

Crazy is Always Crazy
By Einstein Pluto

Just Another Fit

There he was with his back against the wall. Sweat pouring from every part of his body. His eyes were bigger than anyone I had ever seen. It was as if he wanted to become part of the wall. His arms were such that the palms of his hands pressed against the wall and every other surface of the posterior of his body was pressing against it too. He trembled and shook all at the same time. My mother was sitting at the dining room table in her nurse's uniform opposite him. She always made sure her uniform was as white as new snow. She was in her early forties now and had her hair done in the classic Dionne Warwick look. She was meticulous about her clothes and her hair. She loved jewelry but never had money for any. Nothing was ever out of place. She was always under control, well most of the time. I could see this thing with Dennis was making her come unraveled lately. I knew it was time for her to leave for work but that was the farthest thing from our minds. She talked to Dennis in a calm tone, "baby you right here with me, no one can get you, you are safe."

My brother Dennis was frozen and speechless. Lost in his own mind and terrified of something none of us could see. My mother kept talking - baby it's going to be alright; I just need you to look at me. Please look at me. Dennis Right, do you hear me, I said look at me! This she said in that tone she used to use when we were kids and in trouble. Dennis started to turn his head with such difficulty, it was as if someone had a sack on his head and neck and would not allow him to move. She said it again, Dennis Right, do you hear me, I said look at me! He turned a little more, with less difficulty. That's when I turned to look to my left. Big Mike, was frozen in midstride. He had this contorted pose that seemed to be horrified fear with a pinch of pity. Wanda was there too. She was almost in tears and truly heartbroken.

My mother stood up so slow. She resembled an alley cat stalking an unsuspecting bird that had landed to peck at a flower hovering just above the grass. The movement seemed to capture the full attention of Dennis. He started to talk in what I have come to know as Vietnamese. At that moment he did not see my mother but some other aberration from the jungle. He spoke in short sharp burst as he simultaneously slid sideways on the wall away from my mother. He was angry and frightened. He seemed defenseless. My mother was expert at talking Dennis down. She kept talking, now in a more measured tone, telling him what she wanted him to do. "I want you to sit down now and have some water. You look hot baby, have some water to drink." I could see Dennis' rigidity start to break. Like watching ice on a frozen lake break in front of you, all you can do is stand there and look. You're too afraid to turn and run but you dare not keep walking. As she moved to come around the table, Dennis started to come back to us. No matter how many times I live this moment, I never know if he is going to attack us or sit down and have a glass of water. I know he could kill us in an instant with his bare hands. Dennis' face gradually transformed into a smile. It is one of those smiles that people have when they are embarrassed about something. He stepped towards my mother as she pulls out a chair for him to sit in. "Sit right here baby and drink this water."

It was as if Big Mike, Wanda and I were all playing red light – green light. Now it was green light and we could all move. Wanda went into the kitchen to get a wet towel to try and cool Dennis off.

My mother and Wanda had their routine when Dennis has one of his fits. Me, I just try to get out of the room as soon as I can. Not today. I got to deal with Big Mike. He's been to the house hundreds of times, but he has never seen this. I hate it. I know he won't say anything to anyone but now we have this to share. I mean, we're pretty good friends but I just don't want anybody to know. Almost everybody on the block knows that Dennis is different since he got back from Nam. He tries but I know he can't control it. It's just embarrassing.

Come on Mike, let's go downstairs. Mike never said a word. We went downstairs and straight out the back door. As I started to climb the basement stairs to the backyard, I stopped and looked at Mike. Man, I know you were scared. It's OK. I know my brother is crazy. Mike finally broke his silence. He said, David – man I knew something was wrong with Dennis. I just didn't know how bad it was. I was really scared. I didn't know what he was gonna do.

