

Chapter III

An Emotional Checkup

July 1, 1942 – August 18, 1942

When Sheffield returned to the bridge there was a letter from Ramona waiting for him. He hadn't heard from her since he left Pearl Harbor. The truth was, he hadn't written to her either. They had agreed to stay in touch and she made the first move in keeping that promise.

June 17, 1942

Dear Sheffield,

A couple of days ago while on break in the nurses' lounge, I picked up a copy of Life Magazine and guess who's picture was on the cover. I was pleased to find an very good article about the Navy's newest aircraft carrier, complete with pictures. What really caught my attention was the side story about her widowed captain and how he had lost his wife and children in the attack on Pearl Harbor. It was a very nice human interest piece that put a face behind the magnificent new ship.

I must say the picture did you justice. It looks as if you are doing well. How are you, really? I think of you often and wonder how you are doing. I miss having a friendly face around here to pop in to see me once a while.

I had an opportunity to get acquainted with your old boss, Admiral Halsey. When the Enterprise returned from a cruise to the South Pacific around the last week of May, he was admitted to the hospital with a severe case of dermatitides. The poor man was so miserable. He was in the ward were I was working and I got to spend a quite a bit of time with him.

He actually remembered me from the farewell party that he hosted for you the night before you shipped out. He had nothing but good to say about you. He asked me about my friendship with Geannie and how we got acquainted. When he found out that I was with you as we watched her die, he said that she had crossed his mind from time to time. She must have really made an impression on him.

I'm sure by now that you have heard all of the news about Midway so I don't need to go into that. Missing the battle was harder on the Admiral than the suffering he was going through. He was absolutely miserable and wanted so bad to be in on the action. The day after the battle, he was released from the hospital here and was taken aboard a cruiser bound for the States for further treatment. There wasn't much we could do for him here.

The other day the Enterprise and Hornet returned to port after their triumph

at Midway. Watching the Big E steam past Hospital Point made me think of you again. I wished that you were coming in with her and would pop in to say hi. I'll be watching for the Reprisal to come sailing in one of these days and when it does, you had better stop by to see me. From the pictures in the magazine, she looks like a handsome ship. Good luck in whipping her into shape.

I have been well. It is very busy here right now. We have a lot of wounded from the Yorktown that we are taking care of. We had prepared for a lot of casualties but fortunately they were only limited to them. I'll tell you, if the Japs had not been stopped like they were, we were expecting them to hit us here again in a way that would have made December 7th look like a Sunday picnic. Thank God the crisis is over for now.

Speaking of God, you'll be pleased to know that I have attended services nearly every week. Thanks for going with me for my first time. I can say it has made a difference in my life and on my outlook. I am beginning to understand why Geannie was the way she was. Maybe someday I can become a little bit more like her. I think of her often. I wear her cross necklace all the time, just like she did. Thanks for letting me have it. It really means a lot to me.

I know that you are very busy, but I would like it very much for you to drop me a line to let me know how you are doing. It has only been six months and I am sure that you are still suffering greatly. Its still difficult for me, I can't imagine how it must be for you. Whenever I hear someone playing her piano, it makes me smile. I still can't believe that she is gone. But hey, I don't want to dwell on it here. I had hoped to cheer you up by writing to you, not bring you down. I'm afraid that I haven't done a very good job of the first and hope you forgive for the latter. I guess I'd better quit while I'm ahead.

Love Ramona

As planned, Sheffield left the ship Friday morning and his chauffeur drove him to the train station to catch the morning train to Roanoke. He got off at Richmond and had four hours before he had to catch the afternoon train. He took a cab to the Jefferson Hotel where Admiral Halsey was anticipating his visit and had room service bring in lunch for two.

The Admiral wanted to know all about the Reprisal and told him to get back to the Pacific as soon as possible and he'd bring his flag aboard and together they'd go give the Japs hell. He also wanted to know how he was doing otherwise. Admiral Halsey fondly reminisced about his association with Geannie.

