

Chapter XXXVII

A Few Days At Home

April 30, 1952 – May 18, 1952

When Ramona received Sheffield's letter from Hawaii, she circled May 13th on calendar and began planning for his return. Since that was a Tuesday, it meant she had to get a substitute to cover for her for a couple of days. She also began planning a welcome home celebration as well. He would only have the rest of that week at home before reporting to Washington, so the timing was critical.

She wrote back with the latest news and a few days later received a letter that he had mailed from Panama. The days seemed to creep by as she anticipated seeing him again. After school on the 12th she set out alone on US Highway 460 for the drive to Norfolk. None of the kids came as they all had school. She arrived just as the sun was setting a little after eight o'clock and checked into the Tazwell Hotel.

The next morning, she called the Navy base and identified herself and inquired as to the arrival of the Reprisal. She was told that they were due around one o'clock. That gave her plenty of time to get ready for the day. She had room service deliver breakfast to her room and then had a long leisurely bath in the deep, free standing, claw foot bathtub.

She drove over to Cape Henry and parked by the lighthouse and walked the short distance to the beach and sat down on the sand to wait. It was a little on the cool side with a stiff breeze blowing in off the ocean. Visibility was pretty good, with haze out toward the horizon. She had been there about forty five minutes when off to the southeast, the seven ships came into view while still several miles out to sea. The Reprisal and the Wisconsin towered above the smaller cruiser and the destroyers were barely visible.

Excitement and emotion welled up in her breast as she sat with her eyes fixed on the homeward bound vessels. Ever so gradually they grew larger as they drew closer. Finally, they entered Chesapeake Bay as they passed directly between Cape Henry and Cape Charles on the opposite side. The ships were close enough to make out the uniformed sailors lining the decks. She strained as she looked at the flag bridge to see if she could see her husband. The windows were dark and she couldn't see through them.

She wondered if he was looking toward the shore. Just in case, she waved vigorously as the carrier steamed slowly by. She wasn't the only one there for the same purpose. Several people were strung along the beach, doing the same thing. She watched for a several more minutes before going back to her car. It would still be a while before the ship arrived at the dock.

It took twenty minutes to drive to the base. By the time she showed her credentials and was permitted onto the base and parked her car, the Reprisal had three tugboats guiding her toward the pier. She walked down the pier and joined others who were awaiting their loved ones.

The carrier was backing into her berth, with the island structure next to the dock. The few minutes that it took for the ship to be moved into place and secured to the dock seemed to take forever.

Ramona's eyes were fixed on the flag bridge, but again, she couldn't see through the windows. Then, there he was standing on the catwalk outside of the flag bridge, almost directly above her.

Sheffield waved and called down to where, "I knew you'd be here."

"Where else would I be" She called back.

"Give me a few minutes and I'll be right down." He waved again and disappeared back inside.

Ramona watched as the hoards of sailors and officers streamed down the gangplank and many of them right into the arms of wives and sweethearts. Nearby, she saw the tender sight of a sailor holding his baby son for the first time. Two children bolted from their mother's grasp and dashed to their daddy. The officer stooped down to take them into his arms.

Tears and hugs were all around as families were reunited after the long nine month deployment. As for Sheffield, he had been gone nearly an entire year, even though Ramona had seen him at Christmas when she met him in Japan. But now he was back and would be close to home for the foreseeable future.

"Excuse me, ma'am." a sailor said as he approached her with a cart loaded with luggage. "Are you Missus Brason?"

"Yes. That's me."

"Admiral Brason will be right with you. These are his things. My instructions are to take them to your car."

"Oh. Very well." Ramona said as she reached into her purse and pulled out her car keys. "Its the dark blue two door Ford Victoria with the white top parked in the VIP parking." she said as she handed him the keys and pointed in the direction of where it was parked. Then she added, "The licenses plate number is six nine one, five oh four. Just put it all in the trunk."

The sailor left and Ramona returned her attention to the gangplank a few feet away. Then she saw him emerge from the quarter deck, accompanied by a younger officer who she recognized as Lieutenant Moncur, who she had meet in Japan. Sheffield picked Ramona out of the crowd and waved to get her attention. She moved in closer to the gangplank and as he stepped off, he hung the crook of his cane over his forearm and reached out for her. A heartbeat later, she was in his arms, as he closed them around her and lifted her off her feet. As he set her down, he reached down and kissed, her.

