

Chapter IV

The Diamond Tree

November 22, 1953 – February 27, 1954

The next week was Thanksgiving with a short week at school since it let out at noon on Wednesday. Takara had never seen such a feast as the Brasons gathered together. The family was growing with two more on the way in Shenan's family; Wendalynn was expecting in March and Delbert's wife was expecting in May. From Walt's family, Sylvia was expecting in April. The question everyone was asking was, "When are Norma and Wade ever going to get married?"

The missionaries were also guests at Thanksgiving. One of them, Elder Mansfield, was brand new while Elder Cunningham was quite seasoned. He had been working with Takara from the beginning. That evening after everyone had left, they gave her another lesson. She had been very receptive for the most part and enjoyed attending church. There was something that seemed to be holding her back, but no one seemed to be able to get to the core of the problem.

That lesson focused on forgiveness; receiving forgiveness from God, from others, as well as forgiving others and oneself. Elder Mansfield in his humble, inexperienced way bore testimony of the power of forgiveness and how God will forgive completely and unconditionally.

Whether it was what he said or how he said it, something got through to her. "Do you mean I can be forgiven too even if it was really, really bad?"

"Absolutely." she was assured.

In tears, she made a confession. "I believe everything you've taught me to be true but I'm not worthy to be baptized." No one said a word as she continued, "When I was fourteen, one of the older boys in the orphanage forced himself on me against my will. He told me that if I told the missionaries that he'd tell the them that I was the one who took some missing money and I'd be forced to leave and go out on my own.

"I didn't take the money, but because he was older they would have believed him over me. He used it to coerce me into having sex with him a few more times until he left the orphanage. He had me convinced that if the missionaries knew what I had done that they'd condemn me to hell. He made me feel like it was my fault for what he did to me. I knew that it was a sin and I have felt guilty for the longest time even though I realize that it wasn't my fault but I was always afraid that I wasn't worthy of forgiveness."

"That's just not true." Elder Cunningham told her. "To begin with, you aren't guilty of any sin here but were the victim. Through the atonement all of the guilt and hurt that you have endured will be swept away. All you have to do is to turn it over to the Savior and baptism washes it all away."

"So I am worthy to be baptized?"

"Yes you are."

"Then that's what I want. I want it more than anything."

"You poor child." Ramona consoled. "What he did to you and how he made you feel was just awful."

"I just thank Heavenly Father that I didn't get pregnant." Takara said through her tears. "Every time he did it to me, I prayed to God that I wouldn't. Even though I believed that I had committed a terrible sin, he was watching over me. Now that I know that I didn't sin and Jesus can heal the hurt, I feel so much better. That's all the more reason that I want to be baptized."

The issue was settled and her baptism date was set for the following Saturday on the 5th of December and she asked Sheffield to baptize and confirm her.

That weekend, Sheffield, with the help of Janet and Takara, put up the outdoor Christmas lights. Takara was really looking forward to Christmas in America. On Thursday the Magicains had another win, making them two and one for the season. The next day, Takara was baptized as planned. She said that when she came up out of the water, she felt that all of her guilt, pain, and sins had been washed away. Then when Sheffield confirmed her, she felt the Holy Ghost settle on her and reaffirm that she they had and that everything was true. The next day, she attended church for the first time as a member of the church.

Tuesday of that week was Sheffield's fifty fifth birthday. Nothing was said, but Geannie was on his mind that day as it would have also been her fifty fifth birthday as well as their thirty second anniversary. It was also the twelfth anniversary of her death as well as Sandy and Austin.

On Friday, Sheffield, Ramona, and the girls (including Takara) went up to the cabin to spend the night. There wasn't any snow in the valley, but the mountains had a good three or four inches. On Saturday morning they bundled up and set out to find a Christmas tree. They found several nice trees, and let Takara select the one. She wanted to help cut it down and took a hold of the other end of the bucksaw. Dragging it back to the cabin was a bit of a chore, but they made it and put it in the back of the pickup and drove back down the mountain in a two car caravan. By bedtime the tree was up and decorated.

Both Sheffield and Takara felt that she was ready to get her drivers license. On Wednesday of the next week, he took her to the court house during the lunch hour to get her license. She passed both the driving test and the written test on the first try. She was so proud as he let her drive him back to school with her very own driver's licenses. That evening was cause to celebrate and she chose the Pizza Joint as the place to do it.

