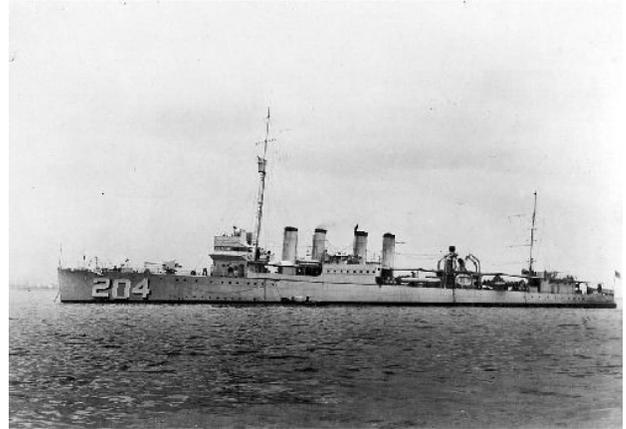


Chapter IV Newlyweds

January 6, 1922 – November 1, 1923

Four days later, the Wadsworth stood out of Hampton Rhodes in company with the three other destroyers in her division along with the armored cruiser Rochester on their goodwill world cruise. He kept a record of the voyage in his log. He had never kept a journal before, he never failed to do so ever since. The cruise took them first to Puerto Rico then across the equator into the South Atlantic calling at Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Before sailing on to Buenos Aires, Argentina he got a letter off to Geannie.



February 5, 1922

Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

Dear Geannie,

I trust you received my letter from San Juan, Puerto Rico. I did receive your letter. Here I am in Rio. We arrived here late Friday afternoon on the 3rd and dropped anchor in Guanabara Bay. Right at the mouth of the bay on a peninsula that juts out into the Atlantic Ocean is Sugarloaf Mountain. Before I tell you about Rio, I have to tell you about crossing the equator on the 1st.

"Crossing the line" as it's called is a tradition where those who are crossing the equator for the first time (we're called pollywogs) are initiated into the Realm of the Raging Main during a two day ceremony by those who have crossed before (they're called shellbacks).

On the night before the crossing, us pollywogs were summoned before the high court of King Neptune and a jury of salty shellbacks and were

accused of being lowly pollywogs, which is worse than sea scum. After a thorough interrogation consisting of mostly jeers and insults, we were released only to be sentenced the next day after crossing the line.

The court reconvened and the sentences were handed down. As for me, I was ordered to change into my Arctic foul weather gear. Keep in mind, we are in the tropics. After reporting back to the court dressed in my long johns and heavy winter garb, including coat, hat, boots, and gloves, I was ordered to report to the engine room which is always hotter than blazes where I was to tend to the boilers for a period of one hour. Boy was it ever hot down there. I must have sweat off five pounds!

Others had various sentences. One fellow was strapped into a special harness and was hoisted to the top of the mast and was ordered to look out for mermaids. You get the idea.

In conclusion, we were all brought back to the court of King Neptune. At that point we were ordered to strip down and were handed over to the shellbacks wielding paint brushes and buckets of concoctions of egg yolk and banana oil and other strange mixtures. These pigments were used to "anoint" our bodies by painting all kinds strange symbols on us.

The worst part of the ordeal came at the end when the shellbacks formed two lines and we had to run the gauntlet between the two lines as they swatted us on our butts.

In the end we completed the initiation and were presented a Certificate of Crossing the Line signifying that we are now shellbacks, never to endure another crossing of the line, provided we can produce the certificate, if

asked. Boy am I glad that's over!

So, now we are in Rio. I just got back from a 48 hour shore leave. Rio is a very interesting city. It would help if I understood Portuguese. I have enclosed picture postcards on which I have described the things I've seen.

I have gotten to be good friends with Lieutenant (junior grade) Antonio Pauldini, the ship's chaplain. Now there is an interesting character. He is a Roman Catholic Priest from Brooklyn, New York. Before becoming a priest he was involved in an organized crime gang. He had quite a wake up call that turned his life around and he became a priest. Because of his background, none of the parishes wanted anything to do with him out of fear of the mob. That's when he decided to join the Navy. Since he already had four years of college, he went through the officer training program and received his commission. He's about two or three years older than me.

Anyway Joni and I were walking down the sidewalk in the main business district of Rio when we saw three men wearing masks burst out of building on a dead run straight toward us. Someone ran out right behind them shouting something in Portuguese.

Neither of us understood Portuguese so we didn't know what they were saying but from sizing up the situation, it was obvious what was going on. As the thieves attempted to brush past us, we were ready for them. Between a NCHA wrestling second place finisher and a welterweight golden gloves boxing champion, they didn't get away. We held them for the police and then went on our way.