"Gosh, its good to see you again. You don't know how much I missed you."

As tears slowly trickled down her check, she replied, "I'm so glad to see you too, Babe."

Out of the corner of her eye, she witnessed the tender reunion of Lieutenant Moncur with his wife and little girl who appeared to be about four years old. After another kiss, Sheffield let go and took her by the hand and turned toward his aide.

"You remember Lieutenant Moncur, I'm sure."

“Certainly. Its good to see you again Lieutenant.”

“Admiral, Missus Brason, this is my wife Anita and this is Maureen. They came all the way from Kansas on the train. They'll be staying with me in Washington.”

“Its so nice to meet you.” Ramona said. “Your husband has taken such good care of mine for me.”

“Phil speaks very highly of the Admiral.”

“What are your immediate plans?” Ramona asked. “You're more than welcome to come out and spend a few days with us.”

“Thank you, Missus Brason.” Phil said, “But we need to go up to Washington and find an apartment and line one up for Admiral Brason.”

“I understand. You're welcome to come and stay anytime.”

“Thank you again. We'll be certain to do that sometime.”

The two couples visited for a moment until the sailor returned with the empty cart. “Here are your keys, ma'am.”

Sheffield introduced the young man as Yeoman LeRoy Walinsky, who had been a member of his staff.

Hand in hand, Sheffield and Ramona walked down the dock toward where her car was parked, As they drew near, Sheffield commented, “So this is your new car. You sure know how to pick them.”

“Would you like to go for a ride sailor?” she winked. “I know a hotel near by.”

“Sure lady. Why not.” Then he laughed, “Do you just hang around the piers looking for lonesome sailors?”

“Yeah, I know how to pick them too. I'm pretty particular.”

“What are you going to do with me?”

“Get in and come find out. That is unless, you're afraid.”

“Should I be?” He asked as he got in the passenger side and shut the door. “So were are we going?”

“The Tazwell.”

“Oh, I see. You have class.”

“Nothing but the best. Who knows, after tonight, I might even take you home with me.”

They visited as they drove to the hotel where they secluded themselves in their room and spent the afternoon and evening making up for lost time. True her word, the next day, she took him home.

When Sheffield and Ramona turned off the highway into the driveway when they got home, everything looked pretty much as they had a year ago. The flowerbeds were in bloom and the cows in the

pasture, right were he remembered them. When he went in the house, it too was just as remembered. It was a relief to be home.

Sheffield brought in his things and put them away, while Ramona turned her attention to dinner. Janet and Norma would be home soon and Craig and Edith had arranged to get away early and would be there about the same time. As much as he wanted to see them, he was glad that Ramona had come on her own to meet him. The time alone with her was just what he needed and wanted.

Janet was the first to come home. She excitedly threw her arms around him and exclaimed, "Welcome home Daddy." and gave him a kiss on the cheek.

"And how's my big little girl? I sure missed you."

"I have some good news." she beamed. "The doctor has cleared me to participate in track and my coach says I can compete in the district track tournament on Friday. She says to just do my best. Isn't that exciting?"

"Why, I'd say it is. And the best part is that I can come and watch."

"She's known this for a couple of weeks." Ramona said. "But she wanted to tell you herself."

"I've been running to get ready." Janet explained. "I'm not as fast as I was, but at least I get to compete. Thats all I wanted."

"Go get changed," Ramona said to Janet, "and come and help me."

Sheffield wandered out into the yard to have a look around. As he went up to fence to look at the cows and calves in the pasture, Red and Roxy, who were down by the trees, made their way to him. Red reached over the fence with his head and nuzzled him with his face, as if to say, "Where've you been? Lets go for a ride."

We wandered out to the hangar to have a look at his Staggewing. Thats when he heard a car pull into the driveway. When he came out of the hangar, Norma was just getting out of her car.

"Norma." he called. "I'm home."

Norma left her things in the car. "Dad!" she yelled as she ran across the yard to greet him. She threw herself into his arms and buried her face into his shoulder. He could tell that she was sobbing as her gently stroked her hair.