Now that Takara had her driver's license and with the fall semester coming to an end she focused more seriously on going to college after graduation. She had sent in all of the applications that she had filled out and was waiting to hear back from them. She had decided where she wanted to go. She wanted to attend Ricks College with Janet, Beverly, and Olivia. Beverly's grandparents had room for all four girls by setting up two sets of bunk beds. She had written to the school and asked for an application and about any

scholarships and grants that they might have available.

School let out for Christmas on Wednesday the 23rd and everyone was ready for a break. At that point, the Magicians had an even split of wins and losses for the season. It had snowed during the week before Christmas but it had all melted. Snow wasn't necessary for it to be a special holiday.

The most memorable happening was when Wade and Norma came home after an afternoon outing the day before Christmas. The rest of the family, including Craig, Edith, and Little Geannie, had gathered for dinner and to spend Christmas Eve together. Dinner was just about ready when Norma and Wade burst into the house. It was obvious that something was up because Norma was bursting with excitement.

"Whats all the excitement about?" Ramona asked.

Norma simply held out her left hand to show off a diamond engagement ring. Instantly she was surrounded by everyone, wanting to have a look for themselves and excitedly congratulating them.

"Its about time." Sheffield exclaimed. "You have only been going together for almost two years now."

"How did he propose?" Ramona wanted to know.

"Well, Norma explained, "we went for a horseback ride through the hills above the Rowan's ranch. At one point we came to a tree and Wade got off his horse and looked up into a low branch at something. 'I didn't know those grew on trees.' he said."

"What?" I asked.

"Then he pointed to something sparkling in the sun and pointed it out and said, 'Diamonds.'

"Just as I saw it, he got down on one knee and asked, 'Will you change your name to mine and live with me forever.'

"I told him, 'Only if the ring fits.' As you can see it does, so I had to say, 'yes.'"

"That sounds all so familiar." Ramona reminisced. "I once found a pair of diamond ear rings growing on a cherry tree." That was a clever idea Wade."

"I remember that too." Sheffield added.

"So when and where is all of this going to take place?" Ramona asked.

"In August in Idaho Falls." Norma replied.

"We went back to the house and told my family our news." Wade explained. "At first we were thinking of June after I graduated. But, my mother, the ever practical one, suggested that we wait until August when my sister and Sedric are getting married and make it a double wedding. That way they could make one trip out west for both weddings and to take Beverly to Ricks. We talked it over and decided that it only made sense. So mark August twentieth on the calendar."

"Well, I think that is a smart idea too." Sheffield agreed "Because that way we can do it all in one trip as well when we take Janet and Takara."

"That way we can go to Sedric and Jolene's wedding too." Ramona added.

Norma went on to explain, "We will stay for their reception in Blackfoot and take a honeymoon train ride home, stopping along the way and come home and have a double reception here."

"That sounds like a good way to do it." Sheffield agreed. Then he asked, "Where are you going to live?"

"Well sir," Wade said. "During the summer, I'm going to set up a trailer house on the ranch and after we're married, we'll live there until we can build a permanent house in two or three years."

"You are planning on finishing school, aren't you Norma?"

"Oh, absolutely. With only one year left, I'd be foolish not to."

The talk of their plans continued into the evening. When it got later, Norma accompanied the family in some Christmas carols followed by Sheffield reading the nativity story from Luke. Christmas Eve actually turned out more exciting and memorable than Christmas Day. As for Takara, she got the American Christmas that she had longed for.

Christmas lingered throughout the weekend and culminated with a special special Christmas program in Sacrament Meeting on Sunday. The program consisted of beautiful music and inspirational messages. One of the musical selections was a solo of "Glory Be to God in the Highest" by Ramona, accompanied by Norma.

Then at first light on Monday morning Sheffield, Ramona, Norma, Janet, and Takara took off in the Staggerwing to attend Quinn and Bonnie's wedding in Logan. As much as they had gotten to know Quinn and all of the time that he had spent in their home, and the fact that Bonnie was one of Norma's best friends, they really wanted to go. Not only that, but also because of their close friendship with Tom and Eve Rowan.

Wade went with his family and the rest of the Rowans who flew out of the Roanoke airport that morning. Quinn and Sedric were also traveling with them. Quinn was given a two week leave for his wedding, but Sedric only got three days. Craig and Edith stayed behind.

