# THE PREACHER'S DAUGHTER

Anne Lewis

# Prologue

“It’s a girl.” It couldn’t be! Only sons were a sign of blessing in the bible. Was this a judgment from God? The baby’s father, a church official, said evil entered the world through Eve, and women have been the downfall of men ever since.

He strides up the steps of the maternity ward. ‘God’s curse on Eve’, he muses, ‘pain in childbirth. The women in this ward should not be given pain-killers. And they should be subject to their husbands in all things’. His own wife, at least, understood that.

Bed after bed he passes, looking into the condemned eyes. From the far corner of the ward his wife sees the look that had terrified her for the ten months of their marriage. It does not change as he catches her eye. She crunches her shoulders. This must have been her fault. He was close to perfect and God should have rewarded him. He bends over and kisses her with cold lips.

“Well I’m pleased it’s healthy.” The sound is forced and flat. “I suppose you’re all right?” His wife does not answer. They had both been so sure it would be a boy. “R” for Rodney had been embroidered in blue on the tiny clothes. How could a girl wear them now?

Baby is brought to mother. She raises the little face to the harsh eyes.

“She looks like you” a timid voice suggests. He glances briefly, then moves towards the window.

“I've got to finish my sermon. I'd better be off.”

Baby is confused by the noise and bright lights. She longs for closeness again. Mother gives her the breast and she is content. But soon unfamiliar hands take her away.

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Home from hospital. Mother places the bassinet on her side of the bed. Father tosses and turns.

“What's that snuffling sound?”

“Is she disturbing you?”

“I can't sleep with that noise. You'll have to put her in the back room.”

"I think she should stay with me, just for a few weeks."

“No!”

Baby is taken away. She hears the door close. She cries, but no one hears. She wakes in the night and cries again. Silence. She is alone.

“I can hear baby” Mother says next day. “I’ll go and see to her.”

“Don’t.”

“But surely I could just hold her.”

“Is she due for a feed?”

“No.”

“Then leave her alone.”

No one comes. Baby is frightened. The silence is endless. Life in the womb was so good. She dreams of warmth and nourishment, and she is back there. She dreams again. Such a good baby. Always asleep.

But then she wakes, and the vision goes. Loneliness overwhelms her.

Eventually Mother comes. Baby clings to the breast and won't let go.

At the clinic they said Mother was doing a great job. Baby had put on weight.

Home to the cot. Again the door closes. Baby can't bear it. She tries to think. She can't understand the pain, but the process creates an energy within her. It saves her life.

The struggle to be born had become the struggle to survive. The universe was hostile. The fight had begun.

# CHAPTER 1

God punishes those who don't believe he exists, and those who fall below his standard of perfection. For twenty-three years I did not question these ideas. Punishment had formed my identity.

The time was the early 1940s at the height of the Second World War, and the place was a modest home on the outskirts of Brisbane. Our dwelling sat on a steep slope, low at the front and with high piers at the back. Like those of our neighbours, our small front yard was bare of shrubs or trees. The back yard, beyond which was bushland, descended in four terraces. The bottom one was all weeds – long sharp blades that cut your fingers, and fluffy thick undergrowth. Holes in the weathered grey palings of the back fence allowed a free flow of wildlife. Snakes dozed on our side, unaware of passing from public to private property. One slid up under the house and curled itself around a leg of the green gas copper, narrowly escaping Mother's attack with a broom. Mother could handle anything, but when I thought of that horrible creature close enough to strike at her, I realised, from an early age, how much I wanted to protect her.

In the garden near our parents' bedroom, feral cats mated. Father roared at them, hosed them, threw stones at them but they defied him. In retribution he drowned all their kittens. I thought it was cruel, but he said they didn't feel anything.

The outhouse containing the lavatory stood at the end of the top terrace. We were too far from civilisation to have sewerage, and too poor to afford a septic tank. The small timber structure provided strange acoustics when my younger sister, Deborah, stood on the seat and sang through the triangular gap formed by the inverted V-shaped roof.

The only feature of the narrow, sloping terrace below the outhouse was the incinerator, a three-sided stack of blackened bricks. Mother was known throughout the neighbourhood for her regular burn-offs, though her fires were lit only after she had assured herself that no one within smoke range was planning to hang washing. Mother never kept anything for more than a few weeks. Cards, letters, even photos of unidentified people, fell indiscriminately into the flames, together with advertising junk and butchers' wrapping paper.

Between the incinerator and the weeds was a terrace containing vegetable gardens, a strip of level ground on which we played a gentle version of cricket, and the chook pen, made of wire netting strung between wobbly square poles. Bits of tin and corrugated iron formed the walls and roof of a shelter, adjacent to the side fence. In the open area the roosters fought and the hens roamed free, except when pinned to the ground to satisfy the bodily needs of their masters. I felt sorry for the hens as they struggled to free themselves, but I never questioned the right of the roosters to overpower them. That was the way God had ordered things.

Inside the shelter were two boxes lined with straw – miniature versions of the manger of Bethlehem—and perches of parallel bars half way between the ground and the roof. Near the entrance was a round silver tin for shell-grit and a china bowl filled with water. Other food—sodden bread scraps and wheat grains, was thrown over the fence. We were supposed to scatter it evenly, but invariably it fell in piles, giving yet another opportunity for the males to demonstrate their lordship of the pen.

Scrawny white Leghorns and corpulent black Orpingtons dwarfed the scurrying brown Bantams, whose maternal instincts drove them to sit on eggs too large to have been produced by their tiny bodies. Each morning I squelched my way through the slosh and gently extended my arm into a nest, pulling it out quickly when a sharp beak dug into my skin. Normally hens did not object to the removal of their eggs, but they sometimes resented being deprived of time to deliberate upon their readiness for motherhood.

A few days before Christmas each year, one of the senior hens whose eggs had provided the foundation for sponge cakes, flummeries and lemon meringue pies, was grabbed by Father and taken to a chopping block. Deborah and I hid in the bedroom when we saw him take the axe. Did the hen struggle? Did she feel pain? I did not want to know the answers, but we could not avoid the sight of the bird a few hours later, dripping with blood, hung upside down by her feet from a clothes line under the house.

Whenever we had a surplus of eggs, we shared them with the Thompsons, who lived across the road. They lent us their goat, but a snake killed him. “He was old anyway” they said, trying to hide their pain. Most of our neighbours cared for each other in practical ways. Washing would be removed if the owners were out and a storm was approaching. Other people’s gardens were watered during holiday periods and their animals were fed.

The fences in our street, mostly low brick or wire on timber frames, allowed clear views of the homes and gardens. Saturday mornings saw exchanges of male opinions from front lawns, between stints of gardening, on topics from house painting to politics. Father loved any kind of audience, waving his grass clippers when making a point, or slicing the air with his hands, clippers cast aside.

The Cartwright-Brownes, who owned both a brewery and a two-storey mansion, lived next to the Thompsons. Their brick fence looked down upon the surroundings, its imperious height signifying the disdain of its owners for the common people around its borders. Dense trees, which prevented the curious from gaining too much information, provided just the narrowest glimpses of upper frills on lace curtains. We never saw the Cartwright-Brownes, only their ghostly shapes through the darkened windows of their limousine as it slid silently out from its hiding place in the shadows. Even the gardener seemed invisible, other than when his capped head bobbed up for a moment above the level of the fence.

Our immediate neighbour was Mrs. Ryan, a stooped, wrinkled lady with a mournful smile, who gave us lemons from her tree. We visited her place only once. Thick black curtains, which were never opened, fell almost to the floor. In the darkness we saw strange whitish figures gleaming along a polished mantlepiece. Mother explained later that these were the figures of saints. Each day Mrs. Ryan walked with the help of a stick, a mile to the Catholic church. To me she was even more devoted to God than our parents were, but Mother said Catholics offered prayers to saints and that this was wrong.

In our district everyone knew everyone else’s business. The disappearance of a teenage girl “for about eight months” was discussed by all the women other than the girl’s unfortunate mother, whose supervisory negligence was universally condemned. Mothers with sons and no daughters must have felt safe in their superiority, the failings of their offspring being known to very few.

One woman in a tiny cottage was shunned by all. “She’s a de facto” I heard Mother whisper. I wanted to ask what that meant, but the look on Mother’s face ensured my silence. Had the lady committed a crime? She seemed so nice.

The weekday bus into the city was filled with women discussing breastfeeding, children’s illnesses and problems at the local school. But one subject was never raised. It was only alluded to in laughter at male foibles – a safety valve, I was to discover, when the pain became too great. “Women are better people than men” was all Mother said.

# CHAPTER 2

Each morning I reached down to the end of the bed where my only doll, Lucy, was lying face up. I pressed her little shape tightly to my chest. It didn't matter that one arm was coming off from the shoulder and the white stuffing was falling out. She seemed to know how unhappy I was when Father hit me – most of the time because he didn't like what I said. It was hard for me not to cry as he smashed his large hands across the side of my head.

My fifth birthday came and went. We did not have parties.

"Put those toys away, Anne" said Mother one evening as she heard Father coming up the back stairs. She didn't mind how much mess we made when he wasn't around, but any room he entered must not show any signs of children's fun. I was about to clear the toys when I remembered I had left Lucy under the house. I brought her upstairs and was putting her to bed, when Father came in.

"You haven't done what your mother asked."

"I was just going to" I said defiantly.

"Don't you answer back!" he shouted, pushing me onto the bed. He rolled me over and smacked me hard – this time on the bottom.

I could not understand why Father was always so angry with me. The things I was doing wrong seemed so unimportant. I thought about the night his mother came to visit. I had gone to bed at the usual time, relieved that Father's attention was directed to someone else. But the next morning his face had a black expression that terrified me.

"I was ashamed of you" he said. "You left the room without saying goodnight to your grandmother."

"I just forgot" I said, in a tone of suppressed irritation.

Had I begun, at an early age, to imitate Mother, I could probably have avoided punishment by pleading for his forgiveness whenever I upset him. But though I wanted to be like Mother, I was not prepared to beg Father for mercy. That would have been an admission that his punishments were just. He hit me across the head. "Maybe that'll help you to remember next time." There were so many things I had to remember. Life was full of traps. I was always tense, always on guard.

"You mustn't be late for your first day at school" said Mother, opening the blinds the next morning. "I think the rain has gone, but remember, don't cross the creek if the water is over the bridge." She lifted up the mosquito net and gave me a glass of orange juice. Her face was gentle and kind, but something wasn't right. She was never happy when she looked at me. I wondered if she, too, thought I was bad.

Mother had made me a blue and white cotton check dress, with a sash tied at the back, and a bag made out of the same material to hold my school sponge. It was on a long piece of tape, threaded through the top of the bag, that went around my shoulder. My school bag felt like stiff cardboard, and I practised opening the closing the metal clips and threading my arms through the straps. One of my shoulder blades stuck out and rubbed against the bag. Inside

was my lunch of Vegemite sandwiches, a piece of cake with hundreds and thousands on the icing, and a mandarin.

I had to walk a mile to the school. There were no buses and Father would not allow me to own a bike. After breakfast I said goodbye to Deborah and tried to cuddle Mother, but she pushed me away.

"Don't speak to strangers" she warned, "and don't accept a lift from any man you don't know."

I waved at the front gate and tried to look strong, but I was frightened at having to walk such a long way alone. The furthest I had ever been by myself was to the store down the street. On the way to school I saw a groups of girls who all seemed to know each other. I thought I would be the only person with no one to talk to.

On entering the school grounds I heard squealing and laughing. It was such a contrast to the quiet of home. Children were playing on slippery slides and see-saws. Never again would I go on anything like that. A few months earlier, Deborah and I had been for a ride on a merry-go-round. She giggled the whole time, but I gripped the horse's head and closed my eyes, desperately hoping the music would stop so I could get off.

At the top of the steps in the kindergarten building was a lady dressed in black. She looked older than my grandmother, with a mouth that curled down almost to her chin. Her black and grey hair straggled round her face like a dirty floor mop. I wondered if she had ever smiled in her whole life.

"Stand in straight lines here" she said in a deep voice. Two other ladies helped us get into line. I hoped I would get one of them as my teacher, but as we marched up the steps, I found myself in the same room as the lady in black.

"My name is Miss Hertzog" she said when we were all seated. She picked up a polished stick. "You see this? I use it to hit any child who is naughty." A girl in front of me started to cry, then a boy, then it seemed everyone was crying. I could have cried too, but decided I would be braver and stronger than everyone else in the room.

It was an awful place. The walls were a dirty yellow. There were no pictures, no toys, just rows and rows of desks covered with deep scratch marks. Attached to the front of each desk was a seat which folded up on a hinge. On top of the desk was a slot which held a black slate. Miss Hertzog showed us how to pull the slate out. Grey-coloured sticks, "slate pencils", sat in a groove parallel to the slot. The sponges for cleaning the slates had to be brought to school each day and placed on a shelf under the desk.

I was sitting next to a boy with thick glasses. I had never been close to a boy before, and thought he had a funny smell. I tried breathing through my mouth, but then it got too dry, so I turned my head away. We practised drawing letters as Miss Hertzog walked up and down the aisles. I heard her footsteps behind me.

"Stop!" she said to the boy next to me, as she hit him on the left hand. "Use your other hand." The boy tried several times without success, and threw his slate pencil back in the groove. "Keep trying!" said Miss Hertzog, banging her stick in front of him on the desk. My own hands started to shake.

School was so much like home. Children were treated like the enemy. Did parents and teachers think we were dangerous – like the Japanese? What harm could we do? We could not move from our seats and we were too frightened to make any sound other than crying. At home I could at least argue back, even if it resulted in a beating. In the classroom I felt like a prisoner.

At the end of the lesson Miss Hertzog pointed to the door. “You can go downstairs and return in twenty minutes when you hear the bell”. Underneath the school was the canteen, an old flaky timber structure, where they served flavoured milk in aluminium mugs.

“Strawberry or chocolate?” asked a pleasant lady behind the counter.

“Strawberry please” I said, never having seen flavoured milk before. I loved the strawberries Father grew, but the sweetened pink milk had a strange taste. As the bell rang, I didn't know which was worse – being in the school ground with children I was too frightened to talk to, or sitting in class looking at the cruel teacher.

At lunch time some of the children went to the shop across the road and bought pies and soft drinks. In our family we were not allowed to have things like that. I sat under the school in the semi-darkness and ate my lunch, looking out on the other children playing. They all seem to have friends, or at least had no problem in making them. They were enjoying their freedom while I was in a cage. I was alone and I was different.

I wondered if that was why I was always being hit. Being different meant being bad. Mother and Father were trying to make me good. I wanted to be good too, to have friends, to be like other children. But there must have been something inside me that would not let that happen.

## CHAPTER 3

“Face, hands, feet, teeth, toilet?” The familiar question came from the kitchen.

“Yes Mummy” we responded as we raced to the bedroom and jumped into Deborah's bed. Mother came in carrying our favourite book, “Stories from the Bible”. She sat at the end of the bed and pulled out the bookmark with its shiny gold tassel.

“Tonight’s story” she began, “is about a lady called Hannah. Her husband loved her very much, but she was unhappy because she had no children. She prayed to God, ‘Please give me a son’. She kept asking, year after year, but nothing happened”.

It seemed to me that parents always wanted sons. I wondered if that was why all the important people in the Bible were male. God and Jesus too. We didn't know any boys, except those at school, but we never spoke to them. Mostly they were rough and noisy, particularly the ones from the boys’ home, and they hit each other. Deborah and I never did things like that.

“Then one day,” Mother continued, “Hannah was in the temple, crying. She said to God, ‘If you give me a son, I will give him back to you. He will serve you all his life’. God heard Hannah’s prayer and gave her a son. She called him ‘Samuel’. Hannah kept her promise and she took her little son to the temple. He grew up there with the priest, Eli”. I knew the story well, and I began thinking about the Samuel in my class at school. He was special too—a quiet Jewish boy with lovely big brown eyes.

“One night,” Mother read on, “he was lying in bed and he heard a voice in the dark calling his name. He rushed into Eli, and said, 'Here I am. You called me.' But the priest said, 'I didn't call you. Go back to bed.' The voice called Samuel's name again, and once more it was not Eli. The third time it happened, Eli knew it must have been God who had spoken. He said to Samuel, 'This time when you hear the voice, say “Speak Lord, for your servant is listening”.' The voice came again, and Samuel spoke to God as Eli had told him to. Then God gave Samuel an important message."

At the end of the story we knelt down beside the bed, our hands pressed over our eyes. Mother knelt beside us.

“Dear Heavenly Father” she began. We repeated the phrase.

“Thank you for giving us such a happy day.” Again the phrase was repeated, until the end of the prayer. We kissed Mother goodnight and climbed into bed. The light went out and I lay in the darkness, wondering what it would be like to hear God calling my name.

“Dear God” I prayed, “I'm only a girl, but please speak to me. I am listening”. I repeated the prayer three times. I waited.... and waited..... Thoughts about Jesus came into my mind. I remembered some of the things he had said to people when he was on earth, though I couldn't think of any words he'd actually spoken to a child. I thought of things God might say, and tried to imagine that he was actually speaking to me, but in the end I knew I had made it all up. ‘God is not interested in me’, I thought.

It rained heavily overnight, forming puddles on the worn patches in the middle of our long back stairway. Between the piers were rows of vertical battens, providing an enclosure for the large area underneath the house. Sunlight shining through the battens resulted in stripes on the white sheets hanging on the line. Thick cross beams stretched diagonally from the ground to the top of the piers. Deborah, who had no fear of heights, was climbing up one of them.

"Look at me!" she called out. I watched in fear and admiration as she crawled higher and higher. On reaching the top she put her hand on the metal plate resting on the pier, signifying the accomplishment of her mission

"It's easy" she said, crawling down backwards. "You have a go."

Not wishing to be outdone, I put my hands and knees on the beam and slowly moved upwards. Half way along I looked down at the dirt. My body froze. The ground was six feet below me. I pictured myself lying there helpless, an Ambulance man coming with a stretcher to get me. I tried to edge backwards but found I could not move.

"I've got to get down. Help me!"

"I'll get Daddy" said Deborah.

"No, don't. I've got to make myself do it". I closed my eyes and screwed up my face. Then gripping the beam firmly with both hands, I slowly forced my left leg backwards, then my right leg. One at a time I loosened my grip with each hand and moved them down the beam. Stopping after each movement, I continued until I felt the toes of one foot touching the ground.

"I'm never going up there again!" I said angrily.

At the side of the water tank, a short distance away, I had made a special place for myself where I kept a small blackboard on an easel. The story of Samuel, which Mother had read the night before, was the story of a hymn I loved. I opened the book and began to copy it onto the blackboard.

> Hushed was the evening hymn,
> The temple courts were dark,
> The lamp was burning dim
> Before the sacred ark.
> When suddenly a voice divine
> Rang through the silence of the shrine.

It concluded with a prayer that, like Samuel, we would be obedient to God in life and death. I wanted to do what the hymn said, but what did that mean for me?

"The Bible says children should obey their parents" Father would often say. But supposing parents made mistakes, or disobeyed God, what were children supposed to do then? Could children pray to God by themselves, or did you have to be a very good person before God would hear you? Perhaps I was so bad that God could not answer my prayer the previous night.

I finished writing out all the verses, and then said them to myself over and over again. Then I walked outside on to the grass, where I couldn't see the board, and recited them right through without a mistake. It seemed that the only time Father ever liked me was when I had done something clever, so I ran upstairs with the hymn book to show him.

“I can recite all the verses of 'Hushed was the evening hymn'” I said. Father looked up from his morning paper.

“All right” he said. “I'll hear you”. I handed him the book. At the end of the recitation he smiled. “That was perfect” he said. I was excited. I had made him happy.

The next day at lunch Father was sitting in his usual position at the head of the table. I was glad I never had to sit next to him.

“Anne, you've forgotten to use your serviette”. I pulled a face as I placed the forgotten article on my lap. Learning table manners was boring – like arithmetic at school.

“How did it go this morning?” Mother always asked the same question when Father was preaching at another church.

“There was a good response. And it’s always very humbling when people express such enthusiasm and appreciation.” I was confused. Father was never humble, but he was always having humbling experiences.

“This was a new sermon” he said. ‘Oh no’, I thought, ‘not another one’. “Now for the introduction” he began, “I told them a story about...” I realised, too late, that I had forgotten to ask someone to pass the salt. Father could not bear it when his speeches were interrupted by trivial comments about items on the table. I gave Deborah a nudge, but she must have been too frightened to respond. I then leant across the table and my arm was just long enough to reach the salt-shaker. But as I pulled it back towards me, my elbow knocked Deborah's glass, spilling water on to the table cloth. Father stopped in the middle of a sentence, lifted himself a few inches off his chair, and reaching over the table, banged the side of my face and head with all his might. It really hurt, and I felt dizzy. I said nothing, but glared at Father, enraged.

“I'll give you another clip over the ear if you're not careful.”

I turned my head away from him, and tightened my fists under the table. He continued with his sermon. There was no other sound in the room. Knives and forks were lifted and lowered in silence.

After some time I began to eat, and having no interest in the wisdom Father had imparted to his morning congregation, I wondered whether he had ever been a child. If so, did he ever make mistakes or have accidents? Of course the answer had to be 'yes'. Then how dare he demand a standard from me that no child could ever reach. How dare he!

# CHAPTER 4

It was Sunday, my favourite day. I put on my new white dress so I could wear it to Sunday School. As I walked down the street, the morning had that relaxed feeling–people reading the papers on front verandahs, or taking a leisurely stroll before the sun rose too high. The annuals were in full bloom and I could still smell the freshly-cut grass from Saturday's mowing.

In a basket I was carrying three eggs, which I had collected from the hens that morning. “Be careful not to drop them” Mother had said. “Remember, they go to poor people”.

I loved everything about Sunday School: the smiling superintendent, the beautiful young teachers – so different from the ugly Miss Hertzog at school with her stick – and the music! Miss Dawn's long white fingers made the piano sing. Although our family could not yet afford a piano, I hoped that one day my small hands would play for God.

The previous week in story time, the teacher had taught us about love. She reminded us of the song “Jesus loves the little children, all the children of the world”. She pointed to a picture on the wall showing Jesus surrounded by children from every race, his hands on their heads. “God loves us too” the teacher had said. "He is our heavenly Father."

I was puzzled about love. I often asked Mother “Do you love me?” Her answer was always the same, “All mothers love their children.” I desperately wanted her to say “Yes, I do love you”, but the answer never came. Her reply seemed to mean that although we all loved each other because we happened to be in the same family, Mother could not love me for the person I was. Perhaps she was disappointed that I was nothing like her. But surely that was not my fault. I believed Jesus loved me, but I wasn't sure about God the Father. Was he like my own father– always looking for opportunities to punish me? “The fear of the Lord” Father would say “is the beginning of wisdom. We must never offend God by breaking his laws”. I was certainly afraid of Father, but was I supposed to be afraid of God as well?

Mr. Thompson, the neighbour who had lent us the goat, was driving up the hill in his old Whippet. Deborah and I used to count the number of times he had to turn the crank handle before the car would start each morning. Apart from the windscreen, it had no windows. The driver's door had fallen off, and Mr. Thompson had not bothered to replace it. He had two children, and I would watch in wonder as his eyes lit up whenever he spoke about them. He gave me a big wave, his arm unrestricted by any portion of the car, as he directed it around the potholes in the unsealed road. Recent storms had gouged out deep channels, and there was little left of the original level surface. I waved back to Mr. Thompson as I continued walking, but my foot caught the edge of a pothole. In one terrifying moment my body was flung forward and I landed sprawled out on the road. The basket had fallen from my hand, my new dress was splattered with mud, and something was wrong with my leg.

Slowly I sat up and saw a deep, jagged cut on my left knee. It was stinging–it really hurt. I cried, but did not call out. Wiping my eyes with the back of my arm, I leant over to pick up the basket.

“Oh no! The eggs – they're broken.”

