

Don't Assume I'll Be Here

Steeling himself for a tough conversation, Rick walked into their two-bedroom apartment. Living in the cramped quarters had not been easy, either. It was quite a downgrade from their spacious four-bedroom house with a big yard. He dropped his briefcase inside the door. Sue came in from the kitchen. She studied him warily for a second. She noticed his face was not beaming as she had expected with a big job offer.

“So, how did the interview go?”

“They offered me a job.”

“In engineering?”

“Not exactly.”

“Meaning …?” Sue’s internal radar warned her to steel herself.

“No engineering openings exist right now. They need instructor pilots. They are paying more for pilots than for engineers.”

“Teaching whom?”

“Foreign students,” Rick hedged.

“Where? In California?”

Rick said nothing.

“Arizona?” Sue continued.

“No. South Vietnam.”

“South Vietnam?” Sue’s voice showed growing anxiety.

“Yes.”

“Is that war over? Occasionally, the news suggests it isn’t.”

“The peace agreement remains in effect.”

Rick knew it was a weak answer. Technically, it was an accurate statement.

Sue scrutinized Rick. “How soon do we have to leave?”

Here it comes, Rick thought.

“I go to California to learn to fly the F-5 right after New Year’s Day.”

“How long is the training?”

“It depends on how quickly I learn. Maybe a month or six weeks.”

“Then …?” Sue pressed.

“I leave for South Vietnam as soon as possible.”

“You leave …” Sue replied. “When do David and I leave?”

“It’s not clear if you’re going. I’ve negotiated three-month periods, coming home for a month in between. They don’t seem to contemplate families going with the pilots.”

“You asked …” Sue prompted after a pause.

“Not exactly. It was clear from everything they said.”

“Well, you call them and clarify it. Tell them your wife and son will join you.”

“Living near Saigon for you and David might not be the best idea.”

“Because it’s too dangerous?” Sue pressed. “But the war is over.”

Rick knew he could not admit to any danger in the job. He wasn’t sure how to phrase his objection to Sue and David coming along. Sue sensed his dilemma.

“If it’s too dangerous for David and me, then it’s too dangerous for you. I don’t want you to go. You can find another job. Apply to the airlines.”

“As I’ve said before, I’m not interested in an airline job.” *Here we go again*, Rick thought.

“I still don’t understand why you are hostile to flying for the airlines,” Sue countered.

“Maybe it doesn’t pay well for a couple of years. But then the pay becomes fantastic. And we can fly anywhere in the world for free.”

“I don’t want a union job,” Rick countered, louder than he intended. “You only advance based on seniority. And I don’t want to fly a big jet straight and level for the rest of my life. It’s like being a bus driver.”

Sue placed her right hand on her hip. Her piercing, dark eyes framed by her black hair displayed a fierce determination that belied her petite frame.

“If you insist on taking this job and going without us, it can mean only one thing. We are not important to you. So, buster, you need to understand one thing. If you leave, do not assume David and I will be here when you return.”