

Chapter LXII

The Wicked Witch of the West

July 9, 1976 – May 18, 1977

Sheffield and Ramona looked forward to just relaxing for a few days after coming home. Sheffield hadn't worked that hard in a long time and at his age, he was worn out. Nevertheless, he had the satisfaction of having made a difference. When they went to church on Sunday, everyone wanted to know all about their adventure.

They didn't hear from Norma until Tuesday of the following week. "I've got some good news." she began. "For starters, we have a telephone again."

Then she went on to explain, "The HUD trailer was delivered just after you left and its all set up now. It's small and cramped, but at least its much more roomy and comfortable than living in the camp trailer. It has three bedrooms and one bathroom. Wade and I got the biggest bedroom. The other two are the same size, Teresa and Samantha are sharing one, at least until she goes back to BYU, and Marty has the other one. It has a really small kitchen and there is barely enough room at the table for four. Wade's dad and Todd are still living in the camper but they don't seem to mind."

"Thats all wonderful, Norma." Ramona said. "I'm glad that things are starting to shape up for you. How soon until you can get started on your house?"

"Well, Wade and Roger brought home a load of plywood just this morning. He says that it has dried out enough that they can start closing it in as soon as he can round up some tools. He hopes to have it ready to move back into by winter."

"How's he going to have time to work on it once school starts up again?"

"His plan is to get it closed in, rewired and the sheet rock up before then. The plan is for Roger to stay until Chantelle comes out for the Ricks reunion and then he'll go back with her. After the sheet rock is up, we're going to have a contractor come in and finish the rest."

"Your father wants to know if we should still come out for our family reunion, or did we already have it earlier in the summer?"

"I don't think that counted. Besides, Craig and Edith weren't here."

"Their plan is to take Geoff out so he can go to school and bring the rest of Todd's things and get them both settled. So since they're coming, we might as well come too. The only question is, where will everyone stay?"

"The camp trailer will be available. We'll figure something out." Norma concluded. She went on to tell about other things that were going on as the area was being rebuilt. For one thing, the bridge wouldn't be finished until sometime in fall.

Relieved that Norma and Wade had things worked out, they put their minds at ease and made plans

of going back during August.

In the meantime, there was something else that they had too look forward to. Mace and Pat had initially planned on going through the temple for the first time in June, a year and a half after they were baptized, but they chose to put it off until Sheffield and Ramona could go with them.

On the 20th, Sheffield and Ramona flew to Washington in the Staggerwing. Mace and Pat met them at the airport and took them home with them. The next morning they drove up to the temple for their special day. Sheffield and Ramona were at their side every step of the way throughout the day, as it was all so new to them. In addition to Sheffield and Ramona, a good number of people from their ward had made the effort to come and support them. The day culminated with Mace and Pat being sealed. That night the Owen's treated the Brasons to dinner at very nice restaurant in Washington D.C.. They spent Thursday with the Owens as well and returned home on Friday.

There was one more event anticipated for July and that was Geoff's home coming. No one anticipated it more than did Craig and Edith. Others had commented about how quickly those two years had gone by. That was hardly the case for the parents. Now they were down to counting the days. July 28th couldn't come soon enough.

Craig had considered flying to Denver in his Bonanza to bring Geoff home, but he preferred flying home on a commercial flight, after all the church was paying for it. Craig decided that It was just as well since they would be flying out west a few weeks later to attend the family reunion and to take him to school. As much as they anticipated seeing Geoff again after two years, they also anticipated seeing Todd when they flew to Rexburg, since it would be two months since they last saw him.

Each day ticked by and the day finally came. Geoff was scheduled to land in Roanoke at three fifteen in the afternoon. During the morning Ramona, Edith, and Tina were busy with last minute preparations for his homecoming. When it was time to go get him, Edith and Tina rode to the airport with Sheffield and Ramona. They first went to Craig's office to meet up with him. He had arranged to take the rest of the day off and together they made their way to the terminal were Stirling and Mary Ann were already waiting.

They watched the plane land and taxi up to the terminal and waited with anticipation for the passengers to begin disembarking. Finally the the ladder was moved into place and the door opened. They strained to see Geoff as one by one, people began making their way out of the plane and down the ladder.

After a good number of passengers had emerged, there he was. He looked so much like the three hundred or so missionaries that Sheffield and Ramona had seen off in Hawaii. His dark suit, white shirt and tie, and short haircut made him stand out form the rest. As he came closer, there was something else that identified him as a missionary returning home; the far off look in his eyes.

The small welcoming committee applauded as he drew near. The first to rush to him with a big hug was his mother. Rather than hug her back, he just stood there for a moment with tears running down his cheek. "I want to go back." he muttered.

"You do?" Edith asked in dismay. "You're home my boy."

"I'm sorry Mom." he apologized as he loosely returned the hug. "It's just that I'm not sure that I'm ready ready to come home. But it's sure good to see you." he said as he tightened up his hold on his mother.

Next he greeted his father, and then his little sister. "Gosh you've gotten so big while I was gone." he said as he nervously hugged the blossoming young woman.

"What's the matter? Are you afraid of me or something?"

