

## Chapter XVI

### Rio

December 9, 1942 – December 10, 1942

Sheffield had a restless night. He tossed and turned as he wrestled with the question. He knew that it was time to let go. He had made significant progress over the last several weeks; especially in the last two days. It wasn't so much that he wasn't ready or didn't want to, he simply didn't know how. He realized the futility of being emotionally tied down to Geannie and the kids when they were gone from his life. He understood that it was holding him back in so many ways. Geannie certainly wouldn't want him to go on living that way. He reflected on the dream, or whatever it was that he had the night before.

At breakfast the next morning, it occurred to him where to start. He glanced up at the portrait of Geannie smiling down at him from the wall opposite of where he sat. Several things came to mind. "The first thing I'm going to do is to take down that picture and put it away, however I want to leave the one on the nightstand right where it is." he determined. "Then when I get back to Norfolk, I'm going to let Paula remove her name from our. . . , my bank account. Paula seems like a nice nice lady, I think I'll ask her out."

All during breakfast he complemented what else he needed to do. "The first chance I get, I'm going home to Roanoke and while I'm there, I'm going to sort through the things in storage. If that isn't letting go, I don't what is." When he got up to leave, he took down the picture.

Reggie had overheard the entire conversation the Cap'an had with himself. As he cleared away, he looked up at the empty place on the wall and commented to himself, "I'm sure going to miss your smiling face, Miss Geannie."

From his wardroom, he went to his office to go over the business for the day prior to meeting with the senior officers. The most daunting item on the schedule was the burial for Ships Serviceman 3<sup>rd</sup> Class Porter and the Nazi political officer. Before going to his ready room, he poked his head in the galley and asked, "Reggie, how well did you know Petty Officer Porter?"

"Not real well sir, but I did know him."

"What can you tell me about him?"

"Well Cap'an, he was real practical joker. He was always doing something to get a laugh. There was this one time that he took my clothes and towel while I was in the shower. I had to go all the way back to my bunk naked as the day my Mama had me. Everyone got a big laugh out that. What else could I do but laugh too? He was always doing something like that."

"Do you know where he was from or anything about his family?"

"He was always talking about his wife and two kids back in Oakland, California. He had a picture of them pinned up where everyone could see them."

"Thanks Reggie. Will you be attending his funeral?"

“Yes, sir. I plan on it.”

Once the senior officers were assembled, the staff meeting began. There was the usual business of the day, status updates for ongoing work, and the preparations for making port. Sheffield instructed that every colored man in the crew who wanted to attend the burial should be accommodated, even if it meant having someone else assume their duties temporarily. He concluded his business by asking Major Jerbowski to have Captain Gottfried brought to his office.

He had Yeoman Gover follow him to his office to give him some paperwork that needed filed. “Have you heard anything from Missus Watson or Molly this morning?”

“No sir, not a peep.”

“I understand that you and one of your buddies were going to visit with her last night and answer some of her questions.”

“She was asking me if I believed God. I told her that I did and she had a lot of questions that I didn't have time to answer at the time so I asked her if I could come by after I got off duty. I took my friend, Seaman Ballard with me. Together we were able to answer her questions and tried to give her some hope.”

“Is this Seaman Ballard a friend from home?”

“No, not exactly. Although he is from Salt Lake City, I never met him until boot camp. We reported aboard at the same time.”

“She was also asking me if I believed on God. I told her how my faith saw me through the last year. So were you and Seaman Ballard able to satisfy her.”

“I think so, sir.”

“Thanks for looking after them. I think that little Molly really likes you. She shies away from me, but she hangs on to you like you were her big brother.

“Oh and Morris, can you have Petty Officer Porter's personal effects brought to my office. I want to look through them before writing to his wife and kids. I want to get a feel for what kind of a person he was.”

“Yes, sir. Is there anything else, Sir?”

“No, Yeoman Gover, that will be all.”

No sooner than he left, a Marine guard brought Captain Gottfried to his office. “Thank you Sargent. Wait outside.” The Sargent closed the door after showing the Captain in.

“You wanted to see me, Captain Brason.”

“Yes, I wanted to talk to you. First of all, how are your men doing? I'm sorry that the work details didn't work out. I appreciate what they did do.”

“At least the trips up on deck for some fresh air and exercise gives them a break. You can only play cards so long. The guards have been good to us. I hope we find the same treatment wherever we end up.”

