

Chapter XII

Rendezvous in San Francisco

June 30, 1926 – July 19, 1926

While Curly was away, Geannie kept busy taking care of Sandy and the other things she was involved in. As each day passed, her anticipation grew. As time drew near, she let her piano students know that they had the week off. The morning of the day she was to leave, she packed everything that she and Sandy would need for the week. As she was busy packing, the airfield at the station was a buzz with activity as the other squadrons were taking off to join the fleet exercises up north.

By afternoon when Geannie left their apartment she noticed that there was hardly a man in sight. The air station was unusually quiet. Susan McGowan gave Geannie and Sandy a ride to the ferry dock. After crossing the bay, they took a cab to the train station.

The ticket agent had her tickets waiting for her. She purchased them and checked her luggage and sat down on the wooden bench on the depot platform to wait for the boarding call. At first, things were pretty quiet. As the time for the departure of the four o'clock north bound train neared, the train station came to life with activity. Geannie watched as passengers began arriving and last minute freight was loaded into the baggage cars. The hiss of steam added to the symphony of chaos as the locomotive's boilers built up steam. Soon, the shrill blast of the whistle was heard above all of the other commotion. That was the conductor's cue to call, "All aboard!"

Sandy toddled along at her mother's side. With a tight grip on Sandy in one hand, her handbag, tickets, and carry on bag in the other, they boarded the train and took their seats. The passenger car soon filled up as the conductor made the final boarding call. He made his way up the aisle of the passenger car, punching tickets. Standing beside their row of seats, he asked "Tickets, please?"

Geannie handed him the tickets.

"I see you are bound for San Francisco." he said as he punched the three inch by six inch card stock ticket. "Have a nice trip and be sure to take advantage of all of the amenities we have on board." He returned the tickets and he moved on up the aisle.

With another blast of the whistle the locomotive chugged into motion, beginning the five hundred mile, eighteen hour trip to San Francisco.

Geannie sat back in her seat with Sandy on her lap as they gazed out the window at the passing scenery. Sandy played a game of I see. She excitedly named the things they saw. "I see car", "I see house", "I see cows", "I see truck", and on and on. Soon she tired of it and nestled down on Geannie's lap. Within an hour, the motion of the train had lulled her to sleep. Geannie moved Sandy from her lap and laid her across the seat beside her.

For the next hour, Geannie engaged in conversation with the older couple in front of them. The time

passed quickly, even during the two stops the train made. At six o'clock, the passengers were called to dinner. She woke Sandy up and made their way to the dining car.

After dinner, Geannie and Sandy returned to their seat. A game of patty cake kept Sandy entertained for quite some time. When she tired of that, Geannie retrieved another toy for her to play with.

The combination of a full tummy and the motion of the train didn't set very well with Sandy. Without warning, she threw up all over herself and Geannie. It was a real mess. A colored porter was there almost instantly to begin whipping up. He picked up Sandy and began tenderly cleaning her off.

"You're sure good with children." Geannie said as she began mopping her lap with the towel he gave her.

"Yez'm. I gots three yungins m'sef."

"So, Issac." She had read his name badge. "Where are you from?"

"Weez all from near to Lanta, Jaw-juh."

"What brings you to California?"

"Why doncha know, ma'am. Dis here's da land of opportunity. See back home I'z a sharecropper. Pert near dut poh. Here, I got me dis here real fine job. I get to wear dese here fancy duds, and look, no calus on my hans."

In the time that it took to clean up a little, Geannie knew a lot about Issac. As he turned his attention to cleaning up the seat, floor, and everywhere Sandy managed to get, the older woman with whom Geannie had been visiting helped them to their sleeping car so they could get a change of clothes. She took Sandy back to their seats while Geannie took their soiled clothes to the lavatory to rinse them out.

Once she returned to their seats in the coach, Issac had everything cleaned up and was busy attending to other's needs. Sandy had settled down and was contently listening to the grandma lady telling her a story.

The rest of the evening passed quickly and soon the sun began setting in the western sky. Sandy was very tired so they retired to their berth for the night. While they were asleep, the train made a two hour stop over in Los Angeles. Geannie was awakened momentarily when the train began moving again.