"You know, its that whole arm's length thing."

"That doesn't count. I'm your sister." she insisted as she held him tighter. "I've sure missed you."

"I've missed you too. I just wish that Todd and Gean were here. I can't wait to meet my new brother in law and nephew."

Next, his Grandpa and Grandma Austin greeted him. Sheffield and Ramona held back until last. When it was their turn, Ramona had a hug for him. "Hi Grandma." he said.

"Welcome home, Geoff." she said in return. "I can't wait to hear all about your mission. You didn't say a whole lot in your letters."

Lastly he came to his Grandpa Brason. Sheffield held out his hand and said, "Welcome home Elder Braosn." as he shook his hand, he then pulled him in close for a hug.

It was obvious that he was in shock as they visited while they waited for his luggage. Once they left the airport, Geoff rode home with Craig and everyone recongregated at their house for dinner. Once he was home, Geoff felt more comfortable. When asked about his mission, he opened up and was more than happy to tell stories of the experiences that he had and of the people he had met. Later in the evening, President Winder, who had driven over from Lynchburg just to meet with him, dropped by. First, he took Elder Brason aside for a personal interview and released him from his mission, then he joined the family for desert.

The next day, Geoff came over to see Grandpa and Grandma Brason and stayed for quite some time and told them all bout his mission. Over the next several days, the dazed look in his eyes slowly receded as he interacted with the family and his friends. His focus began to shift from his mission to going back to school. During the following week, he accompanied his parents and Sheffield and Ramona to Washington to attend the temple.

On Sunday the 8th, he reported his mission in Sacrament Meeting. All of his Austin relatives were there. His sister, brother, Aunt Norma, and Aunt Janet and their families lived too far away to come, but he

would be seeing them shortly. As for Todd, he would have a lot time with him.

The next day, Sheffield and Ramona flew to Utah in the Staggerwing to spend several days with Janet and her family. At the end of the week, Craig and his family, including Geoff, flew to Idaho to spend a few days with Gean and her family in Burley before the family reunion.

On the 19th Sheffield and Ramona flew to Rexburg. The airport had reopened and they were able to land there. Wade picked them up and took them home the round about way because the bridge was still being repaired. When they got to their house, things were different than the last time they were there. The house was closed in, and their trailer was set up nearby. The yard was free of debris but they didn't have a lawn or a garden. Wade's father had left a few days earlier to go home and Todd was anxious to see his brother again.

Wade and Norma gave them a tour of their trailer, which didn't take very long. They were more excited to show them how the house was coming along. When they stepped inside, it looked completely different. All of the interior walls had been sheetrocked. But first Wade and his helpers had replaced the wiring and all of the switches. Even though there was electricity, there weren't any light fixtures installed downstairs and they still needed to replace the appliances, including the furnace, and plumbing fixtures. The upstairs was still intact, but with the downstairs under construction, it wasn't very livable. Although they planned on having Craig and his family stay upstairs when they came, since there wouldn't be anything going on while they were there. That night, Sheffield and Ramona slept upstairs.

The next morning, they headed out in the Suburban, with the camp trailer in tow, for Granite Creek. Although Norma and Wade and their family along with Todd had been basically camping out all summer, this was different because this involved hiking, swimming and fishing and other fun things, not the hard work of cleaning up and rebuilding. It was the first real break they had in a while.

Once they got there, they set up camp and were soon joined by Craig and his family, including Gean, Nathan, and Dewayne. At last Geoff and Todd were reunited. While they were getting caught up, Janet and her family and Takara and her family arrived within minutes of each other. Since this was the first that many of them had seen Geoff since he got home, that first afternoon and evening was another homecoming celebration. Over the next three days, they had a good time together. The last time Geoff had been there, he wasn't able to go swimming; this time he could.

On Saturday, they broke camp and everyone went home. Craig and his family went to Rexburg to spend a few days getting Geoff and Todd settled. As planned, they stayed upstairs and Sheffield and Ramona stayed in the camp trailer. On Sunday they went to church with Norma and Wade.

Since the car that Craig had kept there for his kids while they were going to school was destroyed in

the flood, Craig took the insurance money and went car shopping with Geoff and Todd. The both fell in love with the same car, a blue 1965 Ford Mustang. They had always liked their grandma's car and wanted one like it. Ramona liked it so well that she was happy to still be driving it. Typically she would have traded it in by then.

They also needed some clothes and some last minute things. It made more sense to buy it there than bring it in the plane that was already loaded to capacity. When they went to town to go shopping, most of the downtown businesses were open, although many of them were still in process of rebuilding. What they couldn't find in Rexburg, the rest was obtained by a trip to Idaho Falls.

Not only was Geoff happy to see Todd, he was glad to see Teresa again. She had wrote to him every week while he was on his mission. Each time he got a new companion, he had to explain that she was his cousin, not his girlfriend. They didn't have much time to spend together as she had to return to BYU for her senior year. She was happy to introduce him to Roy Pendleton, the guy she had been dating during the summer.