That's my life. My name is David Right. I am black as the night and fast as lightening. I've got a medium build, but nobody knows that my strength is all in my legs and hips. Don't get me wrong. You can't move me if I don't want to be moved. You can't really tell how strong I am until you try to hit me on the field. I play running back for the 13 to 15 years - Highlandtown Boys and Girls Club football team. Me and my boy Kevin trade time in the running back position. Big Mike plays offensive and defensive tackle. In 1972 you had to be tough and fast in every way. I just got my gold tooth with a diamond shape in it. Dennis got it for me when he came back from Nam. I am Muhammad Ali pretty. All the girls love me and those that don't haven't met me yet. See, I put the grease in slick. I am smooth and slick in all that I do. If it wasn't for me, we wouldn't be going to the regional playoffs against Dundalk. I'll never forget it. It was third down and eight. We were on our own 38-yard line. The play was a play action flare to the flats. See, the left side of the line blocks back toward the center while the quarterback fakes the handoff to the fullback. I take two steps towards the line and then pivot left and head to the flats. The linebackers are sucked up into the line thinking the full back has the ball. I catch the short pass about a yard behind the line of scrimmage and sprint up field. On this night, the play was perfection. I caught the ball in stride. Ronnie, the wide receiver, was blocking the cornerback. Big Mike came off the line to block the outside linebacker. I ran up field as if I was going to go behind Big Mike, studder-stepped and cut outside. There was nothing in front of me and nobody was ever gonna catch me from behind. Touchdown. We went up 14 to 3 on the Loch Raven Rams. Only time will tell if I get a shot at the NFL.

Mike's Last Day of Summer with David

Chris is a trip, I said to David. I know. He's always talkin all big like he's tough. He ain't tough, said David. We were walking down the alley between Decker and Ellwood streets in East Baltimore. It was a hot day in September and school was going to start back next week. David said, you want to smoke some weed? Yeah, I said, why not. Summer is pretty much over. We got nothing to drink. Mike, man – I got you covered, said David. You know Dennis or Wanda always got some beer stashed in the house. So we going to your house? I asked. Is Wanda home today?

Mike why you always asking about my sister? I know you ain't never been with a girl. You probably never even talked to any girl but Wanda, said David. Plus, I don't see how you can stand

her. She's always getting on my last nerve. Always acting like he know everything, Miss intelligent.

David's sister Wanda is fine as hell. There's just something sweet about the way she talks and moves. Her skin is the color of gold. You know, when the sun is golden just before it starts to set. Wanda has this baby doll face – smooth features with slightly high cheeks. And her hair – she has a real short Afro. My hair is longer than hers. She makes me so crazy when I see her. I don't know what to think or what to say. But she makes it easy for me. I think she knows I can't talk but she is just so nice and sweet to me. I went by to get David one day and Wanda answered the door. She was looking right at me. She said, David's not home. What are you doing? I couldn't talk, again. She said, I just got the new Stevie Wonder album. You got to hear this. Come on. She took me to her room. I had never been in there. And I had never been alone with her. The smell of cherry incense was in the air. Wanda had on this red, yellow and green dashiki with some jean shorts and bare feet. She told me to sit on the bed. So I sat on the bed. She put on the album and handed me the album cover – Stevie wonder – Talking Book. I didn't know who Stevie Wonder was but did not want to look dumb. With a bit of tenor in her voice she asked, you heard of Stevie Wonder before? I shook my head. She said, Mike you gonna love this. The only way to listen to it is laying back with your eyes closed. Now I'm really freaking out. She looked into my eyes and in almost a purr said, I'm serious, lay back and close your eyes. Standing at the record player, she turned and dropped the needle. I already had my eyes closed and she laid back beside me on the bed. Superstition was playing. Its funky rhythms and lyrics were something I had never heard before. Wanda was like a magic trick. She pulled back the curtain on a whole new world and invited me in to experience it with her. She didn't know it but it was the first intimate experience I had with the opposite sex – not my sisters – that didn't involve some competition or any pretext. The whole thing was not sexual. We listened to several cuts until her mother came home and started to ask questions about her chores. See, Wanda was probably 19 or 20 years old and I was just 14. Being with her that day changed everything for me. I mean, that day I learned about the dynamic between men and women. I didn't know it in that moment but looking back, that was the day I left childhood behind.

“David, I don't know what you're talking about”, I said. Your sister Wanda is nice. She's nice to me. Better than any of my sisters treat me. Plus, you know she is old. Too old for me. So she gonna be home? David just started laughing. I mean bent over about to fall down laughing. I pushed him and he almost fell down. We walked down the block a few steps in silence and then he looked at me. We started racing down the block to see who could get to the house first. David is so fast and I'm big and clunky. He started to pull away so I reached out and grabbed his shoulder so he wouldn't beat me too bad. He turned the corner to the house and took the steps two at a time. I was on his heels when we bounded into the house.