The time passed quickly and it came time for Sheffield to leave for the train station. He was glad that

he had taken the time to go visit Admiral Halsey. He had been so good to him.

When the train came to a stop at the depot in Roanoke, his dad was waiting for him. Sheffield tossed his bag in the back seat and climbed in the passenger side of the car. When they got home, both of his brothers and their families were waiting for him.

Dinner had been help up, awaiting his arrival. After a round of greetings and hugs, they all sat down to at the table. After Emmett said Grace, everyone dished up. One of the first things that someone brought up was the issue of Life Magazine. Sheffield blushed and tried to change the subject. His mother insisted that he looked very handsome on the cover. Then she added, "I see that you have put on a few pounds. Good for you." He was able to change the subject away from him by telling about his chance encounter with Tim. He assured Walt and Sarah that he was doing well.

Sheffield wanted know what the plan was for tomorrow. He was pleased to hear that were all going to join the Austins at the cabin for a picnic. "I haven't been there since thanks to Geannie that it came back into the family four years ago." he said. The gathering lasted until about ten o'clock before it broke up. Sheffield went to bed soon after.

On Saturday morning, he drove his folks up to the cabin in their car. He looked forward to the day with anticipation as they wound their way up Highway 311. When they pulled into the yard, the place looked great. After greeting those who had already gathered, he went in the cabin to say hello to Marie.

As he stepped inside the door, he wasn't prepared for what happened next. It was as if time and space froze around him. A vision of him carrying Geannie through the door on their honeymoon opened up in his mind. Other scenes of being there with Geannie and the kids also played out.

He came out of the trance when Walt patted him on the back and commented, "Hey there little brother, you look like you just saw a ghost."

"Yeah. I did."

"Are you going to be alright?"

"Yeah, sure. I'm fine. Its just that this place holds so many memories of Geannie."

"While you're here, I'd like to take you aside and talk. I think you are due for another emotional checkup. I want to see how you are doing with that bookshelf."

"Remember," Sheffield corrected him, "its the whole darned library."

"We'll talk later. Right now we're at a picnic. Come with me. Marie's in the kitchen. She's anxious to see you."

It was typical of all of the Austin/Brason picnics he'd been to over the many years. It was as if they were all one big family. By marriage they were, except for Shenan and Emily. The food was delicious as

always, the conversation was great. It was one of those perfect occasions. And yet Sheffield found himself caught between two worlds, as it were. One hand the present was all around him, while on the other hand, he was surrounded by the past.. Every scene from the past was focused on Geannie, either when they were young or after they were married. Sandy and Austin at the various stages of the growth were woven into the tapestry of memories. He was interacting with the world of the present as he visited, ate, and joined in with the games, all the time observing the world of the past. The same thing happened later in the afternoon at the lake. Later in the evening as the bonfire got going good, he was relieved when his mother and father asked him to drive them home. When Sheffield went to bed that night he was exhausted physically, mentally and emotionally. That night Geannie came to him in his dreams and they were carried away in the passion that they had for one another.

On Sunday Sheffield, in uniform, attended services. The Brasons sat in their usual place, right behind the Austins. Walt's sermon was titled "In God We Trust" in which he talked about freedom and liberty and how God required that it be defended. He paid tribute to those from the congregation who had so far answered the call. He took the time to name each one, their rank and branch of service, and where they were serving. He extended an invitation to all who had served in the past to stand and be recognized. The main part of his sermon dealt with trusting in God for deliverance from the enemies of liberty and freedom.

After services, Sheffield waited for Walt to take care of a couple of matters. As he mingled with the members of the congregation, several people went out of their way to talk to him. Many of them mentioned the article in Life Magazine. He visited with people he knew well like Bill and Marge Casper and others who he barely knew like Michael and Samantha Taylor. Samantha told him how she and Geannie had got to know each other quite well four years earlier when she and the kids had stayed in Roanoke all summer. In fact, Sandy had babysat her three children a number of times. Again she invited him to Sunday dinner. Sheffield felt obligated to accept after turning them down the last time. He then excused himself from his conversation with the Taylors when Walt interrupted to tell him that he was ready for him.

