

Chapter XLIV

Armistice

June 7, 1953 – July 27, 1953

On Monday morning, Sheffield and Ramona woke up early as it was going to be a long day for her. After saying good morning, Sheffield asked as she got out of bed, "Do you have your things together?"

"For the most part." She replied. "Let me get in the shower real quick and get dressed."

As she took off her clothes, Sheffield said, "When you're ready, we'll get something to eat and I take you to the airport and see you off. Then I'll come back and get my stuff and check out."

"Okay Babe." she said and as she leaned over to kiss him as he laid in bed.

He laid there a little longer as he wasn't as rushed as she was. From the bathroom, he could hear the shower running and above that, her singing. When he heard her turn off the water, he decided that he had better get up and get in the shower and get ready. He slipped out of his clothes and went into the bathroom where Ramona was drying off. He took her into his arms and gave her a kiss.

She received the kiss but then pushed him away. "As much as I'd love to lallygag, Babe, I don't have the time."

"Aw, you're no fun." Sheffield said with disappointment in his voice. As he turned away to step into the shower, she gave him a playful slap on the butt. When he got out, she was already dressed.

Ramona got the rest of her things together while Sheffield got ready. He called for a bellman to come and take her things down stairs and out to their car and put them into the trunk for them. For the service, Sheffield handed the young man several lira.

Sheffield opened the door for Ramona and helped her into the car and came around to the other side and got and the drove off. Along the way they stopped for breakfast and he had her at the airport in time.

After checking in at the ticket counter, Sheffield waited with Ramona while she waited for the boarding call. They reminisced about the things they had done on their rendezvous and looked to the future with confidence as the peace talks with the communists looked promising for an end to the war in Korea. When the war was over, he would be free to resign his commission for good and come home permanently.

The time passed quickly and the boarding call was made. "Well, I guess this is it." Sheffield said as he took Ramona into arms and held her close.

"I suppose so. Its been wonderful." Ramona replied as she looked deep into his eyes.

They froze in time for an instant, which was followed by the inevitable parting kiss and it was a long one. Ramona instinctively lifted one foot in the air behind her, just like in the movies.

"There'll be another one of those waiting for you on the dock when you pull into Norfolk." Ramona promised.

"If everything goes according to schedule, that should be at the end of July or first of August." Sheffield said as he released her and picked up her purse from off the floor and handed it to her.

"Well, I'd better go. They aren't going to hold the plane for me so I can lallygag with you." She took his hand and gave it one last squeeze and turned away to walk toward the door that led out to the tarmac. She turned around one last time to wave goodbye.

"See you in the funny pages." Sheffield said as he waved back.

She disappeared through the door and Sheffield moved over to the window to watch her board the plane, then waited around to watch it take off before returning to the ship.

When Ramona arrived back in Roanoke on Wednesday the 10th, Norma and Janet were there at the airport to pick her up and bring her home. As nice as it was to spend a week with Sheffield in Naples, walking through her own front door was even nicer. From the looks of things, the girls had gotten along just fine.

After giving her a chance to put her things away, they wanted to know all about her trip. The three of them went out to Ramona's bathhouse and after a showering, they stepped down into the relaxing hot water. "Ahhh." Ramona sighed as she sat down. "This is what I've been looking forward to all the way home." Once they were settled in, she told them all about it.

When she told of the Blue Grotto, Janet said, "We just got a new book that arrived at the BookEnd titled Red Sails To Capri, by Ann Weil. Its about a fourteen-year-old boy named Michele Pagano, who lives on the island of Capri with his parents, who ran a small mountainside inn. His best friends were a fisherman and a goat herder. One day, three rich visitors arrive on the island in a boat with red sails. Though each has come for different reasons, all three became obsessed with the mystery behind a cove that the islanders fear so much that they will not even speak of it. Despite the fears of Michele's mother, the three visitors, her husband, Michele, and his friends eventually visit the cove and discover, not monsters or cutthroat pirates, but a beautiful blue grotto. The novel," Janet said "was supposedly based on the real people who discovered the cave in eighteen twenty six."

"It sounds fascinating." Ramona agreed. "Have you read it?"

"Just what's on the back of the dustcover."

"After having been there, I'd like to read it."

"You might find it too simple, its in the juvenile section."

Ramona went on to tell them more about her trip and the time she spent with their dad. They were both amused by how he got all embarrassed by the two girls on the beach.

"I can just see it." Janet laughed.

"I can't imagine how embarrassed he'd be if he walked in on us like this." Norma added.

"Yeah." Ramona concluded, "About as embarrassed as you'd be if he did, and that's why there's a lock on the door."

