

Chapter XXXI

Heritage

May 27, 1938 – June 1, 1938

School for Geannie and the kids let out on Friday the 27th of May, Curly took his leave to correspond with the end of the school year. They loaded up the car and Saturday morning got on the road for Roanoke and pulled up in front of the Austin Mansion early in the afternoon. Marie anticipating their arrival, was waiting for them in the porch swing.

“Hi Grandma!” Sandy and Austin called in unison as they ran up to her on the porch.

“When did you get so big?” She fussed over them, giving each a hug and kiss on the forehead. Marie, now seventy, had been alone in that big house for six and a half years. It was a relief to her to not have the stable and the property behind the house to worry about too. The city had extended it and Lusk Avenue now ran right behind the house.

After being fussed over, Sandy and Austin rushed off to Walt and Sarah's to see their cousins, Sylvia and Curtis who were their same ages.

Curly and Geannie came up the steps with the first load of their luggage. They set it down and received a warm welcoming embrace from Marie. Curly left Geannie on the porch swing with her mother while he carried the first of their luggage upstairs. The room they stayed in while they were home had been Geannie's while growing up. Sandy and Austin stayed in two of the other upstairs bedrooms. After two or three trips, the car was unloaded. Curly sat down on the steps to rest for minute before going next door to see his parents.

Later in the afternoon, Curly returned with Emmett and Ellen. Walt and Sarah came about the same time. Sandy and Sylvia had gone to a matinée at the showhouse and Austin and Curtis played catch in the front yard while the adults visited on the porch.

“So how long are you here for this time?” Walt wanted to know.

“I can only stay for a couple of weeks.” Curly answered. “But Geannie and the kids are planning on staying all summer.”

“Why do you have to leave so soon, Curly?” his father asked. “I thought you had the whole month.”

“Well,” Curly answered, “My ship was just commissioned a couple of weeks ago and will be ready for flight operations and I need to be there to take my squadron aboard.

“Then,” he continued, “we'll be taking her down to Rio on her shakedown cruise in July and I won't be back until later in September.”

Geannie chimed in, “So with him gone all summer, the kids and I are going to stay until its time to go back to school.”

From there the conversation broke into two. Curly was telling his dad and brother all about the

Enterprise and the Shooting Stars. Sarah raved over how great Geannie looked. Geannie changed the subject to how the kids were doing. Marie had slipped into the house and returned with a big picture of lemonade and enough classes for everyone along with the batch of cookies that she had made that morning. As the afternoon wore on, the girls had returned from the picture show and Walt and Sarah's two older children, Emmaline and Timothy, joined the gathering. They were both a few years older than the younger ones. Meanwhile Marie, Geannie and Sarah went into the kitchen and put together the fixings for a light meal and brought it out on the front porch.

Sunday found the Austins and the Brasons in their usual place during Sunday services. Whenever Curly attended church when he was home, his uniform turned a lot of heads, particularly the young boys who looked to him as real life hero. After church, all of the Austins got together for Sunday Dinner.

This was the first time in a long time that Curly and Geannie had been home on Memorial day. Marie, Sarah, and Geannie cut some fresh peonies, irises, and lilacs from her yard and put together some bouquets. They went out to the cemetery together and placed flowers on the graves of Grandpa Austin, Charles Emmett, Sarah's mother and father, and all of the grandparents. Sarah took the kids on a family history tour of the cemetery and showed them where all of their Austin ancestors were buried and told a little about each one.

The Austin Plantation had its beginnings in 1757 when Sir Andrew Foster Austin sought a safe place to hide his family from the King of England. Andrew had been a nobleman in England and was a member of the House of Commons. He had enraged King George II when he proposed a measure that would give the American Colonies more autonomy, including representation in parliament. Branded a traitor and accused of high treason, he fled England with only his wife their three year old daughter. They secured passage on a ship bound for the Colonies under an assumed name. Disguised as an old man, he barely escaped capture when the ship was searched before sailing.

After twelve weeks at sea, they arrived in Philadelphia where they thought they were safe. It wasn't long before word of the fugitive traveled across the Atlantic Ocean and wanted posters with his picture began to appear. Fearful of capture, they fled again. It seemed the frontier was the only place to seek refuge.

Andrew obtained a wagon and team of horses, loaded up what belongings they had and headed for the less populated southern colonies on The Great Wagon Road which was the main route to the south transiting the back county of Great Appalachian Valley from Pennsylvania to North Carolina.

After traveling several days, they came to a place in the Roanoke Valley of southwestern Virginia. It was sparsely settled and far from the watchful eyes of British troops. At the point where the road crossed what was then known as the Staunton River and later the Roanoke River, they stopped as it was getting late in the year. He went to work clearing a place to build a temporary cabin using the timber that he had cleared.

Finding the winter mild, game plentiful, rich soil, the Indians friendly, and settlers opposed to crown, Andrew decided to stay. During the next year he built a more suitable home and cleared more land. It was there that his first son William was born in 1759. Over the years three more children were born and they were secure and prospered in their new home.