Roy was about five years older than her and had served a mission to Argentina, graduated from college with a degree in accounting, and received an MBA. He was originally from Idaho Falls, and upon completing graduate school in the spring, he was hired by Diet Center as an accountant. Teresa had met him at a young single adult dance earlier in the summer. They hit it off and had seen a lot of each other during the summer. Their relationship had progressed to the point that he wanted to continue a long distance relationship while she finished her senior year at BYU. Norma and Wade thought that he was good young man and would like to see them get together. Likewise, his family was smitten by Teresa. Sheffield and Ramona got to meet him and they too were impressed with him. Ramona went as far as to predict a wedding in the near future.

During the middle of the week, Marty went back to school and on Saturday, Sheffield and Ramona, Craig, Edith, and Tina said goodbye and flew back to Salem.

Since Wade had to go back to work on Monday, he hired a contractor to finish the rest of the house. He was comfortable with roughing it in, but not the finish work. Also on Monday Geoff, Todd, and Samantha began classes at Ricks College. She never did get accepted into student housing, and still lived at home. The dormitory were Geoff and Todd lived was in Wade's ward and Geoff received a call to be his executive secretary.

Sheffield and Ramona looked forward to spending the fall at home after having been away a good share of the summer. Once again they settled back into their routines. It was nice to have the freedom and the ability to go and see the girls and the grandkids like that, but it was even better to be home, for a while at least; they were planning a trip to Hawaii in December.

With Todd away at school, Sheffield had lost his helper. But after helping out with the flood, Tina had proved herself as a hard worker and wasn't afraid to get dirty. In Todd's absence she became Sheffield's helper around the ranch. She wasn't a tomboy by any means and was all girl, and the boys had noticed. When she went back to school in the fall, she was a sophomore at Andrew Lewis High School and eagerly anticipated her sixteenth birthday in October; and more importantly she looked forward to dating.

Sheffield and Ramona typically kept track of the grandkids through Craig, Norma, and Janet. For example, Gean was busy driving truck during the harvest while Nathan's mother watched Dewayne. Geoff, Todd, and Samantha were having a great time at Ricks College. Craig reported that Geoff had met a young lady from Richmond during the first week of school and he had asked her out. It was ironic that he went clear across the country to meet a girl from Virginia. Teresa came home from BYU about every other weekend so she could see Roy. Norma said that they were getting pretty serious.

As for the rest of the grandkids, Marty was in the ninth grade, even though he was old enough to be a sophomore. Holding him back in the first grade had helped, although he still struggled to keep up. Wesley was in the tenth grade, Andrea was in the eighth grade, and Pearl was in the third grade. With the grandkids all getting older, it was refreshing to have one great grandchild; Dwayne was a eighteen months. At the rate that things were going, there were bound to be more in the next few years.

By the middle of October the family began to be concerned about Geoff; he was head over heels in love with the girl he had met at the beginning of the semester. Whenever he wrote home or talked to his folks on the phone, all he could talk about was Marla. He said that she was twenty years old and had been born and raised in Richmond, Virginia but didn't say much about her upbringing. He did say that she had joined the Church in June after having been taught by the missionaries. The elder who had baptized her was from Rexburg and had suggested that she attend Ricks College to help her become acclimated to the church.

The concern was that he had only been home from his mission for two and half months, hardly enough time to readjust. Their concerns were heightened by what Todd had to say about it. First he was disappointed because he had envisioned spending time with Geoff. Ever since he met Marla he had spent all of his time with her. Todd's concern went beyond his own disappointment. He said that she was nothing but trouble. At first they thought that he was just being jealous. But he insisted, giving some examples. He said that she couldn't get along with her roommates, she had been written up for dress code violations, and was at odds with the college rules in general. Geoff made excuses for her behavior and took her side and defended her actions.

Then when Wade weighed in on the matter, they decided that maybe Todd's concerns were valid. He said that he was going to have to release Geoff as his executive secretary and get someone who he

could rely on. Geoff was so captivated by her, that he was completely neglecting his responsibilities. Not only that, but lately he hadn't been attending the ward, he said that he was attending hers. A quick check with her bishop revealed that she had told him that she was attending his. As it turned out they were going to neither.

Todd, who was his roommate, didn't know what they were doing. He said that Geoff got defensive when he asked him what he was doing. He didn't see his brother much as he would stay out until the last possible moment. Todd said that he had at least one curfew violation that he knew of. He hardly ever saw Geoff do his homework. He claimed that he was studying with her. "If you ask me," Todd said, "I think that its her that he's studying."

With them clear across the county, Sheffield and Ramona, and his parents didn't know what to think. They had to rely on the observations of Todd and Norma and Wade. Even if distances wasn't a factor, it probably wouldn't matter much. This was all so unlike Geoff, who had always been diligent and conscientious of his duties and responsibilities, not to mention obedient.

Then a couple of weeks later, Geoff told them that he had broken up with Marla, but wouldn't say why. What he didn't want to say is that one night while parked above the campus, they were making out, something that they had become accustomed to doing. She bared her breasts and it scarred him and he realized that they were heading for trouble. For the next two weeks, Todd had his brother back and Geoff seemed to be himself again, much to everyone's relief.