“The main thing I wanted to talk to about is the burial for your political officer. Would you like to conduct that?”

“Not really, but since he was in my charge, I suppose it is my duty. Thank you for offering.”

“Why don't you assign a detail to take care of it. Would your men like to attend? It would give them a chance to get out of the repair hangar.”

“I'll let them know. I'll have our chaplain conduct the service. Where he wasn't military, I don't think military honors are in order so we'll dispense with that.”

“Let Major Jerbowsky know how many of your men plan on being there so he can have a sufficient guard detail on hand.”

“Now, we'll be pulling into Rio sometime tonight. Once we get there, I'll have to make arrangements for turning you over to the proper authorities. Admiral Weston has informed his superiors in Recife that we have you aboard. Perhaps they have something already worked out.”

The two men went on to chat informally for a few minutes before having the guard take him back to the detention area. Before going up to the bridge he went to check on Mrs. Watson and Molly. He listened at the door before knocking. Upon hearing them talking he softly rapped on the door. After a moment, Debra answered, wearing the bathrobe with the ship's name monogrammed on it over her parachute silk nightgown.

“Good morning Captain, Won't you come in.”

“Just for a minute.” He said as he entered the admiral's stateroom. “I just wanted to check on you and see how you are doing.”

“We slept in this morning. I stayed up late after Morris and Simon left. They are sure two fine young men. I was amazed at how they were able to answer all of my questions. I'll tell you, they gave me something to think about that I had never considered before and they gave me a book that I've been reading. You know, those two should be chaplains or something. They sure know their stuff.

“Oh and Sheffield, you are right about God. They taught me how to pray and I asked God if he was really there.”

“And what did he say?”

“He assured me that he was.” With emotion in her voice and tears welling up in her eyes she went on to say, “He let me know that I was His daughter and that he was watching over me. I think I now understand what you were saying about your faith in God getting you through the loss of your family.”

“Good. I'm glad that they were able to help you. Is there anything you need? Breakfast, perhaps.”

At the mention of breakfast, Molly, also still in her parachute silk nightgown, responded, “I'm hungry Mom.”

“Yes,” Debra answered for both of them, “some breakfast would be nice.”

“I’ll tell Reggie to whip something up for you. Would you like to come up to the wing bridge for some fresh air later?”

“Oh, I don’t know. I’d kind of like to stay to myself today if you don’t mind. I have a lot to sort out. Besides I’d like to read some more of the book they gave me. Molly can keep herself entertained by drawing. I found some paper and pencils in the desk.”

“I understand perfectly. If you need anything, you know where to find Yeoman Gover or you can call up to the bridge. I need to go now, but I’ll check in on you later in the day.”

“Thank you Sheffield, for everything.” she said as he went through the door and closed it behind him.

Before leaving the galley deck, he instructed both Reggie and Morris to look after their guests. Once on the bridge, he found it to be a mostly overcast day with a chance of rain squalls. The patrols were all on station and nothing out of the ordinary had been reported. One of the Scouts had happened on the Cutthroat on the surface about a hundred miles away.

After about an hour, it was time for Petty Officer Porter’s funeral. Captain Brason made his way down to the hangar deck where several of the ship’s servicemen had already gathered. Other members of the crew who were not on duty also gathered. By the appointed time, several hundred men were on hand. The flag draped body was brought forward by four colored sailors dressed in their whites and Lieutenant Fellows began the service. Captain Brason made a few concluding remarks, including some of what Reggie had said about him. As he committed him to the deep, the table was tipped up and the canvas wrapped body slipped out from under the flag and splashed into the sea, his final resting place.

After the three volley salute and taps, those assembled returned to their duties leaving the captain and the chaplain to await the arrival of the POWs.

Even though Joseph Reader wasn’t very popular among the crew of the Edelweisses, they all opted to attend, under guard by an entire platoon marines. Sheffield was intrigued by how naval traditions were pretty much the same between navies. Even though everything was in German, he could tell it was pretty much the same. Rather than a flag, the body was draped with a white sheet and there was not a three volley salute. At the conclusion of the services, they were taken below. It was too big of a group to allow to linger, without inviting trouble.

Rather than going back to the bridge, Sheffield went to the galley deck to have lunch and then planned on going to his office to write a letter to Petty Officer Porter’s wife. At the top of the stairs, he poked his head in Yeoman Gover’s office. He was surprised to see Molly sitting at the desk.

