

## Chapter XXXIII

### When in Rome

October 24, 1951 – December 24, 1951

When Ramona came home from running a few errands after school, she checked the mailbox hoping for a letter from Sheffield. She wasn't disappointed. She pulled the car into the garage and with an arm full of things went into the house and deposited everything on the table. First things first. She opened Sheffield's letter and read all about his ten day stay in Tokyo. After sorting through the other mail and put things away, she turned her attention to supper since the girls would be home soon.

After dinner, Norma and Janet helped clear away before turning her attention to their homework.

Ramona sat down and answered Sheffield's letter

*October 24, 1951*

*Dear Babe*

*You're right, I am envious. I'd love to see Tokyo sometime. Maybe someday you can take me there like you took me to Rio. I'm glad that you got to get out and enjoy it this time. I was reading in a magazine the other day about how the city is being rebuilt and becoming a modern metropolis.*

*That's great that you saw Wade and got to talk to him. I'll have to tell Roger and Chantelle that you saw him. From what I understand he'll be coming home in a couple of months.*

*Speaking of Roger. Yesterday during Sacrament Meeting, he was released as the branch president after six years. The new Branch President is Jack Brown. What do you think of that? You'll never believe who his First Counselor is. Give up? Okay, it's your brother Walt. How about that? I don't know if you remember Elmer Preston or not. He and his family are fairly new to the Branch. Anyway, he's the Second Counselor. So that's exciting.*

*So you've been doing a little missionary work with Lieutenant Kirk. It sounds like he is making progress. In the last couple of weeks there have been some more baptisms in the branch. First there was a young lady who is attending Roanoke College that was baptized and then Saturday night Bill and Marge Casper were baptized. I made sure I went to that one. He told me that if you were here, he'd of asked you to baptize him. Instead, Walt baptized both he and Marge. I think it was only fitting with their connection through Emmaline and Willie.*

*So much for news from the Branch. Your government classes are going well. I'm really beginning to enjoy teaching it. It's fun to be around the young people like that. Being at school really gives me a chance to be around Janet more.*

*She has really been working hard to get her speed up. She still isn't as fast as she was, but each week she's improving. Her coach thinks she'll be there by the first meet in late February. I just hope she doesn't have another of her accidents before then.*

*Coach Karrington says that your letters to the team are a big help. That was a good idea to still make yourself a part of the team like that. Your pep talks and encouragement are a real boost. The kids really respect you. They had their second match on Friday night at Lexington and won again. I'll included the clipping from the sports section of the paper, like I did their first match.*

*Your mother seems to be doing alright. It has been almost six weeks now. She misses him terribly, after all they were married for 59 years. At the same time she's relieved that he isn't suffering. She mentioned that having the eternal perspective of the gospel helps a lot. She takes comfort in the fact that they have been sealed in the temple. She's been getting out more lately and I've noticed that in Relief Society she's been sitting with what we call the widows club.*

*The kids are all doing fine. I already talked about Janet. Norma spends a lot of time on campus and is working about ten hours a week at the music store. She comes home for supper and then hits the books and practices the piano.*

*Craig and Edith come up from Blacksburg about every other weekend, when he's not on drill duty. They split Sunday dinner between here and Stirling and Mary Ann. This weekend will be his second weekend drill in Norfolk. He seems to really enjoy it. He decided that he couldn't do both wrestling and ROTC and didn't tryout for the wrestling team.. Now he's wondering if ROTC is too much on top of beginning the Reserve. I wouldn't be surprised if he dropped that too. Personally I think its for the best, I'd hate to see his grades suffer.*

*We'll that is pretty much it for everyone. I'm doing fine too, except for missing you. I sold another house last week and I'm looking for another one to take its place. I hope all goes well with you now that you're back out at sea.*

*Just remember that I love you and can't wait to see you again, whenever that might be.*

*Love, Ramona.*

Meanwhile, when the Reprisal rejoined Task Force 77 Sheffield resumed command. He now had four carriers at his disposal. The Reprisal and Bon Homme Richard in his division and the Essex and Antietam in Carrier Division Three. There were no shortage of targets to assign out as the stalemate continued, neither side seemed to be gaining ground. The peace talks were in the same quagmire.

