

Chapter VI

Gold Wings & Pink Booties

May 28, 1924 – November 4, 1924

School let out for Geannie and spring quickly passed into summertime. She was now getting quite big and very uncomfortable. The Florida heat and humidity didn't help matters. The baby was very active as she moved and kicked. Curly was well into the advanced portion of his training. His aerobatic skills were particular keen, as he could outmaneuver even the best of the trainees.

One day in late summer, Curly was practicing some touch and goes in an older model Vought VE-7 trainer while Geannie watched from a distance. His red scarf trailing behind him, she watched him make his approach. Just before his wheels touched down, he throttled up and began regaining altitude. All of a sudden his engine coughed, sputtered, and died. He didn't have much speed or altitude and began dropping fast. He barely cleared a stand of trees as he guided his powerless aircraft toward an open field. Geannie watched in horror as he came down fast and bounced twice before coming to stop, his nose in the ground and his tail in the air.

An ambulance and a tow truck raced to the scene of the accident. Geannie, hands over her mouth, was relieved when a moment later she saw Curly emerge from the cockpit apparently unhurt. Knowing that she had been watching, he waved to her to let her know that he was alright.

When the tow truck arrived, Curly helped bring the plane back into a horizontal position. It was towed back to hangar to determine what had caused the accident. Just as a precaution, Curly was taken to see Commander Phillips.

Geannie got in her car and drove over to the infirmary too. When she got there he was in with doctor and she was allowed into the exam room. "Its nothing more than a bump on the head." Doctor Phillips assured her. "He'll be fine."

Addressing Curly, "I see no reason why you can't go back to work, Lieutenant."

Taking Geannie by the hand, Doctor Phillips pulled her aside and asked, "And how is my favorite patient doing?"

"I'm doing fine." Geannie assured him. "The baby has sure been active lately."

"Thats a very good sign." he reassured her. "I'll see you next week for your regular appointment. Good day, Mrs. Brason."

Geannie went home and Curly went back to the hangar were his plane was being examined. The only damage was a broken propeller and a bent wheel resulting from the bounce. It was determined that the engine cut out because of a clogged fuel filter. They drained the fuel tank and found the fuel was contaminated with sediment.

The commanding officer ordered a cessation of flight operations for the day and all aircraft in the air

were ordered to land immediately. An investigation was undertaken to determine the source of the contamination and how widespread the problem might be. Curly was cleared of any error on his part and was actually commended for the way he handled the emergency.

At the end of summer the student pilots were ready for their squadron assignments and go on to the corresponding advanced training. The company was realigned according to their training regiments. About half were assigned to patrol squadrons and went on to train in float planes. Of the those remaining, most were going to torpedo bomber squadrons and the rest to fighter squadrons. Curly couldn't have been more pleased with his orders.

That evening when he got home, he burst through the door excitedly calling, "Geannie! Geannie!"

Geannie could tell that whatever had Curly excited was good news. She rushed from the kitchen to see what it was all about. Before she could greet him, he grabbed her shoulders and told her, "Stop whatever you're doing, we're going out to celebrate!"

Before she could ask, "Celebrate what?" he answered her unspoken question. "I'm gong to be a fighter pilot!" he gleefully exclaimed.

Finally Geannie had a chance to say something. "Oh Curly, thats swell!" she cheered, sharing his excitement. "That's exactly what you wanted."

"So, what do you say? Lets go out to dinner and celebrate."

"Well I was just getting started on supper, but I reckon I can put it away for another time," Geannie said accepting his offer.

"Alright then!" Curley exclaimed. "What can I do to help do to get ready?"

A few minutes later they were driving into town.

Seated in a booth at their favorite diner, Curly told her all about it over their meal. "I've been assigned to Fighting Two attached to the USS Langley stationed at San Diego." he began. "I report for duty on December 1st, which gives me a thirty day leave after graduation."

"That means I can go home to have the baby." Geannie said as she realized the timing of things.

"Yeah, I guess it does," Curly responded. "I hadn't thought about that. Ever since I received my orders this afternoon, I haven't been able to think straight. There are a lot of things we need to think about and figure out."

"Yeah, I'm sure there is." Geannie said sipping on her Coca-Cola. "Like how we're goin to get there and where we're goin to live."