She raised her head up and looked him in the eye and said, "I'm so glad to see you. I've missed you."

"I've missed you too, sweetheart. Lets go back to the house."

She took him by the arm and walked with him back across the yard.

"So." he asked, "You really like Wade, huh?"

"Oh yes, Dad. I really, really like him. And I know that he likes me too."

“Wade's a good young man.”

“I hope that someday it becomes a lot more than that.” She confided.

“Just give it some time and I think something could very well become of it. There's no hurry. Take your time to really get to know him.” he counseled.

When they got to the house, Sheffield went in while Norma retrieved her things out of the car.

A little after that, Craig and Edith arrived. This was the first time that Sheffield had seen them since he left. After another round of greetings and hugs, Edith helped Ramona and the girls with dinner while Craig took Sheffield out to the hangar to show him what he had done with the Staggerwing.

When dinner was ready, Janet came out to get them. When they got back to the house, Wade was there as well. As they sat down to eat, Sheffield offered the blessing and in so doing he expressed his gratitude for being home with his family again.

Ramona had baked a special welcome home cake for Sheffield. A little later on, Walt and Sarah, Shenan and Emily, and Ellen all came for cake and ice cream and to welcome him home. That was also the first time that he had seen his mother since his father passed away eight months earlier. He was pleased to see her doing so well. They all stayed into the evening and left around nine o'clock.

The next morning, Sheffield saw everyone off to school and just took it easy after his long voyage. He did keep his appointment with Red and went for a ride through the hills to the south. When he got back, his leg muscles made it obvious that he hadn't been on a horse for a while.

On Thursday, Sheffield accompanied Ramona to school, wearing his uniform. He sat in on each of her government classes. He couldn't say they were his, because she had taught them all year. In each class she gave him some time to talk to the students. There was a special assembly in the auditorium in which he was the featured speaker. He talked about the freedoms that we have in the United States and how important it was to safeguard them because there were nations and individuals who would like to squelch them.

During wrestling practice after school, the wrestling team put on their sumo wrestling exhibition. When they learned that he would be coming home, they wanted to save it for him. It was open to anyone who wanted to watch.

That evening, Norma had a piano recital that was her final for her piano class. Still in his uniform, he sat with Ramona, Janet, and Wade as he proudly listened to her rendition of Beethoven's Sonata Number 8 Pathétique - 3rd Movement in C minor, which she played without sheet music. She got an A on the piece and for the class.

Then on Friday afternoon, he went to Janet's district track meet. At the junior varsity level, there was no state competition. She was nervous about competing after sitting out the entire season. Her first

event was the one hundred yard dash. She had always been a good sprinter and typically finished in the top three. She set her sights on third place and surprised herself and everyone who was familiar with her situation by actually placing second.

She sat out the relays because she wasn't confident enough in her strength and didn't want to let her team down. In running the sprints, she was mentally competing with herself and her personal best times. When she took the starting block for the four hundred yard dash, she was fatigued from her first race. Her goal was to simply finish the race. When it was over, she placed sixth out of eight runners.

After the meet, the varsity coach approached her and said, "Brason, I admire your guts. Not bad for sitting out the season. Work on it during the summer, and I hope to see you at tryouts this fall."

That was a bigger boost to her confidence than competing had been. Her reply was, "You betcha, Coach. Not only will I show up, but I'm going to make the team."

"I'm sure you will." the coach said as she walked away.

On Friday afternoon, Craig and Edith came up from Blacksburg. This was his weekend to go to Norfolk for his reserve weekend drill. He took off in the Staggerwing and Edith went to stay with Stirling and Mary Ann for the weekend.

Saturday was a day to just be home with no where to go and nothing to do. Norma had two hour shift at the music store. Janet rode to work with her that morning and took the car to go to a park to play in a girl's church softball game. She wasn't that much into softball, but she did it for the physical exercise as part of her goal to make the JV track team in the fall. Playing outfield gave her plenty of chances to run.

About eleven thirty, Sheffield noticed a taxi pull into the driveway. Watching through the window, he noticed two sailors with their sea bags come up the sidewalk toward the front porch. Recognizing them, Sheffield put down what he was reading and went to the door and opened it even before they had a chance to knock.

"Seaman Goodey, Airman Orchard. What on earth brings you to my doorstep?"

