

Chapter XXXIX

The Clouds of War

August 3, 1941 – December 7, 1941

The next morning, the sun had been up for about a half an hour when Curly and Geannie woke up at 6:30. As they laid in bed next to each other, Curly said, "That was some evening last night, wasn't it?"

"I'll say." Geannie answered. "The admiral sure knows how to host a social event."

"I was taking about you and me after we got home."

"Oh that. Yeah, that was something alright. Just think, if we got drunk like those poor fools, we wouldn't be able to remember the highlight of the evening."

"We'll I think I'll get up and hit the shower." Curly said. "What about you?"

"I think I'll lay here a little longer. I'll get up when you get out."

Geannie laid there listing to the shower run and couldn't get back to sleep so she got up and surprised Curly when stepped into the shower behind him just as he was finishing up. "Would you like me to scrub your back?"

"I already did, but yeah that would be nice." he said as he went to turn around.

"I'd rather reach around you." she said and she put her arms around him with her body pressed against his and began soaping up his back with her hands. "This way we can wash each others back at the same time."

Curly reached around behind her and did the same for her.

"That was nice wasn't it? Now get out of here so I can have my shower, or we'll be late for services." Geannie insisted.

Sheffield got out and went ahead and got dressed in his suit and went out on the doorstep and picked up the morning edition of the Honolulu Star-Bulletin and sat down at the kitchen table with it. A moment later he heard Geannie call out, "Sandy, its your turn." before she when back into the bedroom to get dressed.

A few minutes later she came out into the kitchen and began setting out breakfast. "Is there anything interesting in the paper this morning?" she asked as she put a box of Wheaties and a box of Cheerioats on the table.

"I'll say." Sheffield answered. "After freezing all Japanese assets in the United States last week, now Secretary Hull has hit them with an oil embargo to pressure them to get out of China."

"How did they respond to that?" Geannie asked as she set the table.

"Not very well, I'm afraid. They are accusing us of declaring economic war on them."

"What do you think is going to happen?"

"I think we need to step up our training." he answered. "Halsey and the rest of the top brass are

sure that something is going to snap one of these days. And when it does, we'll have our hands full because if we go to war with Japan, Germany and Italy will declare war on us as well."

"I'm just glad that we've stayed out of it this long." Geannie answered as she set out some bread and butter. "After all, the rest of the world is involved."

"That's why I keep asking you if you want to go home." Curly reminded her.

Rather than answer him, she called out, "Kids, breakfast is ready"

A moment later, Sandy and Austin came out into the kitchen and they all sat down to eat. As Curly said Grace, he asked that peace be restored in the world so war could be avoided.

After breakfast while Sandy finished getting ready Austin got in the shower and was dressed and ready before her. While the kids were getting ready, Geannie put on the finishing touches to her make up and hair while Curly read the paper.

When they were all ready, they got in the car and drove to the church for Sunday School which started at 9:00 and was followed by the worship service at 10:00. After services they came home and changed their clothes and had lunch. The afternoon was spent with Ramona at her beach house.

As the staff was assembling on Monday morning Commander Browning railed on Curly in the presence of some of the other staff members, accusing him of insubordination and disloyalty. His tirade was interrupted when Admiral Halsey entered the smoke filled conference room. Everyone rose to their feet and snapped to attention.

After putting everyone at ease, Admiral Halsey asked Commander Browning, "What's the commotion all about?"

"Sir, you have traitor among your staff."

"Oh really, and just who might that be, Commander?"

"It's Commander Brason, Sir. At your party, he showed terrible disloyalty to you during the toast."

"How's that Miles?"

"Did you know that he and that wife of his toasted you with soft drinks instead of the liquor that you so generously provided?"

"I should hope so. I would have been disappointed in them otherwise."

"But, Sir." Commander Browning protested.

"Nonsense. I know of no finer people than Commander Brason and his lovely wife. He works as hard as anyone toward the success of this command." At that Admiral Halsey raised his coffee mug, "To Commander Brason." he toasted. That silenced Commander Browning, and nothing more was said of the issue. Knowing the Admiral's opinion of Curly, Miles went out of his way in attempting to treat him with

greater respect and dignity.