Tomorrow we are going to go to the famous Ipanema Beach. Don't worry, I can't get into too much trouble with a priest can I? Oh yeah, it's Joni. I'll have to keep him out of trouble.

Later in the week we'll sail for Buenos Aires, Argentina. I'll write again from there. I wish I could have shared Rio with you instead of Joni. I do miss you and I love you. Sometimes I can't believe that we were married. We haven't had much of a chance to settle into it have we?

Your husband, Curly

In addition to writing to Geannie, he kept his log. At each port of call he wrote a descriptive letter and included picture post cards and sent them to Geannie. She shared them with her class as part of her social studies lessons as she traced his route on the large world map in her classroom.

The five ships rounded Cape Horn into the Pacific. They called on Tahiti, Samoa, and Brisbane, Australia. They headed north, stopping at various islands of the Pacific before dropping anchor in Tokyo Bay. Curly's log began to fill up as he described Manila, Hong Kong, Singapore, and Bombay, India.

In July, Curly had just completed exercises with the US Asiatic Fleet in the Philippines when Geannie attended their five year class reunion with Sarah and Walt. They sat together at a table with another of their classmates, Lilian Weaver. Lilian sometimes ran around with Geannie, Sarah, and Lorraine during their high school years. Soon after graduation she married a man somewhat older than her and moved away. Now five years later, she was divorced with two children and living with her parents. She asked Geannie, "So, where's Curly?"

"The last I heard from him, he was in Hong Kong."

"Hong Kong!" Lilian quizzed in amazement. "What on earth is he doing there?"

"He's an Ensign in the Navy." Geannie boasted. "His ship is part of a nine month around the world cruise."

"By the time he gets back, he'll have a girl in every port, then won't he." Lilian commented off the cuff.

"I beg your pardon!" Geannie demanded.

"I'm sorry Geannie. That was uncalled for. I guess I'm still bitter over Sam. You see, he was a

traveling salesman. He was gone for weeks at a time. Sometimes I never heard from him at all during an entire trip. It turned out that not only did he have a mistress in every city, he had a another wife and family when he married me.”

“Oh Lilian! That is just horrible.” Geannie said.

“Yeah. I'm so sorry.” Sarah added.

“I'm sure Curly isn't that way. He has only had eyes for you. None of the rest of us girls ever had a chance to get his attention because he was stuck on you. You're so lucky to have him. So, tell me. How do you cope with him being gone?”

“Well for one thing, we have a solid relationship and are absolutely committed to and trust each other completely. Whether or not we are together, he's all mine and I'm all his. I know that we have only been married for eight months but it seems like it has been forever; and I mean that in a good way. After all, we were engaged for over four years, not to mention our entire lives of devotion to each other.

“The way I see it is like this, being a couple doesn't make me less than a whole person without him. I am also an individual with my own life and so is he. I'm independent by nature, anyway. I have our families close by and I stay busy with my job and am involved with the Methodist Women's Auxiliary and play baseball in the women's league. Curly and I stay in close touch through letters and an occasional telephone call. Since he is stationed in Norfolk, we have it worked out to be together as often as possible, when his ship is in port. Sure I miss him, and he misses me. After all, 'Tis absence, however, that makes the heart grow fonder.”

“I admire you for your strength, Geannie. That's where I went wrong. You see, it wasn't all Sam. When he was away, I felt incomplete as a woman and needed to have that void filled. I'm ashamed to say it, but I started sleeping around to fill that void and I went to all of the wrong places to find men.”

Lilian's comment made her realize just how fortunate she was and just what she had. “I've thought about it a lot, Lilian. You see I have come to expect separation as part of our relationship and I cherish the time that we have together. For me, the anticipation of being reunited keeps a sense of excitement in my life.

“I'm so proud of Curly and what he's doing in the service of our country that I love so much. I know that its men like him, willing to sacrifice, that make this nation great. For me, the willingness of women like myself, to share their men for such a worthy cause is equally important.”

At the reunion she also got to visit with several of their classmates and old friends, including Curly's wrestling teammate and friend from church, Bill Casper.

The final leg of the cruise took Curly through the Suez Canal into the Mediterranean Sea with port

calls in Alexandria, Egypt; Rome, Italy; Marseilles, France; and Barcelona Spain, before transiting the Strait of Gibraltar into Atlantic Ocean. They finished the cruise with stops in Porto da Praia De Victoria in the Azores, and Hamilton, Bermuda before returning to Norfolk in mid September.

