
Chapter Twenty-Two

JACK

*Have you seen a valley green with Spring
Where my heart can go a journeying
Over the shadows and the rain
To a blossom covered lane?
...Wonderful music
...I don't know if you can find these
things,
But my heart is riding on your wings,
So if you see them anywhere,
Won't you lead me there?*

—"Skylark"

Charlie couldn't believe what he was hearing. Though he was starving and light-headed, he still couldn't manage one bite of his tuna salad on wheat toast. On this never-to-be-forgotten Monday, Jack Teagarden had fulfilled Charlie's wildest dreams with one statement and one question: "Man, I love the way you play and my guitar player's leavin.' How 'bout joining the band and goin' on the road with us?"

Charlie wanted to bust out with a "yes" and hold it forever like a sustained high C on a French horn, but he knew he would have to talk it over with Marge first. Leaving the security of Cur-

tiss-Wright and traveling around the country, maybe even abroad, might not sit well with her. They had talked before about such an opportunity, but Marge always hemmed and hawed about her willingness to see her husband only occasionally and, more important, be left at home to care for two small daughters only nineteen months apart.

Though it was probably just a few seconds, in Charlie's head it seemed like forever before he was able to utter the words, "Sounds great, Jack. Great! Just have to talk to the little lady, ya know...."

"Well, here's my number," Jack said, slipping him a piece of paper with a Chicago phone number on it. "We're leaving in the morning and we'll get to our hotel by Thursday. Figured you could just meet up with us in L.A., oh say, around mid March or so. We're playing New Orleans, Kansas City, and the guitar guy can stay for those, but...well, anyway when we get out west we're playing L.A. for a good part of the spring. So, anyhow, Charlie, just let me know, huh? Love to have ya on board."

"It's a 'yes' I'm sure, Jack, but again, gotta talk to the wife." Trying to throw a little machismo Jack's way, he said, "Broads, well, ya know..."

Jack smiled with a "I wouldn't know" look and a cock of the head, as if to say "No broad can tell me what to do."

Charlie insisted on paying the bill. Though it meant he would have a few less bucks for grocery money—no ice cream for the week, vanilla his favorite—it didn't matter. He would have traded the Olds for one lunch with Jack Teagarden.

Charlie could hardly pay attention to the road in front of him on the way home; he was giddy with a newfound sense of power. In a high pitched sing-song he kept repeating: "I'm gonna make the big leagues, I'm gonna make the big leagues...!" In between the simplistic lyric he scatted. His phrasing on such a ridiculous refrain was ingenious.

Marge could hardly wait to find out how the meeting had gone, but she needn't have asked. When she watched from the living room window as Charlie jumped from the car and ran up the long cement walkway, pushing against a sudden snow flurry to get to their front door, she knew. Like a human snowplow he had accidentally cleared an even path to the stoop. His smile took

up most of his face. She was prepared for what he was about to tell her. Though elated she remained guarded.

The two embraced tentatively, for Charlie lost his grip and helplessly skidded across the hardwood floor past her. He had not stopped to scrape the snow off his shoes and had entered the house as though he was taking energetically to the ice on a skating rink. If not for Marge's ultimate goalie catch, the two would have careened into a burning fireplace. Charlie burst into a maniacal laugh, which always prompted the same from Marge. As he held on to her to keep himself from falling, Charlie struggled to speak. When he finally came to a stop and steadied himself, he looked down and shook his head, his laughter giving way to tears. He was unable to recount the event for several seconds, but Marge could wait. She, too, was crying. She didn't think it was bad news, because his smile had given him away just moments before. Finally, he told her what had happened with Jack.

It was one of the happiest days of their lives.

They danced about the living room like kids celebrating the news that Santa had just pulled up.

They talked well into the night, Charlie following Marge around the house, obeying every chore command she hollered out. Like a tightly knit debate team, the two rattled on animatedly. They discussed every single detail—all the pros and cons of uprooting the life they knew. Though they were clearly siding with one another, still each presented the downside of the other's logical point. Marge's word was always the final one and Charlie was reluctant to disagree. It was she who always clipped doubt and sealed it off like an electrician tying off a loose wire. Charlie had come to fully respect Marge's wisdom and insight and when she was adamant about something she was very vocal. At times she was the proper drill sergeant grounding her family and yanking them back into line, especially when her husband was being silly and the girls mirrored him, all three escalating to a ridiculous frenzy right before company was to arrive. Henpecked and dutiful, Charlie had learned from Francesca to "hop to" readily, so submitting to Marge's orders was automatic to him. But unlike Francesca, Charlie never resented Marge's control; she was exactly what he needed. When his dreams became too lofty, she always startled him awake with sensibility. When he

was down she knew just how to render a swift kick to his emotionally sagging butt. She stood strong and immovable, like a flagpole, cemented firmly in the ground on which Charlie could raise and lower his flag of aspiration.

The intensity of the conversation that night was reflected in the results of their work. Shortly after dinner they had already managed to change the beds, vacuum the entire house, clean the children's smudges from windows and dust every cranny of the dining room hutch. They also had bathed and readied the kids for bed. Though they weighed the decision heavily, both already knew Charlie would say yes to Jack. It would be professional recklessness to do anything else.

It was becoming a custom to discuss life-altering events to death, in order to satisfy the couple's wariness, a ritual to ensure that crucial decisions would be wise and solid ones. The move to Columbus had undergone the same verbal scrutiny.

The closing remarks at the end of any summit discussion were not as formal as those of Roberts' Rules of Order, but they did take on a similar formality.

"Are you in or out?" Charlie would query.

"In. Period," Marge would say with pomp. "Period" from either party would move them on to the next agenda item.

Making the rounds to tell his fellow musicians, his family and their Columbus friends the exciting news was great fun for Charlie. Every single person he told gasped at the news. Each time he recounted the historic lunch with Jack, he did so in intricate detail, embellishing the monumental job offer by pouring more salt and pepper on each piece of dialogue, making each tidbit more delectable to the listener. Like a great gossip who spices up the dish for maximum impact and personal thrill, Charlie did the same, even down to the description of the corners of Jack's mouth when he popped the question to Charlie. All his listeners were delighted to be privy to the conversation between Charlie and Jack.

Though Marge patiently said that by listening to a story she could have memorized if Charlie hadn't kept adding to it, she also quietly reminded him that the couple had lots to do before they could make the move. According to the most recent conversation