"Uh huh," Curly remarked after swallowing a byte. "I've got some information and forms about

housing that came with my orders. But let's not worry about that right now."

Geannie nodded in agreement, her mouth was full and couldn't speak at that moment.

Curly continued, "Hey, what do you say we take in a picture show after dinner?"

"I'd like that. There's a new Rudolph Valentino movie playing. You know how I love his pictures."

"Sounds good to me," Curly consented. "Whats it called?"

"Monsieur Beaucaire," or however you say it. "Its a romantic drama."

Curly explained to Geannie what he knew of his assignment and they spent the rest of their meal dreaming about California and what lie ahead.

After dinner they went to the show. Curly didn't enjoy it as much as Geannie did. He did enjoy the way she clung tightly to him during the suspenseful parts and softly squeezed his hand during the romantic parts. For a time she laid her head on his shoulder.

That warm August night night a three quarter moon bathed their bedroom with light. Lying on the bed with the covers on the floor, they talked for a while before eventually drifting of to sleep. Curly was snuggled up behind Geannie, like a couple of spoons in a drawer, his hand resting on her belly.

"The downside to the whole thing," Curly went on, "Is that Browning has the same orders."

"You're a likable fellow, Curly." Geannie defended him. "Everybody likes you. I don't understand what he has against you? Cathalene seems nice enough."

"Oh well." Curly concluded. "There's one in every outfit. If it weren't him, it would be someone else."

"Did you feel that?"

"What?" Curly yawned.

"The baby moved. Here." she said moving his hand into place. "She's really been active lately. There she goes again."

"Yeah, I can feel it." Curly continued, "So, how do you feel about moving clear across the country to California?"

"It sounds like an adventure to me." Geannie replied. "Oh, there she goes again. You know how I like an adventure. Being here with you has been wonderful."

"Yes." Curly went on. "But here I have been home every night. There, I will be gone for days and even weeks at at time."

"True." Geannie reasoned. "But at least you will be home when your not gone. We can be together then." She unbuttoned the top buttons of her nightgown as she spoke. "No matter where you are you will always be right here." she said as she moved his hand inside of her nightgown and placed it over her heart.

"Mmmm," Curly sighed. I can feel your heart beating."

"It beats only for you, Curly. My, your hand is hot against my skin."

"There was some information about housing," he began to explain "that came with my orders. There is a married officer's housing complex in Coronado, right next to the air station similar to what they have here." Then he asked, "Do you want to do that again or find our own place?"

"I don't know, Curly. What do you think?"

"Well, there is a form I can complete and turn in that would guarantee us a place when we got there. We wouldn't have to spend time looking for a place. That would be one less thing to have to worry about."

"That sounds good to me." Then Geannie added, "Then if we wanted something different, we could always move."

"One thing about it," Curly assured her "is that Navy wives really look out for each other. I wouldn't be as worried about you when I am gone."

Curly continued explaining, "The material mentions that the apartments come furnished with the basics; beds but no bedding, a table and chairs, an icebox, and a sofa. Pretty much like here. We have the rest of the things we would need."

"How would we get it there?" Geannie queried.

"That's a good question. I have another question for you. With the baby coming in the middle of November, would you want to stay in Roanoke for a while and join me later?"

"I reckon it all depends on the baby." Geannie reasoned. "We don't have to decide that right now. Why don't you at least submit the housing request and we can figure out the rest later. I'm too tired to think about it right now."

"Me too. Good night sweetheart."

"Mmm hmm." Geannie moaned. She was soon fast asleep.

Curly removed his hand from her nightgown and rolled over and was soon fast a sleep as well.

During the fall, Curly put his aerobic skills to use in aerial gunnery and other fighter tactics in a Vought VE-7 fighter plane. As the right wingman to an instructor, he learned how keep station and maneuver as a team with the lead pilot and other wingman. The mock dogfights were particularly exhilarating.

As the new school year began, Geannie was offered a permanent teaching position but had to decline as they would be leaving in November. She did continue to substitute teach from time to time. Being in the later stages of her pregnancy, she found it difficult to keep up the pace she was accustomed to. Despite witnessing Curly's crash landing, she continued to watch him in the sky.

