

# Moving On

You can still see the handmade crosses on the side of the road where the wreck happened, a constant reminder of that tragic day. No one really knows what happened, but it was a day that reshaped a community forever. Clint was the toast of the town, Carlton, Ohio's favorite son. In a town where Friday night High School football was the social event of the week, Clint was the main attraction. He had scouts drooling all over him since his sophomore year. He was a can't miss quarterback. That is until he and Jimmy veered into that tree on old Sullivan road.

It took Clint awhile, but soon he was back making his old rounds to his usual hangouts.

"Chocolate milk shake, Sam," ordered Clint with smile.

Clint loved Henderson's Ice Cream Parlor. It made him feel normal again.

"Coming right up," said Sam.

"Looks like it might rain for tonight's game. How does the old team look?"

"Pretty good," said Sam with a wink, "Are you going tonight?"

"I wouldn't feel right. It's just to soon to go back there."

"They all miss you."

"Look, they miss the hero. They miss the football star. They miss Mr. Perfect. They don't miss me."

"That's not fair, Clint. That's all of you they knew."

"Does anyone say they miss Jimmy? Was his life any less important?"

"They didn't know Jimmy. They knew you."

"Well they should have known him. He was a good guy. He was my best friend and it shouldn't matter that he didn't play football."

Clint started to cry. He was so different from the guy who played for two hours with a separated shoulder in the homecoming game. He never let anyone see him cry, but that was then.

"Somebody needs to remember Jimmy even if it's just me. It's time I visit the grave and say my goodbyes," said Clint.

"Now Clint you can't climb that hill to the graveside, not in your condition," said Sam.

"Shut up, Sam. Just shut up."

Clint stormed out, wiping tears from his eyes. He didn't like people pointing out his disability. His constant limp was enough of a reminder.

A few raindrops started to fall as Clint walked home. He was supposed to call his mom when he was ready to come home. His mom didn't like him to walk long distances with his bad leg, but Clint wanted to clear his head. Clint flung open the screen door.

"Mom, I'm home."

"You were supposed to call me," called his mom.

Clint sat down at the table with a glass of milk. His mother walked into the kitchen and gave him a look only a mother can give.

"What?"

"You know how worried I get. It's starting to rain and you could have been right in the middle of it."

"Mom, will things ever be like they used to be?"

"Things can never be like they used to be, son. You're a different person now."

"I know I can't play football anymore, but when will I move past this? When will things stop being weird and just start being?"

"It will when you're ready, and not a moment sooner."

"I'm tired of hearing that, mom. I'm ready now!"

"You must not be or else you wouldn't still be here."

"I don't want to go to the game. That's the one thing I won't do. It brings back too many memories. I couldn't deal with that."

The rumble of thunder interrupted this tense moment. They both gazed through the window at the approaching storm.

"Mom, I want to go see Jimmy's grave."

Clint's mom stood and started clearing the dishes.

Storms always make me nervous," said Clint's mom as she grabbed Clint's cup.

"Didn't you hear me mom?"

"Are you hungry dear?"

"Mom, will you take me to see Jimmy's grave? It's time. I've never said goodbye and I think it would help me."

"I don't think you're ready, son..."

"That's what everybody says," interrupted Clint, "but I say I am! I'm tired of mourning. I'm tired of this life. I am ready to move on."

Clint stood and slowly walked to the door. His mother just stared at the floor. She couldn't face him.

"Please don't go up there, Clint. You are going to open a wound that hasn't healed yet. Trust me. You are not ready for this."

"If you won't help me then I'll find someone who will."

Clint pushed the door open waiting for his mom to say she would help him. The screeching of the screen door was the only reply he got.

"Goodbye, mom."

The door slammed behind him and he slowly limped toward the hill where Jimmy was laid to rest.

"Goodbye, Clint," whispered Clint's mom as a tear found it's way to her cheek.

The sky began to open up onto Clint. The rain was slow and steady, but it was enough to soak Clint in a matter of minutes. By the time he reached the hill the rain was becoming a torrent. The more it rained, the more determined Clint became. The dark and violent sky lit up with lightening streaking across the sky. A wind gust blew knocking Clint down on one knee and as he tried to stand he slipped and fell face first into the mud. He reached out for a dark barren tree, but it was just out of reach.

"Do you need some help," called a voice from the dark.

A shadowy figure stepped towards Clint. Through the night sky and the rain Clint could barely make out what appeared to be a face of a young man.

"I'm trying to get to the top of the hill," cried Clint.

The young man helped Clint to his feet.

"I'll walk with you if you need help."

"I'd appreciate it. This leg isn't what it used to be."

The young man put his arm around Clint and walked him up the hill.

"I used to play hide and go seek on this hill, and now I can't even walk up it," explained Clint.

"I played hide and go seek on this hill too," said the young man, "maybe we played together once or twice."

"Maybe."

The pair reached their destination.

"Would you wait for me? I need to do something."

The young man agreed to wait and Clint walked towards the grave. A lightening flash illuminated the night sky revealing the writing on the gravestone. Jimmy Dent, March 2, 1984 – September 6, 2001.

"Jimmy, I'm sorry. I'm sorry I haven't come here sooner. You were my best friend and I miss you..."

Clint's face was wet. The tears and the rain mixed together to form a stream of water pouring down his face. The emotion of the moment was too much and he fell to the ground.

"Are you okay," asked the young man rushing to Clint's side.

"He was my best friend and life hasn't been the same without him. I was hoping this would help me move on, but I just don't know. Maybe my mom was right."

"I think you're doing exactly what you need to do. If you are ready you'll move on."

"I'm ready. I just hope Jimmy forgives me for taking so long."

The young man walked from Jimmy's grave to neighboring sight. Clint hobbled over.

"Did you know him too," asked the young man.

A streak of lightning lit up the words on the new stone they were gazing upon.

It read Clint Hunt, March 2, 1984 – September 6, 2001. Clint slowly turned to lock eyes with the young stranger who was no longer a stranger.

"Jimmy? That means I'm dead."

"What took you so long buddy," said Jimmy as he smiled at his long lost friend.

by David Wagner