With blood pouring from my leg, I limped back up the hill to the house, tearful and afraid. I knew Father would say I had sinned, but perhaps God was punishing me as well.

"What on earth have you done to yourself?" asked Mother, looking down at my injured leg. Hearing the noise, Father came striding along the hallway scowling. His thin lips tightened, his body stiffened, and he stared – not at my injured leg, but at the eggs dripping from the basket.

"Get in there!" he yelled, his long finger pointing to his bedroom.

"But her leg is cut" said Mother. "It'll bleed all over the floor".

"I'll attend to that later" he snapped.

My parents' bedroom to me was the only beautiful room in the house. Fine lace curtains and delicate soft green wallpaper gave me a feeling of peace. I loved the dressing table, adorned with Mother's crystal. The large mirror was in three sections, with a wing on either side. The bevelled edges created brilliant rainbow colours. I could place the wings at various angles to make my reflection longer or wider, and at certain angles I could see my face a hundred times. Alone in this magic room, I could forget that it had become a place of pain.

Father was wearing the black trousers of his Sunday suit and a singlet. He had not finished dressing. A few days earlier he had gone into the bush to look for a tree or shrub from which he could make a cane. He had apparently decided that in smacking me as hard as he could with his bare hands, he was not following the Bible closely enough. Fathers, he said, had been told they must not "spare the rod". I wanted to say how sorry I was about the eggs, but it would not have helped. I was not allowed to have accidents. The sound of the door closing behind me filled me with terror.

"Three valuable eggs wasted – all because you were too lazy to watch where you were walking." I listened in silence. He went over to the cupboard, pulled out the cane, and waved it a few times in the air. How I hated that swishing sound.

"Pull your pants down" he snarled. I obeyed, bent over and buried my face in the sheets. It was not only that my body was exposed. To my father on those occasions, I was less than human. In my presence he would say to people, "Anne's like a wild horse. And it's my job to break her in".

I waited for the first stroke, biting my lip. It came suddenly. I winced as the pain seared the top of my thighs. Then I felt the cane touching me lightly, higher up. Then another stroke of pain. Father breathed heavily but said nothing. How many more? The cane touched me again, marking the place where it lashed me the third time. I bit into the sheet, but I would not make a sound. I knew that my refusal to scream and beg for mercy infuriated Father. He regarded it as wilful pride, and punished me even more. But I remained silent. He could force me to submit my flesh, but he could not control my mind.

"Get dressed" he said in a different voice – though it contained no hint of remorse. It was more like exhaustion. Again I obeyed.

“I'll fix that leg now”. The sound was flat. What did he care if I was in pain? Roughly he washed away the blood. “Keep still” he snapped as he bandaged the leg. “Well I hope you've learnt your lesson. Now go.”

I went out to see Mother, wanting her to put her arms around me, or at least to ask me how I was. She just looked at me as if nothing had happened. It was not as though I expected her to criticise Father in front of me. Over the years I came to wonder why she never once tried to protect me. Whenever I was in disgrace with Father, it seemed that she was rejecting me too.

With bandaged leg, aching buttocks, an old dress, and no eggs, I followed Mother and Father to church later that morning. Deborah walked beside me. She had seen what had happened, but was powerless to help me. My only consolation was that I hadn't cried. I hadn't given in to the man whose authority I was forbidden to challenge. I resolved on that day that whatever he did to me, I would fight him with everything in my being.

# CHAPTER 5

"Anne I can't find your red cardigan" said Mother, holding an armful of clothes for the washing. "Did you bring it home with you yesterday?"

I could not remember. Part of my mind was never where it was supposed to be. I was not interested in ordinary, every-day things – only the big questions that had no answer. Why did Christians thank God for life? I was angry that I had not been given a choice about my existence. I would not have opted for life unless I could have chosen my parents – a mother who could really love me, and a father who would correct me without being cruel.

"I must have left it at school" I said, "but I can't think where".

"This is getting beyond a joke" was the exasperated response. "I'm going to tell your father".

I deeply resented the occasions that Mother made such threats and carried them out. Why couldn't she deal with me herself? At least that way the punishment would have matched the seriousness of the offence. But with Father, it depended on his mood, and Mother must have known how brutal his treatments could be. I went into my bedroom and waited. Each day I promised myself I would try not to lose things. But my overcharged mind refused to be confined. What cruelty would Father think up for me this time? I heard his footsteps in the hallway.

"You're coming with me" he said coldly. "Put your shoes on". I obeyed. He grabbed me by the shoulder and pushed me out the front door and down the steps.

It was Saturday morning. The neighbours were working in their gardens and friendly greetings were exchanged. I felt betrayed by all the people who liked Father. He could be so charming outside the home. By contrast, I was not regarded as particularly "nice". I said what I thought, and that was unacceptable behaviour in a ten year-old girl.

As we turned the corner at the end of the street, I looked anxiously towards the house of Mrs. Lamont, the local gossip, who could usually be seen leaning her heavy body on one of her side fences. After exhausting her immediate neighbours, she would engage the woman on the other side of the road, the sound of her rasping voice being interrupted only by that of an occasional passing car. A few weeks earlier, I had been to the corner store. It was owned by Mr. Dickson, a scrawny man with a bony face. He had never married and treated children with contempt.

"That will be eight shillings" he said, as he handed me the groceries. I gave him a pound note– or so I believed. He gave me two shillings change.

"Well why are you standing there?" he asked.

"I'm waiting for the rest of my change" I replied.

"You gave me ten shillings" he insisted.

"No, it was a pound. Look in the cash register and you'll see it."

He opened the register and pulled out a ten shilling note.

“This is yours” he said, waving it in the air.

“You're trying to trick me” I said.

“You are a little spitfire, aren't you?”

I was enraged. “Don't you call me names!”

Despite my bravado, I was terrified of adults. A few of them were more kindly disposed to me than my parents were, but with older people generally I had become suspicious and distrustful. My anger towards them arose because I knew that, as a child, I would always lose in any conflict with them, no matter how just my cause.

Realising again that I had lost, I strode out of the shop and raced back home to tell Mother what had happened. She then relayed it to Father. Showing no interest in whether or not I had given Mr. Dickson a pound note, he demanded to know who else was in the store.

“Mrs. Davidson and Mrs. Lamont” I replied.

Had Father contacted Mrs. Davidson, I knew she would have been on my side. A professional woman, she had said to me, “People may not understand you at times, but you are a special person”. Of course Mother and Father rejected Mrs. Davidson’s assessment of their daughter. It was a strange experience for me to have an older person who believed in me. I was tired of hearing Mother discussing me with friends and relatives as the “difficult one” in the family. Rarely, it seemed, did these people stop to wonder whether I was being mistreated. But then, why should they? To the outsider, my parents were such lovely people.

Father was not interested in pursuing a line of enquiry which could have exonerated me. Instead he rang Mrs. Lamont.

“It's as I expected!” he snapped, slamming down the phone. “She said you were disrespectful.” In a fury he then applied the cane. I was in my usual position, bent over his bed.

“I'll belt the devil out of you yet” he said. I detested Mrs. Lamont at that moment with a ferocity that I normally reserved for Father.

With the memory of the pain inflicted on my body, I peered along the street, but could not see any sign of my enemy in the garden. As we passed the house, I was too afraid to look up at the windows in case I saw that treacherous face again. I took a deep breath, and hurried to keep up with Father's long strides as we walked the rest of the mile in silence.

Entering the school gate, he grabbed me again.

“We'll stay here all day if necessary” he threatened. “You’re going to find that cardigan, if that's the last thing you ever do.” I looked at the empty school ground and my heart sank. What if someone had stolen the cardigan? Would Father leave me there all night?

We walked up the steps and along the corridor. It seemed so bare without school bags and caps hanging on the rows of hooks, and in the stillness our footsteps echoed. I went into my classroom, with Father waiting at the door like a lion at the mouth of a cage. The cardigan

was not on the shelf under my desk. I checked all the other desks and the teacher’s drawer and cupboard, but there was no sign of it.

We went underneath the school. It was dark in places and I felt along the bench seats. My hand touched a woolly object. Excitedly I ran out into the daylight, only to discover that it was a boy's grey pullover. I was close to tears.

“You'd better find it” said Father, “or you'll be sorry”.

‘Sorry’, I thought. ‘My whole life is spent being sorry. Perhaps I should just apologise for existing’.

The next stop was the girls' toilets. Again, Father waited outside. Each time I emerged empty-handed, the face grew more fierce. I then thought of the playground. Most of it was open space, but near the fence there was long grass. I walked through it, bending down and parting it with my hands. Nettles stung my skin and I bumped into a tree. As I straightened to rub my head, I noticed a small patch of red between the tree trunk and the fence. Quickly I pulled at it and out came my cardigan, covered with leaves and dirt. I pressed it tightly to my chest, as though greeting a lost friend. I looked into Father's face as I showed him the cardigan, hoping to see just the slightest change of expression. There was none.

“This is not the end of it” he said. “I’m going to give you a father of a thrashing when we get home”.

On the way back, I thought only of the punishment that awaited me, until we approached Mrs. Lamont's house. There she was, leaning on the front fence, a horrible grin on her face. She had obviously assessed the situation well.

“Looks like you've got a little matter to attend to” she said with heavy sarcasm.

Father gave a hollow laugh. “You bet I have” he said, almost with glee.

At that moment, something deep within me changed. Until then, I had believed Father had at least enough respect for me to confine his punishments to the home. But to humiliate me publicly, in front of this dreadful woman, was an affront that I would never forget.

I was quiet. I was still. I just took the beating, but a part of me was not there. Father had broken my trust in the cruellest way of all. From that moment, and for the rest of my life, I would fulfil my outward obligations as a member of the family, but never again would such a father have access to his daughter's soul.

# CHAPTER 6

During the next few years, Mother gave birth to two lovely daughters, Ruth and Jennifer. Each time she was pregnant, our parents prayed the baby would be a boy, but by the time Jennifer arrived, Father seemed to have accepted his fate. “All we ever produce in this family is girls” he would say. He either did not know, or could not face the fact, that he was biologically responsible for the gender of his children. Everything that went wrong was always someone else’s fault, but this time he couldn’t find anyone to blame – except God of course. Perhaps the Almighty was teaching him a lesson through this painful deprivation.

“What does Father do when he goes to work?” I asked Mother one morning.

“He organises meetings during the week”, she said. “Then on some Sundays he conducts evangelistic services”.

“What are they?”

“Well you know that Jesus died on the cross so we could be forgiven. A lot of people don't know that – or they don't know that they have to accept him into their hearts”.

“But don't ordinary ministers tell people that?”

“They do, but they don't go far enough. They should invite people to do something publicly, such as walking to the front of the church in a service, so everyone will know their decision. That's what God expects”.

“But supposing people ask Jesus into their heart and don't do anything else. Are they forgiven?”

“I don't think they are” said Mother.

I wanted to be forgiven. I was so bad, according to Father, I needed to be. Yet every night when Mother prayed with us and we asked God to forgive us, she never suggested that God did not hear our prayer. So were we just practising for the day when we could be in a service and do something for other people to see?

That afternoon Mother pulled out her starched linen table cloth from the sideboard. She rolled up the matching serviettes and placed them in broad silver rings on which were engraved the initials of her father's family. She had spent an hour polishing her best cutlery, which she removed from felt-layered segments in a dark-green box.

“Who are the posh visitors we're having?”

“Mr. and Mrs. Benson”.

I might have guessed. The Bensons were “very comfortable” Mother had said, and she liked to keep her best ware for special occasions. The couple knew Mother from her single days at the Gospel Hall, where Mr. Benson was the senior elder.

A Mercedes Benz glided on to the footpath, looking out of place in the humble surroundings. Our front door was open and we could smell Mrs. Benson's perfume as she

walked down the path. Deborah and I peered through the blinds in our bedroom to see all the sparkling jewellery she was wearing. Mother and Father went to the door to greet them.

"May the blessing of God rest upon this home" said Mr. Benson, sounding like the Archbishop of Canberbury.

"We're so delighted to have you" said Mother in her charming manner.

"God has honoured us with your presence" Father added. Deborah and I looked at each other and started to giggle. We waited for a few minutes, and when we thought it was safe to do so we emerged, trying to look as solemn as the occasion required.

"Would you be good enough to ask the Lord's blessing on our gathering?" said Father when we had taken our places at the table. Father had been known to offer up an extended grace before a meal, but he was no match for Mr. Benson, who interspersed his lengthy prayer with various biblical quotations and exhortations. I pressed my hand hard over my mouth, trying to stifle my laughter. I sneaked a look at Deborah, but she seemed to be concentrating on the flow of words from the great man.

Father always dominated conversations at meal times, but in Mr. Benson's presence he was silent, just uttering the occasional "Amen to that". We adjourned to the lounge and Mr. Benson opened the large bible he had brought with him. He read from the book of Proverbs, "My son, hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother". In our home there was not much chance of avoiding either of those admonitions. Mr. Benson then told the gathering about the wisdom God had given him.

"Do you hear the goodly words that proceed from my lips?" he asked.

"Indeed we do" said Father. "We are so blessed."

Jennifer was lying in her bassinet near Mother. Mr. Benson stood up and extended both arms out in front of him.

"Hand me your infant" he said to Mother. "I want to present her to God". Mother complied, but I could tell by the look on her face she thought Mr. Benson was taking things a bit far.

After another long prayer, in which he could have been a Hebrew patriarch pronouncing the blessing on his eldest son, he handed Jennifer to Father, who decided to add his own blessing on our baby sister. Jennifer had been baptised the previous Sunday and it seemed to me she was the most prayed-for child in Australia!

We were all still standing for the impromptu ceremony and I thought we were about to sit, when Mr. Benson looked into my eyes for several seconds. He then placed his right hand on top of my head.

"I feel the Spirit in your eldest daughter" he said.

Mother and Father looked at each other in dismay. Surely the godly man could not have made such a terrible mistake.

“That is so gracious of you” said Father. “I'm sure Anne will remember this moment for the rest of her life”.

“Yes I will, Mr. Benson”. I tried my hardest to sound overwhelmed.

“I've got the Spirit!” I said to Deborah later that night after the Bensons had gone. “You'll have to treat me with respect”. We both rolled on our beds with laughter.

The following week in place of Sunday School we had a visit from a children's speaker. It was the first time I had ever been into the church building. It was so much bigger than the Sunday School hall, with brightly-coloured patterns in the windows and a huge platform that stretched right across the front of the building. A curved opening in the centre of the wall at the back of the platform allowed a stream of light to flood the area behind the pulpit. This stood so high that I thought people would get stiff necks looking up at the preacher.

Mr. McIntyre, the visiting speaker, did not go up to the pulpit. Between the front pews and the platform he had erected a little stage surrounded by curtains along the top and sides. A few assistants stood behind the stage. When we were all seated he gave us a big smile.

“It's so good to see all your happy faces” he said. I didn't think my face looked particularly happy, but I tried to smile to make him feel good. He moved closer to his little stage.

“Once upon a time” he began, “a man had two sons whom he loved very much.” The assistants put their hands behind the curtains and three figures on the end of strings walked jerkily out. The oldest one stuck out two bony arms to put them around the two younger ones. I tried to imagine Father doing that to us!

“One day the younger son said to his father, 'Give me my share of the property'. The father did so and soon afterwards, the son went into a distant country and spent all his money doing wild things”. On the stage there were figures at a party, lying all over each other. I think they were supposed to be drunk. In our church nobody ever touched alcohol.

“When all his money had gone, there was a famine, and the son took a job feeding pigs”. Little round pink things scuffled onto the stage and the figure on the strings waved his arm towards them in a throwing action.

“The son was very hungry and wanted to eat the pigs' food, but he was not allowed to”. The figure lay down, putting his hand on his stomach.

“ 'I must be mad' he said to himself. 'At home the servants have plenty of food. I will go home and tell Father that I have sinned and don't deserve to be his son, but that I would like him to employ me as a servant'.” The figure got up and hobbled out behind the left curtain.

“The son arrived home and spoke to his father as he had planned, but the father said to his servants, 'Bring the best robe and put it on my son. Put a ring on his finger, and sandals on his feet. Let's kill our best calf and have a feast. My son was lost, but he is found'.” There was another party scene, but this time all the figures were sitting or standing upright.

“The older brother was angry. 'You have never given me a feast' he said, 'and I've served you faithfully all these years'. But the father said, 'Everything I own is now yours. We thought your brother was dead, but he is alive again. We're celebrating his return." The older son bounced off the stage while the party continued.

“Each one of us is like that younger son” said Mr. McIntyre. “We have all gone away from our heavenly Father. We have all sinned.”

‘Oh no!’ I thought. ‘He's not going to talk about sin. It's all I ever seem to hear’. Then he told us about Jesus and how we must invite him into our hearts. I had lost count of the number of times I had done that, lying in my bed at night.

“I'm going to ask you to pray a prayer with me” continued Mr. McIntyre, “and if you really mean the words, I want you to come down the front here, and I will talk to you and give you a little book”. We all prayed the prayer.

“Come forward now” he said, “while our eyes are still closed”.

Several children in my seat got straight up and walked towards him. Would I join them? I didn't know what to do. I stood up, then sat down again. I thought of the conversation I'd had with Mother about the need to do something publicly at a service. Of course! This was my opportunity. Some older children from the back also came down the aisles, and before long it seemed that every child in the building was at the front, all squashed together. I stood up again and walked out to join them. I had done it! I was now accepted by God. I was his child.

As soon as the meeting was over, I raced home. “You know what you said about doing something at a service to show people you've accepted Jesus?”

“Yes” said Mother, uncertainly.

“Well I did it this morning–at the children's service”.

“Oh” she said, her voice dropping.

“Aren't you pleased?” I looked at her in despair.

“Yes of course I am. But you're a bit young for that. One day when you're older, you'll have another opportunity and it will mean more to you then.”

I could not win. Everything I did was wrong– even responding to an invitation in church. Was I so bad that even my good actions were unacceptable? How many more years would I have to wait before I was regarded as a child of God– both by my parents and by the church? Of course, I should have thought of it–the church!

“Mother, you told me that when a baby is baptised, she becomes a member of God’s family. That must mean I have been accepted by God.”

“Most people believe that” said Mother. “But your father and I think it just means you belong to the family of the church. It does not affect your situation with God”.

In bed that night I said to God, “I'm tired of asking to be your child. I've done everything I possibly can to get it right. If there's anything more I have to do, you'll have to show me”. In a state of anger towards God and all his human representatives, I fell asleep.

# CHAPTER 7

The August school holidays were approaching. We had always spent them at Mooloolabah, where the rental was cheap and the fishing was good. But this year we were going to try Caloundra.

“Perhaps we could invite my mother to come with us” said Father. “She gets on well with the whole family.”

“Yes... she does....” said Mother “but we could hardly invite her without inviting Mum. I'd never hear the end of it”.

“Your Mum sets people against each other. She causes trouble wherever she goes”. I'd had enough of my own problems with Grandma Denham to secretly agree with Father, but I felt he was not in a position to sit in judgment on anyone else.

“So it's either both of them or none” Mother added. “I don't think having both of them would work, but of course it's up to you”.

“Let's take both. Perhaps I can mediate between them”. I smiled to myself. Father – a mediator?

We could not all fit in the car, so Father took the Grandmas and the younger ones. The rest of us caught the train to Landsborough, where he picked us up later.

“I can always smooth things over in the office” he said, “but those two!” Mother refrained from comment, but her look of resignation filled me with anger. Once more her wisdom had been ignored.

At the house Grandma Denham had made the adults cups of tea. “This one's for you”, she said to Mother, placing a cup and saucer at the end of the table.

“That's Peter's position, Mrs. Denham” said Grandma Lewis. “*He's* the head of the family”.

“Mrs. Lewis!” snapped Grandma Denham. “*I* made the tea. *I* will decide where everyone sits” Mother sat at the end of the table as Father walked in.

“Would you mind sitting at the side, just for now?” whispered Mother. Father did not seem inclined to make an issue of it. He had obviously bitten off more than he could chew. It was one thing to have a family of five females whom he controlled completely, but quite another to have two strong-willed women who were well able to dominate him.

Grandma Denham and Mother prepared the evening meal, while Grandma Lewis went to her room. Deborah and I were playing a game on the floor.

“Do you want us to leave?” I asked.

“No, I'm just going to rest. I'm rather tired. I had a bad night”. Deborah and I looked at each other, trying to keep a straight face. Grandma was always having bad nights. “I didn't

sleep a wink" she would say. A few months earlier we had asked her, "What keeps you awake?"

"It's your Uncle Angus. He gives me the knocks".

"Does he knock on the wall?" I was picturing our emotionally retarded uncle banging his fists in despair. He detested his mother-in-law, but he and my aunt and their children were forced to stay with her for financial reasons.

"No. But he's such an evil person, his spirit makes the whole house shake".

"Oh Gran!" I said, unable to restrain my laughter. One thing about Grandma Lewis, she never took offence.

"I've been reading about him in the Psalms". She reached under her pillow and pulled out a well-worn Bible. "Here it is. David is talking about the enemies of God. 'Let them be confounded and troubled for ever. Let them be put to shame and perish.' That's what'll happen to your uncle if he doesn't mend his ways".

"Mrs. Lewis, would it be *too* much trouble for you to set the table?" Grandma Denham stuck her head around the bedroom door.

"Mum's feeling tired" said Father, overhearing the conversation. "She'll probably help you later". Grandma Denham swung around.

"And who made *you* an authority on the matter? Your mother is just reading the Bible. There's nothing wrong with her".

"You're just like Martha in the scriptures" Father sighed, "rushing around, doing all these secondary things. But remember, Jesus commended Mary. She just wanted to sit at his feet and listen". Grandma glared at Father, and strode back into the kitchen.

Father never spoke about his childhood, but we picked up bits of information from Mother. Our grandfather, whom we never knew, was raised in a violent family and believed he had to whip his son into shape. The only person he was afraid of was his wife. Grandma Lewis was tall and straight and weighed seventeen stone. Folds of surplus flesh hung down from her jawline, almost touching the rolls in her sagging neck. Her body was shaped like a barrel, with mountainous breasts supported by a circular stomach. We had visited her recently.

"Well how's my boy?" she greeted Father at the top of her creaky stairs.

"How many times do I have to tell you?  I'm not your 'boy'. I'm your son."

"You've lost weight" she said.

"I'm the same weight I've been for the past twenty years" Father snapped.

"You need something to eat". Grandma seemed to believe that a statement from anyone other than herself was not part of reality.

“We’ve just had a hot dinner!” said Mother, who normally avoided visiting her mother-in-law. It wasn't that Grandma was unkind to her, but Mother said she had never felt accepted by Father's parents. Grandfather had even refused her permission to teach in the Sunday School because she attended dances at the YWCA.

“You can all come into the kitchen” said Grandma, putting her arms around us and pushing us through the door. “You sit there and you sit there.” Father obeyed. Mother eventually sat down, probably afraid of his reaction if she refused.

“I've just made some fairy cakes” said Grandma, bringing out a huge tin from the cupboard. She was to live to the age of eightyfour, defying medical wisdom in having spent most of her waking hours with cakes and biscuits. She piled several of the former onto each of our plates. Mother’s arm did not move. Father picked one up, took a small bite, and then replaced it. Deborah ate all hers but I followed Mother’s lead.

“Come on Anne” said Grandma, munching her fourth cake. “Eat up. You look so thin”.

“I'm terribly sorry Gran” I said, “but I've just had a huge meal. You know what a wonderful cook Mother is” I added, looking across at the pecked-at cake on Father's plate.

“How are things at the church, Mum?” he asked.

“A neighbour is minding the little ones" Mother interrupted. “We should be going home”.

As I thought back on that meaningless encounter, I felt I understood Father a little better. But then I wondered why he would engage in the sort of behaviour he could not tolerate in his own mother.

The following morning we attended the local church. A man with his head held high and his shoulders back, smiled at us through a closely-clipped, orange-brown moustache. The bar of ribbons he was wearing suggested he was a retired Army man. “Welcome to Caloundra” he said in a brisk manner, presenting us each with a hymn book.