The brothers went into the pastor's office and sat down. Walt began, "So Sheffield, how are doing, really? It has been seven months now."

"I'm doing better than I was for the first several weeks. Being close to home has been good for me. This is the third time I've been home since the end of April. The love and support from the family and the Austins has really helped. Before I left the Pacific all I had to lean on was Geannie's friend Ramona and the chaplain on the ship."

"Marie showed us the letter that she got from Ramona. She told of how Geannie had a big influence on her life and how much their friendship had meant to her. She told of how she was there when Geannie and the kids were brought in to the hospital and how she was with you when Geannie died. She thanked

Marie for raising such a wonderful daughter. She must have been a really good friend.”

“She is. It was her husband who was killed in that accident when everyone thought I was dead. Geannie helped her through her loss. It was ironic that years later, she helped me through mine. She really went out her way to be there when I needed someone. She even assisted at the mortuary with Geannie's hair and make up. I can't say enough good about her. In fact, I got a letter from her just the other day. I think I'll drop her a line this afternoon.”

“I'm glad there was someone there for you. I remember Geannie talking about her. I'm really glad that you are close by for the time being so we can be here for you. Yesterday at the picnic it didn't look like you were doing very well at all. You seemed quite distant.”

“It was kind of hard for me. Coming home is kind of mixed bag. On the one hand everyone is so good to me and go out of their way to make feel good. On the other hand, everywhere I look I see Geannie. Yesterday when you said that I looked like I had seen a ghost, I had. A soon as stepped inside the cabin, time seemed to stand still as I remembered in great detail going there for our honeymoon and other times we went there alone. Then all during the day I kept having flash backs to times of being there with Geannie and the kids. They keep coming to me in my dreams, especially Geannie. Lately I keep having these dreams of being with her in a married way, if you know what I mean. I sometimes even catch myself daydreaming and fantasizing about her. Is that normal or is there something wrong with me?”

“Yes, it is quite normal and it's okay. Thats one of the emotions that you are having to deal with as you pick up your books. Intimacy is an important part of the marriage relationship. On a subconscious level, this is a way of dealing with the loss of that connection with her.” Walt assured him.

“Its something that people have to watch out for. Too many times I have seen people who have lost their spouse act upon it at a conscious level by directing those feelings to another person. Just a couple of years ago there was a man who lost his wife and within six months he was involved in an affair with his brother's wife. She ended up leaving her husband and wrecking their family.”

“Speaking of dreams. I had felt somehow it was all my fault. I kept wondering if things would have been different if I had gotten out of the Navy. In this dream I was flying for an airline and came home one Sunday to discover that they had been killed in a car accident. I came to realize that it was just their time and God would have taken them either way.”

“It sounds like that was a big step forward.”

“It was. I find that there are three things that have really helped me. One is coming home. Another is being busy. When I am focused on my job, I don't dwell on it. However when I'm alone in my stateroom at night, loneliness and emptiness sets in.”

“I was concerned about you holing up on the ship like some kind of hermit. But once I saw it and all

of the familiar surroundings you have, I wasn't quite as concerned. I understand where your coming from. First off all, either way you would be alone. Secondly your ship will be leaving one of these days anyway."

"Thats one of the things that fascinate me about ships and the sea. One day your in one place and the next you are hundreds of miles away. You can go to exotic ports without ever leaving your home."

"Whats the third thing? You said there are three things that have helped."

"Just the passage of time. I am to the point were I realize that one day I can see myself through this."

"I see you're still wearing your wedding ring."

"Yeah. I'm just not ready to take it off yet. Is there anything wrong with that?"

