

## **“At last my heart’s an open door”**

Secret Loves + Lies + Longings + Love + Losses + Gains =  
Life. A personal narrative about womanhood

**Judy Anne Speare Kokkinn**

Skriftserien 2026 nr. 2

**OSLO METROPOLITAN UNIVERSITY**  
STORBYUNIVERSITETET





**“At last my heart’s an open door”**

**Secret Loves + Lies + Longings + Love + Losses +  
Gains = Life. A personal narrative about  
womanhood**

A contribution to the field of Psychosocial Health

**Judy Anne Speare Kokkinn**

CC-BY-SA versjon 4.0  
OsloMet Skriftserie 2026 nr. 2  
ISSN 2535-6984 (trykt)  
ISSN 2535-6992 (online)  
ISBN 978-82-8364-732-7 (trykt)  
ISBN 978-82-8364-733-4 (online)

OsloMet – storbyuniversitetet  
Universitetsbiblioteket  
Skriftserien  
St. Olavs plass 4,  
0130 Oslo,  
Telefon (47) 64 84 90 00

Postadresse:  
Postboks 4, St. Olavs plass  
0130 Oslo

Godkjent for publisering av Per Arne Olsen, Seniorsenteret

Trykket hos Byråservice  
Trykket på Scandia 2000 white, 80 gram på materiesider/200 gram på coveret



My father and my mother with me, Brisbane, Australia, 1944.

**WRITTEN IN THE HOPE THAT SCHOLARS AND PROFESSIONALS IN SOCIAL WORK, HEALTH SERVICES AND CHILD WELFARE WILL RELATE TO AND BENEFIT FROM MY EXPERIENCES, BOTH PERSONALLY AND IN PRACTICE. ALSO TO PRESERVE AND PROCESS THE MEMORIES OF MY DEAR PARENTS AND ALL THE OTHER ACTORS IN MY LIFE: MY BELOVED CHILDREN AND GRAND-CHILDREN, MY EXCEPTIONAL FAMILIES - OF ORIGIN, BY MARRIAGES AND BY CHOICE- , MY FAITHFUL FRIENDS, MY ENRICHING COLLEAGUES - AND MY ADVERSARIES.**



# Commentary by professor emeritus Michael Seltzer (30.08.2024)

Dear Judy,

First of all I want to say many thanks for allowing me to read *At Last My Heart's An Open Door*. I knew from your solid social work text that you were a very good writer in Norwegian, but with this book you made clear to me that you were a masterly wordsmith. With your choice of words, metaphors, and lyrical passages, you have taken me – and others lucky enough to read your book – along an awe-inspiring and brutally honest journey from your childhood in Australia to your life as a wife, mother, grandmother and late-blooming widow. That latter description was given me years ago by my good friend and former roommate, Knut Faldbakken, who is also of 1941 vintage. He told me that Norwegian society is filled with many women who like you after the death of Gus psychologically liberate themselves from the network, traditions and culture of the familial constellation they had married into. The changes in your life and feelings about yourself after Hugh came into your life mirrors much of what Knut told me about the late blooming he had seen in his own mother and other women who had been widowed and then broke free of many conscious and hidden bands constraining their lives.

The fact that you had NOT read *The Years* made your book even more awe-inspiring for me. Both you and Annie were clone-like pioneers in combining words and truthfulness to tell readers about the myriad of experiences involved in moving from girlhood to womanhood.

My advice to fasten your seatbelts as you opened *The Years* was one way of signaling to you how I was feeling as I learned about you, Theo and how sexual abuse had impacted on him and his relation to you. And I kept it on until the final section of the beautifully told story of a multi-faceted life filled with so many ups and downs.

Judy, through the years, I have met so many women who appeared to be punctuating significant points in their lives with music. You joined them in so many ways by weaving in lyrics to mark and to reflect upon the personal waypoints in the multitonned tapestry of your life. I am sure that women readers of *At Last My Heart's An Open Door* will feel bonds of sisterhood with you as they read about the musical marking points of your life.

As I read the wonderful history of your relationship with Hugh and how it developed, I kept thinking of the phrase "third time lucky" which I had learned as a child out on the prairies of North America. It seemed to me that his persona and ways of acting seemed to satisfy needs in your life not satisfied in relationships with Gus and Theo.

It was nice to find Larry appearing twice and to read about some points where our paths crossed – like Wencke and you both working at the Viking Ship museum and also where you and I as foreigners had to do battle with Norwegian academics in getting our positions.

Judy, as an atheist and someone seldom reading books with religious dimensions, I must thank you for introducing me to a kind of Christianity I could admire. Where I came from, crazy Christians like the Plymouth Brethren dominated schools, politics and many other aspects of life, and they gave me a long-term aversion to anything associated with Jesus. Now I have a much different understanding thanks to you.

You asked me to make some judgment of your English. I don't know whether PAGES has a feature like MicroSoft Word where you can choose several different kinds of English and then do a check. I hope so. There were occasional typos and spots where things like "og" appeared where you wished to write "and" but they were few and far between.

Finally, I wish I could give you some leads for finding a publisher. There was an agent in New York who helped Betty Lou Valentine, a good friend, find a publisher for her book based on 5 years of ethnographic research in a Black American ghetto. I checked however and found out that the agent had died last year. Judy, if you google - publishing agent in Oslo – you will find several and if you do some research, I feel you can find one who will help find a publisher for your beautifully written masterpiece.

I hope my few words here give you some sense of the power of your writing.

Mike

VOLUME I.....	3
Prologue .....	5
Chapter 1 "Softly awakes my heart" .....	6
Chapter 2 "Ah! Sweet Mystery of Life...longing, seeking striving, waiting, yearning".....	29
Chapter 3 "Both Sides Now... It's life's illusions I recall" .....	38
Chapter 4 "At long last love has arrived..." .....	51
Chapter 5 "What a feeling, dancing on the ceiling!".....	69
Chapter 6 "Where ever you go I shall go" .....	72
Chapter 7 "Sunrise, sunset, swiftly flow the years..." .....	85
Chapter 8 "Who am I?".....	106
Chapter 9 "Feelings, like I'll never have you again in my arms" .....	121
Chapter 10 "Jesus loves me, this I know" .....	134
Chapter 11 "Tonight I celebrate my love for you!".....	144
VOLUME II.....	155
Prologue .....	157
Chapter 12 "A House is not a Home" .....	158
Chapter 13 "What a Diff'rence a Day Made" .....	169
Chapter 14 "He touched me" .....	183
Chapter 15 "Every time you touch me I become a hero" .....	188
Chapter 16 "He shall carry the lambs in His arms" .....	201
Chapter 17 "Behold, I stand at the door and knock".....	207
Chapter 18 "Close Every Door to Me, Keep those I love from me".....	218
Chapter 19 "Something New in my Life" .....	226
Chapter 20 "Did I not Love You before This Lifetime?".....	245
EPILOGUE .....	258
Playlist: The songs, most secular, some sacred .....	261
Definitions .....	266
References .....	268
About the Author: .....	273

# THE DAWN OF MY WOMANHOOD

THE DAWN OF MY WOMANHOOD

# **VOLUME I**

“We are like books. Most people only see our cover, the minority read only the introduction, many people believe the critics. Few will know our content” (Émile Zola 1840-1902)

## THE DAWN OF MY WOMANHOOD

# Prologue

My father wrote his Memoir. He called it “*As it came to mind*”, in other words a string of associations without chronological structure. My narrative has some of the same qualities: there is no real sequence, yet there is an unfolding. My memories of the events and deeds that were a part of my maturing lead to new associations and recollections, but I have endeavoured to maintain a sense of movement in time. The focus on my womanhood predisposes disclosure of me - body, mind and soul. I favour a holistic approach to understand and examine sensuality, sexuality, thoughts, goals, failures and emotions, in other words my loves and hate, desire and frustration, insight and confusion, griefs and joys, belief and disbelief. It excludes other aspects of my life not specifically related to my womanhood. My language bears the stamp of the years that I have lived,

The Norwegian playwright, Henrik Ibsen’s lines from his famous play, “A Doll’s House”, are relevant.

Helmer (the husband): You are first and foremost a wife and mother.

Nora (the wife): I don’t believe that is so, anymore. I believe that I am first and foremost a human being, like you.

I am a female human being like Nora, not a role, though I have possessed many roles. To avoid recognition of the fellow actors in my life I have given us all, myself included, fictive names. I have also juggled with the names of places, occupations, major institutions and geography. Descriptions of people, events and emotions are subjective, my ‘*in situ*’ experience. I have aspired to preserve authenticity and refrain from embellishing, but I have supplemented with my imagination when my knowledge about a person or a situation is incomplete. Conversations are as authentic as my memory serves me. Some characters and happenings are a composite of several persons or a string of events in order to make the text less complicated. Those that may have done something unseemly or damaging to their reputation at the time, are deceased. This is my memory’s treasure chest where the popular adage coined by William Shakespeare, “*all that glitters is not gold*”, aptly describes its content. In the closing chapter I reveal my true identity.

Music is a part of my DNA. Someone close to me once remarked that I sing songs in my head the whole time. I share my womanhood and the music that either accompanied, or in retrospect could have accompanied these experiences and feelings with you, my fellow scholars, professional friends and colleagues in the field of psychosocial health. These songs have enriched my life. I hope that you will find words and music to reverberate with your longings and emotions. My candidness is rooted in the hope that my story and the music will empower you.

# Chapter 1 “Softly awakes my heart”

## JULIET: 1941-1960: LOVE, FAITH, SHAME, PASSION

I was on a car ferry on my way to a beautiful island off the East Coast of Australia. Recently I returned to my native land for an extended holiday. This island was one of the main attractions to return to. Gliding through the temperate waters of the bay I could feel my adrenalin rising. Was it unchanged? Was it still as magical as I had remembered over the past 50 or so years? My adrenaline rose even higher as we drove nearer and nearer to where the cluster of houses and cabins that had meant so much to me stood. So many holidays, so many fish we had caught, so many sharks we had seen at one time stranded on the beach after their ill-fated pursuit of the tunny fish (or tuna), which had, with the speed of lightning, followed the herring steam. The herrings got away, but the tunny fish and sharks lay stinking on the beach. The adults had worked furiously to try, with the help of driftwood logs and poles, to roll the unwitting captives back into the water. They managed with most of the tuna, but the tide ebbed so quickly and the distance to roll the sharks increased by the minute, and the unfortunate victims were heavy and threatening. So, in the end they had to give up. Our only hope of regaining our beach for use was that there would come a flood tide big enough to wash the carcasses out to sea, so they could be fodder for some other predators.

The Island's natural allurement was in fact unchanged. No government, city planner nor private entrepreneur could erase the multicoloured cliffs, the rushing gorges, the virgin sand dunes, the shimmering, azure-crystal bays or the treacherous main beach. The mountainous waves still rolled in with their monotonous drone and swirling froth. The undertow was just as irresistible and hopeless to battle with as before. There were many more houses, and very fashionable houses. The huts where we had camped were all gone, their properties sold off at a good price to a wealthier clientele. The trails were upgraded which made access much easier than when we were teenagers, scrambling down the rocky cliff faces to get to a ledge where we could fish. The lagoon like bay was still as peaceful, transparent and iridescent aquamarine. I could see my feet below savouring the white sandy bottom as I waded out and then lay effortlessly back to float and gaze at the fluffy white clouds floating in azure heaven above.

Suddenly the memories came flooding back, teenage memories. Sue and I were here, Easter, 1957. It was nighttime with a glorious yellow, egg yolk of a full moon enticing us to try its path over the ocean. As long as one sat high enough up on the brow of the cliff, the crashing, churning waves at its base didn't disturb the pillar of light that glowed like a golden shaft from the nearest waves out toward the distant, coal black horizon. The low Pandanus trees painted grey-blue shadows on the rocks and shaded the grassy nook

## THE DAWN OF MY WOMANHOOD

where the four of us sat, secluded from curious eyes. Sue had just turned 16 and I was 15. An intriguing boy named Danny frequented this island.

He was olive brown, tall, lanky and lithe, with a rakish look. I liked his silky soft, nut-brown hair that flopped over his impish eyes. And he swaggered nonchalantly around looking as if he couldn't give a damn. I knew that he was besotted, or should I say infatuated with a girl named Anna. She owned a horse and would ride on the beach, but she paid no attention to him, she was frankly quite disdainful. I knew her from previous holidays, and we had talked. I went horseback riding with her once. The horses were frisky and cantered at an awesome pace. I couldn't walk for the next two days. My thighs were as stiff as beanpoles. Anna told me that she didn't want to be a notch in Danny's belt: his way of boasting of the "women", i.e. "girls" he had laid. In some ways I was appalled, on the other hand I was wildly attracted to him, but Anna's warning made me wary.

He had a school mate, Gavin, with him for the Easter Break. Gavin was an athletic, fair skinned young man, not a beachcomber like Danny, but he seemed considerate and dependable. Some girls may have considered him boring; I found his interest in politics and social economics stimulating. Unfortunately, Danny and Sue tired of his academic conversation and slipped away, saying they would go for a walk. I should have warned her. I saw that she had lost Interest in me and was mesmerized by Danny. I felt as if I had failed her, so I called out anxiously, "*Don't be late.*" They weren't late, but during that moonlit tryst Danny had managed to get into Sue's pants and gotten her pregnant, a terrible thing in the 1950s. My Mum told me this many years later. She had had been harangued by Sue's frantic mother for not protecting her daughter from the teenage beach-predator. I had never understood why Sue took a 6-month leave of absence from school that year. It was hard remembering that this exquisite place was the venue for my lovely friend's anguish, heartache and pain.

Four years later, a young man named Theo Llewellyn and I had holidayed on this island-paradise with his parents and younger sister, Deidre. I was nineteen then. We had a marvellous vacation hiking, fishing and flirting in this wildly exotic landscape. I was on the brink of my life's adventure.

In the eyes of his peers Theo was an impressive figure: six feet four inches (193.04 cm) high with broad shoulders and chest, long, elegant legs, thick, wavy, brown hair crowning his relatively large head. His eyes were like green mountain pools, his dark beard, clean-shaven. He had expressive, relatively small hands and a tiny bum - an informal word for buttocks that I never used openly. I had made his acquaintance twelve months prior to the holiday, and we had been involved in a relationship for a while. My mental association from the first time I saw him on the Uni campus was, "*Wow, what an elephant!*" Maybe it was the bum that prompted it. Elephants do have small buttocks in contrast to their massive shoulders and heads.

## THE DAWN OF MY WOMANHOOD

I was only 5 feet 4 inches (162 cm), and after our first meeting when I was going on eighteen, Theo vanished from my mind. I studied, washed the local Presbyterian church to supplement my income and loved the Uni Music Club. I joined the Varsity (a derivative of University) Evangelical Christian Fellowship (IVF) and followed their bible studies and prayer-meetings. I was a practicing Christian: By this I mean I believed in God Father, Son Jesus and the Holy Spirit, and I enjoyed the fellowship of my church. I had heard that "*the elephant with the tiny bum, and elegant legs*" was also a devout Christian.

It was after one of the above-mentioned prayer meetings that he approached me. We had been sitting in a ring, ten to twelve of us one sunny day on the finely cut couch grass. We felt no embarrassment about the other students observing us praying. Theo got up from his place, squatted down beside me and whispered in my ear:

"Your voice when you pray, it gets to me."

What does one say? I was startled by his attention, perturbed. Why was he trying to bust into my life? I shrugged my shoulders disconcertedly and smiled.

"And your smile!", he added emphatically, his dark emerald eyes flirting with me, his hair caressing his forehead.

Smiling came easily to me having inherited my paternal grandmother's, what in the derogatory vernacular is called, "buck teeth". Mine were only slightly "buck", but my uncles always remarked that my "pearly whites" reminded them of their mother. "The elephant" was obviously interested in me, but he wasn't my idea of Prince Charming, so I made some polite excuse, joined the other girls and left. But I did ask the girls later what they knew about him.

Their account was full of superlatives: His name is Theo, and he is a wonderful, widely read and knowledgeable Christian, an impressive Youth Evangelist with compelling charm. He is also a valued, hard-playing member of the Uni Rugby League team, (the most popular football game in varsity circles at the time) a witty, astute and brilliant student who had won a Special State Scholarship to study medicine at the University. As well as covering his Uni fees the scholarship provided him with an ample living allowance. The girls supplied further tidbits: He was in a relationship with Hannah, an equally dedicated and brilliant philosophy student. Both were Baptists, Theo having recently broken away from his denomination of origin, the more pietistic community called Plymouth Brethren.

When I was young, we often identified people's attitudes to many areas of living by their denominational affiliation, and the Brethren, a lay-man's community, were known for rigorous behavioural codes. Most members of my extended family and neighbourhood attended or were members of some sort of denomination. Mostly they were Methodists or Presbyterian, but my mother's two sisters had married Catholics. I didn't know any Plymouth Brethren and very few Baptists.

## THE DAWN OF MY WOMANHOOD

Frankly red warning-lights rotated in my brain at the mention of the Plymouth Brethren. My paternal grandmother had suffered at the Plymouth Brethren's hands in England before they emigrated to Australia just prior to the First World War. I have no memory of her. She died of kidney failure when I was 18-months old. My only connection with her was that the older generation told me I resembled her because of the teeth. My Dad's father was still living, but an alcoholic and he had been "*run in*" by the police for organizing an illegal betting-shop in the early 1950s. He lived in a humble shed on his brother-in-law's farm and we visited him once a year, usually before Christmas.

But the Brethren! My paternal grandparents had left Swindon, South England, in disgrace, after being excommunicated from the Brethren community because my grandfather, a railway worker, had been observed entering the local pub. My Christ-loving grandmother, whom my father adored, had taken this family expulsion very hard. Their new life in Australia had not exactly cured her husband's urge to drink, and this brown-eyed, graceful woman died 28 years later of disillusion in addition to her kidney complaint.

My girlfriends kept me informed about Theo. It wasn't long afterwards they told me that he and Hannah were a thing of the past. Theo had asked if I were interested in joining several other friends at an Inter-Varsity Christian Conference in a city in the South during the Summer vacation. A fifteen-hour train ride with one stop-over and billets i.e. staying over free of charge with a hospitable family, normally local students' homes, were the options. My good friend, Beverley, wanted to go. It was a cheap way of traveling.

The more I got to know Theo in the interim, the more I was drawn to his magnetism. He was so knowledgeable and enlightening. He introduced us to Ole Hallesby, a Norwegian, Lutheran theologian, whose book about prayer inspired us to open our hearts in submissive faith with thanksgiving.

“Prayer is like drawing breath in reverence to our Creator and Heavenly Father who loves us, hears us, leads us and comforts us.»

Theo's eyes glistened with fire as he explained.

His consuming interest in theology simultaneous with his vocational choice and prowess in science and medicine, dumbfounded me. We had both experienced the power of preaching during the Billy Graham Crusade (although we didn't know each other then), and the Crusade had inspired Theo to have confidence in his own charismatic gifts when he prayed or held devotionals in our group meetings. He was spellbinding. One sermon I heard him preach was about the death penalty that awaited us all because of the first humans' fall from God's grace in the Garden of Eden; that is unless we gave our hearts to Jesus and believed Him to be God's son:

“The world and humanity is already lost! On the road to Hell! Jesus, the Son of God, came into the world to pay the penalty....”

**“You must choose!”** He thundered, and paused.

## THE DAWN OF MY WOMANHOOD

“Choose between darkness and light, death and life, Hell and Heaven. Jesus offers you Light and Life.....”

Theo’s hands grasped the sides of the lectern. He surveyed the audience with a penetrating, but warm and enticing glance.

“Life Everlasting!”

The applause was deafening.

He had heard from his father that the Norwegian theologian, author of the book we had been enamoured about, had been severely criticized by a liberal newspaper in Norway for a similar sermon. The paper had published the publics’ reactions to the Norwegian Broadcasting Commission’s radio broadcast of his *“Hell-sermon”*. Many listeners had been disturbed, both frightened and horrified and complained to the broadcaster. But Theo was not deterred. He would continue to emulate the theologian and preach on the same (John 3. 16-18) at the Christian Youth Conference. He loved Jesus and would follow the call to be *“a fisher of men”*.

I was mesmerized by him and became his devoted supporter in heated debates with more liberal Christians. I adored his brilliant mind, his deep, warm voice and the authority with which he expressed himself.

One can fall in love with parts of a person’s body, I discovered: I became erotically excited by his long and elegant, but powerful legs. And I had plenty of opportunity to survey and admire these body parts. Theo trained regularly, always in the team’s flimsy, lightweight fabric short trousers (shorts) on the lush, freshly mown, Varsity football field. It was delightful there, surrounded by stunning views over the river. When his team was competing in the Inter-State Varsity Cup which were tough, and exhausting matches, I became a willing and enthusiastic supporter. I became consumed by my admiration for him. And he continued to pursue me, flirting with me, and giving me compliments. I was flattered and now I became flirtatious in return.

During the summer vacation on the train southbound to the interdenominational Christian Conference, all my previous misgivings about his stricter background with *“prohibitions”* - of popular music, popular literature, theatre, cinema, with the exception of Christian films, make- up and of course alcohol and dancing, all of which were all presumed to be the Devil’s devices to undermine and eventually annihilate one’s faith - evaporated. Of course, fornication i.e. sexual intercourse outside of marriage, was forbidden, but this was not confined to Christian circles. It was also the general attitude to how *“proper”*, middle class girls should behave. By now I felt oblivious to all of this. I was overwhelmed by the urgency of the passion and desire I felt for him. I loved Theo Llewelyn.

What you can get up to in other peoples’ houses away from home leaves nothing to the imagination. We are still in 1959 - please don’t forget to enter the time-machine back to those good, old, sexually conservative days. Theo had managed to get his hands down

## THE DAWN OF MY WOMANHOOD

inside my blouse during the first evening away from home: only to remark that my nipples weren't hard. I sensed he was disappointed, but I was a novice and didn't know what hard or soft nipples implied. His disappointment didn't dampen his interest in me.

Three months after the Conference we would often drive in his car to a remote area of the Campus under the low, spreading, pink, crimson and purple Bauhinias by the river, The big flowers blushed as they caressed the windscreen with the brilliant blue sky behind them. It was enchanting. And Theo's fascination for breasts had not subsided. In the back seat he would lie with his head in my lap, nestle into my breast like a baby and fondle or suck. Of course, my soft pink nipples had learned to grow hard. But if he thought I relaxed and enjoyed it, he was mistaken. I didn't know what to feel or think. I wasn't liberated enough to get rid of the fear of being discovered, the shame of being "*caught in the act*". In the beginning it was exciting, but as time passed my being, my head and eyes, instead of delighting in the beauty around me, and his devotion to my breasts, were like those of a suricate, constantly on the alert searching for possible intruders. These clandestine meetings gradually became a nightmare more than pleasure. On the other hand, and in more culturally acceptable postures, I was inspired by his mind and admired his conversation. He was intense, captivating and he talked incessantly. He was so knowledgeable that one could be spellbound by what he had to say whether it was a current theological debate, generated from Calvinism, concerning "*free will versus predetermination*", or about physiology and the intricate workings of neurons, or stories of all the "*down and outs*" his parents had taken in and had living with them in their home over the years.

I partook willingly in the admiration he enjoyed from those around him, although some fellow students found him domineering and got bored by his enthusiasm. I was however thrilled to follow and share in his studies. It was also fun being his girlfriend at exciting, local football matches. His team-mates remarked that he could be sluggish early in a match. Someone had to twist his balls early in the piece, then he got on fire and became an invincible adversary. He studied hard and I studied hard beside him, and he seemed elated to have me as his pretty and astute girlfriend. In hindsight I wonder if I felt I should have followed a more ambitious line of study. I had come out best in the class from Primary School and in our final year at Secondary School, but my parents had never encouraged me to do sciences, and I imagined that I had inherited my mother's lack of ability in maths. So it wasn't their fault that I hadn't aspired to more. Maybe Theo was a type of "*alter ego*", an intellectual and spiritual hero, an alternative personality for me. I basked in his glory.

Theo's parents were very welcoming. Baptist, Hannah, had probably been more compatible with their line of theology than a Presbyterian, who like Methodists, Anglicans and Catholics all practiced baptism of babies. Baptists and the Plymouth Brethren insisted on adult baptism by immersion as the only gateway to being blessed by the Holy Spirit,

## THE DAWN OF MY WOMANHOOD

because the act of baptism was deemed to require a personal, adult decision to follow Jesus. But they were kind to me.

I grew to love Theo's sister, Deidre, and his paternal grand-mother, Lizzie, who lived with them. Lizzie with her greying hair in a bun and wise, blue eyes taught me to iron Theo's shirts. Male students often wore shirts and ties to the university in those days.

Deidre had thick, wavy, auburn hair. Could it be the same colour as Anne of Green Gables' hair, I wondered? L. M. Montgomery's novels about Anne (with an e) had been my favourites. I was fascinated by Deidre's translucent, green eyes. She sort of looked through you, lovingly, into your soul. She was two years younger than me, with a deep, velvety voice that was so endearing.

Gillian, my sister, was 5 years younger than me, and I had already started school when she was born, hence we had never been close. Claire, my youngest sister, was two and a half years younger than Gillian and they developed a warm and interdependent relationship. Because Gillian was slighter built and didn't grow so tall, it didn't take long before Claire was taller and sturdier than her. Many thought they were twins and they operated like that. That meant that they, as sisters, were emotionally non-existent in my life. Deidre filled that gap. She confided in me too. I'll never forget the anger and disgust I felt when she told me what a Baptist, male, youth leader had proffered as his assessment of her:

*"You have absolutely no allurement and you'll most likely never find a husband, so you'd better settle on being a missionary."*

What did this insulting representative of God mean, that she had no sex appeal? And he gilded the pill by calling it "*allurement*", or was he using damning, manipulative measures to recruit teenage fellowship members into being missionaries? For me she was a sylph - tall, often dressed in green to bring out the best in her auburn hair. Of course she had allurement. Maybe not for him, silly man. I could have throttled him:

*"What a load of bollocks,"* I exclaimed. *"He has no right to say things like that, and nothing is further from the truth. You have loads of charm, and one day your Prince Charming will come along, Mark my words!"*

I stopped to take a breath, and saw her broken self-esteem picking up the pieces, trying to paste them together again. She gave me a wan smile,

*"Thanks Julie",* she said.

In the back of my head, I remembered that fairy tales were banned from their home, so *"Prince Charming"* was not the best idiom I could have used. But she was old enough to know what I meant, and she believed me. I experienced a calm energy, a peace deep inside Deidre which made me believe she would recover.

## THE DAWN OF MY WOMANHOOD

Their mother was pretty, with curly, brown hair and tired, dark brown eyes that livened up when she spoke about her children and her deceased brother who was also named Theodore, but called Teddy. She had idolized him, and as he had also been on the police force was the reason she and her husband had met. He had died of a heart attack ten years before. She had little education herself and was extremely proud of her children's accomplishments, she spoke little and quietly, seeming to live in her husband's shadow.

Theo's father impressed me with his knowledge of theology, and he was a compelling, much sought after lay-preacher. His work on the police force and in the courts made his conversation stimulating and fascinating. He was certainly the dominating person in their home. With my focus on Theo, his family and the university, my own dear parents and my four younger siblings had faded into oblivion, even though I technically speaking still lived at home.

I had grown up in a loving and a "church-loving" family. My mother had a beautiful voice. My earliest memories of her are interwoven with song. After our evening prayer and good-night kiss she would softly accompany her own song, Brahms' lullaby: "*Sleep, my darling, good night; Fair angels in white shall watch o'er thy sleep and safely thee keep*" on the piano. I slept to these peaceful sounds. And the presence of angels in my existence seemed like a self- fulfilling prophecy, subliminally infused in me through her song.

She also practiced, among other pieces, Schubert's "*lieds*" with an accomplished pianist, but that was not soothing - rather more frenzied musical communication between piano and voice. Our local church was however delighted to have her contribution in their morning services, and occasionally I sang with her. Our best effort was from Handel's Messiah, where Mum sang the contralto solo "*He shall feed His flock like a shepherd...*" and I sang the soprano solo "*Come unto Me all ye who labour...*". The organist got quite carried away by the exquisiteness of our song as she told us afterwards.

In retrospect my mother had come a long way. She was the eldest of four children having spent her childhood in the backwoods. I was told that her maternal aunt, a couple of years younger than my grandmother, was the first white female child to be born in the area that was primarily inhabited by aborigines. Her father supplied timber to sawmills. He owned two bullocks and a device by which they could drag huge logs, stringy barks and towering gums from the dark forest to the sawmill on the outskirts of the village. She recalled that one of her tasks each evening was to disinfect a needle and patiently work at removing the devious splinters from the palms of her father's hands, and his fingers.

There was no electricity in their small, wooden cottage with its corrugated iron roof. She would place his hand strategically under the kerosene lamp and sometimes had to gouge deep into the flesh to loosen the wooden invader. If a piece broke off and what remained was too deep to continue, she would fetch her maternal grandmother's "*black ointment*" to soothe and draw out the remaining bit. My grandfather always thanked Mum for her

## THE DAWN OF MY WOMANHOOD

painstaking effort. It was the quality time they spent together at the end of each working day.

Peggy, the maternal grandmother, had been a midwife in Durham, England before she married and sought her fortune with her husband and their baby girl in Australia in the early 1890s. Peggy with her nursing experience, became not only the deliverer of all the babies in the bush town, but It's unauthorized general practitioner for sores and ailments. She concocted the black ointment, using tar, glycerine and other secret herbs that had an almost magical effect on stubborn foreign bodies.

Mum was hopeless at maths but gifted as far as writing was concerned. The Head Teacher at the tiny, one-teacher school reckoned she should move to a town or city to continue her education after the 6th grade. But she needed to pass an entrance exam in English, Maths and Geography. English and Geography were a piece of cake, but Maths, a real hurdle. Mum entered the exam room with trepidation: she was the only pupil to take the exam from the school. It was the second day. She had gotten through yesterday pretty well, but today was Maths. She opened the sealed envelope with shivering fingers. The sheet of paper with the typed exam questions was easy to spot, but there was another page behind it. At first, she didn't comprehend what it was. It just made her more confused and anxious. Suddenly it dawned on her: this extra page revealed the solutions to the sums, the geometry and the mathematical problems she had been dreading. She didn't know what to think or feel. In a numbed state she copied the solutions onto the typed exam-paper. She was careful not to mix up the answers.

She was painfully aware that it would have been catastrophic for that person, if he or she had been exposed as deliberately helping my mother to cheat. Until my mother's death she never knew if the sympathetic headmaster had made a solo stunt of concealing the answers with the questions, or whether she had been given the envelope that was meant for the examiner. She did manage to conceal the solutions-page on her person before she quietly left the room. When she received the results - she had passed- she gave her guardian angel a wry smile, "*Thank you!*"

Mum's father arranged that she be sent to the State capital where his widowed mother lived with his two unmarried sisters. These three pious women lived in a well-furnished, wooden house in a pleasant suburb. The decor was charming, and dinner was served on beautifully embroidered tablecloths and using delicate crockery. Best of all, they a piano in the drawing-room. One of the maiden aunts was a teacher, and taught my mother the rudiments of piano playing, after that Mum was self-taught. The family were regular attenders of the local Presbyterian Church and engaged in the life of the congregation. The church choir embraced Mum and her talent and encouraged her to take singing lessons while she attended secretarial school.

Mum thrived with the singing lessons, but she had no ambition to be a secretary. Her secret desire was to be a newspaper reporter, in today's terminology, a journalist. The aunt

## THE DAWN OF MY WOMANHOOD

who was a qualified teacher and earned her own money was occasionally able to buy Mum a pretty, new dress as the allowance her brother sent each month was barely enough to feed my mother and pay for her daily tram rides to the city. I am sure Mum missed her parents and younger siblings, but she found the new life in the city fulfilling and exciting. She joined the young adults fellowship at the church and was confronted with the commitment of the Oxford Group, which was sweeping through England, Scandinavia and also Australia in the 1930s.

The Group's tenets were soul-searching and demanding: One should reserve a Quiet Time each morning as a means to be inspired by God through bible reading and prayer. This was an empowering reservoir to live out a Christ-like life for the rest of the day. It was essential to admit mistakes, make amends and ask for forgiveness, and always seek to be at peace with people one may have been irritated by or angry with before sundown.

Mum and Dad met on the train. Mum's parents had retired and moved to the city. She lived with them when she became an aspirant journalist. Her first job was in a typing pool, but she had managed to get a apprenticeship as a reporter and worked 3 days a week typing and two days, often evenings and weekends, reporting. When they met, both my parents were in their twenties and worked in the same newspaper. Dad was in logistics: getting the newspapers printed and distributed the public. Although Mum delighted in singing and performing, she was rather shy and not versed in the ways of the world. At age 23 when they got engaged, she believed that kissing could make a baby. Although they loved each other deeply and had five children my Mum never indulged in any deep talks with me about "*the birds and bees*"; so my knowledge of surging hormones and fatal attractions had been acquired from all the romantic novels I submersed myself in. Even when I menstruated for the first time, she only told me that it was normal for girls of my age and helped me with the practicalities that were pretty primitive at the time: homemade cotton pads that one attached to one's panties with safety pins and had to rinse in cold water before washing in our primitive boiler. She never mentioned the whys and the wherefore. I had to wait to biology classes at secondary school for that.

As my relationship with Theo developed he began to confide in me about "*prohibited things*", in this case sexually forbidden things. First it was about Hannah. It sounded as if their relationship was pretty sexualized even though they were school-age sweethearts who professed to live as Christians should. He ventured to tell me also that Hannah's father, who was a Baptist pastor, would visit her while she lay in the bath and soap her back and her breasts. I found this distasteful, but by the time he told me this my professional training was enough that I revealed neither shock nor suspicion. This confidence disturbed me. I was reminded of why my Dad would never let me nor my sisters join the Brownies or the Girl Guides/Scouts. He had spoken vaguely about himself as a youth avoiding the sexual advances of an older Scout leader. Father and daughter sounded even worse.

## THE DAWN OF MY WOMANHOOD

My lovely Dad had always tried to protect us, not only from potential sexual predators, but from sorrow and evil of all kind. He had enough of it to cope with in his childhood. As an adult he had been frugal and saved enough to put a deposit on a house in a pleasant suburb. Our road was a “*No through*” road on the crest of a ridge which dropped down on one side through virgin bush to the normally sluggish, meandering river. The river crept, either muddy brown or shining like a silverfish, toward the sea. From our house we could see the low, green, treeless peninsula in the hairpin bend of the river on the opposite bank. It was here that the floods would intermittently rise. While we on our side were safe on a hill, ensconced in verdant bush, broken in season by the burning yellow and red blossoms of the prickly lantana, the houses on the other bank became the victims of the swirling, debris-filled water. Dad chose a good spot.

Our road contained twenty houses, ten on each side of the road. Helen was a year and a half older than me and my best friend from as long as I can remember. She lived seven houses up the slight slope from us. We were the only two girls in our age group, but Helen had a cousin Beatrice who was a little older again who always spent holidays with Helen. Helen had two older brothers and a much older sister, Wanda, who seemed like an adult to me. Stephen, who was my age, lived next door with his parents and a younger brother, Rolf.

There were only two cars in the road: Helen’s mother’s car, a spacious open car with a black, canvas hood, tan-coloured, lacquered body and wide running boards that we children could stand on when she drove slowly and serenely down the road; and my Dad’s car, a tiny Standard firm car which he occasionally was allowed to drive home and use at the weekends. On these precious occasions we would drive out to a creek in a nearby suburb for a picnic, and if we were lucky, we would be given a treat, a caramel sweetie each. The absence of cars meant that we, small children could play, happily and safely in the road and traipse around from house to house at our pleasure. There were no kindergartens at that time: just a crèche for minding children if mothers had an appointment at the dentist or with a doctor.

Unfortunately, despite his efforts some things were out of my father’s control. Bushfires, and also house-fires in Australia were one of them. Many parts of Australia are either blessed or cursed with extreme weather. We seldom had grey, drizzly days like London. The gardens and rainforests blossomed because of short-lived, heavy downpours. In the dry seasons, we could experience raging, hot winds and very occasionally sandstorms from the red centre. The fine red dust enveloped us making our eyes wince and our mouths and throats so thick and dry that we could barely speak.

One dry, hot and blustery Thursday, late October 1957, a year and a half before I met Theo, our house caught fire. My mother and my twin brothers, aged four at the time, and I myself were at home. I had Scarlet Fever and was quite sick. My distraught mother’s terrified scream got me out of my sickbed:

## THE DAWN OF MY WOMANHOOD

“Juliet, ring the Fire Brigade: Our house is burning down!”

I saw no fire, was completely bewildered, but I responded obediently to the desperate, compelling tone in her voice. I rushed to the phone and rang the Fire Brigade. They asked me,

“Where is the fire?”

“I don’t know,” I replied in a broken voice. “I can’t see any fire, but my Mother says our house is burning down. You must come!”

They came, but too late. They understood when they arrived that their prime mission was to save the neighbour’s house, which was severely threatened by the direction of the fire, borne on the searing, fierce wind. I managed to get down the stairs to the garden and saw that our traditional, expansive, wooden house with its wreath of verandas was engulfed by a bed of flames. They were licking up around the railings of the floor where my bedroom was. I sat in a hole in the fence in my unbecoming, flannelette nightie beneath the Cypress trees along the other neighbour’s fence - on the side which was protected from the horrendous wind - when an avalanche of molten roofing came crashing down not more than ten yards in front of me.

I learned about Community spirit in the aftermath of the fire: How tailor-made, individualized help to persons in need is of the utmost importance. Nothing was saved. When the heat had died down and we could sift through some of the rubble, we found bits of Mum’s beloved China tea service with tiny flower pattern and gold-rimmed, a present, and my beloved books. When I picked up one of their recognizable charcoal remains, it crumbled away in my hands, just dark grey, diaphanous charcoal flakes that floated away like delicate, muted moths. Our beautiful red cedar-wood piano was gone, all my sheet music from Beethoven’s *Für Elise* to Christian Sinding’s *Rustle of Spring*, and Mum’s precious songs from the Eisteddfods she had competed in and the concerts and oratorio in which she had performed. My beautiful dolls, especially the baby doll with chocolate brown eyes and an open mouth with two tiny teeth. I cried for them, the vision of them in the searing heat of the flames was too much. I cried also over the new, becoming, red and white silk, polka-dot dress with a tight-fitting bodice and swirling skirt that matched the red high-heeled shoes that I had worn, only a week before, to the High School Ball. Gavin had been my partner.

I sobbed too over some dainty exquisitely embroidered handkerchiefs that I had never used, keeping them in my “*Hope Chest*”. The hope-chest was reduced to smouldering embers, only the brass metal lock still shone like a tiny, golden sun when we sieved through the ash. I vowed never again to put precious things aside and save them for later, a better occasion. The verse from the Bible “*Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy.*” (Mathew 6.19) rummaged around in my brain: Why didn’t the apostle mention fire, or flood for that matter? They were equally obliterating! Mum searched endlessly for photos of us as babies and found some relics that were

## THE DAWN OF MY WOMANHOOD

damaged both by fire and water, but recognizable. She wept and hugged them to her breast.

We had no clothes. My two younger sisters, Gillian, eleven, and Claire, nearly nine, had been at school, so they had their school uniforms, poor darlings. They had been called to the Principal's office in the middle of a class and been informed that the hullabaloo with fire engines and black smoke east of the school was in fact their own home that was burning. I had my wretched old nightie and panties. My twin brothers were my mother's first concern, finding them. They were clad in shorts. Poor Dad, in his office attire, was called home and stood alone watching the still seething black rubble. The tears were streaming down his soot-smeared face. I heard him mumble:

*"Forty years of hard work ready for the Dump!"*

He had not had an easy life. His father's lack of responsibility meant that he had to leave school at the age of thirteen and go to work so that his mother, her younger sister and his two brothers could survive. But his marriage to my Mum was a turning point for him. He thrived in his marriage and family life, succeeded at work, enjoyed his extensive garden with its hens' house, fruit trees and flowering shrubs, flourished in our Church to which he had converted after their marriage, and relaxed with his favourite hobby, sailing. But the fire took its toll. My youngest sister recollects seeing him secretly sobbing, his head in his hands, sitting on an upturned bucket under my great-aunts' house. This was the house where my mother had grown up from thirteen years of age. Her grandmother had died and the great-aunts took care of us temporarily.

In addition to our neighbours and members of our congregation it was my Dad's fellow sailors that came to our rescue: an architect and a builder from the Sailing Club offered to design and build a new house on our allotment without paying fees for the architect or any administrative charges.

The insurance paid for the house building, but the only item inside the house that was insured, was the piano. Some neighbours helped us to find a house to rent in the same suburb for a year. This was important for my little sisters' schooling. The Church fellowship supplied us with hand-me-down clothes, utensils etc. And a beautiful girl, June, from the Youth-fellowship, a little older than me and a wizard at sewing, said:

"I guess you are a bit tired of wearing other peoples' hand-me-downs. Come, we can go to a store where they sell sewing patterns and fabrics. I will sew you a dress of your own choosing."

Her gesture was heavenly, and I have considered her an angel in my life ever since. People asked incessantly how the fire started. A neighbour over the road said he heard an explosion. His windows were blown out by the heat. This information may have supported that the whole thing started in my mother's kiln, which was placed centrally in the house. My mother dabbled in ceramics. She was quite good at it. This was difficult for me to accept as my room was quite near the kiln-room, and I would surely have heard an

## THE DAWN OF MY WOMANHOOD

explosion before my mother's heart-wrenching cry for help. Others asked where the boys (the twins) had been. There had been a drought, and that coupled with fierce, dry wind meant that any game with matches could have been incendiary. When my mother had found the boys, Freddy had immediately proclaimed: "*Frankie did it!*" i.e. diverting suspicion of blame away from himself. My mother told me this, but neither of us was inclined to accept it as the truth. They were only four and a half. I doubted Freddy's innocence more than Frankie's; he was always getting up to mischief with the boy from over the road.

The dilemma I felt about blame, shame versus exoneration and innocence brought to my mind a dramatic tale, conceived in my imagination that I had told an elderly lady when I, myself was four years of age. She and her husband were Helen's neighbours. It created quite a furore:

The war was still on in North and Eastern Australia. Brigadier General Dwight Eisenhower had, after the bombing of Pearl Harbor December 1941, got Congress to agree to the establishment of a Headquarters for Australian and American Defence in Brisbane, deeming it to have strategic value in the fight against the Japanese invasion in South-East Asia. General Douglas MacArthur was ordered to Brisbane from the Philippines to lead the War effort. Japanese midget submarines had been discovered and destroyed in Sydney Harbour in 1942, the same year that Darwin had been bombed by their Air Force. Five Japanese First Class submarines had also rendezvoused some 35 nautical miles north-east of the entrance to Sydney Harbour. Newcastle was threatened.

We had black-out blinds on all our windows, and there were air-raid shelters in the neighbourhood. When the alarm sounded, we all had to evacuate our homes and huddle together down in the air-raid shelter in the basement of the house opposite us until the "*All clear*" sounded.

My father was in the Army but stationed at a base about 40 miles from our home. A football injury meant he was declared "*a second class citizen*" as far as active fighting was concerned. I don't think my mother minded. Her much younger brother was already a prisoner-of-war (POW) somewhere in Germany, having volunteered for the RAF as a 17-year-old. He was trained as a bomber in England but had to bail out in a parachute when his plane was targeted and destroyed on his second raid over France. My father's two brothers and my maternal aunt's husband were all fighting in New Guinea. The news from there was horrific, the enemy behaving barbarously, oblivious to the conventions of war in the torture of their prisoners and their ferocity toward their foe. Thus, from the age of three I was plagued by nightmares.