“Well hello there Molly?”

“Hi, Captain.”

"Where is Yeoman Gover?"

"Oh you mean Morris. He had to go get something. He said he would be right back."

"What are you doing?" he asked as he approached the desk.

"Drawing pictures. Do you want to see them?"

"Sure. Lets see what you've got here."

She showed him a picture of the "boat", as she called it, with all of the airplanes. There was a picture that she said was of Morris, although he couldn't see the resemblance. There were pictures of fairies and all sorts of mythical creatures. "I don't see a mermaid. You can't be at sea and have all of these fairies without a mermaid."

"Thats a good idea, Captain. I'll draw a mermaid next."

"What's this one?" he asked holding up a drawing of two men with beards, wearing robes.

"Last night that's what Morris and Simon said God and Jesus look like." she explained.

"That's very interesting, Molly." It reminded him that once Geannie had said something along those lines. "What's you mother doing?" he asked

"She's sleeping. She was crying for a long time and fell asleep. I was lonely so I came to be with Morris."

"You like Morris a lot, don't you."

"Uh huh. He's really nice."

"Are you hungry, sweetheart? I was going to see what Reggie has for lunch. Would you like to join me?"

"Okay, but I'll have to draw your mermaid later."

Taking her by the hand, he lead her to his wardroom where Reggie had some grilled cheese sandwiches and tomato soup ready. They had just sat down to eat when from out in the corridor they could hear Yeoman Gover calling after Molly. Reggie was heard explaining that she was having lunch with the Cap'an.

Morris poked his head in to make sure that she wasn't being a bother to the Captain. "She's just fine, Yeoman. We're just having some lunch here."

Satisfied that she wasn't in the way, he returned to his office. A moment later. They could hear Debra frantically calling for Molly. Morris told her where she was. Still wearing her robe and nightgown, she stuck her head into the wardroom. "There you are. When I woke up you were gone. I was so worried about you."

"It's alright Debra, we're just having lunch. Would you like to join us?" he said pointing to a chair.

"Alright. I haven't anything to eat yet today. I guess I am a little hungry."

Sheffield got up and pulled out a chair for her and slid it back up to the table.

“Thank you. You're such a gentleman.”

It wasn't until Sheffield sat back down that a glance in her direction revealed that she had indeed been crying. Reggie, anticipating that she too would want lunch, came in with some more sandwiches and soup.

“Are you sure you don't want to come up to the wing bridge? You look like you could use some fresh air. It's cloudy and kind of breezy today, but not bad.”

“Maybe later. I must look like a shipwreck, don't I?”

Sheffield knew not to answer that question. “Do you know what you need? You need a bāth?”

“A what?”

“A bāth. Geannie used to explain it like this, 'The difference between a bath and a bāth is that a bāth has hotter water, has bubbles, and takes longer.' She said they were even better with a good book and chocolate.”

“I want a bāth, Mommy.” Molly said. “That sounds fun.”

“You can have one right after me, Molly.” she said. “I've got a good book but I don't have any chocolate.”

“I think I can remedy that.” Sheffield said.

“Reggie, Reggie.” He called.

A moment later he came into in the wardroom. “Yes sir, Cap'an. What can I get for you.”

He tossed him a dime and said, “Run down to the store and get two chocolate bars, please.”

“Sure thing Cap'an. I'll be right back.”

Sheffield and Debra visited over lunch. Soon Reggie had completed his assignment and returned to the wardroom with the two Hershey bars. After lunch, Debra and Molly returned to their stateroom to indulge themselves.

Sheffield went to his office where Petty Officer Porter's personal effects were sitting on his desk. He looked through them and got a feel for what kind of person he had been. He picked up the picture that Reggie had talked about. He studied the face of the woman that he was about to write to, trying to figure out how to tell her what happened to her husband and why. On either side of her were their two children, a boy about eleven and girl about eight or nine. He thought of them having to go through life without what was obviously a loving father. Then he began his letter, doing his best to explain what happened to the man who was their husband and father. He had written other letters of this sort before, but for some reason this one was the most difficult.

On his way back to the bridge, he dropped the box and the letter off at Yeoman Gover's office with

instructions to take them down to the post office. When he arrived on the bridge, the overcast sky had given way to mostly sunny. In the distance up ahead of the ship the Brazilian coastline was visible. The afternoon patrols were ready for launch and soon began taking off. They were followed by the recovery of the midday patrols.