Even though he wasn't in uniform, they saluted. "Admiral Brason, sir." Sedric Orchard said, "we're on our way home for a month and since the train went right through here, I thought I'd stop in and see Craig. I haven't seen him since college."

That was only an excuse, the real reason was that Quinn wanted to see Norma.

"Well you just missed him. He flew to Norfolk yesterday afternoon for drill. He's in the Navy Reserve and this is his weekend to be on duty. Why don't you come in anyway."

"Thank you, sir." Quinn said as he looked around to see if Norma was at home.

"Have a seat men." Sheffield invited.

Just then Ramona came out of the office. The two sailors who had barley sat down, stood to greet

her.

“What a pleasant surprise. What brings you boys here?”

Simultaneously the both politely said, “How do you do, ma'am.” Then Sedric explained, “I wanted to stop by to see Craig while we were passing through on our way home. But I guess I just missed him.”

“Oh, that's too bad.” Ramona said. Then added, “I was about to make some lunch, would you like to join us.”

The two young men looked at each other not quite knowing what to do since the excuse for their uninvited presence wasn't working. “Yes, ma'am.” Quinn said still wanting fulfill the real reason for his intrusion. “We'd like that.”

The moment was a bit awkward for the two sailors in the home of an admiral. Sheffield didn't quite know how to respond either. The whole thing was outside of proper protocol. Sheffield had got to know them pretty good from attending the Serviceman's Group aboard the ship. They looked to him as a role model and a father figure away from home. He considered them as he had the wrestlers on his team and accepted the responsibility they placed on him. There was no one within two hundred miles who would look upon the interaction with a critical eye. He decided to tear down the barrier that was supposed to separate them.

“Since you're here, why don't you spend the weekend. Craig will be home late tomorrow afternoon.”

“That's right.” Ramona added. “You can stay in the guest room. We have an extra cot that we can set up for one of you.”

“Thank you. Sister Brason.” Quinn said for the both of them. Then he got brave and asked, “So where are Norma and Janet?” He added Janet to his inquiry hoping not to give away his real objective.

“Oh,” Ramona answered. “Norma is at work and Janet is at a church softball game. They'll be home soon. Now if you'll excuse me, I need to go fix some lunch.”

While Ramona went into the kitchen, Sheffield invited them to go on a tour of the ranch. Quinn had grown up living in town in Tremonton, Utah and hadn't had much exposure to a ranch type setting.

On the other hand, Sedric said, “This is just like back home. My family has a similar place out west of Blackfoot, Idaho. Only we don't have as much land. We have a few calves and a couple of horses too. My dad grew up on a ranch, and it was his way of staying in touch with his heritage.”

“What does your father do for a living, Sedric?”

“He's a foreman at a potato processing plant in Blackfoot.”

“I suppose there's a lot of need for work like that in Idaho.”

“I worked there too during the summers during high school and while I was at Ricks.”

From the pasture and livestock. Sheffield took them out to the hangar to show them where he kept

the Staggerwing, which Craig had taken. He went onto explain that Craig had decided to go into aviation mechanics. About that time, Ramona called them in to wash up for lunch.

As they were walking back to the house, Wade brought Norma home from work. Quinn saw her sitting next to him in his 1947 Mercury Coupe. He immediately recognized the fellow and his heart sank. Now he understood why Norma hadn't returned his letters lately.

Norma and Wade got out of the car and hand in hand walked toward the two unannounced visitors. "Quinn, Sedric." Norma greeted. "What are you doing here?"

"We were just going home and Sedric here wanted to stop by and see your brother, but he ain't here." Quinn lied, attempting to disguise his disappointment.

Norma let go of Wade's hand long enough to give them each a hug. "Gosh, its good to see you. How long are you staying?" she asked as she took a hold of Wade's arm.

"Your Dad has invited us to stay the weekend so Sedric can see Craig when he comes home tomorrow evening." Quinn said.

Quinn looked awkwardly at Wade and said, "Hello. Elder Rowan."

"It's just Wade now. It has been for the last five months. I'm surprised you remembered me." Wade said as he shook hands first with Quinn and then Sedric. "Say, there's a district M Men Gleaner dance tonight at the church that we're going to. Would you fellows like to come?"