Mostly the dreams entailed the enemy encroaching on me, and me escaping "*by the skin of my teeth*" (Job, 19.20). I remember one of the nightmares vividly to this day, 78 years after the event: We lived near the river and there were a few different parks that nestled in the curves of its meandering. I was in one of these parks playing. It was a sunny day. I wore a

## THE DAWN OF MY WOMANHOOD

pinafore over my cotton top and I had left my sandals somewhere, so I was barefoot. There was no-one I recognized in the vicinity. Suddenly a disturbance in the river, a swirling of waters accompanied by frightening noises. A submarine surfaced and out jumped a whole company of "Japs" (that was the vernacular for the Japanese enemy during the war.) They were dressed in light yellow-khaki uniforms and caps with back-flaps shading their necks, and all had rifles. They were effective and quickly rounded up the whole bunch of people in the park, including me. A table was set up on the bank beside the submarine and the captain or whatever he was, opened a book and took out his pen. He glowered menacingly at us through the black slits that were his eyes, We were shoved into a line, and I saw that they started sorting the people, those who had shoes were allowed to go, free to wander off, the others who were barefoot were pushed into a huddle with armed guards in an ominous ring around them. I looked frantically around the grassy area in search of my sandals. They were nowhere to be seen. With great trepidation I followed the line. Being the smallest, I was wedged between the people who towered over me both in front and behind. Someone whispered that the people with no shoes were sure to be shot. I was crying, screaming out loud,

*"I won't be shot, I want my Mummy. I won't be shot!"*

The next thing I remember was my mother sitting beside me in the bed, stroking my forehead, whispering:

*"There, there, my darling, you are not getting shot! Mummy's here! Oh, you are so warm, and your forehead is damp with fear. Have you had a bad dream?"*

My little heart quieted, but the fantom of imminent peril continued to haunt me in the nights and fired my imagination in the daytime.

The tale I told the elderly lady, was monstrous. I told her my parents had been on a train that had been bombed by the *Japs*. Both my parents had been killed, and she believed me! When she found out that she had been duped by a fantasizing four-year-old, she never let me forget it. She called me "*a nasty, little liar*" with disgust smouldering in her eyes whenever I passed by her house, which was pretty often on my way to Helen's. I always ran by on the other side, but that didn't curb her yelling at me. Imagination and reality can get mixed up when one is small. I felt shame.

My sensitivity to shame extended also beyond my own person, to my race and my immediate environment. This started when I was just a little older than the lying issue. I started school as the youngest in my class, four and a half years old. In those days it was called Prep 1 and 2 and it encompassed a school year before the first grade. We learned to read, write and did sums, so it was not a kindergarten nor a year of fun and play. It was serious stuff. In our suburb there was a Children's Home for boys run by the Salvation Army. My feeling of shame was not connected to the Boys' Home. I'm sure they did their best, but the little fellows who were pupils in my class that came from the Home were representatives of '*the last, the least and the lost*'. And they weren't the brightest either.

## THE DAWN OF MY WOMANHOOD

It was quite usual in those days to ask one or two of the '*brighter*', more privileged children to sit with and try to help one or two of these Homeboys. Alan, a good and clever, little boy, and I were asked to do this task. I got to know two of them, Alfie and Owen, and my heart warmed to them: Alfie was a slender little creature with rosy, white skin, pale blue eyes and flaxen hair that stood out in all directions. He understood very little of what we were trying to learn, but he smiled and was glad for my company and interest. Owen, who resembled a five-year-old edition of Cristiano Ronaldo with red cupid lips and coal black eyes was a *half-caste* aboriginal, a belligerent boy, who had been treated badly by the world and wanted to lash back.

Today it is an insult to use the term "*half-caste*". All who have aboriginal blood in their veins in Australia, albeit a small percentage, are proud to be called black, not *blacks*, but black. From reading Jamaica Kincaid's book, "Lucy" about her female employer's claiming to have North American Indian blood in her veins, I understand that this may be considered "*a trophy*", transforming one's attitude: from being "*the vanquished to a victor*". But Owen was still one of the vanquished, and I had difficulty getting close to him. He put on an air of pride, as if nothing or no one could touch him. It was this pride that the headmaster and his assistant, a male teacher, did their best to break. It was heartrending for me to see these two small boys being pulled out, often by their ears, in front of the class to be beaten on their open hands with a cane. We called it "*getting the cuts*". Quite often their hands would bleed. Alfie was caned because he couldn't spell, and Owen because of his insolent attitude and rudeness. I felt ashamed, so ashamed of the teachers' callousness, their ignorance! They were totally lacking in understanding or sympathy, although my vocabulary didn't include any of these words or sentiments at the time. I just hurt, deep in my heart, and it still hurts remembering the indignity, pain and injustice these children suffered at the hands of the adult bullies. Alfie wasn't even rude or cheeky or bad. He just didn't understand. He would sob while he was getting beaten, and then the teacher would sneer at him calling him a "*cry-baby*", making his humiliation even worse. Owen didn't cry, just scowled, but one time I did see a tear trickle down his cheek. He wiped it away very quickly with the back of his free hand. My mother had told me that Owen, who seemed "*bad*" to us, didn't deserve to be treated in this way either. He must have lost his mother somewhere or other and he was sad and angry about having no one of his own. This thought made my hurting even worse. I learned that injustice happens.

It was not long after these incidents in the Prep grades that I too was humiliated and the lady teacher who perpetrated this never let me forget it. My little sister, Gillian was born the year after the War ended. I became obsessed with staying at home with my Mother and the new baby, so I put on a temper tantrum just outside the school gates, screaming that I hated school. Our Sewing teacher witnessed this and rattled on about my misdemeanour in a demoralizing way in front of the whole class. She hoped I would learn my lesson.

## THE DAWN OF MY WOMANHOOD

These memories about “*truth*”, “*blame*” and “*shame*” meant that I couldn’t bear the thought of my little brothers being shamed in connection with the fire. I wanted them exonerated. I gave my little brothers the benefit of the doubt when it came to the cause of the fire. I didn’t want either one of them feeling the shame of being accused of something when no-one knew the true cause of the fire.

Our neighbour’s house that the Fire Fighters had prioritized survived the flames: all it needed was a new paint job. It was hard to bear when I visited them, realizing that all their precious keepsakes and memories from a former life were intact. But the neighbour, a Professor of Veterinary Science at the University, kind of adopted me after the fire and was so supportive. He became engaged in my final schoolyear studies and listened without interrupting to my doubts about the Creation story in the Bible when exposed to Darwinism in my Biology classes. He was a Christian, but a quiet and meek man, assured of his own position and authority without having to flaunt it. He was my confidante for the year after the fire. His children, all my senior, were also loving and good friends.

My experiences with the family who had lived next door before the Professor were of another variety, and integral in the story about my sexuality, secret loves, shame or the lack of it, and womanhood. Stephen, the older boy and I were in the same class- We walked to school together every day, and he became the first “*love of my life*”. I respected and loved this skinny, athletic boy who at the age of eleven was often stricken by melancholy because his two-year-older cousin became one of the victims of the poliomyelitis pandemic and died. 1952 to 1955 was the era when Dr. Jonas Salk and his team at the Mayo Clinic, Minneapolis, worked untiringly to develop a polio vaccine that could reduce the terrible death toll among young children and teenagers all over the world.

Stephen was the light of my young life, and an extremely good cricket player. He also played an admirable game of tennis. We had such fun playing together, especially competing on the tennis court, and I would barrack for him in the school cricket team when our school played against other schools. I adored him, but it was his younger brother, Rolf, who was the “*arouser*”.

That summer holiday, when Beatrice was as usual staying with Helen, these girls and I arranged a special game. How? I can’t remember. Rolf, aged nine, was interested in what we called “*the fairy cake game*”. Cupcakes were called fairy cakes when I was at school. Helen and Beatrice were a year or two older than me. We all wore dresses in those days. It was easy to pull our skirts up and our panties down around our knees in a quiet, secluded spot under some bushes. Rolf would lick what he called “*the icing*”, his term for our upturned vulvas, his “*fairy cakes*”. He seemed eager to partake. I don’t think the older girls gave him anything for his services, neither sweeties nor pennies. I never shared in any payment and never asked. It was only after he exclaimed that it wasn’t any fun anymore because Beatrice had begun to grow pubertal hairs on her cupcake, that I experienced a feeling of distaste. I was glad we never got discovered, but I felt no shame.

## THE DAWN OF MY WOMANHOOD

In retrospect, considering today's way of perceiving things, maybe we three girls were the abusers - him being at least two years younger than us.

Helen was a class ahead of me at school. Her father had died soon after she was born of complications from war injuries that he had sustained in World War 1. My Dad became a substitute father for her. She was constantly at our place, and a very welcome visitor. Dad loved pushing us as high as the sky on the swings, high enough to look down into the swallows' mud nests. We caught fleeting glimpses of the baby swallows gaping for the titbits when their mothers swooped down to feed them under the rafters. We whooped with joy.

Helen and I had also participated in exploratory, genital games as four- to five-year-olds playing "*Mothers and Fathers*" and "*Doctors and Patients*" in our garage with her older brothers and another boy from up the road. In this connection I experienced a feeling of shame. I think the shame came from the tone in my mother's voice when she yelled at me:

***"JULIET, GET THOSE CHILDREN OUT OF THE GARAGE! You must come out into the light, onto the grass, into the garden!"***

Why did I react so much to the name "*JULIET*"? Most of the time they called me *Julie* as a pet-name, and I was comfortable with that. But it was always *Juliet* when I was in trouble.

It is a quaint story how I got my name in the first place. My father was very partial to the name, *Juliet*. In addition to his other attributes, he was great at reciting poetry and small ditties. His two favourite poets were typically Australian, Banjo Patterson and C. J. Denis. It was C. J. Denis' "*The Play*" that was relevant to my chosen name.

"*The Play*" is a heartwarming account of Bill (called Billo), the main character who features in the verse novel "*The Songs of a Sentimental Bloke*" (1909-1915) when he takes his girlfriend, Doreen, to the theatre. Billo is a down to earth, working-class bloke to use the Aussie vernacular, and he has finally gotten to know Doreen who works on the assembly line at a pickle factory. She agrees to go on a date with him if he gives up drinking.

Neither of them has been to the theatre before. Shakespeare's play, "*Romeo and Juliet*", is on at a posh, downtown Theatre, "*a chair apiece wiv velvit on the seat; A slap-up treat*" as Billo describes it. One of the verses in the poem is spun around Juliet's famous line; "*What's in a name? A rose by any other name would smell the same*": Billo's thoughts get caught up in the emotional investment in names:

Billo reflecting on the substance of the lines:

"Wot's in a name?" she sez. An' then she sighs,  
An' clasps 'er little 'ands, an' rolls 'er eyes.....

"Wot's in a name?" she sez. '*Struth, I dunno*  
Billo is just as good as Romeo.

## THE DAWN OF MY WOMANHOOD

She may be Juli-er or Juli-et, 'E loves 'er yet.  
If she's the tart 'e wants, then she's 'is queen,  
*Names never count... But ah, I like Doreen!!"*

I had heard Dad recite this poem hundreds of times. He had loved it before I was born, and decided if I were a girl, I had to be "*Juliet*", and I was glad he chose *Juliet* (especially Julie) and not *Doreen*. My mother preferred Judith.

My mother was a good woman, but no saint, even though she preferred biblical names. Like many women of her time she could get frustrated over her role as disciplinarian. Men worked long hours or away from home especially during the war, and small children were always at home. Kindergartens weren't invented then, at least not where we lived. After the war, daily life began to get back to normal. The annual yearly Show, and local fetes were in vogue again with parades, stalls, rides, sideshows with entertainment, wagons with fairy floss, and ladies who wandered around with huge baskets filled with celluloid fairy dolls. Their flimsy garments in organza were all the colours of the rainbow and tinged with glitter. The fairy dolls were mounted on bamboo canes.

There were also cattle and sheep at the shows, and vegetables and flowers of all shapes and sizes. I was five years old and pestered my mother into buying me one of the fairy-dolls. I was so delighted when she did.

At home I took the celluloid doll off the cane so that I could play with the wee thing with its transparent, golden wings. Little did I realize that the cane which Mum kept in pantry would be used to spank me at a later date when I was cheeky or disobedient. A few hard slaps round the calves of my skinny legs were my Mother's way of getting rid of her frustration, and the cane really stung! When it happened, I was devastated, filled with shame, but also with a mixture of rage and disappointment over my mother. How could she dare to use such a sacred item as a weapon? How could I have been so imprudent as to disobey and rile her? How could she demean herself by using my cane on a defenceless child? Strange how one remembers so vividly the stinging pain and the variety of emotions induced by the three times she punished me, whilst the thousands of happy times when she was loving, fun, supportive and comforting are blurred or faded into oblivion.

When I rationally think back, I recall the music, the books, the painting lessons, the endless piano lessons, the modern dance, as well as ballroom-dancing classes in my early teens, and a Twelfth Night Drama Group that I desperately wanted to join and did so just before the fire. The fire put a sudden end to my acting career, but it was exciting as long as it lasted. My parents weren't well-off, so I am sure both Mum and Dad sacrificed a lot to let me be enriched by these cultural treasures. But it is the memory of the fairy-doll and the cane that became etched in my hippocampus.

I experienced something else that was disturbing and distasteful as I was entering puberty. An elderly man and his wife, who were childless would spend their winters in our town to

## THE DAWN OF MY WOMANHOOD

avoid the colder weather in the south. They frequented our church, and to put in the vernacular, this old man took a shine to me. He was fairly wealthy and an eager photographer. He took many pictures of me and also gave me a Kodak box camera which I was delighted about. But I wasn't so delighted when he put his arm around my shoulder allowing his right hand to touch my developing breast. When I think back, the touch which I then assumed to be accidental, was probably deliberate, and it was hurtful as the new, small breasts were tender. I remember that it sometimes brought tears to my eyes. Now in the light of the #MeToo movement I feel his intentions may not have been honourable. I never told anybody about this, but I was shocked by my recent realization of whom he really was. When I reflect over the end of our relationship, I recall that I was neither surprised nor sad when he died, having been trampled on by a Circus elephant. He had been trying to take close-up photos at a "*Meet the Animals Day*" that a Circus had arranged. He had obviously been "*too close for comfort*" for the elephant also.

My first kiss was Charlie's. He was the captain of the school's cricket team, and for me his profile and complexion were that of a Greek god. We were both twelve. He invited me to the Picture Theatre, *the Pictures* in the local language, to see "*By the Light of the Silvery Moon*". It was in technicolour and featured Doris Day and Gordon Mac Rae. The third line of the song goes "*we'll be cuddling soon*". That didn't happen, but we held hands and he kissed me on the lips, a loving, furtive kiss. I warmed to him, but his family that had no academic ambitions for their children, so we parted and went our separate ways after we left primary school.

I had also been deeply in love, at a distance, with our teacher, Mr. Bertrand Haley in the 8th grade. Mr. Bertrand H. was probably in his early 30s. In my mind he was a magnificent physical specimen. His sapphire blue eyes and wiry, black hair fascinated me. He was divorced with two small daughters. I worked hard at school to please him, won an essay prize, and succeeded in coming out as best student in our final year of primary school. I relished it when he gave us lessons in ball-room dancing. It was like being in a dream, his strong brown arms holding me, his taut body leading me. After I finished at the local school I met him once at a camping ground by the beach. We talked. He kissed me good-bye on the forehead. Like a blessing. Another angel in my life inspiring me to use my talents. My longing for him was physical, but he managed to be stand-offish and treat all us girls exactly the same.

My next infatuation was with Pearl. She was captain of the net-ball team at the prestigious and religious, Protestant Ladies College that I had talked my father into allowing me to attend for my secondary school education. It was expensive for him, and today I am ashamed to think of how I treated him. He drove me to school each day, but I insisted he dropped me off before the main entrance. We had just a small, firm car that couldn't compete with what I judged to be the limousines many of the other girls arrived in. Pearl was a boarder and in the class above me, while I was a day pupil, I was crazy about her

## THE DAWN OF MY WOMANHOOD

black opal eyes, raven black hair, milky white skin and bowlegs. She was everything I wasn't, even to the bowlegs. I had been treated as a child for knock knees.

It was November, the jacarandas were flowering with their luxuriant, mauve blossoms. I had been at Art class in the sprawling atelier which was full of light from the glass windows in the ceiling but had dallied and came out alone. I had some water colours that had dried in a cardboard portfolio under my arm when I suddenly burst into a song from "South Pacific", Mitzi Gaynor's "*I'm in love, I'm in love, I'm in love. I'm in love, I'm in love with a wonderful GIRL!*". I substituted for the more prosaic "guy". When I got to the "girl" I flung out my arms, somewhat restrained by my school uniform, and lost my grip on the portfolio and all my paintings were strewn out over the grass. I gathered them up, sheepishly. But it put no damper on my elation. I adored her from a distance.

We knew about lesbians in those days, but I never considered my admiration and love for Pearl as something erotic or queer. She was my idol. This intense, all- consuming feeling, known in the segregated school system as a "crush", was a common phenomenon. I gave her an expensive Christmas present before the summer holidays. I never heard from her, and the long break helped me get over the melancholy of unrequited love. This theatrical expression of feelings may sound like something from "*Anne of Green Gables*", but it was heart-felt.

Apart from this interlude of loving, my daily life at school was far from extraordinary. I was contented and studied hard, primarily to make up for my father's disappointment about not having a secondary school education and my Mum's longing to be more than a wife and mother. She was so like Ibsen's Nora, but she never had the desire nor the guts to leave.

On Saturdays I sailed with Dad in 14-foot Skiffs at the local sailing club. I practiced diligently on the new piano we had bought with the insurance money after the fire and was reasonably good. Dad would often joke about my future as an accomplished pianist. He would retire from his office job to be my manager and had visions that we would travel around the world on fabulous concert tours, the ultimate being Carnegie Hall, New York.

But it was participating in the Church Youth Fellowship that gave me immediate pleasure. In addition to Bible studies and singing in Church Services, we put on a Musical for the congregation each year. There were many talented young people in the group. We played, sang, danced, directed, and sewed. My guardian angel, June, and some of her cronies were in the costumes group and helped with the props. My soprano voice meant that I usually got some solo part, and the singing, dancing and playing in "*Oklahoma!*", "*Carousel*" and "*Pajama Game*" were just up my alley. We all relished it, the actors, singer, musicians, the back-stage assistants and the audience, mostly our parents and family.

There was one young man in the group who became special for me. David was a year younger than me and had recently lost his father due to a heart attack. We spent a lot of time together and were close friends. I remember my mother who sang semi-professionally, practicing the aria "*Softly awakes my heart, as the flowers awaken, to*

## THE DAWN OF MY WOMANHOOD

*Aurora's tender zephyr*" from Camille Saint-Saëns' opera "Samson and Delilah" and the effect it had on me. Sitting close to David and listening to her could make me weak at the knees and get me humid "*downstairs*". The erotic flame that yearned for stimulation and fulfillment with David was induced by the exquisiteness of the music. I learned later that there is a term for this sensation, "*ego-orgasm*". Later in life I also discovered that Delilah's declaration of love of Samson was a farce, but then at that moment with David, the sensation was delightful. The fire turned to ashes however when I matriculated and enrolled at Uni. and he still had another year to go at high school.

Dad's finances after the fire were depleted. I had to earn my keep while I was at Uni so my summer holiday was spent in a Pineapple factory from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. working on an assembly line. The pace was intense, and the female supervisors yelled at us if we didn't keep up with the other experienced working women. The train ride to and fro took an hour each way and I stank of fermented pineapple on the rides home and nursed my arms that were full of eczema from the acid juice.

Before this however, our family had undergone a spiritual transformation. Early 1959 the Billy Graham Crusade was due to come to Australia. The Reverend Billy Graham was an ordained Southern Baptist minister from North Carolina who became internationally known and accepted as one of the most influential preachers of the twentieth century. His evangelistic meetings, which were on large scale in huge tents or stadiums, drew thousands of participants in every city or town he visited. The year before the Crusade became a time of spiritual and practical preparation for all the local protestant churches.

Prayer-meetings for the success of the Crusade, Choir practices, and Counselling Courses for those who were assigned to welcome the much-hoped-for new converts were the order of the day, I was very much involved, loved singing in the enormous choir and the counselling instructions, My personal commitment to Jesus Christ as "*author and perfecter of my faith*" (Hebrews 12, 2) became a reality: a heightened awareness of the spiritual fact that my life and my future were held securely in His Hands flooded over me. I felt obliged to follow Jesus' way of being, helping people less fortunate than myself, and this forced me to reconsider my career choice to become a journalist. I had hoped to compensate for my mother's aborted dreams of a reporter-career, the path she had turned her back on when I was born.

At that time, it was unusual for women in urban areas to work outside the home after the children came along, i.e. if their husbands had a steady job. Only single mothers, widows and wives of the unemployed were forced to work. Helen's mother for instance went back to nursing after her husband died. My mother, I believed, felt caged in, especially after the fire, without any hope of self-realization, a word that wasn't in her vocabulary. I didn't want my life and ambitions to end like that, but I became concerned that journalism was perhaps not the right path for me.

## THE DAWN OF MY WOMANHOOD

Dad had taken my journalistic plans seriously and secured me an apprenticeship in the Newspaper where he still worked. But journalism in a newspaper seemed all of a sudden, trivial, even tawdry: Reporting on the *rich and famous* was my naive stereotype of what journalists engaged in and became degraded in my estimation. My experiences with Alfie and Owen reminded me of the depths of despair described in W. Beatrice Deas' hymn: "*this world of sin and shame*". I became convinced that Jesus' atoning sacrifice to bestow on us a new life of redemption from sin and a promise of an eternal life in His love, was something I had to share, not only in words, but in deeds. I changed my mind and my direction as far as my career plans was concerned. I chose a four-year bachelor's degree in the field of sociology with the final year specializing in psychosocial health.

This brings me back to the University and my relationship with Theo. Theo and I were again sitting in the backseat of his car, this time admiring the beauty of the flowering bauhinias. We had a time of prayer together. He was subdued, quiet, unusual for him. After a long silence he told me he had a secret he wished to confide in me. His secret was a far cry from the innocent loves and erotic experiments in my childhood. Also, far more disturbing than my experience with the elderly photographer. Family was, in my mind synonymous with loving support and goodness, my alcohol dependent grandfather being the exception. Even he had been sober enough for longer periods in his life to be remembered as an excellent football coach. But Theo's secret? It was mind-boggling.

## Chapter 2 “Ah! Sweet Mystery of Life...longing, seeking striving, waiting, yearning”

### JULIET AND THEO, 1960-1966: SECRETS, LOVE, DECEPTION, BAD DREAMS, TRAVESTY

Theo's confidence made it difficult for him to speak. I had never heard anything like it before: for me it seemed implausible, incomprehensible. In an unusually quiet, measured voice and with flushed cheeks he told me he had been sexually abused by his maternal grandmother who had also lived in their house after she was widowed, and who had died five years prior to our meeting. I was shocked. In my wildest fantasy my imagination couldn't extend to the thought of a grandmother enticing her thirteen-year-old, well into puberty grandson, with chocolates and sweets into her bed. She would lure him to suck on her breasts while she fondled him to an erection. When his father discovered them, late one evening, Theo ejaculated all over the place. He told me with deep sorrow, shame and disgust in his voice how his father had yanked him out of her bed, and in his nakedness pushed him in front of him into the bathroom where he cleaned him up and sent him to bed. All the while the grandmother ranted around the house like the raving mad *Mrs. Rochester* in “*Jane Eyre*”, screaming and swearing damnations at the top of her voice on this usually so holy house.

Little sister, Deidre, corroborated this happening four and a half decades later, recalling what had been for her a mayhem: woken by her grandmother's screams, scared to death, she witnessed the half-naked, dishevelled grandmother's rampage down the hall. Deidre was completely ignorant of what lay behind. Sheepishly Deidre admitted to being secretly relieved when the grandmother died a mysterious death a few days later. The grandmother had always favoured Theo, coddling him, giving him presents, completely ignoring Deidre. Deidre never understood why.

Theo continued his story: Neither his father, who was a policeman in the Vice Squad and used to sexual debauchery, unspeakable for many, but daily diet for him, nor his mother, the abuser's daughter, ever broached the incident again. The disclosure of the violation of a growing boy's innocence and the grandmother's unforeseen death three days later were erased from their conscious minds. “*Business as usual*”, as if the whole thing had been a bad dream. For Theo their silence was unfathomable, unbearable. For me the incident had been unthinkable, to them, unspeakable. Theo's bitter experience, the ambivalence about enjoying the grandmother's favour and reciprocating her erotic needs, the humiliation of the discovery and the shame of being washed by his father, were all swaddled in a shroud

## THE DAWN OF MY WOMANHOOD

of denial by his parents. The burden of guilt had been intolerable. I was the first and only person Theo ever shared this with.

Sometimes you don't know what to do with the information you receive. I should have done something about this; found someone Theo could talk to. We both had Psychiatry classes in our Uni courses. But I just *contained* it. His confidence bound me closer to him. This huge, impressive young man became now for me like a vulnerable, injured child. I felt a need to protect him. But I loved him also as a man. I remember vividly when we holidayed on the above mentioned, enchanting island, I would look at him as we scurried over the sand dunes toward the ocean, my vagina all wet in a way that was almost uncomfortable, like peeing my pants. The whole of my body was ready for him. But because of our religious commitment to wait until we were married, we never got the chance to enjoy this warm self-lubrication.

I did have a period of doubt, not about my Christian beliefs, but about Theo. At the second InterVarsity Conference that we attended we got to know some young, male theologians who became leading lights in the charismatic evangelical awakening that was soon to sweep through the Anglican Church. His new friends meant that Theo was wasting his time with me. I was "*a millstone round his neck*" was their expression. He ought to be free from worldly pleasures, i.e. girlfriend, in order to follow God's calling. In addition to becoming a doctor, they reckoned he was destined to be a great evangelist. This rejection of my person by these men was hurtful.

Theo had always respected me, treated me as his intellectual, social and spiritual equal. When he told me what they had said, I felt like a second-class citizen: Were they excluding me from the fold of the spiritually worthy? Their agenda may, of course, have been something else, for example more practical in light of the adage: "*He travels fastest, who travels alone*", or Apostle Paul's analysis of 1. Corinthians 7.1: "*it is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman*". The Roman Catholic Church has down through the ages praised the choice of celibacy, the freedom from worldly encumbrance that a wife and children entail. I felt uncertain about whether Theo loved me or not. If he really had cared, he would have protested that I enriched his life. He seemed as if he were under their spell.

There was another medical student from a different state at the conference: Andrew was very thin and sinewy. He had the "*lean and hungry look*" that Shakespeare so eloquently describes in "*yon Cassius*" on the Ides of March when Rome's greatest military leader, Julius Caesar, was fatally stabbed by the conspirators, among others Cassius and Caesar's former friend and ally, Brutus. I have wondered later about *the lean and hungry look*: Did it arouse me sexually, or did I mistake its' appeal as erotic when, in reality, it appealed to my motherly, protective instincts. In any case when Andrew asked if he could stay with my family during the holidays in order to do some preaching at Beach Missions in the sunny North, I was very keen to take him in. My Dad, earth-bound as he was, after Andrew's third week in our home, proffered an insight, not sarcastically, but it went home:

## THE DAWN OF MY WOMANHOOD

*“These guys like Andrew who ostensibly ‘live by faith’ are really leaches, living off the host’s generosity.”*

My proximity to Andrew, however unreliable he was, caused me to see my choices and relationships in a different light, also Theo. I told my mother that I was uncertain about Theo’s feelings for me and mine for him. I was disappointed in him. I wanted a time-out. Mummy was all for it. The evangelical patriarchy in his family and his infatuation with his new friends from the Conference had got to me. Mum’s support was unexpected, but welcome. She had obviously sensed something that I was oblivious to at this stage.

When I told Theo I wanted a pause, he sobbed his heart out. He insisted that we should continue as we were. He said he *“didn’t give a damn”*, an unusually emphatic phrase from his non-swearling, Christian lips, about the guys from the Conference and their opinion of me.

*“Love me”, he implored.*

His tears and abject fear and sorrow at the thought of losing me had its effect. I put my arms around him. I was the person to whom he had revealed his darkest secret. My heart and body had wakened to him. Could I abandon him? No.

\*\*\*\*\*

It was our WEDDING NIGHT in our own house. Theo’s parents had helped us to buy it, an old, but charming farmer’s cottage on the rural outskirts of the city. We were married in an Anglican Church that had hopped on the charismatic bandwagon. It was also old by Australian standards, sandstone, with exquisite architecture, but spiritually renewed in its joyful, sparkling approach to Christianity. The sunlight gleamed through the stained-glass windows turning the crimson-red, golden, blue and white shafts of light into colourful patterns that danced on the worn, stone floor. We sang Charles Wesley’s beautiful hymn, *“Love Divine, all loves excelling”* to a magical accompaniment. The priest held a moving sermon and blessed us. It could have been like a fairytale come true. But, in spite of my white silk and taffeta dress out of Vogue, and beautiful bridesmaids, Deidre, Gillian and Claire in orchid pink tulle with short veils and blossoms in their hair and groomsmen in black tie, I wasn’t ultimately happy. The organist mucked up the music for the processional march out of the Church, so it hadn’t been as perfect as I had planned. Even Deidre’s eloquent and loving speech to us at the wedding reception where she proclaimed that ours was *“a Marriage made in Heaven”* hadn’t lifted the cloud that had been like a gloomy shroud of uneasiness over me for a few weeks now.

The reticence that sullied what should have been my joyous, celebration day was caused by an occurrence four weeks prior to this: Theo had used his fingers, with cold, almost surgical precision to penetrate me *“downstairs”*. The hymen tore and bled. It was not a romantic nor an erotic action. It was not gentle, not loving. He didn’t even tell what he was doing or why. I was not aroused, I was frightened. I felt outraged when I understood his errand and stricken with guilt and deep disappointment that I couldn’t wear my virgin white,

## THE DAWN OF MY WOMANHOOD

professionally sewn wedding dress with the clean conscience that I had aspired to. I had been on the P-Pill for a month before the wedding. We couldn't afford kids. I think I was the only one in our circle of friends and acquaintances who dared to take it, not that the Pill was something one discussed openly at this stage in society's development. It was new on the market, but Theo had assured me it was safe. Theo had three years more to finish his medical degree, and I was already working at an Institute for children and young adults with congenital brain damage.

Beverley sang "*Ah! Sweet Mystery of Life, at last I've found thee*" in her striking, soprano voice as the last item on the program. It was glorious, inspiring. One of the groomsmen kissed me, deeply, strongly and said, "*Good Luck!*" And then we were off home, finally to culminate three long years of waiting for sexual fulfillment and abandonment. Forgetting my reticence, we jumped into bed like a couple of eager kids, but we jumped out again nearly as quickly to a shocking cacophony of deafening alarm bells. The best man and groomsmen had been active, erecting a sensory device with jingle jangles under the bed which reacted to the slightest movement. It took Theo more than half an hour to untangle the wires. He didn't have a great sense of humour, nor a musical gene in his body that could relate to the bells, however discordant. He was out of sorts, disgruntled. I, who had looked forward to the romance of the act, was astonished by his, not brutal, but almost animal-like efficiency: copulation purely for the purpose of procreation. No foreplay, no kiss, no romance, just frustration about his urges having been disrupted by his playful grooms. It seemed he didn't want me to see his penis, even when fully erected, he was just intent on testing his own reproductive capacity, even though there could be no evidence of this, my being on the Pill. Many years later when they introduced the mini-pill I finally had evidence for the fact that my female, erotic desires, my womanhood, had most likely been thwarted by this introduction of The Pill's fake pregnancy in my body that fateful night. I felt nothing. I felt I had been duped, mislead into believing that intercourse between a man and a woman who loved each other was beautiful, overwhelming, all-consuming.

Thinking back, I wonder what expectations Theo had with regard to our *first night*. I should have asked:

*"Dear Theo what are your intentions, longings or desires for your woman, i.e. me?"*

I had no idea, we had never discussed it, and I didn't like to ask. On the other hand he talked, he talked incessantly during our first years of marriage, so I'll let him tell his story.

THEO:

*"I had gotten used to Juliet's soft, round breasts, her pale pink nipples that needed to be coaxed out by either sucking or gentle massage. If I had lived today, I would have said that the actor who played Bridget Jones in "Bridget Jones' Diary" is probably the nearest physical likeness I have to Juliet, but Juliet was smaller and had shorter, wavy, blondish hair. I loved her for her goodness, her voice, and she was pretty. But the whole time as a teenager and young adult I had dreamt about smallish, triangular, strutting breasts with protruding, dark-brown nipples. My wet dreams were always with such alluring women."*

## THE DAWN OF MY WOMANHOOD

*Hannah had been erotically exciting when I thought of the forbidden seances with her Dad. Juliet was subservient, caring, loving, but not exciting. Like most of the male gender I was primarily interested in penetration and ejaculation, my orgasm. But when I didn't receive any aggressive sexuality or eroticism in return, I began to be frustrated, and disappointed. And I realized as time went on that she wasn't having any orgasms, not as I had read about them in my medical books. And she was often dry, not easy to penetrate, and she seemed to wince rather than enjoy our sex. Was she frigid? I never touched her down there, and her soft breasts didn't interest me any longer. Anatomy classes had taught me all I wanted to know about the female body. We almost never kissed, though I felt that she craved for it. I didn't want her to touch me either. I didn't want her hands clawing at my penis reminding me of Nana's desperate, arthritic hands on my soft, little penis forcing it to erect. I didn't want Juliet doing that. I could manage myself, and when I was ready, she was a convenient fuck, good enough to satisfy the current of testosterone that infused me. I considered it her wifely duty to enjoy my nightly visits. I even suggested anal sex once, but she wasn't having that. I did my best to ignore her confused and disappointed look.*

*Our daytime communication was good. We were both intelligent and interesting people. We had a lot to talk about and discuss. Lots of mutual friends and colleagues. We also had our Faith, although we were already beginning to back-slide. Our little house on a small property, which my parents had financed, and which Juliet was paying instalments on, was situated on the periphery of the town. There was no local church, and the effort of attending the church we got married in was often too much to be bothered about. Sundays were spent lolling about on the veranda with our dog, Bella, and with visits from our friends who loved coming by for a bite to eat and a swim in our dam.*

*Juliet's cooking couldn't hold a candle to my Mum's, so Mum and Dad would often visit with a nice ready-made casserole as a present. Juliet didn't seem to mind. She was my bread-ticket.*

*After a year at the Institute, she was invited to join an epidemiological research team, where she would have responsibility for her area of expertise. The timeframe was good. Her project would last until a year after I graduated. This would give me the opportunity to be finished with my year as a resident doctor, before we could consider having children. Life wasn't so bad, and being out of my parents' clutches meant that I had an incredible sense of freedom. My wildest fantasy was that I could play the field, the emphasis being on the word play, no strings attached. Being married, meant that I could flirt without it being taken seriously by the opposite sex. An elegant, eloquent, impressive dilettante. Worth trying!*

*My Faith, however, got in the way of this fantasy. I wasn't exactly the good Jesus' follower I had aspired to be. My chronic guilty conscience made me put the brakes on and I focused instead on Comparative Religion. I met Roxanne. She was a Madonna of a different faith, the Baha'i faith. She was like a Wedgwood porcelain figurine, pure milk-white skin, long blond hair plaited in a braid around her head like a halo. She didn't arouse me sexually,*

## THE DAWN OF MY WOMANHOOD

*but she was scintillating. She was a medical student in the year under me: her Year's representative in the Medical Students' Society where I was active. We had a lot to do with each other, and she was a missionary. She had her own agenda to try to win me over to the Baha'i religion which emphasizes the oneness of all religions. It was easy to involve Juliet in this attempt to find a common denominator so that all religions could harmonize - acknowledging a creative and sustaining being outside themselves, Kahlil Gibran's words in his book *The Prophet* inspired us both: "Drink not from one cup but fill each other's cups."*

*Roxanne became a regular visitor. We would dine together and discuss theology for hours. We were suddenly a trio, not a duo anymore. But after a while, when we didn't convert, and Roxanne found a sandy-headed male who was passionately involved in philosophy and ethics, her interest in us cooled, and my testosterone began to surge again, looking for new outlets.*

*The next adventure was with Wanda and her husband, John. Wanda was Helen's older sister. She was a medical doctor with her own practice, and John was a Uni. lecturer. It was the mid-sixties, and they were open for loosening up sexual taboos. I had done a short practice placement in General Practice with Wanda, and we really hit it off. She despised the Methodist church's mentality she had grown up with. She wanted to break with tradition, both religious and cultural. We embarked on what was prosaically called group-sex. We needed to be 6 people to make it exciting, so Wanda's friend, Genevieve, from French-speaking Switzerland and her husband, Kenneth, were invited in. Kenneth was a Scot, and a Presbyterian like Juliet. Juliet, but also Kenneth, were the killjoys.*

*They sat politely, fully clothed, talking to each other on the sofa while we four had it off together in Wanda's and John's king-sized bed. "Make Love not War" was becoming a popular slogan in those days. Middle-class people like us started new trends even though we never went "barefoot with flowers in our hair". The new liberated part of me gave me a craving for modern art. Juliet didn't support this either, but I had my own allowance from the super scholarship I had won. I bought a large oil-painting. This livid, red, black and orange masterpiece that resembled either "Dante's inferno" or the inside lining of some cancerous stomach, replaced an insipid water colour on the wall in Juliet's pastel coloured living room, it was something she just had to get used to. I assured her it was a good investment. I let my beard grow and smoked a pipe. At least she didn't protest about my smoking. I believe she really liked the smell of my aromatic pipe-tobacco.*

*There was quite a lot of beer, wine or whiskey at these swinging sessions. I started to drink and to adopt the jargon of my bedfellows. Swear words that had never crossed my lips before suddenly became quite natural to me, even though Juliet flinched when I swore. She couldn't bear it. She still read her Bible and tried to pray, but she didn't pester me to go to church, so I shrugged my shoulders and let her be. She never interfered with my freedom, and her intense involvement in her research made it easy for me either to play poker with the poker-players in my year or play the field.*

## THE DAWN OF MY WOMANHOOD

*I had begun to study Sigmund Freud and Friedrich Nietzsche. I loved them and tried to get Juliet to appreciate them. Freud she knew pretty well, but with Nietzsche she was not only half-hearted, she was antagonistic. My previous heroes had been the Oxford Fellow and tutor, C. S. Lewis (1890-1963), especially his book, "The Screwtape Letters", the Norwegian conservative theologian, Ole Hallesby (1879-1961) and the French/Swiss theologian and one of the fathers of the Reformed Church, John Calvin (1509-1564). Even the lighter stuff such as Morris West's books, "The Devil's Advocate" and "In the Shoes of the Fisherman" with their wry, insider look at the Catholic Church's authority, no longer appealed. The whole caboodle was fake. The only rational conclusion was: God is an illusion that my parents had successfully brain-washed me into believing to be a reality. My choice of literature changed to authors like John Steinbeck, Ernest Hemingway and psychologist, Robert Mitchell Linder, "Rebel without a cause". The latter should not be confused with the film of the same name, the subtitle being "The Hypnoanalysis Of A Criminal Psychopath".*

*Now that I didn't believe in God, not any god, I no longer feared the threat of God's judgment. This was the final key to my freedom. All I had learned about atonement and Jesus dying for my sins was irrelevant once the concept of sin was abolished. What was there to fear or to be guilty about? When the poker-players, who often played all night, offered me the chance to indulge in an amphetamine kick to get through the next day, why refuse? This may give the impression that I was out of control. I wasn't. I was intelligent enough to regulate my use of the drugs, but I did start betting on horses.*

*I started goading Juliet for her prudishness. She was a born romantic, had a passion for music, especially love songs and dance music, but because of my background I had never learned to dance. Many songs she liked had nuances that she either wasn't aware of or didn't want to accept. I was delighted to disillusion her with the story that Engelbert Humperdinck's song about two lonely people in "The Last Waltz" was quite probably a story about an escort-girl and a deluded customer. I also related a new lyric I heard at a poker game to the melody "These foolish things remind me of you": "A cigarette that bares a lipstick's traces. An airline ticket to romantic places" was transformed to "A trace of lipstick on an old French Letter. A touch of syphilis that won't get better." She had never been allowed to put her lips on my penis, and I had never worn a condom with her, but I knew that she fathomed the paraphrase. Her look of disgust and despair amused me. The more sordid, the more I amused myself with her reaction.*

*Playing the field also gave me ample opportunity to bring Juliet down. Her piousness brought out an evil instinct in me. I had to tell what I did, shock her, hurt her. My intention was probably to get her to give up her Faith. I had, with my newfound philosophies, no need to feel guilty any more. I didn't want her guilt getting in my way. The first episode I told her about was the sexy, young nurse whom I seduced at the hospital in the large closet behind the bedpan room.*

## THE DAWN OF MY WOMANHOOD

*It was just a quickie and happened so rapidly that she didn't have time to reject my advances or take out her tampon. She came back to me later, distressed because the whole thing, strings and all, had been pushed way up in her vagina. We had to find another suitable venue where I could find a forceps and get it out. I told Juliet all this. What could she say? I could tell by her face that she was mortified and terrified about the possibility of my being discovered and disgraced. This upset her more than my unfaithfulness. Again her protective instincts rose to the occasion. She hoped the girl wouldn't tell. But Juliet looked like a whipped dog.*

*I must admit that she was also a good sport and very good at typing. She enjoyed being my ghostwriter for the papers I had to present. Her excellent knowledge of the field of Medicine and her close contact with some of my lecturers helped. She also included moving stories of my experiences with patients in her diary: During the Obstetrics course I was about to perform my first delivery. I must have exuded an aura of anxiety, as the woman in labour asked how many babies I had delivered? The presiding nurse, well into her fifties, answered so promptly I didn't get a chance to reply: She smiled broadly and pronounced, "Between us, Dr. Theo and I have delivered a thousand babies". I was let off the hook, and the baby came out whole and all were overjoyed.*

*Not so, with another delivery. The baby's head had engaged, but we couldn't get it out, not with forceps, not with suction. The presiding nurse sounded the alarm, and the anaesthetist and surgeon rushed to our aid and performed a caesarean section. But the baby was far from normal. The reason for our problems was the oversized head, hydrocephalus, water on the brain. The Neurosurgeon was called immediately to check the shunts between the brain hemispheres and reduce the pressure in the hope of limiting serious brain damage. But the prognosis for the child was uncertain and I became overwhelmed by the ultimate sorrow the mother expressed when I visited her. She screamed and sobbed and would not let go of the hem of my white jacket. I was literally caught in the grip of her sorrow. When I came home, I told Juliet, and then I sat down and cried, my head in my hands, and dictated a poem.*

*Expressing my feelings in poetry came easily. My poem was heart-rending: my empathy with this woman was stutteringly but carefully formed in words that could give some comfort.*

*Such seances with Juliet gave her hope. She saw the old me in them. But this was just a flash in the pan. Within the week she experienced how hard-hearted I really was. Our dog, Bella, had produced 6 adorable puppies. Our neighbour took one, but the other five were difficult to find homes for. Bella was a mongrel, and we didn't know whom the father was. I suggested I take them to Uni and try to palm them off on some sympathetic students. I came home the same evening empty handed. I saw the happy expectancy in Juliet's eyes, but dashed that very quickly: "Nobody wanted a puppy. I put them in a bag with some heavy stones and threw them in the river".*

## THE DAWN OF MY WOMANHOOD

*I started having Flashbacks to my grand-mother's raving and swearing. Flashbacks featuring the shame of my father washing me after our secret was divulged. Nightmares about a mystical, older family member, Joan, with strutting breasts who always aroused me. Night after night she would come to me. She gave me wet dreams. Why didn't Juliet arouse me? Why did I love shocking her, telling her of my escapades. Once she threw a plate at me. I ducked, and it continued, like a frisbee at full speed through an open window shattering on the driveway outside. I couldn't do more than swear and laugh. Even her attempt at being angry was unsuccessful. Mostly she resembled a mistreated dog with sorrowful, accusing eyes, her ears and tail hanging down. Quite unattractive. If my parents were worried about us, I didn't care. I knew they blamed Juliet for working too hard and not prioritizing me and my meals. Deidre loved Juliet, and Juliet was good to her, but Juliet never confided in Deidre, Juliet was too proud. She kept face.*

*My mood brightened when I met Simone: Sex with this older, red-headed woman was a revelation: bedsheets wet with sweat and her orgasmic fluids. The intensity was like a freight- train at full speed when my loins and her pelvis gyrated in perfect tempo. And then afterwards, the overwhelming, absolute exhaustion. All I wanted to do was marry her as quickly as possible. But when I asked Simone if she were willing to be named as "the guilty party" in a file for divorce from Juliet on grounds of adultery, her fire turned to ice. She turned around and swore to my face that she would never see me again. The last thing she wanted was the shame. This was just a bit of fun. I learned later that she got engaged to another man somewhat her senior only a few months after our final meeting. Who did I go to comfort and solace. Juliet of course, I told her the whole story.*

*I had thought and hoped that Juliet would reject me, throw me out, but "No," she had this crazy notion that we had given our vows to God "for better, for worse". In addition, her psyche was screwed together in a way, that as long as she believed I needed her, she would be there for me. She didn't know it, but I could see this silly, romantic song from the musical "Oliver" resounding in her head and heart: Nancy Sikes singing to her cruel and incorrigible husband, Bill:*

*"As long as he needs me, I know where I must be. I'll cling on steadfastly, as long as he needs me."*

*That is what she did, cling! I felt smothered by her mothering, she felt like the proverbial "millstone around my neck" that the fellows at the Conference way back had predicted. But I had no intention of becoming a convincing evangelist, "pure and spotless" as in the hymn, "Love Divine, All Loves Excelling" that we sang at our wedding. I wanted different sex, a different bed mate, a different life - without Juliet."*

## Chapter 3 “Both Sides Now... It’s life’s illusions I recall”

### JULIET: 1965-68: DESPERATION, FAITH, PRIDE, DEFEAT, RECOVERY

My personality had now begun to resemble a typical, psychologically abused woman. I tried to kick back. In a rush of fury, I confronted Simone. I knew whom she was as a Senior officer in the Uni. administration. She shrugged it off, saying:

*“He’s just a little, immature boy coming home to cry on your shoulder. He cried on my shoulder about you; and now he cries on your shoulder about me. For me it was just the novelty of the ride. I never wanted to interfere with your marriage. Try talking to him, not me.”*

Worst of all in hindsight I see that Simone was right. The turmoil in my soul was as horrific as the impending doom fashioned by Edgar Allan Poe (1842) in his pioneer, thriller short story, “*The Pit and the Pendulum*”. All I wanted to do was scream as the razor-sharp blade slowly sank toward my captured chest and heart. I had great difficulties breathing. How could I continue keeping my stiff upper lip? But I didn’t talk to Theo.