The sun rose early and Sandy was bright eyed and bushy tailed. They returned to their seats in the passenger car just as the train stopped briefly at another train station along the way. Once on their way again, the passengers were called to the dining car for breakfast. Geannie was careful as to what she let Sandy have, not wanting a repeat performance of last night. Geannie's anticipation grew as they neared San Francisco. As the train got closer, time seemed to slow down. There were two or three more stops that seemed to take longer than they should have.

Sandy became restless in her anticipation. She became fussy and whinny and nothing Geannie

could do seemed to distract her. Geannie became self conscious, worrying that Sandy was disturbing the other passengers. After a while Sandy wore herself down and fell asleep.

At ten o'clock, right on scheduled, the train ground to stop at the depot at 3rd and Townsend in the heart of San Francisco. Geannie made her way down the aisle holding Sandy by one hand and her carry on items in the other and got off the train.

Geannie took a good look around. The bay to the east was full of ships as the Battle Fleet had sailed in earlier that morning and dropped anchor. Geannie noticed that there were uniformed sailors and soldiers everywhere she looked. The clatter of the cable cars and the crescendo of the sounds of the city filled Geannie with excitement as she waited for their luggage. Sandy too, was excited by so much going on around her.

Once on the platform, the porter who brought their luggage happened to be Isaac. "Thank you so much, Issac. I didn't get a chance to thank you for your help last night." She reached into her handbag and pulled out her pocketbook. Handing him a tip she said, "Please accept this with my appreciation." as she placed it in his gentle hand. "You were such a big help."

Isaac graciously accepted the token of her application with a broad smile. "T'wuz my pleasure. Youze all have a goo'day, ma'am."

Standing next their luggage at the curb, Geannie had a tight grip on Sandy with one hand as she hailed a taxi with the other. It was only a moment before a cab pulled over right in front of where they were standing. The cabbie bounded out of the car and quickly stashed their luggage in the trunk. By the time he got back behind the wheel, Geannie and Sandy were seated in the back seat.

"Where to, Ma'am?" the cabbie asked politely.

"The Fairmont." Geannie answered.

Before she could give him the address, the cabbie responded, "Yes, ma'am. That is one of the nicest hotels in town." Then he asked, "What brings you to our fair city?"

"I'm here to spend a week with my husband. He's here with the fleet." she explained.

The cabbie commented on all of the ships that showed up in the bay during the morning and about all of the sailors all over the place. He told her that there was going to be a parade of ships on the Fourth of July. He asked her about her husband and Geannie told him that he was a naval aviator and flew a fighter plane. The conversation ended with the conclusion of the mile and a half ride.

The cabbie jumped out and unloaded their luggage onto a cart waiting at the curb. Geannie reached into her handbag and retrieved her pocketbook. She paid the cabbie his fair plus a generous tip, as always. The cabbie bid her, "Good day, ma'am." and was off to pick up his next ride.

Standing on the sidewalk in front of the Fairmont Hotel, Geannie was impressed by the grandeur of

the magnificent building. The entrance featured a tall arched door with columns on either side and was topped with a balcony adorned with the flags of many nations.

The bellman followed her into the hotel lobby with the cart carrying their luggage. The ornately decorated hotel lobby took her breath away. After admiring the splendor, the thought, "How much is this going to cost?" entered her mind. The bellman stood back and waited while she stepped up the desk.

A chipper desk clerk greeted her, "Good morning, ma'am. How may I help you?"

"Hi," Geannie began. "I am Mrs. Gean Brason. My husband is staying here with his squadron."

"Ah, yes," the clerk responded, looking over his list. "Lieutenant Barosn is in room 724, overlooking the bay. It says here that you and your daughter would be joining him today." He continued as he reached for the key, "He has requested a crib for your daughter. It should already be in your room. If it is not, please ring the front desk." Handing her the key he concluded his business with, "Enjoy your stay at the Fairmont." As he snapped his fingers over his head he said, "The bellman will take you to your room."

The bellman had appeared at her side with the cart at the snap of the desk clerk's fingers. He led them to the elevator and took them up to the seventh floor and to their room. Geannie unlocked the door and stepped inside. The bellman followed and unloaded the luggage. As he stood up straight, Geannie handed him a tip. Again, a generous one.

Geannie looked around the room. It was every bit as elegant as the suite at the Hotel de Coronado although not nearly as spacious. It was very, very, nice. First class to be sure.