As Ramona told about the ruins of Pompeii, Norma found it particularly interesting, having learned about it in one of her classes.

In turn, Ramona asked, "What did you girls do with yourselves while I was away?"

Norma answered for them both, "Besides going to work and taking care of the chores, we had a girls night in on Saturday night. I invited Bonnie and Jolene and Janet invited Olivia Furness and Beverly Rowan."

Janet continued, "They all brought their bathing suits for a soak, but then Jolene dared Beverly to not wear hers. She returned the dare by saying, 'I won't if you won't.' It went from there and all six of us opted not to wear our bathing suits and we got in 'Japanese style'."

"Oh you did?" Ramona said with a raised eyebrow. "Bonnie and Jolene are adults now and can do what they want. I don't have a problem with it, but I wonder what Wendy and Chantell would say if they knew that their daughters went skinny dipping with you."

"It's not like we did anything bad." Janet defended. "There weren't any guys here."

"We just sat around and talked." Norma added. "Besides, Bonnie, Jolene and I have done it before."

"I know, but Olivia and Beverly are younger and their parents might not be comfortable with the idea. It's one thing for us to do it, just," she cautioned, "be careful of who you invite into the sisterhood. So what did they think of it?"

"Olivia was a little skeptical at first." Janet revealed. "But then I told her that it was no different than when we shower together in PE. After that she was willing to join us."

"To answer your question," Norma concluded, "they all enjoyed it and kept going on about how good it felt."

"Yes, it does." Ramona agreed. "We'd better get out now and see about supper."

Later that evening after having supper, the three of them went over to Stirling and Mary Ann's to see Edith and Little Geannie. Ramona couldn't believe how much she had grown in just eleven days. Naturally they wanted to hear all about her trip too.

After resting up from the trip for a couple of days, Ramona was back into her summer routine of things.

The magic of what was left of June passed quickly. Toward the end of the month Ramona received a letter from Sheffield.

Thursday June 18, 1953

Souda Bay, Greece aboard the USX Reprisal

Dear Ramona

After seeing you off, I waited around to watch the plane take off. When I left the terminal and went to the car, I thought to myself, "It was sure a fun little car." I knew that I'd never have anything like it again, so I took it for one last spin around the city and out into the countryside. I couldn't resist just one more exhilarating burst of speed, after all I had born to fly. Besides, you weren't there to talk me out of it, so while on a stretch of open road, I put my foot down on the accelerator and shifted into fifth gear. Within seconds, the speedometer went from 95 kilometers an hour to between 190 to 195 before backing off. I did a quick conversion in his head and figured I was going about 120 miles an hour, but it could have easily gone faster.

When I got back to the hotel, the first thing I did was to call the ship to have my launch sent to the marina. Then I packed my things and stepped out onto the terrace for one last look around before I went downstairs and checked out and paid the tab.

After returning the car, I took a cab to the marina where my launch was waiting. On the trip back out to the Reprisal I looked back at the shore and city and reflected on the great time that we had. I am definitely glad that you had gone to all the trouble of coming to see me.

The next day (June 8th), the fleet weighed anchor and stood out to sea split up. I took the Reprisal and her escorts south toward Sicily. Our course took us through the exact spot where just under ten years earlier we were hit and damaged by the Germans during the invasion of Salerno. At my request, Captain Murry called for all hands to stand by at their work details for a minute of silence to pay their respects for their 143 shipmates who had died in that very spot.

That night we passed through the Strait of Sicily, the narrow passage between Sicily and Tunisia and into the Eastern Mediterranean for more exercises. The cruise has been going well for the most part. Our test of the angled landing area is a complete success. However we

encountered heavy seas and one man was lost overboard and was never recovered.

After 10 days at sea we put in at Souda Bay on the Island of Crete and will be here for three days. I haven't got off the ship yet, but I do plan on going ashore.

Not long after we dropped anchor, the mail was brought aboard and I received your letter. I'm glad that you made it home alright. Although I just saw you, I'm counting the days until I'll see you again. If all goes according to plan, we should be back in another six weeks. I'm counting on the war to be over about then and I'm planning on coming home and going back to school this fall. Even if the war continues beyond that, I just might see what happens if I submit my resignation anyway. After all, I did retire once already.

I hope you and the girls have an enjoyable summer. What are your plans for the 4th of July? You are often in my thoughts. I love you and look forward to hearing from you soon. Even more so, I look forward to coming home to you.

Yours
Sheffield

She received another letter from him dated the 28th of June from Athens. He said that they been in the extreme eastern end of the Mediterranean. He took the opportunity to spend time ashore and got to see many of the ruins and other sights of Athens, including the Acropolis and the Parthenon. The only thing that would have made it better was to have shared it with her. The cruise was nearing and end and they'd soon begin slowly making their way home.