To whom should I go? I couldn’t stand the idea of admitting failure. And my theology was pretty fundamentalistic as far as marriage and divorce were concerned, almost Catholic. I had become quite ecumenical, and with my Catholic friends had learned to enjoy a glass of wine. But I really believed that if we divorced, marriage to anyone else was out of the question. I longed to have children, a family life after these three years of supporting Theo. I was at the end of the collection of data in the epidemiological research. I was respected workwise and had enrolled in a master’s degree course. I had biblically speaking sowed during these three, ultimately turbulent years, I wanted to reap! I had put up with his whiskey breath, his swearing and goading, even though all these repulsed me. We had regular sex, even though it was a cold affair, as he was seeing other women at the same time. No wonder I winced. I had developed Chlamydia. Sex with more than one partner at a time is the culprit. Knowing so many in the medical profession I would make up a silly, probably transparent story, about a friend of a friend who needed help.

I’m sure they saw through me, but they pitied me and gave me a prescription to treat the discomfort. Theo didn’t keep his conquests a secret. And his poker playing and betting on racehorses continued with a similar enthusiasm.

I pleaded with Jesus: He should be “*my rescue, an ever-present help in trouble*”. In addition to pouring out my heart, I recounted my merits in the hope that He would respond: Theo’s parents had had their doubts about my being baptized as a baby. In their view

## THE DAWN OF MY WOMANHOOD

infant baptism was not valid. A baby could be blessed but was not capable of deciding to follow Jesus. Jesus' followers should be old enough to make this decision themselves, and be baptized by immersion, the practice in the Baptist denomination. Their arguments seemed feasible. I agreed to be baptized.

Australia had no national church. The Anglican Church dominated, Australia having been first colonized by Englishmen. Catholic churches dominated with their buildings, many of them having been built on sites that were hilltops or promontories. Irish immigrants were drawn to them. My Presbyterian Church had long traditions from Scotland, but unlike the Anglican church had no practice of confirmation of the vows made by the parents during infant baptism. None of the churches were financed by the State or Federal governments. The congregation's members were their sole source of income. I was a member of the Presbyterian Church by baptism, but the interdenominational Christian groups at University tended to erase our theological idiosyncrasies. Only the Pentecostals and Baptists preached baptism by immersion.

Immersion encompassed at least three vital symbols connected to the Christian Faith: first, being washed clean of sin after repentance; the second, dying from self by going down under the water, i.e. submitting inherent sin to death in the "the watery grave" and then getting to one's feet in the trough symbolizing a new, "*born again*" person incorporated in Jesus and His resurrection. The third ingredient was the gift of the Holy Spirit - a promise to the baptized. I had become ecumenical enough that I understood the arguments for adult baptism. I hoped my parents would understand. Deidre said she'd stand beside me at the baptism in the local Baptist Church. It took place a week before Theo and I announced our engagement.

Theo had bought the engagement ring, a large diamond in the shape of a heart from an acquaintance, without consulting me. I am sure it was not fake, but I felt disappointed that I hadn't been invited to go to a jewellery shop and choose it with him. I felt the heart shape was a bit tacky, not my style, but it was big and it sparkled, so I soon got over whatever I felt. "*Dying from self*" in the white robe under the tepid water in a strange church was a part of my commitment to Theo. I was not conscious of it then, I just believed I was doing God's will being baptized for a second time, but I wonder if my dear mother felt I was compromising myself. I do believe they felt they had lost me. Later on, Theo and I left the Baptist Church and became Anglicans, joining a special church because of its ongoing, charismatic revival. It was here we got married.

As I tallied my fruitless efforts to please Theo's family and him, I realized that I was degraded to a nothing. I needed help to regain some balance. I didn't confide in anyone, not my parents, not my work colleagues, nor my old girlfriends. They were all having enough challenges of their own: Helen became pregnant at nineteen and her mother arranged a shot-gun wedding for her with the father of their child. She obviously wasn't as knowledgeable about prevention as me, even though Dr. Wanda was her older sister. By the time she was twenty-one, she had produced twins as well. Three babies in the space

## THE DAWN OF MY WOMANHOOD

of 15 months. The children were now four and five years old. Her hands were full, and she envied me my life. Also, Beverley had got pregnant. The father of her child was an older medical student who always called her “Gorgeous”! He managed to arrange for an abortion at a Clinic in another state. It was illegal, but at least she had been in good hands. After this she became depressed. I couldn’t burden her. To whom should I go? I chose Jesus, my Saviour, as my confidante. Prayer became an essential ingredient in my life.

St. Patrick (390-461 A.D.) is attributed a simple prayer that appealed to me: “*Christ be with me, Christ within me, Christ behind me, Christ before me, Christ in quiet, Christ in danger, Christ in the mouth of friend or stranger.*”

My Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, was my ever-present companion. I kept quiet about my problems, and I kept going, borne up by my Faith in His “*everlasting arms*”. But I beseeched the Lord to cause Theo “*to change his heart, change his mind and change his direction*” (the popular slogan from the Billy Graham Crusade that had altered my career-choice).

Frankly, after Simone, I was forced to agree to a period of separation. The strategy Theo used was that he was depressed. He needed time on his own. I was in his way. I was depressing him. My hangdog look probably did affect him in that way. My emotional life was reduced to numbness. I felt like a walking Zombie. Apart from at work I couldn’t allow myself to feel anything, otherwise I would dissolve. I could appreciate how the prisoners of war in Germany during World War II (my uncle being one of them) must have felt, the hopelessness, the powerlessness, completely out of control in relation to one’s own existence.

I knocked on the door of my former part-time lecturer, a psychiatrist who had also had Theo as a student and asked his advice about a separation. I told him Theo reckoned I made him depressed, that he accused me of being frigid, and that I was constantly plagued by Chlamydia. I left in a fury when he advised me to go even further than separation. He said I should divorce Theo immediately. He had completely ignored my dilemma, being a Christian and wanting to be faithful to my marriage vows. I slammed the door in anger and frustration. With a huge sigh I admitted to Theo that our hopeless marriage was no longer possible to keep a secret. We could separate.

I moved South. My Dad was broken-hearted. He felt for Theo. Mummy was practical and a huge help. I had been given a recommendation to the leader of a Research Institute connected to a Children’s Hospital. Mum ordered the plane-tickets. Neither of us had flown before. We marched up to the Institute together and then she discretely left me to fare on my own. I got a job, amazing! The next item on the program was a place to live. To save money, I reckoned I could walk to the hospital, if we found a flat in the vicinity. We decided to eat and sight-see a bit in a suburb that was notorious for its night-clubs, but now it was midday and broad daylight. All the clubs were closed. It was just like any other sleepy inner suburb. We wandered down waterside. On the wall of an old, dark-redbrick eight storey

## THE DAWN OF MY WOMANHOOD

building was a sign: FLAT TO RENT. The address to the Estate Agent was in the neighbouring building.

Mum was the chief negotiator here. The flat was furnished and recently vacated. I could move in immediately. Mum could put down the three-month deposit in cash on the table. The flat was mine. In the space of 6 hours, I had a new job and my own place to live. *“Praise the Lord!”*, was on both our lips. Mum left by plane the same evening after giving me more cash to tide me over until I got my first pay. She was a good sport - a mother who was there at my time in need.

The Professor of Child Psychiatry whose first name was Jay, was trained in England and grounded in Freud's psycho-analytic theory, but he and his staff assumed a practical psychodynamic therapeutic approach with their clients - both the children and their parents or carers. Working within the transference was essential, and even though my job was research, both observation and questionnaires, I needed to understand intimately what the therapists were attempting to achieve. In addition, the Professor of Social Medicine wanted to use me in a much more confined study - the assessment of the parents of battered babies/children. One aspect was the differential diagnosis, that the baby or child was actually battered, not just the unfortunate victim of congenital bone fragility/osteoporosis. The second aspect was, using his words: *“Find the little child in the parent, relate to that, and discover the dynamics of what is going on in that child.”*

Here there was no attempt to put the blame on someone, no moralizing or assumption of guilt, no threat of protection for the child by the Child Welfare Services, nor punishment according to the law for an offender. An openminded discovery of how the mind of the parents (or parent) worked and a survey of their socio-economic conditions. The police did their own investigations. I was prohibited from seeing the babies/ children before my home visits, so that I had no bias.

*“Tread carefully”* was the other advice the professor gave. He and I were assured confidentiality: This matter had been approved by a Board of Ethics, and further on a law was passed giving us immunity, so that the Police could not subpoena us to witness against the parents or carers who had confided in us. Reporting on the incidence of challenges that underprivileged families experienced caring for chronically ill children seemed like an important contribution. I regained my self-confidence.

And I met Jamie. He was six months younger than me and leader of the Young Adult Fellowship at the Presbyterian Church in the City Centre. We played tennis every Saturday with other members of the fellowship and attended evening Church Services on Sunday. There was usually a bite to eat after the Service, and we were a jolly and inquisitive group. Another young man, Bob, was also active, and as he lived quite close to me, I would walk home with him. These two men became my good friends. And we loved competing at tennis. I didn't tell them I was separated, and as I never entertained any romantic notions about either of them, I thought it wasn't necessary.

## THE DAWN OF MY WOMANHOOD

About three months after I had settled in at the Institute, my old school friend, Cecily rang me: she and her husband, Jim, and their baby of five months, were invited to attend the wedding of some very close friends, quite near me. They would fly down and hire a car at the Airport. Could I please put them up? There was a sofa-bed in the living room, and the baby could sleep in the baby-bag. So I said, "Yes, of course!"

Cecily, Beverley and I had been a threesome at School for four years before we matriculated. Cecily was an Occupational Therapist. Her husband had done something in Education and was making a name for himself in intellectual circles. Theo knew them both. Cecily had dated one of his groomsmen ways back. So, we had history.

Whether Theo had heard that they were coming to visit me for the weekend I never found out, but on the Saturday morning around noon, several hours before they were to leave for the wedding, Theo rang on the doorbell. He said he had arrived to stay the weekend. After months of silence during which, in spite of my good life at the Institute, I had still prayed for our reconciliation, I was utterly confounded. I was still married to him. I had hoped for and dreamt about our making up.

I was in the process of making a light lunch for my guests, and there was Theo, as large as life in the tiny living room with their outstretched bed on the living room floor and the baby whimpering, chatting away to Cecily and Jim as if he and I had never been living apart.

*"I need you,"* he whispered in my ear, his body touching mine, as he followed me out into my tiny kitchenette shutting the door noisily behind us.

His hands found my breasts and then lower down with force dragging at my Mary Quant copy skirt to rip open the zip. I stiffened, I couldn't scream, I couldn't say "No". I was petrified, thinking of my guests waiting for lunch just outside the flimsy door. I wanted him, but I didn't want him like this. I wanted him to love me, not rape me. My heart was pounding with fear of losing control.

My breathing was strangled: "No, My God, no!", a desperate whimper, but no sounds came.

*"I'll take you from behind"*, he announced completely in charge of the situation.

By now my skirt was flattened upwards over my back and my panties were shoved down straddling my ankles. Embarrassment riddled holes in my resolve. I slumped like a rag doll in his grip. He lifted my puppet like figure up. I was shattered, cowered. It went quickly. When he yanked himself away from me, I shuddered and he let me down. He gloated:

*"Huh, you had an orgasm. You must have liked it!"*

What did I feel? The whole gamut of appropriate reactions, disappointment? humiliation? rage? escaped me. Nothing is what I felt, just numbness. I got a glimpse of myself in the faded, little mirror on the kitchen wall, a degraded, obliterated woman. I rearranged my

## THE DAWN OF MY WOMANHOOD

skirt and smoothed the havoc of my hair. Theo was already lounging on the living room floor cooing at the baby when I came out in a catatonic state with the lunch-tray.

I hardly said a word to my guests, just hoping deep inside that they hadn't heard, hadn't noticed. Theo slept in my bed that night. Cecily and her husband drove around the city half of the night with the baby who wouldn't sleep. They felt embarrassed about the baby keeping us awake.

Theo continued to come on intermittently. His shift work during his Residency year didn't allow for more. He loved dragging me with him to the night-clubs in the vicinity. The Drag-clubs were the best he thought. These elegant men with gorgeous, shaven legs in their stiletto heels parading round in sequins and glitter and miming popular love songs.

Whether Theo got a kick out of their huge, cow-like eyes with their long, fake lashes or their fabulous wigs, I never knew, because I never enquired. I got a kick out of their immaculate legs I remember. I was still in a half-dazed state every time he turned up. I didn't know which way to turn, again I was getting that feeling of numbness, powerlessness, so I just played along.

Two months later Theo was not only getting depressed again, he was having trouble with his potency. He showed me his penis. It was the first and only time. It was more pudding than stiletto. Perhaps he did this as proof of what I was doing to him. He stopped turning up. Not a word. Another woman had attracted his attention. I sighed with both relief and a feeling of devastation. He had monopolized me on these hectic weekends. I had missed both tennis and evening services when he was with me. My absences demanded an explanation. I told my friends at the Fellowship about my marital circumstances. I was accepted back into the fold without a word, but many had sympathy in their eyes. *"You always smile, but in your eyes your sorrow shows."* was me in a nutshell. The lyrics of Louie Smith's song, *"Can't Live If Living Is Without You"* got all jumbled up in my head.

It was true. I felt I couldn't live, if living was without Theo. I had loved him, he had been my world, I had tried to please, support and follow him. Last, but not least I had made my promise to him and to God. A couple of bible verses, Mark 10:9 &12, chilled my brain:

*"Whom therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder,"* and *"If a wife should put away her husband and marry another, she commits adultery."*

I wanted a family so desperately and saw no other way out than Theo to fulfill this longing. But Louie Smith's song continues: *"Can't give, can't give any more."* I was empty. I had nothing to give. I couldn't give any more. All the life, all the juices were squeezed out of my frame. I got two associations, one was to the play I'd seen, *"Of Mice and Men"*, dramatized from John Steinbeck's novel. I reminisced over the scene where the big, child-like Lennie, stroked the mice that he cared for to death. The other association was to a research report about abused women. The researcher used an allegory to make her point about loving versus calamitous relationships:

## THE DAWN OF MY WOMANHOOD

“A little bird lands on an outstretched hand. The owner of the hand observes the bird’s idiosyncrasies, its beauty, its fragility, its strengths and he or she delights in it, but does not attempt to close the hand or capture the bird. The bird is free to fly. An abuser has other drives. When the bird alights on his or her hand, the abuser has a deep-rooted need to close the hand, to own, to possess, to control, maybe to kill.»

I didn’t want to believe I was abused. But my emptiness caused the thought to cross my mind. A decade later I read “*Sybil*” (1973), a non-fiction story by psychoanalyst Flora Rheta Schreiber about her treatment of Sybil Dorsett who suffered from dissociative Identity disturbance. The author uncovered the dark secrets of Sybil’s abuse by a female perpetrator her mother. This reiteration of female destructiveness helped me to understand the respect I had entertained for Theo’s trauma. At the time I felt I just had to keep on keeping on. Deirdre, Theo’s sister and the oldest of my three bridesmaids, had coined the phrase: “*A Marriage made in Heaven*” in the speech she made at our wedding reception. Her words were etched into my brain. How could our miserable marriage have been made in heaven? Is the Suffering Jesus a role that I should emulate: “*He was wounded for our transgressions... With his stripes we are healed.*” (*Isaiah 53: 5-8*). I found myself identifying myself with Him, suffering for someone else’s good, suffering for **us**. Was I really a masochist putting up with the recurring rejections and all the insults? So many conflicting thoughts and feelings, so many considerations.

In all this mess I wondered if Theo had ever loved me? He had wanted me, pestered me, pursued me, wherever I turned he was there in the beginning, smiling, gushing, cajoling, beguiling. It was flattering. But was it love? When did he get disenchanted with me? We had had periods of deep *good mates* love when we studied and worked hard together. We had had occasions of erotic, sensual love. He had called me frigid earlier on, but that was before. We had fun with our friends when we lived in the little house by the dam. But *agape*, charitable love, really caring about the other, wanting the other’s best. Had he ever felt that about me, or anyone else for that matter? He had felt for the mother of the hydrocephalic baby, but who else? And me, was it just my pride that spurred me on, or the need to be needed? Is that love or just an aspect of some power-game?

Someone needing you, gives you an advantage. Had this part of my personality been damaging for Theo? I believed that my faith encouraged me to be submissive, to forgive and keep on trying.

One thing was good in all this turmoil. My youngest sister, Claire, visited me during her mid-term holidays in order to comfort me. She came by train. I took her with me both to tennis and to the evening service.

“*Love at first sight*”, they said.

I had never really believed Cupid’s arrows could really hit the mark with two people simultaneously. For my adorable sister and my good friend Jamie this was the case! Jamie

## THE DAWN OF MY WOMANHOOD

asked me sheepishly after we had supper following the evening service if it were okay that Bob walked me home while he took Claire for a ride in his car to see the bayside? I was terrified when they weren't back by 11.30 p.m. I even rang the Police. There were no mobiles in those days. The police officer asked how old Claire was.

"Seventeen and a half," I answered.

"What!" the officer exclaimed, "Lady, it is only half-past eleven!"

They arrived home blushing and looking like two silly kids - Jamie, aged 24 and a half, should have been more dignified in my opinion. 55 years later they are still in love, and together.

By the end of the year, I was able to take a month's "*leave of absence*" from my amazing job to return to my home town. The writing up of the results from the epidemiological study had been mostly done by correspondence, but now we all needed to sit together to quality-check the final draft before publishing. Theo turned up again, most inconveniently, but demanding an answer. He had been jilted by his latest girlfriend, and wanted to know if I would move Southwest with him this time, onto the grounds of a huge, old Psychiatric hospital.

I hadn't heard before that he was interested in psychiatry. Maybe it was a case of "*Physician, heal thyself!*" As a married man he had the opportunity of occupying a good-sized cottage in the extensive hospital grounds and was saved from living in a barracks as a single man. He reminded me we were still married. What could I say? My prayer-time every evening included beseeching God for mercy, for a new chance, with a new Theo. Was this the moment, the answer to prayer? Could God really heal and reconcile?

I knew that my parents prayed daily for us that we could build a life together, but I felt uncertainty and anguish at the thought of leaving the amazing life I had built for myself. And when my mother, in contrast to her prayers, tentatively suggested that Theo may be driven by self-interest: Was he, in reality, just more interested in living in a 3 bedroom cottage than in a barracks with other single, male employees, I became angry with her for suggesting such a thing. My conviction was to try to rescue our marriage, again, and who was she to add suspicion and doubt, undermining my resolve. I told Theo I would join him. With a heavy heart I informed the Research Institute that my leave of absence was almost certain to be permanent. A month later Theo and I were packed up and driving interstate in his recently acquired brand new, black, Ford Mustang sports car. My mood was buoyant imagining our new abode. All of a sudden, he turned to me:

"Now, Juliet, I must tell you about Colleen!"

My heart sank. My ears turned deaf as he rattled on with, for him, a heart-rending account of his most recent, failed love affair.

## THE DAWN OF MY WOMANHOOD

The first months at the Psychiatric Hospital, which was 80 miles west of a major city, passed happily enough. The cottage was charming, sparsely, but pleasantly furnished and equipped with all we needed, except a piano. But then again I hadn't had a piano in any of the places I had lived since marrying Theo. He wasn't into music. We enjoyed the company of two other psychiatry trainees and their wives. One of the couples had a delightful little son who brought sunshine with him wherever he was. We adopted a Bassett Hound, *Mandy*, and an unnamed, stray cat. My Dad found a name. His sense of humour, while visiting us to see how we were faring, came up with the pun:

*“The-oph-ilos”!* He’s “the awfulest” cat I’ve ever seen», he exclaimed, and the pun-name stuck.

Poor Theophilis was scrawny with one blind eye that was as opaque as a pearl. He was far from beautiful. Amazingly enough Mandy and little Theo, as we called him, really hit it off and often slept cuddled up together. All of a sudden, we had a big Theo and a little Theo in the house.

It wasn't long after my father's visit that the traumas began: First Theo's best friend from school, his best man, a promising physicist, was killed in a single car accident driving home from a bushwalking weekend in the Great Divide. Then a colleague, a psychiatry trainee at the hospital who was unmarried and kept a lot to himself, was also killed in a single car accident. It was considered a possible suicide. These incidents bought flashbacks with them. During Theo's years at Medical School three of his fellow-med students had died: a good friend drowned in a crater lake on the Atherton Tableland in the far North during his practice placement there; a valued member of Theo's Rugby team was fatally ravaged by a shark while surfboard riding; and one of his groomsmen, Cecily's previous boyfriend, collapsed with a ruptured congenital brain aneurysm at a med ball. These losses had been devastating for Theo when they occurred, and now the two new fatalities, in particular the searing loss of his best friend, tipped Theo over.

When his depression finally lifted, I could see him becoming restless again. His eyes began to prowl after new conquests, and then the pattern repeated itself: for a series of nights, he didn't come home. He gave some lame excuse about patient crises. In those days medical doctors in Australia were awarded metal badges with the emblem of a copper serpent twirled around a rod to be mounted on their car's bumper bar. This gave them parking privileges when necessary. They also received a leather sheaf to cover the badge when they wanted anonymity. When Theo came home early one morning with his badge concealed, I knew it wasn't the hospital that had called him out.

The chlamydia I suffered with confirmed my suspicions. My physician told me bluntly that if my husband continued having other partners, I could end up sterile. This was the last straw. Theo surprised me with a suggestion: He wanted to take a cruise to New Zealand to see if it would help his depression. When he first mentioned it, I thought he meant that we would go cruising together, but no, he insisted that he would go alone or not at all. I was

## THE DAWN OF MY WOMANHOOD

deeply disappointed and hurt, but I had a part-time job with obligations pending. I reluctantly agreed that it may be a good thing for him.

Ten days after Theo had left, he sent me a telegram: "Ship berths at Circular Quay, Sydney, 7 a.m. Saturday. I can't bear the thought of taking the bus all the way home. Please meet me at wharf. Theo"

It was Friday noon. The drive to Sydney from our Psychiatric hospital through two States would take at least eleven hours, i.e. with an hour's break (or two). Again, my hopes rose, he wanted me to come, he needed me. I told the people at work I was called out on a happy mission, went home to our cottage, grabbed a bag and filled it with some nice clothes, rang the burnt-out schizophrenic lady, a long-term patient, who cleaned our house once a week and asked if she could look after our pets. The Mustang's tank was fortunately pretty full, so I could drive a fair way without having to fill up.

It was a fabulous car to drive. Sleek, black, shiny with a powerful engine. One sat so low in it that I had to jack up the seat as much as possible. I had a kangaroo fur jacket with me. It was early September and in these Southern climes it could get quite cold at night. I drove all night, and only stopped to fill the tank, go to the loo and have bite to eat. The Highway was straight, flat and wide (no divider in the middle, just a white painted, dotted line). In the late evening dusk, during the first leg of the journey, just before drivers put on their manually operated headlights, I misjudged the distance to an approaching vehicle and started overtaking at 90 miles an hour. The approaching vehicle was being driven at around the same speed as I was driving. The oncoming car was in front of me like a flash. I kept my head and didn't swerve. We passed each other - three abreast - like a breath of wind - the three cars covering the whole breadth of the road with me the middle. It was the nearest I had been to sudden death. I was in a state of shock, but I kept on driving, completely numbed.

I knew it would take time and ingenuity to find a parking place down near The Rocks in Sydney, somewhere down under the Harbour Bridge. I had never driven a car in that vicinity before. I parked and walked out onto the wharf area at Circular Quay at 6.50 a.m. The ship had already berthed.

Theo had booked a smaller hotel at Double Bay with an early arrival, so he took over the wheel. He seemed reserved. I didn't look forward to making love with him, though this seemed to be his intention. He said he had booked a double bed. We could sleep first, then go to the yacht club to eat and leave early next morning. My chlamydia was bad, but I had glider with me. In those days I don't think one could buy glider as a sex facilitator, my glider was a tube I had wheedled out of gynaecologist friend. After we made love, which for me was a painful affair, Theo hauled himself up in bed and lolled on the pillows. His face turned toward me, his head resting on his hand:

*"Juliet, I met the most amazing woman on the ship. No, no, it wasn't what you are thinking..."* His eyes were searching my face and registered my look of dismay. *"It was*

## THE DAWN OF MY WOMANHOOD

*completely platonic. I assure you! She was much older than me, but she helped me to sort things. I have never felt so completely understood in my whole life!"*

I can't remember a thing about the equally long drive back to our cottage on the hospital grounds I was past feeling or reacting to anything. I never asked him what this mature woman had helped him to "sort out", nor confronted him with what I experienced as his abominable selfishness, using our money on an expensive cruise alone, getting me to drive all that way, nearly getting myself killed, being completely exhausted driving without sleep through the night, only to be told that another woman had again met some great need in him that I was incapable of fulfilling.

He asked me for a divorce four weeks later. The lass he had been illicitly courting before the cruise was willing to be named the guilty party in adultery so that he could get a quick divorce in the law courts and remarry. Now I understood the role the woman from the ship had played in this process. She had given him the advice and the emotional support he needed. What could I do? I assented. After winding up my job at the local Social Services Office I said a tearful good-bye to my sad-eyed dog and my ugly, but incredibly lovable, sweet little Theo. When big Theo asked for my heart-shaped diamond ring, I gave it back. His plan, no doubt, was to place it on the finger of the new love of his life. I was so numb I just put it lamely into his hand. I should have thrown it at him and called the whole caboodle a terrible sham! He helped me carry my one, big bag and stored it in the baggage compartment of the Greyhound coach for the first leg of my journey home. But where was home?

I had plenty of time to reflect on the coach. It took more than eighteen hours on the inland route to get where I was heading, my parents' home in the north. I had failed, failed in my attempt to save the marriage, and to save Theo from himself. I had "*betrayed his trust*". Some might say that it is natural to obsess about trying to fix a broken relationship, but why did I feel guilt? I had succeeded in so many areas of my life, and I hated admitting defeat with Theo. Who was I to try to save anybody? Who did I think I was? I had asked God to help me, but what an oversized ego I had, believing I had salvation in my hands. It was God's salvation for Theo that I had wanted, but that had eluded me. My defeat gave me a chronic guilty conscience and a nervous stomach. This in addition to my chronic hay fever and sniffy nose. Why and how had it ended this way?

Good times stored in my memory bank also resurfaced during the bus ride. The occasion when Theo had attended a conference in another major city and brought home a Dior outfit for me: a houndstooth black and white tweed in the finest wool, comprising a skirt and a hip-length jacket with a stylish collar, plus a white, felt pillbox hat with black trimming. We still wore hats to church in those days. Did he think highly enough of me to want to give me such an expensive gift? But then the dark thoughts interfered: Maybe it was remorse over yet another fling that had prompted the gift? Or the desire to make me over to something I wasn't, that didn't fulfill his imagination? He had asked a shop assistant who was about my size to try on the outfit for him. It fitted her, and it fitted me

## THE DAWN OF MY WOMANHOOD

perfectly. But there were not many occasions in my line of work where it suited. And we hardly ever went to Church. He had also given me a rectangular, what he told me was a sapphire ring and an eighteen-carat gold bracelet. Why, I often wondered? These were beautiful gifts, but it was kisses, hugs, caressing and respect from a man that loved me that I longed for.

The Interstate coach stopped for lunch, and I bought a glossy Vogue magazine at a kiosk. The first article had an amazing photo: a gnarled farmer's hand with a lump of black earth in it. Out of the earth grew a seedling, one little ochre-yellow stem and two small, shiny-green leaves. The caption posed a question: "*DO YOU STILL LOVE LIFE?*"

The accompanying article was by Erich Fromm. I knew his book, "*Art of Loving*". His words went straight into my confused and broken heart, and all of a sudden, I was infused with a feeling of dignity. I wanted desperately to embrace life, I could get through this. A stanza from Whitney Houston's song flooded my brain: "*No matter what they take from me they can't take away my dignity.*"

My parents were waiting for me with tears in their eyes when I finally arrived at their front door. Home again after nearly five years. Five years and four months after Theo and I married, I was divorced.

I moved South again. I furnished my new flat with two items I could hardly afford, a piano and a luxurious, wool hand-knotted Indian carpet. Although I was far from happy, I was thankful that I was resilient. The Research Institute that had rescued me more than two years ago was finished with me, but sympathetic enough to recommend me for a part-time advanced course in Psychotherapy that would last a year. I was able to work at the Children's Hospital under supervision while I applied the knowledge I had theoretically acquired at the Institute.

My work was exciting and challenging and I was awarded a master's degree in Social Studies when my previous research was completed, submitted and published. I was rearing to go with new possibilities ahead career-wise, but I was still ashamed and had guilt feelings about the breakdown of my marriage. One of my colleagues continually reminded me and others of my fallibility. At a morning meeting where we discussed incoming cases, who would do what, Jay suggested that one of the male Child Psychiatrists and I should do couple-therapy with the parents of two sons who were intelligent enough but had difficulties learning. He would take the sons under his expert care. An older woman psychologist who was married and had three children, piped up.

"Is it wise to give the case to Juliet? Don't forget, she has had a failed marriage and she has no children.»

Before I had time to feel crushed, my coming therapy-partner, Alec, replied:

"Who better?"

## THE DAWN OF MY WOMANHOOD

I have never again experienced such a feeling of exoneration, an expression of dignity. He became a new angel in my life. I couldn't help but smile, and although the song "*The Greatest Love of All*" only came on the charts a decade later, as the theme for the film, "The Greatest", its words echoed in my tired brain:

"No matter what they take from me,  
they can't take away my dignity,  
Because the greatest love is happening to me  
Learning to love yourself  
Is the Greatest Love of All"

## Chapter 4 “At long last love has arrived...”

### JULIET 1968 - 1970: BITTERNESS, DISILLUSION, HATE, HOPE, FALLIBILITY, LOVE

The next three years became the fulfillment of a dream, but they began very prosaically. I was financially depleted after the marriage. I didn't sell the ring or the bracelet. The jeweller did apprise me of the fact that the stone in the ring was not a sapphire, but a semi-precious stone called London blue topaz. Instead, I gave Theo's gifts to my mother, who got the topaz reset so that it didn't remind her of him. She had played a pivotal role in the resurrection of my feeling of worth, so I felt he owed her.

My parents-in-law on the other hand tried to bill me for half of what Theo owed on the Mustang. As I wasn't in the picture when he bought the car, I flatly refused. He took all the paintings he had bought over the years, except a charcoal sketch supposedly drawn by Jon Molvig. It has never been established if he were the artist or not, but it appealed to me: a wan-faced woman with serious eyes, and wind blowing the flyaway strands of hair that encompassed her face. I hid a Sterling Silver cream jug from Grand-mother, Lizzie. I really loved her and wanted it as a keepsake. Just the same, a petty thing to do. It was part of a set, an heirloom, and the set had been given to us, not just to me. I experienced it as deception, not revenge. On second thoughts they had deceived me by not giving their son a healthy upbringing. My minuscule deception by comparison was nothing, but maybe it was a feeble attempt at revenge. I still have the cream jug.

Whatever my motive this action was evidence of a growing bitterness in me. I had nothing to show for the years I had worked to support us. The house by the dam had been let out after I went South the first time. Theo had moved to a flat in the inner city. Our house was now sold at a loss, so Theo's parents demanded that they got all the money and whatever furniture that was able to be salvaged, even though I had paid instalments on the house every month for three years as interest on the loan they had taken up on our behalf. They now regarded my contribution as rent. Deirdre contacted me and asked if we could still be friends. She said she missed me desperately, as I did her, but I refused, coldly. Not only was my pocket-book depleted, but my surplus of energy and caring for her family was at such a low ebb that in spite of my feelings for her, I said an emphatic “NO!” I saw in her tearful eyes that she was hurting. She protested that her parents were also in crisis. Her father, who had been a much sought after lay-preacher, refused to preach anymore because of a verse in one of Apostles Paul's letters: It proclaimed that a father who couldn't manage his own family wasn't fit to preach to others. I was totally indifferent to her petition. “Good!”, I exclaimed! Good! that a man who was incapable of helping his sexually

## THE MORNING OF MY WOMANHOOD

abused son through the traumatic consequences of the abuse was denied the right to preach. He wasn't fit to preach! Least of all about God's love, mercy and salvation.

As far as Theo was concerned my numbness had been transformed into hatred. I hated Theo. I would never have been so impervious to my beloved Deidre when she begged me to continue our friendship if I hadn't been spurred on by hate. A sentence about hate in a Norwegian book by Vera Henriksen, "*Bodvars Saga Bind 1*" encapsulates my emotion: "*Hate is as cold as a glacier, and as hard as flint stone. It sinks to your stomach like an indigestible lump of dough*" (p 181). Everything about him and his parents was abhorrent to me. I blamed them for the way he had turned out. And I was unable to make an exception for Lizzie or Deidre.

I approached my parents' Presbyterian minister about my future prospects as far as marriage and family were concerned. My conversation with him was both enlightening and encouraging. He had without my knowledge, but at my father's request, contacted Theo to check out his intentions. Theo had told him that he was finished with Christianity, and that he was living with another woman. He had not only filed for a divorce, but had provided the evidence of adultery for the Decree Nisi, so that it all went very quickly. Within the month it would be Decree Absolute, and he was free to marry again. My minister was well versed in all the places in the Bible where marriage and divorce were mentioned. He drew my attention to a passage which he understood as applicable to my situation:

"....If any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever, and he consents to live with her, she should not divorce him.....But if the unbelieving part desires to separate let it be so; in such a case the brother or sister is not bound. For God has called us to peace." (1. Corinthians 7:12-16)

He interpreted the words "*she is not bound*" to mean that I was free to marry again. But I had to be certain. I rang Theo to ask if we could meet. He seemed indifferent but consented. He was now living in the city and had an apartment near the City Centre. Despite the fact that the divorce proceedings were already under way my parents and I prayed again for a reconciliation before I took the plane. I think this was mostly for my Dad's sake. He had a child-like faith and believed God answered our prayers, so it was so difficult for him to accept any other outcome than reconciliation. I can't remember what expectations I had. I wasn't expecting a miracle. I had hated him. Maybe I wanted evidence that he was still the unbeliever he had professed to be. This would help me exonerate myself as far as my religious qualms were concerned about being a divorcee. Maybe I just hoped for some sort of recognition, an admission from Theo that he had loved me way back.

When I got to the flat, Theo opened. He was courteous and asked me what I would like to eat and drink. We ate a sandwich, and he opened a bottle of wine. But the flat oozed of the presence of another female. Her apron was folded over the back of a kitchen chair. I

## THE MORNING OF MY WOMANHOOD

needed to use the bathroom, and there were her pink toothbrush and glass beside Theo's blue. Her perfume stood on the glass shelf over the washbasin and her bathrobe hung behind the bathroom door. In those days she would have been called his "*de facto wife*". I dared to ask her name. I had seen it on the file for divorce he had submitted.

"Beth, she was a nurse at the psychiatric hospital."

"What did you do with Mandy and Little Theo?" I ventured.

"Our good friends, the couple without children took them in," he said, and explained that the husband had finished his training and had been offered a permanent job at the hospital.

"What are you doing now, Theo?"

"I gave up Psychiatry. And I'm leaving practice, going into Medical Technology instead. As soon as the divorce is finalized Beth and I will marry. Did you know we'll be settling in Tokyo? A well-paid traineeship and job are waiting for me."

He smiled.

I felt numb. I said nothing. He rang for an airport taxi. We said polite good-byes, but I cried all the way through the long flight home. He had seemed completely indifferent to me, like someone he had just met a few times before in his life. Not someone he had spent seven to eight years of his life with, admittedly on and off. There was no confirmation of whom I was or what we had had together. I was humiliated. I had let my guard down by visiting him. And now my heart was broken again by his callousness. The Air hostess asked anxiously what she could do to help. I assured her that her kind eyes and attention were welcome, but nothing could help. My parents had waited up for me. They had warm expectancy in their eyes, but that died when they saw my tear-stained face.

When I woke up next morning, later than usual, I was finished with crying. I had cried enough during my yo-yo years with Theo. I now repressed my conflicting emotions about him, shrouded them in a coffin of forgetfulness and closed the lid, tight. But mistrust and wariness were, for the time being, still imbedded in the whole of my person. I felt that I was finished with him, but I still bore his name.

After a month or two a feeling of liberation gradually seeped through and overwhelmed my tired body. The minister's words, "*You are not bound*" had buoyed me up. But I was sexually frustrated. Like alcohol and nicotine, one acquires a dependency on sex. Despite the infections, I had retained my longing for sexual culmination. I wanted a man. On the other hand, I was far from lonely. I had acquired wonderful friends: Olivia, being my absolute best friend.

Olivia was the cousin of one of my colleagues on the epidemiological research team. He had asked her, when I moved South the first time to take me under her wing, which she did. She was married and worked as a News Anchor on a commercial television channel.

## THE MORNING OF MY WOMANHOOD

She had her first baby during my first year there, and although I experienced pangs of envy, I really loved her and was so grateful for her good humour and lovingkindness. And her baby was gorgeous. My sister, Claire had moved South after she and Jamie married, about 18 months after they met. They lived on the outskirts of the city by the sea. She was very young but settled into the role of wife effortlessly. She was a great comfort. I had occasional contact with the Presbyterian Fellowship group in the city, but after I moved to a better flat in a heritage type, fashionable suburb, I switched over to the local, Anglican church. Its theology was more restrictive as far as divorcees were concerned than my Presbyterian denomination, so I didn't tell anyone there that I had been married. The old, sand-stone church and the liturgy appealed to me, and there was a handsome policeman of about my age who worshipped there regularly. I also had wonderful colleagues at the hospital: Patricia, a fellow psychotherapy trainee, Alec, the Child Psychiatrist, my co-therapist and Jay, Professor in Child Psychiatry.

I had regular supervisory sessions with Jay. His wisdom was invaluable. He was concerned about my seemingly incorrigible, romantic attitude to life. These unrealistic expectations were detrimental to my own health in his opinion, especially when I was being confronted daily with so many darker issues: anxious and psychotic children, non-coping, destructive and sometimes violent parents, incompatible marital partners, possessive mothers and indifferent fathers, poor families and rich families with drug- and/or alcohol abuse, gifted children who suffered from anorexia, and children with brain damage or chronic illness who were struggling terribly. I had been through crushing, dark passages in my turbulent marriage, but had continued to hope and pray for something better. It was my faith that kept my hopes high, but Jay had no time for that notion. His parents had fled from Russia because of religious persecution. They were people of means and had managed to get a passage to South Africa in the mid-1930s when Jay was a teenager. He completed his medical degree in Cape Town and specialized in Child Psychiatry in London at the Tavistock Clinic. The development of apartheid ideology in his adopted country in the 1950s had prompted Jay to migrate with his family to Australia. He was well-versed in sorrow, changes, adapting, disappointments, transitions.

Jay's recurrent attempts at reality-confrontation helped to corrode my already wavering faith. My God hadn't responded to my pleas to save the marriage, and it wasn't only I who had prayed: my Mum and Dad, Claire and Jamie, Deirdre, Theo's parents, and dear, frail Lizzie. My feeling of numbness indicated that I had given up all hope, resigned myself to my fate. Christ was no longer *behind me* nor *before me*. I didn't question His existence, but He had also betrayed me. He wasn't an "*ever-present help in trouble*". A wave of disillusion swept over me. "*Is that all there is?*" was the question that pounded in my brain. Peggy Lee's insightful song that topped the charts in 1969 could have been written about me:

"I remember when I was a little girl, our house caught on fire,  
I'll never forget the look on my father's face...,  
And I stood there shivering in my pajamas

## THE MORNING OF MY WOMANHOOD

and watched the whole world go up in flames...  
And then I fell in love with the most wonderful boy in the world.  
We'd take long walks down by the river...  
And then one day he went away  
and I thought I'd die, but I didn't...  
If that's all there is my friends,  
then let's keep dancing,  
Let's break out the booze and have a ball If that's all there is."

Was there no Sovereign God? Ultimate power being the concept in question. Did Jesus not love me as I had always believed? Is the Holy Spirit a figment of the imagination? Is life and society just composed of us humans, fallible, funny, resilient humans, trying to get on with living with a *little help from their friends*? Nothing else outside nor within? No *Source of Life*, No *Everlasting Arms*? There were, of course, a majority of rational, sensible people in the world, but in my job, I met an overrepresentation of "*the last, the least and the lost*". They were in my care to learn more advantageous ways of doing things guided by my insights and supported by my concern for their welfare. My focus on humanity left little room for reliance on a God who is my experience was impervious to people's prayers.

In addition to my spiritual dilemma, I was trying to understand and cope with my sexual frustration. I was preoccupied with sex. I had never masturbated nor heard of a dildo if there were such devices in my day. My knowledge about erogenous zones or sexual satisfaction had been hindered by the taboos in the circles I frequented. My sexuality had surfaced long before Theo's inadequacies and rejection. A longing for what I dreamed about and hoped for became a type of phantom pain. My sex life had been amputated. I suffered and yearned to experience the release and the heights of a perfect sex life, with anyone. I imagined myself, sensually attired, standing on my balcony and luring gullible male passersby to come up and share my bed. Of course, I never told anyone about my promiscuous fantasies.

Jay Insisted that I say to myself every morning, "*Life is Hard!*" I needed to look the strengths and weaknesses in both my clients and me straight in the eye. He believed in the inherent potential for betterment in humanity, "*otherwise we wouldn't do the jobs we do*". But he also recognized that in many cases we could only achieve maintenance of the status quo and help to limit further self-destruction or damage to others. Some colleagues reckoned that he was depressive. I followed his prescription and for the time being buried my illusions. It helped. I started smiling again, this time without sorrow in my eyes.

And Patricia invited me to a dinner party. Everything moved quickly after that evening.

FAST FORWARD ...

The telephone rang. I jumped up with both fear and expectancy in my tread. Was it him? We had met just a week before at Patricia's place. His name, Gus, he said he *might* ring. I

## THE MORNING OF MY WOMANHOOD

had even told the handsome policeman from church that I was invited out this coming Saturday, when he suggested we go sailing on the Bay. That was a chance to take! But now, here Gus was on the end of the phone. I could hardly believe my ears:

*"I have a friend who has just taken his Pilot's license. He suggested we take a spin together over the ranges in the National Park. What do you say?"*

It was the second time in my life I have literally weakened at the knees.

*"I'd love that!"* I managed to blurt out.

The rest of the conversation was practical. Where and when he would pick me up in his VW. What to wear. It was not exactly a traditional type of date. The butterflies in my stomach became extremely active. Whether it was because of the prospect of meeting Gus again or venturing up in a light plane I didn't know. None of my acquaintances had ever talked about flying. I had only seen it in films, awe inspiring!