1976 was a presidential election year and as usual, Sheffield and Ramona had opposing opinions. Sheffield felt that President Ford had done a good job despite how he came to office and deserved another term. Ramona, on the other hand, found Governor Jimmy Carter from Georgia to be refreshing and charming. They carried their opinions with them to the polls on the first Tuesday in November as they cast their ballots. President Ford carried the state of Virginia but still came up thirty electoral votes short in an extremely close election. So close that if 3,687 voter in Hawaii and 5,559 voters in Ohio had voted for Ford instead of Carter, it would have resulted in Ford winning the election.

Just when they thought that Geoff had come to his senses, he announced that he had got back together with Marla and had asked her to marry him, and she had said yes. This turn of events left everyone dumbfounded, especially Todd who knew better than anyone that this girl was trouble. Craig and Edith only had the conflicting stories of Geoff and Todd to go on, as they hadn't even met the girl and hardly knew anything about her. At least they weren't planning on getting married until June so they could be married in the Washington Temple. She had to wait that long so she would be a member of the church for the required one year before going to the temple. To put his parents mind at ease, Geoff announced that he was bringing Marla home for Thanksgiving so they could meet her.

Thanksgiving dinner was postponed until Friday for when Geoff and Marla would be there, since they were spending Thanksgiving with her family in Richmond. With the change in plans, Sheffield and Ramona and Craig, Edith, and Tina went up to the Cabin on Wednesday to get their Christmas trees and Thanksgiving day was spent decorating for Christmas.

On Friday morning Geoff and Marla drove over from Richmond in a rental car and arrived at around noon. Sheffield and Ramona were there when they arrived. It was the first time they had seen Geoff since leaving him in Rexburg at the end of August. He didn't seem to be himself as his demeanor had changed. The lost look in his eyes had changed from that of recently returned missionary to the lost look of love.

He proudly introduced Marla Chatterfield to his parents, little sister, and both sets of grandparents, since Stirling and Mary Ann were there as well. They hadn't even known her last name until that moment. There was so much they didn't know about her. She was a pretty girl with a terrific figure, about five foot five with shoulder length red hair and green eyes. It was what she was wearing that got their attention. She wore a one piece pantsuit with a halter neck. The pant legs were flared from the knees down. Her back was bare from the waist up and the front had a plunging neck line which revealed her ample cleavage. Clearly this wasn't the kind of girl that Geoff naturally would have been attracted to; it was as if she had him under a powerful spell.

As they visited and got acquainted with Marla, she was vague in her answers to their questions as if she was purposely concealing her past. A past that Geoff was unaware of as well. They did learn that her parents were divorced and she had lived with her mother and her boyfriend. They were indifferent about her joining the church but her mother was pushing for a civil wedding so that she could see her daughter be married.

When asked about school, she didn't hesitate to vent her attitude toward the rules and expectations and how awful her roommates were. All the while, Geoff made excuses for her attitude. It was as if the only opinion that he was allowed to have was the one that she gave him. The depth of the spell she had on Geoff became more apparent as he would only respond with what she wanted him to say. Before he would respond, he would look at her as if he was taking a cue from her. The longer they were there, the more uncomfortable she became. When dinner was over, before clearing away, she gave him a look. It was if she was communicating with him telepathically.

"I'm going to show Marla around." he announced abruptly. "We'll be back after a while."

She took him by the hand and led him to the door and they left. With them gone, it gave everyone an opportunity to say what they had on their minds, and it wasn't good. But what could they say or do, except to hope that he came to his senses. June was still six months away; he had broke up with her once, maybe he would again. One thing was obvious, if anyone said anything, it was sure to push him deeper into the

mismatched relationship. It was obvious to them that they were not in love.

Later in the evening when Geoff and Marla returned, they visited for a while, trying to get to know her better. It was like pulling teeth, but occasionally they could extract small pieces of information from her. Eventually Stirling and Mary Ann went home as it was getting late the evening. Marla was informed that she would be sleeping at Sheffield and Ramona's house because Edith did not want them sleeping under the same roof.

They took her home with them and gave her the guest room. They had hoped to visit with her alone, but she said that she was tired and wanted to go bed.

The next morning, Geoff came over but she was still in bed. They had a chance to talk to Geoff but he was cautious in what he divulged. When she did finally get up, Geoff and Marla had breakfast with them before running off. They spent most of the day away from home and returned in time for supper.

Geoff brought Marla over later in the evening and asked Ramona if they could use her bathhouse.

"You know the rules. Leave the door open."

"Thanks Grandma. We will."

"Do you have a bathing suit, Marla?"

"No, but Geoff said that you had some extras."

"Yes, I do. Lets go see what I have that will fit you."

Ramona found one for her and sent her into the guest room to change. Geoff had brought his trunks with him and changed in the bathroom. Once they had both changed, they hurried out on the porch to the bathhouse.

"Do you really trust them alone out there? Because I don't." Sheffield said.

"Not for one minute. That's why were going to join them. Lets go get changed."

Sheffield and Ramona went into their bedroom and changed into their swimming suits and headed for the bathhouse. The door was open as they barged in and announced, "We decided to join you."