As she scanned around the room, it was obvious that Curly had been there, his clothes were neatly hung in the closet and his toiletries next to the sink. She continued to look around the room and that's when she saw a bouquet of roses with a note attached. She went over and smelled the roses as she plucked up the note. It said simply, "From your lover, Curly." Sandy too was busy exploring the room when Geannie heard her call out, "Da-dy!"

Geannie turned around and saw a handsome naval officer wearing a white uniform and sporting a mustache standing in the door. "Flyboy!" she shrieked as she ran to him. Curly had only taken a step or two when he caught her literally flying into his arms.

"It's so good to see you, sweetheart. Gosh, you're beautiful." he said. He kissed her and then let her go so he could pay attention to the other woman in his life. He bent down and picked Sandy up and gave her a kiss on the cheek. She rubbed her cheek and said, "Me Mommy come choo choo."

"Did you and mommy come to see me on a choo choo train?"

"Uh huh," she answered shaking her head.

He put Sandy down and took Geannie by the hand and lead her to the window and opened the drapes. "Just look at this view!" he exclaimed.

Geannie gasped as she looked out over the bay full of ships to Oakland on the other side of the bay. Curly opened the window to let in the fresh breeze and the sound of the city. "Its amazing." Again she gasped. "It just takes my breath way."

Sandy tried pulling herself up to the window seal so she could see out too. Curly picked her up so she could see. Pointing her finger, she said, "I see boats!"

"Lots of boats, huh Sandy?" Curly responded.

"Speaking of boats," Geannie interrupted. "The taxi driver told me about a parade of ships on the Fourth. Whats that all about?"

"Oh yeah!" Curly explained. "And I'm going to be in it too." He went on to explain, "The ships will all leave the harbor on the afternoon before and anchor just off shore overnight. Then around ten o'clock on the Forth they'll steam back into the bay in single file. When the flagship is about there, just off Hunter's Point," he said pointing to spot in the bay, "we will fly over. There will be all of the squadrons from North Island as well as several Army planes. It should be quite a show."

Changing the subject, Culry asked, "How was your trip?" Not waiting for response, looking at his watch he commented, "Look, it is already a quarter past noon. I bet your famished. There's someplace where I would like to take you for lunch."

With Sandy in one arm and Geannie on the other, he walked them to the elevator. After descending the seven floors to the hotel lobby he led them around the corner to one of the hotel's restaurants for lunch and tea.

Setting at a window booth looking out into the street, they spent the lunch hour catching up as they watched the cables cars. Geannie told him about the train ride. Culry told her about his adventures during the exercises and the sobering realization that he had come to. After lunch they hopped onto a cable car and went exploring. From the Fairmont located on Nob Hill, it was only a short distance to downtown.

At one point, they hopped off the cable car to look at the shops that lined the street. Noticing several sailors and soldiers heading down a side street, Curly, Geannie, and Sandy turned the corner to see what the attraction was. They hadn't gone very far before they realized they were in unfamiliar territory. "Who are all of these gals painted up like floozies?" Geannie asked.

"Floozies and hussies." Curly answered. "I think we stumbled into the red light district."

"The what?" Geannie asked naively.

"They're prostitutes. The red light district is what they call the area where they do their business."

Geannie just stood there in amazement looking around at the eager men waiting to get paired up with the scantily dressed women clamoring for customers. "I declare, I don't believe that I have ever seen an honest to goodness whore before." After taking in the scene she said, "This in making me ill. Lets get

out of here, Curly.”

As they retraced their steps, Geannie stopped again as she gazed in utter disbelief into the alley. She was shocked to see countless winos and junkies passed out in the middle of the afternoon. After seeing more than enough, she hurried on. “I suppose I have really lived a sheltered life. I have heard about people like this, but I reckoned it was just stories.”

“I'm afraid its all too real, sweetie. Come on. Lets go.” Curly said as he led them back to the street that had been on. Having had enough for one afternoon, they hopped onto a cable car and began making their way back up to Nob Hill and their hotel.

Sandy was tired and Geannie put her down for her nap. With her sound asleep, they took advantage of the time and took another crack at making a baby. When they were finished and after lying next to each other in bed for a little while, Geannie got out of bed and went over to the wall. To Curly's amazement, she did a headstand with her back against the wall.

