lips, lit it from his cigarette and handed it to Fabiana. Bo watched her intently as she took a deep drag and slowly exhaled. His curiosity got the better of him, so he asked as gently as he could, but not without a trace of frustration in his voice, "Fabiana, why do you act like you want to go all the way and then you suddenly put on the brakes? You get me all hot and bothered and then you expect me to stop when I'm damn near ready to explode. It makes me think you are just a big tease."

Fabiana giggled briefly and then realized how serious Bo was. She suddenly got very serious, looked at Bo with a glistening of tears in her huge brown eyes and said in a quiet, cracked voice, "Bo, I really like you, and I don't want you to think I am a fast girl – a tramp. But I also think that you like Martha a lot and I know she is crazy over you. It's just that I've always been the baby in the family and Martha has always had lots of boy friends, while I...I just haven't gotten much attention from the boys when Martha is around. Please don't think poorly of me. I do like you, but I'm afraid to let you go all the way. It...it could ruin everything and you wouldn't respect me and sooner or later we'd be found out and... and that would be just a big mess! I just thought that this one time I could have a little of the popularity that Martha has. Please don't hate me!" Then she started to whimper.

Bo thought to himself, "Oh, shit, please don't cry. I can't deal with that". He pulled his hanky out and gave it to Fabiana. He put out his cigarette, took hers and put it out. Clearing his

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throat, he said sincerely, “Don’t cry. It’s OK. I do like you and yes, I want you, but I don’t think you are a tramp.”

Fabiana said with a bit of whimper, “What about Martha, if she ever found out, she would be hurt so bad, and I would feel like a real heel?”

“Yeah,” Bo countered, “I do like Martha a lot, too, and wouldn’t want to ruin my chances with her. But I still enjoy seeing you, and don’t really want to stop that.”

“Well, maybe we should just stop dating for a while. You know, until you and Martha can see if you are meant for each other”, Fabiana offered reluctantly.

Bo looked in her wet eyes and thought for a second before responding, “Maybe you’re right. But let’s not decide just now. Let’s just watch the rest of the movie and think about it tomorrow.”

That was the last date Bo had with Fabiana, but they remained friends.

Saturday evening August 31, 1957...

James was a bit tired from working at the Quaytown Deli most of the day, but he was not about to let that spoil the evening. He had planned on this double date for over a week. His brother Jeremy had recently bought the family pale tan 1954 Ford. James had borrowed his it for the night and was going to pick up Bo and then they would pick up their dates. For James it was Sue Barlow, while Bo was dating Martha Luchese. He and Bo had finalized arrangements while at work at the deli earlier.

James finished shaving (it was now a twice weekly task), splashed some Old Spice on his face and brushed his teeth with Ipana toothpaste. He put on and buttoned a white shirt and tucked it into his tan khaki pants. He looked down and smiled at his new blue suede loafers. “Me and Elvis”, he thought and smiled. Time to go! He went out the side door while saying so long to his Mom and Dad, who were still sitting over a cup of coffee at the kitchen table, “Don’t wait up for me”, he said with authority. But he knew that even if his Mom and Dad went to bed before he got home one or both of them would lie awake until he came home.

James flipped on the car radio, tuned to WNJR and heard Daddy Sears introduce a song that was one of the earliest R & B ballad hits he first heard in 1955, Johnny Ace singing “Pledging My Love”...

*Forever my darling our love will be true
Always and forever I'll love only you*

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*just promise me darling your love in return
May this fire in my soul dear forever burn*

*My heart's at your command dear
To keep love and to hold
Making you happy is my desire dear
Keeping you is my goal*

*I'll forever love you
For the rest of my days
I'll never part from you
Or your loving ways
Just promise me darling your love in return
May this fire in my soul dear forever burn...*

By the time they got to the Drive-in Theater, it was almost time for the cartoons to begin. James and Bo went to get popcorn, candy and soda, since they had all eaten dinner and the girls had said they were not all that hungry, but popcorn, candy and soda would be fine.

On the way to the refreshment stand, Bo said to James, “What do you think Hein? Who’s going to make it to the World Series this year? Yankees and Dodgers again?”

“The Yanks, yes, but I don’t know about the Dodgers”, James replied, “With them moving to Los Angeles soon they may not be able to adjust to the move. And they are still about ten games behind the Milwaukee Braves and the Braves look really tough this year.”

“On a more important subject, Hein”, Bo continued, “How are you getting on with Sue? Getting much? Any poontang?”

“Ha!” James guffawed, “I haven’t gotten past first base thus far, but I’ve hit a lot of ‘singles’”. They both laughed. “Maybe tonight, she’ll let me hit at least one ‘double’ – sure would like to see the view from second base if you get my drift”, James said as he rubbed his hands together. Again, they both laughed.

“How about Martha, Miss Goody Two-Shoes, Bo? Have you breached her fortress yet?” James asked.

“No, just about the same as you and Sue”, Bo replied, “But, you know, I really, really like her and I’m glad she’s not that kind of girl. I’m not sure what I’d do if she should suddenly get all hot and say, ‘Take me, take me!’” After a brief pause, Bo continued jokingly, “But after that initial surprise, I doubt I’d hesitate more than a minute.” Once more they laughed.

Then James got serious, “Did you hear about that science teacher, Mr. Lunar?”

“No”, Bo answered, “What about him?”

Beach Party Days: Chapter 6

“He’s not coming back this year. It seems he was “porking” Patty Rodding all last year”, James informed Bo with a sly smile.

“You mean that cute Senior girl with the big boobs, who always wore tight sweaters? How’d you learn about that?” Bo queried.

“You know my dad is on the board of education, so one night last week I overheard him talking on the phone with another board member about it”, James responded. By now they were in line at the refreshment stand and both were smiling as they mentally envisioned the chubby science teacher and Patty, who was a full-bodied girl, doing the dirty deed.

While the boys were gone to get the food, the girls were idly chatting in the car about the start of school, shopping for school clothes, which classes they would take, and who were their favorite teachers. Eventually they got around to comparing notes about their dates.

“Have you and Bo gone all the way?” Sue asked in a hushed voice filled with curiosity.

“Heavens no!” Martha fairly shouted. “I’m not that kind of girl and Bo wouldn’t respect me, if I did. How about you and Hein?”

Sue quickly responded, “I’m not that kind of girl either. I want to get married someday and want my husband to know he’s not getting used goods. You know what I mean?”

“Oh, yes, I feel the same way!” Martha said emphatically. “Well, here come the boys back with the refreshments.”

The rest of the evening went according to plan – the girls’ plan that is. Neither James nor Bo got past first base, but they did hit a lot of ‘singles’.