A few elderly ladies were seated towards the back, one of them with her feet resting on a large cushion on the floor. The eight of us just fitted into one pew, a short distance in front of them. The only other person in the building was the organist, who seemed about the same age as the ladies behind us. Her back was to the congregation, her pelvis occupying most of the organ stool. She wobbled from side to side as she alternately pressed two rectangular pedals at the base of the organ which pumped air to create the sound. To my ears it was an awful, scratchy noise – like a piano accordion.

The minister entered through a door in the back wall and walked quietly up the steps into the pulpit. His rimless glasses were shaped in a half-moon, so that when he looked down at the congregation the upper edges seemed to cut his eyes in two. A clerical collar was wrapped around his plump, short neck, rubbing against his chin.

“It's lovely to see you all here” he said, “particularly our visitors”. Since we made up more than half the congregation, I felt the welcome was sincere. “Some of the Lord's people are on holidays” he continued, “but I know they are with us in spirit”. Hearing that phrase

reminded me of a comment by our minister at Walka: “I prefer spooks with boots and socks on”.

“It's difficult to preach to a timber yard” the minister continued. “Do you think you could all come forward and fill up the gaps”. I couldn't work out how two rows of bodies could fill any gap, but we did as he asked. The Army man came in from the porch and sat at the back.

After a short prayer the minister announced the first hymn, “Now thank we all our God”. The organist struggled through the introduction at a slow pace, but since it was a stately tune, the speed seemed appropriate. We began to sing, but something was wrong. But the time we reached the end of the first line, the booming voice of the Army man was half way through the second line. He was singing it in march tempo! Grandma Lewis had an enormous voice, and she managed to keep the rest of us in time with the organist, but the Army man went on regardless. At the end of the verse the minister stopped us.

“Perhaps, Miss Murgatroyd, you could play the hymn just a shade faster, and we'll all try to keep with you” he added, looking straight at the lone figure in the back seat. I wondered whether the Army man might be deaf, but then I thought he was probably like Father–always needing to be in charge.

At the beginning of the sermon the organist moved away from the organ and sat in the front pew. The minister had a sing-song voice and before long I noticed her head starting to nod. She jerked it back up a few times, but then it stayed down. After twenty minutes of nothing in particular, the minister announced the last hymn. But the organist did not move. He repeated the announcement in a slightly louder voice. Still there was no response.

“Miss Murgatroyd!” The unfortunate woman let out a cry and shook her head violently.

“Oh!” she said, looking up into the pulpit, “I'm so sorry”. As she rushed across to the organ, I wondered whether this might be a regular occurrence, with a person of that age. It was sad to see a church in decline. I assumed most of the absent members were of similar vintage. Occasionally I would hear of churches that had to close. Father always fought to keep them open, saying that if ministers preached the gospel faithfully, there would always be growth. He refused to accept that some of them were simply not talented as public speakers. Father had a habit of expecting the impossible.

As I was shaking the minister's hand after the service, I asked him if there was a piano where I could practise. The previous year Father had bought a second-hand piano and I was making reasonable progress as a student.

“There’s one in the hall” he said, pointing to a weatherboard building with the paintwork flaking. “It’s not exactly a Steinway, but you’re welcome to use it at any time. The door is left open.”

“Can I try it now?” I asked Mother.

“I want to go straight home” said Grandma Lewis, in a tone of voice that was not to be challenged.

“She's had another bad night!” Deborah whispered.

Early next morning I walked back to the church, carrying my music case. The hall door was open – it fact it did not even have a lock. At the far end of the hall was a stage, where in the distant past some aspiring young actor might have made a first trembling entrance. All that remained were two faded green curtains, half falling from the overhead rods. Holes and rips made a mockery of their once proud role in stimulating the audience's imagination.

The piano sat at the foot of the stage. The lid was resting sideways on top of it, like a piece of dumped baggage. I tried to put it back in its correct position, but parts of the hinges were twisted and it would not fit. Rather than risk the thing falling on top of me, I leaned it against a wall. The light bulb above the piano had been smashed but there was almost enough light from a nearby window. It was covered in dirt and cobwebs, and the lower pane had jammed shut. Before cleaning the window in the hope of getting a bit more light, I checked to see if there were any spiders. The webs however seemed to be as old as the hall, the creator spider probably living only in the spirit of its descendants.

The piano keys were a dull yellow, with dark streaks running parallel to the edges. Some of the keys had lost their veneers, leaving a surface rough to the touch. I played some scales, but a few of the notes did not sound. A passer-by might have thought I was missing one or two of my fingers. The squeak of the sustaining pedal was so loud and the action so stiff, I decided not to use it. Was it really worthwhile continuing?

Had I been a normal child, I probably would have given up at that point. Then again I would almost certainly have given the whole thing a miss during the holidays. Father had not made any ruling on it. But something deep inside me would not let me rest. I had to strive and strive – to become better and better. Was I aiming for an impossible standard I had set myself, or was I trying, against all my instincts, to please Father? I did not know. I just had to keep going.

In the middle of a piece I heard the sound of a bouncing ball. Some children in swimsuits, covered in sand, had come into the hall. They threw the ball in all directions and it bounced off the walls like a slow squash ball. It was a wonder there were any windows left. I felt like asking them to leave, but it was always important for me not to spoil the image of the church. Then the ball landed on top of the piano, where the lid should have been, before bouncing down onto the keys.

"We're terribly sorry" said one of the boys.

"That's all right" I said cheerily. "Would you like to have a play?"

"Yeah, let's!"

They banged their way from the top to the bottom, then ran outside for a new adventure. They were so carefree. Part of me wanted to be like that, but I knew I was different.

The house we were renting was at Bulcock Beach, and after breakfast Deborah, Ruth and I went out with Father on to the sandbanks.

“Form a semi-circle round here” he said. “You have to be quick”. He plunged a large metal pump deep into the sand, pulled it up, and spread its contents near our feet. We bent down and dug our hands into the yellow and grey sand.

“Ouch!” said Ruth, as the claw of a yabbie nipped her finger.

“Quick, grab it!” The creature dug its way back into the sand, but it could not escape Father's groping hand as he held it by its claw and dropped it, helpless, into a bucket of water. I felt for that yabbie as it struggled to crawl up the side of the bucket. It was just as much Father's prisoner as I was. All our struggling achieved nothing.

Later that day the four of us, with a large supply of yabbies and some prawns, pushed off in a rowing boat. We anchored some distance out into the channel that ran between the coast and the northern end of Bribie Island. Far out in the open sea, two bronze-coloured oil tankers broke the straight line of the horizon. A strong breeze coming in from the ocean was chopping the calmer waters of the channel, making it seem like a continuation of the great deep, rather than a quiet place for family recreation.

Each of us had a fishing line wrapped around the thick end of a narrow-necked bottle. Father threaded the bait on and threw our lines out.

“Whatever you do, don't pull the line when you feel a bite. You don't want to frighten the fish. They have to believe the bait is harmless.” He then used a rod to cast his own line out a long way further than our little ones could reach.

“I've got a bite” said Ruth, dropping her bottle in excitement.

“Here, I'll take it”. Father took the bottle and handed me his rod. I felt honoured to be holding such a prized possession. After several minutes he pulled the line towards him in a sharp movement, and began to wind it around the bottle.

“I've got him” said Father, standing up. We looked out beyond the end of the line and a wriggling white shape was creating a different kind of disturbance on the channel's surface from that created by the wind. The fish fought with all its might as it was pulled closer and closer to the edge of the boat. But it might as well have given up then. Father would not be denied. He placed the bottle on the floor of the boat so he could use both hands to regulate the pull of the line. A medium-sized bream was raised in triumph over the edge of boat, its scales glistening in the afternoon sun. Then it fell with a thud into the centre of the boat, where it thrashed around in a small pool of water. Father removed the hook from its mouth and placed it in a hessian bag.

In the meantime I was feeling a bite on Father's line, and before long he began reeling them in. Whenever we went fishing, Father always seemed to catch more than anyone else in the area, though on that afternoon we were the only people with lines. All we saw were a few outboard motors doing the length of the channel.

“This is strange” said Father. “With the fish biting, you'd think everyone would be out”. He leant over the edge of the boat and put his hand in the water. “I don't like the feel of this. The current wasn't nearly this strong a short time ago. I'm going to pull up the anchor. Sit in the middle of the boat.” He moved forward to where the anchor chain was attached. With the strong current, the boat was pulling away from the point where the chain

disappeared below the water. He pulled at the chain and the boat moved till it seemed to be directly above the anchor. Again he pulled, but the anchor was stuck. Standing up, he made one final attempt. The boat tilted forward.

"We're in trouble" he said. "It won't move. I'm going to pray". He bowed his head for a few moments, while we held on to each other.

"I'm going to try to row to the side of it" he said. He and I swapped places and he grabbed the oars, pulling hard on one side. For a while we didn't seem to be moving, but with perspiration dripping from his forehead, he made an almighty effort and the position of the boat changed slightly.

"Hold this oar down in the water" he said to me. "You'll need both hands".

"Deborah can help me" I said, knowing how much stronger her hands were than mine. We both held on with all our might. Father made several pulls at the anchor. Then it suddenly released, throwing him backwards. The boat lurched dangerously to one side. We grabbed each other in fear. Father's head caught the edge of a tin we used for bailing out, and his forehead began to bleed. Staggering to an upright position he motioned to us to go back to our seats as he took both oars.

Although we were not a huge distance from the shore, we were making no progress against the current. A couple of days earlier I had seen a large sign which read, 'You who go out in boats, keep well away from the bar'. I had asked Mother, "Do fishermen and sailors often get drunk?" Mother was a member of the Queensland Temperance League and I knew she was an authority on the subject of drinking.

"No" she said with a smile. "That sign's about the sand bar between the tip of Bribie Island and the mainland. It's dangerous for small boats".

As I thought about that conversation and how small our boat was, I became very frightened that we could be swept out to the bar. What would Father do then? Could his prayers rescue us? I didn't say anything, but I looked at the position of our boat in relation to a point on the shore. Although we were making no headway, the current was actually taking us away from the bar. I almost cried with relief. I was terrified of the water. Several people had tried to teach me to swim, but I could never trust my body, or the water. I would just freeze.

Father stopped rowing. He was exhausted. Blood was streaming from his forehead. We drifted.....and drifted..... I looked anxiously at where we were heading. A rocky edge formed the shore line further along. Although we would probably just miss that, if we drifted any further in, we would almost certainly collide with rocks under the surface.

Across on land, people were lying in the sun or strolling along the Esplanade, unaware that there was no one in control of our boat. Father showed no interest in calling out for help. Perhaps he did not have the strength.

"Do you want us to yell out?" I asked him. He shook his head weakly. Then in a superhuman effort he gripped the oars with all his strength, and drove them down into the swirl, defying the might of the racing waters. After each stroke he let out a gasp. When I felt he would have to give up the struggle, we stopped suddenly. The nose of the boat had stuck

in some sand. Deborah and I quickly jumped over the side, Father lifted Ruth up, and we waded to the shore.

That night I thought about the strength and courage Father had shown. I had to admire the strength of his convictions also, even though most of them seemed to be so wrong. If only that strength could be used to uplift and inspire us, his children. If only he could believe in us, could accept that we, too, were made in the image of God, that even daughters could enrich his life beyond measure. In closing himself off to those possibilities, he was depriving himself of the real joy of fatherhood.

# CHAPTER 8

"They're having a session on softball after school today" I said to Mother. "I think I'll have a go at it". This was a new challenge. I had never played sport before, but already I could picture myself hitting the ball really hard – perhaps finishing up as captain of the team. I packed my sandshoes and waved her a cheery goodbye.

By some miracle I managed to behave well in class that day. I was not going to risk being kept in and miss my opportunity. At three o'clock all the girls ran down the steps, changed their shoes, and met Miss Ralph, the slim, quietly-spoken sports mistress. We pushed each other to try to get close to her.

She led us across to the playing area and explained the field positions. "Who'd like to go on a base?" There were no volunteers. "Everyone to my right will field". Miss Ralph extended her arm and brought it down between the shoulders of two girls wedged close together. "Those to my left can line up to bat".

We took our positions, and the first girl in the lineup strode out. She grabbed the bat and flung it across her shoulder. Her solid arms delivered a deadly blow to the ball, which beat the field and came to rest in the grass near the fence. It looked so easy. I would hit the ball right over the fence. Miss Ralph pitched and I took a wild swing. The ball passed me by, disdainful of my presence.

"Don't worry. We'll try again". The sports mistress pitched as gently as she could, again and again, but I could not connect with a single ball.

"It will be easier next time" said Miss Ralph, giving me a reassuring smile.

Next time! How could I ever face it again? Already I knew the other girls had written me off as stupid. Watching everyone carefully, I walked slowly backwards behind them. The fielders couldn't see me, nor could Miss Ralph, as I sneaked away and hid underneath the school. "I will never play sport again" I said, flinging my sandshoes in my bag.

"You're home early". Mother was bringing in some clothes from the line.

"Well I didn't like it much". I strode to the piano. "Anyway I can beat them all at this" I whispered so Mother couldn't hear. Gritting my teeth I raced up and down the scales.

My failure on the sporting field did not diminish my enthusiasm as a follower of cricket. At a young age Father had introduced me to the radio broadcasts. Perhaps he was trying to alleviate the pain of not having a son with whom to share his passion. When the Australian team was batting, I used the counter at the end of my knitting needle – not to count the number of rows I had completed, but to register my team's score.

I drew an oval on a sheet of paper and a rectangle in the middle for the pitch. "Could you put a dot to show me where Fine Leg is?" Father did so, and explained all the positions on the field, together with their subtle variations.

Australia was playing a test match at the Adelaide Oval in a series against England. Arthur Morris, our great opening batsman, had been having problems with the bowling of

England’s Alec Bedser. I sat on a chair in the lounge, opposite the radio. Father switched it on for the pre-match commentary.

“Morris doesn't seem to be able to read Bedser.”

“Yes. It's almost as though the medium-pacer has a hoodoo on the opener.”

I did not like the sound of this. “Do you think Morris will get through the opening session?”

“It’s an easy-paced pitch” said Father. “He should be OK”.

“They're setting an attacking field.” The commentator's tone added to the tension. I curled up on the chair. My heart was thumping.

“In comes Bedser bowling to Morris.” I leapt up from the chair and ran out of the room.

“What's wrong with you?” Father shouted.

“I can't stand it. He might get out”.

“You're a bad sport. You have to win all the time, don't you?”

I did not reply. For the only time I could ever remember, Father was right. I hated being the way I was, but the fear that one of my players could fail was too much. I ran to the bedroom and put on some shoes. “I'll be back later” I called out.

Walking quickly down the middle of the street, I tried to avoid the sound of radios. At the bottom of the hill there was bushland. My pace slowed as I walked along the winding dirt track. Lorikeets and currawongs formed a chorus with the cicadas. I stopped to listen, and to take in the stillness. My pulse rate, which had soared at the thought of an Australian batsman losing his wicket, was gradually lowered with the soothing bush sounds. The thick foliage of the tall trees created a blanket against the sun, and the track in places was an obstacle course of puddles. I tried to leap across the biggest one, falling short by only a few inches and splashing my leg with mud. I plucked off a flower and smelt its fragrance, then ran my fingers along a mossy ridge and wiped the moisture over my face.

Beyond the trees was a creek surrounded by sand hills. It was a beautiful secluded place, except for a food processing plant on the far side. During operational hours the smells belied the rustic aura of the setting. The area was usually deserted, and I was grateful for the solitude.

After taking my shoes off, I lay down on the grass and looked up at the faint streaks of white cloud across the pale sky. A soft breeze fanned my face and a small bird settled nearby. I could faintly hear the sounds of the creek falling over the rocks, and in my dreamlike state I almost forgot about the cricket.

The stillness and the view of the heavens were eventually interrupted by a plane on its way to Eagle Farm Aerodrome, jolting me back into the world of action. “I wonder what the score is. I must get back home and find out”. I ran back along the track and up the hill. Arthur Morris was on his way to a double century. I was ecstatic. But if only I'd stayed home,

I could have heard the descriptions and listened to Johnnie Moyes, the specialist commentator, analysing the skills of our batsmen.

A few weeks earlier, I had gone outside to collect 'The Courier Mail'. Quickly I opened to the sports section to read about my heroes. “What's this special supplement?” I called out to anyone who could hear me. “Look at this! Big photos of all our team!” I rushed into the kitchen to show Mother. Although she was not interested in cricket, I always wanted to share my joys with her.

“Can I cut them out?”

“You'll have to ask your father”.

“Only after I've read both sides”. He proceeded to read every word, while I jumped up and down beside his chair.

He finished at last. I borrowed Mother's dressmaking scissors and carefully cut around each picture and the summary of the player's history below. Then I taped the pictures around my bedroom wall, placing them in batting order. Lindsay Hassett, the captain, was No. 4, and I put him in a slightly elevated position, giving him the recognition I felt he deserved. I thought Neil Harvey was a magnificent batsman, and that Ray Lindwall was the greatest bowler in the world, but my favourite player was Keith Miller, the brilliant allrounder. There was an exuberance about him that I found irresistible.

“He can do everything” I said, looking admiringly at his photo. “That makes him the best”.

# CHAPTER 9

The temperature was 98 degrees. Small groups of children straggled across the playground. The wooden handrails were too hot to hold as we lugged our suitcases up the steps. Early morning games were forgotten as young bodies soon drifted down to the cooler concrete floor underneath the school.

At nine o'clock the gong sounded from the school verandah. Four hundred children lined up listlessly, seniors at the back, juniors at the front. On command we turned our heads to the left, where two pairs of small hands pulled on the long white rope. The kettle drums rattled, the chins in the front rows tilted upwards as the Australian flag struggled to the top of the white pole. Reluctant to show its brilliant colours, it hung like a wrungout dishrag. The only currents of air that day were in the stratosphere.

“Salute the flag” Mr. Wilkes the headmaster barked from the platform at the top of the steps. Hundreds of hands touched hundreds of right eyebrows, then slapped down to their thighs. The fife and drum band, which had lined up at right angles to the parade, blew and banged its way through the National Anthem. The Lord's Prayer was recited in a monotone, the speed of the address to the Almighty seeming to increase throughout the year with each rendition.

Stillness of body was expected from each child. “That boy at the end of the fourth row”. Mr. Wilkes' arm indicated the position of the offender. “You were wriggling. Come out here. And that girl in the back with the green blouse. I could see you. Out!” Each morning a collection of wrigglers and talkers was captured in the disciplinary net, and stood facing the assembly of non-offenders.

“Stand at ease”. There was not much of that under the burning sky, but stiff limbs took advantage of the respite. “Atten - hun!” The girls' shoes clicked together, the boys dragged their feet through the dirt.

“Now listen carefully”. The headmaster spoke about the polio epidemic, lost property, bikes being stolen from underneath the school, and arrangements for cleaning the playground. Then he straightened his long body as if preparing to announce the end of civilisation.

“Pull your shoulders back. Stand tall. Hands behind”. The muscular boys stuck their chests out. The adolescent girls in the back rows looked at each other and giggled. Some complied with exaggerated effect to the command, while others ignored it. “Be proud of yourselves. Be proud of your country. We are part of the glorious British Commonwealth. We are loyal subjects of King George the Sixth”. On and on he droned. The exhortations seemed interminable. Rigid, hatless bodies began to wilt, dehydrating in the relentless heat. The girl next to me fainted.

‘This is outrageous’, I thought. ‘Parents should complain to the authorities’. More bodies fell as teachers rushed to give aid.

“Right turn!” shouted Mr. Wilkes at the end of his ramblings. The bodies which had remained upright marched to their classes as the band played 'Men of Harlech'.

The next morning I woke to the gentle touch of Mother's hand. I sat up and drank my orange juice, dreading the thought of another hot parade. Perhaps I would be the next one to

faint. Mother pulled back the mosquito net and raised the blind. Deborah had drunk her orange juice, almost without waking.

Over breakfast we told Mother yet again about the parades and the awful teachers at the Walka school.

“The place gets worse every day” I said. “I think we should transfer to Edenvale. All the other kids in this area go there, and they love it”.

“I've been thinking about that myself for some time” she said. “I'll suggest it to your father”.

“No way” the voice bellowed as he strode into the kitchen. “I went to a tough school and it didn't do me any harm. In any case, if you went to Edenvale you would be able to get the bus. I'm not going to have lazy kids around the place”.

My teacher was Mr. Stewart, a short man whose broad shoulders sat untidily on top of a narrow body. His top lip did not quite cover his long front teeth, giving the impression that he was always smiling. Apart from his appearance, his personality reminded me of father’s. At school he never missed an opportunity to shout commands, either on the playground with a megaphone, or in the classroom without one.

Seating in the class was in order of merit, and as I was usually second, I shared a desk with Victor, the top student. As far I was concerned, he was the only interesting person in the room.

It was the Monday morning maths lesson. “I'll be glad when I get to high school” Victor yawned. “This stuff bores me”.

“Me too” I replied.

“Come out here, you two” shouted the teacher.

I led the way. Mr. Stewart smacked me several times on the leg as hard as he could. It hurt, but I was used to far worse. At home I was punished for accidents or for speaking inappropriately. At school I could avoid punishment if I managed to be silent for six hours.

“Now your turn” he said to Victor. Boys were always hit with a ruler, unless they were sent to the headmaster. Mr. Wilkes used a long cane, which was applied to the open hand, while our teacher used a ruler in a similar manner. I watched Victor's punishment, wondering if I were partly to blame.

“Get back to your seats”". Mr. Stewart stood erect. “Maybe that will keep you quiet for a while”. Following the tradition for boys in that situation, Victor walked back with a swagger and a forced smile of triumph as though he had not felt a thing.

The only subject that aroused my interest was English grammar. I was fascinated by verbal nouns, nouns in apposition, dangling participial phrases and clauses as subjects and objects. That afternoon we had a grammar lesson.

“Listen to these two sentences. 'A number of people were there. A number of people was there'. Which is correct?”

A boy sitting in front of me raised his hand. “It's 'were there'”.

“No” said Mr. Stewart. “'Number' is singular, so the verb has to be singular.” When I felt it safe to do so, I leaned forward.

“You were right” I whispered.

“I heard that” said the teacher. “Would you care to explain yourself?”

“Well actually Sir, you could say 'The number of people who were there was 20', but when you use 'number' in the sense of 'several' it has to be 'were'”.

“You think you know everything, don't you? Would you like to take the class?’

“All right” I replied. I wasn't sure if he was serious, so I remained seated.

“Well come on then” said Mr. Stewart, moving away from his desk.

I rose from my chair and walked down the aisle. I then went to the blackboard, wiped it clean, and found a piece of chalk.

“Look at her” whispered a boy in the front row. “She's game”.

On the board I wrote, 'Strolling along the track, a beautiful view appeared'. Turning around I asked “What's wrong with that sentence?”

“Please Miss, there's nothing wrong with it”, said a cheeky boy at the back.

“Oh dear” I said, pretending to frown, “I must have made a mistake. Who else thinks the sentence is correct?” A few tentative hands were raised.

“What part of speech is 'strolling'?” I asked.

“A participle”.

“That's right. A participle can be part of a verb. 'He was strolling along the road'. But when it's by itself, it has to be related to a noun or pronoun. Is it related to any word in the sentence on the board?”

Victor raised his hand. “Well it's related to 'view', but you can't have a view that's strolling along”. A few titters went around the class.

“Well done” I said, giving Victor a smile. “There are two ways to correct this sentence. Victor can give us one.’

“'As we were strolling along the track, a beautiful view appeared'”.

“That's right. Can anyone else think of another way?” There were no takers.

Mr. Stewart then came to my rescue. “'Strolling along the track, we saw a beautiful view'”. He then stood up and I looked anxiously towards him. Had I done something wrong – perhaps taken too much of the lesson time?