The Syracuse, Gunnison and some of the destroyers, including the Brazilian ships left the formation and set course for Rio. They would make port by sundown. The Reprisal along with the Billings, Cedar Rapids, Archer, Kirkman, Gordon, and Nash would remain at sea and enter port sometime after midnight.

Sheffield spent the remainder of the afternoon on the bridge. Debra and Molly never did come up. When he went below for dinner, he stopped by to invite them to join him. Much refreshed, Debra was happy to accept the offer. "Your wife was right about a good hot bath. I didn't ever want to ever get out, but I was beginning to shrivel up like a prune. When I finally did get out, I felt a lot better in more ways than one."

Molly presented him with the picture of a mermaid that she had drawn. He posted it on the wall where Geannie's picture had been. It reminded him of the dream he had the other night when she turned into mermaid and swam away. Over dinner, Sheffield explained that during the night they would be dropping anchor in Guanabara Bay and that the next day he would personally see to it that they got on a plane to take them home.

After dinner Sheffield spent the remainder of the afternoon and evening on the bridge. All aircraft aboard, except for the Bat Team were readied for launch and sent on in ahead of the ship. Once the afternoon patrol was recovered, they too were serviced and launched to join the rest of the air group at the Galeão Air Force Base located on an island the west side of the bay. Late in the evening, after the Bat Team took off, he retired to his cabin just off the bridge so he would be available when they steamed into the bay.

The Bat Team landed aboard around one o'clock and as ordered the ship set course for Guanabara Bay. Sometime around two o'clock Sheffield was awakened by the officer of the deck. He came to the bridge and took over to guide the ship in, followed by the cruisers and destroyers, in single file. Seven miles out, they passed along side the Rasa Island lighthouse. Guided by the Santa Cruz lighthouse on the east side of the entrance to the harbor and the Laje lighthouse on the west, Sheffield brought the ship through the mouth of the harbor. Once well inside, he ordered "all stop" and dropped anchor just off the navy yard at Ilha das Cobras, which translates into "Snake Island" around three o'clock in the morning of December 10<sup>th</sup>. Once at anchor, Sheffield went below to his stateroom to get some sleep during what was left of the night.

Despite a busy night before, Sheffield woke up at his usual time. After showering and shaving and putting on a fresh uniform, he went up to the flight deck to have a look a round. The light of morning revealed all of ships of the task force at anchor throughout the bay. In addition there was a US Navy

transport and another destroyer also present. "It must here for the POWs." he reasoned.

This was Sheffield's fourth visit to Rio. The last time was in 1938 with the Enterprise on her shakedown cruise. Not much had changed in four years. He looked all around to take in the skyline, beginning with Sugar Loaf Mountain almost four miles directly south of where the Reprisal lay at anchor. Sugar Loaf Mountain is on a peninsula at the mouth of the bay and rises 1,299 feet above the harbor.

Directly west of Sugar Loaf Mountain was the one hundred thirty foot Christ the Redeemer statue with outstretched arms on the peak of a twenty three hundred foot mountain. It wasn't there on his first visit in 1922 on the Wadsworth's world cruise, having been constructed between 1922 and 1931. Sheffield was just as impressed with it that morning as he was when he first saw it in 1934 when he was there on the Ranger's shakedown cruise.

He continued to scan the panorama before him. To the west was Rio da Janerio. To the east was Nitero. To the north was Guanabara Bay and the mountains beyond. He was through with staying holed up on the ship like a hermit. He wanted to get off the ship and spend some time ashore. He had his staff car and personal secretary who knew the area and the language. He was determined to take advantage of both. Their orders were to operate out of Rio for the next month or so, so there should be plenty of opportunities.

But first things first. He stepped down off the flight deck onto the port catwalk and through a hatch onto the Galley deck. He turned into the passageway leading past the admiral's stateroom and paused to listen at the door. Detecting activity inside, he knocked on the door. Debra, who was up and about, answered. She was wearing the red dress that he had given her three days ago when she and Molly first came aboard. After greetings of "Good morning," he invited them to breakfast. Reggie had gone all out with bacon, eggs, hash browns, and orange juice. Over breakfast Sheffield explained that later in the day they would be docking at the pier at the navy yard. After that he was going to take them ashore and secure passage back to the states for them. Debra was happy to finally be going home. "We've had two ships sunk out from under us. With my luck, the plane will go down." she joked.