The next day, Curly went to sea for three days and was home on Friday. The next week was pretty much the same routine. Again that summer, there was not a trip home to Roanoke. Instead their vacations consisted of weekend get aways and day trips whenever Curly was in port.

Austin celebrated his fourteenth birthday on the 17th . That year his birthday was on a Saturday when Curly happened to be home. Curly, Geannie and Sandy attended his baseball game in early afternoon. Ramona even came to watch. Then after the game, which by the way they lost, Geannie threw a birthday party for him in their backyard. At fourteen, he was still two years away from being able to solo, but he was making good progress in the flying lessons that Curly was giving him.

The following Monday Curly went to sea for ten days and when he got back he had a whole week before having to leave again. They took advantage of every day of that week, which included Labor Day. Since they couldn't attend the Brason Labor Day picnic back home, they had their own. They had invited Ramona, but being the shift supervisor, she took another nurse's shift so she could have the day off to spend with her husband, since he too was going back to sea.

On Wednesday, Geannie and the kids went back to school and Curly went back to sea. The fleet stepped up their training exercises even further, spending more time at sea, which took Curly away from home more often. Now instead of three days out during the middle of the week, he was out for a week at a time, sometimes more. But fortunately, ships need upkeep and maintenance which kept them in port at times for a week or more .

During the last full week of September, the Enterprise was in port and on Thursday the 25th and hosted Captain Lord Louis Mountbatten of the Royal Navy, great grandson of Queen Victoria and second cousin to King George VI, the king of England, as a special guest. Lord Mountbatten was the Captain of the British aircraft carrier HMS Illustrious which was in Norfolk for repairs following action at Malta in the Mediterranean in January. While his ship was in the yard he paid a visit to Pearl Harbor.

While aboard, he was hosted by Captain Murray and Admiral Halsey and received a guided tour of the ship. That evening Admiral Halsey hosted an evening of entertainment in honor of their guest on the hangar deck of the Enterprise to which other special guests were invited, including the wives of his staff.

Geannie looked forward to the evening with anticipation, as this was the first time she had the opportunity to meet anyone connected to British royalty. The evening began with a private dinner, also hosted by Admiral Halsey. After dinner they were escorted to the hangar bay where chairs were set up. As they entered the hangar, the crew were already in their seats. While everyone was being seated the ship's band provided the entertainment.

The main entertainment for the evening was the movie Dive Bomber, which had been filmed aboard

the Enterprise while she was on the West Coast back in April. The movie had only been released a month earlier. Prior to watching the movie, Admiral Halsey addressed those in attendance and introduced Lord Mountbatten, who also made some remarks before the movie was shown.

The film, starring Errol Flynn and Fred McMurray, was about a flight surgeon who teamed with a ranking naval aviator to develop a high-altitude suit to protect pilots from blacking out when they go into a steep dive. For Geannie it was fascinating to see what Curly had been doing all of those years when he was flying from aircraft carriers, particularly the Enterprise. He wasn't flying when the movie was made but he could be seen in the background of several of the scenes that were filmed aboard the ship.

Long gone were the days of yellow wings, blue tails and colorful section markings that were still in place when the movie was filmed. Since then it gave way to light gray a few months earlier. As the clouds of war gathered more ominous, there were further subtle indications. As of August 20th all ship based aircraft were to have their topsides (and the undersides of the wings if visible from above when folded, as was the case with the Devastators) painted blue gray while the remainder of the undersides were left light gray. As with the light gray scheme, the national insignia was worn on the upper left and bottom right wings and on both sides of the fuselage with black identification numbers. The Enterprise Air Group quickly complied and everyone thought it was a good idea.

The following Monday Curly went to sea again and returned four days later on the 2nd of October. As the clouds of war grew even darker in October, many of the military families began evacuating the islands and returned to the States. This led to some serious discussions for Curly and Geannie.