Not only did Curly see the world, but he developed a keen skill of seamanship at the helm of the Wadsworth. As skill set that would serve him well in the future. All the while, he stayed focused on his goal of learning to fly.

At the conclusion of the cruise. he was reunited with Geannie and his family back in Roanoke. Geannie had moved into a quaint apartment. She had acquired some furniture and had it decorated nicely. She had planted flowers across the front had a small garden in the back.

Curly came home in mid September and they were able to spend the entire month together and mostly stayed close to home since Geannie was in school. He attended her ball games to watch her play and spent a weekend at the cabin. One day she brought him to school with her for show and tell and had him tell her class all about his voyage around the world for her social studies lesson.

At the end of the thirty days, he reported back to the ship. Curly came home a few times during the fall and she went to be with him in Norfolk. When she came to see him, they stayed at a hotel near the base. Unfortunately he had to go to sea and they weren't able to spend their first anniversary and birthdays together. However, he did manage a seven day leave to come home for Christmas.

A couple of days before Christmas, Curly dropped Geannie off at her mother's. Sarah was there too as they had planned the day to bake cookies and prepare other holiday goodies, a family tradition. Curly took the opportunity to go downtown to do some Christmas shopping.

He wanted to get her something nice. Something for their anniversary, her birthday, and Christmas. Something she would have for years to come. While walking past the shops along Market Street, Christmas music sweetly filled the air from a speaker mounted to the outside of the building. He stopped to look at the display window, and there it was! He went in for a closer look. "I've got get this for her." he mused to himself.

He bought it on the spot, plus several items that complimented it. "Now where can I hide it?" He wondered. Then it occurred to him, "I can hide it in the storage room in the basement of the church."

Curly stopped by the Church suspecting that his father was in his office. He was. After stashing his goods, he drove around the block to the Austin's. The last batch of cookies had just came out of the oven and they were in the process of cleaning up. Of course, he had to sample their goods.

On Christmas Eve they attended services at the church followed by a family gathering at the Austins. It was late when they returned to their apartment and went to bed. Curly lay next Geannie listing to her breath, waiting until he was sure she was asleep. He got out of bed and quietly slipped his pants on

over his pajamas, put on his shoes, and grabbed his coat. Quietly closing the door behind him, he walked out to the car. He started the car, hoping it didn't wake her, and drove off without turning on the headlights.

Using the key that his father had loaned him, he unlocked the door. He lugged the heavy object up the stairs and loaded it into the back seat of the car. Then he went back for the rest.

Getting it in the apartment would be bigger trick. Bringing it through the door he crushed his hand. Holding back a groan, he brought in and sat it beside the Christmas tree, then went back for the other part.

As he slipped back into bed, Geannie moaned, "I didn't know you were gone."

"I just went to the bathroom and got a drink of water." Which he actually had done before coming back to bed. She was asleep again before he finished the sentence.

The next thing Curly new, Geannie was hovering above him gently shaking him. "Curly, Curly. Wake up. It's Christmas!" she exclaimed excitedly.

Anxious to give her her present, he was instantly wide awake. Reaching up, he pulled her down on top of him. Taking her in his arms he he told her, "Merry Christmas, sweetheart."

She kissed him and returned the holiday salutation. "I've got something for you out under the tree." she said in anticipation.

"I have something for you too, but I'm afraid its not much," Curly told her.

"I can't wait!" Geannie said as she led the way into the living room. She stopped in her tracks and he ran into her. "Curly!" she exclaimed. Then she just stood there with her mouth gaping open as she stared a the large object covered with a blanket.

By then Curly was standing beside it. "Uncover it and see what it is!" he said proudly.

Hopping up and down on the balls of her feet with her typical girlish excitement, she pulled it off and gasped, "Oh, Curly!" as she stared in amazement at the Electrola phonograph player with a built in radio. She repeated, "Oh, Curly. My goodness, I love it!"

"These go with it," he said handing her a square wrapped package. She opened it to find a stack of records. Curly took the one on top and set it on the turntable. He turned it on and placed the stylus on the spinning disc.

Instantly, their apartment was filled with the jazz strains of "I'll Build A Stairway To Paradise". Right there in front of the Christmas tree they began dancing to the music, he in his pajamas and she in her nightgown and rollers in her hair.

When the music stopped he took her in his arms, "Happy birthday, happy anniversary, and Merry Christmas." he said.

Before getting dressed, they opened the rest of their gifts. A little later in the morning they went over to their families. The seven days ended all too soon and it was time for him to go back to the ship.

