

Chapter V

Medicine For the Soul

September 23, 1942 – October 6, 1942

When the Reprisal arrived in Norfolk on Wednesday the 23rd of September, everyone was anxious and ready to go and do their part. But first, the ship needed to be checked over after her shakedown cruise. Two days later she steamed down to the Elizabeth River to Portsmouth and was placed in dry dock at the Norfolk Navy Yard for maintenance and upkeep. Only minor and routine modifications were necessary.

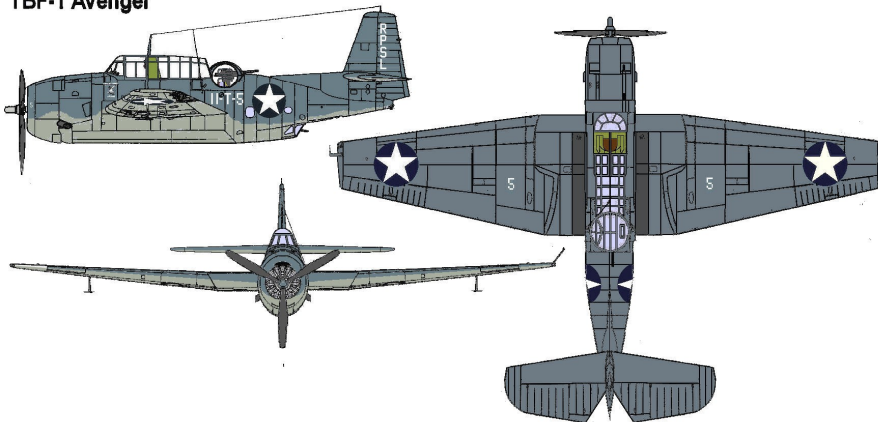
The biggest modification was an upgrade to her medium anti aircraft guns with the installation of the new and more effective Bofors 40 millimeters in place of the inadequate 1.1s. In addition, she received six more of the 20 millimeter light anti-aircraft weapons bringing the number to forty two. Besides the new weapons, a secondary radar set was mounted on a platform outboard of the stack. She also had her camouflage updated. Everything below the hangar deck had been repainted in navy blue and everything above in haze gray.

Waiting at the air station were new planes for the air group. Fighting Eleven found thirty six of the new F4F-4 with folding wings waiting for them. That brought the squadron up to full strength. They turned in all of their old planes except for the four that had been upgraded with radar plus six others to be converted by Chief Evans and his men. The older F4F-3 with nonfolding wings were better suited for the job than were the newer, heavier planes. That would give the Wildcats thirty six operational aircraft, twenty eight brand new F4F-4s and eight radar equipped F4F-3Rs, with eight additional aircraft in reserve.

The squadron was also reorganized into four plane sections, each with a pair of two plane elements. Experience in the Pacific had proved that two fighters working together was more efficient than three. The radar equipped Wildcats were dubbed Alleycats by the pilots who flew them because just like an alley cat they intended to be out prowling around at night looking for a fight.

There were also nineteen new TBF-1 Avengers waiting for Torpedo Eleven. One went to the air group commander and fifteen to the squadron with three spares. They turned in their obsolete TBD Devastators, which proved to be hopelessly outclassed at the Battle of Midway.

TBF-1 Avenger



Bombing Eleven received seven spares and Scouting Eleven got three more SBD-3s plus six spares, including two radar equipped dash fours. Most of the spare aircraft were disassembled and packed

neatly away in crates.

While the Reprisal was in drydock, Commander James and the air group were busy breaking in their new planes and new pilots. Not only were the squadrons up to strength in their numbers of aircraft but also pilots, including extras. Many of the new pilots were inexperienced. Fortunately a few with combat experience in the Pacific had made their way into the squadrons.

To reward the crew for a job well done, Sheffield instructed Mace to grant thirty day leaves to any man who had not had one in the last twelve months, provided that they were proficient in their duties. Since most of the nearly three thousand men had been in the Navy for less than a year and a good number the rest had been on leave, about five hundred men, including Reggie, left the ship and fanned out to hometowns all across the county. As for the rest, he had Mace grant them seventy two hour weekend passes in shifts over the next four weeks.

One day a package was brought to him on while Sheffield was in his office reviewing the daily status report regarding the refit that Mace had left on his desk. The package was from Lieutenant Commander R. Katmuth, Naval Hospital Pearl Harbor. He put down the report and opened the box to see what it was. On top of what looked like bandages he found a letter. He opened it and sat back in his chair to read it.