“That was very well done, Anne” he said in a conciliatory tone. “You would make an excellent teacher – unless," he added with a wry smile, “you decide to go into politics. You could argue your way out of anything!”

I was pleased with my teaching effort, but puzzled about Mr Stewart. At times I thought he hated me the way Father did. He certainly would not tolerate his authority being questioned, but occasionally he seemed to appreciate having me in the class. Grown-ups were so unpredictable. No wonder I found it hard to trust them.

# CHAPTER 10

“We're having a raffle to raise money for the school” Mr. Wilkes bellowed at the morning parade. “Every family is expected to sell at least one book of tickets”. He paused and looked at the children in the front rows. At that moment the only sound was the screeching of birds on the telegraph wires. I envied their freedom. I was caught in a trap of restrictions and prohibitions. Other children, like the birds, seemed to soar on the breezes, while I banged my head against iron bars.

The previous year the school held a fancy dress ball. On the day of the announcement my classmate Madeline and I were walking home from school.

“I'm going to the ball as a penguin” said Madeline. “What about you?”

“Our family doesn't go to things like that” I replied. “The only time we ever go out, it's to church”. Entertainment such as opera, theatre, ballet – those things were 'of the world' Father had said, and Christians must have nothing to do with them.

“Oh that's right, I forgot. You're religious, aren't you? But my family goes to church and they don't see anything wrong with it”. I had put this argument to Mother.

“We have higher standards than other people” she explained.

“But it's just dressing up” I protested. “You always let us do that”.

“It's not what people wear. There'd be dancing. That can lead to sin”.

“What kind of sin?” I thought of various possibilities – lying, cheating, stealing – even arguing.

“You'll understand when you're older” said Mother. Statements about my age or lack of maturity made me furious. They seemed a poor substitute for a reasoned explanation. Sinfulness and I seemed destined never to part. I was always saying something sinful, doing something sinful, or wanting to do something sinful. Could I really be more evil than everybody else?

“Quick march!” said the headmaster. We obeyed the verb in the command, but not the adverb, as we straggled to our classrooms. Throughout the morning I wondered how the raffle tickets would be distributed–perhaps at a central point in the school. At least that way, no one would know that I hadn't taken any. Gambling was another activity on my parents' banned list.

It was almost lunch time and there had been no mention of the raffle. I was beginning to think I had escaped, when I noticed Mr. Stewart opening a drawer.

“Put your pens down” he said, producing a pile of the dreaded tickets. “I'm going to hand these out. There'll be a prize for the family who sells the most”. He walked up and down the aisles. Some children took two or three books. His black squeaky boots came towards my desk. I looked down, sensing that everyone was staring at me.

“How many books would you like?” he asked in a loud voice.

“I..... I don't think my parents will allow me to take them” I replied in a whisper.

“What!” he said. “Not even to help the school?”

I felt myself blushing, wishing I could slide under the desk and disappear.

“It's just .....that .....they don't believe in that sort of thing”. I saw the peculiar looks of my classmates. A few sniggered. Why was I made to feel such a misfit? The teacher shook his head and walked away. How dare he blame me for having strange parents!

“Mr. Stewart wanted me to bring home some raffle tickets, but I didn't” I told Mother that afternoon.

“Good girl” she replied. “Those things are evil”. I wanted to ask why, but having received rare approval, I would not risk losing it.

That evening I was doing my homework on the dining room table. The smell of overcooked steak hung in the hot, still air, the aromas unable to float out into the night through the small kitchen windows. The family wireless, encased in a polished wooden box with fretted panels covering the speaker, stood in a corner near the doorway to the lounge. Sprawled out on the floor in front of the wireless, Deborah was teaching Jennifer how to play Monopoly. Ruth was having a bath.

The time signal for eight o'clock, an announcement of a broadcast from the City Hall, and the strains of ‘God save the King’ filled the room. I walked quickly across to the bathroom door, which always jammed a few inches from closure.

“That's the National Anthem” I yelled through the gap. “Are you standing up?”

“I am now” said Ruth, to the sound of a swish of bathwater.

Hearing the music, Deborah and Jennifer rose abruptly from the floor, their card game unable to compete with devotion to the House of Windsor. The four of us stood motionless until the final note. Only illness was accepted as a valid reason for non-compliance with our self-imposed ritual. Our parents did not object to our loyalty to the throne, but they considered it trivial in comparison with loyalty to God and the scriptures.

With the passing of King George VI and the crowning of Princess Elizabeth as Queen, I felt part of a fairytale history. How I would love to have been at Westminster Abbey and seen the Queen in all her coronation splendour.

“The school has made a block booking at the Walka Cinema for the film ‘A Queen is Crowned’ ” Mr Stewart announced one morning. “I expect everyone in this class to attend – even you, Anne” he added, glaring at me. I could not bear the thought of another humiliation, but would I be allowed to go?

That afternoon I lay on my bed, thinking of a way to ask permission. Perhaps if I promised to be good? But that wouldn't work. I was always trying to be good. Could I ask God to make them say 'yes'? That was difficult, because I never knew if God was on their side or mine. There had to be another way. “I've got it!” I exclaimed, leaping up. “This film is history, so it's part of my education!” I ran into the kitchen, where Mother was peeling potatoes in the stone sink.

“I know you don't allow us to go to the pictures” I said, “but supposing it was something organised by the school?” I looked anxiously into her face. There was no change of expression, so I pressed on, using all the logic at my command.

“Maybe we could make an exception in this case” was the quiet response. “After all, it was a Christian ceremony, and the royal family are God-fearing people”. I jumped up and down on the linoleum, hardly able to believe that my powers of persuasion had won the day.

“Of course we'll have to ask your father”. In my excitement I had almost forgotten that the head of the house had the power of veto. My ecstasy vanished.

“I've never been to a picture theatre in my life” he said later that evening, “and I won't have any child of mine inside one”. Mother winced.

“But Peter, it's not as though there'll be anything of Hollywood shown”.

“What's Hollywood?” I asked.

“The people who appear in those films lead immoral lives” Mother explained. “They're not faithful in marriage”.

“The cinema is tainted by what is shown there” said Father. “We must abstain from all appearance of evil”.

I was close to tears, disappointment mingling with rage. Father, it seemed, would stop at nothing in making me feel powerless. I was deprived of the right to be heard, let alone to present a reasoned argument. My only hope was Mother. Could she win against his rigid mind?

“Surely Peter, a building full of school children to see a film of the Queen – no one could possibly see that as evil”. Father was silent. He stared at the wall, his body motionless. Then he let out an angry sigh.

“Well I'm not happy about it, but I suppose you've got a point”. I flung my arms around Mother, almost knocking her over. Then I raced out of the room before Father could change his mind.

I had often ridden past the picture theatre, never imagining that one day I would be inside it. As I walked towards the building a few weeks later, I was excited, but almost frightened. What if Father was right – that there was something evil in the place?

I joined the other children at the entrance, and tried not to look as though it was my first visit. The girls in my class often talked about their favourite film stars. I had no idea who they were, and was always too embarrassed to ask. We entered the foyer and I saw pictures of scantily-clad women in advertisements for coming shows. Were these the unfaithful women Mother had told me about? The other children rushed over to the sweets stall, eager hands sliding sixpences, threepences and pennies across the counter. I stood back. I had no money, but sweets were not allowed in our family, so it didn’t matter.

A few teachers tried to get the children into line, but they crowded around the entrances and ignoring the usherettes, pushed and jostled each other down the aisles. I almost fell into a sagging canvass seat. What weird, shapeless things they were! Everyone else

treated them with the familiarity of lounge chairs. Packets of assorted sweets were ripped open, some of their contents falling to the floor. A few Jaffas rolled down the slope, and children at the front bent down to collect the unexpected treasure.

I looked up in amazement at the huge screen. The only ones I had ever seen before were minute in comparison – one at the church, used by missionaries to show slides of their work, and the other at the school, where they rarely got to the end of a film because the projector would break down.

As the film began, I quickly left my world of sin and punishment, swept up into a dimension of beauty and goodness. A heavenly choir, the Archbishop and other dignitaries in their magnificent robes, a congregation from all parts of the globe – countries within the British Empire, republics, dictatorships. It mattered not their race or political persuasion. "God save the Queen" they shouted, and I longed to cry out with them. The richness of the pageantry, the grandeur of the Abbey, and the purity and loveliness of our sovereign, filled my heart with wonder and joy.

I walked out of the building alone, oblivious to the chatter around me. The sounds of the trumpets, the choir, and the magnificent organ carried me up the long hill home. I went into my bedroom and closed the door. Unable to speak, I wanted no human contact. My Queen had been anointed by God, and in a way that I could not understand, I had been a part of it.

My devotion to Her Majesty would become for me a haven – a place free from pain and injustice. My feelings about God and my parents were confused, mixed with doubt and a sense of alienation. But my love for the Queen was of a different order. It was unconditional; it was boundless; it was eternal.

# CHAPTER 11

"You can sit in the back seat of the church" said Mother, "but you must not talk". She and Father moved towards the front, where the rows were draped at each end in white ribbons. Deborah and I sat at the end of the seat near the door leading to the foyer.

Arrangements of pink and white carnations in every available spot transformed the sombre looking building into a sacred garden. Two women in huge hats came and sat in front of us, blocking our view. We shifted along a bit, but then I could not see between the hats, which almost collided whenever their owners moved. It was not only the view which was obliterated. The delicate fragrance of the carnations was no match for the ladies' Lavender and Tweed, which stamped its pungent authority on our corner of the building.

The organist began her prelude, but the sounds of the instrument could be heard only when there was a lull in the chatter. Most of the congregation were friends of the bride, Merrilyn, whose family had been stalwarts of the church for generations. The bridegroom, Jo, was not interested in the Christian faith. He had attended church only once, and that was the week before the wedding. Jo had the looks of a film star and divided his time between modelling and lifesaving on the Gold Coast. Most of the girls at the church thought Jo was a "catch". Mother did not agree.

"It's such a shame" she said. "Merrilyn is a lovely girl. There would have been a nice Christian young man somewhere for her".

"The parents are the problem" Father declared. "They could have stopped it".

"Merrilyn's in her twenties," said Mother. "She wouldn't need her parents' permission to get married". As a thirteen-year-old I had not even considered that Father could one day exercise a power of veto over who I would marry.

"They should not have allowed her to go out with him". Father's statement indicated the policy he would pursue with his own daughters.

"That may have caused a rift in the family" Mother suggested. "If only she'd brought him to church, particularly when it was an evangelistic service. He might have been converted".

According to Mother and Father, the Bible said believers should only marry each other. I couldn't help thinking the whole thing was terribly harsh, particularly for girls, since there were many more of us in the church than there were of potential husbands.

The minister led out the bridegroom and his attendants. Jo looked nervously around the building. Was it just wedding jitters, or did he feel uneasy, surrounded by all these religious people?

The sound of clicks and flashes of light came from the foyer. A man with his face screwed up against a black box walked backwards towards the inner door. Believing that his mind was as faithful as his camera in having mapped the layout of the place, he seemed unconcerned about the possibility of human obstruction. The clicking and flashing stopped as he moved aside to allow Merrilyn's two sisters, dressed in pink satin, to make one final check on their sister. The three girls shared a close bond. I envied Merrilyn. I was close to my sisters too, but would I ever be able to have them walking in front of me down the aisle?

The congregation stood for the Bridal March. Merrilyn clung to her father as though her life depended on him. He looked down at her and smiled. She looked lovingly up at him, and her whole body seemed to relax. The ceremony itself was conducted with a tasteful mix of decorum and informality, but as we walked home afterwards, all I could think about was that smile from Merrilyn's father. Approval, admiration, pride, love –it overflowed from him.

I lay on my bed that afternoon and wondered. Did Merrilyn earn that smile because she was lucky enough to fit the model her parents wanted? She had always won the highest praise from Mother – "What a sweet, gentle girl". But perhaps the smile came, in effect, from two hearts that had accepted their child as a gift of God, regardless of nature she had inherited. My own father believed that for a girl with my characteristics, the only hope of marriage would be with a man like him, who would "keep me under control". There was never any suggestion that such a man could love me for the person I was.

"She looks so beautiful". That's what they always said about brides. I wanted people to say that about me one day, but of course they would never say it until I was in a wedding gown. Lace over tulle – that's what I'd have. And a fluffy veil. But who would be standing near the minister, waiting for me? A man I would have to "honour and obey"? The thought terrified me.

## CHAPTER 12

“What a dreadful voice that man has!” Mother flashed her eyes towards the wireless – a look of disapproval I knew so well. She pulled out a freshly-washed dress from the laundry basket and shook an aluminium tin a few inches above the fabric. Droplets splashed through the holes in the lid. She rolled up the dress into a tight ball so the moisture could spread evenly through the garment, making it ready to iron.

“That voice” said Father, “belongs to Dr. Evatt, the Leader of the Opposition. He will be Australia's next Prime Minister”. Father raised his arms behind his head and leant back on the lounge chair. His legs were crossed and there was a gap between his sock and the lower edge of his trousers. The skin was white, almost shiny. It looked cold. I thought of the man across the road with his olive skin. He laughed a lot, and gave his children cuddles.

But I was excited. The Labor Party might win the election! They were like me – struggling against powerful forces. Father knew all about politics. He didn't like the Prime Minister and I didn't like him either. He had a posh voice and made fun of the Labor Party.

“Menzies represents the rich and powerful”. Father's voice rose, and he paused, the way he sometimes did when preaching. “We should be on the side of the workers, the people who struggle”. Mother was silent and continued her sprinkling.

It was early in May and the Federal elections had been called for the 29th. Already we had collected several how-to-vote pamphlets from our letterbox. Mother was looking at them intently. “This man has character” she said to herself. I rushed over to see who it was, but she pulled the pamphlets away.

On Monday morning, as Deborah and I walked down the long hill to school, we saw huge posters stuck on all the telegraph posts. The first one read: VOTE O'BRIEN 1 FOR LABOR. Above the caption was the picture of a man's face. It was rough and his nose was bent, like Mr. Russell's at church. Father said Mr. Russell used to be a boxer before he came to Christ.

The next day some of the posters had been pasted over with those of the Liberal candidate, John Henderson, a handsome man with neatly-combed glossy hair and a thin moustache. Despite his polished appearance, I convinced myself that he would have nothing else to offer.

“They've got no right to paste over the Labor man” I said to Deborah, but she was looking admiringly at Mr. Henderson.

I was still thinking about the two pictures as Mr. Stewart cleaned the board after the morning maths lesson. Clouds of chalk dust danced in a stream of sunlight which was deflected by his desk, lighting up the cupboard door on the wall opposite the windows. He had encouraged us to listen to parliament, but had not discussed the policies of the Parties.

“Although you can't vote yet” he said in a serious tone, digging his fingers into the back of his chair, “you need to know what the political Parties stand for”. His voice became more intense, and I felt he was about to disclose something he believed in much more passionately than maths.

“The Liberal and Country Parties believe in the rights of the individual. They are opposed to Communism and Socialism”. I knew he was having a go at Dr. Evatt but there seemed nothing I could do to stop him. I tried to think what Father would say.

“Who controls the Labor Party?” Mr. Stewart asked the class. I put up my hand while everyone else was still thinking. He waited for a while, probably tired of having to ask me all the time.

“All right Anne”, he said at last with a sigh, “What do you think?”

“I don't know who controls them, Sir, but I know they want to improve things for poor people”.

“Ah, we've got a little Socialist in our midst!” he said with a mocking laugh.

I was angry with myself for letting him humiliate me, but I never seemed to be able to stop myself from getting into arguments. I pictured his flashy silver car parked in the school grounds. He knew nothing about poverty. I did.

“You add it up” Mother had said, sliding a sheet of paper across the table. “I've checked it over and over, and I still get the same answer”. Father grabbed the sheet, mumbling. The scowl on his forehead meant trouble. Thank goodness it wasn't me that time.

“Well, your addition is OK, but are you sure you entered everything you spent this week?”

“Yes, I know I did” said Mother, close to tears.

“You're still sixpence out” shouted Father. “You've got to find it. Check your purse again”. Mother pulled out the worn money purse from her old black handbag and spread all the coins on the table. She put them in small piles: two shillings, shillings, sixpences, threepences, pennies, ha'pennies, then counted them again.

“It's just the same” she said, her eyes lowered.

Looking at my parents from the corner of the room, I was filled with anger – both with Father and with the unjust political system that had caused Mother such pain over a missing sixpence.

A few nights later, the screech of a microphone was heard from the end of the street. “Testing one, two, three four....testing, testing”.

“It must be one of the local candidates” said Father. “I think I'll wander down and have a listen”.

“Can I come too?” I asked. I had never seen a live politician. There had to be something special about them, they were so powerful. They would have to be tough, too – with all the horrible things they said to each other in parliament.

“No, you can't” said Mother. “You haven't done the washing up for a week”.

“She can come with me” said Father, “and do the washing up when she gets back”.

As we hurried down the street I glanced at the various houses to see if anyone else was coming. I tried to guess how each of our neighbours would vote. There were two Catholic homes in the street. According to Father, they would vote Labor. Then I remembered Aunty Mabel's statement, “We vote Liberal because we own property”. Only the Cartwright-Brownes were rich enough to be in that category. That left a lot of people I could not account for.

The grass footpath extended along the side wall of the corner store and along the side of the concrete slab under the shop's awning, which faced onto the main road. Between the front of the slab and the road was a broad strip of gravel. A truck was parked diagonally so that its front was on the gravel and the back was on the footpath. It looked like the sort of vehicle used to transport bales of hay. Bits of paint had been chipped off the panel work and there was a section missing in the running board. A huge Labor 'how to vote' sign–even bigger than the posters on the telegraph poles - sat on the cabin roof.

On the back of the truck a tall, rugged looking man had his hand over the microphone and was speaking to someone in the front. The fact that they could hear each other through the rectangle in the back wall of the cabin meant that the usual pane of glass was missing. Two old wooden chairs were placed between the microphone and the cabin. They reminded me of the creaky ones kept under the platform in our church hall.

Several people were standing near the truck on the footpath. I wondered if the candidate had brought them with him, as they were not from our area. Father took up a position underneath the shop awning. Perhaps he didn't want the neighbours to think he was part of the official group.

“Could you give us a hand up, mate?” A short man was trying to lift his right leg to the floor of the truck. It reached no higher than the rear number plate. The tall man leant down with one arm out, while a few men from the group on the footpath pushed the man upwards, and he landed with a thud on the dusty floorboards. As he stood up I recognised the face of Mr. O'Brien.

After brushing himself down, he moved towards a chair and pulled out some notes from inside his jacket. As he read them through quietly, he nodded his head and occasionally moved his hand in the air, as though emphasising a point. A wind had sprung up, blowing his straggly brown hair across his forehead. He looked up and grinned.

“Righto mate, let's give it a go”. The candidate folded his notes and placed them back in his jacket. The tall man cleared his throat and bent down to the microphone.

“Ladies and gentlemen, good evening. May I introduce the Labor candidate, Mick O'Brien”.

“Hear, hear” said the men near the truck. I felt like joining in, but as Father did not, I kept quiet.

“The Australian Labor Party represents the only hope for justice in this country” he began. His voice was strong, and he spoke with passion and conviction. He said things that I had always believed, and I felt I could trust him. He looked earnestly into our faces. I looked back at him, hoping he would sense I was on his side. He quoted from Dr. Evatt's policy

speech – increased medical and hospital benefits, equal pay for equal work, abolition of the means test for age pensions, more money to the States for housing.

By this time a crowd had gathered in front of the shop. They listened quietly through the list of promised benefits. I felt the speech was going well. Surely any reasonable person would be impressed.

“Don't say anything!” a female voice behind me whispered.

“And let them get away with it?” an irate male voice responded.

“It's a blue-ribbon Liberal seat” the woman insisted. “This chap hasn't got a chance”. The man grunted. Father half turned his head towards them. I was afraid he was going to start an argument.

“What about the Communists in the trade unions?” the man yelled.

“Edward, stop it!” the woman whispered, this time a bit louder. I was amazed that she had the courage to stand up to her husband, particularly in public. Sneaking a look around, I saw that the woman was about Mother's age.

“I'm glad you asked that question” said Mr. O'Brien calmly. “I'm actually a union secretary. I've never been a Communist, there are none in our union, and I don't even know any”. I was so proud of his reply, I felt like cheering.

“That's a laugh” said the man. “How about your leader? He was legal counsel for the Communist Party in the High Court!”

“A barrister can represent any type of client” said the candidate. “Dr. Evatt has pledged that a Labor government will support the Royal Commission Mr. Menzies has set up to investigate espionage...”

“They won't have to look too far!” the man interrupted.

“Let the candidate continue his speech” snapped Father, swinging around and glaring at the man. I was pleased Father had stood up for Mr. O'Brien, but I wished someone else in the crowd could have done it. Now the neighbours would know how our family voted. The man behind made a threatening noise and I was afraid of what Father might do. I had never seen him being attacked by someone his equal. With a complete stranger he would not be able to use his usual line, “the subject's closed”.

“It's all right” said the candidate in a reassuring manner. Although he must have been used to that type of interjection, I admired his composure. “We need to listen to all....”

At that moment a huge gust of wind lifted the sign off the truck roof and hurled it against the Peters' Icecream advertisement on the front of the shop’s awning. The sign fell in pieces on to the gravel.

“That's what'll happen to you lot in the election” said the interjector as he pulled his wife's arm and strode away. I looked up sympathetically at Mr. O'Brien as he glanced down at the remains of his sign. If he was upset, he did not show it.

A few other people left – I assumed they were Liberal voters – but the majority stayed. The fragments of the sign were picked up and placed on the floor of the truck.

“I think you all know my name by now anyway” he said with an embarrassed smile. “They regard this as a safe Liberal seat” he continued, “but a vote for Labor will send a message to Mr. Menzies”.

At the end of the speech Father led some vigorous clapping. I joined in, though my hands were so small, they couldn't make much noise.

As the candidate was helped down from the truck, Father went over and pushed in front of everyone else.

“Congratulations on an excellent speech” he said, shaking the candidate's hand firmly. Before Mr. O’Brien could reply, Father put a hand on his upper arm and moved him away from the group. He looked back and winked at his supporters. I crept up as close as I could so I could hear what they were saying.

“I'm in great demand as a public speaker” said Father, “and I thought I could give you a few tips”.

Again without waiting for a response, Father outlined his ideas on gestures and hand movements. He placed his arms in various positions and he seemed to want Mr. O'Brien to copy him. But the candidate just nodded, occasionally sneaking a look back at his friends who were nudging each other at the impromptu oratory lesson. I felt Mr. O'Brien's gestures had been appropriate, but Father had a need to be copied by others. If they did not take his advice, he considered them incompetent.

“Thank you for taking the time to speak to me” said Mr. O'Brien, “but I should see a few other people before they leave”. He moved away, leaving Father alone on the gravel. I was too embarrassed to move towards him – in fact I did not even want to be seen with him. I thought of all his claims to Christian humility. How empty they seemed now.

“Some people have suggested I should go into politics” he said as we walked back up the street. “I know I'd do a great job, but I have been called to higher things”. I wondered whether this 'calling' included being a father, and what God thought of his efforts in that area. But I was beginning to think the two of them had similar ideas on the subject.

At home I discovered to my relief that Mother had done the washing up, and she was in my bedroom, cleaning out a cupboard.

“How was it?” she asked in a dull voice.

“The man was very good” I said. “You might even have liked it”.

“I don't think so” said Mother, as she firmly closed the cupboard door. “I don't believe in Party politics. Everyone in parliament should be an Independent”.

“But we never have an Independent standing in our electorate” I said, “so how do you vote?”

“I choose the candidate on the basis of his character”.

“But how do you know what that is?” I asked, barely concealing my frustration.

“You can tell a man's character by his face” she declared.

I couldn't understand why Mother wouldn't tell me how she voted. Father made all the decisions for the family. She didn't even have to bother thinking about politics.

“Mother” I said emphatically, “which of the two Parties has the candidates with the best faces?”

