

Chapter XIII

The Heroine of Coronado

July 6, 1926 – July 19, 1926

Geannie took a seat by the window so she could see Curly as the train pulled away from the station. With Sandy standing on her lap, together they waved goodbye until they could no longer see the object of their affection.

The train ride home was very much like the trip to San Francisco, only without the drama. After catching a cab to the ferry for the ride across the bay, Susan was waiting at the dock on the other side to give them a ride home.

Geannie gave her a brief synopsis of her trip on the ride home. “Thanks for the lift, Susan.” she said as she got out of the car. “I’ll have to tell y’all about it later.”

As Geannie retrieved her luggage, Susan replied, “I’d love to hear more.” Then she continued, “Listen Geannie. There is a rumor that there is a stalker in the area. Watch yourself, okay.”

“I always do.” Geannie assured her. “I’ll see you later, Susan.”

Geannie let Sandy toddle ahead of her as she carried their luggage to the door. Once inside, Geannie collapsed onto the couch and Sandy climbed up onto her lap. It had been a wonderful trip, but it was sure nice to be home. “It won’t be long and Daddy will be home.” she told Sandy.

After resting a moment, she put Sandy down to play. The little girl followed her mother into the bedroom and played while Geannie unpacked. It was getting late in the afternoon and the next item on the agenda was to fix supper for her and Sandy. Then it was Sandy’s bath time. Once she was asleep, Geannie had the rest of the evening to herself. She glanced at the calendar to see what she had coming up over the next couple of weeks before Curly came home.

Geannie got back into her regular routine of the things which kept her busy and brought her joy. One of the first things she did was to drop off her film at the drugstore for developing. She resumed her piano lessons, there was baseball, a meeting of the Navy Wives organization that she wanted to attend, and her one day out of the month that she volunteered at the Red Cross. She told Ramona about seeing Tom and that he said, “Hi.” She could tell that the two of them were becoming quite stuck on each other.

Taking a break from her household chores, she took Sandy to the playground nestled in amongst the officer’s housing complex. As always there were Sunday services, of course. Her life went on pretty much the same when Curly was gone. As she was out and about she was sure to be aware of her surroundings as others had also shared the rumor of this stalker. But no one had actually claimed to have seen him.

A couple of days before Curly was to home, Geannie had been to the store to get some groceries. On the way home Sandy had fallen asleep on the car seat. She picked Sandy up and carried her into the

house and put her down in her crib. Since her arms were full she had left the door open so she could return for the two bags of groceries that she had left in the car.

She quietly crept out of Sandy's room and closed the door. When she tuned to go back out to the car she noticed that the door she had left wide open was only open a crack. "The breeze must blown it closed." she reasoned.

At that moment a figure stepped out of the shadows and stood a few steps in front of Geannie, between her and the door. Geannie gasped at the sight of the intruder in her home.

"Keep quiet, lady and give me what I want." he demanded as he produced a knife.

In that instant the words of one of her favorite Bible passages came into her mind. "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me."

In the face of uncertain danger she felt a calm assurance that she would be alright. Emboldened, she demanded, "What do you want?"

"I want you, cookie. Now lets see what you got." He took a step closer and waved his knife. "Take'm off." he ordered, gesturing with his knife.

Remaining calm, a million things went through her mind. The first was, "Absolutely not! No other man, except Curly had ever seen me in such a way." But then it occurred to her, "I need time to size up the situation. This dress has a lot of buttons on it. If I started unbuttoning it slowly, it will give me time to figure something out."

Geannie very slowly began to unbutton her dress. She noticed, "His hand is shaking. He is either nervous or high on something. If I can get him to say something, maybe I can tell."

"How long have you been watching me?" she asked.

"For a few days now." he said. That wasn't enough. Geannie needed him to say more. Before she could engage him further, he continued. "Of all of the broads around here I've been watching, I picked you, cookie. I think you've really got something and I want it."

Disgusted by what he said, she couldn't detect a slur in his speech. "He's not high. If he was that could be bad. He'd be unpredictable. He's nervous. I need to look for a distraction." Running out of buttons she studied him very closely. "He is a couple inches shorter than me. He doesn't look all that strong. If could jump him, I think I could take him. I've got to distract him. But there's that knife. But I can't make a move with this dress on. It's too fitted. With it on I can neither run nor fight." As she ran out of buttons she had a decision to make. She took it off.

She didn't take her eyes off of him. He was filthy. His stench permeated the room. His evil grin revealed rotten teeth. His eyes were dull but not glazed over. He hadn't shaved for several days. "His hand

is still trembling.” Geannie observed. “Perhaps its an infirmity. He’s not nervous.” she deducted.