All I saw was Dennis standing there in the dining room with his shirt off. He was sweating hard. I knew it was hot and Dennis was always a little wild, but this was something else. When you enter their front door, you are in the living room which opens to the left. The dining room is just ahead with a big arch way opening – no door. Dennis was standing just behind a chair that was pushed up to the table. He wasn't touching the chair and was staring straight ahead but was seeing nothing. At least that was the feeling I had. He had an intense look on his face with his eyes open wide. Our entry seemed to startle him, but he never looked our way. He backed up to the wall

and talked in a language I had never heard. He seemed to be shouting commands. As we got farther into the room, I then saw Miss Right sitting across the table with her hand up – palm facing us like a crossing guard stopping traffic – directed at us but she never turned her head as she was focused on Dennis. David and I stopped cold in our tracks. I had heard stories about Dennis from my brother and sister. They said he came back from the Army crazy. He had been to Vietnam and it made him crazy. I didn't really know what they meant. Now I was seeing it for the first time. I wanted to do something, anything, but I knew enough not to move. Wanda was standing to my left but in front of me. She seemed to want to run over and grab Dennis but was frozen in place. Miss Right was talking to Dennis but I couldn't quite make out what she was saying. She was talking slow and low. He suddenly, slid along the wall and started to yell some more gibberish.

I was so afraid. All I could think about was the day my mother got shot by my father. I had come home from school during the middle of the day. It was late morning, before lunch time and when I was in the fifth grade. I was going to the funeral of one of the boy scouts in my troop. I didn't really know him. He died when a tree fell on his tent during a camping trip. We were all rushed home after it happened. There was a sudden rainstorm, the wind was blowing hard and several trees fell. I recall the look on my mother's face when she finally saw that I was ok. The look she had before she saw me was like the look on Dennis' face. When I opened the front door to our house, I knew something was wrong. My father is never home during the day. I saw my mother and father in their bedroom. My mother was sitting on the bed and her clothes were torn. Her hair was all over the place. My mother is a beautiful lady. She is tall with creamy light brown skin. I couldn't see her face. I ran upstairs to change my clothes.

My father could be a terror. He would sometime go off on us. He would break things and hit my mom. There was no warning. None of us could figure out when it was going to happen. Once I changed into my suit, I was starting back downstairs, and my father was standing at the bottom of the stairs. He was a hulk of a man. Shorter than my mother, with dark skin. About the complexion of a dark chocolate bar, a deep brown but not black. He said, 'come down here, I want you to see your mother'. He grabbed me by the arm and took me to the bedroom door. He said, 'look at her', she slowly turned to look at me. That's when I saw the black eye and the bruises on her arm. He said, 'take a good look, it'll be the last time you see her'. I was frightened but it wasn't the first time I had seen this. Usually, I was there with my brother and sisters when this happened. Today was the first time I was all alone with them while he was losing his mind. Just as suddenly as it started, he said, 'go on now' and walked in the bedroom and closed the door. I left without saying a word. When I got back from the funeral and was walking home people, in the neighborhood kept stopping me to tell me my mother was dead. They said the ambulance came and took her away. They said the sheet was over her head and she was dead. I guess they thought they were warning me or preparing me. All I could think was that he finally did it. He killed her.

I could see Miss Right slowly standing up while she was talking to Dennis. She moved around the table. Dennis seemed to slowly come out of his trance, and he was now talking English. He reached out for a glass of water and eased into a dining room chair. I could feel David looking at me. He said, "come on, let's go downstairs." He said it as if nothing just happened. One thing I had learned was to not ask questions. Plus, always do what people tell you when you are in their house. Even if it seems strange, do what they tell you. That's the best way to stay safe. We headed downstairs and went straight out the back door started up the stairs to the backyard. David

stopped and turned to me and said “Man I know you were scared. It’s OK. I know my brother is crazy”. I said, “David – man I knew something was wrong with Dennis. I just didn’t know how bad it was. I was really scared. I didn’t know what he was gonna do”.

What Does Crazy Mean?

Once we got into the back yard and set at the picnic table, Mike said, ‘It reminded me of when my mother died’. I said, ‘what you talking about, your mother is not dead’. Mike said, ‘I know, but I thought she was dead. You remember that time my father beat up my mother. Everybody thought she was dead because the ambulance people covered up her face so no one could see her black eyes’. I said, ‘Oh, I forgot about that’. That’s how it was with me and Big Mike. We understood each other. We never got into an argument because we knew that either of us could go crazy at any time. We had to be there to save each other. We saw people around the way go crazy all the time. We would just laugh and say, “crazy is always crazy”.