With a year and a half of sea duty under his belt, he was that much closer to his goal of attending flight school. During the next several months he spent time at sea on routine training cruises with an occasional three day liberty spent at home and the weekend rendezvouses with Geannie in Norfolk.

It was a happy day in early fall when he received orders to report for flight training at Pensacola, Florida. Those orders also granted a thirty day leave prior to reporting and included a promotion to Lieutenant (junior grade) both to be effective immediately.

This news was too good to tell Geannie in a letter, or even over the telephone. He had to tell her in person. He had two days to wrap up things on the Wadsworth, she could wait that long.

The train wound its way through the Virginia countryside ablaze with brilliant fall colors. Much like the day when they set their wedding date two years earlier. He was amazed at how much more he loved her now. He tried to think of a clever way to spring his surprise. She would still be in school when he got there. "Should I meet her at school or be waiting for her at home?" he rationalized. He couldn't decide. "I make up my mind when I get their," he concluded.

The later choice won out. From the train station he took a cab directly to their apartment. Thinking she would be home any moment, he waited anxiously. But she didn't come. He waited longer. "Oh, well," he said out loud to himself. "I'm the one who made her wait for the good news."

The next thing he knew, he was awakened to find himself propped up in the chair he had been sitting in. It was Geannie's excitedly calling out, "Ensign! What are you doing here." as she stood in the door with a bag of groceries in each arm.

He arose and made his way across the room too her. "Thats Lieutenant junior grade, lady." he explained pointing to the new quarter inch stripe on the cuff of the sleeve of his uniform. He took the sacks from her arms and set them on the table, freeing their arms for each other.

"Well then Lieutenant, aren't you the big cheese! I should make you take me out to dinner." she suggested as she squeezed him as tight as she could.

"Wait, there's more. I have orders to report to flight training in thirty days!"

Still squeezing him, she began bouncing up and down. "Oh Curly, I am so happy for you!" Then she added, "I think we should really put on the ritz. Take me someplace spiffy."

After putting the perishables in the icebox, "Where do you want to go?" he asked.

"Daddy told me of a new joint at the Hotel Roanoke where he recently attended a business luncheon." she explained. "I have heard others say that it is pretty swanky. Thats where I want to go."

"Then by all means, get a giggle on and go get dolled up." Curly encouraged.

Geannie lead him into the bedroom to change her clothes. She reached into the closet and retrieved her two her nicest dresses. "Which would you like me to wear?"

"I like the blue one with the sailor collar. It matches my uniform."

"I thought that would be the one you would pick." she said as she slipped out of what she had on.

Curly, sitting on the edge of the bed suggested, "How about we skip dinner and go straight to desert?"

"Oh, no. You're not getting out of this." she laughed as she slipped into her sailor dress. "I promise, you will get plenty of desert. Here, zip me up." she asked as she turned around.

She took just a moment to freshen up. "How do I look?" she asked modeling for him.

"Splendid!" he answered. "Absolutely splendid you really have it, and you smell terrific."

Curly walked her out to her flivver (as Model Ts were called) and helped her into the passenger seat. He gave the crank a couple of turns to get it started and he hopped behind the wheel. She slid over next to him as close possible and still give him room to drive.

They made a handsome couple, with he in his dress uniform and she in her nicest dress, as they entered the restaurant. The matradee seated them at a window table and handed them their menu's. Curly gulped when he saw some of the prices.

"Are you okay? She quizzed.

"Yes, I'm fine." he assured her. Then he asked, "What looks good to you?"

"I think I will have the lamb." she said confidently, knowing full well it was the most expensive item on the menu.

Curly gulped again as he studied the menu.

"What was that, Love?"

"I think I will have the southern fried chicken." he responded. "It is about half the price." he reasoned to himself.

No sooner than they set their menus down, the waiter was at the side of their table. "Are you ready to order?" he queried. He took their orders and asked, "Will there be anything else? Perhaps you would like to see our wine list."

Curly quickly responded, "Some coffee while we wait, please."

For the next hour they enjoyed each others company. "Did you know that they have housing available right at the training facility?" Curly more explained then asked. "You can come with me."

"But Curly, I can't just up and quit my job in the middle of the semester. They could probably find

someone to replace me for the next one. You know, I might not find a teaching position in Pensacola in the middle of the year.”

“That’s alright, you can join me there after the first of the year.” Curly assured her. Then he advised, “You could always find work as a substitute teacher. Who knows, maybe you could fill in for my flight instructor sometime.”

Geannie nearly spewed her coffee all over the table as she burst out laughing. “You slay me!” Then she added, “That’s one of the hundreds of things I love about you.”