With his training complete, the day he had dreamed of for so long had arrived. The day he got his wings! His mother and father along with the Austins had come down on the train for the big day. It was the first time that Curly and Geannie had seen their parents in nearly a year. It was a particularly sweet reunion for Geannie and her mother. At nearly nine months pregnant, everyone made such a fuss over her.

Saturday November 1, 1924 was the day, and what a day it was. The Brasons and Austins had arrived the day before and were staying in a hotel in Pensacola. That evening Senator Austin treated everyone to a celebration dinner party at the finest restaurant in town.

On graduation day, Curly reported to the ready room for the daily briefing on the activities scheduled for the day. Geannie and their parents arrived at the field outside of the main hangar where they were seated on the bleachers erected for the ceremony. Seeing that they were about to be seated up in the bleachers, Commander Phillips rushed forward and insisted that they be seated on the front row so it would be easier for Geannie when she was called forward to pin the wings on Curly's uniform.

Geannie proudly introduced Doctor Phillips, who had taken such good care of her, to her family. Doctor Phillips and his wife then took their seats in the VIP section with the rest of the training staff.

With military pomp and ceremony, a navy band marched onto the field followed by the honor guard. They took up position directly across the field from the stands. Next, all of the pilot candidates in their dress white uniforms marched into position between the honor guard and the stands. Upon the order, "Right face!" they turned to face the audience and stood at attention.

The roar of engines could be heard above the applause. Everyone looked up to see three echelons of JN-4 Jennys in a V of three Vs, each made up of three aircraft approaching at low level. They flew directly over the graduates and disappeared in the opposite direction.

After the roar of aircraft engines and applause died down, the commanding officer already standing at the podium, welcomed the guests and asked them to stand for the national anthem and to remain standing for the invocation which was to be offered by the Chaplain.

The commanding officer, Captain Stockdale, addressed the audience, telling them how proud he was of the men standing at attention before him. He explained what it took to become a naval aviator. He assured them that our nation's security was in good hands with men such as them.

Following his remarks, a quartet of candidates were released from the ranks and came forward to sing the Navy Hymn. After the musical number they returned to their positions. Captain Stockdale then directed the senior officers to inspect the ranks. In military fashion they marched between the rows of the thirty seven candidates. Upon their return they saluted the Captain. A spokesman for the officers presented the candidates and recommended that they be accepted as Naval Aviators and receive their wings.

Captain Stockdale saluted the new aviators who all returned the salute in unison. The captain then

instructed that the division which consisted of the fighter pilots to come forward. They marched forward and formed up in single file in alphabetical order to the captain's right. Curly was third in line, just ahead of Lieutenant Browning. Next he invited those designated to pin their wings on to come forward and line up in the same order to his left.

The Executive Officer, Commander Reid, read the name of the first man to receive his wings, then the second. Then, "Lieutenant (junior grade) Sheffield Brason."

Curly stepped up onto the stand from one direction while Geannie waddled to her position from the opposite direction.

Curly saluted Captain Stockdale. The Captain returned the salute, then said as he presented a pair of gold naval aviator wings to Geannie, "You may now pin the wings on your husband, Mrs. Brason."

No sooner than Geannie had pinned the wings on Curly's chest, she doubled over in agonizing pain. She let out a scream as she put her hands over her very large belly. Immediately Commander Phillips sprang from his seat and leaped to her side as he and Curly helped her to the nearest seat, which happened to be Captain Stockdale's. The puddle of water where she was standing and her wet clothes told Dr. Phillips what he needed to know.

"I've never had this happen before." the Captain announced to the hushed audience. With Curly and Doctor Phillips attending to Geannie, Captain Stockdale stepped aside to give them space.

"If I'm not mistaken, I believe that you are in labor, Mrs. Brason." Doctor Phillips said softly. By that time Geannie's mother was also at her side.

"What?" Geannie protested with labored breath. "I am not due for two more weeks."

"Sometimes these little ones are a little impatient." the doctor consoled. "Sometimes they want to come right now, without any warning. We need to get you to the infirmary."

At that moment, two medics arrived on the stand with a litter. With the help of Commander Phillips and Curly, they gently helped Geannie onto the litter. As they took her away, Commander Phillips and her mother were at her side. She let out another yelp. Uncertain as what to do, Curly started to follow but hesitated momentarily.