"Geannie, I need to talk to you about something." Curly said one night in mid October as they were getting ready for bed. "I think its time that you and the kids should go home to Roanoke. Things are going to get pretty ugly one of these days and it is going to be soon."

"I know a lot of families have left already and others are making plans to leave." Geannie admitted. "But the kids and I love it here so much, and we're with you. Certainly the war won't come here. From what I read and hear, they expect it to be Philippines."

"If it were in the Philippines or wherever, I would have to go and wouldn't be here with you anyway. Besides there is a lot of behind the scenes talk of defending Hawaii against an all out assault. I don't know when or where it will start, but I want you and the kids safe. Back home is the safest place I can think of."

"But I'm right in the middle of a semester." Geannie protested. "It wouldn't be right for me to just up and quit. Besides its hard to pull the kids out and get them resettled like that."

"You've done it before. Please, Geannie. Just think about it. You know, I'm going to sea later this week and will be gone for several days. Please give it some serious thought and let's talk about it some more when I get back."

Their conversation turned to the lighter events of the day as they lay in bed next to each other. There was the final good night kiss before going to sleep.

On Friday the 17th Curly went to sea as scheduled. For some reason, this time it didn't seem to Geannie as routine as all of the other times had been. She thought about it a lot while he was gone. She looked around her classroom at the number of empty chairs as many of her students had left with their families. All of a sudden there were a lot of new teachers that had started in the middle of the semester replacing others who had quit to move back to the mainland. Geannie talked to the principal about it. He told her that if she felt she needed to leave, he wouldn't blame her. If they couldn't replace her, he could consolidate her class with another one because of the number students had declined so much.

During her morning devotionals she found herself reading in Chronicles about the war clouds gathering around Jerusalem and the warnings that Jeremiah gave the people, and how they scoffed at him. Geannie wondered if she was doing the same thing.

She talked to Sandy and Austin about it and they told her that they would go along with whatever she and their father decided. But still, the allure of paradise and being with Curly tugged at their heart strings.

Curly returned on the 29th and was scheduled to be home for nearly two weeks before having to leave again. They continued their discussion of having Geannie and the kids go home. There was still some reluctance on their part until Sandy's seventeenth birthday. That morning news reached Hawaii of an event that transpired in the North Atlantic the day before. The destroyer USS Reuben James had been torpedoed and sunk by a German U-boat. Of her crew of one hundred and fifty nine, only forty four survived.

That one event, even though far from their home in paradise, brought home the reality of the looming conflict that was surly coming. "I could end up anywhere in the world." Curly said.

"Do you recollect what I told you when we were first married and you left on that world cruise? I said, 'I knew that bein a Navy wife there would be times like that.... My love for you is bigger than this old world. Wherever you go in it, you will be right here,'" as she placed both hands over her heart. "It would be just as true in Roanoke as it here".

"Who knows how long it will last but I plan on coming home when it is all over. If for some reason if I didn't, would you remarry?" Curly asked.

"I thought I had lost you once and I don't want to go through that again. Why? Would you want me to?"

"I would hate to see you go through the rest of your life alone. So, yes. I would want you to find someone who could make you happy and take care of you and be good to the kids."

“What if something would happen to me? Would you remarry?” Geannie returned the question.

“It's not very likely anything is going to happen to you.”

“You never know. I'd want you to remarry for the same reason. I wouldn't want you to spend the rest of your life alone either. But I wouldn't want you to rush right out and get married either. If you did, I'd come back and haunt you.”

“Oh, and how soon is too soon?” Curly asked.

“I think after a year or two it would be alright to start thinking about looking around. But you won't need to. I have already picked out who I would want you to marry.” Geannie said with a serious expression.

“And just who might that be?”

“If something were to happen to me I wouldn't mind it one bit if you married Ramona.”

“Ramona? Why her?”

“Well for one thing, she is one of my best friends, she's available, and I think she is in love with you.”

“That's ridiculous! You don't know what you're talking about. Do you want to know what I think? I think you're a dime short of a dollar.” Curly retorted.