Sept 24, 1942

He marveled at the date on the letter, as it was the 26th. "How did that get here all the way from Pearl so fast?" he wondered. He looked at the box again. Rather than regular postage it had been sent via the Naval Transport Service. He noticed something else, it was labeled with the word "MEDICINE". He went on to read:

Dear Sheffield

We are getting this staying in touch thing down pretty good. It is always so good to hear from you. I got your letter from New Orleans. That must have been wild to meet someone who looked just liked Geannie.

I'm sure that you are back to Norfolk by now. It won't be long now and you'll be stopping off here on your way to the South Pacific where you are needed so desperately. Things haven't been going so well down there. The Navy Yard here is working around the clock to get the Big E patched up and ready for another round. Although your stay would be brief, It will be so nice to see you.

It's pretty lonely around here. With all of these people it is still lonely. They come and go so quickly that I never get to connect with anyone. I've been a part of this hospital

for so long, I think I'm just part of the fixtures. I never thought that Paradise would become such a lonely place. A lonely place filled with lonely people.

People handle loneliness so differently. There are the tough guys, the comedians, the romancers, the know it alls, and of course the loners. Regardless of their front, they're all lonely. I get a lot of guys wanting to go out with me but they're mostly looking for a one night stand. I'm not interested. I guess I'm just cursed with a pretty face. When they find out my rank they are quick to put two and two together and figure out that I must be pushing 40 and pretty much leave me alone anyway.

I know that you're lonely too. You're not as lonely as you think you are. Pat and Mace are looking after you. You have your family fairly close and go home from time to time. You have a lot of people who care about you and who love you, myself included. Geannie was my best friend and I miss her too. She is the only person who really ever knew me and understood me. And you were so good to me after Tom died. You were always there when I needed something. Since Geannie can't be here, I wish you were because I need something now, a friend. You may think I was helping you through a tough time after Geannie and the kids died, but in all honesty, you were helping me. It felt good to be needed. You know, not long after Tom died, my mother died too. They were the only family I had, except for you and Geannie and the kids. Now that they're gone too, you are all that is left of my surrogate family.

So what do I do to keep my sanity? I get away from the hospital and the base as much as I can and spend a lot of time at my beach house. In fact as I am writing to you, I am sitting on my deck looking out over the Pacific Ocean. It looks so calm and peaceful that it is hard to believe that there is a savage war being fought on its waves.

What else do I do? I bake. Right now I have a batch of chocolate chip cookies in the oven. It is a recipe that I got from Geannie. Typically when I bake, I have a sample and take rest to the hospital. (That's how I keep my figure.) This batch however I am sending to you. When I get back to the base I'm going to see if I can get away with sending them by

way of the Naval Air Transport Service. I am going to tell them that it is medicine that is urgently needed. Consider it medicine for your soul. So if you haven't figured out what the gauze wrapped bandages are, they're cookies. I'm going to wrap them in gauze to try to keep them fresh. I hope they make them to you alright.

I have my beach house to get away to. What do you have? I hope you're not staying cooped up on that ship of yours like a hermit and never leave. Take my advice, get out and go do something. Another outlet for me is attending services every week. I'm really getting a lot from them. Thanks again for getting me going. I don't know how I ever used to make it through the week without it.

Well I just took the cookies out of the oven. I think they turned out pretty good. I hope they make it okay. I need change my clothes and head back to the base now, I go on duty in a couple of hours.

Love Ramona

When he was finished, he unwrapped one of the “bandages” and found a perfectly preserved chocolate chip cookie that had only been baked two days earlier. It even tasted the way Geannie used to make them. “Why on earth hasn't someone snatched up that woman. She would make someone a great catch.” He thought to himself. “Its as if she is avoiding them. What is she waiting for?”

He thought about what she said about needing to get off the ship. Walt had been hounding him over the same thing. “Where they in cahoots somehow? And whats with the cookies? Did my mother put her up to it to try to fatten me up?” Then he reasoned, “Nah. It couldn't be.”

While the ship was in yard, Sheffield decided that maybe they were right. Maybe he did need to get off the ship from time to time. After all, Mace had everything under control. He hadn't had any flight time for a while and he needed to keep his flight status active. He hadn't been been in the air since late April and was over due.