The routine was the same day in and day out as planes were sent off loaded with bombs, rockets, and extra fuel. They flew to their designated targets and deposited their payload and returned for another load. At least most of them did. Enemy action and operational accidents continued to take its toll as planes were lost. As the fortunes of war go, the toll was counted in lives lost as well. Fortunately a good share of the pilots and crew were recovered, either plucked from the sea or ashore, and returned to fight again.

After the success at Pungsan, Sheffield continued to consolidate the night detachments in an effort to harass the enemy by night as well. That is when the truck convoys were on the road and the trains were running, taking fresh troops and supplies to front lines. Because of these night attacks, a lot of them never made it.

Occasionally combat operations were suspended due to poor weather conditions. From time to time one or more carriers withdrew for replenishing at sea, time off in Japan, or to return to the United States. When one was detached, Admiral Brason made due with what he had until another one took its place. To maintain readiness, target practice and damage control drills filled up the already busy days. As the weeks went by, it seemed that no real progress was being made.

Each Sunday, Sheffield attended the shipboard serviceman's group. With so few of them, Seaman Carter always has an assignment for him. Some might think it strange that an Admiral would take an assignment from a seaman. One week he might bless the sacrament and pass it another week. There were prayers to be offered and talks to give. Sheffield always received his assignments with gladness. As often as he could, he attended the cottage meetings with Lieutenant Kirk. The war didn't seem to be making much progress, but he was. His wife back home had already been baptized and he had committed to be baptized when they returned to Japan. He had even asked Sheffield to baptize him.

About once a week Sheffield received a letter from Ramona. They were always accompanied by short and sweet notes from Norma and Janet, and occasionally a letter from Craig. The mail bag also included letters from his mother and brothers. They too were always full of news and encouragement. He even received a letter from John Steinmann at MGM with an update on Neptune's Realm. The sets had been built and they were ready to begin filming. The production was still on track to be released in the spring.

Of course, the letters he looked forward to the most were the ones from Ramona. She kept him informed of what was going on at home, at church, and at school. He particularly liked the expressions of love that she included in every letter. The news clippings about the Magicians wrestling team always brightened his day. In one letter, she told of hosting Thanksgiving dinner, as usual. She said it wasn't the same without him there. She also noted Emmett's absence as well. She also said that Shenan and Emily had still not heard anything from Ruth Ann.

A couple of weeks later, her letter was accompanied by a birthday card. It caused him to pause and reflect. Not so much as to the fact that he turned fifty three so much as it dawned on him that it had been ten long years since Geannie, Sandy, and Austin had been taken from him. As he thought about it, he missed them terribly. That day resulted in a long hard fought war. Now here he was back at it again in a new war. Then he reflected on how much his world had changed in those ten years and he counted his blessings for what he now had.

When he wrote back to Ramona, he told her that the Reprisal was scheduled to return to Yokosuka on Christmas Eve and that he was looking forward to a break from the war as much as any man aboard. In the meantime, he had a job to do, and so went the war. Then on Saturday December 22<sup>nd</sup>, the Reprisal was detached from Task Force 77 and steamed toward Yokosuka for ten days or rest and replenishing.

When Ramona received the letter from Sheffield telling her that he'd be arriving in Yokosuka on the day of Christmas Eve, she got a brilliant idea. She looked at the calendar and did some quick planning. School let out after a half day on Friday the 21<sup>st</sup> and didn't start again until Wednesday the 3<sup>rd</sup> of January. If it took a day to get to Honolulu and another day to get to Tokyo they could be there on the evening of the twenty second, accounting for time zones and the International Dateline.

"What's the rush?" Ramona asked herself. "Sheffield won't be in until sometime on the 24<sup>th</sup>. Why not lay over for a day in Hawaii?"

She presented the idea of flying to Japan to see Sheffield for Christmas to the kids. Craig couldn't go because he had Reserve that weekend, but Norma and Janet were excited about the idea. Ramona's next move was to stop by and visit with her travel agent friend. First she booked the round trip flight. Next, they looked through the brochure and selected a hotel. She assured Ramona that she would take care of everything.

For the next several days Ramona and the girls prepared for their trip. The house had already been decked out for Christmas, inside and out and some of the Christmas shopping had been done. With this sudden change of plans, Christmas was going to be slightly different, but they would be spending it with Sheffield.