"No. Not at all. Look at Marie. How long has the Senator been gone now?"

"About eleven years." Sheffield reflected.

Walt continued, "Its an individual thing. Its all up to you. Someday you may find it possible to love someone again."

"I thought Geannie was the only love I'd ever have. I'm not sure I can."

"You might be surprised."

"You know Walt, there is something else that has been bothering me."

"Go on."

I find I am so consumed by the loss of Geannie that it over shadows loosing the kids too. Sure, they cross my mind and I miss them, but not as much as I miss Geannie. Am I going to have to go through all of this again for them."

"No. The healing is all inclusive. Whether you know it or not, its a package deal. It's only natural that Geannie would be the main focus of your grieving."

"That makes sense."

"Know this, little brother. You can't do it all by yourself. You have to turn it over to God. He is the one that heals. When Jesus died, it wasn't just for our sins. It was for all of our pains and infirmities. Geannie learned that lesson when she healed from the trauma of being attacked. Put it in God's hands. Remember my sermon today, 'In God We Trust.' Its the only way."

"Okay, then. How do you think I'm doing?"

"I think your going to pull through. You can see how far you've come now. Mark my words, six months from now you will be able to look back and see the progress you will have made."

"How's Marie doing?"

"She is still taking it hard. She hasn't done as well as you. I worry about her, especially at her age. I'm just glad that she has Sarah. Those two are as close as if they were actually mother and daughter.

Speaking of Marie, we had better get over there. Dinner will be about ready.”

“Oh, I promised the Taylors I'd have dinner with them. Thanks Walt. This has been a big help. Lets do it again sometime.”

“Now, I have some news for you, little brother.”

“Oh yeah. Whats that?”

I've been doing a lot of thinking lately and I've decided to go back to school this fall and get a masters degree in psychology from Radford University. Its only fifty miles from here.”

“Oh really. You're already good at that kind of stuff.”

“Well, I've read a lot of books on it over the last several years.”

“It goes right along with being a minister and helping people like me through tough times. What made you decide on graduate school.”

“Well the way I see it, one day this war is going to be over and a lot of guys are going to be coming home with a lot to deal with. Society will expect these guys to just come home and go on with their lives. It isn't that easy. I know from my own experiences in the last war what it does to a man. I figure that this will be something that will be in demand.”

“Yeah, if a guy is willing to admit that he needs help. So would you leave the ministry and do this full time?”

“Oh no, I'd do it on the side. Besides it will help me a lot with the counseling that I do here.”

“Well good luck with that Walt. You'll do well.”

When Walt and Sheffield emerged from Walt's office, the building was empty. It had clouded up and was trying to rain as they parted ways. Walt went directly to the Austin Mansion while Sheffield walked over to his folks and took his dad's car over to the Taylors.

Sheffield had a enjoyable afternoon visiting with them and dinner was good too. They wanted to know all about what he had been up to. Mike and particularly their son Craig listened with great interest as he told them all about the Reprisal and her air group. Samantha shared some of her memories and experiences with Geanine during their brief friendship.

Later in the afternoon he went home and spent the rest of the evening with his folks. Finally they went to bed leaving him to himself. He decided to answer Ramona's letter.

5 July 1942

Roanoke, Virginia

Dear Ramona,

I got your letter the other day. I know that we promised to stay in touch and I'm glad that you wrote. If you saw the article in Life Magazine then you pretty much know what I have been up to. It has been busy to say the least. I am pleased with how the ship and crew are coming together. We've already been to sea once. In another six weeks we'll be going out for our shakedown cruise. After that, my guess is that we'll be heading for the Pacific. When I get back to Pearl, I promise I'll come and see you.

I have had the opportunity come home three times now. Once for a day when I first got here, then for four days over Memorial Day and three days again for the Fourth of July.