The next day he left the ship and made his way up the training hangar at the air station and checked out a Stearman. After getting strapped in and checking things over, he gave the signal for the plane captain to crank the starter and the engine sputtered to life. Sheffield let the engine run a moment before revving it up and let his feet off the brakes and taxied to the runway.

Poised at the end of the runway, he applied the brakes and waited for the signal to take off. When it was given, he revved his engine to the correct rpms and let off the brakes. The rush down the runway and

into the air was always exhilarating. As he took off into the south, he stayed low. In couple of minutes he was over the navy yard. He circled around a few times to get a good look at his ship from the air as she lay in dry dock. She was both an impressive and formidable sight, indeed.

After getting a good look, he began circling around to the west and up over Newport News. Again he circled around go get a look at the new Essex which was nearing completion. She was pier side and in the dry docks he could see the progress being made on the New Yorktown and the Intrepid. In another dry dock was the newly laid keel of the Kearsarge. The Yorktown had been renamed only a couple of days earlier from her original name, Bon Homme Richard, to honor the Gallant Lady sunk at Midway. That same day, the new Lexington had been launched at Quincey, Massachusetts where it along with two others were under construction. He wondered to himself with the war going badly in the Pacific, would they be competed in time to make a difference. Would he be able to get his ship there in time. It was still three weeks before it would be ready to sail.

After getting a good look, Sheffield flew on up Chesapeake Bay. As he climbed higher into the sky, he cut loose. He began going through rolls and loops and anything else he could think of. All of the maneuvers came to him instinctively even though his active flying career had ended two and half years earlier. It was just like riding a bike. As he flew on, he went as far as Baltimore and circled around over Washington. Looking down on Arlington, he saw the neighborhood where they had lived. Those were good days.

He flew down the Potomac River to the Chesapeake Bay and retraced his route. Below he passed by the small auxiliary carrier, Charger, which was used to train pilots. He descended as he neared Hampton Roads to circle around for his landing approach. He also got a good look at the Ranger tied up at Pier 7 and the newly commissioned auxiliary carriers, Sangamon, Suwanee, and Chenango which had been converted from oil tankers. The were slow and small with the capacity of only thirty aircraft. He wondered what value they would have.

After a satisfying flight, he touched down. It was a good break and it was good to get away, if only for a few hours, before going back to the ship, which was going to be in dry dock for a few more days. He decided to take the opportunity to go to Roanoke for a few days over the weekend. His nephew Joe was getting married and the timing was perfect. Besides, spending time at home with family always brought comfort and recharged his reserves. In all of the years he had been away, he had never experienced homesickness. It seemed strange, but he really yearned to be home, especially that time of year with the brilliant fall colors. He wanted one of his mother's home cooked meals.

He caught the Friday afternoon train for Roanoke and got there in time for supper. His father picked

him up and brought him home. His mother was waiting for him on the front porch when he arrived. After giving him big hug she commented. "I see that you have gained a little weight. That's good. Wait until you see what I have waiting for you." He walked through the front door to a savory scent that took him back to his childhood. He hung up jacket and hat, kissed his mother and sat down to her chicken pot pie. Only one other person could ever make it as good as she could and that was Geannie. It felt so good to be home and to sleep in his own home, the only place that was really home anymore.

The next morning, he did something he rarely ever did, he slept in. The thing that roused his senses was the smell of bacon coming from the kitchen. It promised to be a busy day for the Brasons. Family members came and went all day in preparation for Joe's wedding that night. With the rehearsal in the afternoon, everyone was busy and he only got to visit in bits and pieces.

He thought that then might be the best time to slip away and go next door to visit with Marie. They had a good visit as she told him about what little she had been up to, but mostly talked about her family. The boys were doing well in their business. They were providing supplies and materials for a number of government and commercial projects in the area.

She spent a lot of time telling him all about her grandchildren and she gave him the run down for each family, beginning with Charlie's. Elvira had three children and was expecting her fourth. Her husband, Nolan was working at the lumber yard. Horace had completed officer training and was an Ensign in the Navy attending the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey, California training to be a meteorologist. His wife, Pauline and there three children had moved to California to be with him. Chuck had opted for the Army and after attending officer training, was a 2nd Lieutenant in Patton's Third Army. The last they heard from him, he was shipping out to somewhere unknown. His wife, Lisa and their two children were living with her parents there in Roanoke. Elizabeth was engaged to a young man who had just enlisted in the army. Vivian was in her last year at Hoillins and Rachel was in her last year of high school.