“I know her pretty well. She has never said or done anything that would betray the way she feels. I can't say as I blame her. After all, I'm in love with you, aren't I?”

“I like Ramona just fine, she's a good friend, but I'm don't love her.”

“I know you don't. You're as faithful of a husband as any woman could ask for.”

“So, what makes you think she is in love with me?”

“I've seen how she listens intently to every word you say. Haven't you noticed how she will touch your hand or your arm when she talks to you. Just little things, like when she has a hug for you.”

“Some people are just kind of touchy feely but it doesn't mean anything.” Curly protested. Then he added. “Doesn't that make you jealous?”

“No, because I have you and she knows that she can't. She will just hold it inside and never say or do anything about it. Actually, it makes you more precious to me knowing that someone else would want you. That means I really have something!

“Well no one but you is going ever going to have me. I'm coming home after the war and you will be waiting for me and we're going to grow old together and watch our grandchildren grow up. We came into this world together, I want to go out together. As far as I'm concerned, we never had this conversation. I'm going to forget that we even had it.” Curly huffed.

Geannie didn't say another word. Instead she kissed him and and went on to prove him right; that she was the only woman he would ever desire.

Curly looked into the logistics of it and found the soonest he could book passage was on a ship leaving for San Francisco on December 10th. The Lurline, which brought Geannie and kids to the Islands, was sailing on December 5th full of Enterprise families and others were returning to the States, as were other ships bound for the west coast. They discussed it once more as family and decided that it would be the wisest course of action for them to take for Geannie and the kids to return to Roanoke. The next available ship was the Pacific Maiden. Since he hadn't requested any significant amount of leave time for two years, he put in a request for a thirty day leave so he could go with them, knowing it was a long shot.

Commander Browning outright refused to consider it, accusing him of wanting run and hide from the war with his wife and children. Curly managed to make an end run around around Miles and personally asked Admiral Halsey. The Admiral told Commander Browning to approve the request. He said, "Commander Brason has worked hard in preparing the squadrons and air departments to be combat ready. No they aren't ready yet and we'll keep working on it, but I think we can spare him for a month. Besides," he added, "isn't a man's first responsibility to his family. The man hasn't taken any leave for the last two years. Its doubtful he's going to get any in the next two years. I want him back here ready and focused. With his family safe at home, he can give it his full attention."

With their passage secure and Curly's leave approved, they began making plans for the move. Geannie wrote a letter to her mother telling her that she and the kids were coming home.

7 Nov 1941

Dear Mother

I have some exciting news for you! We're coming home for Christmas. And thats not all, the kids and I are coming home for good.

This comes after a great deal of consideration. I'm sure that you are well aware of the conditions in the world. Curly says war is coming very soon and we decided the best place for the kids and me would be back home in Roanoke.

He'll have to go wherever the war takes him and would be gone for long periods of time so we would never see him anyway.

Besides there is a lot of nervousness here that the Japanese could make a move against Hawaii. From what everyone says, that's unlikely. They expect it to start in the Philippines.

The notion of war terrifies me. I remember the last war all too well. So many didn't come home, including Billy. The news of the Reuben James brought it all home that things are getting serious. I can't bear the thought of something like that happening to Curly.

I know he's concerned, but he doesn't say much. I know it's because he doesn't want to upset me and the kids. All during the fall he has been gone a lot as they are getting in all the training and preparation they can. In fact he is going to sea again in three days and will be gone for a week.

I try not to think about it. Now that we have decided once and for all, I keep my mind occupied with the thought of coming home. It has been two years since we were home last. That's way too long. I have loved living in Paradise and will miss it here.

Curly was able to get a thirty day leave to bring us home. It was a little difficult but he got it approved. We sail on the 10th of December and will arrive in San Francisco on the 16th. Early the next morning we will get on the train for the cross country trip. We will be taking a different route this time so we will be seeing some new scenery. We will arrive in Roanoke on the evening of the

20th.

I am going to see if I can find a teaching position. In fact I am sending my resume to the public school district and see what happens. After Curly leaves, I think I'll find a place of our own for the kids and me to live.