Gus (Gustav Gudesen) was an electro engineer from Scandinavia. Several Scandinavian firms were involved in the big Hydro Electric Project in the Snowy Mts. This was an iconic engineering scheme harnessing rushing rivers and waterfalls and building dams to produce electricity. Gus had met the pilot, Roald, on the job, another Scandinavian. We drove at least 30 miles out of town to the small Airfield. We each put on our leather bonnets and goggles and mounted our one-engined aircraft. I felt like I was on the proverbial set of the film *"Those Magnificent Men in Their Flying Machines"*. We went *"up diddley-up-up"*; we went *"down- diddley-down-down"*. It was good I had a strong stomach and that my aforementioned butterflies had quietened with the exhilaration. It was also a godsend that I was in the plane:

After a mind-blowing, breath-taking ride in our flimsy craft over fabulous tree-clad ranges, Roald announced that he was a bit confused, the Airstrip was at Kangara Plains, but from the ground vision Roald had now, there were no distinguishing features that he could remember. He reckoned we were flying in the right direction. For once in my life my home visits to outlying areas for the Professor of Social Medicine became relevant for our precarious *"here and now"* situation.

*"I have no idea of where the airstrip is"*, I said, straining my eyes to see the terrain in front of us. *"But I remember the Church at Kangara. It is isolated, a bit out of town, but quite big, painted white with a tall copper spire. Quite impressive for this rural area."*

Suddenly on the horizon we all spotted the white, swan-like Church rising up from the green fields. With this local attraction in sight Roald was now able to get his bearings and navigate toward the strip. We landed breathless, but safe.

It wasn't my one and only date with Gus. He came home to my apartment the very next day. He had already said that he liked my flat. I made Greek Moussaka for dinner. It probably wasn't the best choice. Eggplant wasn't all that *"in"* in Scandinavia. If he felt like wrinkling his nose at it, he didn't. He was medium tall, slim and lithe, a bit like Danny in the

## THE MORNING OF MY WOMANHOOD

first chapter: hazel-eyed with an olive complexion, but not sunburnt brown like Danny. Gus hadn't spent enough time on the city beaches yet. He didn't seem like a "*notches in the belt*" type of person, he had a tenderness in his eyes, and even though I was simply dying to have sex I respected his gentlemanly equilibrium.

I had come to the conclusion that "*trial marriage*", by this I mean engaging in sex before marriage, is the only certain way to find out if two people are well-matched, and as my faith in God had ebbed out, my Christian values wouldn't prevent me experimenting in the future. But I was also sensible. I had not anticipated that my feelings for him would develop so quickly. I hadn't been on the Pill for over a year, and I had never bought condoms. I couldn't be certain he was prepared, so we went to a Movie.

Our eyes met in the dark, smiling approvingly at each other. He took my hand and we kissed - a long, gentle, beautiful kiss. At the flat lying together on my Indian carpet the kisses became more frantic. Ironically enough, here was I, who had so longed to have a loving man and start a family, suddenly searching through my gallery of medical friends wondering whom I could ask about contraceptives. I wasn't going to any local GP. My thoughts flew back to why I had been on the Pill also during Theo's traineeship in Psychiatry. We were both working, earning money, I wasn't supporting him, but early in the piece Theo had announced that he wasn't ready to have children. After the cruise he rephrased his state of mind:

"I'm ready to have children, but not with you!" So cruel of him.

Gus found out early that I had been married and was divorced. He wore an embossed ring on his left hand. I asked what it signified: He smiled sheepishly and answered:

"My first marriage."

For him it was a joke: the ring was, in reality, a graduation ring from the Engineering Faculty. In Australia we had no such rings, and he had probably received this question before. He wore the ring on his left hand - the custom for wedding rings in the English/Australian tradition. In Scandinavia wedding rings are worn on the right hand. I took his answer literally, having no idea he was kidding.

"Me too," I exclaimed, "I have also been married before."

Whether it came to him as an unpleasant shock or a relief to know that I was experienced, I never found out, because I never asked. After a few weeks we were well entrenched in our enthralling "*trial marriage*", although we never spoke about marriage itself.

Gus not only liked my flat, especially my carpet, and the movies, he loved dancing! Finally a man in my life who could dance and enjoyed it! Glenn Miller and his Orchestra was his favourite, and especially their recording of "*Moonlight Serenade*". Whereas Theo had dragged me to Drag Shows, Gus invited me to pleasant hotels or venues where there was

## THE MORNING OF MY WOMANHOOD

a show, often an artist with popular songs in his or her repertoire, and the invitation to dance to the band afterwards.

One evening we had tickets to the Hilton Hotel where a popular singer from USA performed. After the show the band invited the audience to come down onto the floor - it was a type of amphitheatre with a round marble floor in the middle. It wasn't easy to get down there when we had seats "*up in the gods*". But after two tunes where no-one dared to go down to dance, his eyes grinned at me asking:

*"Are you ready to take the plunge? Shall we open the Ball?"* I nodded, my heart pumping with anticipation.

He reached for my hand and down we scuttled. We hadn't been on the floor more than a couple of seconds before the whole audience seemed to be on the move. A minute or two later the dance floor was full. And Gus and I were swirling around, glittering in each others' arms to the wonderful sound of a fairly recent, big hit:

"You're just to good to be true. Can't take my eyes off of you.  
You'd be like Heaven to touch. I wanna hold you so much.  
At long last, love has arrived. And I thank God I'm alive....."

In 1969 this catchy melody and the becoming lyrics became *our song*.

### FAST FORWARD OVER

How Gus came to be at Patricia's place that evening when we met for the first time is his unique story. In the mid 1960s Gus was a disgruntled graduate from the Engineering Faculty in Gothenburg, Sweden. His father, Olav, was pressuring him to join the maternal grand-father's galvanizing firm, but Gus saw no future for himself in it. His mother, Sofia, despite the fact that her father had started the firm, which her husband now managed, supported Gus. Gus had had a year in Dusseldorf and spoke fluent German. Sofia spoke fluent French and German as well as English. She had boarded for six months with one her father's business associates in Richmond, outer London, in the early 1930s and developed a lasting friendship with Betty, the daughter of the house. Betty had married an Australian sheep farmer and moved to Wagin, Western Australia.

Simultaneously with Gus' search for something more exciting than galvanizing, the Australian Government was searching for young, qualified Europeans to fill the many vacant positions in this rapidly developing country in the Antipodes. The Government couldn't guarantee work, but predicted, the employment situation being as it was, that qualified, able-bodied migrants would find work within a month. The tempting offer was a very cheap plane fare to Australia. The one string attached was your signature on a paper promising that you would stay in Australia for at least two years. It was a risk, but with Betty being on the sheep farm south of Perth, Sofia did all she could to encourage Gus, quite literally to fly away to the Antipodes! At least he would increase his competency in

## THE MORNING OF MY WOMANHOOD

English, even if he ended up as a sheep shearer. And her husband would be forced to stop his pestering Gus to go into the firm.

Gus never forgot his first night in Perth. He found the YMCA and got a bed for the night. His father, Olav, as manager of his own business, was fond of a drink. He was a civilized drinker. He was a Norwegian and had married Swedish Sofia four years before World War II broke out. Whiskey, which was a part of the Swedish culture, didn't appeal to Olav. *Dry Martinis* were his preference, and Gus had inherited the taste. Armed with two brown-paper bags concealing two bottles, one Gilbey's Gin and the other, Noilly Prat Dry Vermouth, Gus had climbed the staircase to his room two steps at a time. He stretched out on the bed, placed a glass and the bottles on the bedside table, and was about to mix the longed-for drink (without ice) when he looked up: On the wall at the end of the bed was an enamel sign in Black and White:

“NO EATING, NO DRINKING, NO WOMEN”

As he was only about to break one of the rules, he poured himself a drink with a good conscience and within the hour he was asleep. The next day was a new adventure, a long journey south to Betty's sheep farm for Christmas. He hadn't expected to get work before Christmas, so now it was just to enjoy the heat, sunshine and sheep at Betty's place.

By the end of January Gus was employed as an electrical engineer in a firm supplying a big shipbuilding company in Fremantle near the estuary of the Swan River. He gained good experience here, had found new digs. Gus bought a car, and was dating a girl named Prue, originally from Adelaide. They loved the beaches outside Perth, and although they petted heavily, they never had sex proper because “*she had promised her mother*” that she wouldn't sleep with him, nor with anyone else for that matter, before she had a wedding ring on her finger. This suited Gus very well, she was nice and fun, and he was not ready to commit himself. Two years after Gus secured his job a Departmental Manager from the East Coast came to visit and inspect the firm's office in Fremantle. Gus ventured to ask what the job prospects were like further east.

“*Excellent!*” was the reply, and the man gave him his card. “*Come on over! Just ask for me and I will see what I can do.*”

On the grounds of this non-committal promise, Gus decided to do just that, “*Go East!*”. Unlike the USA where “*Go West, young man*” was the adage, in Western Australia, it was the East Coast that beckoned.

Gus followed a colleague's advice and advertised in a local newspaper looking for a companion to accompany him on his drive. It is 2,695.2 kilometres along the Eyre Highway from Perth to Adelaide, the first stop on his journey. The lonely road passes the goldfields of Western Australia and crosses the vast semi-arid and often dangerous Nullarbor Plain. At this point of time the road wasn't even paved over the Nullabor. The crossing was perilous because a modern version of highway robbers terrorized the Plain, and Gus's little

## THE MORNING OF MY WOMANHOOD

vehicle (VW bubble) was like a rattling stagecoach from the USA's Wild West for them. The journey was also hazardous because there were no filling-stations, nor help of any kind in the event of motor failure. I always thought Nullarbor was an aboriginal name, but it is from the latin nullus=*not any* and arbor=*tree* (not any trees).

With his second driver beside him to share the driving, and the VW brim full of petrol cans and water, Gus started on the long, arduous, boring drive in the searing heat of the days and the treacherous cold of the nights.

Gus' driving companion was only intent on getting to Adelaide, but Gus' plans extended much further eastward. He stayed however two nights with Prue's parents. Prue had a new job in Adelaide, but she seemed to have had entertained hopes of something more permanent when Gus was willing to meet and stay with her parents. But for him the stay had always been a matter of convenience and only temporary. If Prue had hoped meeting her parents would encourage him to stay, it had in fact had the opposite effect: Gus hated eating in bed, drinking was one thing, but eating, no. When Prue's mother knocked on his bedroom door at 7.30 a.m. the morning after his arrival with a breakfast tray laden with two fried eggs, bacon and baked beans on toast, Gus's stomach turned. Not only was his staple diet for breakfast bread and cheese, a normal routine for many Scandinavian stomachs, he was allergic to anything tomato-based, especially cooked or warm. Prue was deeply disappointed and tearful when he insisted that his plan had always been to "*Go East*".

He got a job, as promised. His adventurousness had paid off. He had more difficulties getting a flat, but coincidence, fate or Divine providence intervened. His new job was a sister company to the one in Fremantle. It supplied parts to the huge Hydro Electric Plant being built in Cooma in the Snowy Mountains: a pivotal location both geographically and strategically to supply power to Melbourne, Canberra and Sydney. In his new office he met Peter, a tall, blue-eyed, blond Norwegian with the consultant group that programmed and serviced the firm's data server. Data servers were huge in those days. Peter lived in an attractive house in a lovely suburb with his Australian friend, Harry, who was a heart surgeon, and he knew lots of Scandinavians, especially Norwegians. One of these, Ivar, had a room to let. Therese, Ivar's wife, had left Australia temporarily, working her passage on a Wilh. Wilhelmsen cargo ship, bound for Oslo. She had been homesick and was granted a four-month leave of absence from her psychiatric social worker position at a hospital to return to Sandefjord, her hometown, Gus was familiar with both Oslo and Sandefjord because he and his family had regularly visited his father's family at their summer cottage in Kjerringvik during school holidays. Ivar came from Stavern in the same coastal region, so they had lots in common.

Gus was born in Norway. Norway was occupied by Nazi Germany at the time. Sweden was politically neutral, and geographically not as strategic to the Nazi war effort as Norway. Gus' parents lived there during the first eight years of their marriage. Their first child, a boy,

## THE MORNING OF MY WOMANHOOD

was four years older than Gus. The little family of four was however forced to flee to Sweden early in 1944 because the Gestapo was hot on his father's trail: The office where Olav worked was regularly used by the underground Resistance as a meeting place. Sweden, being politically neutral, would be a safe haven for them. After a short stay in a refugee camp, Olav, Sofia and the two boys settled close to Sofia's parents on an idyllic peninsula overlooking the Southern Archipelago in Gothenburg. Olav was given an administrative position in his father-in-law's factory, and Gus's sister, Amelie was born four months later. Gus thanked Peter for the tip about the room adapting a popular saying to describe his situation:

"Thanks, Peter, a room in the hand is better than a two-room flat in 'the never-never'." (an Australian idiom for a sparsely settled, frontier region).

The very next day Gus was settled in at Ivar's place. In Norway Ivar had been a member of the Socialistic Youth Organization. In Sydney he was completing his Ph.D. at the University. Gus' politics were conservative, but Ivar hated cooking and Gus thrived on making food, so they found a good balance. Ivar and Therese prized themselves over their liberal values. Before she left, they agreed that if they needed sex while they were apart, they were free to get some. After a few days a woman colleague from the Uni began to spend her nights with Ivar. Gus found that he often had to cater for three.

Therese and Patricia had been social work colleagues and developed a lasting friendship. A month after Therese's departure Patricia and her husband invited Ivar to dinner thinking he may be lonely and would probably appreciate a home-cooked meal. When she rang, Ivar announced - no, not that he had a new girlfriend -, but that he had a flat mate.

"Can Gus come along too?"

The hosts had big hearts and said, "Of course!"

To even up the sexes, Patricia thought about me, and invited me as well.

### FAST BACK TO OUR ROMANCE...

After the first two months of a honeymoon type oblivion, it became clear that not everything was plain sailing for Gus and me. Of course we came from different cultures. And although Gus' English was pretty good, language challenges did pop up from time to time. In addition Gus announced on a couple of occasions that he felt "*squeezed like a lemon.*"

I was non-plussed. He used this potent expression to explain why he put the breaks on. It was not accusatory in any way, just descriptive. It could be related to my desire for him to meet or spend time with my people, foreign for him: my friends, my sister and her husband and on occasions my work colleagues. He used the same expression sometimes when we were making love. I should have asked Gus himself what he was uncomfortable with? But I didn't dare. I don't know why. Maybe my total disaster with Theo made me even more

## THE MORNING OF MY WOMANHOOD

reticent. I told my colleague, Alec, instead and asked his advice. In his usual, playful, laconic way Alec sang me a stanza from a song, “*Feelin’ Groovy*” - a new song by Paul Simon, sung by him and his buddy, Garfunkel:

“Slow down.

*You move too fast,*

*You’ve got to make the moment last...”*

Alec was a down-to-earth person and he understood men. He understood me and he helped me understand Gus. At a later stage Gus did confide in me. He and his best friend, Erik had sailed Erik’s father’s sailing-boat up the West Coast of Sweden to Smögen. They were 16-17 years old. It was glorious summer weather and the islands, Marstrand, Tjörn and Orust were favourites, not only for them, but thousands of young holidaymakers. Berthed on idyllic Tjörn, they had eaten at a tiny restaurant in a red converted boat house with nearly transparent, white, embroidered cotton curtains and red begonias on the windowsills. Well sufficed food-wize, they looked around for the night life for young people. They found a Summer Show and Dance. Erik was a “*Danny*”-type that had already made quite a few conquests. Gus was shy. He had had erections when he had kissed a couple of girls, but it was often accompanied by pain. Boys of their age in Scandinavia were seldom, if ever, circumcised. This being different from the custom in USA and Australia at the time. Theo was circumcised. In Gus’ case he had experienced discomfort because his foreskin, which should have been mobile and fairly stretchable, was not as elastic as in most men. This special evening at Tjörn ended up as a nightmare. Erik had invited two pretty girls back to the boat. The boat had narrow sleeping bunks, big enough for two if you “*bunked*” together.

Both girls were “*hot*”, and wanting to be taken. When Gus’ girl tried to get hold of his erect penis, the pain was intolerable. He tried to back off, which only made her more insistent. He felt he was being raped. He never told me the end of the story. It was too painful for him, both literally and with regard to the humiliation he had felt.

Gus and I were new in Sydney, him being newer than me. We sought a social life together outside our own bubble. Gus had kept contact with Peter after his helping hand with a place to live. Peter like Ivar was from Stavern in Norway, close to Kjerringvik. Gus and Peter found a common denominator sharing memories about Norwegian summers. Gus considered Peter to be his friend. And I regarded Peter as a delightful, sociable and generous acquaintance and host.

He lived in the house Harry had bought before they met with Harry’s two black, toy poodles. Peter took on a house-keeper role at their place, Harry’s demanding position at the hospital requiring him to be on call twenty-four seven. Peter also had an eye for beauty and art in addition to his regular computer job. He sewed, making fashionable, matching curtains and cushions, and bought paintings and works of art that enhanced the functional furniture. Harry was Greek, but born in Australia. He had defied his parent’s wish to devote

## THE MORNING OF MY WOMANHOOD

his life to the fruit and vegetables shops and restaurant they owned and instead completed a medical degree. In record time he went on to become a brilliant heart surgeon.

It took me a while to fathom their relationship. We were regular visitors at their house, but when we invited them, only Peter would come. When Gus' cousin, an Air Hostess with PAN AM, visited us Peter joined us, being the perfect cavalier for her joining us for dinner and dance at a fabulous restaurant with magnificent views over the city. When we visited them, we were just the four of us. I was a bit overwhelmed always being there with the three men. Harry was at least ten years older than me and seemed reticent about his work. I worked at the Children's Hospital and he at the Public Hospital for Adults in the same area. In the medical world everybody knows everybody. I sensed he was uncomfortable talking about potentially mutual acquaintances.

Peter would often confide in me when we were in the kitchen together, either preparing a meal or clearing up afterward:

*“You know, it is not always easy.”*

I didn't understand *what* wasn't easy. I knew it wasn't always easy for Gus living with Ivar, but Peter seemed to be insinuating something else than Gus' irritation over Ivar leaving is dirty clothes all over the place.

*“We have to live a quiet life,”* Peter would sigh.

*“Why?”* I should have asked, but the question stopped before it was formed by my lips. I remained silent, listening.

*“I often suffer, there is quite a bit of discomfort.”* He would say this with a knowing look.

But I didn't know. I understood that it had something to do with his bowel. But I didn't add two and two together at the time. And I didn't tell Gus.

One day I really made a mess of things. We were sitting on their patio in the sun enjoying a drink, and the tiny, black dogs were frolicking around us. Peter was relaxing in a rocking chair. The two curved wooden rockers under the chair were set in motion by Peter's long legs - they operated automatically. He himself was dozing like a lizard in the sun. Suddenly Harry hissed loudly at him:

“Peter, watch the dogs!”

They were playing dangerously near the rockers. Peter woke, startled.

“I think you worry more about the dogs than me, yelling at me like that.” (Peter)

“I didn't yell, I just don't want their paws crushed.” (Harry)

“They are quite capable of looking out for themselves.” (Peter)

“But they were so intent on their game, and you just rocked and rocked.” (Harry)

## THE MORNING OF MY WOMANHOOD

... and so the altercation went on.

I looked at these two extremely intelligent, grown men arguing pettily like an old married couple. It made me nervous. The line between crying and laughing is very fine. Suddenly I got the giggles. I tried to cough to hide my giggling, but despite all my effort to stifle it, it only got worse. Soon I was laughing uncontrollably. It was terribly undignified. They had been silly and undignified in their arguing, but now I was even more so. Gus seemed oblivious to the incendiary atmosphere surrounding him, but Harry turned on me indignantly:

“Why are you laughing at us?”

I couldn’t find an adequate way of lying to better the situation, so I just told the truth.

“You reminded me of an old married couple”, I said lamely.

Without my realizing what I had said wrong, Harry reacted to my admission as a confirmation of what he had suspected: I knew their secret.

“Get out, get out of our house and don’t ever come back!” He bellowed.

Peter was dumbfounded, and Gus distressed and mortified. He hadn’t understood the chain of events. In his book I had just been terribly rude laughing at his friends. We drove home in silence, and we never went back. When I told Gus they were homosexuals, he wouldn’t believe me. His experience with men who were attracted to men was from SS *Oslofjord*, a Norwegian ocean liner that plied regularly between Oslo and New York. His father had got him a summer job two years in a row in the mid-60s as a lowest rank waiter in the sumptuous First-Class Dining Room. A couple of the headwaiters were known for their sexual preferences. They were kind and physically attentive, straightening his tie if it were awry, and giving him pats on his shoulder or arm, but they could be easily circumnavigated if you weren’t interested. Their job was too important for them to risk anything more intimate.

The thought of his friends as lovers was too much for Gus. He cried at first. I believe it must have been a feeling of ultimate loneliness, being rejected by the only two people he regarded as real friends apart from me. I was devastated. And then he became angry, fuming. I thought I would lose him, and it would be my fault. But if anyone adhered to the command in Ephesians 4, 26-7, “*Never let the sun go down on your wrath*”, one of the principles that were a trade-mark of the Oxford Group that my mother had belonged to, it was Gus. He could blow up and blow out, but he was comfortable with his anger, and it never lasted long. This was something I had to learn, and living with Gus helped me get over the anxiety pains in my stomach that I had suffered for ages: my literal “*embodiment*” of what my subconscious mind regarded as unacceptable anger.

The whole affair was a hard blow for Gus. He didn’t have any other friends locally except for Ivar which was more of a businesslike arrangement, Ivar being landlord and Gus, the

## THE MORNING OF MY WOMANHOOD

boarder, so our being ostracized by Peter and Harry was shameful and a huge loss. It helped a bit when I explained that Harry was no doubt terrified that I would reveal their secret in medical circles. They could be punished for their lifestyle, put in jail. At this time, theirs was a crime punishable by imprisonment. Harry would lose his job and all the recognition he had worked for and deserved: All this in spite of the fact that they faithfully lived "*their quiet life*" together and never attempted to date others.

Peter's firm had long finished their introductory stint at the Electro Company, so Gus wasn't able to meet him to try to make amends. Gus wrote a letter to them apologizing on my behalf, but no reply came. We made a pact never to betray their trust. It took decades before I understood what Peter had alluded to in his confidences about *suffering*: abrasions on the soft tissue of his rectum.

I had given up going to church. I knew that our trial marriage was '*fornication*' in legal and religious terminology and a far cry from my former beliefs and values. My dear sisters Gillian and Claire understood my backsliding and vowed to each other to pray for me daily: pray for my return to my faith. They were not judgmental, neither were my parents. They understood my reaction after what I had been through, and my parents welcomed Gus with open arms when we arrived after the eleven-hour-drive to meet them. My mother, true to form, offered Gus "*a nice hot cup of tea*". He was dying for a cold beer but graciously accepted her offer. Later he confided in Frankie who still lived at home, and they drove together to the Drive-in bottle shop and consequently quenched their thirst in the squatter's chairs on the veranda.

My back was by now fully turned on God. I preferred to pursue my own desires, quieting my conscience and consoling my soul by playing the piano. My classical pieces didn't appeal to Gus who always asked me to play "*Hello, Dolly!*". And I rose to the occasion. We'd seen the film of the musical which came out the year of our courtship with Barbra Streisand and Walter Matthau, and we adored the hit with Barbra and Louis Armstrong. We often danced around together at high tempo to the record, ruffling up the fluff on my Indian carpet. Gus' other favourite song which I played and sang, was from the musical "*Oliver!*". No, it was not "*As Long as He Needs Me*", but

*"I'll do anything  
For you dear anything,  
For you mean everything to me.*

*I know that  
I'll go anywhere*

*For your smile, anywhere...  
For your smile, ev'rywhere.. I'd see.  
I'd risk everything  
For one kiss... everything YES,*

## THE MORNING OF MY WOMANHOOD

*I'll do anything, Anything?*

*Anything for you!!*

Maybe I should have sensed the implications regarding what I was promising when I sang, but at the time they didn't strike me. We were just so playfully in love.

Therese, Ivar's wife, had now returned from Norway and needed the spare room that Gus had occupied to store her belongings in, so Gus started flat hunting again. He rented a flat near the hospital where I worked. It was handy. It became our weekday abode being near my work. My flat was our recreation retreat at the weekends.

Gus was really sunburnt brown now. I was drawn to him, so irresistibly good looking with his tan. We loved the beaches, but he was sensitive to too much sun, having got sunstroke on one occasion, so he always wore a blue denim hat, like a little upturned bucket. And he did mention that the constant warmth and the sameness in the seasons, just slightly hotter or colder, was a far cry from the extraordinary and inspiring variations that a real change of seasons offered. Not only had his family the summer cottage in Kjerringvik, but they also owned a cabin in the mountains in Sälen, Dalarna in Sweden. He missed the *cyclus*: winter snow and skiing, the dark, the "*death*" of the foliage and grass that turned to new life in the spring, the long, light summer evenings, and the autumn with its palette of brilliant colours. He waxed quite eloquently when he was in these moods, and I noticed an increasing homesickness in his demeanour.

We became closer friends with Ivar and Therese and were delighted to accompany them to a lodge not far from Kosciuszko, the highest mountain in Australia, 2.228 meters over sea level. There was skiing equipment on loan at the lodge, so even though there were only a few shady patches where old snow still covered the vegetation, Ivar and Gus tried the skis. Firm lodges were quite popular in the area and had probably been built to meet the recreational interests of the large cohort of Scandinavians working on the Snowy Mountain project. There were no downhill slopes nearby, so the skiing was solely cross-country: a skiing style that is said to have its origin in Norway. Therese was three months pregnant, so we two women enjoyed sitting by the log-fire at the lodge.

I believe the long weekend in the mountains only whetted Gus' appetite for the Scandinavian seasons-cycles even more. His two years of duty in Australia which he had signed up for, was completed. The whole of his stay on the East Coast had been a bonus for the Australian employers, but I sensed that he wanted to go home. His mother, Sofia, wrote weekly, and he answered her dutifully. His maternal grandfather, Victor, also sent news-filled, gossipy letters about the wider family every month. And Gus missed Amelie who was now so grown up that she had announced her engagement. But what was our future? Did we have a future together? Things had begun to get serious.

Gus had written to his mother about me, my age, my work and family background, but kept quiet about the fact that I had been married before. Although his parents weren't in any

## THE MORNING OF MY WOMANHOOD

way religious, divorce was “*an admission of failure*” in their eyes. The expression “*It takes two to tango*” was the general understanding of failed marriages: fault on both sides. Scandinavians were pretty influenced in their thinking about marital problems by the famous Danish comedy “*Jeppe on the Hill*” written by the Norwegian playwright, Ludvig Holberg in 1723: “*Everybody says that Jeppe drinks, but nobody asks why Jeppe drinks*”, thus rationalizing his alcohol abuse as a sensible reaction to his miserable life with an abusive wife. A divorced woman was not something his parents would wish for their son. On these grounds Gus refused to reveal this secret. Just the same they advised him strongly against getting more involved with me.

“*Birds of a feather flock together!*” was the argument Sofia used. She continued: “*Think of the cultural differences, the problems she will have with the language, getting a job; and don't forget Charlotte Johansson from over the road is still pining for you - a perfect match.»*

Gus wrote back: five little words, “*Wait til you see her!*”

His reply to them warmed my heart, but their negativity made me doubt whether we could really work. I was already jealous of Charlotte from over the road who had grown up with him and been his playmate. I was sometimes frustrated by his typical “*immigrant*” English, which was more than adequate in daily- and work life, but which didn't extend to literary finesse. The thought of meeting his parents and the whole army of cousins and aunts was daunting, especially when I couldn't speak a word of Norwegian.

Gus had introduced me to some Scandinavian food that one could buy in an international food market. There were several items I really liked. But his attempt to introduce me to herring was a flop. As no Scandinavian herrings were to be found in the market, he bought some Polish Rollmops, but they tasted sour, were heavy and coarse, and not to my liking. He assured me that the herrings back home were smaller and tasted much better.

Gus had made it plain that he wanted to return home. If he were to propose, it was “*Gus+ Sweden*” or “*No Gus*”. I was very physically attracted to Gus; we had a satisfying sex life. I cared for him and wanted the best for him. He had eczema as a child, and still had sensitive skin, but was also emotionally sensitive to me and my needs. We both had tertiary education and good jobs. He worked in the Private Sector and earned more than me, but I had been frugal and saved up quite bit over the last year. We had some savings if we were to start from scratch in a new country. I probably romanticized the challenges I would face.

We made a date for our engagement party. My sister Claire had her first baby on the same day. It seemed like a good omen. On Sunday, after our private celebration at an expensive Japanese restaurant Saturday evening, we turned up to visit her in hospital and to see the newborn. Claire was radiant, and Jamie with her.

## THE MORNING OF MY WOMANHOOD

We made special love that night. I read somewhere that Frank Sinatra was phenomenal with the “*hors d’oeuvres*” i.e. when he started making love, the foreplay, but was quite a disappointment when it came to the “*main course*”. Gus, like Theo, was not good at “*hors d’oeuvres*”, but was excellent at “*main courses*”. I think his body moved to Frank Sinatra’s song from 1960:

“*Let’s take it nice ‘n’ easy, It’s goin’ to be so easy - for us to fall in love!*”

His eyes always smiled at me, encouraging me. I had good time and opportunity to position myself so that his virile “*slow motion*” gave me both delight and satisfaction. We had fun experimenting and swapping positions. For Gus the soles of his feet were also erogenous zones, and he loved it when my pale-pink painted toenails caressed the soft tissue under his arches and the harder skin under his heels. I loved his bare legs. Because of his sensitive skin he always wore the best quality, Egyptian-cotton shortie pyjamas, so sporting these he pranced out onto the balcony the next morning to stretch and welcome the new day. Without shyness he announced out loud to the whole world, “*We’re getting married!*”

## Chapter 5 “What a feeling, dancing on the ceiling!”

### JULIET AND GUS 1970-1971: TOGETHERNESS, OUTSIDERNESS, JOY, A NEW HEMISPHERE

#### FAST FORWARD:

I am on a cruise ship. We could have flown, but the price for the plane was the same as a First-Class ticket on the cruise liner, and we hadn't had a proper honeymoon. We wanted to see some of the world. From Australia to Europe is a long way. The ship is rolling. My head is rolling. I drank too much champagne, and Gus had more than his share of Black Label Bacardi. All went on the impeccably dressed Englishman's tab. I was wearing my satin-sleek, creamy white wedding dress. It was a Formal Night. Gus looked gorgeous in black tie. I am still on the ship, nursing my head after nearly puking over the railing. Thank goodness I missed soiling my wedding dress. Last time I had worn it was on our wedding day, fifteen months previously. The celebration had been in my parent's delightful garden.

#### FAST FORWARD OVER.

Our wedding had been for me a serene and romantic affair. My father had erected a beautiful wrought iron arch in the garden which he decorated with ivy and blossoms from his proliferous flowerbeds.

My wedding dress was simple, but elegant, with a bouquet of yellow tulips, a rarity in our town, and I bore a short wedding veil. Gus wore black tie. The Presbyterian minister presided over the ceremony and about 80 people were invited to attend in the garden and later partake in the alcohol-free cocktail party in the house. My parents didn't drink alcohol and didn't make exceptions. Sweet girls from my parent's church, my precious cousins who had supported me after my divorce, aunts and uncles, many people I loved were all there. It was so different for Gus. The only person who was Gus's alone, was Ivar, his best man. Therese didn't attend: their daughter was a tiny babe, and the thought of driving in the VW with Gus and Ivar the eleven-hour drive to my parents' home was formidable. Roald, the pilot from our first date, had been transferred to the Hydro Electric Installation at Cooma and they had lost touch, and of course Peter and Harry were out of the question. Patricia was my matron-of-honour, but her husband also declined. They were having hiccoughs in their marriage.

All of the interstate guests and a select few of those who had been special angels for me were also invited to a splendid dinner party at a hotel in the city that evening. The waiters took good time serving the delicious three course meal accompanied by good quality wines and other alcoholic drinks, these having been supplied by Gus and me. It may be

## THE MORNING OF MY WOMANHOOD

confusing and difficult to understand, but most Protestant Christians at the time who preached temperance as far as alcohol was concerned had no trouble joining in on occasions where alcohol was served, but they did not partake. Gus and I were hosts at our wedding's celebratory dinner and most of our friends felt that a celebration without alcoholic beverages was not a celebration.

It was neither puritanism nor Christianity that had enticed my father into total abstinence from alcohol. It was heredity he feared: call it physical disposition or environment or both. He feared the risk of emulating his father's egoism: allowing his thirst for alcohol to estrange himself from his wife, family, friends and most important, his own personal dignity. Dad had written about the precise moment he decided to stop drinking in his memoirs:

“I came home from the Army camp after a long week looking forward to a cold beer, and there was Juliet, about 9 months old sitting in her playpen. She looked up at me, her trusting, clear, native-cornflower blue eyes holding my gaze. She stretched out her plump little arms, smiling, begging me to take her up. I took her up and held her little body close to my heart and vowed to myself. “For you, my beauty, I will never drink again!””

And he never did. On our big night, although he didn't take champagne, only lemonade, my father's toast to our happiness was from his heart, encouraging and warming.

Unbeknownst to Gus, his parents and siblings had taped speeches that they had sent to my parents by post. After Patricia and Ivar had said lots of pleasant and fun words about us, my father introduced Gus's father on the tape-recorder. It was too much for Gus. I could feel him shaking as he held my hand under the table. His father had opened his speech with the formal,

“Dear Gustav”, pronouncing his name in the typical Swedish fashion.

I felt him wince. It was so strange for him to hear his father using that name and not his family pet name. “G.G.”, his initials. He hadn't spoken to his father for over a year.

Telephone calls from house telephones connected by cables that were stretched under the sea and land were terribly expensive. Just hearing his father's voice was a shock. When his sister, Amelie opened with her beautiful, warm, clear voice and said, “My dear G.G.”, he just broke down completely and sobbed. All the existential loneliness that had welled up inside him in the midst of all these, for him, “strangers”, found release in his tears.

Everyone understood his position, his outsiderness in the setting and felt for him. He didn't go out. He stayed, and after a little while, regained control.

It was Gus's maternal grandfather who had given him the pet name “G.G.”.

“I don't like Gustav” he had announced; “Much too formal and harsh for a newborn, from now on I will be calling him G.G.”

## THE MORNING OF MY WOMANHOOD

It stuck! The maternal grand-father spoke good English, loved horses and had a sense of humour: he pronounced the baby's name "jee – jee", not "geh – geh" as in Swedish.

His composure restored, Gus gallantly held out his hand and took mine in his, and with panache led me to dance floor for our wedding waltz. We had chosen Victor Silvester and his Silver Strings' rendition of "Around The World I've searched for You!" After a minute with just the two of us whirling, tightly together, but leisurely, elegantly in the spotlight, the other guests gladly joined us on the floor in the enchantment of it all. My joy was complete.

Fifteen months after our wedding day, our cruise liner was approaching the Equator. A big ceremony was planned on board for the event. The men were asked to dress in their wives' lingerie/nightwear. Gus had on my transparent, lipstick-red negligee with the red feather trimming. His hairy chest was quite visible through the thin nylon, and he paraded around like a peacock - his slim, elegant legs poised like a seasoned, ballet dancer. King Neptune was there in aquamarine taffeta robes and a golden crown, and the champagne flowed like the ocean beneath us. The men had to wrestle with each other on the edge of the swimming pool until either one or both landed in the water. The splashes as they, often clutching desperately to each other toppled into the pool were enormous. The laughter likewise. They looked like drowned rats, all of them, in their clinging, dripping garments as they stumbled up out of the pool. Later they emerged again in sophisticated casual clothes and we women were dying to take them into our arms on the outdoor dancefloor.

As an Aussie, north of the equator for the first time, and with a couple of glasses under my stylish silver and gold belt, I had the weird sensation that my world had turned topsy turvy entering the Northern Hemisphere. As Gus twirled me round, his impish eyes glittering, I felt I was quite literally dancing on the ceiling with my head and hair streaming downwards toward the homeland I had abandoned:

"Oh, what a feeling  
When we are dancing on the ceiling...  
So come on!  
Let's get loose  
Don't hold back 'Cause ain't no use  
*Hard to keep your feet on the ground..... Oh, what a feeling*  
*When we're dancing on the ceiling"*

## Chapter 6 “Where ever you go I shall go”

### JULIET: 1971-1973: ADVENTURE, DECEPTION, OUTSIDERNESS, OVERCOMING, JOY

By the time our cruise ship arrived in Genoa, Italy we had used up all our money on board. We had just enough travellers' cheques to buy a sitting-up train fare via Hamburg, Germany, to Kiel and a ferry ticket to Gothenburg, and some provisions. All attempts in Italy to access the money we had transferred to a Swedish Bank were in vain. There were no ATMs in those days and no credit cards either. From total luxury on the liner over the Pacific and Atlantic to near to starvation on the train trip North.

It was a very long train ride, and freezing for me in my thin, patent leather boots when we walked between train stations in Hamburg. It was November and my light-weight Australian jacket gave little protection from the icy wind. But there was absolutely one errand Gus was obliged to perform in Hamburg: buy a bottle of cognac and gin for his father. To ward off the unhealthy effects of alcohol on society, Sweden had in 1955 established Systembolaget, a State-owned and controlled chain of wine and spirits shops. All sale of liquor was limited to these stores and expensive compared with prices further south in Europe. We used up our last traveller's cheque on the spirits.

There had been plenty of time on the three different train facilities that took us from the Mediterranean to Skagerak bordering the North Sea to relive our fabulous journey: The farewells from Australia had been hard, but colourful and traditional as tens of thousands of streamers snapped as the ship slowly departed from the Circular Quay, Sydney. We waved frantically to Mum and Dad and about 20 other dear ones who had come to see us off. They had taken planes and trains to ensure us that we had their blessing for the journey and to join in the final, tear-filled farewells.

After Fiji, which was hot, we relished the next port of call, Western Samoa. A rattling ride in the back of the old, what looked like a well-used cattle truck, transported us from the Wharf, along a coastal track flanked by mountainsides decked with tropical rainforest, to a secluded beach with the whitest sand. The cooling balm of the gently rolling waves of transparent aqua was heavenly. Later we bought hard but brittle, apricot-pink conch shells from the beach stalls to remind us of our day and drank directly from the coconuts that the youths with legs splayed in a frog-like position had shimmied up the tall coconut palms to gather.

In Acapulco, on the west coast of Mexico, we hired a Mini-Moke with the New Zealand couple we had befriended on board and gate-crashed a luxurious hotel on a remote beach. Swimming in the rock pool, drinking pina coladas at the bar under a waterfall, we believed that we belonged amidst the decadent rich that frequented the resort. We didn't

## THE NOON OF MY WOMANHOOD

dare to eat all that day; in case someone asked for our room number. Instead, when darkness descended promptly at about 6.00 p.m., we walked downtown to eat. On the way we were amazed that poverty and slums were often the closest neighbours to the fabulous mansions of the wealthy. No East End, West End here.

We left the Pacific Ocean, sailing through the Panama Canal, stopping at Panama City, and proceeded to our last port of call before 5 days at sea: The port was Curacao with its colourful buildings, a touch of colonial Portugal, and cactus covered desert, I had never seen cactus flowering before. The exotic blooms were a pale gold shade, delicately beautiful.

We crossed the Atlantic Ocean to Portugal and delightful Lisbon with its magnificent blue and white tiling, terra cotta roofs and lots of other attractions. And then rounding the English colony, Gibraltar, that guards the entrance to Mediterranean, we sailed on to Malta, Messina and Naples. In Naples we took a marvellous excursion circumnavigating the Bay of Naples to breathtaking Sorrento and took a fabulously romantic ride in a plumed horse and sulky through the winding cobbled streets and along the cliff path. We hadn't used any money on a honeymoon after our wedding, just a weekend at the coast. We made up for that with the amazing cruise and the onshore excursions.

It was mid-November when we arrived at my parent-in-laws' pleasant, spacious house, and I became uncomfortably aware of the confinements of deceit. Gus had concealed the fact that I had been married before when he first wrote to them about me, and I had agreed. But he couldn't face the repercussions of a disclosure, so it was still our secret. In those days it was a custom to announce weddings in the newspaper. Unbeknown to me the announcement in the Gothenburg Times heralded the fact that:

*"Gustav GUDESEN and Juliet SPENCER are celebrating their wedding in xxxxxx, Australia, on Saturday, xx.xx.1970. The Reverend Keith Heathwood is the presiding minister."*

Although my name and identity had become Juliet Gudesen from the moment I signed the Registry Office papers, it was Juliet Llewelyn who married Gustav Gudesen, not Juliet Spencer. Many areas of my life were publicly known under the name Llewelyn: my degrees from the University, the epidemiological research report that even had law-changing consequences for the whole of Australia and important references confirming my work experience. Now, a year and a half after our wedding, starting a new life in Sweden I was suddenly nervous. I was either having to get these names changed back to Spencer or do a balancing act between two lives; one in the bosom of the family, and one at work, if I ever got work. From that moment I discovered what it is like to be an alien.

Identity is also closely connected with first names: Juliet pronounced in the English fashion is *jew-lee-ett*. Juliet is not such a common name in Sweden but Julie is. The English pronunciation of Julie is "*jew-lee*", but in Sweden it is "*you-lee*". In Gus's case, he was G.G.

## THE NOON OF MY WOMANHOOD

at home. At school he was always addressed with the more formal Gustav, “*goo-stahv*”, When he got the job in Perth his work mates adopted the American and Australian version of his shortened name, Gus (pronounced “guhs” as in “us”, “bus”). A feeling of outsiderness connected to how one is addressed was something one couldn’t change, just accept, however frustrating. And the first Saturday, the day after we arrived I, as ‘*You-lee*’ Gudesen, made my first cultural faux pas: Early Saturday morning I went merrily into the bathroom and took my daily shower only to be reprimanded by my mother-in-law when I came out.

*“Olav’s weekly bath-day is Saturday mornings. You have used up the hot water. Now his bath will be stone-cold.”*

I apologized profusely, but her look of exasperation made me feel like a second-class citizen.

Language, pronunciation and cultural habits can also create serious misunderstandings. Gus was a pretty down-to-earth guy and often tried to emulate the vernacular when he was overseas, trying to be “*one of the natives*”. Four years after we arrived back in Gothenburg his International Swedish firm assigned him to a position to oversee the delivery, assembly and installation of vital parts produced in Sweden necessary for the construction of a huge aluminium smelter/ refinery in South America. The main construction company had its’ headquarters in Charlotte, USA. Here one of his attempts at using the vernacular got him into trouble: a Project Manager from the team in North Carolina asked Gus for information about something that was not in his scope of work. He answered, “*I haven’t the foggiest*”, a typical Australian and English-, but not an American expression: “*foggiest derived from fog*” meaning “*being in the dark*” or “*not knowing*”. The American heard his answer as “*I haven’t the fuckingest*”, which is both vulgar, a swear word with a value-laden touch of impudence. Gus in the best case should have given quite a different answer and shown an interest in trying to understand what the boss wanted to know, not the shrug shoulder, non-caring answer he had given. Gus refuted that he had been insolent, that it was a language misunderstanding, but he couldn’t explain away his nonchalance. The boss’s lack of confidence in him stuck and diminished his own self-confidence. His behaviour and attitude were reported to his Swedish superiors. He stayed the project out, but didn’t get any good reference for his CV when it was over.

For me this particular job became a time of heart ache: instead of thriving in the work as he had done in the beginning, each day was a chore. His Swedish superior on site constantly reminded him that his attitude had worsened the already difficult communication between the Swedes and the Americans. The Americans found the Swedish, abrupt, uncouth and void of the polite niceties that oil the wheels of good communication and cooperation. The Scandinavians abhorred these so-called polite niceties perceiving them as fake and meaningless interactions, such as the common phrase “*Do come round and visit!*” The lack of specifics about time and place resulted in no-one from the Swedish

## THE NOON OF MY WOMANHOOD

cohort ever turning up at the Saturday barbeques. “*Popping in*” as I knew it from Australia wasn’t a phrase in the Swedish vocabulary. When Gus got back to Sweden, his superiors who had found him more of a liability than an asset, assigned him to a project in Russia. He resigned, applied for another job in a local company, got it and left the international arena.