I just got through with what my brother the pastor calls an "emotional checkup." He says I'm going to be alright and will make it through. I sometimes wonder, but I hope he's right. I told him how much help you were to me. I don't know what I would have done without you. You're a great friend and I love you and appreciate you for it.

After talking to him, I guess I am doing better than I thought. Sometimes I wonder. As long as I can stay busy and keep focused on my work I do better. Being close to home helps. Except this time, I went to the places we used to go and I kept seeing ghosts from the past. It was both comforting and discouraging at the same time. I don't quite know how that works.

The same day I got your letter, I got a visit from a member of Admiral Halsey's staff. He told me that the Admiral was in Richmond, Virginia recuperating. That was right on my way home so I stopped off to

see him. You'll be pleased to know that he is doing much better and will soon be allowed to return to duty.

It has been nice to have a break and be here. Tomorrow I'll travel back to Norfolk and to the business at hand. There is still a lot to do. I have some good men. I'm sure you remember our next door neighbors, the Owens. I don't know if you know this or not, but Mason is my Executive Officer. Together we'll get it done.

Again, it was good to hear from you. Please write to me again, I do want to stay in touch. You're a true friend...

Love Sheffield

The next day as Sheffield rode the train back to Norfolk, he reflected on the weekend. He was glad that he had gone home. Perhaps he had inched a tiny bit closer to healing. As the trip wore on, his thoughts turned to the work that still needed to be done. His car and driver were waiting for him and took him back to the ship. As good as it was to be away for a few days, it was good to be back. He was home.

The ship was pretty much loaded. A lot of the work turned to training and drills. There were still things that needed to be installed and brought on line. During the second week of July a fresh batch of twenty four newly commissions Ensigns from the academy reported aboard. In addition, one hundred and twenty seamen right out of boot camp also reported aboard. Of even more value, fifteen officers and fifty four combat seasoned veterans from the Lexington were added to the ship's muster. Most importantly, the Scouts were brought up to strength with the addition of six brand new SBD-4s – fitted with radar. They went to the Scout pilots who had volunteered to experiment with night flying. The Seahawks received three additional Devastators bringing them to twelve planes, still understrength. A contingent of utility aircraft were also made available. The J2F-5 Duck amphibian, SNJ-3C two seat trainer and two SOC-3C Seagulls were not part of the air group, but rather were assigned to the Reprisal.

While Sheffield was away, Lieutenant (junior grade) Arnold Ronelli, the Aviation Supply officer had managed to get his hands on four replacement ASB radar sets like those in the dash four Dauntlesses. Chief Evans had figured out a way to install a set in a Wildcat. The antennas was installed in place of the under wing bomb racks. The scope had to be mounted below the instrument panel, tilted up in a way that the pilot could see it. The control knobs that adjusted the Yagi antenna were mounted on either side of the

scope. In the SBDs, the radar was operated by the a radioman, who passed the information on to pilot. Such an installation in a single seat fighter had been deemed impractical because the pilot had enough to worry about.

A spare set was installed in Cowboy's Wildcat. He was shown how to operate it and gave it a try. That evening as the Bat Team, as they came to be called, took off he was able to try it out. It was a bit cumbersome but after an hour or so, he got the hang of it. Using the radar he was able to get a picture of where he was in relation to the rest of the formation as well as the location of objects on the surface.

When he returned to the air station that night, he reported that it definitely had possibility, especially in the hands of an experience pilot. It was decided to install a set in the planes of each of his wingmen who had been flying with him on these night ventures. Over the next couple of weeks they became familiar with how to use them and were soon able to stay with the Dauntlesses of the Bat Team.

During the third week in July Sheffield took the Reprisal to sea for two more days to work with the air group and give the crew some training at sea. This time the plane handlers were more proficient in their work. The Bat Team was beginning to get the hang of night time carrier take offs and landings. They even got to where they could get by with only every third light on the flight deck on dim. Progress was definitely being made all the way around.