She waited a moment, then looked away.

“The Liberal Party” she said.

# CHAPTER 13

"A child's return to Central please". I pushed a shilling under the iron grill and a ticket appeared beneath long, hairy fingers. It was three thirty on a Monday afternoon. The old corrugated iron roof of the station, which fulfilled its task in protecting passengers from rain, gave up the struggle when confronted by a fiercer enemy, which ignored any attempt to interrupt its scorching progress. The waiting room furnace was deserted.

Walking over to the edge of platform, I looked down at the four gleaming metal strips resting parallel on their sombre supports, and followed the two closest ones along the direction from which the train would come. The nearby level crossing was unprotected. Red and white lights at the side of the road had often proved inadequate for unwary motorists, whose fragile cages crumpled like toys before the ruthless onslaught of the iron juggernaut. A large bell and a red flag were carried along the track by a black-vested employee of Queensland Railways. He stopped where the barriers should have been, raising and lowering his arms with increasing urgency, wishing perhaps that he could convert himself, just for a few minutes, into a wooden beam with flashing lights.

A piercing hoot clashed with the sound of the bell, and an extra puff of smoke joined the streak of upward-floating pollutant, pretending to disappear into the atmosphere as though it had never existed. Another hoot as the sounds of wheel clatter grew, and the hissing, belching monster with its single eye, looked at a thirteen-year-old girl with the contempt it showed to all obstructions on its never-changing path.

I shrank back from the intensity, almost falling over, glimpsing an open fire and blackened engine-hands. Hell was an eternal fire, some people said. Or was it just a symbol of punishment? In any case I wasn't going there. Father said he had to belt the devil out of me so I could go to heaven. Surely I had received enough of that to satisfy God.

The wheels screeched and the passengers' heads jerked backwards or forwards, depending on their position in the carriage. I opened the door of the nearest compartment. The shutter had jammed half way up. As I banged the door closed, the shutter fell out of sight, except for the groove in the top. After dusting soot from the seat, I sat on it and found myself opposite an opened newspaper. Parts of a hand could be seen on either side. On top was a forehead of crevices and clumps of limp hair. The paper dropped suddenly for thick-spectacled eyes to view the changed scenery. Then the face hid again.

My only trips to the city were to the dentist. Would this journey be as painful? "You are going to a new piano teacher" Father announced one night. Miss Armstrong had gently guided me through the lower grades, but an "informed person" had suggested the change. My opinion on the matter was of course irrelevant.

The train entered Central tunnel, and the air in the carriage thickened. A few people began to cough as the lights dimmed, unable to compete with the sooty greyness. At length the train emerged under the dark dome of Central Station. Small squares had been cut in the supporting edifice to suggest contact with the outside world–an exchange of soot for car fumes.

After walking down Edward Street and along Queen Street, I arrived at King House, a centre of excellence in music, with its brightly-lit store at street level. I pressed my nose against the window to look at all the shiny instruments. To the left of the store was the

internal passageway. It began in light, but deeper into the building it ended in gloom. My pace slowed as my eyes adjusted their focus. A horrible smell came from the darkness. I would not have been surprised to see a rat or two emerge. “This place gives me the creeps” I said out loud, half expecting to hear an echo.

Open iron railings formed the lift well. I pressed the brass button and waited. Nothing happened. I could just see the bottom of the lift opposite the first floor. Why wasn't it moving? I pressed the button harder, but there was no response. What kind of a building was this? And what strange people were its tenants? Mysteriously the lift then descended, creaking and groaning. Would I risk it? Well at least it had a light that was working.

The journey began with a shudder. Half way between the second and third floors the lift stopped. I pressed every button. “Move!” I shouted, banging my fist against the panel. I could not be late for my first lesson. I jumped up and down, wondering whether I should scream through the bars for help.

Suddenly there was a lurch. The lift went up, then down, then up again. It faced a dilemma. Would it convey the student to that strange place on the top floor? Nothing happened for several minutes. Then with a violent shudder it shouted its warning and sped down to the ground floor.

I had a strong desire to walk straight out of the building, never to return. But what sort of reception would I get at home? The cane of course. It was not worth it. My new teacher could not be as bad as that. I dragged both doors open, stepped out, then carefully closed them behind me, before groping my way up four gloomy flights to the top floor. I stopped to get some breath. A dim light flickered and there it was! A modest sign in gold print – "Vera Grant, FTCL”.

Miss Grant's door was covered with a dark green felt layer for soundproofing. But where was I supposed to knock? I noticed a small window pane and raised my arm. Just in time I heard the sound of a piano. Mother said it was rude to interrupt people. I waited for silence, then gently tapped my knuckles on the window, hoping my new teacher would be nothing like Father or Mr. Stewart.

The door opened and an elderly, stout lady gave me a withering look. Her cold eyes looked in different directions, and a few streaks of brown dye in her hair made a sad contrast with the sea of surrounding grey. She attempted a smile. “You must be Anne. Come in and sit over there, see?” What was I supposed to see? The lady was quite odd. And the room! The only window looked out onto a small gap between two grimy buildings. Inside it was musty and oppressive. The light was dull and the ornaments on the mantlepiece looked as though they'd been there for fifty years. I felt I wanted to cut a huge hole in the ceiling to let in some sunlight and fresh air. Even a few drops of rain would have relieved the gloom.

The couch I had to sit on was all sag, no springs, as the student's lesson went on and on. Had the strange lady forgotten I was there? One good thing–she was obviously generous with her time. The student eventually departed, and I was invited to the piano.

“Well what are you going to play for me?” I produced a fourth grade piece and played it with a confidence I did not feel.

“I see” said Miss Grant. What did she see? Was my playing really so bad? Such a hard face. Surely her students were not her enemies.

I played some scales. “We've got a few things to fix up here” she said in a deep, scratchy voice. My hand position was corrected, my elbows were steadied, and my thumb was made to move more smoothly. Yes, Miss Grant was an expert. If only she were a bit more human.

“Well how did it go?  I hope you were courteous and didn't argue”.  Father again. Always expecting the worst.

“Miss Grant seems to know more than Miss Armstrong. And I did behave properly.”

“I'm pleased to hear it. Aunty Edna and the family are coming over tonight and you will play a few pieces for them”. I dreaded playing in front of people. Even when I was practising, a wrong note caused a sense of failure, but when other people were listening, my sense of shame was overwhelming.

“I don't want to” I said. “In any case they wouldn't be interested”.

“You'll do as you're told or I'll belt you”. He stood up and moved towards me.

The pain Father inflicted on my body was one thing, but he would never understand the pain in my soul–the conflict between my need to believe that he did proclaim God's judgments, and my feeling that he was wrong–about me and perhaps about God as well. He saw me as evil. I saw myself as sensitive and kind. He confused me as to who I really was.

I thought of the way I wanted him to treat me. He could have said, “I understand how difficult it is for you to perform in front of people, but I would appreciate it if you could make the effort”. With that conciliatory attitude the hostilities would cease. We didn't have to be enemies. He must have believed that demonstrations of power would gain my respect. But his misuse of power had not only destroyed part of my soul. It had ensured that one day I would reject him – for ever.

# CHAPTER 14

I wandered down the far end of the platform at Central, my eyes smarting from the cigarette smoke that rose above lines of black and grey suits. Dropping my music case to the ground, I put my head out through the iron railings, took some deep breaths, then turned around to face the empty section of the platform.

"I want you to work on a new piece" Miss Grant had said that afternoon as she handed me the book of J.S. Bach's Two-part Inventions. "It's this one in B flat major". Opening my music case I saw the face of the composer sketched on the cover of the book. He was middle-aged, with a sturdy, broad face, and there was an aura of serenity in his dark eyes.

The steam engine chugged slowly by, dragging its seven empty boxes. Before it came to a halt, hands grabbed for handles as work-weary bodies prepared to enter the compartments like self-stacking matchsticks. Running up to the end carriage, I stood at an open door and looked at the few inches of floor space remaining. "Just one more–only a small one?" I pleaded. The bodies took in a collective breath and shuffled backwards. Pressing my case into my stomach, I climbed in sideways, and pulled the door against me. At each station I hopped out, then back in, till the friendly sign of the Walka Station released me from the cycle.

I led the way through the barrier, but I was soon outpaced by longer strides. Half way up the steep hill I stopped and peered down at the suburbs in the valley. Late afternoon clouds were hiding the setting sun. 'If we lived there' I thought, 'I would be home by now, without aching legs. Why can't they have a bus service up the hill? But perhaps the engine wouldn't make it to the top. Only mountain goats belong in this terrain'. My breathing quickened as the angle of inclination increased. Our front gate seemed like the finishing line in an endurance trial. I lent on it and half ran, half fell, down the sloping path.

Ignoring weariness, I went straight to the piano. Deborah and Ruth left the room, but Jennifer stayed. She was the most musical member of the family and loved to listen to me play – even when I was merely learning something.

What was this Bach and his "Invention" all about? I struggled through the piece, but it sounded like a lot of exercises joined together. Oh well, I could hardly expect anything as good as Mozart.

I practised every day of the week, every week of the year. The only exception to this rule was Sundays. That was the "Lord's Day", Father said. I was only allowed to play hymns then. I pressed on with the piece, until one morning, a few weeks later, something changed. Out of the mass of notes emerged a form – strong, yet gentle and beautiful. I was falling in love – not with a man, but with his exquisitely-structured music. I played the Invention over and over, each time becoming more enchanted with the rich harmonic intricacies of the weaving parts. As I closed the book, I looked at the sketch on the cover again. Those dark eyes seemed more intense. They must have touched the soul of the universe. I could hardly wait for my next lesson.

"Miss Grant" I asked, having no doubt about the answer, "who do you think is the greatest of all the composers?"

“I consider Beethoven is” she replied. This did not make sense. I had played a Beethoven piece before, but it was nothing in comparison with Bach.

“Do all musicians agree with this?”

“Oh no. Some would prefer Handel or Mozart or Brahms. Some even Wagner.”

“But what about Bach?” Miss Grant just had to like him. I looked at the wrinkles in her tight, drawn face. So much pain there. Had she ever really loved?

Miss Grant managed a half-smile. “Ah yes. I can see the effect the great composer has had on you”.

“So other people like him as well?” The pitch in my voice rose as the tempo increased.

“Oh yes. Many do. I just happen to prefer Beethoven”. My face fell. I longed to share my new passion with my teacher. Did it take a special kind of intellect to plumb the depths of ultimate musical genius? Otherwise how could anyone prefer any other composer?

I wondered if this was the closest to love I would ever be – with a man who had died in 1750. What was it that drew from me such a deep response? Would someone I loved have to be musician? No. I could love a great scientist, a great painter – any kind of greatness that took a man beyond himself to the Source of knowledge itself.

“I think you're ready to do an exam” said Miss Grant at the end of an extended lesson.

“Can I play the Bach?” I asked eagerly.

“Certainly. It will be one of your four main pieces. Then there's an Extra List. The examiner usually only asks you to play one of them. And then there are scales and arpeggios, sight reading, aural tests, and general knowledge”.

“I'll work hard on all of them. It's funny. I hate playing in public, but when I do an examination I get the feeling the examiner really wants me to do well. Then I play my best”.

“A lot of students are the other way round. But I'm glad you like exams”.

The much prepared-for day arrived. I put an arm out from under the mosquito net and reached for the clock. It was only 5.30. “I'll never get back to sleep” I thought, “but I can't practise my pieces because I'd wake Father and probably the neighbours as well. I'll just wriggle my fingers to get them supple”.

I looked across at Deborah breathing heavily under the blankets. The poor girl. She'd had her antrums drained, her tonsils out, and so many operations on her adenoids. But she often snored, and I hated having to drag my bedclothes out into the lounge whenever the noise woke me up.

“She's such a gentle girl” I said to myself. “Nothing like me. She never seems to get angry. How can she tolerate Father? At least I'm only punished when I've been arguing or lost something. But last night.....”

“You've got these sums wrong” he shouted at Deborah, sitting opposite him at the table.

“I'm sorry” she said, her head lowered, eyes blinking. He reached over and with a wild swing he banged his hand across her head. Her body was jolted on to the adjoining chair. She put out her hands to steady herself but she did not make a sound. There were tears in her eyes, her face pressing down on to her hunched shoulder, as though she expected another blow.

I watched in horror. I would love to have protected my sister, but my intervention would have made things worse. If only I had been a boy, and a bit older, I could have taken Father on. “You ever touch my sister again and I'll punch you”. That would have fixed him– or would it? Deborah never spoke about Father's cruelty. It seemed to me that she was like Mother – believing that suffering was part of life. I could never accept that. I would fight to the end.

I heard Father go to the bathroom. At last I could make some noise. I leapt out of bed, grabbed a dressing gown and raced to the piano. It was a cold morning but my body was hot. My fingers flew across the keyboard.

“I don't feel like breakfast” I said to Mother. “My tummy's all churned up”.

“It'll be even more churned up in the middle of the exam if you don't eat. You need Vitamin B”. Mother poured wheatgerm into my bowl and lifted my hand onto the milk jug.

Fortified with Mother's breakfast, I walked briskly to the station, passing the more relaxed office workers who knew, from the sound of the train in the distance, that it would arrive in exactly two and a half minutes. I checked the contents of my music case several times–a note to my form master, explaining my absence, a list of pieces to give the examiner, and all my music books. “I know it's all there” I said, shaking my head, “but I have to keep checking”.

In the crowded train I was offered a few inches on the edge of a seat. I accepted it as a compliment, but my small knees were buffeted with the build-up of human cargo. Then a jerky bus ride provided a different kind of test for my fingers, as I hung on grimly to the straps.

The long, narrow windows of the imposing examination building were slightly open. I put a hand behind my ear, but could not hear a sound. Inside, the musty smell of an old red carpet and high, dark walls made me feel like an unwelcome stranger. I walked up the stairs to a bleak waiting room, where everyone spoke in whispers, as though it were a funeral parlour.

The supervisor, who looked as cold as the room, took my identification sheet. She read it through, then looked at me without any change in facial expression. “That seems to be correct” she said.

In a far corner of the room sat Miss Grant, looking more sombre than usual. “I didn't know you were going to be here” I said, taking a seat beside her.

“I always come to hear my students play” a sad voice replied.

“That must be a real ordeal for you, having to listen to all of us. Can you hear everything from out here?”

“Unfortunately yes” she said, wincing as the sound of a wrong note came through the examination room door. “I usually feel sick the whole time”. I felt like patting her arm, but as I had never touched her before, I was not sure what the response would be. Despite her strange manner, Miss Grant was an amazing person.

The door opened and a young girl in a white dress emerged. Her eyes were red and she was holding a crumpled handkerchief. “I won't be like that at the end of my exam” I said to Miss Grant, “unless of course the examiner's a monster”.

“You can go in now”. The supervisor mouthed the words, with barely a sound escaping her lips.

Miss Grant and I exchanged reassuring glances as I tiptoed in to the examination room. The sun was streaming in through a high window on to the desk where the examiner was busily writing. She looked up and smiled, her soft green eyes reaching out in welcome. We chatted for a few minutes, and to my surprise I found myself relaxing.

“Could you play me the scale of D major?” asked the examiner in a voice so gentle she could have been hushing a baby to sleep. The easy opening scale was followed by some harder ones. I was not afraid of any of them, I had practised them all so many times.

The tones of the piano were richer than I was used to, and my first piece sounded even better to my ears. Then I lifted the book of Two Part Inventions on to the music rack. The great composer had become my friend. I looked into his eyes again and it felt as though our souls had become one. As I began to play the piece, I felt I was being taken over by a greatness I could not understand. At the end I looked across at the examiner, who seemed to be in a trance.

After such an experience I felt that nothing could go wrong, but soon came the moment I had been dreading. The examiner placed a piece of music in front of me. It was the sight-reading test.

I thought of my previous exam, when in my impatience I had begun playing the piece without looking at the key signature. At the end of the first line I realised something was wrong. Without asking the examiner – a man on that occasion – I played the piece again, this time with the two required flats, but at such a speed that my fingers fell over each other. It was humiliating to think about it. I would not make that mistake now.

“Take your time” said a calm voice. How could the lovely examiner know that I needed such a warning? I looked at the piece. It had only one sharp, and was just crotchets and quavers. This was too good to be true. For some inexplicable reason I felt the examiner must have taken a liking to me, as I played the piece like an expert.

“We'll do the aural tests now”. She sat at the piano and I removed myself the required distance. Each time I gave the correct answer, the lovely lady's face beamed. She was an angel.

By the end of the examination I felt as though I was floating. I was determined to have this experience again and again. If only I could get the beautiful lady each time! We said goodbye and I hurried through the door to find out my teacher's reaction.

The smile on my face disappeared as I looked across the room. The creases in that worn forehead had become furrows. Had the performance made her ill? Were there some wrong notes? Miss Grant looked up, and a light from an unknown source seemed to erase the lines of care.

“You did very well” she whispered. I let out a huge sigh, then quickly put my hand over my mouth. The supervisor glared. I apologised, mimicking the lady's voiceless lips.

“Thank you for everything Miss Grant” I said in subdued excitement, as I tiptoed out of the room.

I raced down the stairs, singing at the top of my voice. I didn't care about the supervisor. And I even forgot about Father. Perhaps God had felt sorry for me and had given me a break. Whatever it was, I would try to remember that, at least for one glorious day, everything was on my side.

# CHAPTER 15

In the eyes of God and of my parents, I did not measure up. But as far I was concerned, God's standards were outrageous. Nothing less than perfection satisfied him, but no one could attain it. An individual's best efforts counted for nothing. “All our righteousness is as filthy rags” the Bible said. Humanity could not win. Well, so much for God. But unlike the Creator and the impossibility of meeting his standards, my parents said I had within me the resources to meet theirs – particularly that of gentle acquiescence. I was born female. Therefore I had to be that kind of person. I fell short. My behaviour was 'masculine'.

I believed my ticket to partial acceptance – by my parents, not by God – was achievement, as long as it did not involve any display of 'aggression'. Mother and Father always acknowledged competence. Was there something else I could do? If I could keep on achieving, perhaps their attention would be directed away from my failure as a female to my success as a human being.

“They're looking for new choir members” said our musical next-door neighbour. “Why don't you have a go?”

“But wouldn't I have to pass an audition?”

“Yes, but you're a musician. You wouldn't have any trouble”. If only my voice hadn't sounded like a frog with bronchitis.

I remembered the first time I heard the Queensland State and Municipal Choir. “What's that lovely music?” I asked.

“It's Handel's 'Messiah'”. Father monitored the family radio. Only religious programs were allowed on Sundays. No sport – not even the news. On other days the programs had to be appropriate for a Christian household. Handel's music passed the test.

I thought of our local church choir. The sopranos wobbled, the tenors screeched, and the basses were behind the beat. But this choir was different. How I would love to sing under a great conductor. But what if I failed the test?

The City Hall. Massive Greek columns. World-famous artists. Thunderous applause. Burial ground for failures. From near the fountain in King George Square, I looked at the awesome building. Its great tower surveyed the city, like an ancient king his kingdom. The giant white clock struck six, obliterating the sounds of sirens, bells and motors. All around the square, the pigeons, having feasted on afternoon scraps, were cooing their thanks. What unchallenged lives they led. No one tested *their* ability to create pure tone. Could I bear it if my vocal chords were found wanting?

Slowly I walked up the broad stairway and stopped beside a column. There was still time to go home. No one would ever know. But could I live with myself if I acted like a coward? My heart was pounding as I approached the audition room at the end of the corridor. The sound of a silvery tenor floated through the door. I thought of my own meagre vocal capacities. My throat began to dry, and then it tightened. The door opened and the proud tenor walked briskly out. What was I doing there? I must have lost my senses.

“I'm so pleased you've come”. Alfred Grice, the conductor, smiled at me. “This won't be painful at all”. How could he tell I wanted to flee? He gave me a music sheet, but my

shaking hands made it difficult for my eyes to focus. Mr. Grice played the first note sounded. I opened my mouth, but nothing came out.

"Let's have another go". I just had to relax my throat muscles. A further attempt, but again no sound. Why had I put myself through this hell?

"One more time". A few croaky notes. My throat was choking. I submitted to fate.

"I'm so terribly sorry" I said, turning to leave the room. The gracious man looked at me with his kind eyes.

"You're one of Miss Grant's students, aren't you?"

"Yes" I said breathlessly. What was this all about? How did he know? And what difference did it make?

"I think we could have you in the choir".

"You mean I've passed?" It wasn't possible. It was a miracle!

"Thank you, thank you so much Mr. Grice". The words gushed out. "I haven't got much of a voice, but I will work terribly hard".

"I know you will" he said.

That wonderful man had done something I had never experienced before. He had put his faith in me against overwhelming evidence of my inadequacy. I resolved that I would never let him down.

The uniform for the ladies in the choir was a long white gown. I stood on the kitchen table as Mother adjusted the hem line of my first full-length dress. 'What a terrible existence she has' I thought. 'The sewing machine, the washing machine, the stove. No life of her own. Humiliated by the man she married and a slave to her children'.

Accepting Mother's hand, I lowered a foot to the chair. That rough, weather-beaten skin. What was it like when she was young and free? So talented she could have done anything. So lovely she could have married anyone.

Murray Walters. He belonged to the "high church" branch of the Church of England. Mother went to the Gospel Hall. They fell in love, and tried each other's churches. "I knew he was a believer" she said, "he was so devout. But those prayers to saints–and 'offering up Christ' at the communion service. It was so wrong."

"And what did he think of your church?"

"He couldn't believe he was actually in church. Couldn't stand it."

"So what happened?"

"Eventually we broke up. The pain ...." I looked into Mother's sad eyes. She deserved better than this. But if only she'd married Murray, I would have been a different person.

Sweet and gentle. None of those rotten Lewis genes. Perhaps such a father would have loved me almost as much as he loved Mother.

I surveyed my image in the long mirror in the hall. It was fitting for the City Hall stage. Mother had done a great job. “Thank you so much” I said, putting my arms around her. But Mother could not respond.

It was the night of the concert. I arrived early and walked up the wide marble stairway to the gallery. As a child I had played hide-and-seek there with my sisters. I loved the feel of the smooth, shapely cream balusters and the broad, shiny slab on top.

The concert hall structure was a circle, and everything in the building conformed to a circular pattern–stage, gallery and choir stalls. The roof formed a cream dome, with a golden circle at the base. The light seemed to reach down from heavenly spheres, drawing everything back to it in joyful embrace. I would soon be singing of the loving Father who dwelt above the stars and set them on their courses – the Ode to Joy, immortalised in Beethoven's Ninth Symphony.

The gallery and the main hall began to fill with music-lovers, subscribers and friends and families of choir members. I floated down the steps, along the corridor and into the assembly room, amid a sea of white gowns. Was I really here – with this choir of angels?

At the appointed time the choristers moved with dignity across the stage to the choir stalls, carrying their music in the prescribed manner. The overhead lights were dazzling. I blinked and lowered my eyes. Members of the symphony orchestra wandered in, adjusted their seats and music stands, and began to tune up. I was almost on top of them. So much better than my usual position – in the cheap seats at the back of the hall.

The visiting conductor made his entrance, and the choir and the orchestra stood. After the customary acknowledgements, the choir sat and the performance began. I looked at the conductor, then at the instrumentalists. Unlike choristers, they didn't seem to look at him very often. Perhaps as professional musicians, they didn't need to. The third movement ended and the choir stood.

My heart was pounding. It wasn't an audition and I wasn't playing in public. What was I scared of?  If I sang, I might spoil it. I would just open my mouth and pretend. But rich contralto sounds engulfed me. I wanted to be a part of it – to add my small contribution to the great chorus. Mesmerised by the conductor, I forgot the printed page, pouring out my heart and soul in the Song of Joy.

The audience exploded. The conductor and soloists bowed and the orchestra was acknowledged. Then a black-coated arm pointed to the choir. “Bravo!” The cries rang out from the audience above the applause. People stood in their seats. I longed to acknowledge it – to wave, or bow, or smile. The conductor and soloists returned to the stage again and again. Would the applause ever cease?