After breakfast, Debra and Molly went back to their stateroom and Sheffield went to his office for a moment before going across the hall to his ready room for the daily briefing with the senior officers. There were several items of business for the day. First, the POWs were to be transferred to the transport. It was to be a ship to to ship transfer without going ashore. The LCVP was being prepared to be lowered into the water.

Once the POWs had left, the carrier would get underway, steaming through the bay to launch the planes that remained aboard. The planes would make the short hop to the air base and the ship was to make its way to Snake Island and tie up to the pier where she would be for the next five days. Once the ship was secured, the crew would be dismissed for liberty, in shifts.

At the end of the business on the agenda, Chief Solozar said that he had an item of business. He opened the door and invited Chief Audmundsen to come in. "Chief Audmundsen has something to present."

Chief Audmundsen said, "When Missus Watson and Molly first came aboard I altered the captain's dress for her. Then my men and I came up with a change of clothes for them. I got to thinking, they lost everything they had and they would need more of a wardrobe than that. So I started taking up a collection for them to buy some clothes when we got into port. I was amazed at how much the enlisted men wanted to help out. On average every crewman chipped in two bits. I have here just over five hundred dollars in change, mostly quarters. I would like to present it to them before they leave the ship."

Commander Owen then chimed in, "Not to be shown up by the enlisted men, I started a collection in the officer's wardroom for the same purpose. I have here almost a hundred and fifty dollars that I'd like to hand over to them."

"Well." Capitan Brason said, "I'm touched by everyone's generosity. I had no idea this was going on. Yeoman Gover, why don't you go and get Mrs. Watson and Molly and bring them in."

He immediately got up and rushed out of the ready room. A moment later he ushered them in. At first Debra felt a little intimidated. Sheffield stood up and invited her to sit in his chair. Molly took Mace's seat next to it. "You remember Chief Audmundsen. He has a little something for you."

"Ma'am," he began, "It's been a pleasure having you aboard. Knowing that you lost everything you had, the members of the crew all chipped in and we want to give you this." He plopped two bags bulging with coins down on the table in front of her.

She was speechless. Before she could respond, Captain Brason said, "That's just over five hundred dollars as near as anyone can tell. But that's not all. Commander Owen has something for you too."

"Yes, ma'am. Like the chief said, it has been nice to have you sail with us. Navy regulations prohibit women aboard ships underway, but what were we to do, throw you back? The officers also took up a collection in your behalf. Here is another hundred and fifty dollars to go with it." He placed another bag of cash and coins on the table.

Now she really was speechless. She sat there sobbing for a moment. No one said a word, allowing her to regain her composure. After a moment or two she said. "Thank you, thank you, all of you. I can't tell you how much this means to me. Until just a week ago, life was good. I was here in this lovely city with my husband and daughter. It was real adventure for us. Then my husband was senselessly gunned down right before my eyes and died in my arms before I could even lay him down. The next couple of days were a blur as I made preparations to take his body home. We set out for home on a ship, but before we had gone very far, it was sunk out from under us. We were fished out of the sea and the next thing I knew, we were prisoners on a German ship. We were told that we would be taken to France and be detained there. The

thought struck fear and terror in my heart to think that was to be our fate. But as fate has a way of doing, there was another twist. I heard some planes and recognized them as American. The calvary had come. The next thing we knew, that ship was sinking and Molly and I found ourselves in the water again. This time we were fished out by a boat from an American submarine and ended up on one of your destroyers, which brought us here.

“Everyone here has been so kind to us, especially Captain Brason and Yeoman Gover. They understood what I was going through and were so helpful. All of you have been just fabulous. Please convey to the crew our sincerest gratitude. Now we're back in Rio where we started. This time we can really go home. But first, I think we'll go shopping so we have some clothes and luggage. If it weren't for the Capitan and Chief Audmundsen, we'd still be wearing those filthy, ragged nightgowns that we were wearing when we came aboard.”

When she finished speaking, everyone present in the wardroom rose to their feet in applause. Chief Solozar called for three cheers for Mrs. Watson and her daughter. The the whole galley deck rang with “Hip, hip , hooray! Hip, hip, hooray! Hip, hip , hooray!”