Sheffield had intended to follow the normal flight path that he had taken on previous trips to Utah, but at St. Louis he had to make a detour. A major winter storm was moving through Northern Kansas and much of Nebraska, blocking the path to McCook. He altered his flight plan and flew around the storm, looping down and across Southern Kansas to Garden City where they stopped for fuel and something to eat before continuing on.

They reached Logan late in the afternoon, as the sun was setting low. Since there was two feet of snow on the ground at Wayne Gover's ranch in Clarkston, he put down at the Logan airport. Morris and Sheila were waiting for them with both of their cars. Once the plane was secure, Sheffield loaded his family into Morris' car and followed Morris and Sheila in her car to their home.

When they got there, dinner was ready and waiting. Wayne and Gale had driven in from Clarkston and brought Jerry, their youngest, with them. Gale had looked after Sheila's children while they went to meet the Brasons. Their daughter, Abby, was now four years old and the baby, Maurice Sheffield, was fourteen months old. As promised, Morris had given his first son Sheffield's name for his middle name.

Janet and Jerry had been faithful pen pals since they first met and she still had a secret crush on him. Its true that she dated several boys, but it was Jerry who she especially liked. She had been particularly excited about the trip just to see him. As they exchanged letters, she told him that she was planning on attending Ricks College.

He had written back to tell her that he too was planning on attending Ricks' livestock and animal husbandry program, even though Utah State University right there in Logan had a far more superior program. Wayne wanted him to go to Ricks because of their connections with the Sheep Experiment Station in Dubois. The plan was for him to go to Ricks for two years, serve a mission, and finish his degree at Utah State.

The truth was that Jerry hadn't dated much, partly due to being isolated out in Clarkston. Janet didn't know if he felt the same for her as she felt for him, but she hoped that by attending school together, she would have a chance to do something about it. They made definite plans to get together in the fall.

Janet was thrilled when after dinner Jerry asked her if she would like to go ice skating with him. It was everything that a first date with someone special should be. Janet was pretty good at rollerskating but had never tried ice skating. She had a little trouble at first and fell flat on her bottom a few times before she got the hang of it. Despite hurting, falling had a definite benefit. Each time, Jerry extended a hand to help her up, once he even put his arms around her waist to lift her to her feet. He took a hold of her hand as he skated along side her to steady her. As Janet glanced at him, his eyes caught hers. She wasn't sure but she thought there was spark. After skating, they had some hot chocolate before he brought her back to Morris's house.

The evening also gave Sheffield and Ramona a chance to catch up with Morris and Sheila and Wayne and Gale. All of their older children were married and most of them were living in and around Logan. Of their four sons, only Jerry was interested in the ranch. Thats why he wanted him to go to Ricks. The only other of their children which wasn't married was Holly, who was Norma's age and was attending Utah State.

Late in the evening Wayne and Gail drove back to Clarkston and Sheila set about making room for their house guests in their cozy three bedroom home. She put Sheffield and Ramona up in the spare bedroom and made room in the living room for the girls. Norma got the couch and Janet and Takara slept on the floor.

The Brasons got ready for the wedding on Tuesday morning and drove up to the temple in Morris'

car where they met up with the Rowans. Norma was anxious to see Wade. They and Sedic and Jolene walked around the snow covered temple grounds looking forward to their upcoming weddings. Then it was time for those who were attending the ceremony to go inside.

The Brason girls and the Rowan girls along with Bonnie's younger brother, Michael, came prepared to do some baptisms while they waited. It was a special treat for Takara who brought the names of her parents, grandparents and brother who were all deceased. She had no idea whether her sister was still alive or not so she couldn't be included. In addition, Ramona had them do her recently discovered Douglas line.

They were finished in plenty of time to rejoin the wedding party outside of the temple. It was a cold windy day so they only lingered long enough for a few quick photographs before going to the Bluebird for the wedding luncheon. It was same place where Morris and Sheila had gone after their wedding.

Quinn and Bonnie sat at the head of the table with family and fiends gathered around them. Sheffield and Ramona had the opportunity to get better acquainted with Quinn's family. His parents had heard so much about Admiral Brason and his family from Quinn that it was pleasure for them to finally meet his surrogate family. They went out of their way to thank them for all that they had done for him and particularly to Sheffield for the good example and role model that he had been for Quinn.

Later in the afternoon, the Brasons made their way over to Tremonton for the reception at the Tremonton First Ward meetinghouse where the Goodey's attended. The beautiful building built in 1928 was much larger than the Roanoke Branch meetinghouse, itself a good sized building.