Being a fugitive from the king is something that lasts the rest of a persons life. Even though King George II had been succeeded by his son George III, the charge of treason still stood. For eighteen years Andrew had eluded capture and execution. Then one day in 1772 while fifteen year old William was hunting in the nearby foothills, Andrew's luck ran out.

When William returned with his game, he was greeted by a scene of horror. Their home had been burned to the ground. He found his father pinned to an oak tree with arrows and in the yard, the ravaged bodies of his mother and older sister. All of them had been scalped. There was no sign of his younger brother and sisters; William never did know what became of them. At first glance, it looked like an Indian massacre. But things didn't add up to William who was well acquainted with the local Indians. Then he found a calling card left behind by the murders. Clutched in his mother's fist was a the button from the uniform of an officer in the king's army. She no doubt had ripped it form his coat while he was in the act of defiling her.

William buried the bodies of his father, mother, and sister in what eventually became the Roanoke City Cemetery. For the next several years he lived off the land in the manner of his Indian friends. They taught him how to survive, hunt, and fish, and more importantly, how to fight. On many occasions William joined them on raids against the British who had been dispatched to drive the savages over the Appalachian Mountains and out of Virginia. With time, Andrew married the daughter of an Occaneechi Indian chief.

The increasing oppression from King George III pushed the colonists into open rebellion. Soon the Declaration of Independence was proclaimed. When the British launched a campaign in the souther colonies, William gathered together a company of men and rode south and joined forces with Colonel Francis Marion, know as the Swamp Fox. William was

granted the commission of Captain and placed in command of the company. For the next several years they fought the British using highly unorthodox methods of warfare for the day.

Eventually, the colonists succeeded and a new nation of thirteen untied states emerged from the former colonies. With the war over, Andrew returned to the Roanoke Valley where he was granted nearly two thousand acres by the Commonwealth of Virginia which included the homestead that his father had established.

William founded the Austin Plantation in 1783 and built a fine home and settled in to work the land and raise his family. His wife had converted to Christianity, learned to speak English, and adopted the name of William's mother, Elizabeth. Together they raised four children, having lost two in infancy. With time three of their children and their families set out for new opportunities in Kentucky. Only Francis Marion Austin remained to inherit the plantation. It was he who established the sawmill along the river at the west edge of the plantation. It was a profitable business as timber was plentiful and lumber was in demand as new settlers were coming to the Roanoke Valley. With the demand for land, he sold off portions of the plantation to the new comers.

The children were captivated by the stories that Sarah told as they wandered among the headstones with the Austin name. She went on to tell the stories of Charles Austin Sr. and how he founded the bank and her grandfather Charles, Jr. who fought on the side of the Confederacy during the Civil War. That brought her to her father and the Senator.

After leaving the cemetery, it was the Brason's turn to get together for their annual Memorial Day picnic that afternoon.

That night as Curly and Geannie lay in bed talking, Curly asked, "Do you know what I'd like to do on this visit?"

"No, Commander." she answered. "What would you like to do?"

"I'd love to spend a couple of days at the lake. We have our camping gear stored here, why don't we dig it out and camp out at the lake. You did bring our bathing suits didn't you?"

"Yes I did!" Geannie said excitedly. "That sounds like a great idea. We haven't been there since just before Daddy died." She paused for a moment and added, "There's only one problem, we'd have to pack it all in. Maybe camping isn't such a good idea, but we could pack a picnic and make a day trip out of it."

Changing the subject, Curly mentioned, "Dad, Walt, and Shenan are trying to talk me into going golfing with them."

"I think you should go with them." Geannie encouraged.

"You know how I hate golf. I never could get the swing of it." Curly protested.

"That's not the point, Commander." Geannie interrupted. "It would be good for you just to spend some time with them. I think you should go."

"I'll think about it." Curly agreed. "Now come here and kiss me."

Geannie laid across his chest so she could reach him and gave him the kiss he had asked for. "Is that all you want Flyboy?"

"Hmmm. That was pretty good, how about another one?"

This time she kissed him longer.

"You know what they say, don't you?" Curly asked.

"And what do 'they' say?"

"A kiss without a squeeze is like a burger without cheese!" he answered.

"Hey there mister." Geannie giggled. "Watch where you put your hands! That's mine."

"Would you like some more of that?" Curly asked

"Could you make it a double cheeseburger?" Geannie snickered.

She laughed when Curly gave her another squeeze.

About then, Sandy called from the next room, "Hey, will you two be quiet. I'm trying to go sleep."

"Sorry Sweetheart." Geannie called back. "Good night."

"And good night to you too, Commander." Geannie said as she gave Curly one last lingering kiss.

The next morning they asked the kids if they would like to go to the lake for a picnic. They thought that sounded like a great idea, so it was decided that tomorrow would be the day. Curly agreed to go golfing with his dad and brothers on Saturday.

The day of the picnic was a beautiful first day of June. Geannie and Sandy prepared the picnic and packed their bathing suits. Austin helped Curly take it all out to the car. With the top down, as they headed out of town into the countryside and up the mountain they sang every song they could think of. It had the makings of enjoyable family outing.

