

CHAPTER ONE

ARRIVAL

The official deck log of Naval Air Station Santa Cruz Spain for 30 November reads:

United Airlines Military Charter, flight 521, from Philadelphia, Pa., touched down 0901 local time. All passengers, less one, safely debarked and duly cleared Spanish customs. Reporting personnel met by respective command sponsor. Aircraft towed to apron adjacent to Hanger Three for fueling and servicing prior return flight scheduled 1800, 01 December. Flight crew transported to Hotel Cordoba. Master Chief Henry C. Berkeley transported to Naval Hospital for medical evaluation after being rendered unconscious aboard aircraft. Reason unknown. Master Chief Berkeley insisted he was not ill, refused on-scene medical attention and refused to enter ambulance. Subject transported via Navy sedan. Wife, Patricia L. Berkeley, accompanied husband. Command sponsor, Master Chief Hector D. Seeley and wife, Lisa Ann, followed in POV.

This Flail-Ex, which caused me to look like an understudy to an idiot, began with a question session initiated by my wife concerning the submission of travel claims, for transportation of our bulldog and cat from Big Otter, West Virginia to Puerto Santa Cruz, Spain. The discussion occurred as the aircraft was swinging into its final approach.

Shortly after our engagement and gearing up, teeth, hair and eyeballs, to become a model Navy wife, my prospective bride purchased a sea bag full

of naval texts from the *Navy Institute* and boned up on Navy customs, traditions, rules, regulations and history. Her intelligence was such that her knowledge of obscure topics often surpassed my own. I was proud of her, but her questioning Navy related happenings became something of a pain in the stern. I had, on occasion, threatened to conduct a book-burning!

The conversation that caused the flail-ex went something like this:

"Clay, I have been studying this manual on Navy travel regulations. It is clear that we cannot claim travel expenses for Jarhead and Blue Suit, even though we will pay for their transportation to Spain when they follow via a civilian aircraft."

"So?"

"So, darling," she said, in a little girl voice, "Can one claim a stowaway? And I want you to remember that I love you desperately."

"A stowaway?" I asked, wondering what desperate love had to do with a stowaway

She took my right hand and placed it on her lower mid-section. "*This* stowaway, dearest."

That revelation caused me to faint and make a spectacle of myself in front of God and everybody -- just as the aircraft touched upon the soil of Spain. It also told me the reason for various occurrences since we married almost three months prior.

Why the alleged ghost of the first Berkeley matriarch, Margaret Louise (Tinny) Berkeley kept tripping around our farm house in West Virginia smiling at her. Why Patty insisted we bring the cradle in which Berkeley babies had bedded down since the year 1710. Why she insisted her parents visit us in July. Why she had recently been extraordinarily amorous, even for *her*, a one hundred-pound sex kitten.

Patty Lane was **PREGNANT!**

The doctor poked and prodded at me for a good fifteen minutes, making odd sounds of dismay as he discovered various and assorted dings and zippers that adorned my beat-up carcass. He then strapped me on an EKG machine that looked like something Doctor Frankenstein used to zap bolts of lightning into his monster. Finally, after uttering a sea bag full of hems, haws and hums, he pronounced my heart that of a healthy teenager and declared me fit for full duty, which was exactly what I had told the hospital corpsman who wanted to prod at me at the air terminal.

Fainting from shock is not uncommon, certainly not when one's bride of not yet three months announces her pregnancy in a sneaky way in front of God and everybody when no such thing was even suspected, and absolutely not desired -- by me!

What a way to report to a new command! Such an omen would have caused a superstitious person to catch the next flight out of Dodge.

"My usual procedure is to proceed to the waiting room while my patient dresses, or is transported to a room, and reassure those concerned about the person's well-being. Not *this* time, Master Chief. You are on your own! I do not wish to speak with your protective wife, not after the fit she threw when I refused to let her inside the examination room." the four-striper doctor exclaimed, with no room for argument in his voice.

"I can understand why you might feel that way, Captain."

Patty must have gone totally off-plumb when I sagged in the aircraft seat. When I regained consciousness, she had removed her seat belt and was kneeling on my lap thumping on my chest and trying to give me the Kiss of Life and scream, all at the same time. Despite her being not much larger than the average mouse, it took considerable effort of three flight attendants to get her off my lap and back into her seat.