Marla had been sitting on Geoff's lap and it was obvious that they had been heavily involved in some serious necking, which came to an abrupt end. She was still on his lap when Sheffield and Ramona got in and sat down across from them.

"This is really nice." Marla complimented as she moved next to Geoff. "I like the mural."

That gave Ramona the opportunity to explain how the bathhouse came to be and to talk about all of her years in Hawaii. It must have been a more relaxed setting, because Marla opened up a little more to them, or perhaps it was because Geoff's parents weren't there. They were able to learn a little more about this mysterious and bewitching young woman. She opened up about her family and how she was fourteen

when her parents got divorced. Since then she has only seen her father a handful of times. Her mother never remarried but had had several relationships since then. She said that the man that was currently living with her mother was a nice enough guy.

They asked her about how she had come in contact with the missionaries. She explained, "One day last winter while I was home alone and getting ready for work the missionaries knocked on our door. They were pretty cute so I let them in and listened to their brief message. I didn't get a lot out of it, but they told me about the young single adult group there in Richmond and suggested that I check it out. They left and I went to work and never gave it another thought. Then a couple of days later I got a call from a girl who said that she was on the young adult committee and invited me to an activity. I told her that I'd think about it, not really intending to go.

"That night I went to a party with some kids that I hung out with and realized that they weren't all that good of a bunch and that I could do better. So I decided to go to the activity. I found the church where it was held, but was nervous to go in because I wasn't comfortable with the idea of being in a church. I was about to leave without going in, when I was approached by a girl, who happened to be the one who had called me.

"I ended up going and enjoyed myself. I didn't know that young people my age could have so much fun without alcohol and drugs being involved. I felt something different about them and wanted to be more like that. Needless to say, I kept going back and the missionaries gave me the lessons and I was baptized.

"Elder Martin, the missionary who baptized me, was from Rexburg and suggested that I go to Ricks so I could be in that kind of atmosphere on a permanent basis. I had been saving my money so I could go to school anyway, so I applied and was accepted and that's how I met Geoff."

Her story seemed sincere enough, but it was obvious that both her understanding and commitment were shallow, if not superficial. It was getting late and they had to fly back the next day so they got out and went in the house to change their clothes and get ready for bed. Geoff waited around to say good night. When Marla came out of the bedroom, she was wearing a red nighty that was not only extremely short with spaghetti straps, but was practically see through. Geoff didn't seem phased by it, as if it wasn't anything that he hadn't seen before. She gave him a hug and a kiss before he went back to his parent's house.

On Sunday morning, Geoff came to get her and took her back to his house to gather his things and to say goodbye before going to the airport to catch their flight. Their whirlwind visit left everyone bewildered. At least they had a chance to meet Marla, and now they understood the concerns that Todd and Norma and Wade had and they were concerned too.

Two days later, on the 30th, Sheffield and Ramona left on their long anticipated vacation to Hawaii for the thirty fifth anniversary reunion of the Pearl Harbor Survivors Association and to revisit their mission. It

was pretty much a repeat of their trip five years earlier, except they were now older. It was still mid afternoon when they landed in Honolulu and they checked into the Sheraton Waikiki where the reunion was being held, the same hotel as in 1971. For the next seven days they participated in the reunion events. As before, they used their free time to go to some of their favorite places. The reunion culminated on Tuesday December 7th with the memorial service at the Punchbowl National Cemetery in the and morning and the banquet in the evening with time to celebrate Sheffield's seventy eighth birthday sandwiched in between.

For the next two weeks they visited places and people that they had known while on their mission, including Mililani. One of the more enjoyable times was the time they spent with Manti and Lolani Morley in Laie. At the end of three weeks, they flew home on the 15th in anticipation of the kids and grandkids coming home for Christmas.

It was late in the evening when they arrived back in Roanoke and Craig met them and took them home. After Craig asked about their trip, Ramona asked, "Did anything go an around here while were gone."

"Oh brother, I'll say." Craig huffed.

"What's the matter?"

"Geoff was informed that he can't go back to Ricks next semester because of his grades."

"That's not surprising, the way he has been distracted by Marla."

"Thats not all of it. She can't go back either because of standards violations."

"So what are they going to do now?"

"Get married."

"I know that, but what are they going to do between now and June?"

"Like I said, get married. They've moved their wedding date up to the twenty ninth of this month."

"But thats only two weeks away."

"Tell me about it."

"How are they going to live?"

"Geoff says he'll get a job."

"Whats the matter with that boy? He's only known her for less than four months."

"We've tried talking some scene into him, but he won't listen to us." Craig said in frustration. "There's a lot of things about Marla that bother us and there's so much we don't know about her. I'm not sure that Geoff knows all there is to know either. We're afraid she's pulled the wool over his eyes and that he's got a rude awakening coming."

"This is so unlike Geoff." Ramona said. "People do funny things when they're in love."

"Or think they are." Sheffield added.

"Exactly." Craig agreed.

“But I thought they were waiting until June so she could go to the temple.”

“Not anymore. Their going to get married in Richmond. They're coming home Saturday to work out the details.”

“I guess we'll just have to wait and see what happens.” Sheffield concluded.