Sheffield didn't feel that he was making much progress. He kept having those dreams about Geannie, but with diminishing frequency. He found himself as if he was being haunted by them, particularly the more bizarre ones. For instance one night he dreamed that he was at sea with the Reprisal. From the bridge he could hear Geannie's voice coming from his office. She was softly singing. He turned the bridge over to someone else and went to investigate. He entered his office to find Geannie in a bathtub full of bubbles and eating chocolates. That wasn't that unusual because she used to enjoy chocolate with her bubble baths. The odd part was that he didn't recall having a bathtub in his office.

He stood there watching her for sometime before she realized that he was there. She got up out of the tub and came to him in all of her glory. As he took her in his arms, they were transported through time and space to a place he didn't recognize. They were much younger, probably in their late twenties when he still had hair. The passion was so real that he wondered if he had died and was in heaven with her. It was as if they were suspended in midair above the earth with the clouds as their bed as the loved each other. Then all sudden she let go of him. He felt himself in free fall, hurtling toward the earth without a parachute. As the ocean raced toward him he braced himself for impact. Just before he hit the water, he woke up.

Another time he had one of those passionate dreams, but rather than being with Geannie, he was with Ramona. That one really troubled him. As he searched for any meaning to it, the only connection he could make was that he had received a letter from her just that day. He felt guilty that he had been unfaithful

to Geannie. That one left him quite shaken. Fortunately for him, the hook entitled "Passion" was back in its proper place on the bookshelf.

During the last week of July, even more men reported aboard. At the same time, some new pilots right out of flight school joined the squadrons, except there were no new planes, yet. During the first week of August, two more days were spent at sea. This time things didn't go quite so smoothly. One of those new pilots put a Dauntless in the water immediately after take off. It wasn't really his fault. They were steaming through rather choppy seas and a swell dropped the bow out from under him just as he was leaving the deck. The downward direction of the ship and the upward direction of the next swell made for an unfortunate combination. The pilot and the radioman were both fished out of the sea shaken but unhurt by one of the two accompanying destroyers. The plane was lost.

After returning to Norfolk, attention was turned to loading provisions for the shake down cruise. Another batch of men reported aboard bringing the crew to eighty percent of her intended complement. A replacement for the Dauntless that was lost was made available but that was all. Morale was high and the men were anxious to go to sea. The weekend before the ship was to sail, the crew was given a forty eight hour liberty.

One of the plane handlers made a suggestion that found its way all of the way to Captain Brason. To move the planes from one end of the deck to other, several men had to push them by hand. This particular sailor had grown up on a farm in Iowa and recommended that a Ford 9N tractor, like the one his dad had, would be perfect for the job. The tractor, he said, could do it much faster. Once it was where it needed to be, the plane handlers would still have to push the plane into place. The suggestion sounded reasonable to Sheffield, so he had Lieutenant Gates requisition three of them for trials during the shakedown cruise.

On Saturday morning as he got ready for the day, Sheffield was well aware of what that day was. It was August 16th, what would have been Austin's fifteenth birthday. How quickly had his short life flown by. It seemed just yesterday that he was a tiny baby, who quickly went from toddler to a little boy, to a teenager. A young man who didn't have a lot to say, but sure loved life. Sheffield lamented that he had missed so many of his baseball games. Despite being away for long periods at a time, when he was home, he made sure that he was there and involved.

Sheffield migrated into his office as he continued getting ready for the day. He saw the model of the Stearman that they had built, suspended from the overhead above his desk. He took it down and sat behind his desk with the plane in one hand, taking it through some maneuvers. Austin would have made a fine pilot. As he progressed through his flying lessons, he had become an expert pilot for his age. It got to where he simply went along for ride, Austin could do it all, from take off to landing. It would have been another year

before he could have soloed. Austin was eager to learn and follow instructions. He was as good of a student pilot as any of the men he has worked with when he was a flight instructor at Pensacola. Throughout the day, Austin was on his mind; remembering the boy he was, imagining the man he would have been.