On the morning of the 21<sup>st</sup> they had everything all ready for the trip. It was just a matter of putting in a half a day at school. It was one of those days when not much got accomplished anyway because all anyone could think about was the Christmas break. That afternoon they flew out of Roanoke on an American Airlines DC-3 that afternoon and flew to the Washington National Airport. After a brief layover, they flew out of Washington at six o'clock in the evening on an American Airlines DC-6. After an eight hour cross county flight, they had a brief lay over in San Francisco before continuing on to Honolulu. With all of

the time zone changes, it was six o'clock Saturday and the sun wasn't up. On the long overnight flights, they slept most of the way and got what rest they could. On the way back, the plan was to spend a day in Hawaii.

On Saturday morning, they had breakfast had enough time for breakfast before checking in at the Pan Am ticket counter. Their flight was reported as "on time" and they had about a half an hour before boarding.

When it came time to board, they went through the gate out onto the tarmac. The sun had only been up a few minutes as they approached the giant, double decker Boeing 377 Stratocruiser, with the morning sun glinting off windows. The Stratocruiser was one of the few planes capable of flying non-stop across the Pacific Ocean from Honolulu to Tokyo. The first such flights had begun only two years earlier.



At seven thirty, they boarded the plane and took their seats. Twenty minutes later, the jumbo airliner was making its take off run and was airborne. One of the first things that Norma noticed was that she wasn't feeling queasy, as flying always made her feel. It was because the large plane was much more stable, even more so than the DC-6. Comparing the two, this was much larger. It wasn't as fast as the DC-6 but had a longer range. Settling in for the very long flight, they found the accommodations quite comfortable, even enough to actually be able to get some sleep well into the flight.

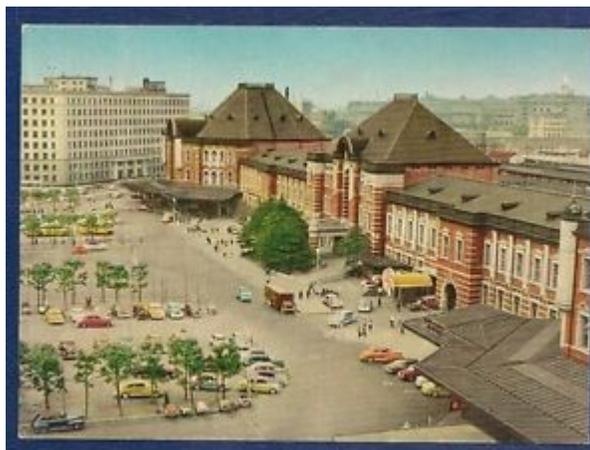
The plane left Honolulu at eight fifty five a.m. on Saturday December 22<sup>nd</sup>, but after crossing several time zones and the Intentional Dateline, when they landed eleven hours and twenty five minutes later, it was three fifty five p.m. on Sunday December 23<sup>rd</sup>. The main airfield in Tokyo was the Haneda Air Force Base, which was operated by the US Air Force which since 1947, had been handling commercial passenger flights.

The temperature at the airport was seven degrees Celsius, or about forty five degrees Fahrenheit under overcast skies. They gathered their luggage and made their way to the airport train terminal for the trip to downtown Tokyo, about eleven miles away. When the train pulled away from the station, it had began to rain lightly.

As the passenger cars, pulled by a Japanese National Railways D51 "Dekoichi" steam engine chugged its way into the city, they got their first look at the county that had been the enemy. Along the route, a modern city was emerging from the rubble of war. One of the first things to be rebuilt was the very rail line they were traveling on. New factories, commercial buildings, and apartments now stood among the ashes.

The rapid reconstruction of the central business district was in part due to recent profits from American expenditures on procurements for the war in Korean.

They got off the train at Tokyo Station in the heart of downtown. The three story redbrick terminal building built in 1914 was more of a European style, supposedly influenced by the main station in Amsterdam. Much of the station was destroyed in the firebombing of Tokyo in May 1945, shattering the impressive rooftop domes. The station was quickly rebuilt within the year, but simple angular roofs were built in place of the domes, and the restored building was only two stories tall instead of three.