As for Winslow's family, Eldon was working at the sawmill. He and his wife Marsha now had three children. Stephen who hadn't gone to college, enlisted in the Army Air Force and was stationed in England. His wife Bridgette and their three children were living in Richmond with her parents. Maxine hadn't remarried after her husband was killed in that train accident a couple of years earlier. She and her daughter were living with Winslow and Grace while she worked at the lumberyard as the secretary. Samantha was also living at home and worked as a telephone operator. Raymond had just graduated from high school and had enlisted in the Navy and was stationed in Ventura, California with the Construction Battalion, known as the SeeBees.

Finally she got to Stirling's family. Clarence had moved to Newport News before the war and was an engineer at Newport News Shipbuilding. In fact he had worked on Sheffield's ship. He and his wife, Cindy had two children and were expecting their third. Sam had tried to enlist in every branch of service, including

the Coast Guard and the Merchant Marines but no one would take him because of his deformed feet. He worked as the accountant at the lumberyard. Misti was expecting her first child and living at home while her husband, Rupert Casper (Bill and Marge's son), was stationed in Hawaii with the Marines. Julian had dropped out of college and was one the first to enlist in the Navy, he was stationed aboard an oil tanker in the Pacific. Laura, Warren, and Edith were all still in school and living at home.

After the better part of an hour, Sheffield knew everything about all of Geannie's family. Marie was obviously proud of all of her children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren. As she told him about them, she showed him photographs and newspaper clippings. She worried about here grandsons and the husbands of her granddaughters who were serving in the armed forces. So far none of them had seen battle. By the time she was done, there wasn't time for her to talk about how terribly she missed Geannie, Sandy, and Austin.

By then it was time to go to the church for the wedding. Sheffield walked around the corner to the church and wearing his uniform took a seat next to his mother and father in the grooms section. All of the Barson family were there including all of his nieces and nephews and their spouses. He hadn't had much of chance to talk to any of then yet.

As the wedding began, Joe was standing at the altar. Naturally, Walt was performing the wedding. Joe was Shenan's second son and was not quite twenty two years old. He had tried to enlist and do his part but was ineligible because he was deaf in one ear, a result of scarlet fever when hew was little. He worked with Shenan in his surveying business. Standing next to him was a young man in the uniform of the US Marines who Sheffield had not yet met, but he knew that he was Emmaline's husband. He was Joe's best friend and best man. He did not know the young woman who was standing in the place of the bride's maid.

Everyone turned their heads when the wedding march began to see the bride and her father enter through the rear doors. Her name was Adelle Nadal from Blacksburg. Sheffield was quick to notice her wedding gown as it was quite similar to Geannie's. It was still storage with the rest of Gennie's belongings. She had been saving it for Sandy's wedding. Sheffield's thoughts turned to weddings that would never be and grandchildren who would never be born. As the bride took her place next to Joe, he thought about Sandy's upcoming eighteenth birthday, that would not be celebrated. He thought about Chip, her boyfriend in Hawaii and wondered whatever became of him.

Walt began the ceremony with the traditional wording that his father had recited at their wedding as he recalled that evening when he and Geannie stood in that very spot over twenty years ago. He forced himself to be part of the present as Joe and Adalle were pronounced husband and wife until death do they part. He hoped that that really wasn't the case. Geannie seemed to think there was a way around that clause. If there was, he sure wanted to know how it worked. He was still every bit in love with Geannie as he

had been during her life. As Joe lifted the veil to kiss his new bride, he felt as if Geannie was just beyond a veil of some kind. It seemed that she lingered for just a brief moment.

Sheffield joined with family and friends as they flowed into the reception hall. As he stood in the reception line, he saw his nieces and nephews everywhere. Watching them made him think of Sandy and Austin. He had been so busy missing Geannie that he didn't take as much time to miss them. He thought of Austin and how on his next birthday he would have been able to take his solo flight. This night was their turn to be missed.

The first people he greeted in the reception line were Mr. and Mrs. Nadal. They had already figured out who he was, after all he was the only Navy Captain present. Next he met the young woman who he had seen at the altar, she was Adelle's sister. Next he came to Adelle and Joe.