The day before, Mace had approached Sheffield with an invitation to dinner that night. "Pat says that its about time that came to dinner again. Would tomorrow be alright?"

"Sure, that sounds good. I could use a good home cooked meal. My mother thinks I need to put on a couple of pounds."

"I think Pat is trying to fatten you up a little too. But I have to tell you, as it turns out Pat's sister who recently went through her second divorce is visiting from Chicago. I want to make it clear that this is not a set up. In fact," he said, "I wouldn't wish my sister-in-law on my worst enemy. Pat simply wants to invite you over for dinner."

That evening Mace took Sheffield home with him. Pat had dinner ready and everything on the table. She introduced him to their house guest. "Sheffield, this is my sister Madelyn." she said. " Madelyn, this is Captain Sheffield Brason." Madelyn was about ten or twelve years younger than Sheffield. He had to admit that she was she was an attractive woman with striking black hair that was complimented by the black dress that was wearing. Beyond that he didn't have any inclinations toward her one way or the other.

Sheffield nervously replied, "Pleased to make your acquaintance ma'am."

Mace interrupted by asking, "Can I take hat and jacket, Sheffield."

As Sheffield handed them to his host, Madelyn said, "So you're 'thee' Captain Brason. I read all about you in Life Magazine. You're even more dashing in person." she flirted.

Sheffield blushed. The advance made him uncomfortable.

During dinner, Sheffield was seated next to Mace and across from Madelyn who was seated next to her sister. Also at the table were the Owen's three boys, George, Wallace, and Myron (now ages 18, 16, and 14). Austin was right between Wallace and Myron in age. Back in Hawaii, they had become good friends.

"So Sheffield." Madelyn asked "May I call you Sheffield? How did you get acquainted with Mace and Pat?"

"I shot him down once." Was all Sheffield would say.

Mace went on to explain all about the exercise in the Caribbean back in 1939 and how they got acquainted when they lived next door to each other in Hawaii.

All during dinner, Madelyn hardly took her eyes off the handsome captain. Sheffield did everything he could to avoid eye contact. All of a sudden he felt the top of her bare foot rubbing against the back of his

leg. She was eying him as she sloshed her glass of wine and winked. Sheffield gulped as he squirmed to get his leg away from her.

Not wanting to call attention to what had just happened, he simply said, "I'm not feeling all that well all of sudden. May I be excused? I'd like to go sit down on the couch, if that's alright?"

"Will you be alright?" "Do you need anything?" Pat asked with concern.

"No. I'll be alright. Just give me a minute." He got up to leave. Mace started to get up too. "That's okay. Stay here and finish your dinner. I'll be back in a moment,"

A few moments later, he heard Madelyn excuse herself, saying, "I want to go check on Sheffield and make sure he's alright." She came and sat down right next to him with her legs crossed and leaned in toward Sheffield, the hem of her skirt hiked up way past her knees. She took Sheffield's hand and placed it on her leg. "I can make forget all of your troubles, Captain."

It was as if he had put his hand on a hot stove! He jerked it away as he jumped up and ran for the door and out into the pouring rain, leaving his hat and jacket behind. In everything he had to deal with over the last several months, this was among the worst. He hadn't figured having a woman come on to him like that. Geannie was the only woman he ever wanted. "The nerve of her trying to force herself on me like that!" he fumed.

Through all of his grieving, he had the professionalism to keep his composure. This was just too much and he snapped. All of the dreams he had been having, coupled with Madelyn's advance were more than he could take.

Mace went to see what all the commotion was about and found Sheffield outside, shaking like a leaf.

Sheffield simply asked, "Take me home."

"Sure, Captain. What's going on?"

"It's that woman!" he yelled, pointing toward the house. "Just get me away from her!"

Mace had a pretty good idea of what had just happened. "Here," he said, "wait here in the car. I'll be back in a minute."