She went into a Mark One - Mod Zero rampage when the doctor would not permit her to enter the examination room. She poked him in the chest with her tiny finger and called him names which were very harsh, and which probably derived from her reading of Shakespeare. Her actions were quite out of character, considering my shy, young, farm girl wife did not know any really nasty words -- 'Damn and Hell', being her strongest cuss words. Missus Seeley resolved the situation by taking the slack out of her towing hawser and hauling Patty out into the hospital waiting room, belligerence radiating every step of the way

Patty probably still did not realize her: *I will slip my pregnancy to Clay gently* tactic caused the entire series of events.

Patty struggled from the heavy arms of Missus Seeley, dashed across the nicely waxed deck and threw herself against my chest with force enough to knock me backwards.

"Oh, Clay-honey!" she sobbed against my now rumpled khaki shirt that would have been rejected by a San Francisco wino as casual attire.

I kissed the top of her wavy-curly head. "I'm fine, Kitten, just like I told that corpsman at the airport. The doctor said I have the heart of a healthy teenager."

"Oh, I am so glad! I would *kill* myself if something happened to you!" she exclaimed, then locked her big, gray eyes and gave me one of her penetrating looks. "If you are okay, then why did you faint on the airplane? Are you certain that mean doctor is competent? Should we get a second opinion from a Spanish doctor? Are they well-trained? Should you--"

I caught her by her little shoulders, set her down in a blue, plastic chair, bent over and said, softly, for her ears only, "I passed out because of the shock of learning you're pregnant and for no other reason. What is done is done, and I'm not being critical, but you should have waited until we got to the hotel, then told me straight out and up front. Actually, you should have told me when you first learned of it. I couldn't have been more shocked if you'd announced you'd taken up with a barfly and wanted a divorce!"

"A *divorce*? You will *never* get rid of me, Henry Clay Berkeley!"

"The shock would have been similar. Speaking of pregnancy, should you be walking?"

"I am in no way *damaged*. I am only pregnant. I am a strong, healthy girl."

"You can walk around and . . . everything?"

"Certainly! I learned of my pregnancy only days ago, but I have seen an obstetrician and I am in excellent condition to carry a baby." She muzzled my ear and whispered, "*Everything* is possible until the seventh month. Isn't that great?"

It was -- then again, maybe not, depending on how many amorous sessions in a given day and night her pregnancy generated. No normal male could hack the degree of conjugal attention she had whipped on me over the last few days -- teenage blood pressure and heart aside.

The *Playa de la Sol* hotel had been remodeled and was even fancier than when I was last in Puerto Santa Cruz. The lobby, which also provided entrance to the bar and restaurant area, was thick with potted plants, heavy Spanish furniture and wee cubbyholes fitted with a table and two chairs. The floor was covered with glazed, reddish tile. The white, stucco walls were decorated with arts and crafts and paintings of Spanish scenery. There were the usual swords, battleaxes and halberds on the walls commonly seen

in Spanish establishments, but no weaponry such as jawbones of asses, dried kitty cats, dogging wrenches and the like.

Master Chief Hector Seeley, our sponsor, had done himself proud in selecting our beach front room. Patty fell instantly in love with the large, airy room the moment she stepped through the door. That was good, considering we had to live there until the current occupant of our cottage-to-be transferred.

Patty bubbled on and on as she swept through the room, touching every piece of furniture as she went. "Oh, Clay-honey, look at the painted tiles running along the wall! Look at the spacious bathroom! Look at the French windows overlooking the beach! Look at the size of that bed! Oh, we have a TV. I can learn Spanish and look at the lovely beach and ocean at the same time!" She hugged herself, cocked her wavy-curly, taffy haired head toward her left shoulder and gave me a sly, broad-toothed grin. "We have been awake for hours on that darned airplane while flying across five time zones. Clay-dearest, let us take a nap!"

We did . . . but not directly. The little minx's rambunctious maneuvering in the huge bed told me she no longer believed I'd almost slipped my cable and shifted my flag to The Big Canoe Club in the Sky a couple of hours earlier.

Patty fell instantly asleep once she turned loose, but I lay there with both portholes wide open, worrying. My concerns when initially contemplating making love with Patty were two fold and for those reasons I had kept my hands off her, more or less, for about three months after we met.