Joe had a hug for him, "I'm so glad that you could come, Uncle Sheffield. This is my bride, Adelle."

Sheffield turned his attention to the beautiful twenty year old woman. "I'm so very honored to meet you, Mrs. Brason. I definitely can see that Joe is getting the better end of the deal."

She laughed and said, "Oh I don't know, I think I got a good one."

"Yes you did," he admitted. "Joe is a good young man. And you, young lady look absolutely fabulous."

"Thank you, Uncle Sheffield. May I call you that?"

"Why, certainly."

"Well then Uncle Sheffield, I have a dance reserved for you later in the evening."

"I'd be honored, Adelle. I look forward to it."

Before he could move along, she said as she put her arms around him and asked, "Would you like to kiss the bride?" Before he could respond, she kissed him on the cheek. He responded in kind.

To keep the line moving, he moved on to the Marine Corp Private. The young man didn't now whether to salute or shake hands with the Captain. Sheffield solved the dilemma by offering his hand. "I am Joe's Uncle Sheffield."

"Very pleased to meet you sir. I have heard do much about you. I'm Seth McClury, Emmeline's husband and Joe's best friend."

"And I'm honored to meet you. I hope we can visit later in the evening."

Next Sheffield came to his sister-in-law, Emily. She looked up into his eyes and held out her arms. He moved close and embarrassed her. He didn't know Emily as well as he did Sarah but he loved her just the same. "What a lovely evening." he said. "I'm so happy to be here for Joe."

As she let go of him, Shenan too had a bear hug for his little brother. "Gosh, I'm glad your here. I

didn't know if you'd make it or not. I don't want you to get away without chatting.”

“We will.” Sheffield promised.

Sheffield noticed Walt and Sarah over in the corner. He hadn't had a chance to see them at all yet and made a beeline straight for them. Sarah saw him and came toward him and took him by both hands and pulled him close for a kiss on the cheek and then a tight embrace. As he let her go, Walt had a hug for him too. He wasn't used to all of the hugging. Where he came from, people just saluted him. In this crowd he preferred the hugs. It was medicine to his soul. Walt with one hand on his shoulder and Sarah holding his hand, led him to a nearby table where they joined Emmaline, Tim, Sylvia, and Curtis.

“I finally got to meet your husband, Emmaline. I'm sorry that I wasn't able to attend your wedding. I was away with my ship in the Gulf of Mexico. But I did bring you a wedding gift. It's over at Grandpa and Grandma's right now.”

“Thank you, Uncle Sheffield. That was sweet of you. I understand why you weren't there.”

“So where is Seth stationed?”

“He's up at Quantico in training, but he will most likely be shipping out to Hawaii soon.”

“Aren't we all.” Sheffield commented. He turned his attention to Tim. “Do you still want to come and join me?”

“I've been thinking about that.” Tim answered. “I think I'd rather have you as my uncle than my commanding officer. I think I'll stay with the airships.”

“That's probably a wise decision, Tim. Say, have you ran across any U-boats out there?”

“Not yet, sir.”

Sheffield next turned his attention to Sylvia. “So how's college life at Hollins, Sylvvy?”

“I really like it.” she answered. “As much as I love, Mom and Dad, it's nice to have my own place.”

Sarah interjected, “Yeah, she has all of the independence of being on her own and all of benefits of home at the same time. She comes over to do her laundry and stays for dinner.”

“You can't beat that deal.” Sheffield smiled. “Have you decided what to major in?”

“Boys!” Emmaline interjected.

“Fat chance.” Sylvia snapped back. “I wish. For starters it's an all girl school, and if you haven't noticed, all of the guys are going off to the military.”

“That way you can focus on your studies.” Walt added.

“You never answered my question, Sylvvy. What are you majoring in?”

“I haven't decided yet Uncle Sheffield. I'm just taking generals this a year.”

What about you, Curt?” Sheffield asked. “How's high school?”

“Being a freshman stinks!” he blurted. “But it's okay I guess. I did try out for the wrestling team and

made the squad.”

“Good for you. You knew that I was a wrestler didn't you?”

“Yeah, I see your NC double A trophy every time I go over to Grandpa's.”

“Don't believe him, Curt.” Walt warned. “Some wrestler, he was. Geannie always beat him.”

“Only because I let her. It was more fun that way.”

“Yeah,” Walt challenged. “I bet I can still beat you.”