He chuckled at the sight of his naked wife standing on her head. “What on earth are you doing?” he asked.

“Someone told me that if I stood on my head afterwards, it would help me get pregnant. I suppose it has something to do with gravity.”

“I don't know about that, but that sure is a comical sight.”

“Ramona said that it was an old wives tale, but I thought I'd try it anyway.”

“Whatever makes you happy.” Curly, who was sitting on the bed, said. “I'm getting a kick out just watching.”

“Do you like what you see?”

“Its very interesting alright. I've never seen you from this perspective before.”

After a moment she said, “Ramona's probably right. This is as silly as it must look.” and lowered her legs to the floor to stand back upright.

Once they were dressed, Sandy woke up from her nap and they went downstairs to have dinner.

There was so much to see in the City by the Bay and so much of it was close to the hotel. Over the next couple of days they spent all of their time sightseeing. On Thursday they went to Fisherman's Wharf and China Town which reminded Curly of Hong Kong. Crissy Field was nearby so Curly took Geannie to see all of the planes that were assembled there.

All day Friday was spent at Golden Gate Park. They went to the California Academy of Sciences, which included the North American Hall of Birds and Mammals, the Steinhart Aquarium which had only been added In 1923, and the Japanese Tea Garden which reminded Curly of his time in Tokyo.

Being a baseball fan, Geannie wanted to see a professional baseball game. On Saturday afternoon they attended a game between the San Francisco Seals and the Seattle Indians of the Pacific Coast League, one of the minor leagues, at Recreation Park. All during the game, the ships in the bay could be seen leaving the bay. Seattle won the game which ended after dark and was capped off with a tremendous fireworks display.

The Fourth of July was on Sunday. Curly had to leave early to get back to Crissy Field for his part in the flyover. Geannie and Sandy made their way down to the waterfront early. The shore was lined with tens of thousands of people on both sides of the bay. Despite the crowds, they were able to get a good spot that promised to provide an excellent view in both directions. The bay itself was filled with hundreds of pleasure craft.

At precisely ten o'clock, the Battleship California, flagship of the Battle Fleet, rounded the north end of the San Francisco Peninsula. She turned and steamed in a straight line right through the center of the bay. The crowds on both sides of the bay could see the entire procession.

Closely behind the California, another battleship followed. As the flagship drew nearer, Geannie could plainly see the sailors in dress whites manning the rails. Giant American flags flew from both the fore and main masts. The entire ship was dressed from stem to stern with brightly colored signal flags, as was every ship that followed. By the time the California neared Hunter's Point, a line of twelve battleships, the symbol of American might at sea, was stretched out in the bay, with the Langley bringing up the rear.

At Hunter's Point, Vice President Charles G. Dawes observed the naval review. As the flagship passed the review stand, every ship simultaneously fired a twenty one gun salute from their secondary batteries. The roar was deafening!

That was the cue for the fly over. All morning, the planes from Crissy Field had been taking off and forming up at the far north end of the bay. As the din of the twenty one gun salute faded, the sound of scores of airplanes filled the ears of the spectators. First in line were the VE-7s of Fighting One and Fighting Two. Geannie was quick to pick out the one with a red scarf flapping in the breeze. Geannie had Sandy in her arms so she could see too. She pointed and said, "Look Sandy! There's Daddy." She then turned to the person next to her and proudly declared, "That's my husband!"

Following the fighter squadrons were the DT-2s of Torpedo One and Torpedo Two. Behind them were two patrol squadrons of PN-9 flying boats. Since this was a Navy show, the Army Air Service, which was renamed the Army Air Corp only two days before, took a backseat and brought up the rear with a number of De Havilland DH-4s and Douglas O-2s of the 91st Observation Squadron stationed at Crissy Field and the eighteen Martin NBS-1 twin engined bombers from the 20th Bomb Squadron.

As the last of the planes had passed overhead, the ships were still passing in review. Following the

battleships, came the destroyers, and submarines in a double column. When the paraded was over, the ships were all congregated in the south end of the bay. They made their way back and dropped anchor between San Francisco and Oakland. The planes had circled around and flew back over San Francisco and landed at Crissy Field.