Captain Stockdale stepped forward and ordered, "Dismissed, Lieutenant."

Curly quickly saluted his commanding officer and ran after his wife. Senator Austin and the Brasons also got up to follow.

As the little parade made their way to the infirmary, Captain Stockdale ordered, "Make ready Runway One! We have a stork coming in for a landing." Regaining control, the ceremony continued.

Once at the infirmary, Geannie was taken into the operating room. Commander Phillips asked her

entourage, except for Mrs. Austin, to wait outside while he examined her. "You are definitely in labor, young lady. Tell me, did it really come on that sudden? It is highly rare."

"No," Geannie admitted. "I started feeling like something was up yesterday afternoon. I didn't want to say anything to detract from Curly's big day."

"I thought I could see discomfort in your eyes." her mother said holding her hand. "I saw you wince several times, but I thought you were just uncomfortable."

Doctor Phillip's went on, "Everything looks alright. The baby's heartbeat is normal so he's not under any stress."

Breathing heavily, Geannie corrected him. "She." she insisted.

"She's doing just fine. She is in the correct position and I would say she will be making her appearance in less than an hour."

Turning to her mother the good doctor asked, "Would you like to don an apron and assist me, Mrs. Austin. I think you would be more help to me than my medics."

"Yes, I would," Marie said. Then she suggested "Ellen, is the one who would be the most helpful."

"Very well, invite her in."

Mrs. Austin stepped outside and briefed everyone as to what was going on. "Ellen, the doctor would like you to come and assist."

Curly was nervously pacing the hall. "Why don't you fathers step outside and let Curly get some fresh air."

About that time, Captain Stockdale came around the corner. Curly stopped his pacing and snapped to attention.

"At ease, son. I just wanted to stop by after the ceremony to see how Mrs. Brason was doing." The Captain paced back and forth with them as Curly explained to him what he had just been told. The Captain then headed off to his office.

After walking back and forth in front of the infirmary for a while, they sat down in the shade to wait for word.

Before long, Ellen came out and announced, "It's a girl!" and invited them inside. Curly excitedly rushed to Geannie's side. So it was that Sandra Gean Brason made her entrance into the world weighing six pounds four ounces at 12:10 p.m. on Saturday November 1, 1924.

Oblivious to everyone around him, Curly rushed to Geannie's bedside. She greeted him with, "Hi Flyboy. I'm sorry I ruined your graduation. I really tried to hold off until after the ceremony. It looks like we both got what we wanted today. You got your wings and I got my baby."

"Our baby." he said looking down at his tiny daughter asleep in a bassinet next to Geannie. "We got

our baby. She's as beautiful as you are." he gasped. "And look! She has sandy hair."

Turning his attention back to Geannie he asked, "How are you feeling, sweetheart?"

"Remarkably well," she commented. "They tell me everything went well. It really hurt, then all of sudden it was over."

"Oh, look. I pinned your wings on crooked," Geannie bemoaned as she reached up to pat them.

Just then Sandy began to stir.

"Would you like to hold her?" asked Doctor Phillips. He reached into the bassinet and retrieved the tiny bundle and placed it in Curly's arms.

His heart melted and a single tear formed in the corner of one eye.

After giving his complete attention to his wife and new daughter for several minutes, Curly wanted to talk to the doctor. "We were planning to drive back to Roanoke tomorrow," Curly told Commander Phillips, Then he asked, "How soon can she travel?"

Doctor Phillips suggested "I would like to see you wait around for a couple of days. Many doctors and midwives believe that a new mother should stay in bed for up to a week after delivery. I personally feel the sooner they get up and return to a normal routine, the better. I think by the day after tomorrow you should be able to travel. I'll know better tomorrow."

Overhearing their conversation, Senator Austin interrupted, "Curly, you let me take care of all that."

Commander Phillips continued, "I want to keep them both here overnight. I think she can go home tomorrow. I mean to your home here."

Curly spent a few more minutes with Geannie and Sandy before Doctor Phillips shewed everyone out of the room to allow mother and baby to get some rest. Before he left, Geannie asked Curly that when he came back, to bring the little pink outfit that she had presented him with when she told him she was expecting.