“That was when you were fourteen and I was only twelve. I can whip you any time, big brother.”

“How about right here right now.”

“Boys, boys.” Sarah cut in. “That would be real dignified now wouldn't it. A pastor and navy captain wrestling right here in the church, during a wedding.”

“You're right, Dear.” Walt concluded. “That would be real spectacle. How about a rain check on that match, little brother?”

“I have a better idea.” Sheffield suggested. “How about one of your check ups instead?”

“Sure.” Walt agreed. “How about after services and before dinner tomorrow?”

“I'll be there.” Sheffield agreed.

From there, Walt's family began visiting among themselves and Sheffield thoughts drifted back to Sandy and Austin. Then he noticed the Taylor children at the next table sitting alone. Sheffield got up and moved over to their table and sat down with them and began visiting with them.

After a couple of minutes, Mike and Samantha returned from the reception line. Sheffield stood to greet them. Mike shook his hand and Sam gave him a hug. “Whats with all these women hugging me?” He wondered.

“Are they bothering you, Captain.” Samantha asked.

“Sheffield, please call me Sheffield. No they weren't bothering me at all. I find them quite delightful.”

“Would you like to keep them?” Mike joked. “You can have them.”

They all sat down at the table. For the next few minutes they visited until it was time for them to take the kids home and put them to bed. They bid their Sheffield good-bye and left.

Sheffield sat there alone for a moment reflecting on what good kids they were, remembering when Sandy and Austin were that age. He wondered if some day, he would ever be able to have another family. He was a family man and he missed that part of his life.

Next, along came his old friend and wrestling teammate, Bill Casper and his wife Marge. Again he stood to greet them. Bill shook his hand and Marge had a hug for him. They visited briefly and Bill told him that he was running for a seat on the school board and asked Sheffield about him. They too had read the Life Magazine article. In parting they wished each other luck in their endeavors.

By then, the reception line had broken up and the orchestra was playing. He made his way around the dance floor to the table where Shenan and Emily and their family were seated. They rose to greet him and Emily had another hug for him, as did their teenage daughters Ruth Ann and Wendelynn. He finally got to visit with them. Again he turned his attention to his nieces and nephews.

Their son Danny had just completed officer's training at the United States Naval Reserve Midshipmen's School Evanston, Ill near Chicago and received his commission as an Ensign in the US Navy Reserve. He was home on leave before reporting to flight school at NAS Corpus Christi, Texas in a couple of weeks. Danny listened intently to Sheffield as he had some sage advice for him. His wife, Melissa and their new baby daughter were going with him to Texas and wherever his advanced training might take him.

Ruth Ann, was attending Hollins and was roommates with her cousin Sylvia. Wendalynn and Delbert were both still in school and living at home. They were joined by the bride and groom who sat down to visit. After a few minutes, Adelle announced that she was ready for that dance with her new uncle.

For the next several numbers Sheffield remained on the dance floor. It was as if all of the women in his life had conspired against him. One after another, his sisters-in-law, nieces and the wives of his nephews cut in to dance with the handsome naval officer. He marveled at how many women had hugged him that evening. He hadn't had that many hugs since Geannie's funeral, only then he was too numb to enjoy them. It felt good to hold a woman in his arms again, even if it was a family member.

Then Ramona came to mind. She always had a hug for him too. She always seemed to hold on extra tight and just a moment longer. "I wonder if after the war, she and I could get together?" he wondered. No sooner that thought left he was shocked by the notion and dismissed it with another thought, "There's no way anyone could ever take Geannie's place in my heart."

Finally the evening wound down and most of the guests had left. It had been an enjoyable evening. He especially enjoyed the interaction with his nieces and nephews. They were all growing up. Something Sandy and Austin would never do. He was particularly mindful of those who were their same ages. It was almost like seeing them by proxy. The whole event had been medicine for his soul.

Sunday found everyone in their places for services at the Greene Memorial United Methodist Church. Walt's sermon for the day was obviously inspired by the wedding the night before. The text for his sermon was Genesis 2:24 "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh." He focused on the cleaving and what it meant during the course of a couple's lives together. He talked about things like complete fidelity to each other, trust, interdependence, unity, and loving each other above all else.