Once on the ground, Curly made his way back to the hotel and waited there for Geannie and Sandy, who returned a little later. By then it was after two o'clock in the afternoon. Everyone was hungry so they went out to get something to eat. They killed the rest of the afternoon riding the cable cars and exploring more of the city. That night after dark, from their hotel room they watched the largest fireworks display that San Francisco had ever seen. Brightly colored bursts lit up the night sky over the bay, illuminating the ships at anchor. It went on for more than twenty minutes. With each burst, Sandy clapped and giggled. Curly and Geannie stood side by side with an arm around each other's waist.

With only one more full day, there was still a lot that they had not yet seen on Nob Hill, close to the hotel. On Monday they saw the Grace Cathedral, and went to Union Square and Market Street.

Tuesday morning they rested as Geannie and Sandy had to catch the two o'clock train back to San Diego. It was nice to have time to just be together, rather than going here to see this and there to do that. With their bags packed and bulging with souvenirs, Curly hailed a cab and went with them down to the railroad depot. After checking their bags, they found a quiet little place to have a leisurely lunch.

The rendezvous was over, and what a time they had. It was time to board the train. But first came the tender hugs, kisses, and goodbyes. "I will be home in two weeks," Curly assured Geannie as she boarded the train.

Left by himself, Curly walked the mile and a half back to the hotel. All during the afternoon the ships in harbor were leaving at irregular intervals. By evening, they were all just off shore.

He didn't have to report back to Crissy Field until the next morning. That evening Curly got together Freddy, Tomcat, Shorty, and others from the squadron in the hotel lounge. As they sat around swapping stories and telling lies, Curly missed Geannie. The truth be known, all of the other men missed their women too. They were envious of Curly for having had the good sense to invite his to come join him.

The hotel room seemed quiet and lonely as Curly went to sleep that night. Before dozing off, he wondered where his girls were at that moment.

He awoke early the next morning. After showering and shaving he packed up his gear and left the room. Before leaving however, he left some of the money that Geannie had given him to leave as a tip for the housekeepers.

When he reached the lobby, the other pilots were also gathering. Curly checked out and paid their

tab. At \$9.50 a night plus meals, it added up. He joined the others for breakfast before loading up in the truck that took them back to the air field.

The first order of business was the morning briefing. Commander Ellison outlined the next phase of the exercises. They were going to experiment with various squadron configurations in preparation for operations on the Lexington and Saratoga when they finally joined the fleet. Over the next several days they would be working closely with the other three squadrons. Since there wasn't room on the Langley for all of them, those not aboard would be operating out of Crissy Field. They were also going to test out various mixes of aircraft on the missions they would be flying. At the conclusion of the briefing he told them to keep an eye out for the Army Air Corps. "You'll never know when they might show up. Treat them as you would an aggressor."

That morning both Fighting Two and Fighting One flew out to the Langley. That day they flew standard training flights. But the exercise the next day called for stronger air cover over the Battle Fleet than what they had been able to provide before. Eighteen of the thirty VE-7s took up station over the battleships and destroyers. Of those remaining, six flew cover over the Langley and six remained aboard in reserve. Curly's section was assigned to the Battle Fleet.

They were flying in routine patrol patterns when the Army showed up. It wasn't quite what they were expecting. The eighteen Martin NBS-1s were fanned out, low over the water as if they were going to make a torpedo attack on the battle ships. Ahead and above the bombers were twelve DH-4s. Even though The Army fighters were driven off, they kept the Navy from engaging the bombers which made an impressive torpedo attack on the battle line.

A couple of days later Curly's division was at Crissy Field while both squadrons of torpedo bombers and only nine fighters were at sea with the Langley. At dawn the airfield was caught off guard as eighteen DT-2s and nine VE-7's made an unannounced appearance. The fighters made a strafing pass ahead of the torpedo bombers which smothered the strip with practice bombs. Only a few of the pilots were able to man their planes before the fighters made another strafing pass. Even fewer of the fliers made it off the ground to give chase.

That experience gave Curly a whole new perspective. In these types of exercises he was the one in the air making the strafing passes. Now he knew what it might be like to be on the receiving end. He decided that he would much rather be the one dishing it out. Curly remained at Crissy field for a couple more days while the torpedo bombers tried their hand at anti submarine patrols.