I had lots of challenges wrestling with the new language and the cultural differences. It sounds like whining and self-pity, but what I experienced was a feeling of outsiderness. It was Christmas soon after we arrived. Gus had sung Bing Crosby’s “*I’m Dreaming of a White Christmas*” over and over on the passenger ship. I had bought the sheet music before we left so that we could sing it on Christmas Eve. Not only had the ship with our furniture and belongings not yet arrived from Australia, in it being my piano, the Indian carpet and my beautifully hand carved Chinese camphor wood chest which among other things contained my sheet music, but it was a very green Christmas in Gothenburg that year, not a snowflake in sight. A let down, especially for Gus.

Christmas Day following the midnight candlelit service in the Lutheran City Church was a merry occasion with the traditional hot and cold smorgasbord. The casserole, in Swedish called “*Janssons frestelse*”, where potatoes, onions and anchovies are the main ingredients, was warmed up from the night before and served with smoked salmon, baked ham, a variety of herrings, mustard, cranberry sauce and greens. The extended family all came on Christmas Day so there were lots of new people to meet. All were well-versed in English, but after a few polite phrases everyone switched to Swedish, and their babble, that being meaningless and unintelligible sounds for me, reminded me of the origin of the word “*babble*”. Babel’s tower (a story in the book of Genesis 11, 1-9) was ostensibly the start of the proliferation of languages in our world and describes the confusion and suspicion that arose in their wake.

The Swedish intonation was so different from English, their voices going up and down, and often ending up, which meant that I perceived them as asking questions the whole time or arguing. And Gus’s mother and older brother talked incessantly. I asked Gus what they were arguing about?

“*Nothing*,” he replied, “*nobody’s arguing!*”

But the way they spoke increased my anxiety level. I so wanted to be accepted. Gus had seemed so demure the whole time, liked he’d shrunk. He had warned me that his brother was always *the life of the party*, the dominating one, but I hadn’t expected to see Gus like this, pleasant and charming outwardly, but not the man I knew. His differentness meant that I couldn’t fathom the atmosphere, a bit like *Alice in Wonderland*. I had lost control of my life. I became a passive object, like the *Dormouse* at the *Mad Hatter’s Tea Party*: “*(I) was sitting between them, fast asleep, and the other two were using (me) as a cushion to rest their elbows on and talking over (my) head.*”

## THE NOON OF MY WOMANHOOD

In retrospect and without reproach I do believe Gus unbeknown to himself, kept me on a sort of leash with our deceit about my divorce, Whom I was academically and personally was taboo. He had the best intentions, believing like the popular Norwegian song his father had sung for him as a child, with lyrics written in a local Southeast County dialect (my translation):

“Yeh’ll get a new day tomorrow, pure and untouched by ‘uman ‘ands,  
wiv plain pages  
and coloured pencils to draw wiv!”

A simple attractive philosophy, self-deception: I could start anew with plain, unsullied, shining white pages. The price however was fear of disclosure, and the anxiety produced thereby became a modulation in the melody of my life, turning many cadences from major to minor key. Gus had no idea of what he did when he insisted on this concealment, so I have forgiven him. And to be honest I embraced the *“pure, unused, plain pages”*, the new start. Why? Simply because I had possessed another chord in a major key that Gus had intuitively understood: a desire to find my roots in Europe. I had been fired by curiosity about my father’s origins in England and his aunt’s (she was only 13 years his senior) descriptions of the seasons and pleasantness of the temperate climate in Southern England.

The anachronisms I had experienced in the Australian school system that at the time included scores of children’s songs and nursery rhymes that bore the taint of colonialism and glorified the fauna and flora of the Northern hemisphere, were also a part of me. Traveling to Europe, albeit not to Great Britain but Scandinavia, was like a fulfillment of my subliminal longings, a deep and basic urge to find and explore my European roots.

When I finally found myself enveloped by my first European Spring, I recalled the lyrics of a popular children’s song we sang so fervently in the first grade:

“Wake up buttercups and daisies, wake up violets dear,  
see the Spring is peeping, creeping. See the Spring is here,  
Soon will tulips gold and crimson, wake up from their sleep  
and the dandelions bright golden from the grasses peep.”

Spring was a season we didn’t notice where I grew up. We had changes of what was flowering in our garden, but I had never seen the spring *“peeping, creeping”*, nor buttercups, nor tulips for that matter. The only tulips I ever saw were for sale in the flower shops, but my great aunt had blown-glass crimson-red and yellow tulips with unusual, green spiky leaves that stood like sentinels in a crystal vase priding her dining table. She had taken them with her as a treasured heirloom on their steamship voyage in early 1914 from South Hampton. They had been a gift from her grandfather who had sailed with the Coast Guard out from Lyme Regis, Southern England. He had once managed to get to

## THE NOON OF MY WOMANHOOD

Murano, an island in the Venetian group and bought them as a souvenir. They were her only tangible keep-sake reminding her of spring in England.

The memory of my spring awakening reverberated remarkably with Jamaica Kincaid's "Lucy" (1990) and her description of her first meeting with spring in Northern USA in contrast to her origins in tropical Caribbean. Hers was more of a protest than mine had been. Both of us had grown up in a land that been a British colony. But whereas my Dad was born in his Mother Country, Great Britain was in Lucy's case deemed to be an oppressor rather than a protector.

An anachronistic verse that reflects the subtle oppression that imperialism exerts on a colony's culture is evident in a children's poem we learned:

*The North wind doth blow and we will have snow,  
and what will the robin do then poor thing?  
She'll sleep in the barn to keep herself warm  
and hide her head under her wing, poor thing."*

Where I lived in the subtropics a Northerly wind is warm, often hot. In the Northern Territory and Northwestern Australia there is a monsoon season with warm, moist north-westerly winds. Further South and more toward the Eastern Coast the northerly winds are hot and dry originating in the red centre of Australia. A North wind is incapable of bringing snow! How confusing this geographical anomaly must have been for the heads and minds of thousands of small Australian school children. I had never seen a fragile, red-breasted robin, nor snow. Not until I travelled to Hobart, Tasmania, I finally saw snow on the summit of Mt. Wellington when on a conference there in my twenties, even then it was a huge disappointment, the summit of Mount Wellington having almost eternal snow. I say this sarcastically because it was expensive to take a taxi to the top. I could see its beckoning white from the Conference hotel, but the snow was just a huge bed of crystallized white beads shining in the sunlight, just like the crystals that formed on my refrigerator when it needed defrosting. It was nothing like the soft, white purity I had imagined.

But now in Sälen, Sweden, the week after my green Christmas in Gus's home, I was surrounded by glorious fields of virgin white snow on the plateaus and the awe-inspiring prospects of one day attempting to ski down the glistening, snow clad slopes. All my dreams had come true and more! I thanked Gus silently in my heart:

*"My dear Gus, the problem of concealment is just related to one side of me: the academic, the successful therapist, the respected researcher, the divorcee. The other side, the woman, the offspring of parents with their family origins in Europe, the lover of nature, the person with a hunger for and appreciation of beauty flourishes here in Sweden in my life with you. I thank you and love you!"*

Celebrating New Year at the cabin was really amazing! If we had been in Gothenburg the family would have celebrated New Year with a black-tie lunch on New Year's Day. At the

## THE NOON OF MY WOMANHOOD

cabin we celebrated New Year's Eve. Scandinavian countries have both national costumes and different kinds of woollen, knitted sweaters that either have a special knitting pattern or pattern borders with embroidery specific to the region they belong to. Victor and Sofia were appropriately attired in classic skiing pants gathered under the knee and magnificent Falun sweaters with a huge and impressive emblem knitted in as a pattern both on the front and the back of the sweater. Sofia's was red on a white background and Victor's white on a black background. Olav had on his Norwegian, Setesdal "*kofte*", a thick, heavy cardigan with an impressive black, felt border embossed with heavily embroidered braid in red and green. Instead of buttons, the cardigan was fastened by specially fashioned, silver clasps. Olav's mother was born in a picture post card little place called Valle in Setesdal. We dined on grouse, again (I'll get back to that) with potatoes, greens and cranberries, accompanied by red wine. And there were beautiful golden, almost amber coloured cloudberries from Setesdal for dessert. Olav had relatives that managed to get a small bucket of the frozen berries to him each year as a Christmas present. I can't remember any fireworks, but we toasted the New Year in with a fake champagne from Alsace-Lorraine.

We drove back to Gothenburg in the late afternoon on New Year's Day in a snowstorm! It was dark. Gus and I sat in the backseat, and I held his hand tight as I was sure we were going to die speeding in his father's Volvo on the scraped flat, icy road, with piles of snow at least a meter and a half high on both sides. And almost no vision: the windscreen being shrouded in a living, translucent veil of huge, flurrying flakes, which, when the lights from an approaching vehicle struck them, became a duvet of whiteness.

Our daily life the week after New Year began with Sofia's practicality. She was an expert at it, and I will come back to that too. I had been struggling these first weeks, food-wise, language-wise and emotionally. The only really bright spot was Gus's maternal grandfather, Victor, the head of the family you might say, as Olav had followed his wife to Sweden and been dependent on his father-in-law's good graces ever since. The grandfather really was a particularly gracious and loving gentleman. He always asked after my family or things pertaining to Australian politics that he had read in the newspaper.

Gus was like his grandfather in every way except eye colour: his height, build, looks and gestures were a model of Victor. He didn't resemble his father at all, his father having a stocky build and a fair, ruddy complexion. But Olav was also a kindly man, albeit very aware of his place in the hierarchy: Victor had been retired for at least 15 years, but he had kept his position as head of the Board of Directors. He enquired if I had received letters from home, cared about me and my welfare, and smiled at me with genuine interest and respect. He proffered advice about hospitals and Institutions that he deemed relevant for me in the future as potential places of work. Victor made me really feel like a welcome addition to the family.

## THE NOON OF MY WOMANHOOD

Sofia had inherited her father's intelligence and dignity, but not his kindness. I felt that she tolerated me for Gus's sake and was determined to make the best out of it. But I wasn't her first choice. When I first met Sofia, I had already been warned by Gus that his mother had an ulterior motive for getting him out of the way, off to Australia. His mother and father bickered a lot, mostly about him because of his father's deep disappointment about Gus's not going into the firm. It was as if his father was obsessed about this "*betrayal*" on Gus's part, and he drank even more than usual when he was upset. This affected the marital relationship and Sofia felt that getting Gus out of their hair was the only solution.

True to character, the first thing Sofia mentioned for me the evening we arrived in Sweden was Olav's drinking and her unsatisfying sex-life. This confidence seemed so out of place after the delicious dinner of grouse, prepared by Olav, with potatoes, Brussel sprouts and cranberry sauce. The grouse was, by the way, not easy to navigate for me as a novice. And Sofia's famous Napoleon cake composed of layers of puff pastry and filled with a whipped cream and a custard mixture laced with rum topped the wonderful meal. As the new daughter-in-law, I found her candidness quite disturbing. I didn't want to take sides, and it became even worse when she started criticizing her other daughter-in-law, Petra, and how she was the reason for an estrangement between Sofia and her eldest son. They had always been so close before the marriage, she said. I felt I was treading on emotional "*hot coals*". And my anxiety about her was not alleviated during the sharing of Christmas, presents when she didn't seem at all pleased with the expensive opal brooch Gus has proudly brought for her from Australia, remarking loudly for all to hear that she had "*oodles of brooches*". She didn't notice his distress. She probably had no idea of what an opal was, deeming it to be just another sort of opaque coloured glass. Instead, she expressed openly her envy about an Aztec demigod figurine in a semi-precious stone, that Gus had bought for me in Acapulco, but hidden as a Christmas surprise.

*"That's the sort of thing I like,"* she exclaimed, *"something exotic!"*

She switched promptly to Swedish and my imagining of what she was saying was probably ten times as unpleasant as what she really said. After six weeks in her house, I gave her the figurine as a thank you present. I was just so relieved to get away from her uncensored bantering about Olav's impotence and threatening cirrhosis of the liver, and her need to keep busy and flirt with the colleagues in the International Travel Agency, Thomas Cook, where she was employed part time.

Sofia was, as previously mentioned, very practical and not '*all bad*'. On the contrary it was probably me, still suffering from my romantic notions about how relationships ought to be, or with my English-speaking cultural background assuming that one only engages in polite conversation during a first meeting. Sofia's open, honest description of how she perceived her relationship and her life could have been refreshing to some, whereas I found it disconcerting. I got a flashback to all the therapy sessions where it had taken me hours of gentle confrontation and reflective coaxing before clients would open up about alcohol

## THE NOON OF MY WOMANHOOD

dependency or problems relating to sex. But that was probably why they were clients and Sofia had never seen a therapist. And when Amelie told me that her Mother's usual good-bye, when she was 16 and off to a party, was,

*"Bye bye, precious! Have fun. Don't get pregnant!"*

I realized that our upbringings were miles apart. It reminded me of the rumours we had heard in Australia about Scandinavians' liberal sexual practices, but in hindsight, it was just talking about sex that was more liberal in Scandinavian countries, not necessarily practice. Sue, Helen, Beverley and also Olivia (she had her baby when she was a young student in USA and gave it up for adoption) had all engaged in sex and gotten pregnant before they married. In Australia, talking openly about sexuality was taboo. These beautiful girlfriends were from different eras of my life, but now all of them were married and entrenched in family life, raising nine flourishing children between them. Unlike them, we were having difficulties getting pregnant.

I had longed for children for many years, and both Gus's siblings had a child each. We had a shared dream of a flock of cousins similar to what we both had enjoyed in our childhoods. My fertility problem was, therefore, sad and frustrating for us both.

Sofia was a wizard at organizing things, and all that she organized during our six weeks stay with them was for **our** benefit: She found a flat to rent, an annex in a larger, beautiful house in their suburb, where the bedroom was formerly part of the original house, the living room, kitchen and bathroom being in the newly built extension. The bedroom was glorious with high ceilings and French doors going onto to an area of lawn that we were permitted to occupy. There was a view from the bedroom out over the sea, much the same view that Gus's parents' house enjoyed. I was thrilled. The other wonderful thing that Sofia did was without my knowledge or consent but turned out to be crucial for the journey I was embarking on in Sweden: she had enrolled me on the University's language course for people with higher degrees. This was a gift of thoughtfulness I would never forget! Her own proficiency in languages had given her insight into how much language competency meant for quality of life. It was hard for me being a beginner on the Swedish course, but the insightful and supportive Sofia became another of my angels!

Olav was pretty quiet the evening before we moved to our new abode, keeping to himself in the library, smoking his Havana cigar and sipping the Chivas Regal Blended Scotch Gus had given him the week after New Year. Our shipment had arrived. Olav was happy, and I was now happy at the prospect of our new home with my piano and my camphor wood chest, and the thought of choosing a lounge suite, a coffee table and sewing curtains. Our dinner service, crystal and cutlery had all survived the voyage, and we had bought a second-hand bed and inherited a varnished dining table and chairs from Victor. We would get them sanded down to the natural flame birch; it was most attractive. It was Olav who had confided in me about what happened to Sofia as a newborn babe, being deposited with her aunt who had milk to spare in her breasts. It seemed he was trying to understand

## THE NOON OF MY WOMANHOOD

her lack of sensitivity and proffered this explanation as an excuse for her directness and the amusement she got out of her attempts to belittle him. He seemed a generous person.

A strange memory hit me when I reminisced about the Aztec figurine and my challenges with fertility. It has to do with repression of events that cause fear, in this case superstition, something I didn't understand at the time. While I was working on the epidemiological research project and Theo and I were into comparative religions, we had a visitor, a man from Sri Lanka. It was called Ceylon back then. He was a representative from the Health Ministry and had attended a conference in our State and our project interested him. I was given cash in hand to look after him for the afternoon and take him and Theo to dinner at a restaurant. We had a two door, green Mini Minor at the time and our guest was a strapping big fellow, nearly as tall as Theo, but I was driving and I had picked up Theo who was now leaning side-ways across the whole of the back seat, so our guest had at least a front seat. I asked what type of food and restaurant he preferred. He replied with his own question,

*“Do you have a garden?”*

“Yes,” we replied simultaneously.

*“Would you mind,” he asked in a soothing, polite voice, his excellent English singing with his country’s special tones, “if we eat at your place? I will cook. We can go to a supermarket and buy what I need. I am so tired of being dressed up in a suit and strangled by my tie, and I would love to put on my normal clothes - I have them in my briefcase - and work in your garden for an hour or so.”*

What could we say, but, “Of course!”

Shopping completed, we gave him the spare room to change in and showed him the bathroom. He came out as quite a different person, his glistening, chocolate brown body now paraded in a very white singlet and a type of white sarong: a large piece of white cloth which he had bound around his waist, and which reached nearly down to his very thin ankles. His straight black hair was slicked back over his crown and he was barefoot. In the same polite manner, he asked where he might find our gardening tools. Theo showed him and followed him down the sloping lawn towards the dam. Halfway down they stopped. He said he would like to dig up a bed ad plant a tree there. There were hundreds of trees on the periphery of our property, but Theo felt he couldn’t refuse. He asked Theo if was possible to take rounded stones from down near the dam to mark the edge of the bed. We let him have his way. The earth under the first layer that nourished our grass was shaley and needed a strong man to get deeper to the richer earth, but he persevered, and after an hour or two the circular bed was lined with rounded small boulders. He suggested we paint the boulders white and plant a special tree there. We agreed.

After dinner where he excelled himself as a cook, and his laughter rang out through the whole house, he asked if he could read our palms. He was still attired in his casual white outfit.

## THE NOON OF MY WOMANHOOD

Again we agreed. He took Theo's palm and examined it carefully, then he took mine. He seemed perturbed and took Theo's again.

*"What is it?"*

I asked, beginning to feel uncomfortable about this soothsayer. It wasn't exactly a line of practice our Christianity encouraged. He looked genuinely sympathetically towards us:

*"It seems somewhat unclear, some discrepancies, so I'd rather not say."*

Theo and I looked suspiciously at each other as he clapped his hands together, smiled broadly and exclaimed:

*"I think I'd better get changed and get back to my hotel"*

Theo laughed it off, calling him a bit of a fraud as far as fortune-telling was concerned when we were driving home again after dropping him off. I was still uneasy, sensing something sinister that he dreaded disclosing. We never planted a tree in his bed, some flowers, yes, but no tree. Now with the Aztec demigod and my difficulties conceiving, I became superstitious: what had he seen? I had heard that Theo now had two children. Was this the discrepancy he had seen: number of children, or the length of our lifelines or what? Dabbling in the occult was still against my religion, even though I didn't claim to be religious anymore. But I wanted the threat of it out of my system, and for a moment I praised the Lord that I had given the semi-precious demigod to Sofia.

I relished the Swedish course. It was held at one of Gothenburg's several University campuses in the city and we were there from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. every weekday. There were about 25 people in the class, mostly women academics like me who had married Swedes. They came mainly from the Northern hemisphere and spoke many languages of origin, so there was no other language than Swedish spoken during the course. Language was and is the key to getting integrated.

My first six weeks had been a struggle, not just because of Sofia, but because I felt like an idiot. The extended family members who couldn't be bothered speaking to me in English, spoke to me in one syllable words and pointed to the object or person they were speaking about, just like one does with a two-year old. They didn't mean to be disrespectful. One of the great-aunts, Victor's sister-in-law, first surveyed me, and then squeezing my jaw in her hands, which leaves one's mouth hanging partially open, she examined my face in detail. Finally, she dropped my jaw and announced: *"Good teeth!"* I felt like a thoroughbred horse must feel when he is getting the run over before being put up for sale. She then nodded her head as a sign of approval. I was **in**, accepted into the fold, or stable!

My first job was at the City Museum where the main attraction was an ancient Viking ship. It was an interesting place to work. After four months on the beginner course, I had now graduated to an advanced language course in Swedish language and culture. It was only

## THE NOON OF MY WOMANHOOD

three days a week, so I could work the other two days. Here my pronunciation was put to the test.

In those days, tourists visiting the museum bought picture postcards to send by airmail back to families, to show them where they travelled and what they had seen. We conversed in English mostly. But from the beginning of May there were also many school children who were on excursions to the Museum. They were encouraged to buy postcards as illustrations for project material on the Viking era.

“*Hur mycket?*” was the question I had to answer in Swedish probably a hundred times a day.

The cards in those days (1972), cost two Swedish crowns. My answer was just as short and sweet:

“*Två kroner.*”

But do you think these primary-school children understood me? Far from it: What!

“*Hva!*” they would exclaim with disbelief in their voices, “*Sju kroner?*”

The pronunciation of *två* is *tvo*. In the English language there is no word I have been able to find that starts with these two consonants “tv” together; and then there is the “å”, which in this word shall sound like an “o”. The “o” is formed in the front of the mouth, cheeks drawn in and lips rounded like you are going to blow out the candles on a cake. My Aussie “o” sounded like “u” and the children confused my answer with seven (*sju*): *seven* crowns being a fortune for a post card! “*Sju*” was pronounced like the English “shoo”, when you are trying to get rid of a pestering fly, or a chook who has escaped from the pen and is heading for the lettuce patch.

That sound, *seven*, was easy for me, but not the elusive number two. Hundreds of times a week I had to work with the muscles in my face to get the sound right so the children would understand. I came home tired, not because of standing on my feet for 8 hours, but because my face muscles were stiff and aching.

Each month, the time of my period was a major issue for us: was I pregnant or not? Until now it had been disappointment and heartache for us both, but in May it finally happened, no bleeding. I remember four or five days after we had begun to trust that I was pregnant, it was a full moon, the first full moon after Easter that year. The apple trees were flowering, and I went for a walk down a path I christened “*White Way of Delight*”, a term used by Anne of Green Gables the first time she traversed the avenue of apple trees in full blossom near her new adoptive home in Avonlea. As a twelve-year-old the “*Anne*” books were my favourites, and now here I was in all this moonlit beauty and my dream was coming true. The light had faded to a deep, translucent, sapphire blue, the moon was white, and the apple blossoms were white as snow, their petals tinged with the faintest pink. I had never felt so ultimately happy in my whole life. I praised God in my soul.

## THE NOON OF MY WOMANHOOD

We had been at the cabin during the Easter, and this had been an amazing experience for me. With my mother-in-law's old wooden skis on my feet and her bamboo poles topped with cork in my hands we had started out on this, for me, new adventure. Gus was patient and the diagonal use of legs and arms in the cross-country skiing style went fairly well on the flat and level sections over the frozen lakes. When we got to the climbing up toward the mountain ridge and plateau, not unlike the terrain around Kosciuszko, - both Norway and Australia have ancient, more rounded mountains, unlike the spiky peaks in the Alps - Gus demonstrated what was referred to as the fish bone method that enabled skiers to walk uphill on skis without sliding backwards. I managed this okay as I was in pretty good shape. BUT, and I write this emphatically with capital letters, skiing down slopes was something else. The trails were prepared with good tram-track like ski tracks, and these could be icy, so the speed for me was horrific. And if the slope was really steep one had to hop out of the ski tracks and *plough*, as it is called in a knock-kneed position that two-year-olds easily learn to do. I was over thirty, and this terrifying situation meant that my anxiety rose to the extent that Gus had to take me between his legs - like one does with small children - and ski down the slopes in a tandem position, just to get me home to the cabin. I didn't give up, it was just a case of "*Try, try and try again!*"

Gus was elated being with his parents, Amelie and her husband and their little son, his beloved grandfather, Victor, and me during the Easter break. He confided in me about a family tradition that had been introduced by Victor when he built their cabin in the 1950s: Easter was not Easter without listening to the Easter Sunday church service on the radio and joining in the singing of an Easter hymn, "*Ge Jesus äran, frälsta mänskighet*" ("Thine Be the Glory, Risen Conquering Son"). We combined our Easter Sunday brunch of fried eggs and bacon with glistening milk-chocolate Easter eggs - the eggs being wrapped tightly in silver paper of many different hues - and joining in with the radio choir to "*Thine be the Glory...!*"

## Chapter 7 “Sunrise, sunset, swiftly flow the years...”

### JULIET 1972–1999: DEVASTATION, OVERCOMING, JOY, OUTSIDERNESS, ANGER, KINDNESS, CHALLENGES

Four months after Easter, not long after we had told the family that I was expecting, I started to bleed. We had been on a boating picnic with friends. It was still summer; we had taken their small Day cruiser to one of the uninhabited islets that are prolific in the Southern Archipelago. We swam, ate, drank beer, white wine and cider. White, feathery clouds sailed across the light blue sky and the air was coolish. Suddenly, a storm blew up becoming ferocious with the wind speeds increasing by the minute and the water heaving and receding, violently choppy. We cried out in unison,

“We’d better get back!”

The boat ploughed through the heavy waves that sprayed our faces with frothy saltwater. I started to be anxious about my tummy, “*my baby*”, “*My peanut*” as I called it. I held my tummy protectively all the way back to the marina. All seemed to be in order, but I was wakened during the night feeling wet between my thighs and under my buttocks and there it was: fresh, bright red blood all over the sheets. I was inconsolable, I cried, sobbed. Gus was equally disturbed, distressed and anxious. He rang his brother’s wife, Petra, who had always been aloof with us, but she was a doctor and worked at a hospital.

“Get her to Casualty straight away!” she said.

So wrapped in towels from my waist down Gus drove me to the hospital and they admitted me at once. There was no hope of saving the foetus, our unnamed tiny child, so they performed a D&C (dilation and curettage) to end the so-called incomplete miscarriage.

“It’s sad, so sad, It’s a sad, sad situation....

Sorry seems to be the hardest word”

“*I am so sorry, I am so sorry.*” Gus cried out.

We were sorry for each other, feeling we had failed each other, and we were sorry for ourselves. It helped when we got home late in the afternoon, Olav came to the door, his arms filled with dark red, Champs-Elysées roses from his garden. He never picked them, so the fact that he had severed at least a dozen green stems was as much a token of his feelings for us as the exquisite blooms with their mild fragrance. He didn’t come in, but Gus told me he had tears in his eyes, and I buried my face in the deep red of his roses, breathed them in and cried again, touched by his sympathy. He had also invited us to a

## THE NOON OF MY WOMANHOOD

dinner at the yacht club when I was feeling well enough. Just us three. Wild salmon for main course and strawberries for desert was their speciality. Sofia had left with a tour group at 3 p.m. without a word to us, even though they had been informed of our private tragedy at 9 a.m. that morning. She would be away traveling for at least a week. I was hurt by what I felt was her callousness, especially when Amelie told me she had been in the vicinity of my ward at the hospital the same morning for a regular control of her thyroid. Amelie was very sympathetic, comforting Gus with good hugs, and holding my hand as she sat bedside when she came to visit.

Gus' empathy recognized and encompassed my hurting which was a composite of all the previous disappointments, the thwarted longing for a family with Theo, the failure to get pregnant and now to the present anguish of unbearable loss. At the same time Gus was down to earth and practical. His words to me and actions were a forerunner to the sentiments that Mark Knopfler later expressed in his song "Why worry?"

*"Baby, I see this world has made you sad....  
But Baby, I'll wipe away those bitter tears,  
I'll chase away those restless fears  
That turn your blue skies into grey.  
Why Worry?  
There should be laughter after pain.  
There should be sunshine after rain.  
These things have always been the same,  
So why worry now?....  
But baby, just when this world seems mean and cold,  
Our love comes shining red and gold»  
Why worry now? Why worry now?"*

Gus was just as crushed as I was. Failure to conceive is often just as much an emotional trial for the men in a relationship as it is for the women. Creating one's own love-child appears to be a part of a deep-rooted desire couples who love each other share. It is a refinement of the primaeval drive toward reproduction that is inherent in men, i.e. producing offspring to ensure the continuity of the existence of the family and clan. For women the process of nurturing, feeding, caring for and the raising of the next generation seems etched in the genetic blueprint of the female gender. My mother-in-law's seemingly lack of concern or love for us really surprised and hurt me. But I rationalized that she was probably hurting too because she had been so delighted when she heard the good news. Most likely her pride was suffering, a let-down in her plans for a welcome addition to ensure the future of her family. And after the loving dinner at the yacht club with Olav, he was so gracious and kind, both Gus and I resigned to life's realities and did what Fred Astaire's song from 1936, recommended:

## THE NOON OF MY WOMANHOOD

“Nothing is impossible I have found,  
For when my chin is on the ground,  
I pick myself up,  
Dust myself off’,  
Start all over again.”

So, we started “*all over again*”, trying to make a baby. Gus, being as practical as his mother in some ways, also became preoccupied with another project. He was in principle against renting a place to live, “*money down the drain*” was his attitude. So, we started looking for a flat/unit we could afford to buy. The deposit was assured from the money we had saved in Australia, but the repayments on a loan would need me to work. Now that I wasn’t pregnant, I could apply for a job. Even if I got pregnant, I could work at least for six months. I had recently received my residence permit from the authorities. Searching for a new place to live and job applications became practical and mental diversions, but the pathos of the real-life drama of trying to get pregnant without success remained and continued to haunt us.

I got a job, working with children and adults with severe learning difficulties caused by congenital brain damage and their next of kin or carers. I was back to near where I had started as a new graduate in Australia, but it was a job in my field of work, and a relatively well paid one. I did lift my eyes up to the heavens and thanked my Creator for His intervention: that He had led me into the field of psychosocial health and away from journalism. I could now speak and write Swedish well enough to be employed at this federal Specialist Hospital and Day Care Centre. As a journalist my literary skills could never have competed with Swedish colleagues.

My new colleagues, doctors, nurses, clinical social workers and psychologists were kindly toward me, also helping me with terms I didn’t understand, and my boss, the Chief Medical Officer even suggested that I take time off with full pay to study “*Legal and political aspects of the Swedish Welfare State*” at the College of Social Work in Gothenburg. I sat in on lectures given to undergraduate students. I was both surprised and elated by this opportunity, but I got more than I had bargained for. Politically speaking I was for a welfare state: universal benefits, no means-test except for individual social care for the most needy, free hospitals and free public schools and university education. It was what I dreamt about as a student in Australia. The ideals spawned in Christian Socialism had appealed to me. But, as a Christian at the time, I had baulked at Karl Marx’s derogation of religion.

Functional social democracy had a solid fundament in the relatively homogenous Swedish population, and this I applauded. In Australia it had been primarily the strong Trade Unions, especially the wharf labourers, and some forthright academics that gave voice to the critical needs of the underprivileged population. The majority of Australians were suspicious of socialism, and communism was feared. The “*domino theory*” prevailed and

## THE NOON OF MY WOMANHOOD

the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization, a military alliance comprising USA, France, Great Britain, Thailand, Pakistan, New Zealand and Australia had been founded in 1954 with the specific purpose of preventing communism gaining ground in the region. Australia became a political and military ally for USA and joined the South Vietnamese' battle against the Viet Cong who were supported by communist China and Russia.

Sitting in on lectures at the College heightened my awareness of the structural barriers that existed in society, keeping the rich, rich and the poor, poor. I had studied both Political Science and Sociology for my bachelor's degree in the early sixties, and I had read Marxian Theory, but the way it was presented seemed more like utopia than a workable theory. In the Political Science classroom in Gothenburg, I witnessed what I deemed to be unreasonable harassment of the female lecturer for her so-called "*luke warm*", social democratic approach to social problems. The criticism was led by left-wing students who were active in the Communist League, Marxist-Leninist (Revolutionaries). The name-calling was so abusive that she left the auditorium in tears. My background in Australian society where middle class women worked free of charge as volunteers in hospitals and childcare centres, and underprivileged, working class women got help from Charities, was such a far cry from the communist ideal of state ownership and a workforce with 40 hours a week employment for all able bodied men and women while their babies were forcibly assigned to a pedagogical crèches from the age of three months. I kept my mouth firmly shut.

The Chief Medical Officer who employed me had done so on the recommendation of his wife. This way of securing a job would never be accepted nowadays, but the work at the Hospital was mentally and emotionally taxing and they didn't have a surplus of applicants. Because his Danish wife worked in the Department of Health and had completed courses in Child Psychology at the prestigious Tavistock Clinic in London, he had asked her to review my work experience, the articles I had written and references. Amazingly enough, it was at the same clinic, the Tavistock Clinic, that Professor Jay J. had specialized in Child Psychiatry, I had a reference from him among my papers. She had never met him personally but had heard of him and supported his recommendation.

I was often on home visits to remote areas and other cities and learned so much about the Swedish people, their culture, their different ways of life from rural to cosmopolitan, their dialects and circumstances. Having a child who is handicapped is independent of race, place of residence, class or status, and it was both humbling and inspiring to experience the energy parents used and the guts they showed to battle for the best possible life for their child with a severe disability. If I could in any way facilitate this process for them, I considered it to be a great privilege.

At the same time, I was battling my own private obsession with pregnancy and my shame about my infertility. I searched for something to blame. Was it the Chlamydia, my age or what? I needed to see a gynaecologist. I couldn't confide in Amelie or Ivar's wife, and

## THE NOON OF MY WOMANHOOD

definitely not Sofia, my previous life with Theo having been kept a secret. In the end I asked Gus if I could talk with his aunt? I would ask her to respect my confidences, and if she could help with a referral to a specialist. Gus loved this aunt with her blue eyes like her father's and honey brown hair, which was the anomaly in the family. When Gus first met me, he told me I reminded him of his aunt.

It was Aunt Ingrid who became another angel in my life. She not only kept our secret to herself, but contacted her own gynaecologist and was able to arrange a pretty prompt consultation for me.

This woman gynaecologist was attached to a City hospital, had a very good reputation and took me under her wing as a foreigner, and as a potential "*older mother*". In the 1970s you came in this special category if you were over 30 and were giving birth for the first time: the higher incidence of preeclampsia being the reason for the concern. The free hospital system in the Scandinavian welfare state was a boon, top specialists were available at all the hospital's clinics, and I became a part of this just, and highly professional health care system.

The empathetic gynaecologist assured me that there were no physical reasons why I shouldn't get pregnant, but the monthly disappointments continued. She asked if Gus and I talked about our situation, but we didn't talk any more. I think it was too painful after the miscarriage. Gus had now found us an apartment, not far from my job on the outskirts of Gothenburg. It had a balcony and a view over an inlet on one side and a pretty view of a park on the other. We could afford it, so it was all settled, and we could move in in three months' time. It was winter again, Christmas was snowy white this year and Gus and I accompanied grandfather, Victor, to the midnight service on Christmas Eve in the centre of Gothenburg.

The City Church was in darkness, only illuminated by the hundreds of burning candles. We had been given one each when we arrived, and their warm, fluttering flames created an atmosphere of reverence and anticipation. Now that I could understand the lyrics of the Swedish hymns, one of them made a lasting impression on me. It was "Härlig är Jorden" ("Fair are the meadows" in English, but the hymn was originally composed by Danish, Bernhard Severin Ingemann). The second verse goes like this in Swedish:

"Tidevarv komma, tidevarv försvinna,  
Släkten följa släktens gång.  
Aldrig förstummas tonen från himlen  
i själens glada pilgrimssång".

"Time comes and time goes,  
And kindred tread in their kindred's footsteps.  
Never will the heavenly voices cease  
As their souls' rejoice in their pilgrim-songs." (Juliet's translation)

## THE NOON OF MY WOMANHOOD

Singing about kindred, the idea of generations following in the footsteps of the former generations, comforted me. Especially imagining that maybe we would be a part this, following in adorable Victor's footsteps with our babies. I was deeply happy as we drove home in his car in the clear, starry, winter's night.

By mid-January I was still not pregnant. Amelie had told us she was expecting her third child at the big, family party on Christmas Day, and on one unforgettable day toward the end of January I received an Airmail letter in the letterbox from my youngest sister, Claire. I opened it eagerly. I was curled up in our sofa which was upholstered in a heavy duty, stylish, sea-green, wool fabric. I had made the flimsy curtains in a deep aquamarine that picked up the colours in the sofa. My piano's red-brown shiny wood, I believe it was cedar, and the oval coffee-table in the same wood gave a warm and welcoming feeling to the room. I lit the candles on the table while I sipped my coffee. The letter was now open, and I had read Claire's opening lines. She wrote that she was delighted to tell us that she was pregnant, expecting their third baby. They had a boy after their little girl, who was born on the day Gus and I got engaged, and now their third child was on the way.

For months I had tried to resign myself to the fact that life without children could be a good life. One of my great aunts and her husband had been childless. They had lived an exciting life with lots of travel and had enjoyed many more enriching cultural events than my parents ever had managed to attend. Reading Claire's news of her new baby seemed to be the last straw. My emotional turmoil that I believed I had conquered, now reared its ugly head to threaten me again. Claire was seven and a half years younger than me, so unfair. I broke down and wept bitterly.

I was at home alone, earlier than Gus because I had attended a Legal Aspects course that day. Gus wasn't expected for several hours so I went deliberately over to our bar in the cupboard in the corner of the room and took out an unopened bottle of Sandeman Fine Tawny Port. I wasn't a heavy drinker, pretty cautious really, but this day I didn't care anymore about any ideals about moderation. I let my hair down and drowned my sorrows. I found one of our delicate crystal port glasses and had imbibed at least half of the bottle by the time Gus arrived home. He was sympathetic and didn't say a word when I told him about Claire and what I had done. He just mixed his own dry Martini and went to the kitchen to prepare dinner. But that evening we made special love, more intimate and connected than ever before, and nine months later our beautiful daughter was born.

During the pregnancy, I had received excellent medical attention by my gynaecologist as I did develop high blood pressure. I was Rhesus negative, and I had inherited a gene variant that increases the risk of Deep Vein Thrombosis. Gus seemed unperturbed by all these health issues that worried me. He was more concerned about the baby's gender. He dearly wanted a girl.

I was fortunate to start labour on a Saturday evening. There weren't so many others in the maternity ward and none in the delivery room, so one midwife sat by head and soothed

## THE NOON OF MY WOMANHOOD

and encouraged me and Gus was able to sit and stand beside the other midwife who was handling the actual birth process. Some kindly person had given me two pieces of advice: choose a rousing song to sing out loud, and choose some article of the baby's clothing you have prepared and focus your attention on that. In those days we didn't know the gender of the baby before it came out, so I focused on a tiny pair of mushroom brown booties, with white bows. They would suit both a boy and a girl. Mushroom brown goes beautifully with either pink or blue. The song I chose was written by Carolyn Leigh and the melody composed by Cy Coleman, but it was Louis Armstrong's recording I loved.

The pain was unbearable, but I perceived the job of delivering my baby as a marathon I had to run, and I sang my song - out loud.

"Hey look me over Lend me an ear, ....  
I figure whenever you're down and out  
The only way is up..."

And I'll be up like a rosebud, High on the vine, ...  
I'm a little bit short of the elbow room  
But let me get me some  
And look out world  
Here I come!"

This song was amazing. It helped me tolerate the accelerating contractions and battle to ensure a smooth passage. The last four lines of the song were so pertinent to the baby's seeming urgency to be freed from the confines of the womb:

"I'm a little bit short of the elbow room  
But let me get me some.  
And look out world Here I come!"

She came, out, all bloody and crying. Gus witnessed the whole birth and was delighted with his tiny girl. He was proud of himself that he hadn't fainted, that he was there for me and for her. She was the most wonderful happening in my entire life, so exquisite, blue-eyed and rosy, my precious "*rose-bud high on the vine*", new life opening up in the great, big world. Gus chose her name, Rebecca. For a day and a half, I experienced what I felt was ultimate joy, learning to breastfeed and cuddling this fragile, beautiful, little creature with her tiny, blond, furry head close to my heart.

Rebecca was born very early Sunday, and next morning, Monday around 10 a.m. I received a visit from the paediatrician. His opening words, were:

"You have a beautiful little daughter, BUT..."

He paused, and my heart began to race, "she has a congenital abnormality that we call hip click. Unfortunately, her case is fairly serious."

## THE NOON OF MY WOMANHOOD

I was numb with fear and concern. He continued to say that the condition was not fatal. It didn't affect her mental development. There was a plan to help her with a regime to follow. There would be a need for hospitalization at intervals. By the age of five or six, she would probably be as normal as most other children. I cried silently.

She was whisked off to a special orthopaedic hospital with a nurse in an ambulance. I saw them drive off and felt an ominous sense of bereavement. They had taken my baby away. Of course she came back after some hours, but my anxiety level had risen to an all-time high. It has probably kept me on the alert as far as danger for my offspring is concerned ever since.

Thirteen months later we experienced a heartrending feeling of powerlessness: Rebecca was again in the special hospital having previously undergone necessary, inhibiting, but not painful measures to ensure her future mobility. She was now forcibly confined to her hospital bed with her legs in stretch and kilo weights hanging from both ankles. If there had not been a good medical reason for the hurt and discomfort, she was subject to, the procedure would have been regarded as torture. The chief specialist had tried to comfort me by saying that periods of hospitalization and immobility only make children complacent and harmonious. I was furious with him, protesting that I didn't want a harmonious child, I wanted a confident, trusting, happy child, a child who was not hurting. I had to apologize to him later as he was only doing his best for her.

Gus had been away for a week with his job visiting an installation in the States. In the early 1970s hospital visiting hours were very strict also for babies: once a day from 4 p.m.-6 p.m. I had been with her for 15 minutes before Gus arrived directly from the Airport. Every time I arrived she looked suspiciously at me as if it were I who was her judge, jury and prison warden. When Gus arrived, her little face lit up and broke into a huge smile, her eyes shone, she stretched her arms up as she called out "Pappa" with such urgency and expectation: Surely, he could save her from her terrible plight. When he failed to take her up or lift her out of the bed - she was literally tied to it - , her little face broke down again into a thousand pieces. She sobbed and sobbed. Gus sat beside her and stroked her forehead, her hair, and wiped the tears from her face. But all our attempts to comfort her were in vain. From that day a shadow of mistrust, a tiny scowl haunted her former totally loving, and confident blue eyes. It was not her fault and not our fault, but it was hard for her and for us. "*It was a sad, sad, situation*". I had weaned her at seven months, no pacifier, no bottle, only a cup to drink from and her thumb. We felt we had lost our happy, trusting baby girl, and came home with a sad, little creature who had lost all faith in us, and seemed only to have her thumb for comfort.

During the following months I was reminded of a picture storybook my mother had read to me about a little girl called Topsy and a baby mermaid. It was during my first year at school, just after Gillian came along as an intruder in the trio that had been Mum, Dad and me. Topsy's uncle had fished the mermaid up from the sea in a hand net and Topsy

## THE NOON OF MY WOMANHOOD

wanted to keep her as a pet. She was the size of a large doll, but very much alive, her cute baby face gurgling, her round baby-torso and arms were warm and pink, but the turquoise scales of her fishy tale were cold and spiky. Topsy meant that life in the bathtub was perfect for her new, little friend. The mermaid, screamed, protesting violently in her tinkly voice that she needed to get back to the sea.

My five-year old mind became obsessed by the mermaid's unwillingness to comply: "*I'd spank that mermaid*" I thought in my little head, "*the bathtub is safer than the sea!*" These memories of my urge to exert control over the small, screaming creature now whirled like a merry-go-round round in my grown-up brain: the hint of mistrust and opposition in Rebecca's sad eyes had activated the same emotions that I had felt so many years before. I resented the fact that our beautiful, mother-child relationship had been desecrated by the measures needed to correct her hips. I resented that she resembled the mermaid: her torso, arms and face were free, whilst from the waist down she was imprisoned in her frog-legs-like plaster of Paris mould. A few months later she 'advanced' to a plaster cast where just her legs could be 'freed' for a short period each day. Anyway, I felt she blamed me for the treatment she had undergone. I knew from the look in her eyes that she was afraid of me, that my old desire "*to spank the mermaid*" had revived and at certain times shone like lightning in my eyes. She saw and sensed the injustice of it all.

One day I scolded Rebecca, "*Why did you do that?*"

We'd had such a nice day, eating ice-cream, swinging in the flat, saucer-shaped swing in the playground, going along with her all the way, but she wanted more and screamed throwing her cuddly toy out of the twin pram where she lay prone when it was time to go home. She was heavy, the plaster casts making her complicated to handle. I yearned to spank her, but I didn't, I was tempted to call her a "*naughty little girl*," but I couldn't. It was against my upbringing and professional training to use the word "*naughty*" about a toddler. "*Naughty*" implies intent. Instead, I screamed inside myself, I was so riled. All of what I had learned in psychology from the American child psychoanalyst, Erik Homburger Erikson, about trust and mistrust in the psychosocial development of children, taunted me. It wasn't my fault. I hadn't wanted to betray her, leave her in the cold, inhospitable hospital in the care of total strangers, suffering alone. She had taken been out of my hands. But I had to endure her accusing look:

*"Why didn't you rescue me?"*

I was lonely, ashamed of the feelings that I harboured. It wasn't her fault either. I had no girlfriends, no-one close I could confide in except Gus, and I didn't want to reveal this side of myself to him. My rage felt so violent at times that I wrote to my mother:

"I finally understand God's wrath, even though I don't believe in Him anymore: I understand why God threw Adam and Eve out of paradise. He'd given them nearly everything, but it was not enough. They wanted the apple too! .... But I also understand

## THE NOON OF MY WOMANHOOD

His eagerness to forgive, his yearning to reconcile, to take his sons and daughters to His bosom the first chance He got. The story of the Prodigal Son is so revealing.”