It was late when they got home, so Sheffield and Ramona went straight to bed, leaving the unpacking for the next day.

When Geoff came home on Saturday, he and Marla went to Richmond to make their wedding plans. He went along with whatever she wanted and Craig and Edith were left out of the picture, except for planning a reception in Roanoke, With such short notice, it quickly became a simple open house in their home.

All during the week of Christmas, they never saw him. But on Thursday the 23rd, Norma, Janet, and Gean and their families, and Todd arrived home for the holidays. They were all caught off guard by the sudden turn in events, even Todd who was his roommate. With all of the talk of Geoff and the mistake everyone thought he was making, Sheffield and Ramona's vacation was hardly mentioned. Janet and her family stayed with Sheffield and Ramona, Norma's family stayed with Roger and Chantelle, and Gean, Nathan and Dwayne stayed with Craig and Edith. In addition, Teresa had brought Roy with her so he could get better acquainted with her family. He stayed with Sheffield and Ramona as well.

The entire family spent Christmas Eve and Christmas Day together, except for Geoff who was being held captive in Richmond by Marla. He did however call and talk to his parents briefly to wish them a Merry Christmas and gave them the details for the wedding and to tell them that he had a job lined up.

Just a few weeks short of being two years old, Dwayne brought the magic of Christmas into the day. Teresa had some excitement of her own to add, she announced that she and Roy were getting married, with plans for a August wedding in the Idaho Falls Temple.

Roy's presence was refreshing. He was level headed and solid as a rock, although a little dull. That came with being an accountant. He had had some brief exposure to the family during the summer, but this was their first chance to really get to know him. He was the real deal, with nothing to hide, unlike Marla. The news of their engagement detracted from the confusion that revolved around Geoff's impending wedding. Or what Todd sarcastically referred to as, “His impending doom.”

They all had an enjoyable time together, but naturally Wade and Norma had to split their time with the Rowans. Not only did Roy have the Brasons to get to know, but the Rowans as well. As an accountant, he was good at keeping track of things and remarkably remembered everyone he met and what their connection was.

Norma and Wade had exciting news of their own. Their house was finished and they had just barely

moved back into it. That meant that Todd wouldn't have to live in the dorms any more and could stay with them as originally planned. They weren't sure what they were going to do with the HUD trailer, until Teresa announced her engagement. They offered it to her and Roy, if they wanted it.

On Wednesday morning, the family drove the three hours to Richmond for the wedding. Sheffield and Ramona loaded as many as they could into Sheffield's Buick. Ramona loaned her Mustang to Janet and Jerry. Norma and Wade borrowed a car from Roger, and Stirling and Mary Ann fit the rest into their car. Once they arrived, they all checked into the same motel and freshened up for the wedding.

From the motel, they drove to the Manchester District Courthouse at 920 Hull Street in Richmond. Geoff's instructions were to be there no later than two forty five. Geoff met them and took them inside to the assembly hall where those scheduled to go before the judge waited for their turn. He introduced them to Marla's mother, Matilda, a relatively attractive woman in her mid forties. It was the first time that they had met her and she seemed like a nice lady.

Matilda had an air of sophistication, on a budget, about her. She was definitely a take charge kind of woman and had thrown the entire wedding together on short notice, using her connections. She actually worked as clerk of the district court and had noticed a thirty minute break in the judge's schedule and approached him about performing the wedding, to which he agreed.

At three o'clock sharp the wedding party was invited into the courtroom and were seated. Geoff's family were directed to sit on one side and Marla's on the other. Those who were there for her were not so numerous. The only ones they had met were Matilda and her boyfriend. They could only guess who the rest of them were.

The bailiff, a uniformed police officer, directed Geoff to stand before the judge, as if he were about to have the book thrown at him. If he only knew. With Geoff in place, the bailiff went to the door off to the side of the courtroom where Marla had been sequestered in the judge's chamber and brought her out to stand next to Geoff.

She was stunning. Her white wedding gown was fitted to her body, emphasizing every curve. The strapless top particularly emphasized her bust. The gown was flared at the knees with ruffles from there to the hemline. Her hair was done up in a beehive with dangling ringlets. A simple veil was attached to the top of the beehive.

Geoff on the other hand wore a light blue leisure suit, the top button of his shirt was undone and the collar overlaid the collar of his jacket. It was very uncharacteristic of Geoff, who had always been a suit and tie kind of a guy.

The judge talked to them for a moment and then very matter of factly preformed the marriage and pronounced them husband and wife with the slam of his gavel. Then the courtroom was cleared for the next

case.

The wedding party reassembled downtown at the Beauregard Buffet on Manistreet. That is where they got acquainted with Marla's family which consisted of her father and his wife, her older sister and her husband and children, and her younger brother, and her grandparents. They all seemed to be nice people.

Their reception was held at the Daughters Of The Confederacy Headquarters Library and Museum at 328 N Boulevard, of which Matilda was a member. It was a simple reception, held in a large meeting room. On the refreshment table were two punch bowls and a variety of liquor. The reception was attended by extended family members, friends, neighbors, and Matilda's coworkers. When the reception ended, everyone pitched in to clear away and clean up before returning to the motel. The newlyweds on the other hand, went off for their wedding night. Geoff was totally unprepared for what Marla had in store for him.