Curly hoped they could access the trail from the cabin. But as they came to the turn off, they were met with disappointment. "Oh look," Geannie said. "There's a gate across the driveway."

Curly added, "And from the looks of that chain and lock and the 'No Trespassing' sign, I don't think anybody wants us going in there." He pulled onto the lane and stopped at the gate. Beyond the bridge across the creek, they could see the cabin.

"Look at this place!" Geannie moaned. "It's all run down."

"It doesn't look like anyone has been here in years." Curly commented as he and Geannie got out of the car and stood at the gate.

"The porch swing is hangin by one chain and the windows are all boarded up." Geannie observed. "What a shame. I declare, Daddy would roll over in his grave."

"What's this?" Curly asked as he stooped down to pull a for sale sign out of the weeds next to the gate.

Geannie looked at the sign, and a light went on in her head. "Why don't we buy it?" she said excitedly.

"We can't buy it," Curly replied. "We don't even live here. For all we know, we will most likely end up back in San Diego."

"I don't mean you and me, silly," Geannie giggled. "I mean all of us. I mean my family. If we all went in together, maybe we could come up with enough money."

"Sandy, bring me my handbag, please."

Geannie took out her notepad and a pencil and wrote down the information on the sign. Curly went to hang it on the gate, but Geannie took it from him and stashed it back into the weeds where they found it. "I don't want anyone else to get the idea."

"Well, we can't get to the lake from here," Curly said. "I guess we'll have to go on up the road and take the hunting trail."

They all got back into the car and drove on up the road and pulled off at the trail head. Curly carried the picnic basket, Austin brought he beach umbrella and fishing poles, Geannie took their bathing suits and towels, and Sandy brought the old well worn picnic blanket. The hike to the lake was a little longer than the trail from the cabin. But soon they were at the shore of the small lake and found that they had the place all to themselves.

The first order of business was skipping rocks. As many rocks as had been tossed into the lake over the years, it was a wonder there were any left. There were enough rocks to skip for years to come. After a while it was time for lunch and they made some ham sandwiches from the leftovers from the Brason Memorial Day picnic. In fact most of their picnic was leftovers, including a half a cake.

Applying the thirty minute rule, they waited to go swimming until the after the picnic was put away. Geannie gave Curly and Austin their bathing suites and a towel a piece and sent them around the bend to change in the bushes.

Then Geannie and Sandy secluded themselves in another patch of bushes to change. After they had both slipped out of their clothes, Geannie looked at Sandy. "My goodness, aren't you blossoming into a young woman."

Sandy looked down at her body and lamented, "I feel so ugly!"

"You're not ugly, sweetheart. Come here." Geannie pulled the gangly thirteen year old woman-child

close and held her next to her own body, pressing Sandy's cheek next against her chest.

Sandy pushed away and cried, "Look at me, Mom. I've got long skinny arms and legs and just look at these little knobs. "

"Give yourself a year and you'll look a lot different." Geannie assured her. "I'm going to tell you what my mother told me when I was your age. When my breasts started to bud, I didn't want them. Grandma told me that a woman's breasts are the blossoms on the flower of womanhood"

Feeling a little better, Sandy said, "I hope my body looks a beautiful as yours."

"However you turn out, your body will be beautiful. All women are different and you will be as God intended you to be. The Bible says, 'know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you.' It says its a temple, not an amusement park. That is why we dress modestly and keep ourselves neat and clean. It's not something we go around showing off."

"Thanks, Mom." Sandy said. "I feel better about myself."

"Listen, sweetheart." Geannie continued. "If there is ever anything at all you want to know about your body, just ask me. I will never laugh at you or put you down. Do you recollect when I told you about a woman's cycles, or when I helped you with your first brassiere. I will always be open and honest with you. One of these days, we'll talk about boys. Now that's a whole other subject. Speaking of boys, we had better put on our bathin suits before your father and brother wonder where we are and come lookin for us."

A moment later, the mother and daughter joined Curly and Austin who had already swam out to the rock. After an hour or so of swimming and playing in the water, it was time to get out. They retired to the respective changing areas and dried off and changed back into their clothes.

After a light afternoon snack, they tried their hands at little fishing. Between all of them together, they caught enough for a good fish fry later in the week.

On the way home, Geannie wanted Curly to stop by the cabin again. Ignoring the no trespassing sign, she didn't let the fact that she was wearing a dress stop her from climbing over the gate and went to have a look. All of the windows were boarded up but one of the boards over the picture window was loose. Geannie pried one end off so she could peek inside.

It was as much of a mess on the inside as it was outside. Nothing a good cleaning, some paint, and few repairs couldn't fix. After having a peek, she put the board back and secured the nail with a rock.

Getting back in the car, she told Curly, "I don't want to say anything to anyone else until I can look into it." All the way home she talked about her vision of reacquiring the cabin, fixing it up, and gathering there as a family.

* * * * *