We had learned in psychiatry that open expression anger is better than a hidden, forbidden rage that leaks out in other peculiar ways. I implored my mother in my letter:

*“This precious child that I have longed for, my Rebecca, why do I feel this way?”*

But she lived on the other side of the globe.

Recalling the extremities of God’s rage encouraged me. *“I want to spew you out of my mouth”* was a phrase from the Bible that came to mind: God’s words to a backsliding congregation in Asia Minor. Not exactly covert, camouflaged, but direct, indelicate and to the point. I needed to tell Rebecca about my rage, my disappointment with myself. I whispered my confession apologetically as I knelt beside her cot.

“I’m sorry that I get so riled, my precious. I’m trying to do my best, but I must try harder. I must think about Mary’s extravagant love: She poured the expensive, fragrant balsam over Jesus’ head, shoulders and feet and massaged them with her hair. Let me imagine that I am her when I am massaging your thin, limp, little legs during the half hour you are allowed to have them free each day, free of the wretched, frog-shaped mould.”

Rebecca did not hear my confession. Her cherub-like face was so peaceful as she slept, but her own resilience meant that she never developed the *“complacent and harmonious disposition”* the orthopaedic surgeon had predicted. She fought back, making war rather than peace with her condition and environment. Her tenacity won in the end, and she learned to smile and laugh again, but she lacked confidence in me. I had betrayed her trust for the better good, her future mobility.

Would she ever understand that?

Her favourite game was mothers and babies, fussing with her dolls, and when she was a little older, she spent hours dressing up our small, black poodle called *Prick*. She had christened him, *Prick*, after the black doggie in Elsa Beskow’s beautifully illustrated children’s books about the three maiden aunts, Aunt Green, Aunt Brown and Aunt Lavender and their brother, Uncle Blue.

It is curious that in English a *“prick”* can have three meanings: the prick of a needle in one’s finger; or when applied to a person it is derogatory, a good-for-nothing; or it can be an obscene term for *“penis”*. In Swedish it is a less value-laden term usually referring to a pinprick, a dot, or a mark. For Rebecca *“Prick”* was the name that she had chosen for her little, curly, black dog.

Later when she could walk, she would put Prick in her doll’s pram and wheel him around. He hated it, especially when she put a bonnet on him and fastened the ribbons under his snout. But she insisted, maybe playing out her own previous struggle with confinement.

## THE NOON OF MY WOMANHOOD

Poor Prick did his best to appease her. She was the love of his life, along with Gus, who christened him “*my shadow*”.

As time went by, she cared lovingly for a honey-coloured hamster called *Vesla* (meaning “*little one*”) and her blue and white budgerigar, *Ludwig*. She did excellently at school, especially languages and literature and often wrote insightful, sensitive essays. She managed at sport, but preferred to sing and dance, both folk dance and jazz ballet. Her sensitivity to people’s moods and reactions was astounding. She could feel the atmosphere in an exchange of looks long before any unkind words were spoken. And I think she sensed that I wasn’t true to myself, nor at ease in the extended family. I was an outsider, this having been exacerbated by the deception Gus and I had conspired to preserve.

The Norwegian author, Karl Ove Knausgaard who lives in Sweden, writes about deceit and betrayal in Book Six of “*My Struggle*”. His description on page 104 of how he felt in the bowels of his father’s family, is an echo of my own experience:

“I had something to hide from them. A part of me I couldn’t show or use in their company. And this fact, that there was something I had to avoid at all cost, made my behaviour seem furtive in some way, thereby damaging my entire person and character. I tried to be like them, to talk like them, to be among them in their way, but in recognizing that I wasn’t like that at all, like them, among them in their ways, he (my uncle) saw through me. The betrayal started there.”

Surrounded by Gus’s family. I tried to be like them, this close-knit clan that drank dry martinis before dinner and cognac after dinner, smoked cigarettes, cigarillos or cigars (the exceptions being Sofia and me), and exchanged news and gossip about neighbours and family. Nothing was secret for them. They talked incessantly, mostly small talk about business, liberal politics or dogs, primarily dogs. Apart from Victor, every single family had a dog or two: My parents in law had a Cocker Spaniel, Amelie and her husband had a Retriever, Gus’s older brother and family had a German Shepherd. And we had Prick. There were nine cousins, all Victor’s grandchildren. Nearly all of them allowed the dogs to sleep with them in their double beds, so much of the banter was amusing expressions of irritation about sleeping arrangements. Otherwise, they complained about bothering visits from eager suitors when the bitches were on heat or daring escapes by the male dogs who hopped over fences in order to satisfy their instinctive drives to mate. I had loved both Bella and Mandy and I adored Prick, but I didn’t idolize my canine pets as they seemed to, and in Australia’s warm climate many dogs slept on verandas: the thought of the extra, doggie-body-heat in the marital bed was unbearable down there. But when the first winter in Prick’s life arrived, he also found a place to nestle in our bed.

Olav’s family was seldom in focus. His family lived in Norway, and there was only one aunt and a cousin on his side. I probably identified myself with him, feeling a bit out on the

## THE NOON OF MY WOMANHOOD

periphery of the clan. In hindsight I was probably inwardly quite critical of the extended family's obsession with dogs, feeling that people should have more worth than dogs. I had trouble finding these people's souls. There was something about dogs that at this moment in time I didn't understand.

I remembered when I was working with handicapped children in Australia, there was one little girl called Pattie, she had Cerebral palsy, severely athetoid and she was desperately trying to hold her balance learning to walk. One day she teetered back and forward in her attempt to run toward me, and I discovered that I no longer saw her disability, only the beauty of her soul as she beamed with pleasure getting nearer and nearer to my outstretched arms. I saw Victor's soul, and Olav's, and I believe I saw Aunt Ingrid's and Sofia's after I found out that she had lost her first baby with a very late miscarriage at the end of the fifth month. I finally understood why she had ignored my pain when I miscarried. But when the extended family were all together, their sense of kinship and bonding was impenetrable for an outsider.

No one appreciated classical music either, or if they did, they never mentioned it. Practicing my piano pieces for example Christian Sinding's "*Rustle of Spring*", my favourite, and evidence of the longing for temperate climes implanted in me from the verses we sang about Spring in the prep grade, was a lonely affair. Even Gus wasn't interested. The only pieces he was keen to listen to were "*Hello Dolly, this is Louis, Dolly*" - we sang this one together - and "*St. Louis Blues*". He and some others from the ship's crew had visited a Night Club in New York when he worked on the Oslo Fjord liner in the '60s. There they heard Satchmo (Louis Armstrong). sing and play live! Both of these pieces had been on his program. Listening to them again revived a memory of a lifetime for Gus. When I was alone, I would put on the record player and it would blare out the electrifying tones of "*The Warsaw Concerto*" composed in 1941 by Richard Addinsell for the film, "*Dangerous Moonlight*", or the pacifying tones of *Clair de Lune*.

In one area, however, I could really feel at home in the clan, and I excelled when the dance records were put on. The family had an abundance of long-playing records: Glenn Miller and his orchestra being a favourite. Dinner parties in Olav and Sofia's home, and in our own home, were usually rounded off with dance music: swing, quick step, fox trot and an occasional English Waltz.

Gus had introduced me to a phrase I appreciated: "*When it comes to dancing it is quite okay to get your appetite out, but remember, we eat at home.*"

In other words, no harm in flirting or dancing cheek to cheek with one's partner. Everyone understands that when the dance is over, the flirting stops and the excitement dies.

Some of the uncles, my brother-in-law, and several of Gus's friends were eminent ballroom dancers: they led well, flirted with their eyes, followed the beat perfectly and held me tight into their taut bodies so that we moved as one person, one element. Gus preferred not to

## THE NOON OF MY WOMANHOOD

dance so closely entwined, he liked swing and jive, and he was good at it. He and his partners occupied a great hunk of the floor space, so we others had no option than to dance close. I relished it, and my unadulterated joy was obvious. One of Gus' school friends was especially good at English Waltz. I'll never forget the breathless swirling of waltzing to Leroy Anderson's orchestral rendition of Richard Hayman's *Belle of the Ball*. And Gus and I continued to "eat at home": an evening on the dance floor had usually whetted our appetite for lovemaking.

One evening around midnight after such a party to celebrate Sofia's 60th birthday, she gave me her greatest compliment:

*"Juliet, you are so Swedish!"*

With this, for her, complimentary remark, I believed I was assimilated, but thinking back, it was probably my blond, blue-eyed appearance and my utter relaxation in the enjoyment of the dance that had prompted her. Being a member of her family, her brood, was true that night for her, but I felt it was only on the surface. The relationships in the family were for me superficial. I missed the deep theological and philosophical talks that Theo, Roxanne and I had engaged in. I missed the oratorios and concerts listening to my mother sing with her choir. I missed my long-playing records that were mostly light classical, or romantic, popular songs and hits from well-known musicals. I missed sailing regattas with my father, and I missed the acclaim and recognition for my research that had been on the way to a Ph.D. and the friendly esteem of a gallery of colleagues and work contacts in the clinical world. All this was submerged under the surface; I never mentioned it in the family, and the face I put on in their company was not my true face, it was a face that tried to please. Maybe the family saw through me, just as Knausgaard's uncle had seen through him. I was not really one of them.

*"Swiftly flow the days, seedlings turn overnight to sunflowers, blossoming even as we gaze,"* came true for me. Amazingly, seventeen months after Rebecca was born, little Philip Victor came into the world, no stress, no planning, no desperation. He arrived before we were ready for him, but we were delighted. We called him Philip with the English 'Ph' instead of the usual Swedish spelling Filip, this to facilitate his dual national affiliations. Victor was of course after his great-grandfather.

Rebecca was unable to walk when Philip was born, and her plaster mould was heavy so it was a real burden, but Olav was a good sport and said, if we could find a Nanny to help me, she could live in their basement flat and come to work for me between 8.30 am and 4.30 pm each day. We had managed to move again, this time to a duplex nearer Olav and Sofia after we knew about our family's expansion. It had been a huge job moving, me with a huge tummy and a heavy, immobile little girl, but we were now happily settled, Gus having constructed a brand new, very functional kitchen before we moved in. The Nanny came daily.

## THE NOON OF MY WOMANHOOD

Philip's birth had been so different from Rebecca's. Rebecca's was textbook: the waters broke when we were visiting a Home and Food exhibition. We left immediately and by the time we got home the contractions had started, faint and at long intervals at first. When they began to get stronger and closer in time we did what we were supposed to do. After ringing the hospital, Gus, drove me in and I was admitted.

With Philip, I had an appointment with the gynaecologist at 9.30 a.m. two days after the due date. When she examined me, there was already an opening, so she felt she couldn't send me home, but I had no contractions and the waters had not broken. I was given a bed in a hospital ward and told to walk around as much as possible, which I did. The midwives examined me regularly to measure the opening. It went very slowly. Gus had gone to work after driving me to the appointment, but they kept him informed by telephone. By late afternoon the opening had increased, but no contractions, so the nurse was given orders to puncture the waters.

Gus had come in after work and about a half hour after this procedure, he was sitting at my bedside. Without warning I got a violent contraction, it was the worst pain I'd ever experienced. Not long after there was an equally violent one. I screamed. Gus was distraught, and I was whisked off to the delivery room post haste. I can't remember them giving me nitrous oxide, but I remember breathing through a mask. The pain each time the uterus contracted was so intense and brutal that I had visions that I was being surgically dismembered and would end up on the bed in two halves, the incision being made from my vulva up to my throat pit. The nitrous oxide must have had the desired effect because I can't remember much more about the birth, just that the baby finally came out and the pains subsided. Gus told me the baby was a boy. I had so wanted a boy.

Being the eldest of three girls before Mum and Dad had the twins, I had no faith in my potential to provide a boy for the continuation of the Gudesen family's name. My sister-in-law, the doctor, had only produced girls. But he, our baby, was a boy! At first I cried and then I started to laugh, I laughed and laughed, I felt supreme joy. Later I was told that nitrous oxide affects people that way, and even has a pet name "*laughing gas*", but for me the delight seemed boundless. As soon as I was out of hospital, I bought fifteen postcards with a beautiful photo of a sculpture of a woman holding her naked newborn baby boy up in the air for all the world to see. I sent one to each of my family members and to my best friends at home in Australia, and hoped they understood my ecstatic feelings about Philip.

Philip was a contented, sleepy baby with a yellowish tinge to his olive skin, probably because he suffered from jaundice. It was not serious the Paediatrician said, but I had to take him regularly to the local doctor for tests during the first weeks. He was so different from Rebecca whom I am quite sure could lift her head after a couple of days. I thought she looked like a baby tortoise with her big, blue eyes, so full of life, following all our movements. Philip just nestled into me and let the rest of the world go by. His yellow-olive colouring reminded me of illustrations I had once seen in a children's book, where a tiny

## THE NOON OF MY WOMANHOOD

baby was sleeping in a foetal position in the heart of a partially opened yellow tulip. Whereas Rebecca had been my “*rosebud high on the vine*”, Philip was slumbering in a garden full of yellow blooms. Later he became more like a sunflower, tall, resilient, ingenious and exuberant.

One happening when he was a baby had, unfortunately, lasting consequences. After five months of idyllic mothering, Gus and I and the children were invited to one of the cousins who was having a family gathering at their summer cottage on an island. They had several bedrooms which we and the other guests could occupy. We choose two rooms, where a child could sleep in the bottom bunk: Gus would sleep in the top bunk over Rebecca and I in the bunk over Philip. We had organized pillows, so they were safe from falling out of the bed, and they both settled well and went to sleep in this strange, new environment. The living area was in a separate wing of the house from the bedrooms. In those days we didn’t have a baby-monitor like everyone has today. We agreed that we would check on the children every half hour. Which we did, but it was a late night with delicious Sea Crayfish, French loaf, beer and white wine and lots of laughter. I was still breastfeeding, so I avoided the alcohol. About midnight I went out for the half-hourly check. Philip was distraught. He had obviously been crying for some time as he was livid, red all over, sweating and screaming. Thankfully the walls were thick, so he hadn’t woken Rebecca, but he continued to scream inconsolably for at least 10 minutes after I took him up. I held him tight and tried to soothe him. Finally, his screams turned into sobs. He hiccupped and coughed and tried to get his breath back. Gus came out after about 20 minutes to see what had taken so long. I said he had to just give my apologies. The only solution was to lie down with Philip until he calmed. When he stopped sobbing, I changed his nappy and crept into the bunk and gave him my breast. After a half-hearted attempt to suck, he fell asleep in my arms, completely exhausted.

This unhappy event resulted in sleeping difficulties for Philip for at least four years. It was so exhausting, never getting a full night’s undisturbed sleep. And there was one occasion when it could have resulted in something much worse. I was reminded of this one day many years later when hosting a Conference with the title “*Parenting small children: Accident, Negligence, Abuse?*” My career had flourished and I was now leading a master’s program in Public Health Science at the University in Gothenburg. The Guest Speaker was a renowned psychiatrist who had a sizable portfolio of cases that comprised his qualitative, post-doctoral research. The research was interdisciplinary and legal experts had also been part of the research team. It resembled the preliminary study of the parents of battered babies when I had assisted the Professor of Social Medicine in the 1960s.

The case presented was of a young mother who had been in the process of washing her three-week-old baby’s bottom in a porcelain sink in a bathroom. The baby girl had slipped in the mother’s soapy hands, falling sideways and cracking her skull on the steel faucet. The baby died. The baby had diarrhea and had been crying before and during the event.

## THE NOON OF MY WOMANHOOD

The discussion regarding the mother's actions pertained to the degree of negligence: should she or should she not have considered the dangers of using a sink in a hard material and tap-system, also in a very hard material with a spout that stuck out? Should she or should not have taken the time to find the plastic bathtub preferably used to bathe small babies, and taken the trouble to fill this with lukewarm water before attempting to clean up the baby? The mother said she deemed it the quickest and best way of putting the baby out of her misery. The fact that the mother was young, it was her first baby, and she had been a ward of the Child Welfare Department in her youth, meant that the atmosphere seemed negatively biased against her. I pitied her deeply and I got a flashback to when Philip was about seven months old.

As previously mentioned after the incident on the island he woke up every night a little over midnight and screamed and screamed like he was in a nightmare. Nothing could console him. We were usually in bed by 11 p.m., so this meant I got about an hour's sleep before this nightly spectacle. One night I was so exhausted and pleaded with Gus,

*“Can’t you take him?”*

Gus complied. Philip slept in our room, his cot being at the end of our bed. When he screamed, we normally had to turn on the light so that he could see where he was in order to calm him. This night he was more unreasonable than ever, kicking, crying, arching his back, trying to get out of Gus's grip, obviously wanting me, his Mummy. Gus was desperate, furious. I had just gotten out of bed to take him from Gus when Gus lifted Philip up under the armpits and threw him down hard into his cot, his baby head missing the railing around the cot by about two centimetres. I shuddered. Philip was in shock, stopped crying and whimpered himself to sleep before Gus came back from a visit to the bathroom, and climbed, defeated, into bed.

Now it all came back to me, sitting in the auditorium listening to the whys and wherefores of this mother's behaviour. In our case Gus had no intention or desire to injure Philip. And I didn't consider *“negligent”* to be a fitting term. But Gus was neither careful, nor caring. He was angry and frustrated, and the way he put Philip down revealed that he was at the end of his tether.

All I could think of was: *“There, but for the Grace of God, go I, or we!”* If Philip's head had been cracked open by the railing, Gus and I would have been in this poor, young mother's shoes or worse. We had two centimetres leeway between nobody concerning themselves with our parenting and the desperation and heartache of both losing our baby and having the authorities' suspicious, maybe malicious gaze, focused on us. Nobody except us ever knew about this, so there was no punitive reaction. As I sat in the auditorium, I felt as if an executioner's noose had been loosened from round my neck. It took me some time to breathe normally again.

## THE NOON OF MY WOMANHOOD

While we are on the subject of nooses, there was one other frightening event that involved both of my children and a noose. One of our neighbours had a large set of swings in their garden. The swings were mounted on a frame with a heavy, horizontal, steel crossbar across the top supported by triangular steel supports at each end. My two kids, eight and nine and a half years of age played often with the neighbours' son, Carl, who was a classmate of Rebecca. He was a lovely kid and they both liked him. This particular Saturday they had been playing Cowboys and Indians, which was a more socially acceptable game than it is now. Carl was the Sheriff and had strung the offending Indian, Philip, up with a noose around his neck attached to the crossbar. The children seemed aware of the danger as Rebecca had dragged one of the swings to one side so that Philip could stand on this swing in a rather awkward fashion, and in such a way that the noose hung loosely around his neck. Whether Philip had sneezed, lost concentration or whatever we will never know, but he suddenly lost his balance and the swing beneath his feet floated away into a limp, vertical position half a meter away. The noose tightened immediately as his weight pulled on the knot. Rebecca became suddenly aware of Philip's dire predicament. He couldn't call out because the heavy rope was already tightening across his vocal cords. Rebecca raced to his skinny, dangling body and held him up with all the strength she could muster. She wasn't so much older than him nor taller. She screamed at Carl, begging him to alert his parents.

*"Get your Mum and Dad! I CAN'T HOLD HIM UP MUCH LONGER."*

The parents came running, Mona (the mother) relieved Rebecca of her burden, holding Philip up as high as she could. Carl senior fetched a large fish knife from the boathouse and cut the rope, helping Mona to catch the whole weight of Philip's body as he fell down. Philip had a nasty, red graze mark on his neck and throat.

Rebecca was crying and shaken up by the experience. They came home like unhappy dogs with their tails between their legs, and with the livid red mark on Philip's throat to help us understand the gravity of what they had been through. Rebecca continued to keep an eye on Philip.

As they grew older Philip was much more included in the bosom of the next generation of cousins than Rebecca. Amelie and her husband had three boys. All were great skiers and did mountain hikes in the late summer and autumn and often took Philip with them.

In addition, Philip danced with the local folk-dance group, played soccer, was good at gymnastics and Taekwondo. This latter being inspired by the film "Karate Kid" which all the kids loved at that time. But as a child he was small for his age and had to fight the humiliation of being a victim of the older and stronger boys' ambition to put someone smaller down. One winter's day he was held down by two or three boys with his face buried in a pile of snow until he thought he would suffocate to death. He was released in time so that he didn't pass out, but after this he was frightened and avoided situations where he met his bullies. He didn't confide in me about this at the time. Not until years later when he

## THE NOON OF MY WOMANHOOD

refused to go to a School Reunion in case he should meet up with one of the “perpetrators”, I understood the extent of the fear they had induced in him.

Regarding my womanhood Philip’s birth had caused a change for the better. If you remember I felt as if I were being surgically severed into two halves during the labour. In reality, I was pretty torn “*downstairs*” because the opening wasn’t optimal, and our little boy was so insistent about getting out. Maybe the gynaecologist decided to make an incision, I can’t remember. She told me that she had to sew quite a few stitches which would cause me quite a bit of discomfort, and that I would be partially immobilized. Because of this, she suggested I remain in hospital for a few extra days. I was ambivalent about this, I understood that I had to give myself time to heal, but I was worried about my Rebecca at home with the nanny. She had been allowed to visit me and her new, little brother in the late afternoon the day after he was born. She looked at me with the same little, broken face, full of uncertainty and disappointment, and with the same touch of accusation that had accompanied her since the hospitalization four months before. I longed to get home to her, but Gus took her up gently over his shoulder and they left. I felt I had betrayed her, again.

The stitches had however a lasting, good effect. They had shaved me “*downstairs*” in connection with the procedure, and I found that I liked being clean-shaven. Whether or not it was a scar after the stitches or that they had made my vagina narrower or tighter when they sewed the tissue together, I will never know, but the result of all this felt good and Gus liked it too when we made love.

In 1957 the book “*Song of the Red Ruby*” by the Norwegian author, Agnar Mykle, had been banned by the authorities in connection with moral laws regarding spreading literature about fornication, i.e. it was indecent. The ban was later lifted, and in his teens Gus, who spoke Norwegian fluently because of Olav and his family, had smuggled home a copy of the book after their summer vacation in Kjerringvik. When we first started sleeping together in Australia, Gus would refer to my “*downstairs*” as his “*red ruby*”. He never stopped using this designation. Right up to six and a half months before he died, he would grin at me with desire in his hazel eyes and ask, “Have you polished your red ruby?”

And mostly I had, and was ready and waiting.

To be honest, I think the children were disgusted with us at times, because we spent so much time together, did so much together, were absorbed with each other and with our jobs. They belonged to the population of children that suffered from the “*latch-key kid syndrome*”. They had to fend for themselves a lot, having their own house key from the age of seven, letting themselves into an empty house after school, sitting on the front steps every afternoon with the dog, that is when it didn’t rain or snow, or beside the kitchen window which looked out over the street, waiting for us to come home. Not one other mother in the neighbourhood worked as I did. I had to work, otherwise we couldn’t afford to live in the villa we had bought in this same attractive suburb where Gus had grown up. We

## THE NOON OF MY WOMANHOOD

had even managed to buy a place with a better view than Gus's parents'. Many times, I felt guilty about working so hard, but I managed to drive Rebecca to singing lessons each week and Philip to gymnastics. Gus never drove in the evenings; he had to have his Martini when he came home. On the other hand, he did all the weekday shopping for us. As I had no network of friends from school days nor a Uni alumni to chinwag with, for me it was "just Gus". He was my best friend as well as my lover and the father of our precious children. I was very dependent on him, and he seemed to depend on me.

After his exit from the multinational Swedish firm, Gus had established his own business. Early on he had long periods when he worked as a highly paid consultant, and he enjoyed this. For a while he was employed with a Shipping and Oil Exploration company, but in the mid-1980s the market was unstable, and in 1986 the firm offered Gus a position in Stockholm as they were downsizing in Gothenburg. I was now settled in my lecturer position at the University, and the last thing I wanted was to move. Gus moved with the firm to Stockholm for six months commuting weekly, but this was too much of a strain on us all, so he resigned. The gender equality that the feminist movement had achieved in the labour market, meant that we both accepted my right to stay where I was. We agreed also that moving would be detrimental for the children. But my refusal to move, left him in a vulnerable position psychologically and financially. The State government's system of employment benefits was for those who were sacked, not for people who quit their job. The market for self-employed consultants was at a low ebb. This caused Gus months of idleness, which he found intolerable. His feelings of desperation at these times rubbed off on me, and I became immobilized, never knowing how to console or help him. Probably I felt guilty that I caused his pain and our strained economy. On the other hand, financially speaking, I may not have been able to secure an equally lucrative position in Stockholm. Gus treated his mother's suggestions of how to occupy his time with contempt. It was as if no one could understand the depth of his despair, and he wasn't good at letting us try either.

One wonderful friend, Oskar, who lived in our suburb with his wife, Kristina, and their two children, caught Gus at an unprepared moment, and instead of refusing his offer of help, Gus went along.

Oskar was also self-employed, but in another branch, and the bad times had meant that he had had to dismiss his one and only employee. His office was in the centre of the city and he had a reasonably priced, long-term lease, so he invited Gus to pretend he was going to work each day. They would take the same bus to the centre of the city, eat lunch together and take the bus home together. Gus could occupy the vacant office. During the rest of the day, Oskar was busy with his own work, but he would poke his head into Gus' office to see if he needed anything, someone to read through a job application, or to give advice about projects that could give some yield. On his friend's advice Gus took an advanced course in Quality Assurance, and this became an investment in the future.

## THE NOON OF MY WOMANHOOD

At the end of the nineties, Gus resigned to the fact that his rollercoaster life as self-employed consultant with no regular income was risky because of his deteriorating health. He had successive bouts of debilitating lumbago, most likely exacerbated by the stress related vulnerability connected with lack of security. His poor health and the financial uncertainty grated on our relationship and marriage as well, and it estranged the children: the fun-loving father of their early lives had become impatient, harsh and intolerant primarily because he was concerned about our economy and he resented the demands of our teenage children. His reliance on alcohol as a pick-me-up also became more obvious. It was a day to remember when Gus finally became a civil servant, Manager for Quality Assurance, in a large national concern.

Although we were in entirely different spheres of work, the state's magnitude and magnanimity made life feel safe for us both, and the excellent pension system promised us security for the years ahead. The children however couldn't wait to get out of the nest: Rebecca was in the States studying at the Juilliard School of Music giving her beautiful voice, her sensitivity and interpretative talents scope to develop into artistry. Philip was studying Criminology, a brilliant student who was later head-hunted by the Swedish National Crime Agency. Here he met the beautiful and talented Louisa from southwest Småland, and on New Year's Eve heralding the Millennium they got engaged to be married.

It was easier for Gus and me to recoup some of what we had enjoyed once the children were out of the house, and we were able to have fun together, just the two of us. But in the bottom of the glass of Gus' and my special togetherness there were some bitter dregs. I had become assimilated, just like Ruth from the previous chapter's title, the Moabite woman who became great in history and fulfilled in her own person. Ruth's former life, however, had been an open book for all to peruse. Her mother-in-law's and her husband's kin and culture embraced her as she was, for whom she was. I was an assimilated alien. My mother-in-law, dear Sofia, died a month after Philip's wedding, without ever really knowing whom I really was.

The bittersweet song from "*The Fidler on the Roof*" (1964) played like the tune from a carousel in my head when I thought about our lives and especially the children who seemed satisfied that Gus and I had each other for ourselves again, and didn't need to be bothered with them daily anymore:

## THE NOON OF MY WOMANHOOD

"Where is the little boy I carried? Where is the little girl at play?  
I don't remember growing older, when did they?  
When did she get to be a beauty?  
When did he grow to be so tall?  
Wasn't it yesterday when they were small?  
Sunrise, sunset, sunrise, sunset, swiftly fly the years,  
One season following the other, laden with happiness and tears."

## Chapter 8 “Who am I?”

### JULIET: 1980 -2008: BELONGING, OUTSIDERNESS, LOSS, COMPETENCY, SATISFACTION.

In the terms of the Israeli American, medical sociologist, Aaron Antonovsky (1923-1994) my “Sense (feeling) of Coherence” most likely had holes that made me emotionally vulnerable. His model for good mental health, Salutogenesis, pertains to a kind of wholeness where life is comprehensible, manageable, and meaningful. To measure a person’s sense of coherence, Antonovsky developed a model that works along two axes: A horizontal axis, the X-axis and a vertical axis, the Y-axis. The X-axis comprises physical and emotional welfare enhanced by a satisfactory social network and vocational and intellectual fulfillment in the here and now. The Y-axis has to do with connectedness in time and personal history.

Regarding the X-axis pertaining to the here and now, I was able to boast of the following: I enjoyed good health, was contented with my children and Gus and had vocational and intellectual fulfillment at work. On the other hand, when Victor died, aged 90 in 1976, and Olav, Gus’ father, aged 68, died two years later, I felt emotionally depleted. I had loved both of these men, who accepted me into their hearts and respected me. They were for me what in therapy jargon is called “significant others”. My horizontal X- axis was however nourished by Amelie and her family. Our neighbourhood was pleasant, but what I missed most was close, female friends. All the women I got to know had already established alliances with best friends during their formative years. They organized themselves in tightly meshed clubs that met regularly. I hadn’t grown up in their parishes or competed in their sporting arrangements. I was an outsider and excluded from these inner sanctuaries.

One happening was however ameliorating. After Victor’s stroke, he was incapacitated for many months before he died. Sofia and her sisters took over the role of dividing up the furniture, China and silver in his stately home. We were lucky enough that no one else in the family wanted some of his precious things: First a matching salon group that was an heirloom dating back to 1789. It needed repairing, but in my eyes it was invaluable. Secondly a delicate, hand-painted dinner service, with cutlery to match found a future in our home. Because of the fire and what I had learnt as a result, we used his exquisite things every day. We paid through the nose to get the French Empire style salon group professionally restored. It was worth it as Victor and some his life’s history lived on with us.

Regarding the Y-axis: The tapestry of my life, my personal history, my roots had been torn from the loom when I arrived in Sweden. This was like an emotional amputation, and I suffered a type of phantom pain. Thankfully we told the children about my divorce prior to a

## THE NOON OF MY WOMANHOOD

visit to Australia when they were school age. We didn't swear them to secrecy, but for them it seemed "no big deal". They shrugged their shoulders and seemed disinterested. My childhood friends, classmates and colleagues from Australia who cherished me and whom I cherished in return were all over there, still alive and kicking, but neither active nor dynamic in my everyday life. This vertical lifeline from my Australian past was reduced to the occasional letter or a reference from a school/family/university reunion. Feelings of connectedness were obliterated by the fact that we were literally oceans apart. Their cards and letters, like those from my parents, were a lifeline for me, but like love letters in the sand erased by the next big wave. Everything about these people I loved was elusive and tinged with a poignant, faded-grey feeling of loss. Psychologically I felt displaced.

To compensate for this lost feeling, I worked feverishly to create and sustain meaningfulness on the horizontal axis, and in doing this my womanhood and motherhood were enhanced by an opportunity that came my way: to be a leader.

My relatively new job on the staff at a Research Institute of Child Development and Welfare was on the north side of the city. I drove over one and half hours every day there and back again. At the end of the spring term of Philip's new kindergarten, the superintendent invited parents to an assessment interview. Gus couldn't get time off work, so I went alone. This obviously competent woman in her mid-thirties, with long, straight hair and an artificially friendly glance masking an officious attitude, asked me about my work. As the interview progressed, she voiced concerns about Philip, revealing her suspicion that my working so many hours a week was affecting his contentment negatively. She said that he had changed from being a happy, confident, little boy who took chances and gripped life's opportunities, to being a sad, timid and reserved child who waited to let things happen to him rather than make them happen. I was thirty-nine and well educated in children and their needs, and here she was telling me I had fallen short. It took me a few moments to digest her analysis of me and my mothering.

Frankly I was shattered. I managed to get out of her office in one piece, before bursting into tears. She had belittled me, but deep down I knew that it was true. I had wanted to be at home with the children, be involved with them in their formative years, but I loved work too. As I sat there, a dejected woman, an irritating housefly woke up from his winter hibernation and buzzed round my head. I did my best to swat it in my anguish and frustration. I was not the mother I had aspired to be.

One of the other mothers observed all this as I sat there snivelling outside the interview room. She came quietly over to me, took my hands in hers and let my cry. Between my stifled sobs I told her what the superintendent had said. Not long after, this mother offered me my first job as a leader. She was married with three children, her youngest, a girl, being the same age as Philip. She didn't work full time, but she did lots of voluntary work, and was at present the chairperson on the Board of Directors of an NGO, or non-government organization. The NGO was looking for someone to lead a new Activity Centre

## THE NOON OF MY WOMANHOOD

in our neighbourhood. They needed a qualified person who was willing and able to take responsibility for others, and who would use his or her energy to facilitate the success that the organization was attempting to achieve. She felt that I may be this person, and if I was in agreement she would promote my candidature for the Board. I thanked her deeply for her confidence in me and said "Yes" without consulting Gus.

I liked her and warmed to her concern. There would be almost no traveling time, so two extra hours a day to spend with Philip. Circa 400 persons were eligible to use the centre. They were, for the record, called consumers or users. The aim of the centre was, in addition to providing counselling and other services, to be a meeting place facilitating users in establishing new, meaningful, social relationships: in Antonovsky's terminology strengthening each person's X-Axis.

There was just a skeleton staff, a half-time secretary and me. The municipality had a contract with the organization to provide the service; paid our wages and the rent for the building we occupied. In addition, three or four free-lance entrepreneurs were supplied with offices or venues free of charge. In return they offered their services to users at a reduced price. A group of volunteers that numbered at least 40 made up the rest of the working body. I could call upon health services from the municipality to meet the needs of individual users. And I could rely on my benefactor as a confidante and facilitator in administrative matters. I was answerable to the Board, but they seemed to regard me with benevolent eyes. This other, beautiful, comforting facilitating mother became another angel in my life.

In the beginning I was preoccupied with how I would tackle and manage the volunteers. This was a new field for me. The term "volunteer" is interesting. It is related to the word "volition", which is defined as the "faculty or power of using one's (free) will". In other words, these men and women, mostly women, were free to take leave of absence when it suited them, but they were ready, waiting and willing to put their shoulders to the wheel when they had the opportunity, i.e. when it suited them. Organizing these to cover the daily services, exercise- and hobby groups, an attractive cafeteria well stocked with delectables, weekly entertainment, monthly excursions and at least two theme-trips outside Sweden each year, was a logistical challenge.

I was used to being a type of detective, getting clues about individuals and their needs and desires, and thereafter surveying and searching through the multitude of services or opportunities to try and match the users' needs with available provisions or providers. Organizing the volunteers who only worked for maximum five hours a week was a virgin field of unknown quantities and qualities waiting to be ploughed. I approached the task with trepidation, and I was also scared that I would miss the security and satisfaction of my boss, the Head Research Officer, patting me on the shoulder and saying to me: "Well done, Juliet!" Now I would have to learn to say "well done" to my many subordinates. I could at least drop the shoulder-patting I thought, but what if they didn't do a good job?

## THE NOON OF MY WOMANHOOD

What if they broke confidences? Or were busy bodies? How would I approach that? Or reproach them? Many of them had good educational backgrounds and lots of work experience, but were now retired, and just wanted to use their time meaningfully in the service of others.

There were not many woman leaders who could be role models at the time. In Sweden the first female Acting prime Minister, Ulla Lindström, was in office in 1958, but I had never heard of her. My potential role models bore the stamp of my Australian background in the Commonwealth of Nations, Queen Elisabeth II being one, and Margaret Thatcher the other. The latter became the first woman Prime Minister in Great Britain in 1979 and governed there until 1990, for three consecutive terms. Maggie Thatcher's uncompromising anti-communism stance resulted in a Soviet Journalist referring to her as the "Iron Lady" in 1976. That was when she was leader of the conservative Tory party. This designation stuck in the Soviet Press and on other critical news desks during her whole term of office. These two British women leaders didn't get on with each other, and my humble leader-job at the Centre was a far cry from the authority and power they possessed. Despite Mrs Thatcher's assumed elegance and eloquence, I was terrified of adopting her masculine demeanour, especially the way in which she intimidated her political rivals. I needed an alternative role model and decided to take a course in leadership.

The course was run by a woman in her fifties, her background being both an organizational psychologist and a theologian, an exciting combination. She was somewhat imposing, but I warmed to her. When she gave each participant the opportunity to have 30 minutes personal consultation, I was grateful for the opportunity to present my thoughts and fears regarding my new position. I wanted an appropriate metaphor as a guiding star for the forming of my role at the Centre:

"Are you a mother?" she asked.

"Yes, two children, aged four and a half and six." I replied.

"Do you agree that mothers need to have eyes in the backs of their heads?"

I shrugged, "Yes, I suppose so" I said.

*"With so many unknown elements in the large group you are working with I think a mother's role is the best metaphor you can use,"* she said.

I must have looked surprised.

She continued.

"You will need eyes in the back of your head, and ears open to everything that happens, as mothers do. You will need patience and caring. Your consumers' welfare is your primary concern, but you will need all your helpers' backing and support to create and provide that welfare, and this will depend on a great deal of diplomacy on your part, like mothers need

## THE NOON OF MY WOMANHOOD

when they have to mediate between their children who are competing for their attention and love. Your volunteers don't receive wages for their efforts, so it will be their feeling of work satisfaction that will ensure that they stay with you."

I had already been working at the Centre for a few months, and her words rang true: The picture she described was quite applicable. My role as a female leader, the initiator, the encourager, the confirmers, the quintessences of motherhood became a part of my womanhood. I saw myself as the hub of a wheel with the different groups of volunteers surrounding me as the spokes, joining the hub to the rim which was composed of our users. Each group of volunteers was designated special functions and developed a feeling of belongingness to and importance within their own troop. But they were also dependent on the other troops, and on me, centrally situated, for the wheel to turn. The providers of special services were more like gardeners tending to each plant, sprinkling clear, life-giving water where it was needed and providing fertilizer when appropriate. They catered for individual user's needs and welfare, and by so doing created an aura of well-being that refreshed the Centre as a whole. Dealing with the difficulties, differences of opinion or other challenges that cropped up regularly was my business and taken care of privately in my office.

This job experience gave a new dimension in my life that was satisfying. The most memorable efforts were matching people who had complementary needs, for example an elderly woman in a wheelchair who longed to get out in the forest nearby her retiree cottage and a physically fit single woman who was losing her sight. The latter would navigate the wheelchair guided by the other's eyes and in return, the elderly woman read the newspapers out loud while they both enjoyed a cuppa. I joined the NGO as a member when I left my post. Looking back, I can see that this involvement compensated for my lack of woman friends. I gained good acquaintances and a network of people I could trust. It contributed to fill some of the holes pertaining to my salutogenesis, those in my X-axis.

Later I gained other leading positions and found other metaphors than "mother" for my roles. Each metaphor has to be appropriate to the idiosyncrasies of the particular workplace. The opportunity arose when I was in my fifth year at the Activity Centre. One of my well-educated volunteers drew my attention to an ad in the newspaper:

"Juliet, isn't this scope of work in line with your qualifications and training?"

I was so excited when I read the job requirements: with my qualifications, work experience and research publications I was fully qualified for the job as lecturer at the University College in Gothenburg. I applied and was ranked as number two. But the number one applicant had no intention of leaving her important position in the national bureaucracy. She had applied so that she could add the evaluating commission's recognition that she was qualified for an academic title to her already impressive CV. I was offered the job, but the male applicant who was rated as number three contested the commission's decision.

## THE NOON OF MY WOMANHOOD

He couldn't fathom that an Australian woman could be better qualified for the position than he. The commission retained their decision that I was best qualified.

The loser in this contest had based in his appeal on quality of educational standards: in his mind a Swedish master's degree must be academically superior to an Australian, but he also drew attention to research methods. In his view quantitative research was superior to qualitative research. Little did he know that the interdisciplinary research where I covered the sociological aspects was quantitative research with an experimental group of around 300 and a control group of 500 persons. He assumed that because I was a woman I would have had a preference for qualitative research, something he regarded as inferior and less demanding on the researcher. I was not a feminist activist but resented his assumptions about me.

My competitor's stereotypes brought to mind my fascination with masculinity and femininity issues dating back to my bachelor thesis in the early 60s. I had chosen to undertake an analysis of the literature and research pertaining to character traits related to work roles, especially stereotypes attributed to gender, at the time regarded as implicit in good carers. In my study of both women and men I found that certain gender-based stereotypes were not a prerequisite for becoming a good and professional carer. The development of empathy and respect for individual preferences and peculiarities were character traits not specific to women as many had presumed. They were not "feminine" traits. Many men exhibited the same traits, and if these men chose to do medicine, psychiatry, psychology, nursing, social work or public health work, their potential for being good professional carers was unlimited. In other words, the requirements for good carers were not gender related.

The pursuit of defined standards of ethical behaviour for both genders in caring roles occupied me. This was not only confined to the realms of health and social work, but also education. My first-hand knowledge of how Alfie and Owen were treated during my first year at primary school was the source of my consuming interest in suitability when it came to teachers. I had become even more preoccupied with the fates of boys and girls in schools after another significant learning experience in my second year at University in Australia:

At the end of my second term of Psychology, we were introduced to and taught how to perform the WISC IQ-test on children between 6 and 16. We were encouraged to go back to our local schools and ask for permission to test two children as practice for ourselves, not to categorize the children. The same Headmaster whom I had abhorred was still at my school, but he was not apprised of my sentiments. He had chosen a stout, woman teacher in her late 50s who had a class at the Grade 2 level to help me. She had been informed, and the parents had consented to my taking a couple of children out of the class to practice my testing. I had said I would prefer a boy and a girl.

## THE NOON OF MY WOMANHOOD

The teacher introduced Pamela first. Pamela was dressed in a pretty, cotton frock, patent shoes and white ankle socks. She had a pink bow in her straight, brown hair. Pamela trustingly took my hand. The teacher then walked over to a boy who had been looking down, seemingly uninterested in what was going on around him. She called his name and when he didn't respond or stand up, she took him by the ear and literally dragged him toward me.

"This is Dumb Dobson!" she exclaimed with exasperation.

I was too flabbergasted to react other than to ask:

"What is his real name?"

"Alexander," she spat it out.

Pamela, appeared to be like the stereotype, "teacher's pet". She conformed to her teacher's instructions without protest, was trustworthy, willing and amicable. She had an IQ of 108.

Alexander came out with an IQ of 136 (even I was surprised). Of course, I was still in training so I could have done something wrong, but the way in which Alexander answered questions, rapidly and confidently and managed the problems, even though he didn't smile, not once, was convincing enough. I couldn't help myself; I had to inform the teacher when the children were out of the room that Alexander was "by no means dumb". She didn't defend herself, thankfully, but seemed to reflect over something before she replied:

"His family is pretty turbulent. Father is a solicitor, and the mother has filed for a divorce and walked out on him and the children."

Then she scowled and asked how it went with Pamela.

"She's in the normal range," I replied. I was not permitted to reveal anymore.

Years after I had administered my first and last WISC IQ test, the memory of these two children was still with me. Alexander had the right to be treated with goodness, understanding, and encouragement just as much as Pamela.

My consciousness of the subtle nature of discrimination was broadened during the four years of my aforementioned research. My major findings resulting from my "mixed methods" approach revealed how young people, especially boys, who had grown up in families with low socioeconomic status were statistically less often verbally empowered to meet the requirements of the public school system: They had seldom been read to, seldom encouraged to draw nor develop communicative skills that facilitated good relationships with teachers. The punitive punishment they often received at home fuelled destructive ways of tackling failure to achieve at school. One couldn't blame them, one couldn't blame the parents: this type of class-related discrimination had been handed down from their parents before them, often over generations.

## THE NOON OF MY WOMANHOOD

My hospital experiences with chronic illness in children and my work in institutions for the disabled confirmed the destructive power that low socioeconomic status could be. Persons struggling with financial insecurity and inadequate housing were often emotionally and socially depleted, thus being less able to follow instructions for treatment and to meet for appointments because of limited access to transport. This tapestry of experience guided my values and goals as I approached my new appointment as a university lecturer. The Scandinavian welfare states were admittedly much better at meeting these inequalities with their systems of universal benefits and individual rights to financial help to alleviate dire need, than Australia had been. But the challenges of inequality were far from erased.