The next morning, everyone headed back to Roanoke to prepare for the open house at Craig and Edith's home in Salem. It too was a simple affair, but with a better attendance than the previous evening. All of his Brason and Austin relatives came as did a lot of people from the ward. A number of Marla's family made the trip to be there as well.

The next morning, the newlyweds left for their three day honeymoon to Florida. The rest of the family stayed a couple more days to welcome in 1977. In anticipating the year ahead, they looked forward to Teresa's wedding. During the time that they were there, Roy had made a good impression and would be a good addition to the family. On the other hand, they weren't so sure about Marla and hoped for the best. On Sunday the 2nd, they all returned home.

When Geoff and Marla returned from their honeymoon, they moved in with Matilda and her boyfriend until they could get an apartment of their own. Geoff started his job as a delivery driver for an electrical wholesale company there in Richmond. For the next couple of weeks they didn't hear anything from him. When he did call, he seemed distant and disconnected and didn't have much to say.

With their trip to Hawaii, the holidays, and Geoff's wedding over with, Sheffield and Ramona settled into to back into their routine. January was unusually cold that year with temperatures about ten degrees below normal. During the third week in January the temperature never got above freezing. They had to bundle up when they went out to celebrate their thirty third anniversary.

One day toward the end of the month, while Ramona was doing her volunteer shift at the hospital, Sheffield had a surprise visit. He answered a knock on the door to find Geoff on the doorstep. "Geoff, what a surprise. Come in and sit down."

"Thanks Grandpa." He came in and took off his coat and he and Sheffield sat down.

"What brings you all the way over here?"

"I had to talk to someone so I took the day off. Marla doesn't know about it and I'd like to keep it that

way. Dad's at work and Mom wasn't home so I came to see you.”

“Whats on your mind Geoff?”

“I realize that I have made a terrible mistake and I don't know what to do.”

“I'm listening.”

“I don't love Marla. I never did. I guess I was just in love with the idea of being in love.”

“You did rush into it awful fast. Everyone was concerned that you were rushing things.”

“Why didn't anyone say something.”

“We tried Geoff, but you wouldn't listen. So what are you going to do?”

“I guess there's not much I can do but to try to make the best of it. But its going to be hard.”

“Marriage isn't always easy, even when you are in love.” Sheffield counseled. “But when there's no love there, its a lot harder. How does Marla feel about you?”

“She seems to be in it for herself. She's not the person I thought she was. I just found out some things about her that I should have known before we got married. For starters, she has always had serious emotional problems that go back to her childhood. Now that I know that, I can see the red flags that I missed. How could I have been so blind?”

“They say love is blind.”

“They've got that right. I was blind to a lot of things. I also just found out that as a teenager she was real heavy into alcohol and immorality. I thought that because she had been baptized that whatever her past was, she had repented and that it wasn't an issue. Come to find out, she never really was converted. Don't get me wrong, while we were going together, we didn't do anything bad, but there were times that things could have gotten out of hand. Now that we've moved into our own place, she wants me to do all of these kinky things that I'm not comfortable with. Its obvious that she has a lot of experience. For example...”

“I don't need to know the details Geoff. That's between you and her. But if you're not comfortable with it, tell her how you feel.”

“I did and it just made her mad. Thats another thing I found out to late. She has a temper and gets downright violent. That's why she can't know that I'm here.”

“That bad, huh.”

“What am I going to go, Grandpa. I can't just bail out. I wasn't raised that way. I guess I'm stuck.”

“I think you should start by talking to your bishop, if you haven't already.” For the next little while, Sheffield counseled him on the merits of sticking it out and trying to make things work but concluded with the fact that it doesn't always turn out. “You didn't give it enough time up front,” he said, “but its only been a month, give it some time and do everything you can. Then if after a while it just isn't going to work, there are worse things than ending it, but only as a last resort.”

“Okay Grandpa, I'll try. I don't know if it'll work or not. It's getting late and its a three hour drive. I'd better start back so I can get home at my normal time so she doesn't suspect anything.”

“Can I tell your folks what you just told me?”

“Yeah, they're who I wanted to talk to to begin with. But I'm glad that I got to talk to you. Thanks for the advice. I'll do my best.”

At that, Geoff got up and put on his coat and left for the long drive home with plenty to think about. Later that day, Sheffield shared his visit with Geoff with Ramona and his mom and dad. No one was surprised that there were problems, but they were alarmed at how serious they were. They had their doubts about this marriage before it ever got started, now it looked hopeless and their hearts went out to Geoff.

That was the last anyone heard of Geoff for weeks. Any attempt to contact him either by telephone or through the mail was intercepted by Marla. The situation only got worse as she tightened her control over him, even trying to change him into someone that he wasn't.