Tokyo Station Hotel was directly connected to the terminal building and had reopened only that year after reconstruction, which began in 1947. After checking in, they went to their room. They stepped into a room unlike anything they had ever been in before. The first thing they had to do was to remove their shoes, as dictated by Japanese custom. The room was filled with typical Japanese furnishings. In the center of the room was a low table, only about a foot high, surrounded by four chairs with no legs that also sat on the floor. These were on an intricately woven rug over a hard wood floor. At the end of the room a stained glass partition separated two sleeping areas, each with a mat on a raised platform a few inches above the floor. Each partition could be closed off by folding stained glass door.

Each partition also had a window that looked out over the Imperial Palace, or what was left of it. It too had been damaged during the war and had not yet been repaired.



Janet opened a door to a closet off to one side to find a typical Japanese style squat toilet that was flush with the floor. At the far end of the closet was a stand with a raised wash basin and a faucet coming out of the wall.

“How are we supposed to use this?” She laughed.

Ramona stepped inside and said, “Look behind the door. See, here it is. You straddle it and squat over it to do your

business.”

“I’m not using that.” Janet protested.

“You will when you have to go bad enough.” Norma encouraged. Then she had a question of her own, “Where are we suppose to take a shower?”

“Funny thing you asked. In Japan they have public baths. They’re called Sentōs. It’s just down the

hall.”

“I'm not taking a bath either.” Janet protested again.

“Oh yes you will. We all will. I don't know about you, but feel like I need to freshen up.”

“Don't they have regular bathrooms here?” Norma asked.

“You've got to remember, we're not in America anymore. They have different customs and ways of doing things over here. The hotel does have a few suites that have western furnishings but they were all booked. Besides they were a lot more money. I thought it would be good for us to experience their customs for ourselves.”

“Alright.” Norma agreed. “When in Rome do as the Romans, or in this case When in Tokyo, do as the Japanese.”

“What do you say? Lets put our clothes away and go freshen up.”

Next to the bathroom was another closet that opened up into an area for hanging clothes and a chest of drawers.

After putting their clothes away, Ramona lead the girls down the hall to the Sentō. Just inside the entrance were some cubbyholes for shoes. They each took off their shoes and stashed them on the shelf. At the end of the entrance sat the attendant, a woman who didn't speak English. She politely handed them each a towell, a washcloth, and a bar of soap and indicated for them to step through the red curtain to their right. The blue curtain to the right was for the men.

They found themselves in the changing room. Along either side were rows of lockers and a long flat bench down the middle. There were two Japanese women in the room. One was just getting dressed and the other was taking off her clothes. They both smiled politely at the three Americans and bowed. They knew enough to return the bow.

“When I lived in Hawaii, I used to visit a Japanese bathhouse on occasion. I even took Geannie and Sandy once. “Just do what I do and the other women here.” Ramona instructed.

They began undressing and hung their clothes in the locker. Norma gulped when the woman stripped completely naked.

Ramona nodded to the girls to do the same as she took off her clothes. Following the woman's example, they wrapped their towels around their busts. As short as Ramona was, her that her towel covered her about a third of the way to her knees. But for Norma who was taller, the towel barley covered her.

Wrapped in their towels, they stepped though a sliding door into the bath area onto a tiled floor. Along both sides and down the middle were rows of bathing stations, consisting of a seat, a wash basin and faucet, a mirror, and a hook for a towel. Drains lined the floor. At the far end was a large tub called an "Ofuro".

There were other women of all ages, shapes and sizes. One young woman had two little girls with her. Two or three women sat at the washing stations, their towels hung on the hook. Ramona took off her towel and hung it up. Her natural skin tone was about half as tan as the Japanese women, but her blond hair and blue eyes were a definite contrast.

For a woman of forty eight, she looked as if she were somewhere between thirty and thirty five. She had always looked younger than she was, but as she got older, the gap between her age and how she looked grew wider. It used to be that she looked ten years younger, now the difference was more like twelve to fifteen years. She attributed it to the gift of youth that she had been blessed with. The fact that she didn't have much of a figure also contributed to her youthful look.

As Ramona stood there naked, a look of panic filled the faces of her daughters.

"It's alright girls. It's not like we haven't seen each other at home without any clothes on."

"Yeah, but there are other people here."

"It's not much different than the girls shower room in P.E. and track now is it? You see the other girls naked there, and they've seen you. Besides, they're all busy doing their own thing, they aren't looking at you."