When the cheering died down, Sheffield dismissed everyone except for Debra, Molly, and Yeoman Gover. He laid out his plan for the afternoon. He and Yeoman Gover would take them into to the city, first to the bank to exchange their money and then take them to the main shopping district. Still overwhelmed, all Debra could do was to hug him tightly, again soaking his shoulder with her tears. He simply reassuringly put his arms around her, patting her back. Not wanting to be left out, Molly hugged her new best friend, Morris.

Sheffield told Debra that he had business to attend to but would call on them later when it was time to go ashore. They returned to their stateroom, Morris went about his duties, and Sheffield went down to the hangar where the last load of POWs were about ready to depart. He got a chance to say goodbye to Captain Gottfried and wished him well.

He then went up to the bridge to begin making preparations for getting underway as soon as the LCVP had been hoisted back aboard. On it's first return trip from the transport, it brought with it some bags of mail. In sorting the mail, anything for the Captain was always of highest priority. Yeoman Gover retrieved it from the post office and took it up to the Captain on the bridge. There was some official correspondence that he could look at later. He had hoped for a letter from Ramona, but it had only been a couple of weeks since he last wrote to her. There was a letter from Walt that he kept with him, the rest he had taken down to his office.

Once the LCVP had been secured, he ordered the anchor weighed and the ship proceeded slowly toward the north end of the bay where she came about, picked up speed, and proceeded back down through the bay, directly into the wind. The twenty aircraft that made up the Bat Team were sent off for the

the short hop to join the rest of the air group at the Galeão Air Force Base, which was the home to a number of 1930s vintage Boeing F4B biplanes and other obsolete aircraft of the Brazilian Air Force.

With the deck cleared of aircraft, the Reprisal proceeded to Snake Island and was pushed into place next to the pier by three tugboats. Once the ship was tied up, the Captain's staff car was offloaded. After some other business, he was ready to leave. He went below to the Admiral's stateroom.

After being invited in, he asked, "Are you ready to go shopping?"

"Are you sure you really want to go with us. We can manage."

"I know, but you are carrying a lot of money on you. I'd hate for something to happen to you. I'd feel a lot better knowing I was with you."

"Well alright then. Let's go." Debra said. "Come on Molly."

They stopped off at Yeoman Gover's office to get him. He was already to go as well. Sheffield asked them to wait right there. He'd be back in just a moment. He disappeared down the corridor and around the corner to his suite. When he returned, he was wearing his side arm. "Like I said," patting the holster, "that's a lot of money. This way anyone who tries to take it will have to think twice."

Leading the way, Captain Brason headed down to the hangar deck and to the gang plank and down to the pier where his car was waiting. He opened the back door for Debra to get in and closed it behind her and went around to the other side. Morris asked Molly if she would like to ride up front with him. She was more than happy to. She thought the suicide doors were pretty nifty.

Yeoman Gover knew exactly where the Bank of Brazil was and how to get there.

"What is the exchange rate, anyway?" the captain asked.

Debra explained, "Back on the first of Novemer, Brazil switched to a new currency. One U.S. dollar is worth twenty two and half cruzeiros."

"Really?" Yeoman Gover spoke up. "That has changed since I was here. I'm not too surprised. The inflation rate had gone crazy down here. Things were really getting out of hand. It sure made our American money go a lot farther."

It wasn't far to the main downtown office of the Bank of Brazil. Morris carried in the two big bags of coins and Sheffield took the smaller bag. They marched up to a teller window and speaking through Morris she asked for seven thousand cruzeiros in denominations of one hundreds. She asked for the rest in US fifties and twenties.

The teller explained to Morris that would take a wile to count out that many coins. Morris relayed the information to Debra. The teller then suggested they go have lunch and come back in one hour and he would have the transaction completed.

After translating, Debra told him to explain that they would need some cash for lunch.

The teller asked how much she needed. Again Morris interpreted.

She told Morris to ask the teller for one hundred cruzeiros in twenties.

The teller handed the cash to Debra, who said "Obrigado." one of the few Portuguese words that she knew.

Sheffield was hesitant to leave that much money out their sight, but Debra and Morris had both dealt with the bank before and assured him that it was alright. Satisfied, he agreed and they left the bank and crossed the street to a restaurant where they had lunch. Morris read from the menu, explaining the entrées. After deciding on what to have, Morris placed the order. Debra was impressed with his ability to speak Portuguese.

Over lunch he explained how he had to learn the language when he first arrived in Brazil. It had been a real struggle for him at first. After all the work that he put to in mastering it, he didn't want to loose it. He had no idea that he would be back in Brazil so soon.