“My husband will be home any time.” she bluffed.

“Your husband is gone with all of the other fly boys.” he countered.

Still looking for any kind of a way to disarm him or slip passed him, Geannie stalled by slipping the the straps of her slip over her shoulder. It fell to the floor and she stepped out of it, keeping her feet free.

“I can’t run,” she determined. “I must keep between him and Sandy’s room.”

Standing there in only her under garments and her ankle high laced up shoes, she considered her next move. “If I untie my shoes, I will not be able to keep my eyes on him. I would be distracted.”

He had inched closer. “He is close enough that I could kick the knife out of his hand. If I could only distract him.” she thought.

“Remove your brassiere!” a voice from her inner most soul shouted.

“Never!” Geannie resisted.

“You asked for a distraction. This is it.” the voice told her

Without any further hesitation, Geannie removed it and tossed it aside.

The man’s focus narrowed and she could feel his cold stare burn into her chest.

“There’s your distraction!” the voice whispered.

With a flick of her long leg, the knife flew from his hand. Geannie threw herself at him, tackling him to the floor. She began using the wrestling moves she used on Curly but with brutal effectiveness. In the scuffle, she caught his elbow just under her left eye. It really hurt! Reeling from the blow she stayed on him like a mother bear.

A stream of vulgar and foul language spewed from his mouth like an open sewer spigot. Such things that Geannie had hardly ever been exposed to.

Her fingernails dug into his face, gouging deep. Blood spurted onto her hand. She just about had him pinned. That is when she realized that Sandy was screaming from inside her bedroom. “How long has she been crying?” That distraction caused her loose her grip on her would be assailant.

He squirmed loose and bolted for the door. Geannie leaped to her feet in pursuit. As she dashed through the front door she grabbed an object from the stand beside the door, a bronze statuette of Jesus.

Geannie ran out the door in only her bloomers and shoes. She stopped a few steps outside the door and with her pitching arm, threw the statuette. It hit him right between his shoulder blades, sending him to the ground, face first. Geannie lept onto his back and grabbed his wrist and pulled it up between his shoulder blades. She had him pinned. He groaned and gave up any further resistance.

What happened next was a blur to Geannie. Her next door neighbor who lived in the other half of the duplex, Nancy Wallace the wife of a pilot in Torpedo One, had heard the commotion and came running

to see what was the matter. She literally had to leap out of the way as the man burst through the door. She was shocked to see Geannie, half naked, bounding after him. She was amazed when Geannie hurled something at him, knocking him to the ground. As Geannie tackled him to the ground others came running to the scene. Hearing Sandy crying, Nancy went in and picked her up out of her crib.

Two women from across the street came running. Seeing that Geannie had the stranger pinned, one said to the other, "Quick! Call the police!" She then turned around and ran back into her home and grabbed a blanket and ran back to Geannie and draped it over her Geannie's bare shoulders in an attempt to cover her nakedness.

Several women had gathered around. Geannie sat there out of breath perched on top of the motionless figure below her. The next thing Geannie remembered was being helped up by a police officer. She didn't even hear the siren as the patrol car screeched to a stop.

She became aware of the crowd standing around her and pulled the blanket tight. Her first thought was of her daughter, "Sandy!" she called out.

"She's alright, Geannie." Nancy assured her. "I've got her."

By then Susan had arrived. She escorted Geannie back inside her apartment. Nancy followed with Sandy. She stooped down and picked up the statuette of Jesus and brought it with her. Once inside, she gathered up her clothes and put them back on.

The two police officers had no trouble taking the man into custody. With him hand cuffed and sitting in the back of the police car, one of the officers came in to talk to Geannie while the other took statements from the bystanders.

Geannie told the officer what had just happened. The officer gathered other pertinent information from Geannie for the case file. Nancy also gave her account. The officer then surveyed the crime scene, looking for evidence. That is when he discovered the hunting knife with an eight inch blade embedded in the wall clear across the front room.

After collecting statements from those gathered outside, the officer asked them to disperse, giving Geannie her privacy. He then attended to the man in the back seat of the patrol car. After concluding their crime scene investigation, the officers left.

Susan and Nancy stayed with Geannie, not wanting to leave her alone. Nancy took care of Sandy and Susan helped Geannie straighten up. Her eye had begun to swell and bruise. Susan went into the bathroom and wrung out a washcloth in cold water. "Here Geannie." she said. "Hold this over your eye. That's going to be one doozy of a shiner."