There was no one at the City Hall to tell me I had done well. But it didn't matter. I was part of a triumph. “Brothers, run your race as a hero going to conquest” I had just sung. Did I really need the approval of anyone? Joy was at the heart of the universe. And the loving Father wanted me to be happy.

# CHAPTER 16

“God is our refuge and strength”. Non-reflecting glass covered the text on the cream painted wall above the piano. The words sat easily, surrounded by a floral border. When thundered by a preacher with a B.A. B.D. they even sounded convincing. 'But where was God' I thought, 'when Father reached for the cane?' That exalted Being was not my refuge. He was nowhere to be found. According to Father, God had dictated every word in the Bible, which told him he had to bring his children up “in the discipline of the Lord”. Beating his eldest daughter he therefore saw as the work of God. So the Being was there after all, causing pain to my body.

Was it worth believing in this kind of God? The Bible said a non-believer would suffer in hell for ever. One lifetime's sins and the offender was punished for billions of years. That kind of justice would hardly be worthy of a corrupt dictator. I lowered my eyes from the text to my new piece open on the music rack. Chopin's Revolutionary Study. So many revolutions in human history. Innocent people slaughtered. Why should I expect to escape injustice?

“This piece is to strengthen your left hand” Miss Grant had said. It looked horribly difficult. I was relieved it was only an exercise.

The piano was against the wall dividing the lounge from the kitchen. As I advanced in my music studies, the volume of sound echoing through the wall increased.

“That noise is going right through my head” Mother complained. Even with the door closed, her hearing aid distorted the sound.

“I'll cover the strings inside the piano with a sheet, so the hammers will only produce a dull thud”. I rummaged through the bottom shelf of the linen cupboard and found an old sheet covered with scorch marks. Then I jammed it at either end of the piano lid hinge and let it fall over the strings. The noise level was greatly reduced, but the action of the keys did not feel right to my fingers.

“I'm sorry Mother” I said. “It won't work”.

“Well you'll just have to cut down on your hours of practice”.

“That's impossible!” I said. “You're always telling us that it's not worth doing anything unless you can do it well”.

“But other students don't drive their families mad the way you do”.

“They don't have to work as hard. They're more musical than I am and their hands are stronger”.

“It's no good trying to reason with you. You're just so pig-headed”. Mother walked out of the room. I knew she hated arguments, but the present problems I regarded as her fault. It had all begun with a conflict a few years earlier, which determined the course of my life.

“You're going to leave school at the end of the year” Father declared.

“But I'm only sixteen. I want to finish high school and become a teacher”.

“Definitely not” said Mother. “You're too aggressive already. No man will ever want you the way you are. And you're too intelligent for your own good. If a woman has brains, she has to hide them. Being a teacher would just encourage you to air your opinions”.

“You can get a job in an office” Father added. “In that kind of environment you'll have to keep quiet and do as you're told”.

“I see!” I glared at him. “In other words you want me to become a nothing –perhaps lose the skill of being able to challenge you”.

“Do you want a belting now?” said Father. The question ensured my silence.

“You don't have to become a nothing” said Mother. “You can concentrate on your music and do your letters”.

“They're not called 'letters' Mother. It's a diploma”.

“Oh well, whatever it's called. You know that all you girls have to qualify at something.”

“Yes I know that. But I have more intelligence than musical ability. Surely God would want me to concentrate on the area where he has given me the skills.”

“In the first Epistle of Peter it says a woman must have a gentle and quiet spirit. That hardly describes you, does it?” Father looked at me with contempt. I held my body rigid. Father and God–a punitive combination. I had been cheated of the only career I had ever wanted – all because I had been born with the wrong kind of personality. A result of this misfortune was years of drudgery in the Commonwealth Public Service, where I typed out the questions people had missed on their application forms. But outside office hours, my main focus was music. Day after day, for eighteen months, I battled with the Chopin. Eventually it was note-perfect – but nothing more.

“Do you think my left hand is a bit stronger now?” I asked Miss Grant.

“Yes it is” she said. “In fact I want you to play this at my student recital”. I could not believe it! The piece was technically beyond me. My teacher had deceived me, and was now giving me an impossible burden.

“I can't do it, Miss Grant. After all this time I still can't play it at the correct speed. It'd sound terrible”.

“Of course you can. You've got a few more months to work on it. It'll be all right”. From the tone in her voice, which at times reminded me of Father's, I realised the discussion had ended. Yet again, I thought, someone in authority is demanding that I do the impossible.

At 5.06 pm on the day of the recital, I removed my carefully-protected dress from a cupboard in the office. It was an embroidered light blue satin – one of Mother's special efforts. I folded it over my right arm, used my left hand to clock-off, then walked down the steps. I wouldn't risk getting the dress squashed in the rush-hour lift.

Tram after tram flashed its way across Victoria Bridge in a silver blur, long black rods drawing power from the lines above as the sparks showered. I watched motorists playing

mind games with pedestrians, each claiming prior right to the roadway between the footpath and the safety zone. To me, trams were cold, heartless things. I hated the constant stopping and starting and the struggle people had to get to the door. The drivers in their sealed-off boxes were immune from the sounds of irate passengers, when their inept handling of the controls threw the strap-hangers on top of each other. I tried to stroll along Queen Street, but I was soon pulled along by the rush-hour crowd.

The basement of the City Hall had a shower room for ladies. The smell of steam and perfumed soap welcomed me as I handed a sixpence to the attendant, whose straight grey hair was parted down the middle and dragged back behind her ears.

"Would you like a towel, love?" Her smile revealed crooked, blackened teeth. Looking at the old lady, I was grateful to Mother for sending me to the South Brisbane Dental Hospital to have my teeth straightened. Beneath the shower, I felt a bond with all the other weary office workers, as they washed away the reminders of their lowly status. Here they could come alive again, throw off their drab uniforms, and admire the reflection of their unacknowledged beauty.

I emerged from this process of transformation in the belief that Mother would consider my appearance "appropriate for the occasion". I would now practise an elegant walk along Adelaide Street, in place of my usual ungainly dash. The peak hour scramble of bodies had given way to the more leisurely stroll of dinner suits and evening gowns. I felt at home in this company until I turned into Edward Street. On the edge of the footpath a bedraggled man was leaning against the metal serving counter of a pie stall, a bottle of beer in one hand and a pie in the other. Should I join him to get a cheap meal? What would Mother say? I edged closer towards the fragile structure, looking around to make sure there was no one I knew who could report my inelegant choice. I stood at the opposite end of the pie stall from the only other patron, but the smell of alcohol almost obliterated the more wholesome aroma of meat and gravy, peas and tomato sauce. The man behind the counter looked at my dress. "You'd better not spill anything on that," he said, raising a finger in warning. He placed the pie on a tin plate, and I tilted my body forwards.

The venue for the recital was the Albert Hall near King George Square. At 7 p.m. I walked up the steps to the foyer, where Mother was chatting with a group of ladies. In the perfumed air were gowns of chantung, brocade and chiffon, a string of cultured pearls, a marquisite brooch, clutch bags and stoles. A brown fur with a fox's head rested across a lady's shoulder. The dark, shiny eyes looked into mine. They belonged in the wild. Part of me belonged there too.

"Have you had dinner, dear?" Mother asked.

"Well… yes". I was frantic, trying to signal to Mother for the questioning to stop.

"Where did you go?" she asked, not reading my strange facial expressions.

"Oh, just down Edward Street".

"Are there any restaurants in that part of the city?" Mother was trying to picture the area.

“Well no.. I…um…” My fast-moving brain had never let me down before. ‘Please, please, mind, think of something. Rescue me!’ But it had deserted me. I was alone.

“Well…I…I….went to a pie stall”.

“You actually ate at a pie stall in your lovely dress!” Mother could not hide her embarrassment, shaking her head as she closed her eyes. The others laughed.

“I was careful” I said, still trying to think of an excuse.

“What a delightful daughter you have” said the lady with the fox's head. “She's such an original.” My humiliation was complete.

The group accepted programmes from a boy in a white shirt and bow tie, and walked down the aisle of the auditorium in a manner befitting ladies who do not frequent pie stalls.

Miss Grant wore a sequined floor-length pink gown. She sat to the left of the stage, just out of sight of the audience. Despite her attire, her facial expression displayed the kind of anguish she experienced every year, with her self-imposed ordeal in the music examination waiting room.

The first student ran up the steps and played a simple piece. He took a brisk bow, turned and ran down again. I was waiting for him in the shadows. “That sounded lovely” I said. “I'm organising a surprise presentation to Miss Grant. Would you like to make a contribution?”

“I'll ask Mum” he replied, as I watched to see where 'Mum' was located. A similar request was made to each performer, and the donations flowed in.

Between my money-collecting activities, I walked up the steps to play my Chopin study. Having worked on it for two years, I did not need the music. But with the brilliant stage lights, the gleaming Steinway and the sight of the audience out of the corner of my eye, I longed for the familiar sight of the well-worn pages.

The applause was generous and I was relieved. Yet I had not measured up to my own standards. I could not play the Chopin the way the professionals did. It didn't sound “right”. What was I doing, pretending to be a pianist?

The final student played a Beethoven sonata. I could hardly suppress the feelings of envy that flooded over me as I marvelled at the brilliance of the player's technique. “That was magnificent” I said, as the talented girl reached the bottom of the stairs. “Would you be willing to make a presentation to Miss Grant on behalf of all her students?”

“I'd love to” she said, with the charm of an accomplished artist. “No one has ever done that for Miss Grant before”. I handed her the huge sheaf of flowers I had bought for our teacher that day.

The star of the recital enticed Miss Grant out on to the stage. I moved back along the aisle to watch the presentation. The intensity of the applause convinced me, just for a moment, that Father was wrong. Despite everything he said about me, I was a good person.

I walked back to the foyer, where the ladies were making appropriate noises of commendation to Mother, who smiled in appreciation. “I guess there are compensations for having a headstrong daughter” she said.

Overall I felt the evening had been a success. But was it worth it?  Two years' work – all over in a few minutes. Why did I drive myself so hard? And why couldn't I somehow be superhuman and do better than my best? At home my best was unacceptable. If only I could be a better person I would pass the test. But I had to find out what the test was all about, or whether my inadequacies had destined me to be a never-ending failure.

# CHAPTER 17

‘Thank goodness I'll never have to ride in this wonky lift again’. I was visiting Miss Grant after my Trinity College Associate diploma examination. It would not be an easy parting. The smell of the old musty room greeted me for the last time as my teacher opened her felt-covered door.

“You look happy enough” she said.

“Well I enjoyed it. John Symons is a delightful English gentleman. But the poor man was stuck somewhere out in the country where he'd been examining and he was two hours late. Another girl and I had a long go on the piano. We were lucky the supervisor was in a good mood”.

“I was sorry I couldn't be there this time. How was your playing?”

“No wrong notes. But I thought I'd blown it in the teaching section when he asked what Beethoven I would give a beginner. I kept on saying ‘Beethoven, Beethoven’ as though I was calling up his spirit. I don't know whether the great master heard me or not, but I had a flash. ‘Oh! I suppose he wrote some sonatinas’”.

“Just as well you thought of it”.

“Yes, it was a near thing. The examiner seemed as relieved as I was. The way he said ‘Indeed Beethoven *did* write some sonatinas’ – there was something in the tone of his voice. I felt I'd made it.”

“I'm sure you have”.

“Miss Grant, I want to thank you for all the help you have given me over so many years”.

“You sound as though you're leaving me!”

I stared at her. “I thought you knew that”.

“No, I didn't. I expected you to stay with me and do a Licentiate diploma. I think you owe me that”.

I took a deep breath and looked up on top of the piano. Photographs of Miss Grant's Licentiate and Fellowship graduates were smiling at me. Yes, I owed her a debt of gratitude, but not another diploma. I didn’t belong to that brilliant lot up there.

“I think I’ve done enough exams. I don't want to be a piano teacher, and in any case I don't have the technical ability to go any higher”.

“So you're going to forget about music?”

“Oh no. For some time I've been thinking about learning an instrument that has always fascinated me – the pipe organ”.

“I see. Well I guess that's better than nothing. As a Bach lover you should do well at it. Where will you go?”

“‘I think I'll try Archie Day”.

“Dear Archie”. Miss Grant's voice was unusually tender. “You'll like him”. She stood abruptly and walked to the door, preparing to sever a bond with a student who had done her best – perhaps more than her best – with her limited ability. The two of us had not become friends, but there was deep respect between us.

“Good luck in whatever you do”. I felt the pain in her voice. There was a pang in my own heart also as I said goodbye. I walked slowly out and heard the door click behind me. Perhaps Miss Grant would actually miss me. That thought had not occurred to me before. I always believed that even my own parents would be glad to get rid of me.

Later that day I sat at the dining room table to compose a letter to Mr. Day. I thought of the strange things that had happened at that table. On Sundays at lunch time, it was the scene of competition between our parents, though Mother would never have acknowledged that, even to herself. Each week she would seek out the lonely and the stranger at church and invite them home to lunch. On the previous Sunday the guests had been an engineer and his wife from England. After an exchange of pleasantries, Mother asked about their children.

“We have a son and a daughter. They're both at university.”

“Are they….”

“What do you think about the doctrine of divine election?” Father's booming voice obliterated the enquiry.

“Well... I think... perhaps.... there are various ways of looking at it” said the engineer, looking helplessly at his wife.

“This is how I see it” said Father, as he began one of his endless monologues. I felt like crawling under the table as I looked at Mother's face. The light had gone out of her eyes, and I could almost hear an inward sigh. I would probably never marry, but if I did, I would not tolerate that kind of behaviour from any man. But then what man other than Father would be like that?

I filled my fountain pen with Quink blue. Should I try to impress my prospective teacher – or perhaps he would require me to audition. A person of his status, who held the title of City Organist, could afford to be choosy about students. I outlined my examination results for piano and the theory of music. In the latter I had topped the State.

A few days after I posted the letter, the phone rang. “Mr. Day says he'll take me!” I called out, running through the house.

“Where do you have to go for lessons?” asked Deborah.

“Albert Street Methodist. It's the most beautiful church you could ever imagine”.

With her narrow spire, the church stood tall like a stately lady, her dress of rich red brick trimmed with squares of cream stone. She looked across to King George V, by the grace of God, Defender of the Faith, sitting in bronze upon his horse in the centre of the Square that bore his name. Each Saturday afternoon the bells of the church pealed for couples who had pledged their love. It was a setting from which love seemed to flow. Steeply sloping galleries along three sides of the building created a feeling of intimacy. Organ pipes in blue and gold spread across the sanctuary wall. In front of the pipes were the choir stalls in a semi-circle, with the organ console in the centre.

The side door was open as I arrived at the church for my first lesson. Soft music was playing and I waited in a front pew. The sound seemed to come from another dimension, permeating every cell in my body. Tears filled my eyes as I allowed the music to embrace my innermost being. My mind went back to a service I had attended there a few years earlier. What a contrast between that and our church at Walka. I was tired of hearing that people would go to hell if they did not repent. There was nothing of that at this church. At Walka I felt judged; here I felt caressed. It was a different kind of God. I did not tell Mother and Father how I felt about that service. They had only grudgingly allowed me to go. “We don't think the gospel is preached there”, Mother had said. “These ‘liberal’ churches just talk about making the world a better place. They never address the real issue – human sinfulness.” I hardly needed to go to church to hear about my sinfulness. At home it was the main topic of conversation.

“Come on up”. A bright, cheery voice broke the spell.

My new teacher had a lively face, a deep sun tan and thick white hair. His movements were quick and he spoke in short, clipped sentences.

“Slide along the organ stool. But don't tread on the pedals”. I looked down and noticed that the pedals were in the same form as the notes on the keyboard, only much larger.

“Yes, they are all notes. They're kept highly polished. Your feet have to move across them easily. You will have to get special organ shoes. Don't wear them anywhere else. Dancing shoes are the best”.

“All those stops!  And three keyboards!”  I smiled with delight.

“They're called manuals. The fundamental one, in the middle, is the Great. The one above is the Swell. The lower one is the Choir”.

“What do you do with three manuals?”

“Each one has different tone qualities. It depends on the stops you select. These stops here, for example, relate to the Swell.”

“How about the pedal notes. Do they have stops?”

“Yes, they're over here”.

“And what are all those buttons just below the keys?”

“They're called pistons. Press one of them. See what happens”. I pressed piston 4 and an array of stops popped out.

“Now play a chord”. I did so, and majestic sound filled the building. A chill went up my spine.

“That is magnificent!” I could hardly believe I had created it.

“Organ playing has to be legato – smooth, connected. There's no sustaining pedal as there is on the piano. Decide what fingers to use to get a good legato. Then write them down under each note”.

The lesson went so smoothly and pleasantly, I could hardly believe it was a man who was teaching me. My experiences with male authority figures up until then had aroused only anger and fear. Mr. Day gave me hope that I could relate to a man without alienating him, and that I could even enjoy the experience.

At my first practice I studied the exercises for the pedals. Different signs above or below the note indicated whether it would be played by the right toe, right heel, left toe or left heel. Positioning my body on the organ stool created a problem. If I sat comfortably, my legs could not reach both ends of the pedal board, but when I sat right on the edge of the seat I was likely to fall off.

“Well how did it go?” Mother seemed delighted I was studying the organ. I would be of use in the church.

“It's terribly hard playing the pedal notes without looking at them. It's like learning to touch type, only when you get it wrong it's a horrible sound”.

“But how do you find where the notes are?”

“Well your toe has to feel for the gap between the groups of the three black notes and the two black notes. Except that on the pedal board they're not painted black. The worst thing is that you often miss a note and finish up pressing two together”.

“You play the piano so well. I know you'll be brilliant on the organ. But it does seem a big instrument for such a little body”.

Mother was so full of encouragement, even though she was not in the least musical. I thought perhaps that was a reason she wanted me to excel. But there was one good thing about learning the organ. Never again would Mother have to endure endless hours of reverberation through the lounge/kitchen wall.

# CHAPTER 18

"Now comes the hard part" said Mr. Day. "Organ music has three staves, two for your hands and the bottom one for your feet. The problem comes with your left hand. It's used to playing the lowest notes on the page, so it keeps trying to do so." I was puzzled. If the left hand knew it had to play the middle stave, why would it want to do anything else?

"You don't believe me? Well try this". Mr. Day produced a simple exercise in two staves. "Now play the top one with your left hand and the bottom one with your feet".

"That looks like a Grade 1 piece!"

"Have a go". He gave me a knowing smile. The first note on each stave was a C. That was easy. The second note went up to a D for the left hand and down to a B for the feet.

"I can't believe this. My left hand refuses to play a D. It keeps going down to a B. I must be going crazy".

"No you're not. You'll feel crazy for about six months. Then your brain will be reprogrammed". I could understand why so many pianists discontinued their organ studies. But I was going to master it, no matter what.

"It's for you" said Father, holding the phone. "The Trinity College office". My diploma examination had been several months ago, so I wondered why were they ringing me now.

"Listen to this everyone!" I called out, dropping the receiver. "I've topped the State in my piano diploma. They'll give me an award, but only if I play one of my exam pieces at a prize winners' concert in three weeks' time. I have to let them know".

"That would be a fitting reward for all your hard work". Father's tone was unusually kind. The only time he seemed to appreciate me was when I had done something worthwhile. He liked the fact that, without being asked, I would mow the front lawn and trim the edges, that I helped him build the retaining wall for the bottom terrace, and that together we had painted the outside of the house. For that task he had built some sturdy scaffolding, but the back of the house was so high, I was terrified to look down. My painting outfit was an old shirt of his that reached to half way down my thighs.

"You look like nothing on earth!" said Grandma Denham, who spent most days of the week helping Mother make our clothes.

"Nothing on earth, nothing in heaven, but something somewhere else", replied Father, in one of his rare playful moods.

The opportunity to perform at the concert caused me a problem. I had not touched the piano since the day I said goodbye to Miss Grant. Thinking that I would have no further use for my music, I had offered it to her, but she was so upset about my giving up the piano, I eventually decided to keep it. I knew this would be the most critical audience I would face in my life. Because I had always hated performing, I usually managed to escape it, apart from the occasional Sunday School concert at which Father commanded me to play. This time any wrong note would be a disaster. I thought about each of my pieces – Bach, Haydn, Chopin. Which of them would hold together best under the stress of performance? Within a few

minutes I was on the phone again. “I will play at your concert. Bach's Prelude and Fugue in C Minor, Book II.”

“I thought I'd heard the last of that piece” said Mother in mock exasperation, as the familiar notes of the Prelude she had listened to for eighteen months once more resounded through the kitchen wall.

I rang Mr. Day to give him the news and to cancel the following three lessons. Organ and piano techniques were quite different, and in any case I wanted to devote every second to a perfect performance of my beloved Bach.

A fortnight later, the examination office rang again. At the end of the conversation I slammed down the phone. “Of all the stupid idiots! A week before the performance and they now tell me I can't play the Bach. The Licentiate winner wants to play it, and of course she gets priority.”

“Well if anyone can do the impossible, you can”. Mother could always lift my spirits.

It would have to be my Haydn sonata – more technically demanding than the Bach and only seven days to prepare it. I could not take time off work, so it was Haydn in the morning, Haydn in the evening, Haydn on Saturday – but never, of course, on Sunday.

The fateful afternoon arrived. I went in early and was dismayed to find the Albert Hall almost full. Why were so many people there? In the middle of the hall I could see the amazing Sisters from the All Hallows' Convent and their brilliant students. Had I gone mad? What had happened to my dread of audiences when I agreed to this ordeal?

Sweaty palms, racing pulse – I could cope with that. But my hands were shaking. I couldn't go through with it. But how to escape. A sudden illness? That was the coward's way out. I had to do it.

The concert began. Each of the grade prize winners gave an excellent performance. But an even higher standard would be expected from diploma winners. Walking up the steps to the stage, I took a sideways glance at the audience. ‘These people’, I thought, ‘are not here to enjoy a performance of Haydn. They're listening for every weakness – uneven runs, phrasing problems, timing problems, unobserved dynamics, poorly executed ritards – what else could they think up?’ I wanted the stage to collapse and bury me.

I adjusted the piano seat and placed my music on the rack. The first chord. It sounded all right. The second chord – no problems. Could I make it? It was legato, so I didn't have to raise my hands. ‘Thank you Haydn’, I said, ‘for writing it that way’. But the last page – I had forgotten about the staccato passage! I lifted my hands, but they came down on to the wrong notes. Catastrophe! More wrong notes. How could shaking hands get it right? Would I be able to finish the piece? Fortunately the last few lines were legato and I raced through them to the end. The audience applauded politely, but I wondered what were they thinking. 'How did such a dill get the prize?' '*My* student could have done far better.' 'I'll bet she did a teacher's diploma. They don't have to be good performers’.

I had done my best, but I sensed my audience was against me. If only I could have explained what had happened – that it was not my fault! But they would probably have told

me not to make excuses. That was the kind of thing Father would say. Well they could think what they liked.

Coming down from the platform, I saw the Licentiate winner approaching – a tall, fair-haired girl, slightly older than I was, who walked with an enviable composure. We acknowledged each other without speaking.

I heaved a deep sigh as I went back to my seat, wondering how the girl on stage would interpret the Bach I should have played. The first note sounded. I had never heard the piece before. Where was that program? I could not believe it! The girl was not playing my piece after all, but Bach's Prelude and Fugue in C Minor, Book I. All that pain because of someone else's incompetence. If only I could have put my hands around the throat of that office secretary! No, I'd have done it verbally. “Do you realise the humiliation you've caused me?” But the secretary would probably have been a nice person and become upset. Then I'd have felt guilty and apologised.

It was a dilemma I could not resolve. I wanted justice for myself, but I wanted people to like me. Life was so unfair. I was always being blamed for things that were not my fault. Even my fighting spirit, which Father condemned, I had inherited from him. I was supposed to be gentle, like Deborah and Mother, and just accept whatever was dished up to me. But to do that would be like giving up on life itself. I could not do it.