By the time she got that letter, it was 2nd of July. She wrote back and told him of the 4th of July Austin/Brason celebration at the cabin. With Wade's help the hay had been cut, baled and staked. Craig would be coming home for a week at the end of the month before the Crown Point left for Korea and they were looking forward to his visit. She said that it was too bad that they would miss seeing each other. Little Geannie was now three months old and growing like a weed. She also expressed that it was too bad that he was missing out on seeing her grow. She included a recent photo when she mailed off the letter.

Although his letters told of visits to exotic ports of call throughout the Mediterranean, it was far from a pleasure cruise. Even though they were not carrying out combat missions as in Korea, he had an important mission in directing the test that they were conducting. For the second time during the cruise, they participated in a multi national exercise that provided the realism of combat.

During the first part of July the Reprisal participated in Operation Black Wave, a NATO exercise.

While operating from in the Aegean Sea the Reprisal and Coral Sea provided air cover for a large scale amphibious landing in Northern Greece. The scenario involved repelling a Communist Block invasion from Bulgaria.

At the conclusion of exercise, the Reprisal put in at Malta where he received Ramona's latest letter. He wrote back and told her about the exercises and that after a few days in Malta, they'd begin making their way back and that he was looking forward to coming home. From the sounds of the progress of peace talks, he was confident that he would be coming home for good.

Ramona got that letter on the 21st. In her reply she told him that they were having a great summer. She and the girls had found time to have fun along with everything else. They had been busy canning things from the garden. She told him about a nice little house in Salem that she had just bought. It needed some work and Ray was remodeling it for her. She thought it would make a nice home for Phil and Anita, if they were serious about settling in Roanoke.

One more letter arrived from Sheffield that he mailed from Gibraltar on the 23rd. It was apparent that he hadn't received her last letter yet. It was a short letter that said that they would sail later in the day and were scheduled to be home on the 1st. He felt bad that that he would just barely miss Craig by one day.

Admiral Brason gave the letter to Lieutenant Moncur to have it posted before sailing from Gibraltar. Later in the morning he gave the order for the Reprisal and her escorts to get underway. By noon they had transited the Strait of Gibraltar and were in the open Atlantic, heading home. The next port of call would be Norfolk. Even though it was the homeward bound leg of the deployment, flight operation continued, although at a relaxed pace.

Three days out, at just after eleven o'clock on the night of Sunday the 26th, Sheffield was awakened by a knock at the door of his stateroom. He got out of bed and answered the door in his pajamas. It was Lieutenant Commander William Dolbey, the Reprisal's communications officer. Commander Dolbey saluted and said, "I'm sorry to disturb you, sir. But we just received this dispatch."

Admiral Brason returned the salute and took the piece of paper handed him. "Thank you Commander." he said as he closed the door. Sheffield walked over to the night stand by his bed and picked up his glasses that sat next to a framed photograph of Ramona.

He put them on and read, "Communist and United Nations delegates in Panmunjom signed an armistice at 10:01 A.M. today, Tokyo time. Under the truce terms, hostilities are to cease at 10 o'clock tonight." Sheffield smiled in relief that it was over, he was going home for good.

Sheffield got back into bed, but couldn't go back to sleep. In a few days he would be home and now that war was over, he could go ahead with his plans. It would take a little time to submit his resignation and for it to go through, but it should be before the start of the school year. He looked forward to resume

coaching the Magicians and teaching his government class after being away from it for two years.

More than anything else, he looked forward to being home with Ramona and the kids. The girls were growing up fast and Craig and Edith had a child, his grandchild, and he didn't want to miss out on any more of their lives. He had one last reflection as he drifted off to sleep, he was lucky – no, blessed – to have Ramona. He loved her dearly and eagerly anticipated spending the rest of his life with her and all of the wonderful things that lay in store.

He was blessed to have had two such women in his life, Geannie and Ramona. Having Ramona, he didn't miss Geannie so much any more. That didn't mean that he loved Geannie any less. He still loved her and always would and one day he would rejoin her and they would be together again. Someday, he would have them both and it would be the three of them. With that thought, he drifted off to sleep.

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Red Sails To Capri, by Ann Weil, is a juvenile mystery adventure that was published by Viking Press in 1953.

In the early 1950s Italy didn't have speed limits. Article 36 of the penal code specified merely that drivers must use discipline and moderation.

Operation Black Wave was a NATO exercise involving a large scale amphibious landing in Northern Greece, in which the Coral Sea participated. No other information was available and the scenario is purely conjecture.