"Sure." Sedric agreed for the both of them. Quinn was still reeling in disappointment and did not respond.

By the time their little reunion concluded and they were walking up to front porch, Janet pulled into the driveway. Again their was another round of greetings. To her query as to what they were doing there, Sedric said, "I thought I'd save myself three pennies and deliver a letter to my pen pal in person." as he handed her an envelope. Then he added, "You're a swell pen pal. You always are quick to write back."

"Seriously, you stopped by just to see me?"

"No." Norma corrected her. "They're on their way home and he stopped in to see Craig." Then she said to Sedric, "I hope you know, you're not the only fellow she's been writing to. She has at least a couple of other pen pals that I know of. One of them she's kind of sweet on. Maybe you know of his family Quinn. He lives in Utah too."

Quinn came out of his stupor of thought by the fact that Norma actually spoke to him. "Oh yeah, where?"

"Clarkston."

"Sure I know where Clarkston is. Its just over the mountain about thirty miles away. Whats the name?"

"Gover." Janet responded. "His name is Jerry, his father's name is Wayne."

"Yeah I know them. I think we might be related somehow. His mother's cousin is married to my uncle. If that means anything."

"No, you dope." Sedric chided. "That doesn't make you related."

"Well, any way, I know who they are."

"So, Janet. How do you know this guy?"

"His brother served with my Dad during the war."

"Do you like him a lot?"

Janet blushed, "Yeah sort of."

Now it was Norma's turn to chide. "Come one. You haven't seen him since a year ago on our way home from Craig's wedding."

"That's right." Sedric remembered. "He and Edith were engaged during our last semester there."

Ramona came to the front door and called, "Lunch is ready." Upon seeing Wade, she said, "You might as well join us too. There's enough for everyone."

As they visited over lunch, Quinn was still miffed and didn't have a lot to say.

When the subject of the dance came up, Sedric asked Janet if she was going.

"No." Ramona answered for her. "She's too young for that bunch."

"Besides," Janet said. "I have a date tonight."

"Well then." Sheffield said to Ramona. "If everyone's going out tonight, we might as well too."

Later that evening at the dance, Sedric hooked up with Read Rowan who was also on the wrestling team with him at Ricks College. Sedric hooked up with his sister Jolene and Quinn with their cousin Bonnie, both of whom were Norma's best friends. Everyone at the dance wondered where they found such good looking sailors. Being with Bonnie made Quinn forget all about Norma.

When Sheffield and Ramona came home from seeing a movie, no one was home yet. Before long, Janet's date brought her home, but Norma and their guests didn't come home until around a quarter to midnight.

Ramona heard them come in and slipped on her robe and went out to see how there evening went.

"It was swell." Quinn said enthusiastically. "Say, Sister Brason. Can we stay over on our way back. We promised Bonnie and Jolene that we'd take them out to a movie or something."

"They're such sweet girls. I think that would be alright. Why don't you plan on it."

On Sunday, Quinn and Sedric accompanied the Brasons to Church. In Priesthood Meeting he introduced them as Seaman Quinn Goodey from Tremonton, Utah and Airman Sedric Orchard from west of Blackfoot, Idaho. During both Sunday School and Sacrament Meeting, they sought out Bonnie and Jolene

and sat with them.

Sheffield really enjoyed attending church meetings at the Roanoke Branch. It was a refreshing change from the serviceman's group. Everyone welcomed him back and were glad to see him. It was the first time that he had talked to Bill Casper since he had joined the Church. Bill told him that he deserved a lot of the credit for his decision to look into it and to eventually be baptized.

A lot had changed since he had last attended there. His friend, Roger Rowan, had been released as the branch president and another friend, Jack Brown had succeeded him, with his brother, Walt, as his first counselor. There were also a lot of new people who Sheffield didn't know. While he was gone, Ramona had kept him up to date with what had gone on. Being the Relief Society President, she was in the know.

Between meetings, Bonnie and Jolene brought over a box lunch picnic that they shared with Quinn and Sedric in the trees down along the river.

That evening, Craig returned from his drill. He was surprised to see Sedric and they had a brief but a good visit. Before he and Edith drove back to Blacksburg, he made sure the plane was all ready for Sheffield to fly to Washington the next morning.

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