Norma was the first to remove her towel. At eighteen, she was now a mature woman in form. She was about five foot six and had a gorgeous figure and was pretty well endowed. Finally, with some reservations, Janet took off her towel and hung it up. She was almost sixteen and was still blossoming into a woman. Even at that, she had a much better figure than Ramona although she was still rather lanky. Besides her missing big toe, she had a noticeable scar on her right leg, just above the knee. At five feet five inches tall, she was taller than Ramona and was still growing. In contrast to Ramona's blond hair, blue eyes and dark complexion, the girls both had brown hair, brown eyes, and a lighter complexion. They looked so much like Samantha looked as a young woman.

They each sat on the stool at their station and filled the basin with water and poured it all over themselves. Next they soaped up their washcloths and began washing their bodies. There were a couple of other women in the same process. One of them turned her back to the other and the other woman began washing her back.

"Turn around, Norma, and I'll wash your back. Janet, turn around too and Norma will wash your back."

There they were all in a row washing each other's backs. While all soaped up, they shampooed their hair. When finished, they refilled their basins with clean water and again poured water over themselves to rinse their bodies. The water ran into the drains in the floor.



Once they had rinsed off, leaving their towels on the hooks, they strutted over to the ofuro with the beautiful mural of Mont Fuji above it. The ofuro was partitioned into two halves, one full of hot water, about ninety eight degrees, and the other full of very hot water, about one hundred nine degrees. The side with the very hot water was occupied by three women, chatting away about who knew what. Ramona, Norma, and Janet stepped own into the first one.

“Aww, this feels so good.” Norma said as she settled in. All three of them sat in water up to their necks.

“Now that wasn't so bad, was it girls?”

“I really like this part.” Janet agreed.

“You know,” Ramona said, “it hasn't been all that long, maybe a hundred years, since men and women bathed together.”

Once they were settled in and relaxing in the hot water, they began chatting among themselves. Before long, another Japanese woman entered, wearing only a towel. She was about the same height as Ramona and appeared to be in her early forties. She wore her black hair in a western fashion. She removed her towel and went about bathing. Although she was about the same height as Ramona, her body was sculpted in proportion to her height.

As she stepped down into the ofuro, “You American?” she asked in English.

“Yes, we are.” Ramona answered.

“For westerners you seem to know what you're doing. Many don't.”

“I've done this before.” Ramona answered.

“This is very important custom for us and there are rules that must be followed. First rule, take off clothes. Can't bathe with clothes on very good. Its impolite not to be naked.

“Rule number two. Must wash well before bathing. No soap in here.

“Rule number three. “Enter the bath to complete the process. The hot water opens pores to clean them out and refreshes circulation, among many other benefits.

“Bathing together reinforces the basic elements of Japanese society, the sense of community. We call it hadaka no tsukiai, which means 'naked communion' where we break down barriers and get to know people in a relaxed atmosphere. It is said that she whom you bathe with becomes a friend for life.”

“Well then. My name is Ramona and these are my daughters Norma, and Janet.”

“My name Mizuko, which means water child.”

“Tell me Mizuko,” Ramona asked, “where did you learn to speak English so well?”

“Many years ago, before war I study at University of Hawaii.”

“Really.” Ramona exclaimed. I lived in Hawaii before the war too. I had a house not far from the

university. When were you there?"

"I go there from nineteen thirty to nineteen thirty four."

"I was there then."

For the next hour Ramona, Norma, and Janet visited with Mizuko as if they were old friends and found that they weren't all that different after all. They talked about everything from their families to why they were there.

Finally, it was time to get out and they bid goodbye to their new friend, who they would probably never see again. When they got up out of the water, all relaxed, Norma and Janet were no longer as self conscious about being naked. They returned to their respective washing stations where their towels were waiting for them. "Now," Ramona instructed, "we have to dry off completely before we return to the changing room so we don't track any water in there."

As they dried off with their towels, they talked. It was one of the best times they had ever had together and they bonded even more as they drip dried. Eventually they returned to the changing room and got dressed. As they were putting their clothes back on Janet said, "Okay. This wasn't so bad. But I still don't know about using the toilet"

Clean, relaxed, and refreshed from their long flight, they went to the hotel restaurant and had dinner before returning to their room to get ready for bed. At one point, Janet couldn't wait any longer and had to use the toilet, Japanese style.