# CHAPTER 19

Ann Street Presbyterian Church sat on a grassy hill, which sloped steeply down to a busy city road. A broad concrete ramp was at the side. Twenty yards back from the front wall of the church, which contained the main entrance door, a section of the building extended out towards the ramp, thereby forming an L shape. It had large Gothic style doors. This entrance was near the front pews. Further in, an elevated area contained the pulpit in the centre and the choir stalls on either side. The organ was against the back wall. For three years I practised in the evening on this instrument.

Brisbane was having a heatwave and I had been in an air-conditioned office all day. Even to go home–to a house which caught whatever breeze there was, did not fill me with delight. But I could hardly bear the thought of going into a building that had been closed all day. “You have to stick at things” Mother would say. In our family, only physical incapacity was accepted as an excuse for non-performance of a duty–even when it was a self-imposed obligation.

I dragged my feet up the ramp and put my key into the lock. “Ouch!” I said, pulling my hand away. The metal had fired in the afternoon sun. I thought of poor Grandfather, spending all his working life stoking train engines. I wrapped a handkerchief around my fingers and pulled the door open. Hot, stale air escaped. Should I close the door? To do so would be like locking myself in an oven. But it would be dark before I had finished practising. The only building close by housed the church offices, which would soon be empty. The risk was too great. From inside I pulled the heavy door closed.

Above the organ was a large mirror, reflecting the small amount of light allowed in by the narrow windows. Raising a limp arm I switched on the fan at the side of the mirror, then used most of my remaining strength to lift the solid wooden cover. The power generated by the organ and its lights raised the temperature still further. My forehead felt wet, and looking up at my reflection, I smiled pitifully at my hair hanging in strings.

Although the organ was small in comparison with that at Albert Street Methodist, its tone was of high quality, and I was grateful to have the use of such a fine instrument. The little fan however was not equal to its task that night. Its tiny turbulence barely stirred the heavy air as my gratitude evaporated. I picked up a church news sheet which lay crumpled on the floor and waved it weakly. “This is hopeless” I said. “There must be a decent fan somewhere. I'm going to raid this building”. In a nearby kitchen I splashed myself with tepid water from the tap marked 'cold'. Then my dripping hands felt around in dark corners and unlocked cupboards. Tea-towels, crockery, saucepans, brass polish, brooms, rags–but nothing that felt like a fan. Perhaps I wasn't meant to practise that night. Yet to give up when the going was tough was not in my nature. I felt worthwhile only when I had achieved the impossible. The heat was just another challenge.

Back at the organ I opened a Mendelssohn sonata, stumbled through the first movement, and fell forward onto the lower keyboard. With the stops still on, it was a horrible sound. When my ears could stand it no longer, I raised my body and shouted into the empty church “I won't let this beat me!” as I stood up and strode to the door. Putting my fingers around the handle, I stopped. “Please God”, I prayed, “protect me”. I opened the door, and it was dark.

A faint breeze came in, and to cool myself I walked down the ramp to the footpath. People were passing in the street, taking no notice of me. Why would a person wander in to a church anyway, other than to pray or to admire the architecture? Leaving the door open this time, I returned to the organ and set the stops for the second movement of my sonata. I let out a cry. A large insect had landed on my left hand. “Get away!” I screamed as I grabbed the news sheet and brushed it off.

The church was silent. I sat motionless for several minutes and then took in a deep breath. Above the sound of the sigh I heard a creak. Most of the church was in darkness, but as I looked around I could see a shape a few rows from the front. It did not move. Picking up my handbag, I ran towards the door. Still the shape did not move. Was it someone asleep? I crept forward, but I now I could see right through the shape. I was staring at a shadow!

That was my last fright for the evening I decided. Nothing more would disturb me. But just to make sure, I coaxed my hot, tired legs up into the pulpit. It gave a commanding view of the dimly-lit building. What would it be like, I wondered, to address a large congregation? I opened the massive Bible and read aloud the opening verses of the Epistle to the Hebrews. Thrilling to the majesty of the words, I paused for effect at appropriate points and looked up from the page to imaginary people in the pews. As my voice echoed in the empty building, I began to understand why Father loved to preach. It was a feeling of power perhaps even greater than I experienced when filling Albert Street Methodist with the sound of my playing. I almost forgot my earlier fears, but I took one final look around the church, noting where the shadows were and listening for strange sounds. There were none.

In a relaxed state I could play my pieces properly. Each one was followed by a trip to the kitchen where I saturated my upper body. Back at the organ I looked up and laughed again at my reflection. Even if there were an intruder, what man would be interested in such a hideous sight? The emptiness of the building now gave me a feeling of peace. I was a child of God, in his church, preparing myself to do his work.

My pieces concluded, I flicked through the Presbyterian Hymn Book to practise some sight reading. I stopped suddenly. Floating above the smells of the building came an odour, distasteful and sharp. It startled me. What was it? The horrible smell of beer I remembered when passing the Walka pub. But how did it get into the church? My mind was racing. That smell could only come from once source – a human! I listened. Then gasped. Behind my left shoulder – the sounds of heavy breathing! My body froze.

“How are you tonight, love?” The voice sent terror right through my body. I could not move. I could not breathe. Frantic thoughts jostled one another in a scramble for acceptance. It was no use screaming–the street was too far away. I didn't think about God, or about praying for rescue. I needed a weapon. The metronome! That would make a dint on the man's skull. From the position of his voice, he didn't sound very tall. Another thought: should I try to reason with him? Or suggest that we go somewhere more comfortable? If I could get him out of the building, I might have a chance.

I waited. There was no movement. Nothing except the sound of that breathing and the smell of those horrible fumes. Slowly I turned my head. An unshaven man in bedraggled clothes stared at me. His eyes were bleary and he held himself upright by leaning on a choir stall. Was a man more or less dangerous when drunk? Coming from a family of teetotallers, I did not know.

“Why did you come in?” I asked. It seemed a silly question, but I couldn't think of anything else.

“I .... um .....I like ..... music.....Is this a big piano?”

He put an arm out and I thought he was going to grab me. I slid towards the far end of the organ stool and put my hand on the metronome. He looked straight at me. The corners of his mouth turned upwards. He was trying to smile!

At that moment I realised I would be incapable of striking him. It was not only that I had never hit anyone in my life, or that I hated violence because I had received so much of it. For the first time ever, I saw a man who was vulnerable. He needed something from me, but unlike Father and Mr. Stewart, he was not going to attack me to get it. I didn't know what he wanted, but a part of me longed to reach out to him.

He sat down on the organ stool with his back to the keys. He was too close to me. I panicked. “It's very hot” I said. “I'm going outside to get some air”. Pushing past his legs I dashed through the choir stalls, down the steps and out the door, then ran down the ramp to the brightly-lit footpath. Maybe God was looking after me. But where was my visitor? I turned around and saw him staggering towards me.

A middle-aged man in a business suit was passing. Should I call out for help? But that could be more dangerous. There was no one else on the footpath. I decided to run for the corner, but the drunk man had caught up with me. This time he was not smiling. “It's been nice meeting you” I said, “but I've got an exam soon, so I'd better go in and do some practice”. Without waiting for his response, I ran around him and back up the ramp, slammed the door and fell in a heap into the nearest pew. My heart was pounding and I was gasping for breath.

Eventually I stretched out full length on the polished timber and looked up at the unlit lights and the dark ceiling. The church had, throughout history, been seen as a place of refuge, but how shaky that refuge could be! With the door secured, I felt triumphant at having outwitted my visitor, but then I pictured him on the footpath, perhaps leaning against the fence. Maybe he was lonely, and seeing me was the high point of his day. Had I misjudged him? Should I have spoken kindly to him, or even taken him for a cup of coffee around the corner in Albert Street? I would never know.

The little fan was still churning and the organ lights invited me back, but I'd had enough for one night. After switching everything off and closing the heavy cover, I trudged towards the door I had slammed. Not wanting to see the man again, either through fear or guilt, I decided to take a different exit, but there was no sign of him.

Would he have hurt me? Probably not. But later, as I walked through my front gate, my dampened dress covered with soot from the train, a twenty-year-old organ student made a firm resolve, “I'll never leave that door open again!”

# CHAPTER 20

I had just come home from yet another late practice. It had not been very productive, but I didn't have the sense to stop and return another time when I was fresh. I flopped onto the settee. Father was at a meeting, Deborah was working and the young ones were in bed. I had Mother to myself.

"I have some important news for you" she said. "We're shifting to Melbourne."

"What?" I said, jerking my body upright. "Anyway, who's 'we'?"

"Well, your father and I, of course, and Ruth and Jennifer. You and Deborah will have to decide what you want to do."

"Why Melbourne of all places?"

"They offered him a position as Assistant Director of Evangelism."

"I suppose it's a promotion" I said cynically.

"Well he won't get much more money, but he feels there'll be greater scope for his talents in a large city."

"Does Deborah know?"

"She won't be off duty till tomorrow morning. I'll tell her then."

'So typically Father', I thought, 'not bothering to discuss it with Deborah and me. He probably just announced it to Mother too'.

But life without Father - what bliss! No more physical cruelty. No more humiliation in front of other people. No more verbal abuse. No more living in dread of his arrival home at night. I would be free! I began to think about the practical issues. Where would I live? I assumed the house would be let, or even sold if Father was a success down south. Would Grandma Lewis have me? Despite her dominating personality, she was not cruel - like her son. I laughed a lot when I was with her. Nothing she said made any sense, but she assumed the world agreed with her.

Yes, I would definitely stay in Brisbane, but not say anything in the meantime. I did not want to influence Deborah's decision, and I wanted to time my announcement to have the maximum effect on Father.

Breakfast the next morning was particularly tense. Deborah had just been told the news and she looked shaken.

"Have you thought of all the disruption to our lives?" I said to Father. "Changes of schools for Ruth and Jennifer - to say nothing of the loss of friendships?"

“Of course I've thought of everything” he replied. “You girls don't realise how much I think about you. Your Mother and I pray for you every night. But when God calls, his servant must obey - like the Old Testament prophets.”

“Well Deb, what do you think of that?” I asked as soon as we were alone.

“As though he hasn’t caused us enough problems already!”

“What will you do then? Will you stay at the General?”

“I might be able to finish my training at a hospital in Melbourne. The whole thing is such a nuisance.”

I gave a lot of thought as to how I would announce my decision. I pictured the look on Father's face. He probably believed that since no man would ever want me, he would control me till he died. Well he would have to think again. The hour of my triumph was approaching.

After dinner that night, when Father seemed in a tolerable mood, I looked straight at him.

“I have something to tell you. I have lived ‘under your roof’ as you call it, for twentytwo years. I have been subject to your attacks, both verbal and physical, more than any other girl I have ever known. I do not accept that I am more evil than everyone else. When you go to Melbourne I will not come with you. I will live the rest of my life as I choose to, and there's nothing you can do about it.”

“You won't last five minutes! Who would want you anyway?”

“I've always been happy staying with Grandma Lewis when you've been on holidays.”

“I can easily put a stop to that” he sneered.

“You sound as though you’ll actually miss me!”

“That's nothing to do with it. You need my guidance.”

“Well whether I need it or not, I won't be there to get it.”

I went to bed with a feeling of elation I had never experienced before. I had been strong enough to stand up to him - to tell him exactly what I thought of him! If I could do that, I could do anything.

Mother woke me the next morning with my orange juice. She seemed worried. Was it that she thought I couldn't survive on my own? Mother and my sisters were the only security I had ever known. I had always found it extremely difficult making friends. Also, although Mother and I were not close, she did everything she could to make life easy for me at a practical level - washing, ironing, sewing. I was too embarrassed to tell anyone outside the family how she spoilt me. And despite her inability to love me the way I needed her to, she disciplined herself to be interested in what I was doing and to spend time talking to me. It

even seemed on some occasions that when I was upset, she shared the feeling with me. What she really thought of me I could never fathom.

"You don't think I can make it by myself, do you?"

"That's not true! You're an intelligent girl. You could easily manage all the things I do for you." There were tears in her eyes. She wanted me to go with her!

Throughout the day I began to think, not about life without Father, but life without Mother and the girls. Was I really strong enough to face the world alone? It was not the practical tasks that worried me. It was the feeling of having no boundaries, no reference points, no one to tell me I was right or wrong. What if I made a mistake - messed up a relationship? Who would bail me out? Who would comfort me the way Mother could? Life outside Father's prison suddenly seemed terrifying. But I had already announced my decision. I couldn't go back on it now. That would be the ultimate humiliation.

I said nothing for several days. Father ignored me, looking in a different direction whenever we were in the same room. Mother was quiet. I didn't know what she was thinking.

One afternoon I looked at her intently, and something deep inside me snapped. I knew I had to have her by my side.

"I will go with you" I said quietly.

"That's nice" she replied, without any display of emotion. I was desperately disappointed that she had not reacted with pleasure, but then I wondered whether she secretly thought I had made the wrong decision. Perhaps if she had been me, she would have jumped at the chance to escape.

"I'm not going to tell Father yet" I said. "Could you do it for me, but leave it till the last possible minute? He'll be insufferable when he finds out he's won."

"I knew you'd come to your senses" said Father a few days later. At least Mother had tried to wait, but perhaps her conscience had got the better of her.

My immediate task was to find a competent organ teacher in Melbourne. I had done well in my grade examinations for the organ, and I was planning to do my Associate Diploma the following year. I would want a teacher whom I liked as well as Mr. Day. I certainly did not want another man like Father in my life. I heard about an Italian organist, Mario Rizzo, who taught at a large Church of England church in the city. Several of his students had done well at diploma level, and I decided to give him a try.

Over the next few weeks, while we were busy packing, Mother seemed to be lost in her own thoughts. I would have given anything to know what they were, but Mother had a way of barring any intrusion into her private world.

On the day of our departure we waved goodbye to our cream-painted home. Apart from all the pain we had known there, the four of us could remember times of happiness, when we created a magic world in which Father's prohibitions and punishments were temporally forgotten.

Our means of transport to Melbourne was by train. The overnight journey to Sydney began at South Brisbane Station, where we found the train waiting for us. It was so strange to see the rear of the guard's van backed up against a platform. This meant the train could only go in one direction – away from our home. It carried the insignia of the State of New South Wales, but it could easily have passed for the local variety. The next day in Sydney however we changed to the "Spirit of Progress", which for us was another world. There was so much space, and the soft colours of the walls and seats were such a contrast to the Queensland browns and blacks. We were expecting the familiar jolt to begin our journey, but did not realise we were moving until we saw the people on the platform disappearing.

The four of us explored as much of the train as we were allowed to, then after a while stuck our noses to the windows to catch our first glimpse of sheep. We had never been to a rural area and fell in love with the little white shapes spread out across the grassy hills. They barely seemed to move, except for the few who found themselves a little too close to the flying rattler.

Our journey ended in Melbourne at Spencer Street Station. I was expecting it to be like Central in Brisbane, but the mass of criss-crossing tracks indicated that this was indeed a big city. No wonder Father wanted to make his mark in it. A friend with a station wagon drove us to our new home in North Balwyn. Like all the other houses we could see, it was brick. In Brisbane only rich people had brick homes.

While the rest of us were unpacking, Father spread out maps and timetables on the only floor area not covered with our belongings.

“We'll have to be in bed early” he said. “To get to the church tomorrow we have to take two buses. We'll leave at eight o'clock.”

“Oh Peter!” said Mother, in a tone of exasperation normally reserved for her children. “Surely we could try one of local churches – just till your car arrives.”

“No” he replied. “"This is the place where I need to be. I must make myself known immediately.”

After the service the following morning, Father introduced himself to the minister, David Landel, who greeted him warmly. He was in his early thirties, though his demeanour carried the authority of a much older man. I was next to Father, but he made no attempt to introduce me.

“I heard about your appointment” said Mr. Landel, shaking Father's hand. “We're so pleased you’ve decided to join us. This must be your daughter” he said, looking at me and smiling. As well as a pleasant manner, Mr. Landel had a voice like a radio announcer's. It was such a contrast to the sound of Father's harsh, scratchy tone. Surely he would now have the sense to try to moderate it.

“Until I'm better known in the churches” said Father, obviously unaware of what he sounded like, “I'd appreciate being able to preach here whenever you could arrange it.”

Mr. Landel looked stunned. “We have quite a number of preachers in the circuit. I couldn't guarantee you anything on a regular basis.”

“Well whatever you can manage, I'd be grateful. I've been told that this is an evangelical church. I trust my information is correct.”

“We... we do preach the gospel” replied the minister, a little taken aback.

“Do you make appeals?” asked Father, with a tone of urgency.

“You mean invite people to come forward down the aisles - Billy Graham style?”

“Yes of course” said Father. “What other way is there?”

Mr. Landel sighed. “Perhaps Melbourne people are a little more reserved than you are up north” he said with a smile.

Father would not be put off. “So you don't give any invitations at all?”

“I didn't say that” the minister replied in an even tone. “I tell the congregation that they can see me in the vestry at any time after the service.”

“And how many do?” snapped Father.

“From time to time, quite a few”.

“The New Testament demands a public confession of faith” Father said in a peremptory tone.

“The Confirmation Service *is* such a confession.” Mr. Landel sounded as though he was about to put Father in his place. I was looking forward to that.

“That's just a formality” said Father. “At least it is in most churches.”

Mr. Landel looked across at an elderly woman using her stick to get down the steps and rushed to help her.

I was relieved. Although I had hoped Mr. Landel would get the better of Father, I realised I did not want the kindly minister to think less of our family. Mother was already making herself known to a group of women in the foyer, who seemed just as friendly as the church women in Brisbane. In any case, Mother had such a gracious manner, she was accepted in any company.

Later I told Father I was going to have organ lessons at the Church of England with a Mr. Rizzo, who had come from one of the Italian cathedrals.

“I don't know much about that lot” he said, “but I'm not happy about it. You know they're like Catholics.”

“I don't think I'll be theologically contaminated just having music lessons there” I said tartly. He glared at me, but did not reply.

It seemed that whatever I did, no matter how well thought-out or well-intentioned, the dark cloud of my father's presence distorted my reality. I had tried to escape from it, but it overwhelmed me, turning my natural energy and vitality into fear - a belief that the world would never want me. I did not belong.

# CHAPTER 21

After arranging a time with Mr. Rizzo for my first lesson, I decided to visit his church, which held a weekly lunch-hour service. I fought my way through the crowds surging in the opposite direction. The church was huge, and like so many buildings in Melbourne, had the old-world charm of Victorian architecture. As I entered I tried to walk in a dignified manner, befitting a worshipper in the Church of England. On one side of the building the sun and the black-outlined figures in the stained-glass windows met in joyful embrace, the strains of the organ solemnising their union. The magnificent vaulted arches, the massive pillars, and the ornate white altar created a sense of majesty, but I could not help feeling that the God worshipped in such a place was remote from ordinary people. At least the building did not suggest a God of judgment, which I always felt at our church at Walka, but I still craved the loving God of Albert Street Methodist.

Mr. Rizzo played for the service, and the sound of the mighty organ seemed to resonate from every crevice in the building. It came from the chancel, from the nave, it curled around pillars, it floated upwards to the cherubs high above the altar, it floated downwards to the congregation. I tried to sing the hymns, but my vocal chords refused. All I could do was listen to that thrilling sound. I had been planning to introduce myself in person to my new teacher after the service, but I felt that in my state of ecstasy I would not even be coherent.

Throughout the afternoon I found difficulty in concentrating on my work. I had obtained a transfer in the Commonwealth Public Service, but being in any government department was for me a source of boredom and irritation. I wondered whether it would be more satisfying in private enterprise, but because of my political views I did not thrill to the idea of working to increase shareholders' bank accounts. In a year's time, after my organ diploma, I was going somewhere to complete my secondary education at night and train to be a teacher. Of course I would have to keep this a secret from Mother and Father.

As I lay in bed that night, the sounds of the organ floated in and out of my consciousness. I had heard of reverberation, but had never before experienced it. I could hardly wait till I was at the console of that magnificent instrument. I just wanted to play a chord, raise my hands, and wait for the sound to come back to me. Then I could imagine that I was in the great tradition of Cathedral organists.

Would Mr. Rizzo like me? I knew of his ability, both as a teacher and a performer. He often gave recitals at his church and also at the Town Hall. But what was he really like – as a person? He had agreed to take me, presumably on the basis of my examination results, but I hoped he would not expect me to be brilliant, or do what Miss Grant did – give me music that was beyond my capabilities. Should I tell him that I was not talented – just a hard worker? Or would he be skilful enough to work this out for himself? It was always so important for me to create a good impression at a first meeting, since I lived with the fear, in all my relationships, that my unacceptable personality would sooner or later destroy everything.

I arrived for my lesson the following Thursday evening. At seven o'clock a thunderstorm broke. Flashes of lightning lit the wall of the church, changing its colour to silvery grey. I dashed up from the street and across the courtyard. The wind had blown my umbrella inside out, but I held it above my head - to catch water rather than divert it. The cobbles crunched under my sodden shoes and my soaked cotton dress clung to my body.

I took a flying leap on to the low veranda jutting out at right angles to the building. There was no light, apart from that provided intermittently from the sky. My handbag and music case fell to the floor as I tried to straighten my umbrella.

The smell of a spicy after-shave lotion startled me. There seemed to be no body that could own it, and no sound to indicate its location.

“Is someone there?” I asked. A low-pitched cough came from the end of the veranda.

“I didn't want to frighten you” said a deep voice. I could just see the outline of a tall, well-built figure walking towards me.

“Here, let me take your umbrella”. Mr. Rizzo put his hand on my wrist and held it for a few seconds, before sliding his fingers down mine and slowly drawing the umbrella towards him. His skin felt hot. “It will be safe in this corner.” ‘Perhaps more so than his student,’ I thought. What had I let myself in for?

“I'm sorry the light has gone out” he said with questionable sincerity. “We have to climb twentyfour steps. You go first. In case you fall, I can catch you.”

It was a spiral staircase surrounded by stone walls. The overhead lights seemed to be minimum wattage. I took a firm grasp of the rough wooden handrail. It was worth the risk of splinters to avoid collapsing into those waiting arms. Round and round we went. I lost all sense of direction. Although we were ascending, we could just as well have been descending to a bottomless void – or going backwards in time. Mr. Rizzo's footsteps sounded a safe distance below mine, but then the after-shave aroma became uncomfortably strong.

“Be careful at the top” he whispered. “There's a loose floorboard. I'd hate anything to happen to you.” I kept a steady pace.

“I'm so sorry there's nowhere we can dry your dress out.”

‘Thank goodness for that’, I thought, as I stepped over the floorboard, groping my way along the narrow passage. I looked up at the huge pipes all around me. At their highest point they lost themselves in the darkness of the roof. There was a mystery about an organ. It drew into itself the air of the planet, then converted it into a sound which seemed to have its origins in the heavens. Even the upward reach of the pipes suggested a desire to return to that source.

From the balcony of the loft, the lights shed a soft glow into the vast cavern below. It was a long way down. I could only just see the floor of the building. After changing into my polished organ shoes, I slid along the stool and placed my music on the rack, wondering what the mysterious man would do next.

To the left of the rack was a photograph of the Rizzo family. His wife and three daughters were stunningly beautiful, with their flawless olive complexion, shiny black hair, and teeth as white as ocean foam.

“They're so lovely!” I said, unable to take my eyes from the photo. I had always hated my fair skin, particularly when it protested visibly at its exposure to a hostile sun. But

apart from my feelings of envy at Mediterranean beauty, I felt reassured about my new teacher.

"Yes, I'm a lucky man" he said, looking admiringly at his family. I was ashamed at myself for having misjudged him.

His gaze moved from the photo to my music. "A Bach trio sonata!" he exclaimed. "How delightful. I'll set the stops for you." He stood behind me and leant his body against mine as he reached over to the right and left panels.

'This is crazy', I thought. 'How can he do this a few feet away from that reminder of family bliss?'