There was a part of his sermon that was scripted just for his little brother. Looking at Sheffield he said, "When a couple is separated by death, it is difficult to let go of cleaving. The living must live, otherwise

they attempt to go through life with one leg chained to the floor and go no nowhere. Naturally there is a time allotted for grieving and healing. The suffering of Jesus is the healing balm and he has the key to set one free. Free to live life and yes even free to love again.”

After the service, Sheffield waited for Walt to take care of a couple of matters. Once he was finished, they retired to Walt's office.

“You appear to be doing better than when we had your last check up, Sheffield.” he began.

“I've had some real ups and downs since then.” Sheffield admitted. “It seems like I have been picking up a lot of books lately.”

“That's because the numbness is wearing off. You're more apt to notice the emotions as you deal with them. Fortunately most of the hard ones hit you up front when you are cushioned by shock and grief.”

He went on to tell Walt about feeling homesick for the first time in his life. Walt couldn't help but chuckle when he told the story of Madelyn. “It is kind of funny now I look back on it too. But I just wasn't prepared for that curve ball.” He went on to tell him about he had to fight being distracted by the dreams and fantasies. Then there was Mrs. Gavin.

At that point he asked, “Do you really think its possible to love again like you said?”

“Absolutely.” Walt assured him. “I have seen it time and again.”

“But I'm still in love with Geannie. I always will be. Is it possible to love another woman as a wife and still be in love with Geannie?”

“Of course. The trick is distinguish between the living and the dead. You have to live with your living love and keep it all in perspective. Another woman will never take Geannie's place. You have to accept the fact that she will be different.

“Its like your children. You have more than one and even though you love them all dearly, you love them differently. When you find someone, you will have to love her for who she is and it will be different, at the same time holding on to your love for Geannie. Does that make any sense?”

“When you compare it to how you love your children, yes it does.”

“The problem I have encountered with people is that they go into a new relationship before they're ready to accept that fact. They expect the same things from the new love as from the deceased. That leads to all kinds of conflict, even the failure of the second marriage.

“I can tell that you are nowhere near ready to love again.”

“How's that?”

“Look at your left hand, Sheffield. When you can take off that ring, you'll be well on your way. There's another way I will be able to tell and thats when you get your quirky sense of humor back.”

Sheffield went on to tell him about feeling inadequate in planning for the shakedown cruise, his

anger over the whale incident. He was worried that now he was overconfident in the readiness of the ship and crew. He went on to tell Walt about other emotions that he had dealt with. "I can't afford to have my judgment clouded when I may have to give an order that will possibly send men to their deaths."

Then he changed the subject. "I have been attending services aboard the ship. We have a fine young chaplain. I'm impressed at the wisdom and insight that he has. But where he is a member of my crew, I feel it would be inappropriate to confide in him. You're all I've got, brother."

"You have always been a strong person. It's that reserve that's seeing you through. It's like the difference between a healthy man getting sick compared to someone who was unhealthy to begin with."

"Do you remember all of the questions that Geannie came up with after we lost Charles Emmett? She talked about them often and I have to agree with her, they are some very good questions. A few weeks ago I was going through her Bible and found two pages of questions that she had been looking for answers to. Some of them reference various passages."

"I remember when she came to me with them. I couldn't answer them then and I can't answer them now. If you ever find the answers, let me know. I'd like to know what they are myself."

"I'm kind of afraid of finding them." Sheffield admitted. "What if they fly in the face of everything I believe to be true?"

"Truth is truth." Walt said. "I believe that God gives us no more than we are capable of understanding. If there is more out there somewhere, it won't detract from what we have. It will complete what we know and fill in the gaps. Perhaps it will clear up some mis-perceptions that we don't even know that we have. After all look at how different denominations have a slightly different twist on the same doctrines. We all can't be right."

"So what makes you sure that you are right?"

"All I have to go on is faith and do the best with what I believe." Walt concluded. "It's like you being the Captain. You might not be sure of the proper course that you must pursue. You can never let your officers and crew see you waiver. You have to take what information you have and use your instincts, luck, faith, or whatever you want to call it and do your best."

At the conclusion of their visit they walked around the corner to the Austin Mansion. Last night was the Brason's show. Sunday dinner was the Austin's turn. The next morning Sheffield took the train back to Norfolk. As the train passed through the brilliant fall colors, Sheffield felt refreshed, recharged and confident that he and his ship were ready for their first assignment. Ramona was right. Getting off the ship and going home had been medicine for his soul.

* * * * *