Mace went back in the house to get Sheffield's hat and jacket. Pat was trying to get Madelyn to explain what had happened. She was crying hysterically and sobbed, "He doesn't want me either. All I wanted him to do was to love me."

"How dare you do that to him!" Mace snorted. "The man is still getting over losing his wife for God's sake. I warned you to leave him alone. I want you out of my house tomorrow, you shameless hussy." he demanded.

Mace came back out to the car. Before driving back to the base, they drove around a while until Sheffield could settle down. "She came onto you didn't she?" Mace asked.

“How'd you know?”

“Pat doesn't know this but she has done the same thing to me more than once. That kind of behavior is typical of Madelyn. I should have known better than have you over while she was here. All we did was to provide her with fresh meat. I'm sorry that we put you through this.”

Sheffield didn't say a word as his whole body continued shaking. Eventually he began to settle down and they stopped at a coffee shop and and talked over a cup of coffee.

Sheffield apologized, “I'm so sorry for my behavior back there. She scared me to death.”

Mace insisted, “The apology should be ours for exposing you to her. I know that your still getting over Geannie and the kids. You're still in such a delicate emotional state.” He said. It's alright, sir. Just because you're the captain doesn't mean that your not human. You've held up much better than most men would have. I don't know that I'd be able to if it were me.” He promised, “Don't worry, I'll never ever mention a word of this incident to anyone and Pat will be just as discrete.”

Mace went on to say, “I guess by now, you've figured out that Madelyn is pretty messed up. She doesn't seem to understand proper boundaries.”

“Yeah, I see what you mean.”

“She doesn't have any trouble attracting men, the problem is she catches the wrong kind. Once she gets one, she can't keep him. Either she tires of them and moves on or they wise up and leave her. Its not uncommon for her to be playing two or even three of them at the same time.”

“She's attractive enough.” Sheffield commented.

“Thats just her bate. Now do you see why I wouldn't wish her on my worst enemy? I just didn't think she would pull a stunt like that on you. I even warned her that you were strictly off limits.”

By the time he got back to the ship, Sheffield had regained his composure. He went aboard and went straight to his stateroom. The next morning when Mace reported aboard he took Sheffield aside. “How are you this morning, sir?”

“I'll be alright, Mace. Thanks for understanding.”

“Hey. You're not just my Captain. More than that, you're my friend. When I got back last night after taking you home, I told Pat all about what happened. She's putting her on the first train back to Chicago this morning. Once you're up to it, we'll have you over again.”

For the next couple of days, Sheffield was more reclusive than usual. Commander Owen simply told everyone that the Captain wasn't feeling well. Sheffield needed to talk through this with someone. He couldn't go to the chaplain, a member of his crew, so he placed a long distance telephone call to the only person he could; his brother Walt.

When Sheffield told Walt about the episode with Madelyn, the brother that he was wanted to burst

out laughing, the professional counselor that he was managed to stifle it. He mostly listened to his little brother talk and get it out of his system. He was able to explain a thing or two that helped Sheffield understand why he had reacted they way he had and told him not to worry too much about it.

As they visited, the conversation turned to the upcoming shakedown cruise. Walt could hear the ring of excitement in his voice as he shared a few details with him. To Walt, that was a good indication that he was going to be alright.

After a couple of days, Sheffield was able to put the whole episode behind him and move on. He had work to do, a ship to shake down, a war to fight, and heart to heal.

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The part about Admiral Halsey coming down with dermatitides and being in the hospital first at Pearl Harbor and then in Richmond, Virginia really happened. Lieutenant Commander Ashford is a real person and his part in the story is also real, except for of course interacting with Sheffield.

It was actually General George Stillwell on the the cover of the June 15, 1942 edition of Life Magazine.

The SBD-4 Dauntless didn't actually begin delivery until October. The dash fours were fitted with Yagi radar, although the equipment was only was only available in limited quantities early on.