As they were leaving, a sailor approached the group. "Lieutenant Brason, sir." he saluted. "Captain Stockdale would like to see you in his office. He would like to see all of you." The sailor then ushered them into the commanding officer's office.

As they entered the room, the captain greeted them at the door. His first words were, "At ease, Lieutenant," before the junior officer could come to attention. "This is strictly a personal visit. I understand you have a baby girl."

"Yes sir," Curly grinned as the captain shook his hand and patted him on the back.

The captain continued, "Congratulations, son. And I didn't get to properly congratulate you on earning your wings." At that, he saluted the new aviator.

"Thank you, sir," Curly returned the salute.

"Thank you for coming to see me, Lieutenant." Then he turned his attention to Mr. and Mrs. Brason and Senator and Mrs. Austin.

"Sir, this is my father, Pastor Emmet Brason and my mother Ellen," Curly introduced.

"Pleased to meet you, Captain." greeted the pastor.

"A pastor, ay? I'm sorry to say I've never been much a religious person." the captain admitted. "The Navy and religion don't seem to mix very well."

"Oh I, don't know about that," Emmett replied. "Curly, I mean Lieutenant Brason, seems to make it work."

"Curly?" the Captain questioned as he looked at the Lieutenant (junior grade). "Thats a good call name for a fighter pilot, I'd say."

Turning the captain's attention way from himself, Curly introduced Geannie's parents. "This is my father-in-law, Senator Charles Austin the Third and his wife, Marie."

"I'm honored to meet you, sir" boomed the Senator as he pumped the officer's hand as if he were trying to win his vote.

"Senator?" quizzed Captain Stockdale.

"Yes, sir. Of the Virginia State Assembly," Senator Austin boasted.

"I understand you will be staying around for a couple of days. If there is anything at all that I can do for you, just let me know."

"Thank you, Captain," Senator Austin answered for all of them. After a round of handshakes they left the Captain's office.

They all went to the hotel were Geannie's father treated everyone to dinner. After a very long day, and what a day it had been, Curly went back to their apartment were he crashed.

The next morning Curly slept way past his usual time. After all it was Sunday and he was on leave. He got up and showered, shaved, and got dressed. Skipping breakfast he eagerly left the apartment and drove to the infirmary. He did remember to bring the things that Geannie asked him to bring.

As he entered Geannie's room he found her surrounded by both grandmothers. Geannie was sitting up in bed nursing the baby.

"Good morning, Lieutenant. Its about time you got here," Gennie greeted him.

"Sorry, I slept in this morning," Curly apologized. "How did you and Sandy sleep last night?"

"Very well, for the most part." Geannie answered. "I think we were both exhausted. It was as much of a workout for her as it was for me."

"She must be hungry," Curly observed. "Look at her go to town on that? It must be pretty good stuff."

That reminds me, I haven't eaten yet.”

“I've got plenty, you can have some too.” she offered.

“Geannie!” her mother scolded. “Shame on you!” Then both grandmothers joined the laughter.

“Whats so funny?” asked Doctor Phillips as he entered the room.

“Geannie just offered to nurse Curly.” his mother hooted.

“Actually, colostrum can be used for medicinal purposes for adults in some instances.” the doctor intellectualized. His remark diffused Curly's embarrassment. “I hate to break up the party.” Commander Phillips continued. “But it is time for Geannie's post natal examination. If you all wouldn't mind moving to in the waiting room.”

“Why don't we take Curly and get him some breakfast?” his mother suggested as she took her son by the arm and led him to the door. Geannie's mother lingered for just a moment before trailing them out of the room.

Back at the hotel restaurant, the women visited over a cup of coffee while Curly eagerly devoured his stack of pancakes smothered in pecan syrup topped with two eggs, sunny side up.

From behind them, the jovial voice of Senator Austin announced the arrival of he and his friend, the pastor. “Ah, there you are.”

Seated in a rounded booth, the two ladies, one on either side of Curly, slid in closer to him as they made room for their husbands.

Taking his seat Senator Austin said, “We've got it all figured out, my boy. You know we were supposed to be heading back on the train today. Emmett and I went down to the train station and traded our tickets for tomorrow. I got first class accommodations for all of us, including you, Geannie, and the baby with,” he added “sleeping berths. And I have arranged a place for your car in a baggage car. Didn't I tell you I'd take care of things?”