Things she said shortly after we met led me to believe her knowledge of birth control consisted of avoiding cabbage patches and locking her knees together to prevent storks from landing. I surely did not want a little Berkeley-Patterson wood's colt crawling about the terrain, although that would have been in keeping with Berkeley family tradition.

Issues of the first Berkeley couple in our family line were certainly wood's colts. That couple formalized their marriage vows in 1709 by jumping over a stick behind tobacco bales on a Norfolk, Virginia dock before heading out, flank-speed legs, toward the mountains of what was then Western Virginia. Their trek to the rugged, almost uninhibited mountains was necessary to prevent a Tidewater planter from taking custody of Margaret Louise Tinny as an indentured servant. The fact that both had arrived on the morning tide, but in different ships, and had not previously met, did not affect their forming a lasting relationship even though there was

no record of their marriage having been formalized by clergy. They produced a baker's dozen children, built their first plot of land into fair-sized holding and lived together in harmony for eighty-one years. They died one day apart.

The second concern was that Patty was so darned tiny! She was not skinny, but well-built with every part of her beautiful body having been fabricated by God's people fitters in miniature. It seemed impossible for a woman of her size to successfully carry a baby to term, let alone give birth

The first concern sorted itself out nicely; she did understand birth control despite her obvious innocence.

The second concern disappeared, at least in my mind, when I informed Patty that I wanted children about as much as I wanted a third Purple Heart. Her desire to have children surfaced again after she claimed sightings of an old lady ghost milling about smartly in our orchard and bedroom. These occurrences followed directly after she had read old family journals and my mother's diaries, which Patty said contained entries of similar sightings.

Supposedly my mother had seen an aged female ghost holding a cradle and smiling at her just before she learned she was pregnant with me. The same ghost, thought by my mother to be the Matriarch of the Berkeley Clan, mustered in and smiled at Patty one night. If the old gal was holding a cradle, Patty *neglected* to tell me that part!

Nosy darned ghosts! If they were so concerned about maintaining the Berkeley Line, they should have put more heat on their descendants to be fruitful and multiply. Natural death and death by disease, injury, war, and an inordinate number of female births caused the number of Berkeley males to fall to where I was the last of the line.

In keeping with tradition of a sponsor, Hec and Lisa Ann Seeley took us to the Sea Dragon Club for supper that evening. It would have been normal for them to have taken us to the Chief Petty Officer's Club, except Naval Station Santa Cruz had no CPO club. CPO and officer's clubs, unlike clubs for lower-ranking personnel, are not fully supported by the Navy and cease operations when they do not sustain at least a tiny profit. The officer's club reduced in size to a room in the Bachelor Officer Quarters and the CPO club was turned into the Sea Dragon Club, for the four top enlisted ranks -- an all-ranks club in actuality. The CPO's reserved one room with a tiny bar for their private use so they could weep, wail and gnash their teeth without junior personnel overhearing them.

Patty, frothing at the mouth to experience Spanish culture, expressed disappointment when I told her where they were taking us. She perked up and appeared quite pleased when she viewed the club's Spanish decor. The immaculately covered tables with heavy silver cutlery and a multitude of crystal goblets were exactly as she'd seen depicted in books about Spain

The kind and friendly Spanish waiter, quite adept at recognizing a total greenhorn, took Patty under tow and steered her toward paella -- a dish of meat, seafood, rice and vegetables. Patty dug in and gobbled her paella with gusto.

Hec ordered a good sherry to polish off our meal that had already encompassed a number of glasses of superb local wine. Patty went deep in conversation with Lisa Ann concerning the care and feeding of a house in Spain. I feared much of what Patty learned would fall by the wayside before morning, her being tipsy on one glass of wine and a sip or two of the brandy.

I'd heard pregnant women should not drink alcohol and so informed Patty soon after we sat down. That caused Lisa Ann to take me to task and inform me that Spanish women drank wine with every meal and their children were born quite healthy. She backed up her argument by stating the infant death rate was much lower in Spain than in the United States. I, being wise, at times, shut the hell up!

"Clay, I'm retiring from this billet." Hec said, after we finished our meal. "We're going to use our retirement to sail around the world in a small yacht we had built in Cadiz. I have to take delivery soon. When can you relieve me?"

I, having had a tad more wine than I needed, faked a salute and said: "Master Chief Seeley, you stand relieved!"