A few days later, Curly and Fighting Two and Torpedo Two were at sea with the Langley. The Langley had always been pretty much tied to the Battle Fleet, providing air cover. This exercise found the Langley and four destroyers operating on their own. Two sections of fighters were overhead on patrol when

Fighting One and Torpedo One attacked. Curly's section and the other section in the division were on stand by. Caught aboard ship during the attack, once again he was on the receiving end.

Lookouts spotted the incoming attack and notified the Captain on the bridge. As the attack developed, Curly and the five other pilots of the two standby divisions were in the ready room awaiting orders. The air officer entered the ready room to brief the pilots of the situation and ordered them to their planes. The six fighters had been spotted on the flight deck in preparation for just such an event. Curly ascended the ladder to the flight deck and dashed to his plane. The carrier was completing a hard turn to port and straiting out in a course directly into the southwest wind as Curly, with his navigation chart in hand, climbed into the cockpit. The plane captain strapped him into the seat of 2-F-8 as he quickly checked his instruments. With a thumbs up signal, the plane captain gave the propeller a spin and the engine roared to life.

Curly waited his turn to take off. He was directed by the taxi signalman to the launch position, referred to as 'the spot', and held there with his feet on the brakes. The flight deck officer, wearing a yellow jersey and skull cap, standing off to his right, thrust a black and white checkered flag in the air above his head. As he twirled the flag, Curly pushed the throttle forward, racing his engine at full bore. The flight deck officer pointed at Curly, who nodded that he was ready. The flight deck officer abruptly dropped his arm, pointing his flag forward. Curly took his feet off the brakes and fighter surged forward down the wooden deck like a racehorse out of the starting gate. Within seconds he was airborne before reaching the forward end of the flight deck.

Tomcat was right behind him and they quickly formed up with Freddy and rushed headlong into their friends of Fighting One to break up the attack. It was an even fight as both both sides were evenly matched in numbers and firepower. The difference for Curly was that his opponent was fresh from Pensacola and lacked both experience and confidence. He flinched and let Curly through the escort defenses. He found himself directly ahead and above a section of three Torpedo One DT-2s. A perfect set up!

He commenced a diving attack on the section leader. Had it been a real fight, the DT-2 would have been history. Curly was officially credited with his second simulated kill. The pilot of the plane that he had "shot down" happened to be his next door neighbor, Lieutenant Marty Wallace. The other two DT-2s broke off their approach when Freddy forced his way through the fighter escort. In the course of the attack, only two torpedoes were dropped at a distance and the slow moving carrier was able to turn out of their path.

Once the attack was over, Curly's and the others that took off with him remained in the air while the initial combat air patrol were recovered. The remainder of the mission was uneventful. At the end of their patrol, they were brought aboard.

Two days later the roles were reversed as Fighting Two and Torpedo Two flew out from Crissey Field to attack the Langley. Curly was part of the fighter escort. Their attack was more successful than the one their counterparts had carried out earlier.

After more exchanges with the Army Air Corps, the fleet exercises wound down. Fighting Two and Torpedo Two flew down the coast to San Diego. The Langley with Fighting One and Torpedo One followed the Battle Fleet back to San Pedro, then continued on to San Diego with four destroyers.

When Curly landed at North Island, he was surprised that Geannie and Sandy weren't there to greet him. Figuring she had something going on, he went home to see his women. "I'm home!" he called as he walked through the door.

Sandy was playing on the floor in the front room. She hopped up and ran to him. "Da-dy come home!" she exclaimed as her daddy picked her up in one arm.

At that instant Geannie came running out of the kitchen and threw herself into his other arm. "Oh Curly!" she cried. "You don't know how glad I am to see you."

As she stepped back to gaze into his eyes, Curly saw the tears streaming down her cheeks. Then he noticed it. "Where on earth did you get that black eye?" he asked as he set Sandy down and took her into both arms. Geannie now sobbing, buried her face into his shoulder.

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I did some research on each of the attractions visited to make sure that they existed in San Francisco in 1926.

The San Francisco Seals and Seattle Indians were actual minor league baseball teams of the Pacific Coast League at the time. The game mentioned is of course fictional.

The Naval review in San Francisco Bay is fictional but reflective of the times. The 91st Observation Squadron was as described.

As with the previous chapter, the exercises are fictional.