Sheffield, Ramona, Janet and Takara made their way through the reception line. First they came to Tom and Eve Rowan, followed by Norma and Jolene who stood next Bonnie in the reception line as bridesmaids.

Quinn's navy blue uniform made a striking contrast to Bonnie's white wedding dress as they stood before a white lace backdrop. On the other side of Quinn was Sedic, also in uniform. Byron and Martha Goodey were at the far end.

The Brasons occupied a table off in the corner which they shared with Roger, Chantell, and Wade. Also seated at the table were Scott and Sylvia. In the few years that the Brasons had known the Rowans, the two families had become intertwined; first when Sylvia married Tom and Eve's oldest son, and again with the upcoming marriage of Norma and Wade. Scott and Sylvia had left their two children, Wallace and Sophia with Walt and Sarah rather than take them clear across the country. Sylvia was expecting their third child in April.

"You know, Sylvia." Sheffield said to her, "I can't look at you and help but wonder what Sandy would be like now. Call me odd, but I have watched her become a wife and a mother by watching you. The two of you were pretty close."

"I think of her all the time. I do miss her. We had a lot fun together when we were together, especially that last summer when we were fourteen."

"I must say, you certainly have become a lovely woman."

"Thank you Uncle Sheffield. That was sweet of you to say that."

"Its true."

Just then her baby moved within her womb. ""You know what?" Sylvia said. "I just got a wonderful idea. If the baby is a girl, I'm going to name her Sandy."

"I think that's a wonderful idea." Sheffield concluded.

Throughout the evening, several of the Goodey's family and neighbors stopped by to talk to the family and friends of the bride who had come all the way from Virginia. As the reception wound down, they helped put away chairs and tables and cleaned up. It was late when the Brasons got back to Logan. Morris and Sheila had the kids in bed and stayed up to visit before everyone retired for the night. It had been a long day and they had to fly home the next day.

After a good breakfast to send off their guests, Sheila and Morris bundled up the kids and followed the Brasons to the airport. Sheila dropped off Morris and took the kids home while he stayed to see them off before taking his car to work.

With the Staggerwing loaded and everyone aboard, they took off. The weather across the plains had cleared up and Sheffield was able to follow his original flight plan which included stops in McCook, Nebraska and St Louis, Missouri. It was dusk when thy landed back at the Two Star Ranch. The trip had been a nice addition the the Christmas season.

There was still the new year to ring in. The next day was New Years Eve and New Years Day after that. 1954 promised to have a lot in store with graduations and weddings and who knew what else laid ahead, hopefully it would all be good.

Early Saturday morning on the 2nd, Craig took the Staggerwing to fly to Norfolk for his reserve weekend drill. Typically they were on the fourth weekend, but that was Christmas and with five weekends in January, it all worked out the same. On Monday the 4th, everyone went back to school and settled in to the new year.

The next weekend, Sedric came to stay and attend Quinn and Bonnie's Roanoke reception. Quinn and Bonnie had made their way back across the country on their honeymoon train trip, stopping off at various places to see the sights and to spend the night. They stopped over in Roanoke long enough to get her belongings to take to Norfolk and got her moved into their apartment. While the ship was in port he would stay with her. It was scheduled to deploy again in February and he had put in for a transfer request for shore duty to finish out the six months left to his enlistment. After all he had been attached to the Reprisal

for three years.

The reception was on Saturday the 9th and was a repeat of the one in Tremonton. Quinn's parents flew out for the occasion, which was supported very well by the branch. They could always be counted on for things such as that.

Early January always proved to be an exciting time at the Two Star Ranch with the arrival of the new calves. Watching them be born was always a miracle and had become something to look forward to each year. For Takara, she had never seen anything like it and was totally amazed.

Later in the month, there was more celebrating in the Brason family with Janet's 18th birthday on Wednesday the 20th. Since returning from Logan, the letters that she and Jerry exchanged had taken on a whole new flair.

Sheffield and Ramona celebrated their 10th anniversary two days later by going out to dinner. A lot had happened in those ten years as they reflected back. Sheffield spent the last nine months of the war in the Pacific. They both retired from the Navy and moved to Roanoke and started new careers. They got to have the family they never thought they would have and found the Church. Then Sheffield was recalled to active duty for two more years; now he was through with that. They were now grandparents as the kids were practically all grown up. Norma was getting married and Janet was going away to college. They had an exchange student living with them for the year who had become a part of their family, and she would be moving on as well. By the end of the summer, it would be just the two of them, as they had started out.