Norma and Janet shared the bed in one of the partitions and Ramona the other, which she would be sharing with Sheffield the next night.

First thing the next morning, Ramona placed a telephone call to Fleet Headquarters and identified herself as the wife of Admiral Sheffield Brason and asked when the Reprisal would be pulling in. She learned that it would be arriving just after noon, which gave them plenty of time to get ready for the day and to ride the train down to Yokosuka.

As the Reprisal steamed back to Yokosuka, combat operations had been suspended and it was a much more relaxed atmosphere aboard the carrier. Sheffield was ready for a break. Other than Lieutenant Kirk's baptism on Christmas Day, he really hadn't thought about what he'd do with his time. He had missed Christmases before, but after having a taste of civilian life, this time he really missed Christmas at home with his family. He'd about give anything to be with them.

At dawn on the 24<sup>th</sup>, the Reprisal was about a hundred miles southeast of Tokyo Bay. A holiday ambiance had settled over the ship as the crew and officers looked forward to spending Christmas ashore. Most of them spent the morning packing their sea bags and getting ready to run down the gangplank as

soon as it was in place.

At eleven thirty, she entered the Ugara Channel into Tokyo Bay and a several minutes later, slowed and rounded the point into Yokosuka Cove, just inside Tokyo Bay as men in peacoats lined the flight deck. Three tug boats approached and soon nosed against the hull. Slowly, they the turned the big ship a quarter turn and began pushing her backwards until she was even with the pier. Then ever so gently they nudged her into place at Berth 12, with her starboard side against the dock. The whole process took time and by twelve twenty, she secured to the dock. The gangplank was lowered and men began disgorging from the ship.

That's when Sheffield, looking down from his flag bridge, noticed the three women standing on the dock. "No. It couldn't be." It took a second glance before he recognized them as his women. He stepped out onto the platform and waved, which drew an immediate response.

"What are you doing here?" he hollered down to them.

Ramona cupped her hands around her mouth and hollered back, "We've come to wish you a Merry Christmas!"

"Have you had lunch yet?" He asked.

"No!"

"Come aboard!" Sheffield shouted. "I'll have someone meet you."

By then, the hoard of sailors rushing off the ship had subsided and Ramona and the girls made their way up the gangplank. They were met by Lieutenant Moncur on the quarterdeck and he ushered them to the Admiral's stateroom. They took off their coats and waited momentarily for Sheffield to come down.

Sheffield burst through the door with the biggest smile on his face. "Gosh, its good to see you." he exclaimed. He made a beeline for Ramona and took her in his arms and gave her a big hug and a kiss. Then, in turn he had a hug and a kiss on the cheek for Norma and Janet.

"I sure wasn't expecting to see you here." he said.

"When I got your letter saying that you'd be in port today, I looked at the calendar and we decided to surprise you."

"Well. You sure did. I can't get over it. Craig wasn't able to come I take it."

"No he had drill over the weekend."

"When did you get here?"

"Yesterday afternoon." Ramona explained, then told about their trip to get there and where they were staying.

About that time, Seaman Mantequillas came to the door. "Lunch is ready, sir." he informed the admiral.

“Very good, Alejandro. Thank you.”

“Ramona, girls, you remember Alejandro don't you?”

“Of course. Its so good to see you again, Alejandro ”

“I take it you met, Phil.”

“Do you mean Lieutenant Moncur? Yes. He seems like a very nice young man.”

“Well, ladies if you'll follow me to the wardroom,” Sheffield said, “I'll treat you to lunch. And then this evening the ship happens to be hosting a USO Christmas show. Would you like to stick around for it?”

“Who's in it?” Ramona asked.

“Danny Kaye and the Andrews Sisters.”

“Sure. That sounds like fun.”

They visited and got caught up over lunch; good old grilled cheese sandwiches and tomato soup.

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Sentos, or public bath houses are still found in Japan but after the reconstruction, most homes now have private bathing facilities. The description and the rules are factual. In the mid 18<sup>th</sup> century, separate facilities for men and women became the norm.

Although Danny Kaye and the Andrews Sisters performed on USO tours, this is fictional.