I had recently played the Bach for my seventh grade examination and despite being on a strange organ, I managed to get through it without accident. But already I was trying to work out what I should do. There was no way I was going to encourage Mr. Rizzo's behaviour, even though I had no idea what he was up to. On the other hand I did not want to register any sign of disapproval, through fear of alienating him. I had come all the way from Brisbane to be his student. I could not afford to wreck things.

"You play the organ very well" he said at the end of the piece. "I'm sure there are other things you do well."

"Well I think I'm a reasonable pianist" I replied anxiously.

"So you'd like me to teach you?" Mr. Rizzo asked, sliding closer to me along the stool.

"Oh yes" I said, "if you think I'm technically competent."

"There are so many things I could teach you."

"Well you have an excellent reputation." 'Surely', I thought, 'he must get the message soon.'

I played a few more pieces, and the warm hands rested on mine at the end of each.

"I think you need to expand your horizons" he said in a whisper. I was not sure whether he was referring to my playing or my personal life. Feelings of relief and thankfulness flooded over me as he produced a piece of his own. It was by a modern French composer. My teacher obviously liked contemporary music. I loathed it, but there was no way I would tell him that. He moved his body quickly along the seat so that his leg bumped against mine.

"I'm so sorry" I said, as I slid even more quickly away from him. "I didn't realise you wanted to play the piece."

"Don't worry about that" he said, smiling at my discomfort. "I think we're going to enjoy our time together."

He looked deep into my eyes in a way that made me feel uncomfortable. It was an invasive look, as though he believed he had some right of access to my soul.

“Would you like to hear the walls of the church shake?”

“Oh yes, please!” I had only ever seen brilliant organists at a distance and could hardly wait to see the action close-up.

“I'm playing this at the Town Hall next week.” The music pages, plastered with semiquavers, looked more black than white.

From the first note I could not believe what I was seeing. The virtuoso’s fingers were moving so quickly I felt I had blurred vision. Then I looked down at the pedal board, where feet were flying from one end to the other. I could not understand how the human body could move at such a speed. I was mesmerised by the technical brilliance, but beyond that I felt I understood something of my teacher's personality through his playing. He was strong and he was masterful. Nothing could ever defeat him.

At the conclusion it took a while for me to regain my composure. “I'm lost for words.” I said. “That was breathtaking.”

“You're so kind to appreciate my humble effort.”

I resisted the temptation to challenge the mocking self-deprecation. He gave me another one of those looks. I blushed and turned my head away.

That night I hardly slept. I was confused and almost frightened. Since my teacher's unusual behaviour had begun in the darkness, before he had even caught sight of me, it was clear that he did not have any special attraction to me. That gave me some relief, as did his obvious devotion to his family. In comparison with them I was positively plain. I concluded that he was just a harmless flirt and that I would adopt a pleasant but neutral attitude towards him.

Having sorted all that out, I felt I could now concentrate on the hard work ahead of me. However my teacher's behaviour had created a problem, but not in the sense of fear for my safety. All I could think about for the rest of the night was the feel of those caressing hands. No man had ever touched my skin before, except in rage. I could feel myself being drawn into a whirlpool of intense physical desire. It was not only the feel of his flesh that I wanted to experience again. Nor was it just the sight of those piercing black eyes or that mischievous smile. There was something about him that was larger than life. He made all other men I had ever met seem insignificant. He was brilliant and yet he was totally uninhibited - so free in the expression of his every desire, so lacking in any sense of pretence or that attitude of harsh dominance that made my life at home such a misery. I wanted to lose myself in him – to become part of that loveliness, that power, that spontaneous zest for life. I wanted him, but I knew I could never have him. Even if he had offered himself to me, there was no way my upbringing would ever have allowed me to respond to him. All I could do was dream.... and practise.... and dream....

## CHAPTER 22

The church our family attended had a small two-manual organ, and I would practise there each night till I dropped from exhaustion. More than anything in my life, I wanted Mr. Rizzo's approval. I wanted him to like me and to do that he would have to like my playing. I hated the piece he had given me to learn. How could a person of taste and discernment enjoy music where the notes seemed to be thrown together at random? But I tried to convince myself that since I loved my teacher so much, I could learn to love his music.

I was counting the days till my next lesson. The piece was sounding reasonable, but all I could think about was that dark, beautiful face and that caressing voice that made my body tingle. Would he touch me again? On Thursday I stayed in the city after work and tried to eat dinner, but my digestive system was like a volcano. I sipped a cool drink and it gurgled all the way down into the eruption.

Mr. Rizzo was waiting for me on the church verandah. This time the light was working and I looked into his face. Something was wrong. All the tenderness had gone. There was no sparkle in his eyes. “Good evening” he said, in a voice as cold as the South Pole.

My whole world fell apart. I knew I must have done something wrong. My life was a succession of misdeeds. But what was it this time? It could not have been my playing. He liked that. It must have been something I said or did. I had spoken courteously, and called him by his name, as I had been brought up to do. It must have been my behaviour. Perhaps he thought I was a prude because I did not respond to him the previous week. But what should I do now?

I went ahead of him up the spiral staircase. This time he was well behind me as we walked in silence. At the organ I opened the piece he had given me and waited. He sat as far away from me as he could, still with the surly expression.

“Well, aren't you going to set the stops?” he barked.

“I've been practising it on flutes” I replied quietly. “I didn't want to try anything heavier while I was still learning it, but do you want something more?”

“Please yourself” he said in a tone of indifference. I was close to tears but my hands were steady and I made a fair attempt at the piece. At the end I rested my arms on my lap and did not move.

“That was not bad for one week's work.” The tone in his voice was still flat, but at least my playing had not offended him. He then discussed technical details in a manner that sounded like a recorded message. At the end of the lesson he stood up suddenly. “Goodnight”, he said, his tone unchanged.

I'd had enough. I was humiliated. I was furious. I was not going to subject myself to that treatment again.

“Mr. Rizzo”, I said in the most icy voice my throat could produce, “do you still want to teach me?”

“Of course” he said, as though he didn't care one way or the other. “I'll see you next week.” ‘That's what you think’, I said to myself.

My mind and body were sick. All my hopes – fantasies though I knew them to be – had evaporated in a matter of seconds. I could perhaps have coped with it if only I had known what it was that I had done. At least at home I knew in advance what my punishments were for. Surely I had not come all the way to Melbourne to find a man just like Father. Life could not be so cruel.

The next day I rang all the churches in the city to find out whether their organists took students. There were just a few possible teachers. One of them was a woman. Would I ring her? Surely she could not be as horrible as Mr. Rizzo. To see what she was like, I visited her church the following Sunday. Her playing was outstanding and after the service I sneaked up close to the organ as she was walking down the steps into the body of the church. Her thin lips were tightly drawn, and her partially-dyed blond hair was pulled back in a bun. The expression on her face was so hard, I could not imagine ever feeling at ease in her presence.

“Dear God” I prayed that night, “show me what you want me to do about an organ teacher.”

I started thinking about Mr. Rizzo again. Perhaps he'd just been through some great tragedy. But then he could have cancelled the lesson, or at least given me some explanation for his unusual behaviour. Was my first lesson just a dream? Did I read more into it than was actually the case? As I tossed these ideas around, I pictured my teacher on that first night. I was expecting to be furious at the way he had conned me into believing he was such a charming man. Instead, to my astonishment, all the feelings I had developed for him before I fell asleep that night came rushing over me. I was in love again! Then I went into a silent rage – but not with him. How could I have been so stupid? How could I ever trust such a reprehensible creature again? I was losing my sanity.

There was only one way to solve the problem – to practise hard and to turn up at the next lesson. Should he repeat the previous week's behaviour, I was out of there for good. I would find a teacher somewhere, even if it meant going back to Brisbane.

I arrived at the usual time, but Mr. Rizzo was not there. The staircase was lit and I could hear the organ playing. I wandered into the church and looked up into the loft, where a female student was having a lesson. ‘This will be interesting’, I thought. ‘I'll sit in a pew and watch what happens’. Mr. Rizzo sat at the far end of the organ stool. That was not a good sign. I assumed he treated all his female students in the same way, which meant that his impossible mood of the previous week had continued.

At the end of the lesson he walked ahead of the student down the stairs. I rushed out to the carpark and pretended I was just walking in as the two reached the verandah.

The girl left. I still could not tell whether or not this would be the last lesson I would ever have in that church. I prepared for the worst by saying to myself over and over, "the last one...the last one...you can stick it just one more time...one more time...."

With my heart thumping I looked quickly across at Mr. Rizzo. That beautiful smile was there again! Last week was just a bad dream. This time he put his arms around me and held me tight. I was in heaven. I stood there, like a good girl, without moving. I must have looked like Mother when she would not respond to my affection. If only I could have trusted myself – or my teacher for that matter – I would have given anything to crush him with my

tiny arms. Instead, all I allowed myself to do eventually was to rest my head against his shoulder.

That must have been enough to convince him that I was happy with him – but if only he had known how happy! He probably assumed that as a reasonably well-presented young woman I had one or two male admirers. He could never have imagined that he was the first man I had ever really loved.

The lesson followed much the same pattern as the first, except that he seemed even more relaxed and more free to let his hands roam. He must have been pleased that I was a conscientious student in that his pleasure in my company would never be spoilt by my playing. On the other hand, could I dare to believe that he actually liked me more than his other female students? He certainly seemed distant with the other girl. My hopes soared, but then a horrible thought crossed my mind. What if he were emotionally unstable - and changed from one hour to the next? I hoped and prayed that I was wrong.

## CHAPTER 23

The next two lessons were pure bliss. My teacher did not actually increase the extent of his affectionate gestures - it was more like a theme with variations. Being a creative genius, he could always surprise me. I was relieved that he had placed a limit on his amorous activities, otherwise I would have had to resist him. That might have angered him, and I could not risk that. I don't think he had any idea of the effect he was having on me. To him the whole thing was just a game. I still could not keep down any food on Thursday nights, but that was a small price to pay for being with the man I loved. I had almost forgotten the disastrous evening three weeks earlier, and assumed that Mr. Rizzo had been deeply hurt by something or someone that day.

A funny incident occurred in our local church the following Sunday and I was planning how I would describe it to him at my next lesson. I was already smiling as I walked on to the church verandah, but my smile vanished instantly. 'Oh no!' I thought. 'He's having another "off" night.' At least this time I knew what to expect, but that did not lessen my suffering. To see that magic face transformed into something I could hardly bear to look at, filled me with a pain that was overwhelming. All my anticipation of the lovely things he might do to me that night - what a hollow memory they were now.

I had decided never to display any negative feelings to him again, and so I pretended everything was all right. But as the lesson went on, I knew I had to do something - anything that would rescue me from being sucked into this black hole. I had an inspiration. I would change his mood!

"Last Sunday at our church" I said in a breezy voice, "the choir was singing an anthem. It was building up to a climax, when the sopranos in the front row stopped singing and started giggling. The harmony parts behind them didn't realise what was going on, so they continued. The conductor couldn't see what was happening either. We heard a dog bark and the minister's cat came tearing into the building through a side door. He put on the brakes by digging his claws into the carpet right in the middle of the church. The poor minister blushed and waved frantically to a steward to remove the animal. By this time the choir and the whole congregation had dissolved in laughter."

I had hardly looked at Mr. Rizzo – I did not want to risk being put off my story. When I finished there was a deathly silence. I stared straight ahead.

"You can work on the Vaughan-Williams and I'll see you next week." With that he was gone.

At that moment I hated him. 'Right,' I said to myself, 'that's it. This man is unworthy of my love.' I could not excuse him the second time on the grounds of having had a bad day - nothing could justify that kind of behaviour. With a heavy sigh and an even heavier heart, I packed up my things and walked slowly down the stairs. Would I stay with him? How often would he be like this?

I tossed for hours in bed that night, trying to find some possible explanation for what he had done. This time I knew it was not my fault. One thing I resolved – if I decided to stay with him, I would never again try to humour him. In that state of mind he was unreachable. I had heard of the artistic temperament and the terrible depression such people could suffer, but I never imagined they would be cruel. I pictured them curled up in a corner, not inflicting

their misery on other people. In our family, getting in moods was forbidden. “You are not allowed to cast a gloom over the household,” Mother would say.

My anger subsided a little, and I could feel myself gradually coming under his spell again – distant though it was. If he did suffer from depression, I wanted to help him somehow, to be able to comfort him. But I didn't know how. I tried to imagine what the world would be like if there were no great artists. It was unthinkable. Mr. Rizzo was indeed a genius. He could play at sight the most technically complex music - pieces that would take most people a year to learn - and his mastery of both the keyboard and the pedal board was awesome.

Up until then I had imagined that the reason I loved this strange man was his power, his spontaneity and his beautiful face. But I began thinking about something I had overheard Mother say, “Women tend to fall in love with men who are like their fathers.” In some ways Mr. Rizzo was even worse than my own father, whose temper was at least predictable. But from another perspective a different picture emerged. With my teacher, each episode in his life seemed completely isolated from all others. Whenever he saw me the week after we'd had a bad night, I could tell he had no memory of the previous week. Father, by contrast, prided himself on remembering every transgression I had ever committed, going back to when I was four. The greatest difference between them was that the only thing Father admired about me was my abilities. My teacher – when he was functioning normally – seemed to like the whole package.

For several days I swung between two states. On the one hand, I allowed myself to remember his every hurtful look, his frosty voice and his overall hostility towards me, and I promised myself I would never think about him again. On the other hand, I had a fantasy that in loving him I could solve the problem, and enjoy those feelings of love for ever. Eventually the love won out.

The following week Mr. Rizzo was back to his usual adorable self. One of my diploma pieces was a Handel concerto. I had just finished playing it when he walked round behind the organ stool and put both arms around me. I sat motionless, wishing the moment would never end.

“That was beautiful – just like you” he said. I could have given him almost anything. I broke my own rule and put my hands on his.

“I want you to enter for the ABC's Vocal and Concerto Competition” he announced in a manner which assumed my consent.

“No!” I screamed in panic. “I'm so sorry” I said, lowering the volume. “It's just that I can't play in public, even when the audience comprises friendly church people. As for playing with an orchestra – it’s out of the question.”

“You always underestimate yourself, my dear” he said, stroking my hair. “You have a lot of ability that you still haven't used.”

“You are completely wrong” I said. “I get there by sheer hard work.”

“How much practice do you do a night?” he asked. He sat down almost on top of me, but facing away from the organ.

“Three hours” I said.

He swung around and stared at me, open-mouthed. “I can't believe that! Most of my students are lucky if they do an hour.”

This was my chance to convince him. “I have to” I said in a tone of resignation. “I simply do not have musical talent.”

“You are a delight!” he said, taking my hand and putting it to his lips. “I don't suppose I can claim to be proud of you, but I'm proud to know you. You're a lovely girl and a damn good organist.” He looked into my eyes, and there was almost a suggestion of sadness. I had no idea what that was about.

# CHAPTER 24

'A lovely girl and a damn good organist'. I said the words over and over again. I wanted to write them on a plaque and hang them on my bedroom wall. A lovely girl – did he really mean it? If he was right, how could my parents, who thought they knew me better than anyone else, have been so wrong? They had blamed me for things that were not my fault. I had inherited the wrong personality. I was a fighter; they said I should be submissive. I got steamed up in argument; they said I should be gentle. On top of that, I didn't smile enough, my speaking voice was too loud, I used my hands too much; in short, I did not fit the biblical description of a woman.

I blamed God. Why did he make me 'masculine' if he had created me female? But Mr. Rizzo had told me that I was 'all woman'. Supposing he was right about me. Should I get away from home? Go overseas? Try to find a special man who could love me? Up to that point, the only men who had been interested in me were those nobody else wanted. Having fallen under the spell of an amazingly gifted man, I would find it difficult to be with somebody ordinary. But if my parents turned out to be right, I would have to change radically.

In front of the mirror I practised smiling sweetly, but I looked like someone recovering from an illness. Then I had an imaginary conversation, with my arms held tightly at my side. This time I looked like a puppet with its arms disconnected from the strings. I tried speaking softly, but it didn't sound like me, and in any case I could only use a quiet voice when I didn't feel passionately about something – and that was hardly ever. If I couldn't be loved for the person I was, I might as well give up.

That afternoon I arranged to get a lift home with Father after work. He was to drive around the block and pick me up in front of my building. "Make sure you're waiting for me!" he snapped.

At four o'clock I had a phone call from Mr Rizzo. "Congratulations" he said. "You've passed! You are now an A.Mus.A."

"I.... can't believe it" I gasped. "The exam was such a disaster." Although my playing had been accurate, the attitude of the two examiners was less than friendly. I remembered the charming examiner from London whom I had for my piano diploma and was expecting something similar. To my horror, one of the examiners was the surly woman I had seen at one of the city churches when I was looking for a new teacher. Her manner of addressing me was in keeping with her appearance. The male examiner, with a pinched nose and an almost invisible mouth, spent most of the time down in the body of the church so he could hear the sound, while the woman glared at me in the loft.

"I never had any doubt that you would make it" said Mr Rizzo in his most seductive voice. "Would you like to come and get the report?" Did he really have to ask?

At 5.06 pm, with my hands shaking, I put my time card in the bundy and dashed out the door. I did not bother to think about Mother's criticism of the way I walked. As I flew along the street, the peak-hour crowds became a side-vision blur. If I had knocked one or two bodies over, it would not have mattered.

At the church I raced across the courtyard and through the door. A mischievous smile greeted me, and strong arms were wrapped around me so tightly I could hardly breathe. My teacher and I sat down and he held my hand as we went through the report. I had received only minimum pass marks and we both thought the comments were ridiculous. But it didn't matter. I was happy.

“I know you don't want to do any further study on the organ” he said. “But I'd love to see you some time in the loft when I'm playing for a service.” Those black eyes were looking deep into my soul, and once more I was a captive.

“Oh no!” I let out a scream when I reached the footpath. “Father! He'll go beserk!” I could not ring him because he would have already left his office. I pictured him driving round and round the block, getting more furious by the second.

When I arrived home he was waiting for me. “Get in there!” he said, pointing to his bedroom. I wondered why, if he wanted to give me a lecture, we did not go to the lounge. I thought perhaps he did not want to humiliate me in front of the family. I walked in and sat on the bed, ready to apologise and explain what had happened.

“What do you think you're doing?” he roared. “Get up!”

“I was just about to tell you what happened,” I said defiantly.

“I'm not interested in your excuses.” He opened the cupboard door and was groping around at the bottom. I couldn't work out what he was looking for. What did he pull out but the cane! That horrible thing he had beaten me with from when I was a young child, right through my teenage years – he had brought it all the way from Brisbane!

Up to that moment I had never tried to reason with Father when he was in a rage. He always interpreted any attempt at self justification as a challenge to his authority. But this time I would stand my ground.

“The only reason I was not waiting for you was that I had received the most amazing news - I passed my....”

“I told you I'm not interested,” he shouted. “Bend over the bed!” I was speechless with rage, but I obeyed.

“You're being a smart Alec now” he said. “Lift your skirt.” Again I obeyed. “And your petticoat.” All I had left on were my pants, suspender belt and stockings. I felt as helpless and vulnerable then as I did the first time he beat me on the buttocks, at the age of seven, when I tripped on a hole in the street and broke some eggs. To Father I was still that evil child, in rebellion against him and against God.

“You defied me!” he said. “This’ll teach you.” He raised the cane in the air and brought it down with all his might. “Round and round the block I drove. Round and round!” He voice was getting louder, the repeated word coinciding with the stinging sensation of the cane. What kind of a monster was this man? I hated him as I had never hated anything or anyone in my life before.

As I walked in pain across the hallway to my bedroom, something inside me changed. Up till then I had believed, deep down, that if I could have been a better person, my life at home could have been happy. Now I wondered whether my father had used me simply as a means of releasing his uncontrollable anger. I did not know what he was angry with, but there could be no connection between my inadequacies and the fury he unleashed. To be beaten at the age of twentythree was beyond all reason, even if I had committed a crime. I felt ashamed that I had inherited one single gene from such a man.

He left shortly afterwards to attend a meeting at the Department of Evangelism. I would settle this issue once and for all.

"Mother" I said in a tone of urgency as I strode into the kitchen, "I need to talk to you." In a noncommital manner she sat down next to me. "You heard what happened between Father and me. You always told me that he would beat me till I was twentyone. I'm two years past that age and he has done it again."

Mother was a person of principle. I had never known her to lie to me. Despite her remote manner, I believed that at some level she did care for me. Surely this was the occasion for her to take a stand – to defend me against the man she should never have married.

She did not look at me. "The age of twentyone," she said in a detached voice, "is something that is recognised by the State, but it has no relevance in this home. As long as you're under his roof, your father has the right to discipline you in any way he chooses."

I could not believe what I was hearing. It was the ultimate betrayal. Father, in my eyes, was a nonperson. But Mother! How could she do such a thing to her own flesh and blood? I stood up abruptly and stared at her. She winced at the sight of the fury in my face, which had never before been directed at her. But I did not move; I did not change my expression. I would stay there until one of us cracked. Slowly she got up, and without looking at me, left the room.

I had lost everything. My only source of love, limited though it was, had gone. Of course my sisters loved me, but I had been dumped on them – they did not select me. Perhaps, like my parents, they would have chosen someone else had they been given the chance.

Why did I find love so hard to get? Most girls of my age had boyfriends, or at least had parents who loved them. I thought of Mr Rizzo again. He was strange and unpredictable, but at least he had some kind of feeling for me. I began to cry. The whole thing was so absurd. My only source of comfort was a man playing for a church service! But if that was all I had, I could not turn my back on it.

I arrived at the church early and went up to the organ loft. "Are you all right?" Mr Rizzo whispered, looking into my red eyes. I just nodded.

Afterwards I did not tell him what had happened – in fact no one outside our family knew what went on behind the walls of our home. But just to be with him again was enough for me to believe that there was hope for me.

At home that night I thought about Mother again. She and I were equally victims and for that reason I found it hard to blame her for anything. But surely over the years she should have tried to prevent at least some of Father's excesses. I thought of all the times she knew he was about to beat me. She could have taken my side then, but she chose not to. Did she find some kind of strength in allying herself with him, or was she as frightened of him as I was?

There was nothing left for me at home. I had rebelled against both my parents in my mind, and often in my words. Leaving now was not so much an act of rebellion as one of defeat.

Where I would live I did not know and I did not care. I knew I would stay in Melbourne for some time at least. I needed to see Mr Rizzo on occasions, just to experience that reassurance.

Before I fell asleep that night I allowed myself to dream that I would one day meet a man who would love my analytic mind, my capacity to fight for justice, my crazy sense of humour, and my passionate nature. Although I had never had any sexual contact with a man, my adventures in the organ loft convinced me that there was an exciting world I might one day experience.

Early next morning I packed a suitcase and placed it in the hallway.

"Where do you think you're going?" Father yelled.

"I'm leaving. And this time I won't change my mind." He looked at me with contempt and walked to the back of the house, as though he had no further interest in the matter.

"Goodbye Mother" I said. She was crying. I wanted to reach out to her, but I felt as abandoned by her then as I had been in my cot.

Picking up my suitcase I walked to the front gate. As I turned to fasten the latch, I caught a glimpse of Mother at the window. In an act of defiance I grabbed my case and turned my back on her, intending to stride away without acknowledging her. To my surprise I found my feet were barely moving. Did I want to leave her? Of course I didn't. I would love to have taken her with me. We could both have been free. Even now, from the footpath, I had to reach out to her somehow. Once I was over the top of the hill she would not be able to see me. But would she still be at the window? I wanted to look around, but what if she were not there? If she abandoned me this time, it would be what I deserved.

I looked up into the sky. Layers of thick cloud seemed to engulf me in their greyness. With a heavy sigh I turned around. There was Mother. She had not moved. Slowly she raised her hand and put it on the glass. Tears filled my eyes and fell to the ground. She loved me after all. I put my hand up and waved weakly. I loved her, and I always would.