During my ten years as a lecturer, I was immersed in the student's needs for teaching in ethics and human values. In 1991 the Dean of the Faculty invited me to accompany him to Moscow. Our academic partners in the Faculty of Social Pedagogy had thawed up during Perestroika and wanted to discuss the position of the individual in society. They posed the question: "Are humanistic values in opposition to a communistic state welfare system?" It was not easy to answer when my soviet colleagues could not conceive that social problems existed in their classless society: poverty issues in a family due to a father's alcoholism were, for them, incomprehensible. We learned a lot from being there but wondered if anything we had to say could be translated into their ideological indoctrination.

Four years later I was elected to be leader of the Institute. During the summer holiday before I was due to start in my new role, Gus and I were holidaying with Amelie and her husband at the coast. The phone rang. It was Mummy. She was crying. Then Gillian took the phone: Dad had been diagnosed with an inoperable brain tumour and had a limited time to live. I booked the first flight, a horrible, seemingly never-ending flight. When I arrived at the hospital and found Dad lying in his hospital bed, he looked wan but brightened up when he saw me. Assuming his usual light-hearted self, he exclaimed: "Crikey, I must be bad, you coming all this way!"

He was bad. Ten days later Mum and I sat with him all day until Gillian's husband and daughter came to relieve us at his bedside. His death had been predicted as occurring three to four days after he went into a coma, i.e. when they took him off life support. It was the fourth day. This had been a collective family decision. Mum and I were sad to leave him, and we had just arrived home at their cottage where they had lived for four years after Dad's decision to sell the big house, when the phone rang. Dad had died an hour after we left. We were devastated and wished we had waited a bit longer.

My Dad's and mother's faith meant however that she was confident that he had entered a new and everlasting life with Jesus, his Saviour and Friend. But after 55 years of marriage, it was far from easy for her. The tears came, slowly, and then she sobbed. She had been so dependent on him. She didn't drive, had never had a license. He had never coached her or given her insight in their financial affairs. He had always looked after her, cared for her, planted and pruned the flowers she wanted in the garden, done the family shopping.

## THE NOON OF MY WOMANHOOD

They had sung together at Old People's Homes and entertained together. But they had not shared practical things, like the workings of the household's financial affairs. How would she manage? Her aloneness worried me.

Because I had to fly home to Gothenburg a few days after Dad's death, Frankie, my brother, overtook the protective role of my mother. He had the Power of Attorney, and he became her loving and financial crutch. He had never married nor had children. My sister Gillian and her husband and children visited Mum regularly, but Gillian was also busy with her family and had piles of voluntary work to attend to. When Gillian rang three years later to say that Mum had suffered a heart attack, but was recovering well, I was frightened for her. I sent her flowers by Inter Flora. And I rang her in hospital. Gillian put the phone near to her ear on a pillow so that we could talk. Mum was still prone, lying in bed and not strong enough to hold the phone. We talked; she thanked me for the flowers. I told her that I loved her.

It was two years to the day since I had seen her and spent time together with her. She was eighty-two then. I was attending a prestigious, International Conference in Hong Kong in 1996. Frankie suggested that Mum travel to Hong Kong to meet me. He arranged for Gillian's daughter to accompany her. This way Mum and I could meet half-way. Frankie chose a glorious hotel with water views near the Ferry Wharf for the week prior to my conference. It was July and summer vacation in Sweden.

My most poignant memory of my Mum from this precious week together was when we took a boat trip to an island out in the Hong Kong Harbour. There was a very pleasant beach there with wavering tea trees, but the island was famous, not because of the beach, but because of a huge statue of Buddha which guarded the entrance to a Buddhist temple. We were told that this was the largest statue in the world of Siddhartha Gautama (born 563 years B.C.) most commonly referred to as the Buddha, meaning "the awakened".

Mum was afraid of anything that might be considered revering a demigod and didn't want to go into the temple to look. Buddhism has no God, but because of its source in Hinduism, Mum's fear was not abated by my niece's and my insistence that Buddhism is not a theistic religion. There were lots of steps up to the heavily embossed, carved door of the temple. She had been suffering from angina pectoris, and I was worried about her as she was breathing heavily. Once up, she drew her breath in a sigh of relief, took a couple of steps forward as if to enter the temple, but failed to see the high stone threshold which she stumbled over landing flat on her face in a prostrate position. In hindsight it was incredibly funny. There she was lying flat out before another statue of Buddha inside the temple, the worst possible and most shameful position for one who had absolutely no desire to bow down to Buddha.

Much worse, she had hurt herself: her lower shins were bruised, her forehead was bleeding, her prescription glasses had gouged into the flesh around her eyes before the frame had snapped at the bridge of the nose and two separate pieces were flung to one

## THE NOON OF MY WOMANHOOD

side, her ribs hurt, and her pride was hurt. And I'm sure she was angry at us for psychologically forcing her to go up and into the temple against her will. I heard her murmur the first couple of the Ten Commandments:

"Thou shalt have no other gods before Me. Thou shall not make idols.... Thou shalt not bow down and worship them."

Poor, darling Mummy, she couldn't see without her glasses. We tried to makeshift the two halves together just for the ride with the boat back to the hotel. Fortunately shops in Hong Kong in the Shopping Centre just near the wharf were open 24/7, even the optometrists. The assistant there was most kind and able to glue the glasses together while we waited. Mum still practiced "not letting the sun go down on her wrath", so she forgave us. But we were a mortified about our behaviour looking at the dark rings around her eyes and the cut on her head. A couple of days later we said tearful good-byes, and I waved and waved as the taxi whisked Mum and my niece off towards the Airport, while I moved into the conference hotel. This was the last time I saw her alive.

With a sad heart I now put the phone down after speaking to Mum, supposedly recovering from her heart-attack. She seemed frail, but positive about Gillian's suggestion that she leave her cottage and go into care. But I shared what I felt was her unspoken anxiety about giving up her cottage. That night she had a new heart attack and died. So, I only saw her in her open coffin when I took the first available flight and arrived in Australia 28 hours later.

The room at the funeral parlour was cold, sterile, silent and very white. There was a large vase of delicately coloured delphiniums and other blooms in blues and mauves in one corner. Mum was lying motionlessly in her white, satin-lined coffin, her sky-blue, lacy, full-length evening gown made for a wedding she had attended some six to seven years before, giving her an elegant, serene appearance. Frankie had chosen her attire. Her hands were clasped solemnly beneath her breast. Freddy was with me at the Parlour as he hadn't managed to drive the long way down from his home in Cairns in time. But when we surveyed her, she didn't look like Mum. She was ashen: her life, her energy, her colour and sweetness were all gone.

She and I had gone back to the hospital to see Dad just after he died. We had kissed his forehead. It was cold and she sobbed silently. Now she was cold and had joined him. I didn't know if I really believed this, but my sisters believed it. Her funeral service, "Celebration of (her) life" as it was called, was full of rejoicing and gratitude for her time with us here on earth, and "her promotion to Glory", a phrase coined by Herbert Booth, following the death of his mother, Catherine Booth, 'Mother' of the Salvation Army. My sisters begged me to sing with them "Turn your eyes upon Jesus", Mum's favourite hymn, at the service. But I couldn't. I had ostensibly turned my back on Jesus. How could I sing the words, "Look full in his wonderful face"? It would be hypocritical. They were sorrowful, and they refused to sing without me.

## THE NOON OF MY WOMANHOOD

Just now thinking about my losses, recalling my parents' faces, I realized I couldn't even remember what Theo looked like. I had burned all the photos I had of him, and made my parents and sisters promise to do the same. Our mutual friends had been in a quandary about whose side to take after our divorce, so they had dropped us both. A big hunk of my life's history seemed unobtainable, unable to be shared with anyone.

In 2003 I was elected to a new leader position, Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences. One of my publicly announced policies before the election was my intention to introduce anti-discriminatory practice in the workplace and on campus. I was delighted that I, as a woman, won over my male rival. Women's rights in Scandinavia had completely infused society with the belief that gender has nothing to do with suitability for, or quality of leadership.

My qualifications for the job also included qualitative research on leadership. I had discovered that asking applicants for leading positions to give me a metaphor for how they would describe the ideal leader revealed quite a lot about their character traits and suitability. This had shown itself to be an effective way of "separating the sheep from the goats". This analogy may seem discriminatory or offensive, but the process of sieving has to be fair, but stringent.

The faculty was in the process of finding the "perfect" leader for a research team that the EU was funding with an ample grant. It was an intercultural study about local community, preferences for outdoor activities, and family health issues. Gothenburg, Sweden, Manchester, England and Dortmund, Germany were the cities from which smaller communities would be chosen. The interviews for the leader position were done in Manchester, and there were applicants from all three countries. One major prerequisite was that the leader could speak better than average English. The other Research Institute leaders were in agreement that the use of metaphors could be intriguing. The first male applicant said he had chosen "a good father" as his metaphor. Asked to elaborate on his vision of fatherhood in the workplace, he fell by the wayside because of his lack of creativity or preparedness to answer unexpected questions. Unlike my mentor on motherhood, he floundered, repeating himself about the positive aspects of being a good role model and revealed simultaneously that he was bereft of strategies for conflict identification and -resolution.

The metaphor of "a conductor of a symphony orchestra" gave meaning when the woman applicant described the requirements for the role: respect for the differing instruments, confidence in and respect for the musicians' competencies and artistry, the necessity of exacting cooperation and precision, and being agreed on common purposes to attain the goal of pleasing and impressing the audience. She was appointed to lead a special section of the research and became next-in-charge. The second male applicant said he would choose the metaphor "captain of a ship". He reiterated the necessity of having things "shipshape". He had to resort to standing on the bridge of another organization, not ours.

## THE NOON OF MY WOMANHOOD

The metaphor that won our hearts was “lead dog of a dog sled”. This applicant described with sensitivity that in leading positions in the academic sphere, none of us has absolute authority. There was always someone over us, and we were ultimately accountable to the EU, the State, and the Grant Foundation. He saw the authorities over us as the human person driving the dog sled in the direction the Race Director had set. The lead husky is obedient and performs his or her task of leading the pack of usually eight to ten dogs along the track the human master or mistress has set his or her sights on. At the same time, the lead dog has autonomy in his/her role. If the human drives the pack into danger, for example onto a treacherous, frozen lake with unstable ice, the lead dog, sensing danger, will lie down and refuse to budge, and the pack follows the lead dog’s example. No amount of cajoling, threatening, tempting with tasty titbits or thrashing will get a lead dog to change his/her attitude. His or her icy blue eyes may look sad, and the pointed ears look less and less wolf-like when the dog lays his head on his front paws, but nothing will get him or her to move forward. The only movement he or she will accept is if the driver turns the sled around and drives back the way they came.

Huskies are the only breed of dogs that can have blue eyes, and about 40 percent of their race have translucent, blue eyes. Their eye colour has nothing to do with their instinctual attribute of caring for the pack, and this is not confined to sled-races, but also exhibited on training tours: If one of the dogs in the pack is exhausted, sick or injured and lies down, the lead dog stops. Nothing happens until the weakest link is taken care of. This delicate balance between belonging to a fellowship, bent on reaching common goals, positive to and following instructions to that end, but simultaneously capable of using one’s instincts, one’s head and heart when called for, in defiance of a path that is deemed wrong, seemed to me an exciting ethical and productive combination of talents in an executive position. The “husky” applicant got the job.

In the beginning of his term I wondered if our judgment had been correct, he was a bit slow off the mark. Pondering over this I recalled a terrifying scene in the first book I ever read in Swedish, Selma Lagerlöf’s “Gösta Berlings Saga”: The scene described a horse and sleigh at full speed on an urgent mission to get medical assistance. The sleigh is gliding at a hair-raising speed on an icy track through a forest of dark firs. The black conifers cast ominous shadows and suddenly the coachman is horrified to hear the howls of a pack of wolves in full pursuit.

The emotions that welled up in me reading about this pack of wolves, guided only by instinct, killer-instinct, was in sharp contrast to the picture the applicant had painted of the “trained lead husky” who in many ways physically resembles his or her distant untamed kin. The research leader needed energy, creativity, strength, a keen vision, almost a “killer-instinct” like the wolves; But he also needed a delicate balance between sobriety, sensitivity, caring, willingness to listen and obey: in other words subservience on the one hand, and the courage and determination to follow his own judgment and acumen on the other. By the end of six months, he showed that he was able to assert his autonomy and

## THE NOON OF MY WOMANHOOD

authority and lead in accordance with our goals, but he was also capable of making a detour to attend to human aspects to ensure his team's workability.

Thankfully, life had not been just work. To backtrack, Gus and I had been in Australia in 2001 to attend my brother Fred's wedding number two. All of us five siblings were to be together, a rare and precious experience. We were to stay at a beautiful palm filled resort at Port Arthur in the far North of Queensland. The relationship was consecrated by the local, black clergyman, and we celebrated at an exotic Rain Forest Park with a typical Aussie Bar-B-Q with trimmings and champagne. The ladies sipped the ice-cold Moët and Chandon, salvaged from the heat by the cooler bag, but the majority of the blokes preferred beer.

When Fred's first marriage hit the rocks, he had obtained sole custody of his two little boys then five and six years of age. This wedding was a new start for him, wonderful, with the backdrop of forest green and the bridesmaids, also in green chiffon, looking like forest fairies. The groom with his now teenage sons as groomsmen could easily have been Peter Pan with a couple of his Lost Boys, while the bride in ethereal white could have been Wendy flying out of the window with her sheer wedding veil streaming behind her on her way to Neverland.

I was brought back to reality when I returned to our hotel room two days after the ceremony, turned on the radio and heard a News Reader on the Australian Broadcasting Commission announce that Dr. Theo Llewelyn has this morning resigned from his position as Chairman of the Board of Directors in an international Medical Technology Concern. The recent issues that the firm had been facing have made it impossible for him to continue. I didn't tell anybody what I had heard but felt quite bothered about Theo and his fate. I had no idea of where he had been working the past 30 years or more. I prayed for him in my heart. I suspected that "the issues" were of the unsavoury sort.

Three years later I attended a famous Leader Training and Personal Development Course organized by the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations at a remote resort site on the outskirts of London. It was a fascinating experience; the theoretical approach being rooted in psychoanalysis. I had just arrived at the cottage I had been assigned to after a gruelling day with several sessions, when a message from Beverley popped up on my mobile. Theo Llewelyn had died, ostensibly by his own hand, yesterday. He had retired as Chairman of the Board of Directors after the incident with the International Company, as well as from his position as CEO of an Australian Medical Supplies Company. He had been alone at his retirement farm and not phoned home as was his habit. His son had driven up and found his father slumped in his Squatter's Chair on the broad veranda, his Golden Retriever whimpering beside him. It wasn't specifically mentioned but recalling Theo's intensity in all his undertakings I imagined he had emulated the violent demise of his favourite author from our time together, Ernest Hemingway. I was shocked. My head reeled.

## THE NOON OF MY WOMANHOOD

Beverley sent me a Newspaper article by post, what we call today “snail mail” that gave me more details. The digital era was just beginning to bloom. I received it the week after I got back home from the course. The journalist expressed astonishment, disbelief over Theo’s suicide. It looked on the surface as if he had everything going for him. He was establishing his farm in a beautiful rural area after his retirement. His merit list of high positions before this was impressive. He was still Chairman of the Board of Directors at a City Library and an Art Gallery. His wife had told the journalist of some health issues and that their daughter’s marriage break-up had upset him, but the family had had no warning and were bewildered and devastated by his tragic and untimely death. The journalist also painted a picture of his background, describing a strict, religious upbringing and his protest against this and his subsequent, chosen path to atheism and nihilism in particular. The journalist’s key question was why? There seemed to be no rational explanation.

My thoughts flew to Deidre, how was she coping, how was this affecting her? I thought of his wife, Beth, too. Could the secret I knew about Theo explain the enigma of his action, and if so, would an explanation relieve some of their sorrow?

I had been in Stockholm, giving a lecture, and had met up with Rebecca there. She understood my dilemma and my grief. My plane to Gothenburg was two hours delayed, so I used the time to write to Deidre. To ensure my revelations about Theo’s abuse wouldn’t be destructive for the recipients, I decided to send the letter to Gillian first. She and her husband knew Deidre fairly well as she had become a theologian and missionary for the Uniting Church in India after being widowed. Gillian and her family had joined the Uniting Church after their return from New Zealand and were members of a support team for the denomination’s missionaries. The incident of Theo’s abuse and the subsequent suppression of the chaos connected with the disclosure and the grand-mother’s mysterious death were committed to paper in Stockholm Airport, Arlanda. I even had time to buy a stamp and put the sad story in a letter box. I was afraid that I would get cold feet, regret writing, and hide it again in my Pandora’s box of repressed memories.

Gillian forwarded the letter to Deidre after carefully evaluating the pros and cons. I received a heart-warming reply from Deidre. She remembered the incident vividly, when the grand-mother was raving, running half naked around the house, swearing and throwing things, and then her complete absence from the home. Deidre recalled that she had been ashamed of her delight at the grandmother’s absence - she had never paid Deidre any attention, all the sweets and expensive toys were showered on her brother. Deidre forwarded the letter to Beth, she felt it may be helpful. Beth had responded: Theo had never told her a word about all this. She was thankful for a possible underlying reason for what had been troubling him but was disturbed by the thought that perhaps she never really knew her husband.

When my four-year term of office as faculty leader was over, I took a year winding up some research and writing a few newspaper articles: one on sexual abuse of boys, one on

## THE NOON OF MY WOMANHOOD

the challenge dementia poses to individuals, families and society. I retired, and in the same breath became a “senior citizen”. After the summer vacation, the faculty held a farewell lunch for me. Sam, a witty, American colleague, originally from Chicago, made a speech. He spoke in a delightful mixture of English and Swedish, with a heavy American accent. He attributed my success as a leader and the success of our faculty to my tenacity. Our faculty had been appraised as one of two of the best-run faculties in our University, based on studies of the social- and working environment and academic achievement. I was somewhat startled by his choice of this quality and his general frankness, but he explained that once I had obtained support of mutual goals for the faculty, no stone remained unturned until we reached where we were supposed to be going: like a determined mother fighting for and protecting her children. The staff numbered around 170 and the number of students was well over 2000. In my valedictory speech, I thanked the staff for their support, creativity and valiant determination toward our common goal of preparing students for their professional lives, and for their untiring devotion to the research we hoped would pave the way for the betterment of society.

My X-axis, half of my ‘salutogenesis’ (sense of wholeness) was satiated. The existential dilemma about my full identity, “Who am I?” had never been an issue at work. Everyone that mattered knew my secrets, my previous names were plastered over the reports and articles I had produced in Australia. No wonder my workplace had been a refuge as well as profoundly enjoyable. And my voluntary work had provided a substitute for close women friends. Only in the family I was still bothered by the words from Jean Valjean’s song in the musical version of “Les Misérables”, “Can I conceal myself forever more?”

## Chapter 9 “Feelings, like I’ll never have you again in my arms”

### JULIET AND GUS 2004-2011: CONFUSION, HEARTACHE, DEPRESSION, JEALOUSY, FEAR, DESOLATION

September 2011, Gus was 68 years old and so afraid of death. It was a terrifying challenge to my lack of faith. I wanted so much for him to be at peace before and when he died. And I think he was, but it was a harrowing and heart-breaking journey.

Six months before we had been together in the Professor of Gastroenterology’s office when this bespectacled, hard-talking prophet declared that Gus and I could “forget about a trip to Australia” that we had booked for November-December that year: “You have 6 months to live” was his prognosis. The date was 1st March 2011.

The sequence of events went like this. One of Gus’ good friends had died at the age of 50 of a heart attack many years before. This man, Oskar, had been especially thoughtful and helpful in the periods when Gus was out of work. He had a vacant office in his own one-man-show business, and Gus was always welcome to sit there, in close company with him, in order to write job applications or hatch out project ideas instead of moping around the house which drove him nuts. All of Sofia’s excellent suggestions that Gus could paint her house or redesign our kitchen fell on deaf ears. Oskar’s premature death was a real blow. His widow, Kristina, who was an only child, had two children, ten and twelve. She was in need of help and guidance in connection with the settlement of Oskar’s estate, as her marriage to Oskar was his second marriage, and there were children from the first marriage who had to be provided for. Gus fell easily into this supportive role for the little family. When Kristina remarried about four years later, we were very happy for her and became good friends with her new husband who was also an engineer.

Life is unjust: Kristina’s second husband was diagnosed with a bone marrow cancer fourteen years after their marriage and he died two years later. We attended both his funeral and the wake in mid-January. I am not sure if it were this confrontation with death at close hand that made Gus aware of his own body and some symptoms he had noticed, because about a week later he mentioned that he had discomfort in his stomach. I asked him about the discomfort a few days later, and it hadn’t subsided. Two weeks later I begged him to ring his GP, which he did. His doctor was of the old-fashioned kind. He had gone in the class under Gus at school, so they had known each other superficially from childhood. He asked Gus to lie down on the examination table in his consulting room, and he examined him manually and thoroughly. He looked concerned, Gus told me. It seemed

## THE NOON OF MY WOMANHOOD

that he had noticed a foreign body under his searching fingers. He didn't share with Gus the cause of his concern but referred him to a clinic for a radiology examination, a Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI), post haste.

It was with dread and foreboding that I awaited the results of the MRI. My apprehension was not unfounded. When I called at the GP's office to fetch them, they were in a sealed envelope. Gus was at work, busy with a huge project which they had finally got the go-ahead to begin with. I asked for his permission to open the letter. He said it was okay and he could hear about the results when he got home from work. I was already retired and petrified. I didn't want to go home and read the results alone. Once or twice a week after my retirement I had been engaged by a former associate of Philip to go into an office complex in Gothenburg in the event he or his colleagues needed help with psycho-social interpretations of some terms or symptoms concerning criminal cases. A small office without a window, but with a computer was normally unoccupied. I decided to go there. I rang Rebecca who was for the time being at home in her flat in Haga centrally located in Gothenburg. It didn't take her long before she joined me. She sat beside me when I opened the letter. It was shattering, devastating. There was a lot of Latin, but I was so well versed in medical terminology, and we used Google and Wikipedia for what we didn't understand. The scan had uncovered that Gus had advanced pancreatic cancer with metastases to the spinal area and the liver.

Gus seemed almost indifferent when he read the letter. It was as if he didn't believe its contents. Maybe he was in shock. Maybe he just perceived some jumbled words on a flimsy piece of paper that did not apply to him. Maybe he had lost faith in the Medical Profession: He had been diagnosed with a carcinoma (cell change) on his tongue in 2004 and the affected area had been surgically removed. It affected his speech in the beginning, but he got use to his lop-sided tongue after a while. The surgeon had predicted a dismal future with the likelihood of the cancer spreading to the larynx. This eventuality would necessitate the insertion of tubes in the throat to breathe and communicate with. None of this had happened. And although further cell changes were discovered in 2009 and Gus was again in the surgeon's hands, an area of soft tissue in his mouth cavity was removed and skin from his thigh was grafted over the open sore, he was still dubious: dubious about the medical profession's prophetic skills. He felt they tended to "måla fan på väggen", in other words, "exaggerating by proffering a worst-case prognosis".

We sat in the office of the medical expert in Gastroenterology and Cancer in this particular field, listening to his predictions about Gus' chances. He, I call him "professor", said there was no cure. Gus and I must have looked like inter-celestial beings from two, entirely different planets. I was slumped, brooding like a beaten woman. I had just received a definitive confirmation of what I had suspected. The road ahead was black, murky, painful, yellow with pus and dark crimson with clotted blood, white hospitals, black hearses and fading wreathes of ugly flowers. For Gus it seemed like this was the first time his conscious mind had allowed the news of his predetermined, premature death to penetrate.

## THE NOON OF MY WOMANHOOD

Because of his previous experience with the carcinomas, he reacted negatively to the professor's resignation. He could neither comprehend nor believe that there was no treatment for his condition, only palliative treatment of the pain that would increase in strength as the cancerous cells in three areas of his body multiplied. Gus was defiant, adamant that he wanted to try Chemotherapy. After a little hiatus of silence, the professor shrugged his shoulders, and sent us off to the oncologist, who echoed the professor's opinion that chemo wouldn't help. The oncologist went even further; the chemo may in fact cause unpleasant side-effects.

But Gus insisted, so he was offered chemo treatments twice a week for two months, i.e. until he developed what they had predicted, thromboses in the leg which caused him to limp: "drop-foot". Only then could Gus resign himself to the fact that chemo was no longer an alternative. He begged that they try radiation. The specialists humoured him, and he was scanned to assess where they could possibly radiate. The liver and pancreas were not an option, and the affected spinal area was too near his spinal cord to be an option either. All doors were closed. This confrontation with the reality of situation left Gus in a state of limbo.

The conflict of feelings and the feelings themselves were inexhaustible for me. So many emotions, so many thoughts, too many things to give up, only one thing to plan for: all this reeled in my head. Visions and feelings were competing with each other for my attention. I had become obsessed by pictures in my mind pertaining to funeral arrangements and couldn't understand why. Of course I kept silent about these disturbing, but recurring visions of coffins, wreaths and the like.

Gus was, according to the scan, very sick, but first and foremost he was, at that precise moment, still just a man, a human being and a valued employee with a bit of discomfort in his stomach. The professor had, without asking our opinion or consent, thrust a signed sick leave form in Gus' hand, saying:

"You should make good use of the time you have left. Enjoy yourself!"

He didn't know Gus, Gus was his work, a dedicated and diligent employee with a good position on a brand-new project. Not only was Gus sentenced to death that day, but he felt he was being declared ineligible for work. The professor didn't have any idea of the tragedy he created. We were entitled to disagree and could have protested that sick leave wasn't necessary. But we were shocked and intimidated by the man's authority exuded through his titles and experience. Gus could have ignored the form and just turned up for work until he felt he needed time off but stunned and numb we bowed under to his professorial expertise.

Gus became extremely depressed now with too much idle time on his hands. He had, as aforementioned, insisted on Chemotherapy even though the Cancer Specialist advised against it. Gus clung onto hope of recovery! My dismal conclusion from the 1st of March

## THE NOON OF MY WOMANHOOD

had always been that there would be no recovery. I felt I failed him with my lack of hope, my inability to share or find any shade of optimism and my recurring visions of funerals.

Why couldn't I just have said? "Promise it's gonna be all right!" as in Voyager's Australia's Eurovision song, 2023. Instead, I just reconciled myself to the prognosis that he would die. How fatalistic can one be? It must have been so lonely, so devastating for him having a wife who just gave up, accepting the worst, without fighting, without being angry. Why didn't I scream out loud: "I won't accept that this is happening!"?

Every time Gus had an appointment at the Out-Patient Clinic for palliative care for the terminally ill, the nurse behind the window would hand him a form to fill in before he spoke with his doctor:

How are you feeling today? On a scale of 1-10.	Gus wrote 0 = ZERO
How is your appetite? On a scale of 1-10.	Gus wrote 0 = ZERO
How is the medication helping with pain management?	Gus wrote 0 = ZERO

I don't think he ever wrote even a 1 or a 2. My poor, lonely, darling, Gus!!

1st March, Gus didn't even feel sick. The professor explained that this was because the fatal tumour was in the tail of the pancreas and the lack of symptoms had enabled the adenocarcinoma to spread to the liver and spinal area before the original site, or should I write "sinner", was discovered. He gave Gus a prescription for Oxazepam, a short-to-intermediate-acting benzodiazepine that is used for the treatment of anxiety. This must have been his "standard cocktail" to alleviate the effects of his "death sentences". He hadn't asked Gus if he wanted a prescription. He just assumed it. Gus showed no symptoms of anxiety during the consultation, so why the prescription? The fact that Gus wouldn't accept the fact that there was no road to recovery, may have prompted the professor to interpret Gus's reaction as denial, a defence mechanism against anxiety. Gus had never used medication before except a Cortisone cream for his eczema, and some painkillers after the operations on his tongue and in his mouth.

Being at home with nothing to do except going for walks with me was torture for him. Gus had never been an indolent person. Idleness made him nervous. It reminded him of his painful periods of unemployment. He got his wage as usual of course, but the bottom was blown out of his meaningful existence when he didn't go to the Office. And the exciting project he was working on would pass him by much too prematurely. I had told Philip's associate I couldn't continue to help them at the office. So, Gus and I were all of sudden both unemployed and had a tendency to sit at home and stare at each other, not knowing what to do or say. It was heart-wrenching.

Gus also felt the loss of our dog much more acutely when we only had walks or chemo or shopping to occupy us. Our second dog, Prick-too, or Prick-two (with the nickname P2), had almost entirely been Gus' dog. And similar to all members of his extended family, P2

## THE NOON OF MY WOMANHOOD

had assumed a pivotal position in his life. I sometimes felt that he regarded P2 more highly than the children, but that was probably unfair, as we all loved P2 intensely, except Philip, who was good-natured and playful, but more stand-offish as far as the dog was concerned than the rest of us.

Not quite five years before our fateful day, 1st March, P2 had died after being bitten by our neighbour's unmanageable German shepherd. Gus always took a quick walk with P2 around the block in the mornings before work. He would often meet the neighbour, the owner of a chain of hotels, coming home from his jog with his big, male German Shepherd, which was never on a leash. The neighbour, Mikael, had a rousing, authoritative voice which his dog respected and obeyed. Some mornings Mikael's new girlfriend would take her morning run with the dog, also not on the leash.

One morning the German Shepherd, on a run with the girlfriend, bolted towards P2. Gus saw him coming and snatched P2 up into his arms, but the German Shepherd jumped up on his hind legs, his fangs gashed Gus's bare arm and worst of all severed a hunk of flesh from P2's stomach. It hung there, P2's tender, pale pink tummy bled profusely. Gus was white with shock.

"Mikael will pay! Mikael will pay!", the girlfriend shouted hysterically.

Mikael did pay, but an infection developed in the wound. P2 was twelve years of age and when the antibiotics didn't have any effect, the Vet said we would have to put him down. I was with Gus during these visits to the Vet and we also rang the children before we made the final decision. Philip was already married, and their little son had been born just four months before. For Rebekka it was worse, but she was on a singing engagement in Linköping, so couldn't be with us. We said a last farewell to our faithful, little friend before the Vet administered the fatal injections. Gus cried. Mikael could never pay for the hurt he had caused us.

We made the decision not to have a new dog after P2. I was due to retire in the year or two. A dog ties you down. We had both been in agreement about this. I was emotionally preoccupied with our new grandson. I used every opportunity to visit, admire and cuddle the new baby. Gus was proud of his grandson, but babies are not necessarily warm and cuddly in strange arms. He grieved for the dog to cuddle with, walk round the block with mornings and evenings with, to stroke, feed, comb, to tend to. A being that needed him, solely him. He had become rather surly during the years that passed before the sick-leave, but now I sensed his desolation. With a death sentence hanging over his own head, his sorrow over P2's death put its clammy hand around his heart again. This intensified during the month of March, understandably enough. He had cried for P2, but he couldn't cry for himself. Alone, I moaned, deep, dry, choking, tearless screams of horror and desperation about Gus's plight, but I couldn't share this with him. I kept it to myself.

In the darkness of our bed he would whisper: "Juliet, I don't want to leave you."

## THE NOON OF MY WOMANHOOD

I would stroke him gently, and say lamely, "There, there, I'll be okay."

But I couldn't put into words what I really thought, that he was scared of leaving us, scared of separation, scared of death. And I couldn't sob or moan as I thought that would make it even harder for him. He had never tolerated tears, not even when the children were small. He told them "to grow up".

We made love during the night approaching 2nd March, clinging to each other in a desperate effort to ward off the shocking, impending danger. It was bitter-sweet, transcendent, loving, incredibly sad. The refrain from our song,

"You're just too good to be true.

Can't take my eyes off of you,"

resonated in my brain and my whole body.

"I need you, Baby, to warm the lonely night.....

And let me love you, Baby, let me love you!"

We never made love again.

Gus became increasingly introvert and depressed. The boredom of not going to work, not meeting his colleagues, feeling that he no longer had a place in society, ate him up. The quiet, tense atmosphere between us was at times intolerable. Who can speak about the unspeakable? I have had colleagues who died of cancer who, in the phase before their deaths actively engaged in the arrangements for their funerals, chose hymns, readings, flowers. We weren't there. I discovered that I had been caught in a process which is now termed "anticipatory grief", but Gus was still in a state of denial. It became much easier to bear when Gus, after the first month refused further sick leave and contacted his office. He asked if he could come back to work full time on the understanding that his capacity may be reduced, but that he was capable of nerving himself up to being of use. The workplace may have suffered somewhat financially by his decision, but there were also many areas where his personal attendance and acumen was necessary for the transfer of inside know-how and responsibility to other colleagues.

In hindsight there was another side of Gus that I had never before understood: the strength of the bonding between Gus and our two dogs. I had been fond of them both, especially Prick because we got him when he was only six weeks old. It was just before I started at the Activity Centre, the job where I was managing the volunteers. It was my job to train him. And my new job in the neighbourhood meant I could dash off home and see to him in the middle of the day, checking that he was learning to fend for himself. Gus's bonding with the dogs was something different. I will try to explain. Gus would never say he loved me of his own free will. I knew he loved me, but sometimes I yearned to hear the words. If I ever asked him, "Do you love me?" like Tzeitel sings to her husband, Tevye, in

## THE NOON OF MY WOMANHOOD

the “Fidler on the Roof”, Gus never answered “Do I what?”, thereafter reciting a list of merits as evidence of his love.

Gus would, with a look of sweet surprise in his eyes, declare: “But Juliet, I adore you!

I was never quite satisfied with his answer. Maybe the aforementioned disillusion regarding the traitorous Delilah’s plea to be adored by Samson had put a bad taste in my mouth. I imagined I was being placed on a pedestal like an idol to be venerated. This made me feel insecure. I was sure that one day I would fall down and disappoint him, and then where was the love? And I did fall, not long after we lost P2:

Gus and I had driven to Norway very early one Friday, mid-August, to attend the funeral at Holmenkollen chapel of his one and only Norwegian cousin. Amelie and her husband were with us, and they had arranged for us to stay-over after the wake on the Friday night. One of Amelie’s good friends, Klara, was in Norway from Minneapolis. She had settled in the USA with her Norwegian husband who was a medical doctor at the Mayo Clinic. She and Amelie had been holiday playmates in Kjerringvik every summer for years. Both of their grand-parents had built summer cottages along the sheltered, narrow road that winds through the huge boulders to the Marina. Amelie had also visited Klara in Minneapolis. Klara was in Norway visiting family and was delighted at Amelie’s suggestion to meet us around 7.30 p.m., and stay the night at a hotel on the outskirts of the North Forest, an area situated a half hour tram ride from Oslo in peaceful, idyllic surroundings. The hotel is built in an old-fashioned, log cabin style. The rooms had modern facilities at the same time retaining an atmosphere from the past. The daintiness of the furnishings and curtains secured a feeling of the gentle life from the early 1900s.

Klara was a full of fun person and a flirt, probably completely harmless, but Gus flirted back. Their friendship went way back. Gus hardly ever put his arm around me, except when we were in bed, and I often longed for an open declaration of his love and a feeling of intimacy in public. But no, this was out of the question in his book. He wasn’t demonstrative with his mother either. Sofia asked me on several occasions why Gus never hugged her nor put his arms around her. This was after her husband passed away. I had no adequate answer, as I knew he loved her and was dependent on her.

This evening at the hotel he became deeply involved with Klara. We had eaten a delicious dinner, with both white and red wine, sipped cognac with our coffee, and the three others were into the long drinks, GT or whiskey and soda. We had danced too, but we were one too many, and Klara was the guest, so I politely gave Gus the go ahead to dance with her. I felt out of it. Their tête-à-tête during dinner about their childhood memories, and their dancing close with oodles of physical contact both on the dance floor and later with his arm slung around her shoulder, began to rile me. As they sat together on the fashionably upholstered, cretonne sofa, he leaned forward, his head nuzzled into her neck. It was too much for me. The well-known idiom, “Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned”, often attributed to William Shakespeare, but in reality coined by another William, the playwright,

## THE NOON OF MY WOMANHOOD

William Congreve in the play “The Mourning Bride” creates the scene for the drama that followed.

I’d never seen Gus like this before. Unfortunately, I hadn’t seen the Opera “Eugene Onegin” at the time. (It is based on Aleksander Pushkin’s story, composed by Pjotr Tsjajkovskij, and first performed in 1879). I had no concept, not even after all my time with Theo, how passionate and destructive jealousy can be. The enormity of it and the drastic consequences thereof are brilliantly portrayed in this Opera: The young, romantic, starry-eyed poet, Vladimir Lensky becomes outraged at his fiancée, Olga Larina’s insensitive response to him, when his supposed friend, the older and bored dandy, Eugene Onegin, flirts with her on the dance floor. The trio are together at a boisterous country ball in honour of Olga’s sister’s birthday. Lensky’s jealousy escalates to an extent that he throws down his glove at Eugene’s feet and challenges him to a duel.

The flirt with Olga had meant nothing to Eugene, and if he could have, he probably would have apologized. But the barbarous rules of duelling didn’t allow for that. The duel went ahead at daylight and Lensky paid the price for his consuming jealousy with his life.

This evening, without realizing it, I “threw the glove down” by announcing that I was tired and wanted to go to bed. I spoke in a cold, well-modulated voice, but Gus understood my meaning, my desire to break up his/their fun.

“What on earth?” he exclaimed, “It’s only 11.30 pm.”

I must have looked stonily at him, unmoved by his protest.

“Don’t be a spoiled sport. You’re being a kill-joy!”

It was nearly 40 years after I had been finished with Theo, but these words burnt in me, and fired my jealousy, which can be as frenzied as falling in love. This time I answered back:

“You never touch me like that in public, now you are all over Klara like a rash, and you never hugged your mother either! What has come over you?”

The words were true, but this was neither the time nor the place to air them, and the icy disdain in my voice hit hard. Gus was furious and drunk. He yelled and screamed profanities at me for destroying Klara’s one night in Oslo with Amelie. He called me “a spoilt brat” and raved on so much so that one of the staff came and asked us to keep our voices down. Amelie, her husband and Klara made a quiet exit after this.

After a silence Gus proclaimed in a loud, unsteady voice that he would never speak to me again if I didn’t agree to apologize to Klara and Amelie and her husband for spoiling their evening. He more or less dragged me by the arm to our room, and continued to barrage me with this condition for our continued life together until I agreed:

“First thing in the morning I will apologize,” the words came out hesitantly, stutteringly.

## THE NOON OF MY WOMANHOOD

They were hard to say, because a part of me, reckoned the whole thing had been his fault, but just the same, deep down I was conquered by a deep feeling of regret, heart-felt anguish and distress. Gus was disappointed in me. Gus was ashamed of me. This I was truly sorry for.

I really thought Gus and I were finished, I couldn't believe that our relationship could survive this ghastly altercation. I didn't sleep a wink and sobbed silently to myself lying there in the double bed beside him, not daring to move. My head whirled around like a Merry-Go-Round gone mad trying to conceive a life, a future on my own.

Morning broke. I showered and dressed and Gus literally shoved me out of the door. I knocked sheepishly on their doors and said with a demeanour of honest sorrow, "I regret saying what I said last night and ask forgiveness for ruining your evening."

They looked stupefied but accepted my apology without a word. There was a mixture of bewilderment and sorrow in their eyes. Back in our room the atmosphere was very chilly, but Gus announced that we had better get down to breakfast. I was embarrassed meeting the eyes of the staff, meeting the others. I felt shame.

I said very little when we drove Klara back to the Central Station in Oslo, and we four set off on what turned out to be a very quiet journey back to Gothenburg. Gus was driving. The incident was never mentioned again, and the atmosphere returned to normal after 24 hours. But after this I became afraid of Gus when he was drinking more than usual. I was terrified that the metaphorical bile containing all his undigested disappointments or accusations about my personality or behaviour, secretly stored in his mental gall bladder would regurgitate all over me. At the same time, it taught me something about adoration and dogs, which is where I started this digression.

Dogs adore their owners unconditionally, i.e. with complete devotion! You can accidentally stand on your dog's paw: he may whimper, but he never looks accusingly at you. When the pain has subsided, he will adore you just the same. Dogs can reveal their emotions, especially of sadness when they observe that the whole family is getting ready to go off to work or school in the morning. They can lurk in a corner, their body language showing very clearly that they are not going to wish you a jolly "Good-bye! See you later."

They may sulk a little, but they don't blame you for having to go. One can get a bad conscience about leaving them when they get their hang-dog look. There is however no condemnation in their look, and no indication of a plan for retribution. Just.....

"Come home quickly. I love you. I need you!"

I was never devoted to Gus in the fashion that P2 was. Maybe I had been more like that with Theo, self-effacing. I loved Gus deeply and thankfully, but not unconditionally, nor he me for that matter. Only dogs, "man's best friend", do that.

## THE NOON OF MY WOMANHOOD

Slowly, after the diagnosis, I came to see many things in a new light. It was like Gus's preferences came out of a fog. His pending death caused me to examine and try to interpret our relationship, and also his emotional investment in P2. My reflections revolved around my sins of omission: I hadn't massaged Gus's feet with passion or enthusiasm even though I knew he loved it - his "extra" erogenous zone. But his devoted dogs licked his feet in the summer months when we often went barefoot. I couldn't stand it when Prick tried to lick my feet. It was too ticklish for me. This is just a silly example, but I had failed to understand the overall importance of what having a dog had meant for him. I had never looked at him adoringly, just waiting, quietly for him to suggest something. I had never slept contently at his feet, just to look up expectantly if he showed the slightest intention of moving. P2 had been like Gus's shadow. When I suggested we should not get a new dog, Gus had agreed rationally, intellectually that it was logically better not to have one. I realize now that I had contributed to a huge feeling of loss, not only in his life, but in his identity, and this was exacerbated by the fatal diagnosis.

In the years after P2's death I experienced Gus as becoming more and more like the grumpy, old man in the theatre-box on the Muppet Show, scowling at those around him including the magical Kermit and Miss Piggy. I had regarded the changes in him as the product of three happenings in his life: a delayed reaction to his mother's death; Amelie's move to an apartment near the city, with the result that we had less contact with her and her husband; a physiological change due to nicotine abstinence when he gave up smoking after the operation for the carcinoma on his tongue. I had not considered that he was introspectively seeking solace after P2 was killed. Losing his mother and not being able to enjoy a smoke with Amelie were bad enough, but the intensity of his grieving for the dog had been inconceivable to me.

After P2's death we still enjoyed a mutually satisfying love life. We worked well as a team, financially and otherwise at the cabin and the summer cottage. We managed some amazing, scintillating holidays: marvelling over the Victoria Falls and the Big Five in Zimbabwe, Zambia, Botswana and Namibia; relaxing playfully like dolphins in the pristine, aquamarine waters of the Caribbean; and diving off the sharp, rocky cliffs on the Hellenic island of Hydra into the cobalt-blue balm of the Mediterranean. I still considered Gus to be my best friend as well as my "too good to be true" lover. But there was something that had "changed from major to minor", also before this new diagnosis. Could it be that the previous cell changes in his mouth and now the adenocarcinoma in the pancreas had illicitly, insidiously, stealthily invaded his body over the years, and were the ultimate offenders responsible for his general air of discontent and malaise? In retrospect, we should have bought a new dog in 2006, whatever the inconvenience.

The grandchildren had been made aware of the fact that Gus was extremely ill about two months before his death. We had driven up from Gothenburg to spend time with them at the summer cottage in Kjerringvik. I did all the driving now. Otherwise, we tried to live as normally as possible except for the fact that Gus had no appetite. Everything was a chore

## THE NOON OF MY WOMANHOOD

for him, and eating was perhaps the worst - it made him uncomfortable and he had no taste, nor desire for food.