During January the Magicians pulled off three straight wins to pull ahead in the standings. Their next match was against the Armstrong High School Wildcats in Richmond on February 5th. There was also a two day, multi school indoor track meet across town at Thomas Jefferson High School that same weekend; the first of the season. Janet got out of school for the day and rode the team bus to Richmond. She had to get up extra early to get ready, as the bus left from the high school parking lot at seven o'clock sharp for the three hour trip. Sheffield and the wrestling team left on their bus at two o'clock.

Takara had made arrangements with with Olivia Furness to watch the Cooke children that afternoon and went Richmond with Ramona. By the time they got there, Janet had ran her qualifying runs for the one hundred and four hundred yard dashes and was scheduled to compete the next day. But unfortunately the relay team had failed to qualify.

After getting the team squared away, Sheffield joined Ramona and girls for dinner at a nearby diner. They spent the evening watching the Magician wrestlers get roughed up by the Wildcats. After the match, Sheffield put Coach Warfman in charge as they boarded the bus for the trip home with their tails tucked between their legs.

The Brasons spent the night at a hotel so they could watch Janet compete the next day. There were

three races for each event, with the top finishers of each of the first two going on to compete in the final race. First was the one hundred yard dash, Janet's best event. She held herself back during the first heat, pacing herself making sure that she finished no further back than fourth place, which she did. In so doing, she had a spot in the final heat. By reserving her strength, she was able to finish first place.

After a rest, she applied the same tactic to the qualifying heat of four hundred yard dash and finished fourth as well, putting her in the final heat. The four hundred was not her strongest event and typically she finished in second or third place. She even felt good about a fourth place finish. Occasionally she placed first against smaller schools, but never against the big schools from all over the state that were participating in this event.

Janet did some jumping jacks and squats to limber up before approaching the starting block. She looked over the girls she was competing against with confidence. She was as good as any of them. Many of them she had competed against before. She wiped her brow, took a deep breath and took her position in lane four.

With the starting gun, she leaped off starting block and soon found herself in the middle of the pack, right where she wanted to be; for now. She paced herself remaining there for the first half of the race before moving up one place at a time until she was in third place, a little behind the girls in first and second place who were virtually neck and neck. On the final lap, Janet mustered every bit of adrenalin and strength she had and began moving up. She was right on their heels within yards of the finish line. She didn't quite have enough in her to pass them and was feeling good about a third place finish. All of a sudden, the girl in second place caught the heel of the girl in the lead, tripping them both. Janet nearly got caught up in the pile up but managed to leap over the two girls sprawled across the track only steps from the finish line to finish in first place. The win, even if by default, was huge boost to Janet's confidence. After the awards ceremony, rather than riding the bus home, she rode home with Sheffield, Ramona, and Takara, but not until after stopping by to celebrate her victories.

During February, Takara tried out for the girls softball team and qualified, although not one of the better players. By making the team, she was no longer available to watch the Cooke children after school. She had earned more than she had spent and still had a enough spending money to last until school was out. One of the younger girls in the branch was more than happy to take her place.

Janet and Takara and their friends Beverly and Olivia all received formal acceptance letters from Rick College during February. Takara received enough in scholarships and grants to cover her tuition, books, and boarding but was still faced with the lack of spending money. With her acceptance, she was allowed to remain in the the United States during the summer and the Brasons graciously offered to allow her to stay with them. Perhaps she could find a way to earn some spending money during the summer.

Around the middle of February, Quinn and Bonnie stopped by for a visit while they were in Roanoke visiting her family. He did get the transfer he requested and was assigned to shore duty at the navy base in Norfolk. Sedric had remained aboard the Reprisal and sailed with her on another Mediterranean deployment and wouldn't be back until the first part of August. When he returned, he was due to be discharged, just in time for he and Jolene to be married later in the month.

By the end of the month, the wrestling team was winding up their season. Overall they had done pretty good with more wins than losses. They were looking forward to the district tournament and had their eyes on a berth at the state championships. At the same time, the track season was getting into full swing and Janet was off to a promising start. That is until the last Saturday in February.

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For the story of the ear rings on the cherry tree, see *The Business of War: Part II, Chapter 25*.