Debra told how she found it to intimidating to even attempt it that she didn't bother. She explained how her husband had picked up enough to get by and that she depended on him. She found that there were enough people who spoke enough English that she could usually communicate what she needed, although somethings as always, got lost in the translation which made for some amusing circumstances.

After lunch, they returned to the bank where the money was ready and waiting for them. Debra put two thousand cruzeiros in her purse and had Morris lock the rest in the trunk. They all got back into the car and she had Morris take them to a particular shop where she had bought clothes before.

Debra took advantage of her interpreter while shopping. He didn't seem to mind although he turned several shades of red when it came to the ladies undergarments. Debra laughed and took him by the arm and thanked him for being such a good sport about it. Sheffield stayed back and read the letter from Walt. He was interrupted from time to time when asked for his opinion. He never particularly enjoyed going clothes shopping with Geannie, but did so on occasion.

As she tried on several outfits, she handed the ones she wanted to Sheffield. Soon he had a whole pile of clothes laying across his lap. He too blushed when several pairs of panties, brassieres, and griddles were added to the pile, but he too was a good sport about it. After what seemed a long time she was ready to pay for her purchase.

That shop didn't cater to children, nor did they carry shoes so all of the new clothes were locked in the trunk for safe keeping. Next they went to a children's clothing store and then to a shoe store where the process was pretty much the same. Then they needed some luggage to pack it all into.

Sheffield watched Debra and was amazed at how shopping seemed to take her mind off the fact that she was such a recent widow who had been through so much in the last week.

He was impressed with Yeoman Gover and his willingness to help and was so cheerful about it. He didn't know very many sailors who would be willing to do what he was doing. He was the kind of young man that he would have been proud to have for a son. After all he, was old enough to be his father.

After a long afternoon, Debra and Molly had more than enough clothes to make it home with. It seemed like a marathon. There was still one more important item of business to take care of. They had to secure passage back to the States. Sheffield had Yeoman Gover drive them to the American Embassy.

The staff in the front office knew Debra from her husband having worked there. Many of them expressed concern and had heard that the ship they had sailed on had been sunk. They were relieved that she and Molly were safe.

After the pleasantries were over, the difficulties began. She was told that she would have to cover the expense of the trip home herself. The government only covered the cost for embassy personnel. The bureaucrat outright refused to offer any assistance.

That's when Sheffield stepped in. Taking a cue from Geannie and her father, he proceeded to explain that the US Government owed it to her. He explained that the woman's husband had been killed while on official government business. He told how they had two ships sunk out from under them before finding their way aboard his ship. The bureaucrat still resisted until Sheffield demanded to speak directly to the Ambassador.

"Oh he is busy and can't be interrupted. You'll have to make an appointment and come back later."

That answer didn't set well with Sheffield. Then totally out of character for him, he channeled the late Senator Austin. "We'll," he said. "I too happen to be an officer of the United States Government and I say I want to see him right now." He made his way to the ambassador's office and was reaching for the door knob when the bureaucrat relented.

"Perhaps there is something I can do," he sheepishly said. He pulled out two vouchers from his drawer and handed them to Mrs. Watson. "Take these with you and present them at the Panair ticket counter. Explain to them that you need passage to the United States. They will stamp them with the price of the fare and return them to our office. Once we receive them, we'll cover the cost."

Then channeling Geannie, he exaggerated his appreciation for how the bureaucrat went out of his way to be accommodating. Geannie had a way of doing it that didn't sound sarcastic, he hoped he did it half as good as she would have.

From the embassy, they went to the Santos Dumont Airport which was just adjacent to Snake Island. Again, Morris was her interpreter as she used the vouchers to purchase two tickets to Miami on the Panair flight that left in the morning. Panair was the Brazilian subsidiary of Pan American World Airways. Fortunately not all of the seats had been filled.

Next to the airport was a very nice hotel. Again with Morris' help, she checked herself and Molly into a room for the night. By then it was evening. She offered to treat her dear friends to dinner, in appreciation for all she had put them through that afternoon. Upon bidding them goodnight, she asked if they would come and see her off at nine o'clock the next morning.

Tired from the whirlwind of a day, the captain and the petty officer returned to the ship. Meanwhile, representatives from the British Embassy had come to the ship to claim their citizens and the Brazilians left to make their own way home.