“That's great! Thank you.” Curly said appreciatively but then added, “Provided the doctor will let her travel.”

“Oh, I'm sure he will.” his father chimed in. “This way she can travel in comfort. Much better than she would on a road trip.”

“That way,” Marie added, “Geannie and the baby can spend as much time as possible at home with us before you go cart them off clear across the country.”

“Actually, we haven't quite figured out what were going to do about that yet.” Curly responded. “We were going to wait until the baby was born before decided. We can talk about it on the way home.”

“As much as we would love to have them close to us,” her mother continued, “their place is with

you." All four shook their heads in agreement.

"Do you think the doctor is through by now?" Curly asked. Without waiting for an answer he said, "I better get back over to the infirmary."

His parents got up to let Curly out of the booth. "Thanks for breakfast. I'll catch up with you later."

When Curly returned to the infirmary he found Geannie dressed and up and about. Sandy, dressed in her pink dress and booties, was asleep. Seeing Lieutenant Brason enter the building, Commander Phillips quickly concluded what he was doing and asked them to join him in his office.

"Well," the doctor began, "I don't see any reason why you can't start home tomorrow, provided you take it slow and easy."

Turning to Geannie, Curly told her about the arrangements that her father had made.

"Splendid!" the doctor replied. "Then I see no reason not to. You can take the baby and Geannie home with you now."

"I can't wait to leave." Geannie blurted. "Not that isn't nice here." she added apologetically.

"I understand completely. And that is where you should be." Doctor Phillips agreed. "But before you go, my staff, my wife, and I have a little something for you." He reached into the cupboard and retrieved a sack and handed it to Geannie. "I'm sure you are already prepared with baby supplies, but here are some extra diapers, safety pins and other items. My wife made the burper pads for you just last night. Oh and take the blanket that Sandy is wrapped up in.

"I have to tell you that you, young lady, are the highlight of my medical career in the Navy. Sure I have delivered other babies along the way. But over the last several months I have become particularly fond of you. Taking care of you sure beats looking after these want to be pilots."

Geannie and Curly got up and she gave the doctor a hug and kiss on the cheek. "Thank you for everything, Doctor. From that first day, you have been so good and kind to me."

"Good luck to you both." Commander Phillips said as he shook Curly's hand. "To you Geannie as a new mother. And to you Lieutenant, in your first assignment." Letting go of Curly's hand, he offered a salute.

Curly returned the the salute.

"Good bye," the couple said unison as they left the doctor's office.

They went back to her room and Geannie picked Sandy up and placed her in Curly's arms. Taking Curly by one arm and the sack of diapers in the other, the little family left the infirmary and walked to their car.

They hadn't gotten very far when they heard a voice behind them call, "Lieutenant Brason."

They stopped and turned toward the sound of the voice. It was Captain Stockdale. Curly attempted to come to attention the best he could with a sleeping baby in his arms.

“At ease, Lieutenant. I was just heading back to my office when I saw you come out of the infirmary.” The captain said. “I just wanted to see what you've got in your bundle here.”

Geannie pulled the blanket back so he could see the little girl. She opened her bright eyes as Captain Stockdale gazed on her. Then uncharacteristic of a Navy Captain he “goosed” as he wiggled his finger on her nose. “Sorry, that's the grandfather coming out in me.” the Captain beamed .

Addressing Lieutenant Brason, he said, “Good luck in your squadron assignment, Lieutenant. From your record here, I know you will be an outstanding pilot. You will go a long ways in your career. By the way, I have written a letter of recommendation to your squadron commander.” Saluting, he said, “And take good care of both of these lovely ladies.”

“Thank you, sir.” nodding his head in lieu of a salute, “I will.”

Geannie hadn't had much to eat since the morning before and all of a sudden realized how hungry she was. Curly took her to the hotel to meet up with their folks. While they all fussed over the baby, Curly took her to the restaurant for lunch.

It was a beautiful, warm, sunny November day in Florida. They all spent the afternoon lounging in the hotel courtyard. It was nice for Curly to have a break from his training routine. And it was nice for Geannie to be holding her daughter in her arms rather than carrying her around inside. It was a perfect way to end a very busy time in their lives. They soaked it all in knowing that there were only twenty nine days left before he had to return for duty.