As the adrenalin rush subsided, Geannie began trembling. Her body shook all over. Susan sat

beside Geannie on the couch with her arms around her shoulders, gently rocking her back and forth. Geannie didn't say a word and Susan didn't try engaging her in conversation. She simply rocked her and softly sang to her. Eventually she calmed down and stopped shaking. Closing her tear filled eyes she drifted off to sleep. Susan got up and gently laid Geannie down on the couch and covered her with a light blanket. Nancy had fed Sandy and she too was asleep. Susan needed to get home and check on her own children.

Nancy stayed with Geannie and Sandy the rest of the afternoon. While the two slept, she cleaned the blood off of the hardwood floor and tidied up the house. There on the floor was Geannie's cross necklace. The clasp must have broke in the altercation. She left only momentarily to check on her eight year old and quickly returned. Two or three times someone came to the door to check on Geannie. Nancy graciously accepted the food they brought but politely turned them away as Geannie was resting.

Geannie suddenly awoke with a start. She was sweating and trembling. Nancy assured her that she was safe and that everything was alright. Nancy talked to her softly and settled her down. "Here, I found this on the floor." Nancy gave her the cross necklace. "The clasp is broken." Geannie clutched it tightly in her hand and held it to her breast.

Geannie got up. She had to look in on Sandy to know for herself that she was okay. Satisfied that Sandy was alright, she calmed down. After a little while Geannie assured Nancy, "I'll be alright now, Nancy. I reckon you need to get home don't you?"

Nancy asked, "Are you sure, Geannie? Because I can stay. Its no problem."

"Thank you, Nancy, but I'll be fine. Thank you for all you have done. You're amazing." Geannie said.

"Hey there, thats what Navy wives do." She gave Geannie and hug and added, "If you need me, just knock on the wall and I'll be right over."

After Nancy left, Geannie went into the bathroom to freshen up. She looked into the mirror and for the first time saw her black eye. It was going to take days to go away. She washed her face, reapplied her makeup, and brushed her hair.

After she finished brushing her hair, she took Sandy and sat down in the rocking chair. A couple of times someone came to the door. She just sat quietly and didn't get up to answer.

She truly appreciated the food that had been brought, but she wasn't hungry. She was emotionally drained and spent. She managed to find the energy to feed Sandy and give her a bath and put to bed for the night.

Geannie sat alone in her wood rocking chair as darkness gathered in around her. She didn't turn on lights and her Electrola stood silently in the corner. It was her custom to have it constantly filling her home

with music.

Well after dark, she finally got up and went into the bedroom and undressed and got ready for bed. She didn't even bother to put the rollers in her hair. She knelt by her bed to pray, "Dear Father Above, I thank thee for watching over Sandy and me with thy protecting providence this day which hast kept us safe. I'm so grateful for the kind people thou hast surrounded me with, especially for my dear friend Susan and my neighbor Nancy.

"Watch over Curly and keep him safe that he may return home to us. Please bless my precious Sandy." She paused. Rather than going on with the things she usually included in her prayers, she concluded with, "Thank you for thy love, mercy, and grace. In the name thy blessed Son, Jesus. Amen."

She climbed into bed and just lay there staring at the ceiling for the longest time. A million things ran through her mind. As she thought about what had happened and how she reacted, she began to feel guilty. Eventually sleep overcame her.

When she woke up the next morning the sun was already climbing high into the morning sky. Geannie was always an early riser. This morning she just wanted to stay in bed. She could hear Sandy stirring and that motivated her to get up. She dressed and fed Sandy but didn't bother to do the same for herself. After taking care of Sandy she went into the bathroom to freshen up. She took one look in the mirror and saw the black eye staring back at her. It reminded her that it still hurt. She couldn't look any more and didn't bother to do what she went in there to do.

At nine thirty sharp a familiar knock came on the door. It was here nine thirty piano student. Geannie, still in her nightgown, didn't answer the door.

A little later there was another knock at the door. Again she didn't answer. A moment later there was another knock, this time more persistent. When the knocking ceased, she heard a familiar voice announce, "Geannie, its Eleanor Ellison. May I come in?" Geannie hesitated as Mrs. Ellison knocked once more. Geannie had great respect for Mrs. Ellison and looked to her although she was only ten or twelve years older than Geannie. Geannie had wanted so badly to talk to her mother. Mrs. Ellison was the second best thing.

Still in her nightgown at ten o'clock in the morning, Geannie opened the door. Without a word, she simply motioned for her to come in.

Once inside, Mrs. Ellison took one look at Geannie and exclaimed, "Oh Geannie!" She gently took her into her arms. "Late last evening I heard what happened. I've been so worried about you. How are you, dear?"