Geoff was willing to work at their marriage and made considerable concessions in order to try to keep Marla happy. There were some good days, depending on the emotional roller coaster that she was on, but it didn't take much to sour her mood, especially since she started drinking again. When things didn't go her way, she became violent and abusive, especially when it came to intimacy. She wanted it all the time. The longer things went on, she demanded more and more of the erotic. When Geoff refused, she became so angry that she severely beat him, bad enough to cause considerable bruising and the swelling. From that point, he utterly refused to be intimate with her ever again.

As her reign terror continued, Geoff sank deeper and deeper into despair, seeing no way out. At times he was in fear for his life as the violence escalated. He was ashamed of himself when he had to hit back in his own defense. Sometimes he wished that she would just kill him and get it over with. Many times he thought of just running away, but he was no quitter.

Then one day at the end of March, which happened to be their three month anniversary, while on his deliveries, Geoff realized that he had forgotten his wallet. He swung by their apartment to get it, only to catch her red handed with another guy doing the very things that he had refused to engage in with her. That was his ticket out. He not only grabbed his wallet but hastily gathered his things while Marla and her lover looked on from the bed. When he told her that he wanted a divorce, her reply was, “Good, its about time.”

He left with his suitcase and returned to his truck. His first impression was to be angry, but that gave way to relief as he drove off. He had no idea that she had been cheating on him as well, but looking back over the last two or three weeks, there were plenty of clues. Not knowing what else to do, he finished his deliveries. When he returned to the warehouse, he told his boss that he quit and called his dad at work to come and get him.

It was getting toward late afternoon when Craig hung up the telephone after talking to Geoff. He called Edith to tell her that he would be late for dinner but to set an extra plate because Geoff was coming home. Next, he placed a call to have his Bonanza fueled and readied. He quickly finished up what he was working on before leaving his office for day. An hour and half later he picked up Geoff and his things at the airport in Richmond.

All the way home, Craig listened with horror and disgust at what Geoff had endured as he vented, letting the poison out his system. "I was a fool for marrying her to begin with and an even bigger fool for staying married." he lamented. "I'm so glad that its finally over. How could I have been so stupid?"

"What are you going to do now?" Craig asked.

"The first thing I'm going to do is to file for divorce. Then I need to figure out what it is that I really want to do with my life. I never got to that point after coming home from my mission."

"Well, you can move back home for however long it takes"

That evening, there was a quiet homecoming for Geoff. He was happy to have one of his mother's home cooked meals and to sleep in his own bed, in his own room. For the first time in weeks, he felt safe. Meanwhile back in Richmond, Marla's lover moved in with her that very evening.

The very next day, Geoff contacted an attorney, who lived in one of the Roanoke wards and began the process for filing for a divorce. The process seemed painful, but no where near as painful as enduring another day with Marla. Over the next several days, Geoff laid low. Sheffield put him to work doing some things around the ranch that needed attention. It gave him something to do and time to think. What was done was done and there wasn't anything he could do to change it. He regretted all of the time wasted on Marla. It was an unnecessary detour that had jeopardized his education which set him back. All he could do was pick up the pieces and move forward.

As he thought about what he wanted to do, he thought about what he was good at and what he liked doing. He had always been detail oriented and liked collecting information. He had several recipe boxes full of file cards that he had recorded information on, which he would sort in various ways. He had heard that the computers that businesses were beginning to use worked in much the same manner and decided to look into it. One day he borrowed his mother's car and drove down to Blacksburg to visit Virginia Tech. After spending an afternoon, he came home all excited. He found something that he thought he would be good at. After looking over the information that they had given him, he decided to enroll in their computer science program. Most of his general credits from Ricks College would transfer over, which meant that he could be done in three years.

In the meantime, progress was being made on his divorce case. Marla had been served with the papers and had signed them. Since there was nothing to contest, the process went pretty smoothly. He felt

lucky to be getting out, and was ever so thankful that their brief marriage didn't result in a pregnancy. Now all that stood in the path of his freedom was a court date.

After having been the focus of concern within the family for so long, Geoff and his troubles were no longer at the forefront. In the wake of his troubles, there were good things to look forward to. There was Teresa's wedding in August and Gean announced that she was expecting in November. At the end of April, Geoff accompanied Sheffield and Ramona out west to attend Teresa's graduation from BYU on the 22nd. While there, they spent a couple of days with Norma and a couple of days with Janet. It just so happened that the Sunday that they were in Rexburg, Wade was released as the Bishop of the student ward. Sheffield and Ramona left Geoff in Rexburg and flew home without him.

When Todd got out school on the 27th, he loaded up his things in the Mustang that they had shared and started out on the long cross country drive home. It was the time together that Todd felt he had been cheated out of when Marla came along. Their route home took them through Colorado so Geoff could revisit his mission. It was good for both of them. It helped Geoff get back in touch with who he was and it got Todd excited for his mission. He had submitted his papers earlier in the month and was waiting for his mission call.

When they got home, Todd's mission call was waiting for him. With all of his family and both sets of grandparents gathered around, he opened it to learn that he had been called to serve in the California Los Angeles Mission and was to report to the Mission Home in Salt Lake on August 20th.

A few days later, Geoff had his day in court on the 18th of May. Marla didn't contest the divorce nor did she show up. Finally, he was free from the spell of the Wicked Witch of the West.

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