After all these years of tagging along wherever Curly went, It will be hard to not see him for who knows how long. In the past he has been gone for months at a time.. It could be a year or two before we see him again.

I am very excited to be close to you. We have a lot of time to make up for. The kids have grown so much since you last saw them. You won't believe how much they've grown. The photos I have sent you don't do justice to them.

I look forward to seeing you on the 20th of next month. Give everyone my love, especially Sarah, and let them know that we are coming home.

Love Seannie

She also put a resume in the mail to the Roanoke Public School District, giving her mother's address and telephone number as the contact information.

Curly went to sea again for a week between the 10th and 17th of November. When he returned he was scheduled to be home for two weeks before leaving again. It was a short week for everyone. Geannie and the kids got out of school early on Wednesday afternoon and Curly came home at his usual time. For the first time in three years, they were together for Thanksgiving. Geannie went all out for a traditional feast and invited Ramona to join them, which she did.

Realizing that this would be their last chance for a weekend outing, they decided to take the

weekend and go up to the North Shore. After all they had never made it up there yet.

They got an early start on Saturday morning and drove up the valley through the center of the island to Haleiwa on the North Shore and on up to Kawela Bay at the very northern tip of Oahu where they stayed the night. The North Shore, known for its massive waves, was a drastic contrast to the area around Honolulu. It had a beauty all its own.

On Sunday they headed down along the east shore. Before they had gone very far, they came to the community of Laie where they stopped for breakfast. Geannie noticed a palace that had a row of fountains lined by palm trees running up to it. "Let's stop and take a look." she suggested.

Curly turned into the driveway, the gate was open although there was no sign of anyone being there. He parked the car and they got out to walk around the immaculate grounds.

"What is this place?" Geannie asked. "It feels as if we are on sacred ground."

"From the inscription above the door, 'Holiness to the Lord. The House of the Lord', I'd say it is church of some kind." Curly said.

Sandy chimed in, "The sign at the gate said something about a temple and the really long name of some church."

As they continued walking around the building, Geannie was overcome by a powerful feeling she had only experienced on occasion. "This place," she gasped "has some sort of connection with eternity and our relationship to each other there."

As they continued walking around in silence, she felt a very strong impression. "This place. This temple, or whatever it is, holds the answers to what I have been looking for ever since we lost Charles Emmett." She announced to her family. "We can be together for ever! All of us, including Charles Emmett."

As she spoke, a sense of awe overcame all of them. Somehow they knew that there was something to what she said. Needing to be on their way, they had to leave. As they pulled out of the parking lot, Geannie wrote down the name of the church on the sign at the gate. She decided that she would have to look into it when they got back to the States.

The rest of the day was spent driving along the shore. Geannie pondered on what she had felt back there. After several stops along the way, taking in the sites and scenery, they rounded Makapuu Point and drove on along the south shore past Koko Head and Ramona's beach house. That raised a discussion about spending time at the cabin once they got home.

Curly spent the next week working out of his office and was home every evening by 5:30 or 6:00. On Thursday morning before breakfast he took a few minutes to look at the newspaper.

The news was not good. For months diplomats in both Washington and Tokyo had been in serious negotiations in an attempt to resolve Japanese-American relations. But no solution could be agreed upon

for three key reasons: Japan's alliance with Germany and Italy; Japan's quest for economic control and dominance of Southeast Asia; and their refusal to leave mainland China.

In their final proposal on 20th Japan offered to withdraw their forces from southern Indochina and not to launch any attacks in southeast Asia provided that the U.S., Britain, and the Netherlands ceased aiding China and lifted their sanctions against Japan.

The paper that morning reported that Secretary Hull's counter proposal demanded that Japan evacuate all of China without conditions and sign a multilateral non-aggression pact between Japan, the United States, Great Britain, China, the Soviet Union, the Netherlands and Thailand.

"I'll bet they'll never go for that." Curly said as he sat down the paper and had breakfast with Geannie and kids. Curly was the first on out the door as her went to work. Geannie and the kids left for school not long after.