That evening Curly and Geannie spent their last night in the furnished apartment that had been their home. Looking back on that time together, Geannine wanted even more to go to San Diego with Curly. They talked about it a lot that evening as they packed most of their belongings. As they went to bed that night, they placed their precious daughter in a portable bassinet that Geannie saw in the window of a secondhand store in town a couple of weeks earlier.

The next morning they gathered the rest of their belongings together and loaded them into their car and drove to the train station so it could be loaded into the railroad car. There was plenty of time stroll the short distance to the hotel to meet their folks for breakfast. They too were ready to go. The hotel had already taken their luggage to the train station.

After a good breakfast and conversation, they walked together back to the depot. They arrived only moments before the conductor issued the first boarding call.

Once aboard, they settled into their seats. Moments later the train began moving and long they

were passing through the countryside. The motion of the train quickly lulled Sandy to sleep. It wasn't long before Geannie was also asleep. The Austins and Brasons were engaged in conversation with some other passengers who they had just met.

At one point on the trip home, Emmett gave Curly some sage advice, "Well, son. You've come along ways. You have a new little baby girl and your wings. Both of them bring a lot responsibility. The trick is balancing your family and your career. Let me explain something to you. What you do isn't who you are. You need to look at your career as the means to an end, not the end itself. Do you understand what I'm saying?"

"I think so."

"Okay then, what did I just say?"

Curly put it in these words, "My career is a way of providing for my family and to not let my it take priority over them."

"Exactly." Emmett replied. "I have know countless men who never understood that until it was too late. They put their careers first and ended up losing their families. Rarely does a man lose his career because of his family, and if they do they didn't have a very good career to begin with with."

"No, who you are is not what you do. Who you are is what your made of. Your core values and convictions. Honesty, integrity, and yes, faith. Things like that. You get the point. It's a combination of what I have tried to teach you and what you make of it."

"I suppose the best example I can site is Charles, over there." At that moment Charles was engrossed in a political debate with some other passengers. "His plate is pretty full with the bank and the senate. You know him as well as anyone, what stands out as most important to him?"

"That's obvious. His family."

"How do you suppose he dose it with the heavy demands on his time?"

"I guess he makes the most of his time with his family."

"He does. He also makes time for them as well. Did you know that he missed a key debate in the State Assembly to come down here for your graduation? I have seen him postpone meetings at the bank with people who think they are pretty important so he can attend to the people who truly are. Granted, he has the luxury of controlling his own schedule where you don't in the navy. There will be times when you will be gone for long periods; you can't control that. But when you can be home, be home."

"Geannie is an amazing woman. She's independent and can manage while you're away. I have watched her over the last three years. Its because she knows who she is. Do you know who you are? What kind of man are you? More importantly, what kind of man do you want to be?"

"The kind of a man you brought me up to be." was Curly's response.

Emmett's attention was drawn elsewhere and Curly was left to ponder his father's words. He could see the wisdom in what he said. He had seen the opposite in some of the officers he had been associated with, particularly some of the more senior officers. Curly made a promise to himself on that train ride home. A promise that his family was the most important. It was a promise that he was to keep. His career, one that he loved, had two purposes, first to provide for his family and second, to defend and protect them as well as his country.

Late the next morning, Curly, Geannie, and Sandy were back home in Roanoke. At least for a while.

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Monsieur Beaucaire was a silent film drama released on August 11, 1924 starring Rudolph Valentino as the Duke of Chartres who is in love with Princess Henriette, but she seemingly wants nothing to do with him. Eventually he grows tired of her insults and flees to England when Louis XV insists that the two marry. He goes undercover as Monsieur Beaucaire, the barber of the French Ambassador, and finds that he enjoys the freedom of a commoner's life. After catching the Duke of Winterset cheating at cards, he forces him to introduce him as a nobleman to Lady Mary, with whom he has become infatuated. When Lady Mary is led to believe that the Duke of Chartres is merely a barber she loses interest in him. She eventually learns that he is a nobleman after all and tries to win him back, but the Duke of Chartres opts to return to France and Princess Henriette who now returns his affection.