The next morning, as promised, Sheffield and Morris met Debra and Molly at their hotel for breakfast while the hotel took their luggage to the airport. Even though the seaplane terminal was in walking distance, Sheffield had Morris take them in his car, the same seating arrangements as the day before.

With a few minutes before it was time to board their flight, they chatted casually. Then came the time for goodbyes. Again, Debra threw her arms around Sheffield. "Thank you again Sheffield for everything you have done for us. You have been more than kind. You were there for me when I needed a shoulder to cry on. I'll never forget you." Before letting go, she kissed him on the lips.

Sheffield was taken back by that. Geannie was the only woman who had ever kissed him on the lips. This was a tender kiss, void of passion but full of tender appreciation. As he looked into her face, he saw tears glistening in her eyes.

She slipped a folded piece of paper in his shirt pocket. "Here's my address and telephone number. Drop me a line sometime, or if you're ever in Washington, look us up."

"I'll be sure to do that. When you get home, drop me a line to let me know that you made it alright."

"I'll do that."

"You know, it is I who should be thanking you. I'd say that in the four days that I have known you, you have done so much than you'll ever know in helping me see that I can move on. Giving you that dress was a big step for me. By the way it looks great on you."

"Thanks. Knowing the story behind it, I will all ways cherish it."

"So what will you do when you get back to Washington?"

"First I need to settle my husbands affairs. He had enough life insurance that I won't need to worry about having to go to work anytime soon. Once I work through things and get my own bookshelf put back in order, perhaps then I'll consider going back to work. I'll keep busy enough just looking after Molly."

She took Sheffield's hand and gave it a gentle squeeze. Then she turned to Morris and gave him a similar hug. "And you, Morris. Thank you for everything that you have done for us. You have been so good with Molly. She told me that she wants to marry you when she grows up." That drew a chuckle from everyone.

"I'll tell you what Molly. I have a little brother who is a couple of years older than you. You can marry him, okay."

Debra continued, "Most of all, you and Simon have given me hope and something to really think about. I've been reading the book you gave me and plan to finish on the trip home." She also kissed him on the lips and slipped a folded piece of paper into the pocket of his uniform. "Like I told the Captain, drop me a line sometime and if you're ever in Washington, please come and see me. And be sure to tell your 'friends' in Washington to come see me, I'd really like to learn more about what you and Simon told me the other night."

"I'll be sure to do that. It has been my pleasure to get to know you and Molly." He held his arms out to Molly and she literally jumped into them. He caught her and held her close as he spun her around once. "Goodbye Molly. Thank you for helping me in my office, it was fun. Do you have a kiss for me too?" He asked patting his cheek.

"Uh huh." She gave him a big wet kiss right on his mouth. "I love you Morris." she cried.

"I love you too sweetheart." Morris said as he set her back on her feet.

She turned to Sheffield and threw her arms around him as high as she could reach. He bent down on one knee and took her into his arms. "Goodbye Molly. You take good care of you mother, okay. She is going to have some hard times and will probably cry a lot. You need to comfort her and tell her that everything will be alright, and it will be. I know."

"I will, Captain. I promise."

"I'll think of you when ever I look at the mermaid that you drew for me." He let go of her and she took her mother's hand.

"Well, I guess it's time to go." Debra said. She took Sheffield's hand once more. "Goodbye, and the best of luck to you. I hope you will find someone who really deserves a man like you. Men like you are hard to come by."

She let go and tuned to board the plane tied up at the terminal building. No one said another word as they boarded the plane. They were the last to board and the hatch was closed behind them. Sheffield and Morris watched as the plane handlers untied the ropes that had it secured to the dock. The four engines mounted on the wing above the fuselage spun to life. A moment later it was taxiing out into the bay.

The thirty two seat Sikorsky S-42 Pan Am Clipper flying boat began its take off run through the length of water marked off with buoys for a runway. Captain Brason and Petty Officer Gover waved enthusiastically as the bow lifted out of the water, a couple of seconds later, the entire hull was out of the water and the plane was airborne, beginning their four day, twelve thousand mile trip to Miami. From there they would fly on to Washington, D.C.

“Well, Morris, that was something wasn't it? We have today and tomorrow. Now, why don't you show me Rio?”

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The United States Naval Operating Base, and United States Naval Air Facility, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, were established on December 2, 1942 under the command of Rear Admiral Augustin T. Beaugard