Geannie responded with, "I'm fine. Thank you. Please won't you sit down?"

Mrs. Ellison sat down on the couch and patted the cushion beside her, inviting Geannie to sit next

to her. "Sit down, Geannie, and tell me what happened."

Geannie sat down and began telling Mrs. Ellison of the experience. She listened with very few comments. Then Geannie said, "I feel so guilty for letting a complete stranger see me like that. I have never showed my body to any other man, but Curly."

"You did what you had to do, Geannie." Mrs. Ellison said comfortingly. "Didn't you just tell me that you felt a prompting to do what you did?"

"Uh huh." Geannie acknowledged.

"Well then." Mrs. Ellison continued. "Don't you think that it was God, who knew what the the outcome would be, guiding you through it to those results? I'm sure it was Him who recited the Twenty Third Psalm in you mind."

"I suppose so." Geannie agreed.

Mrs. Ellison went on, "By having the presence of mind to follow those promptings, you bought some precious time to evaluate the situation. I know that under any other circumstances you would not have done that. I know the fine Christian woman that you are."

Geannie listened carefully as Mrs. Ellison continued, "When it comes right down to it, there was only one thing that could distract a man with his intentions. You used what you have and it worked. Didn't it? God knew that and that is why he told you to do it. He gave you your body and He had you use it to your advantage.

"I can only imagine his surprise when you turned the tables on him and you became the attacker. I'm sure he was not prepared for that in the least. That took real courage, Geannie."

"Yeah, but I ran out the door with practically nothing on. I should have just let him go."

"If you had, the next woman he selected probably wouldn't have been able to give him the thumping you gave him. He's setting in jail and won't be able to hurt anyone else. The only harm he caused you was emotional. That too will heal."

"But I threw Jesus at him!" Geannie blurted.

Mrs. Ellison responded, "And its a good thing you did or he might of gotten way. After all doesn't the Bible say, 'He will fight your battles?' It looks to me like He won that battle for sure."

Geannie responded, "But I can't show my face. Everyone will think I am some sort of a shameless hussy."

"Nonsense! Geannie, I've never know you to care what others think. Do you want to know what they are saying about you?"

"Not really," Geannie replied.

"Well, I'm going to tell you anyway." Mrs. Ellison reached into her handbag and retrieved that

mornings edition of the San Diego Union. "It's right here on page two." Mrs. Ellison began with the headline, "Coronado Woman Thwarts Stalker."

"The Coronado Police Department is praising the quick thinking and actions of a Coronado woman who single handedly apprehended the stalker that had been eluding authorities for the last two weeks.

"Mrs. Gean Brason, 27, a resident of the North Island Naval Air Station Officer's Housing Complex, was confronted by the suspect in her home early yesterday afternoon. At the time of the attack Mrs. Brason and her 18 month old daughter were home alone. Her husband, Lieutenant (junior grade) Sheffield Brason was away with the fleet on maneuvers.

"Acting coolly in the face of great personal danger, Mrs. Brason engaged her assailant in conversation while creating a distraction. Once distracted, Mrs. Brason used her superb athletic abilities to disarm her attacker. She wrestled him to floor, but he escaped her grasp and fled. Undaunted Mrs. Brason pursued him outside, tackling him and holding him until the police arrived and took him into custody. Mrs. Brason is a true heroine.

"The suspect, William S. Chaney, 34, a transient from the Midwest, admitted to police that he was the stalker that had Coronado on edge for the last two weeks. He said that he had stalked several women over a period of two weeks and had even spied on them through windows.

"Mr. Chaney has several outstanding warrants for various crimes committed in Iowa. He is expected to be extradited to Iowa after spending six weeks in the Coronado City Jail.

"Last night the women of Coronado rested easy knowing that the threat to their safety had been taken off the streets.

"Coronado Police Chief, Seth Nielsen said, 'The Coronado Police Department and the citizens of Coronado take our hats off to Mrs. Brason. We say thank you for your courage, bravery, and fortitude. Our community is once more the safe haven it has always been.'"

Mrs. Ellison put down the paper. "It said heroine, courage, bravery, and fortitude. It didn't say anything about being a shameless hussy. They didn't even mention the tactics you used to distract him. Now Geannie, dose that help you to feel better?"

"Yes ma'am. A little." Geannie said nodding her head.

"Now," Mrs. Ellison asked, "do you want me to contact Commander Ellison and let your husband know what happened and that you and Sandy are alright?"

"Oh no, no." Geannie insisted. "I don't want him to be distracted from what he is doing. I don't want him crashing his plane on my account. I'd rather tell him myself when he comes home."