“And tell me, what’s that?” Curly wanted to know.

“You make me laugh.”

“I’m glad that I can be of service.” Then Curly suggested, “You could always teach piano lessons.” Geannie was a very gifted pianist. It was a talent that Curly resented in their younger playmate/buddy years. Piano lessons and all of that time practicing cut into their playtime.

“I kind of need a piano for that.” Then a serious expression came over her face. She leaned forward and paused, inviting him to do the same. With their faces only inches apart she whispered, “Do you know what I really want to do, Curly?” Without pausing she answered her own question, “I want to have a baby.”

They both sat back in their seats. Curly assured her, “Lord knows, it’s not because we haven’t tried. We have had a good deal of practice.”

“Yeah it sure has been fun, hasn’t it?” Geannie grinned. “But it obviously didn’t work. After all, there was nine months when we didn’t even see each other.”

“We’ll now we should have a lot of time to work on that, especially after you join me down there.”

Geannie acknowledged with a snicker and added, “I suppose all good things come in their own due time.”

Changing the subject she continued, “After dinner we should go tell the folks our news.”

Curly leaned forward and in a hushed voice said, “Don’t you think we should keep the part about making a baby to ourselves.”

“Yeah,” Geannie agreed. Then added in a not so quiet of a voice, “Then after we see the folks, you can take me home and get me pregnant!”

Just then the waiter was standing next to their table with their meal. Curly put his finger to his lips and “shoooooshed” her as the two couples at the next table glanced their way. “Pipe down, they’ll think you’re on the make.”

“Well,” Geannie giggled. “Maybe I am.”

As they dined, they caught up on what each other had been up to since they last seen each

other. Geannie told him all about how both families were doing and filled him in on the latest gossip.

Curly told her about his last training cruise and how he successfully turned the ship hard to starboard and missed a spread of practice torpedoes. Geannie interrupted his story with, "Gee, Lieutenant. Do you think they will give you a medal for that?"

Then they turned their attention back to making plans for the next thirty days and their time in Pensacola. Curly explained the outline for the flight training. They even talked about what the years to follow might bring with his career in the Navy. Curly speculated, "The navy is building two new aircraft carriers right now. There will certainly be others to follow. Who knows. If I stay in the Navy long enough, maybe someday I will be the captain of my very own carrier."

"I can just see it, now!" Geannie interrupted. "The USS Curly." she laughed.

"No. No, it will have a name that inspires pride and resolve. Something dignified, for sure." he assured her.

By then, they were finished with their meal and the waiter brought their check. "Please come again." he invited. Then as he went to turn away he paused and added with a wink, "Oh, by the way. Good luck!" Curly blushed. Geannie beamed.

When the waiter was out of ear shot Curly beefed, "I have a notion not to leave that sap a tip!"

"Baloney, Ens... I mean Lieutenant! You're all wet." Geannie insisted, "I think you should give leave him a generous tip."

"Alright," Curly grumbled as he laid some change on the table and helped Geannie from her seat.

As they were about to leave, Geannie opened her pocketbook and threw a couple more coins on the table. "There." she smirked, "Maybe that will bring us some good luck. Now lets go home and have some of that desert I promised you."

The next thirty days were busy and passed quickly. The first thing Geannie did was to talk to the principal at the school where she taught and explained that she would be leaving at the end of the semester. She also made the same arrangements with their landlord.

A lot of time was spent visiting with both families. They were sure to make plenty of time for each other. One night they went to see a motion picture called "The Navigator", a comedy about two spoiled rich people who found themselves trapped on an empty passenger ship. Another time they attended a baseball game. They even spent a couple of days at the cabin surrounded by the beautiful fall colors.

They traded Geannie's Tin Lizze in for a new car for their coming adventure. They had been driving her 1915 Ford Model T that her father had given her when she went off to college. Curly wanted to get a roadster but Geannie didn't think that would be very practical, after all she wanted to have room for

children. Since it would be more her car than his, she selected a 1923 Chevrolet Superior Series B touring car.



It had four doors and accommodated five passengers. It had features like extra wide doors, regulated windows, and stylish and very comfortable upholstery, and an electric starter. No more handle to crank. And it was priced right for a young couple. For Curly, the fact that the top folded back made it a good compromise for the roadster that he wanted.

Then one morning, the thirty days was over. Geannie saw Curly off at the train station as he set off to make his lifelong dream a reality.

* * * * *

The USS Wadsworth is fictional as is the world cruise. However, the armored cruiser Rochester was a real ship but its part in the world cruise is fiction.