That day, the staff worked on the tactical plan for the upcoming exercises while at sea next week. Before they had got very far, Admiral Halsey and Commander Browning were called away to attend a meeting with Admiral Kimmell, the commander in Chief of the Pacific Fleet. Before leaving, the Admiral left Commander William Buracker, the operations officer, and Curly, the air officer in charge of working out the details.

Of the men on the staff, Curly had the most in common with Commander Buracker. They both were at the Academy at the same time, only he was two years ahead of Curly. He also earned his wings a couple of years ahead of Curly. He was a fellow Virginian from the area around Harrisonburg where Curly's mother was from. He actually knew some of Curly's cousins.

That evening just as he got home from work, the telephone rang. It was Commander Browning calling for Curly.

After hanging up Curly announced, "We have orders to sail tomorrow."

"But you weren't scheduled to leave until Monday." Jeannie protested.

"I know. Something about an emergency sortie drill and training some Marine fliers."

"When will you be back?"

"According to Miles, we should be back around Monday or Tuesday. I should be home for our birthaversary."

Geannie said, "Our last day at school is the 5th. That would give us time to pack before leaving on the 10th."

A few minutes later, the telephone rang again. Geannie answered and this time it was the Admiral himself. He called to invite them to an impromptu informal dinner party that he was hosting at the Halewulani Hotel. After quickly conferring with Curly, she accepted the invitation.

They, along with others of the staff arrived at the hotel at seven. During dinner and afterwards something seemed wrong. The Admiral had an air of nonchalance about him while Fan seemed to be agitated. It was obvious that there was something out of the ordinary about putting to sea the next morning.

The Admiral and Fan spent a few minutes visiting with Curly and Geannie individually, as they did with everyone else. They talked about Geannie and the kids returning to the States. He told Curly to enjoy his leave because they would be stepping up training even more after the first of the year.

The conversation turned to their upcoming twentieth wedding anniversary on December 7th. The Halseys were intrigued by the fact that it was also both of their birthdays. Geannie told them the story of how they were born the same day and had grown up together.

Admiral Halsey always seemed to enjoy being around Geannie. He paid more attention to her than he did the wives of the other officers on his staff. Geannie found a charm about him that others didn't see.

On Friday morning, Curly was getting ready to leave as Geannie came home from her run. Curly was shaving as she climbed under a thick blanket of bubbles in the bathtub. While she relaxed in the tub, he and the kids had breakfast before they got ready for school.

Geannie emerged from her bath and was drying off as he put the last of his things together. As he was ready to leave, she let her towel drop to the floor and gave him a kiss and a hug goodbye. She teasingly tempted him with her body, "Wouldn't you rather stay and have some of this?"

"Won't that make you late for school?"

"Not if we hurry." she said as she loosened his tie and unbuttoned the top button on his khaki shirt.

"As much as I'd love to, I really have to go. I'll keep this image of loveliness in mind to remind me of what I'll have to come home to." At that, there was one more hug and kiss goodbye. "I'll be back and take you home." Before leaving the room, Curly took one long last look at the sight of her goddess like body crystallized forever in his memory – never to be forgotten. After he left, Geannie began to get dressed and get ready for the day.

Before leaving the house, he had hugs for the kids. He told Austin that he was in command and to look after his mother and sister. "I'll see you in the funny pages." Curly said as he closed the door behind him and walked out to Little Bertha and drove off for his base.

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Lord Mountbatten's visit to the Enterprise is factual as was an evening of entertainment. The movie shown is simply conjecture. Dive Bomber was filmed aboard the Enterprise in April 1941 and was released on August 21, 1941.

CheeriOats were introduced in May 1941, however the name was changed to Cheerios in 1945.

The negotiations with Japan were as described.

Commander Buraker was the Operations Officer on Admiral Halsey's staff at the time. He graduated from the Naval Academy in 1919 and received his flight training at Pensacola during 1922.

The orders to sail and party hosted by Admiral Halsey the night before the Enterprise sailed actually happened as described.