"Okay dear." Mrs. Ellison replied, then continued. "I know two of the squadrons are flying in tomorrow and the other two will come in with the Langley a couple of days after that. I just don't know which

will be which. Either way, he will be home soon. I know that they are scheduled to stay close to home for a while." Then as an after thought she added, "I will insist that my husband give Curly a three day leave."

"Thank you so much, Mrs. Ellison." Geannie began to say.

Mrs. Ellison interrupted her, "Please Geannie, call me Elanor. Mrs. Ellison makes me sound old." Geannie laughed for the first time. "See, you're feeling better already."

"I am feeling much better. I still don't know if I can show my face with this black eye." Geannie said.

"Horse feathers!" Mrs. Ellison roared. "You earned that black eye, wear it proudly. Now why don't you take yourself a nice long b  th. Do you know the difference between a b  th and a bath?" She asked.

"No," Geannie answered.

"Its all depends on how long you take and how hot the water is." she answered. "It is even better with bubbles and a good book."

"That sounds heavenly." Geannie said with the typical ring of her voice.

Then Mrs. Ellison offered, "Why don't I take Sandy to the playground and you can have the place to yourself without any interruptions. Take a b  th, put on your makeup, put on some perfume, and slip into your prettiest clothes. I guarantee that you will feel much better."

"You've got it!" Geannie said cheerily.

While Mrs. Ellison took Sandy to the playground, Geannie took her advice and took a nice long bubble b  th. Then she fixed herself up as if she was going out on the town. Mrs. Ellison was right, she did feel much, much better. She even ventured outside and walked to the playground. She was greeted cordially and with respect by everyone she encountered.

Thanks to Mrs. Ellison, Geannie came a long ways in her healing process that afternoon. Geannie was a strong woman, physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Yes, she still had her moments. Getting over something as traumatic as what she had been through takes time, even for the strongest.

Geannie thanked Elenore for everything that she had done for her and assured her that she would be alright and took Sandy home. Not long after they returned to their apartment, there was a knock at the door. Geannie answered to find Ramona standing on the doorstep, still in her nurses uniform.

"Come in, Ramona." Geannie invited.

Before coming in, she gave Geannie a hug and asked? "Are you alright? I came over as soon as I got off duty."

"My, word gets around." Geannie said as Romona came in and the two of them sat down.

"I was on duty last night, but during my break this morning, I was looking through the newspaper and read what happened. I had to come and make sure that you were alright."

"Thanks Ramona, you're a good friend. I'm alright." She assured her.

"Well you don't look so good. That's quite a shiner."

"It looks worse than it feels now."

"What you need is some witch hazel. It will take care of the bruising."

"Witch hazel? I've never heard of it."

"It's an herbal compound made from a shrub. My mother used to use something similar to it all the time, but witch hazel is more common. It really helps."

"That sounds good. I'll have to try it. Where would I find some?"

"Go to just about any drug store and ask for Dickinson's Witch Hazel. It comes in an eight ounce bottle. In addition to healing bruises, it's a terrific makeup remover and an excellent skin toner. I use it all the time."

"I'll be sure to get some." Geannie concluded.

"Now," Ramona insisted, "tell me what happened."

Geannie rehearsed to her whole episode, including the visit from Mrs. Ellison as Ramona listened intently. When she was finished, Geannie said, "And that's about it."

"All I can say is, girl you've got guts. You're about the only woman I know who could of handled it like that."

"I don't know about that. I'm certainly not the hero the paper says I am."

"You're my hero, Geannie, in so, so many ways. I just want you to know that I really look up to you."

"Well, thanks Ramona. That's kind of you to say."

"I really mean it." Changing the subject, Ramona said, "I don't know about you but, I'm starved. I just got off work, you know. How about you?"

"Yeah I guess I am. I haven't eaten much since this whole thing happened."

"Good. Grab Sandy and let me take you out for something to eat."

The next day, Geannie resumed her normal activities. Her black eye still hadn't begin to recede but it didn't hurt. She wasn't sure if Curly would be home that day or not. Hoping that he would, she made a special dinner. She was right in the middle of it and couldn't leave when she heard the planes coming in.

She was in the kitchen when she heard the door open and the sound of the voice she missed so much announce, "I'm home!" 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 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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The San Diego Union was one of two daily newspapers serving San Diego in 1926. The other was the Evening Tribune

Witch Hazel is an American Indian herbal remedy from the bark and stems of a shrub by the same name. Dickinson's Witch Hazel is a real product first formulated in the 1860s by the EE Dickinson Company of Essex, Connecticut and is still produced.