I had been reading “Bröderna Lejonhjärta” (“The Brothers Lionheart” in English) for Lucas and Katarina. Astrid Lindgren, the famous Swedish author of many amazing children’s books, lets her two main characters, the sickly Karl, aged ten, and nicknamed “Rusky”, suffering from the last stages of tuberculosis and his older brother Johnathan, get stricken by a disastrous house fire in the very first chapter. In his attempt to save his weak, exhausted brother who is fighting for his breath, Jonathan, the stalwart, visionary Lionheart takes Rusky on his back and hops out from a perilously high window. Jonathan is killed by the fall and dies on page nine. Karl gets worse from his pulmonary disease and dies five pages later. Thankfully for me and the children who felt all hope was gone - we were all in inconsolable tears - Jonathan had told Rusky of his vision of a home in a beautiful country, after death. He had imagined this, a kind of metamorphosis, as a way of helping his brother not to be afraid of his impending demise. It lay waiting for them, this glorious, enchanting, relatively untouched country, called Nangijala. I had read this book for Rebecca and Philip when they were just a little older than Lucas and Katarina, and the memory of Gus finding us three in bed sobbing with grief over the fates of the two Lionheart boys, got me thinking more and more about what would happen to Gus after his death. He was so afraid of death, so afraid of dying. Does an after-life exist? How would he tackle it? Would I ever see him again, meet up with him in some kind of Nangijala?

Kjerringvik was renowned for its Summer Shows, mostly because of one particular pop-rock artist, Lars Lillo Stenberg and his group. The group’s first album was released in 1985 and had the title “Kjerringvikdemonen” denoting the group’s strong family ties to this quaint, gorgeous summer place. During the 1990s Lars and his comrades became one of Norway’s favourite groups. The open-air concert venue at Kjerringvik where they performed was impressive, past the wharf leading to the Marina, then left through a cleft in the high rock faces of the promontory to a spreading, grassy slope surrounded by low, smooth, boulders in hues of ochre, pink and deep beige. At the end of the slope was the sea. DeLillos often invited other popular Norwegian artists with the same genre preferences as themselves to join their show. One Norwegian artist whom I learned to like, Jan Eggum, had performed there one summer and I had been intrigued by his song, “En Natt Forbi” (English “A night is over”). Yet another summer I heard Bjørn Eidsvåg’s song “Eg ser” (English “I see”).

Bjørn’s song, “I see”, was currently plaguing me. I sang it for Gus in my heart, not out loud. When I sang the first three verses, I felt it was me who was the first person, the “I” in the song, but when it came to the fourth and final verse, I was confronted with the fact that it wasn’t me who could help Gus:

I see that you’re tired,  
But I can’t walk all the steps for you.

## THE NOON OF MY WOMANHOOD

You must walk them yourself  
But I will walk them with you,  
I will walk them with you.

I see that you're hurting  
But I can't cry all the tears for you.  
You must cry them yourself,  
But I will cry them with you  
I will cry them with you.

I see that you will give up,  
But I can't live your life for you  
You must live it yourself  
But I will live it with you I will live it with you.

I see that you are scared  
But I can't go into death for you  
You must taste it yourself  
But I'll bring Death to life for you I'll bring death to life for you  
I'll bring death to life for you.

(Approved English translation)

Bjørn Eidsvåg had trained at a Norwegian Theological College and was an ordained Lutheran minister. He had worked as a hospital chaplain for some years. This was before his career as a singer and composer reached its zenith. The person in Eidsvåg's song who could "see" Gus, "walk with" Gus, "cry with" Gus, "live with" Gus and had already "died for" Gus, was the risen Jesus, He who had conquered Death and offered Eternal Life to all who believed in Him. The same Jesus whom Gus and Victor had sang so ardently about on Easter Sundays. The same God's Son, whom Gus had sung to for our children at bedtime, an evening prayer, "Kjære Gud, jeg har det godt. Takk for alt som jeg har fått!" ("Dear God, my life is good. Thank you for everything You have bestowed on me!"). Gus always used the Norwegian cradle song that he himself had been lulled into sleep with by his father. In some haunting way it echoed the comfort the the Brothers Lionheart found in Nangijala, the place where Rusky and Jonathan found a life together after death. In the cradle song it was God who would ensure that no matter what, you would never be alone.

I cried out loud:

"I want to see you, Gus! I want to walk with you, Gus!"  
Before you walked so quickly, I could barely keep up, now you walk so slowly, so labouredly.

## THE NOON OF MY WOMANHOOD

“I want to cry with you, Gus!  
I want to live your life with you...  
But I can’t! bring Death to Life for you?”

I wept: “I have no faith!”

I remembered him lying on my thick-piled, Indian carpet in our flat back in Australia, in his shortie pyjamas, looking tenderly at me as I played and had sung. “I’ll do anything for you”. But the lyrics were a bluff, there was nothing I could do. If only you, Gus, my darling, could receive some solace!

Gus called out my name, jolting me out of my reverie. His tone of voice was urgent. I left the children in a hurry. They had started to play another game while I was distracted by my thoughts. I hurried to him. He stood, holding himself up against the door frame to the bathroom. There was fear in his eyes.

“Look, Julie, look at the colour of my urine!”

I looked into the toilet. It looked as though someone had poured freshly brewed coffee into the toilet bowl.

“We must ring the ward at once.” I concluded, trying to keep calm. “We must get hold of your personal contact there.”

“Come to the Oncological Section, Palliative Ward at once,” was their answer.

Within an hour we were packed up, had said tearful good-byes to Philip, Louisa and the children, and were heading in the direction of Horten, a nearby town on the west coast of the Oslo fjord previously known for its marine base. Here we took a car ferry and crossed over to the East coast of the Oslo fjord to Moss. After traversing the rural area surrounding Moss, we drove down the ramp onto the E6 Highway and 20 minutes later we had crossed the border to Sweden. The whole journey to the hospital took about four hours. He was admitted at once.

## Chapter 10 “Jesus loves me, this I know”

### GUS 1943 – 2011: DESOLATION, SILENCE, CHILDHOOD TRAUMAS, FEAR, FAITH

When you have a death sentence hanging over you, you do a lot of serious soul-searching. But it wasn't my death sentence it was Gus'. Why did I feel so paralysed? Why didn't we talk openly about fear, about what happens to us when we die?

This type of silence, this burden of private sorrow without sharing, was something I had been through before with Gus. When we were trying to get pregnant, we talked. But somewhere along the way the sharing of feelings had evaded us. We talked enough about practical, day to day things, and about matters, issues relating to his family, the cabins, but us, the children and their lives, were often shrouded in a truce of silence.

It was during a long period of unemployment for Gus in the mid-1990s that this aura of silence had descended over us like a grey fog. Unlike his first, long period of unemployment in 1988 when Oskar especially, but also his wife Kristina had been stalwart helpers, Gus seemed completely on his own. For Gus unemployment was shameful. I became the main breadwinner. We were forced to sell my car. We had tried to help Rebecca buy a flat but had to sell that too. My heart bled for Gus. Reliving the periods of shame and disillusion in my failed marriage, I felt sick to the stomach, as if it were me. Each time he wasn't called in to an interview, each time he was called in to a second interview but didn't get the job was experienced as defeat, much in the same way that I had experienced not getting pregnant and then getting pregnant and losing the first baby. But if I tried to comfort him as had done for me earlier on, he brushed me off.

In psychological terms this total identification with “the broken or suffering person” is called “projective identification”. Gus' hurting, his shame, his dissatisfaction was projected onto me, and I, being whom I am, couldn't shake it off, dismiss it or respond to his silent plea for help by distancing myself from his pain, acting hopeful and assuring him that it would go over. I just got sucked in with him, into the shitty mire of despair.

Frankly our problems with communication had begun much earlier. It wasn't just the family's culture and its prominent role in our lives that changed the balance between us, Gus seemed to forget that I needed an introductory clarification period in so many areas. Maybe he grew tired of having a novice on his hands, day in day out. Maybe I wasn't good at asking in a way that he could explain things to me. I remember the first time at the cabin that New Year in 1972 the birch trees were heavy with snow and hoar frost. They looked like ice sculptures. I was so captivated by their beauty. For me it was a magical wonderland. I was learning cross country skiing. When these amazing frozen branches

## THE NOON OF MY WOMANHOOD

lined our track, Gus would strike the branch with his skiing pole so that snow sprinkled heavily down, leaving the branches like icy skeletons.

I admonished him softly, "Please, don't do that, Gus! They are so magnificent to look at."

I assumed his action was some kind of childish prank.

He could have remonstrated with, "But Juliet, it is out of consideration for the birches. The branches are so thin, and the weight of the snow is so heavy that the branches will crack and eventually break. Come back in the summertime and see how sad they look with their crappy branches."

But no, he didn't say a word. He just did what I asked, like an obedient child, and the poor birches suffered as a result. I felt mortified and sad later on, when someone told me the reason why. Why hadn't I posed my wish to save the ice sculptures as a question: "Why do you do that, Gus?", asked in a friendly, interested fashion, inviting him to explain.

On the other hand, maybe he hadn't consciously thought about why he did it. Maybe he learned it as a child skiing with Victor: Victor would strike the trees, and he would be showered with a snowfall of ice and snowflakes. It was fun. Maybe he had never asked. There were also other areas where he failed to give me "insider" knowledge, and I felt like an idiot when I did something that could have been avoided. Maybe he felt I would learn better by making my own mistakes or tackling my own issues with misunderstanding. The issues were always connected to language or culture.

The period of unemployment passed. After about six months of unwelcome idleness, he got a senior position as a civil servant. I was so happy for the security of the job, and he was too, but he couldn't help himself complaining about the wage reduction compared to private enterprise.

About this time, I read something that was just so gloriously honest and liberating. It was uttered by someone who was hurting:

"Sometimes I just want someone to hug me and say, 'You are going to be okay. Here is chocolate and 6 million dollars'."

In hindsight I wish that Gus and I had been able to capture and retain some of the mirth and light-heartedness of that sort of optimism. Now in the face of his death sentence my academic rationality continued to block this kind of platitude. Maybe platitudes are kind in certain circumstances. The one who is suffering is not looking for an analysis of the whys and wherefores of reactions, affect and the like. He or she would just love a good hug, chocolates and a million dollars, if not six. I should have bought Gus a huge box of chocolates. He had always loved chocolate, craved for it. And now that his weight loss was beginning to be noticeable, the chocolates would probably have stalled the trend, just for a little while.

## THE NOON OF MY WOMANHOOD

When Gus as a tiny child he suffered badly from eczema. Sofia who had desperately wanted a girl as a little sister for her first-born boy, had even painted the baby's room pink before Gus arrived. In the old days, there were no known medical ways of determining the gender of a child before its birth. There were old wives' tales about pointed, bulging abdomens predicting a boy, and rounded abdomens a girl. In Sofia's case her round abdomen produced Gus, and not the baby girl she desired. He had to be content with his pink room. They didn't bother to paint it over. At least it was all set for when Amelie arrived, but by then they were refugees in Sweden, and never came back to Oslo.

Gus developed his infantile eczema very early. I don't recall being told of any precipitating event, but in my sister, Gillian's case, my mother was convinced that Gillian's eczema was brought on because she, my mother, had deliberately allowed her baby to cry herself to sleep.

This was on the advice of some well-meaning Health Nurse when my mother complained of difficulties getting Gillian to settle. The next morning my Mother was shocked to find Gillian blazing red, covered with minute blisters, an angry, red rash all over her tiny body.

Gus' rash was just as bad as Gillian's, maybe worse as it also affected his hands. Sofia had to spend hours with all the terrible, thick, sticky ointments they used in those days to try to alleviate the itching from the blisters. His tiny hands had to be bound in special cotton mittens at night when he slept so that didn't scratch himself to bleeding-point. It was Olav who sang the Norwegian cradle song, a prayer, to try and comfort the itching baby boy:

"Du er stor, du holder av meg, Kjære Gud, Gå aldri fra meg." (You are Great, You care for Me, Dear God, Never leave. Me!") (My translation)

"Jesus loves me this I know" is an English equivalent cradle song, a cry for closeness to Almighty God, especially in times of danger:

"Little ones to Him belong.  
They are weak but He is strong."

Could this cradle song be his comfort now? But so much water had gone under the bridge between Gus's birth during the German occupation of Norway, and now his 68th year. I could sense the fear and the trauma of his family's flight, under cover of night to the Swedish border: Gus being carried on Olav's arm, pregnant Sofia dragging her tired, five-year-old son. The courier from the Underground Resistance, that Olav had assisted, had met them at the train station in Halden, hurrying them along on foot the 15-20 kilometres through the forests of Southeastern Norway to the border and safety in politically neutral Sweden. 16.000 Norwegians who were in danger of being discovered for their undercover activities fled to Sweden in 1944. I am sure Olav sang this cradle song with heart-wrenching fervour, beseeching God to save Gus and them all from the constant danger of their Nazi rulers, and now again during their flight from an impending arrest warrant. Only

## THE NOON OF MY WOMANHOOD

when they were ensconced in the security of Sofia's family, could they relax. But everything they had built up in their home in Oslo, Norway, was lost.

At four years of age Gus was also asthmatic. With Amelie just two years younger than Gus, it was a handful for Sofia. Two years after the war ended Olav's father and mother were visiting Gothenburg from Norway. They observed the amount of attention Gus's ailments demanded, so the military minded grandfather, he had a Major's rank in the Norwegian Army, decided to intervene and made the following announcement:

"A stay away from home, a period at a Sanatorium will do Gustav the world of good. He needs to get rid of his cry-baby tendencies, a cure for his bed-wetting, his asthma and eczema as well."

Victor and his wife were inclined to agree as Sofia was at the end of her tether tending to Gus' skin and being wakened up night after night by his wheezing. Only Olav was in doubt.

Dutifully, four weeks later Sofia and Gus were on the Central Railway Station in Gothenburg to meet the Head Nurse from the Sanatorium for children with Asthma and Allergy. The institution was north of Karlstad in beautiful, serene surroundings. The staff was primarily doctors and nurses in addition to a House Mother and her staff. Gus was booked in there for six weeks. Sofia handed her shy, little son, he had always been undersized as far as height and weight were concerned, to the tall, forbidding woman in her matron's uniform. She had a male assistant with her, so he took Gus' bag, and the matron then gathered Gus and the three other children who were also patients in her voluptuous arms and drew them with her into the train carriage.

Gus described the incident as a vague memory of being a package, when his mother just handed him over to this awesome lady. The critical memory he had from his stay there, however, had nothing to do with missing his mother, or longing to go home. It had to do with injustice and a box of chocolates.

Gus and the other children received letters from home, and one day a huge parcel came in the post for Gus. He was elated when it was handed to him. It was from Grandfather, Victor, and his beloved grandmother. What could it be? He tore off the brown paper and to his delight the parcel contained a beautifully wrapped box of chocolates. On the lid of the box there were pictures of all the delicacies that were inside. Gus lifted the lid, gasped in wonderment and was about to choose, when he was intercepted by a harsh voice:

"Oh no you don't! Who do you think you are? Such presents are to be shared. All the children can take one each now, and then I will take charge of the box and everyone can eat one each day until they are finished."

Gus hesitated, feeling this was unfair. They were his chocolates, Grandfather and Granny had meant them for him!

The House Mother strode toward him: "Come now Gustaf, hand them round!"

## THE NOON OF MY WOMANHOOD

Gus who was used to being called G.G. at home, was mortified by the House Mother's tone of voice and the emphasis she put on what was not his given name, Gustaf with and "f" and not a "v". He was also seething inside: Seething about the injustice of it all. This beautiful present, this wonderful comfort from his loving grandparents being stolen from him. He refused to eat one. He sulked for the rest of the day, and when he eventually allowed his feelings free rein, cried himself to sleep.

This incident never left Gus. He was clingy, especially of his mother when he got home, but at least he didn't wet the bed anymore. His eczema was as bad as ever, his lungs much better, and he overcompensated as far as Amelie was concerned, in psychological language it is known as "reaction formation". Instead of envying her as would have been natural when she was so obviously his mother's favourite, Gus imitated his mother, showering Amelie with his kisses, giving her toys, admiring her achievements. This was unconscious behaviour, but it had its effect. His mother adored him for being the admiring older brother of their little princess. Of course, Amelie loved him back, followed him round like a shadow and this gave him confidence and courage. He was her hero. And this lasted through childhood and teenage years until it was disturbed by Gus' being sent to Germany by his father to learn the trade of his grandfather's business before starting his engineering degree. Amelie took a year in USA at the same time with her girlfriend, Klara. When she got home, she got engaged and married. And Gus was pushed out of the nest by Sofia and packed off to Australia.

In Australia he was free, free to unfold, a metamorphosis. He still had some eczema but had grown completely out of his asthma. He was 179 cm tall, broad shouldered, slim built and lithe. Australia had opened her door to him. He embraced it. The longing for a woman to love and care for him and him alone was still buried deep down inside him. For Gus this came true when he met me. He was dependent on me in so many ways in Australia, and we had such unadulterated fun together. He was homesick on occasions, but his adventurousness which had not had sufficient opportunity for ventilation in Sweden found fulfillment in Australia, and the feeling of achievement he experienced at work kept his desire to return home at bay, at least for a while.

The tables turned when we reached Sweden. It didn't take long before he adapted to the family's fairly rigid and traditional routines regarding meals, walks, talks and economical dispositions. The concealment of my "true identity" meant that I had little to proffer to the development of an "us", apart from the family. Holidays were exclusively with the family, either in Sälen or Kjerringvik, beautiful places, but little novelty or adventure. It was a secure life.

Early on Gus may have experienced my dependence and my admiration of him, whom I needed desperately, as resembling the devotion Amelie showered on him. She still doted on him, and we four, she and her husband and Gus and I spent lots of time together. I liked her husband a lot, so it was easy. But later, when my desire to be open about my previous

## THE NOON OF MY WOMANHOOD

life-experience forced me to find satisfaction in other areas than in the bosom of the family, Gus and I seemed to develop in juxtaposition to each other in several key areas of life. Sometimes it was beneficial, but it also created conflict especially as far as the children were concerned.

Gus had been marvellous with them when they were small, but the more they demanded from him, either rightfully or unreasonably, the harder his attitude to them became. Driving them to different activities was always a source of conflict: It was always my job to drive them. If I couldn't, then they had to take the bus. Gus saw no legitimate reason why he should not be able to come home from work and relax with his dry martini. He was adamant about not driving when he had taken a drink.

At age eleven, Philip desperately wanted to join a Taekwondo Club. Fortunately a boy from Rebecca's class had seen the film "Karate Kid" at the cinema with our children, and he also wanted to join the training. The club was in a very dodgy suburb on the other side of town, but the route our bus took was such that they didn't need to change buses and would arrive directly outside. Training started at 6pm. Gus was adamant that if Philip were to join, neither he nor I would drive. It would disturb our relaxation and our dinner. The bus was their alternative. The other boy's father had the same attitude. So, off the two boys went after an early tea, "rain, hail, snow or shine" on the bus to Taekwondo.

It was the makings of Philip. Although Taekwondo doesn't teach one to attack or have real physical contact. It teaches physical control over one's body and the art of defence, and it caused the two growing boys to exude a confidence that left the previous bullies at a loss about how to tackle them. The bullying stopped. Philip gained their respect, and he had an ally and friend in the class over him as well. To this day however he hates the guys who bullied him. I think Philip gained Gus's respect too, and Philip became a bit of a "self-made man" from that day on. It seemed that he became impervious to the fact that he seldom felt love or pride in the eyes of his father. The love and pride may have been there, but it was unexpressed, unspoken.

Philip's wedding was a dilemma for Gus: Louisa wasn't his choice, in spite of her obvious good looks, talents and their joy and love for each other. It had something to do with her dialect, a different intonation, a stress misplaced on certain syllables. I knew that people in Stockholm looked down their noses at people like Gus and his family because of the way they spoke in Gothenburg. Maybe the Gothenburg dialect was deemed superior to Småland. I couldn't understand or accept this attitude and dismissed Gus' anathema regarding her regional dialect as petty and unjust. I had a good command of the Swedish language and was even writing an academic book in Swedish, ordered and assisted by a University Publishing House, but my pronunciation would never be as good as Louisa's.

"Are you a Dane?" some people would ask when they didn't know me. They must have imagined they heard a slight Danish intonation. Or "Where do you come from in America?"

## THE NOON OF MY WOMANHOOD

Here someone must have heard an American rhythm or cadence in my fashion of speaking. No one had ever thought to ask if I were an Australian. The queries reminded me that I was still an alien. Like Sting, “a legal alien”, because of “the way he talked, an Englishman in New York”.

The ridiculous thing was that Gus really liked Louisa, she was attentive, kind and good fun and had an uncanny way of getting around him. If he criticized her in any way, she bounced back. She never cowered or was obsequious. Quite the contrary she treated him with slightly amused respect, and he her, so his disappointment with Philip’s choice seemed both unreasonable and unkind. It brought me back to his mother’s reproach when we were dating: asking Gus to reconsider marrying me, suggesting that I was a conniving, older woman and that the girl over the road was a much better cultural choice. What was one of the most exciting and supreme days of my life, Louisa’s and Philip’s wedding, was for Gus a disappointment. During the celebrations at the wedding reception Philip announced, without prior warning, that he had changed his name from the typically Danish surname, Gudesen, (the “sen” at the end = son of) to Spencer, my surname, and that Louisa had now become “Mrs. Spencer”. I was dumfounded but must admit being a bit flattered. At the same time, I felt sorry for Gus. I was glad my mother-in-law was too confused by dementia to attend the wedding. When, a couple of years later, Philip and Louisa moved to Norway, to the town of Sandefjord, where he was offered a leading position in the Norwegian Customs for the region Oslofjord West, it was the last straw for Gus. I think he felt his ancestral heritage was rejected and what little influence he had had over Philip’s life had dissolved in the Skagerak that now physically divided us.

For Rebecca, the hardness Gus sometimes exhibited, was related to punctuality. He had always had a soft spot for Rebecca: he had wanted a girl, and he got his girl. But when she started expressing her career desires, and dating, the path was not so plain. It was a tradition in our family when the children moved out that they were invited to dinner on Sundays at 5 p.m. Boyfriends and girlfriends were also invited if these were on the scene.

Gus and I had dedicated ourselves over the years to being the perfect hosts. Our dinner parties for sixteen with neighbours, family and friends, were renowned. We held them at least twice a year. These dinner parties involved three course meals at our extended table in the large dining room with Victor’s dinner service, crystal and silver. We used our own and borrowed from either Sofia or Amelie to set an elaborate table. We supplied plenty of drinks and encouraged dancing after dinner. This was viewed by many of our regular guests as “an invitation one couldn’t refuse”. Gus put his heart into Sunday dinners in the same generous and particular fashion as the parties. It was his idea of being a loving father and a generous provider.

However, Gus was precise about the schedule of family dinners. On one occasion, Rebecca, then nineteen, and her boyfriend hadn’t arrived by 5.20 p.m., despite being invited for a 5 p.m. start. Gus had timed the meal for 5.30 p.m., leaving 30 minutes for pre-

## THE NOON OF MY WOMANHOOD

dinner drinks. This late arrival meant that the Brussel sprouts would be overdone, and the roast beef would be cooked to well done instead of medium rare. There were no mobile phones in those days, so he was seething with anger when they rushed in and slung their coats on the settee in the hall. Gus felt their being late as a personal affront, maybe rejection: that they failed to value the time and effort he put into his culinary delights. Of course it was his hobby, not theirs.

They didn't want, expect nor need the fastidiousness with which he prepared these meals. They were more than happy with a hot dog on Saturdays, which was another ritualized meal of Gus'. In our home, certain traditions were sacred: Fridays between 6 p.m. and 9 p.m. were reserved for shrimps served with the best of soft, white bread and butter, mayonnaise, sliced lemon, a lettuce leaf for colour, and white wine. Saturdays were for hot dogs at 4 p.m. The hot dogs were not served in bread rolls, but in traditional Norwegian potato wraps, served with crispy onion flakes and ketchup, mustard and beer. The use of potato wraps instead of bread was inherited from Olav's traditions. Gus and I would often have snails or something equally as exotic at around 8.00 p.m. for supper on Saturdays. Sundays, of course, were reserved for the perfect, three course meal with all the trimmings for the children and their friends, and for Sofia, who came regularly to Sunday dinner after Olav died.

This particular Sunday, when Rebecca and her friend were late, Gus gave vent to his anger. He was livid. Rebecca and her friend were not only astonished by his reaction but totally aroused to fight back. After screaming profanities at him, they turned heel and left. Gus and I sat there miserably at the beautifully set dining table, eating the spoiled dinner. He was fuming late into the evening, I was heart-broken about losing my daughter's and her friend's respect because of Gus's reaction to their tardiness. It was so humiliating and unnecessary. We didn't even inquire about the reason why they were late. Those twenty-five minutes caused lasting damage.

The rocky road between Gus and the children smoothed out temporarily when both Rebecca and Philip left to study in other places. Gus had me to himself, and we followed our routine which also included being very supportive of me. He never appeared to envy me my job, my writing nor my position. He seemed really proud of me and extremely helpful, taking over all the shopping and chores that he could so that my career could flourish. Being realistic, I do believe he was delighted with the wage I earned and the revenue I brought into our joint account. He loved it when we took our "love journeys for two" to Switzerland, from Basel to Lucerne, Cape Town and the Garden Route to Port Elizabeth in South Africa, Iceland, New York and Egypt, from the Red Sea to Luxor, the river cruise on the Nile being a highlight.

But when the grandchildren arrived, especially the first born, Lucas, it was another story. Gus couldn't seem to understand my joy over Lucas' arrival. He competed with the little cherub for my favour. It was confusing and tiring. I was back to where I had been with our

## THE NOON OF MY WOMANHOOD

children earlier on, forced into doing the emotional splits: defending Philip when Gus was demanding and unreasonable, or Rebecca when she was playing in some theatre production he didn't care for. And defending Gus when the children criticized him. The only time he seemed really proud of Rebecca was when she featured over a long period in a popular Soap Opera set in Stockholm, and when she performed in the musical "Cabaret".

Not having my parents or siblings close by, I had so wanted to build my own happy and harmonious family, a community of my own. When I read "The Corrections" by Jonathan Franzen (2001) I could see myself in Edith, the mother. Edith had a dream that her three, grown-up, very independent and unique children would always come home happily, willing to celebrate Christmas together with their Mum and Dad. It never happened for Edith. Nor did it happen for me.

Gus, as a husband, was true to the form he revealed earlier in our lives. He was reliable, economically responsible, and trustworthy: When a woman engineer at work took a shine to him, he organized for me to come to lunch and meet his staff, including her. He didn't admit to it, but I understood his strategy: he was showing me off and indicating that he "ate at home". I never doubted his faithfulness, and he never seemed jealous of me when I danced so intimately with his friends. I myself had swooned over a couple of male colleagues, but I would never harm or disappoint Gus, so I only used my fantasies about them to liven up my sex life with Gus. I wanted Gus, I would never leave Gus, but I could imagine the colleague in bed to fire me on when Gus and I made love.

Now he was sick and afraid. There was a lot of blood in his urine. The specialist admitted him to hospital, and that night he was struck by severe pain in his spinal area, so they kept him on the ward for a couple of days. We had already used up nearly five months of his six-month sentence.

I didn't know if Gus had been christened as a baby. I imagined so. Rebecca and Philip were christened in the long, ethereal, heirloom robe I had tucked away in my camphor chest shipped from Australia. It had come from Durham, England, with my maternal grandmother, Peggy, and miraculously survived the fire at our family home, because my Mum's much younger brother had his first and only child, a son that year and had borrowed the christening robe for the occasion. Gus was at least confirmed in our local church as a fifteen-year-old. Could there be solace for Gus in Christianity? I knew he was afraid of being alone on the journey ahead. I couldn't die with him. I could follow him as long as he still breathed, but when life went out of his plagued body, could Jesus accompany him, like in Bjørn Eidsvåg's song?

I spoke to one of the palliative nurses, Pernille, to ask her advice about the hospital chaplain. Would it or would it not be appropriate for him to visit Gus? She was the night nurse for him while he had been in hospital these past few days. She confided in me that she had spoken to Gus about faith in those moments when he was distressed and in pain during the nights.

## THE NOON OF MY WOMANHOOD

"Juliet," she said, "He has a childish faith. Of course, you can ask the hospital chaplain to call in on him."

"What do you mean by childish faith, or child-like faith? I like the latter better," I said.

"Child-like faith is the same, the confidence or trust in God that small children inherently have in their parents: The feeling that the grown-ups are sort of invincible. They can manage everything and supply every need. Child-like faith is a boundless confidence in God the Father, that everything will be all right." She smiled, and continued: "Jesus said, 'Let the little children come to me and forbid them not: for to them belongs the kingdom of heaven'. One should not despise Child-like faith." (Mathew, 19,13-15)

Her eyes were full of sympathy, as if she shared my fear, my anxiety about not knowing. As part of their professional training, palliative nurses are trained to talk about life and death when patients broach the subject. I was so afraid of scaring Gus by asking a chaplain to visit and bless him. I had imagined that for Gus it would seem like the last absolution before the death penalty was executed. I put the idea out of my head for a while.

## Chapter 11 “Tonight I celebrate my love for you!”

### **GUS AND JULIET: RALLYING, CELEBRATING, DECLINE, BLESSING, ENDINGS**

Gus's weight loss was extreme. His trousers hung around him like billowing bags and his stick-like arms and legs were weak. His face was worn. They prescribed free nutritional drinks, but most of them were milky or milk-based, and he had never drunk milk of his own free will and didn't like ice cream or yoghurt either: "Milk is for calves" was his maxim. The staff at the palliative ward didn't question his choices. He had been discharged five days after discovering the blood in his urine, but the outpatient clinic did everything in their power with cortisone treatment to keep him alive until he achieved the one goal he had in life: to celebrate my 70th birthday before he died.

Early in January Gus had booked the beautiful clubhouse at the Sailing Club for a Sunday lunch for 50-60 people. My birthday was the last day of August. I had celebrated my 60th at the same venue. I had worn the same, full-length, sleeveless, buttercup yellow dress, with a becoming jacket that I had bought for Philip's and Louisa's wedding the year before. Philip and Louisa had their wedding in a mediaeval, stone church in the Småland countryside where Louisa had been christened, and her parents married. The bridal procession went through the green and yellow cornfields with a fiddler in a local folk costume heralding our progress toward the Community Centre. Louisa's uncle had erected a huge arch over the entrance, decorated with fresh, crisp branches of Rowan berries with their lively, bright reds and greens. It was beautiful, welcoming the 90 excited guests. For me this had been the most glorious day, and my 60th the following year was a good runner-up.

A memorable speech at my 60th, after Gus's moving proclamation of mutual dependence and affection, was one that related to my career. It was given by the only colleague from the University whom I invited, Sam, an American who had lived in Norway even longer than me. The invite was not because of him, though I liked him a lot, and had used him as consultant for the book I had written on professionalism. It was because he was married to the current manager of the NGO where I was now the Chairperson. Several other women from the NGO were among the guests and it would have been unnatural to omit her. He made a witty speech about the couple's daily conversation, at breakfast, dinner and supper, where I always seemed to pop up, being both their bosses. "Rather tiresome!", he remarked. And here he was now spending his longed for, free Saturday evening with me!

My 70th birthday was ironically enough exactly 6 months after 1st March, the day the professor had predicted as the proverbial deadline for Gus's life, macabre as it might

## THE NOON OF MY WOMANHOOD

sound. The professor had of course no idea of when my birthday was, but Gus was quick to inform his own palliative specialist that he wanted to celebrate me on that day. Dinners and parties were a part of Gus' love-language and as such were an integral part of his personality. The thought of celebrating was however abhorrent to me. I had no wish to celebrate it. I felt more like crying than celebrating. But Gus was insistent. He agreed to cancel the booking he had made at the Sailing Club. My birthday heralded Autumn and early Autumn is beautiful in Sweden: Our garden would be full of roses in all shapes and colours. I was so proud of my rose-bed. Unlike Olav who specialized in Champs-Elysées, I cultivated a variety of hues and shapes, Ingrid Bergman, Peace, Queen Elisabeth and Golden Celebration being favourites. Our tall, voluptuous, blue hydrangeas would also be at their peak. "We can have a Garden Party", was Gus's conclusion. I showed so little enthusiasm, which he interpreted to be my lack of faith in his enterprise, i.e. survival until after the date. He engaged Rebecca in the project instead of me. I was already in a type of mourning: mourning the future we would never share.

Of course, once they had sat the wheels in motion, I had to get on the figurative bandwagon. Rebecca and Gus had sent out the sweet, modest invitations before the summer holidays, but Rebecca was now busy in Stockholm with a musical she was playing in. She had neither time nor opportunity to order a tent big enough for 50 guests, decide on the menu, choose a caterer, or anything else for that matter. A crucial decision was whether to order a floor for the tent. The tent company strongly advised that we consider and be prepared for rain, both before and during the event. The large round tables and chairs that we would be hiring from the same company, would risk becoming unstable on humid earth covered with wet grass. A wooden floor with tightly fitted slats was the solution.

The Sunday that I had anticipated with fear and dread, the celebration of my birthday, dawned. My mood was dark. The weather was dark. It was pouring with rain. Gus said he felt awful. I tried to collect my thoughts and gather the threads of the plans for the day together.

"You just stay in bed, the guests can come up one by one and say 'hello' to you", I suggested.

He didn't protest, just turned his back to me. I wondered if he sobbed. He was a pitiful figure in constant pain in spite of the epidural morphine pump they had supplied him with. Rebecca rang at 10 a.m. to ask how we were going.

"Pretty awful", I said echoing Gus's sentiment.

"Pappa doesn't think he can get up for the party. Can't you come early, darling, and after you've talked to him, you can decide what we ought to do. I've put his new trousers, you know, the ones I bought at the teenage store on the chair. He has tried them on. They were long-legged enough, so he agreed he could wear them. His shirt, tie and blazer are

## THE NOON OF MY WOMANHOOD

there too. They are far too big for him, but never mind, they'll do. Do you think Armand can come early too?"

Armand and Rebecca had lived together for about six years, and after they broke up, they remained good friends and colleagues, so he was invited. They came at 12 noon and went up immediately to Gus. My sister, Claire had rung earlier. I had asked her to pray about the rain when we spoke during a downpour on Friday. Her first question was:

"How is the weather?"

"Pretty awful" was my non-emotional, now standard reply.

"I'll pray for you, darling Julie, and the rain," she said.

Before Rebecca and Armand arrived, the weather had turned. At exactly 11.30 a.m. the rain stopped, the clouds cleared and the sun came shining through. By 1 p.m. when the caterers arrived, I was already in the throes of putting the garden furniture back out onto the terrace, now dried up in the late August sun. I plumped up the cushions and rescued some geraniums that I had hidden to protect them from the downpour and placed them to their advantage in their usual corners.

The garden was a delightful scene: Roses of all colours were blooming. The earth between the roses nourished a mass of blue delphiniums and long-stemmed, white, Marguerite daisies with egg-yolk yellow centres. Some golden rod in the corner was just starting to burst out of the tiny green pods. The massive blue hydrangeas stood like freshly groomed sentinels guarding the stone stairway from the terrace down to the lawn where the white tent shimmered in the sunlight. All this beauty was a distraction, in glaring contrast to the heavy weight that had taken permanent residency in the pit of my stomach.

I had spent hours from when I woke at 6 a.m. arranging a variety of delicate, garden blossoms, ivy and maidenhair to be centre-pieces on the eight round tables. The white, damask tablecloths I had bought were a perfect fit. All our best crockery from Victor, and the crystal we acquired over the years were a perfect accompaniment. I managed to roll up two sides of the tent, one on the long side that opened out onto the garden, and one at the end facing the flat, green lawn where the guests could enjoy an aperitif.

Rebecca had called down to say that I had better start getting dressed, Gus was now fully clothed in his regalia and wanted to come down and inspect the dining room in the tent. Typical Gus, true to his inherent love of being a good host. Armand and Rebecca took a good grip on Gus, one under each arm and helped him down the winding staircase from the first to the ground floor. The caterers had done a good job of displaying the sumptuous buffet in our spacious dining room. Gus nodded his approval. The next stop was the tent. Rebecca and Armand continued to escort Gus. He was interested in the place cards, where people would be sitting. True to form he meticulously straightened a knife here and a fork there. It looked as if he were contented until he noticed that beside him was an empty seat. Why? He seemed perturbed. I explained that Kristina had suggested reserving

## THE NOON OF MY WOMANHOOD

a spare seat beside him so that our guests could take turns to sit and chat with him, as he would not be physically strong enough to move around the table and mingle freely. He seemed to understand the meaning of this, averted his eyes from my gaze and was silent, but agreed to the arrangement. Philip, who was toast master, had been prepped to suggest that guests who wished to have a personal chat with Gus could come in turn to the place reserved beside him.

Subsequently, Rebecca placed us in the library by the fireplace in two of the chairs we had inherited from Victor. Gus was frail and pale, but I was glad his clothes disguised his emaciated body. When the Home Nurses came to shower him - we relied on them because of his epidural morphine pump - I could hardly look at his body. He reminded me of photos I had seen of Mahatma Gandhi after he free-willingly had been on the longest of one of his eighteen hunger strikes. He called them 'Freedom fasts'. Gandhi had fasted for twenty-one days and apart from his still vibrant eyes he looked as if a puff of wind could blow him apart, just like a dandelion's whitish grey seed head when you give it a good blowing. But Gus' eyes weren't vibrant, there was excruciating pain, fear and exhaustion in his eyes.

My mind flash backed to a young boy I had as a patient on the ward when I was working with Prof Jay. He suffered from a critical and seemingly incurable anorexia. The first time I saw him my mind wandered back to the horrific pictures of those victims of Nazi terror whom the British 11th Army Division had liberated from Bergen-Belsen prison camp in 1945. Skeletons draped in ashen skin, with dark, sunken, meaningless eyes. My patient died, but before he did so, he gave the staff a huge box of chocolates. We all cried. We had so longed that he had been health prone enough to wish to partake himself. Now my lithe, vital, "dancing on the ceiling" Gus was reduced to a Bergen-Belsen prisoner, not by any foreign, human enemy, but by the body's enemy, cancerous growths that eat you up from the inside.

I was aching all over as we sat there like mummies ready to welcome the guests. Aching outside, aching inside, my smile was plastered on my face as if set in cement. Why would I want to celebrate my own existence when part of me is dying. Gus was dying, almost dead, and here we were pretending. But I had to do it, for his sake. He was not dead, not yet. I had to rally for his sake. And when the guests started filing through, escorted by Rebecca so that they didn't get out of line or talk too much frivolous talk, he brightened and greeted them graciously. I also smiled sweetly and gratefully to all who filed by, giving us their hands, their gifts and best wishes.

Philip, Louisa and their three children, Lucas, Katarina and Freya sat at our table. Freya sitting in her highchair meant that we had room for the empty chair. Philip did a good job as toastmaster and introduced the idea of the empty chair for alternating guests. It was an ingenious suggestion and one after another the guests came and sat down quietly but talked brightly. Many confided in Gus what their friendship or relationship had meant

## THE NOON OF MY WOMANHOOD

personally for them. Gus seemed both touched and temporarily gladdened by these private reassurances of his place in their hearts and lives. There were several speeches with well-chosen and moving words to in my honour. Then it was Gus' turn. Gus managed to get on his feet. His voice was almost gone. The doctors had explained that it was the acid bile regurgitated from his dysfunctional liver that burnt his throat and vocal cords. His voice was reduced to a hoarse whisper, but he was intent on making a speech to me.

He stood up for the duration of his speech, and I was so afraid he would fall. He said such loving things. The tent was so quiet, and I hoped they could hear his whispered words. His eyes were bleary, wan with exhaustion, but he thanked me for our lives together. This was the celebration of our lives he said. I broke down, the tears were streaming down my face. I tried to rally for his sake and smiled up at him and took his hand. He sat down, and everyone applauded wildly. I could see that he was satisfied. Everyone looked at me, waiting for me to respond.

I bent over and kissed him, whispering "Thank you, my darling Gus!". I stood up and proposed a toast to him, the speechmaker. Everyone stood and cheered for him and then they sang 'Happy Birthday' for me.

One of our good neighbours, Susanna, who knew no boundaries called out,  
"Sing for us, Julie!".....

I shook my head, bewildered by her suggestion, but then others joined in,  
"Yes, Sing for us, Julie!!"

Still shaking my head in disbelief that anyone could imagine that I could sing, I stood up and sang Charlie Chaplin's poignant song with tears filling my eyes:

"SMILE, tho' your heart is aching,  
SMILE, even tho' it's breaking,  
When there are clouds in the sky, You'll get by,  
If you SMILE through your fear and sorrow,  
SMILE and maybe tomorrow...."

I got to "tomorrow" and the whole reality of our dreadful situation flooded over me. My voice broke, I couldn't sing a stanza more. I sat down, and the same neighbour led the cheering.

The day after the party, yesterday's tomorrow, Gus was admitted to the palliative ward. As was the custom with dying patients I was also admitted and could share his large hospital room with him. Our two separate beds were pushed close together. His eczema sensitive skin didn't like the hospital bedclothes, so I drove off home to fetch our own satin sheets, pillowcases and duvet covers. He was gaunt and sorrowful, so much so that he felt he was

## THE NOON OF MY WOMANHOOD

unrecognizable. Three of his women colleagues wanted to visit, but he rejected their plea to come. He didn't want them remembering him in his present state.

I hadn't really understood before that the specialists had prescribed enormous doses of cortisone for Gus just to keep him alive and well enough for my birthday. Now he was on the dying list, no special treatment, just like everyone else whose days are numbered. They were not unkind, but they explained the realities of the situation. He now had morphine released through the two epidural pumps to ease the debilitating pain that came mostly from the cancer near the spine. We both knew we were in the waiting room for Death.

Alone with the specialist I asked, "How long?"

"Ten days maybe, as long as he is still conscious, we will do all we can to keep Gustav alive, but when he goes into a coma, there is no more we can do, then we take away life support, and just continue with pain alleviation."

The first week of "our" admission to hospital was a routine of monotony. Gus became more and more depressed as he grew weaker. After five days he could no longer get out of bed. There was little I could say, but I was beside him. He let me hold his hand and I stroked his beautiful forehead. I had always loved his forehead. They put in a catheter for urine, and he screamed in pain like a dog being maltreated. The nurse explained that they had to do it while he was still conscious. I felt so helpless, useless. I spoke with Pernille again, I had decided I wanted to talk to a hospital chaplain. I knew from an experience just before my father died that being in a coma doesn't mean that a person can't hear. Dad had himself answered a question my brother asked over his comatose body, so I was afraid that if Gus were in a coma during a visit from a chaplain, that it might be a terrifying experience for him.

Pernille said that the chaplain usually came on Thursdays, so he wouldn't come again before next week. On Sunday I went to a church service held on the treatment ward in the other wing. But if the gospel was so boring and meaningless as the woman minister presented it, then it was nothing for Gus nor me. I had thought of asking her advice and maybe suggesting if she could accompany me to meet Gus but decided against it. I'd rather wait until Thursday.

On Monday, Gus' lead specialist wanted to see me. She said that everything indicated that Gus would be in a coma by Wednesday, and that he would probably die two to three days after that.

"I hope he holds out until Saturday," I cried out. "Rebecca can't come before, but she's taking the bus from Stockholm, late Friday afternoon."

Philip was driving from Sandefjord by car and taking a ferry to Strömstad and then down to Gothenburg tomorrow, Tuesday. He turned up late afternoon, and Gus really brightened up when he saw him.

## THE NOON OF MY WOMANHOOD

“What would you like, Pappa?” Philip asked.

“Cured ham and beer” was Gus’ reply.

I was astonished, amazed and perhaps a little hurt. I had asked him a million times if there was anything he would like. The answer was always “No, nothing.” The hospital kitchen also supplied beer if desired.

I rushed out to the shop in the hospital grounds and bought beer, cured ham, some cheese and tomatoes as well. Gus had barely eaten since my party, but he partook, if somewhat meagrely, and washed it happily down with the cold beer. Philip had organized for us all to Skype with Rebecca when she had finished with rehearsals for the day.

There in the hospital room, with our twin beds, our bed linen from home, Gus in his own pyjamas and Philip beside us, we talked to Rebecca on Philip’s PC screen. We saw the flat she had been allocated for the production, heard how she was going, and how Philip and family were managing. Lucas was now going on six, Katarina, nearly four and Freya nine months. It was finally the family togetherness that I had longed for, for so long. In our mutual sorrow and fear of impending separation, we were together.

Next morning, Gus didn’t wake up. He wasn’t dead, but in the coma they had predicted. I was so grateful for our previous evening. Philip turned up to say good-bye to me and kissed Gus good-bye for all time, before he set off back to Norway. There were tears in both Philip’s and my eyes as we waved until he was out of sight. I sat by Gus all day. Amelie came also. She had always been welcome. They had been booked on a cruise for her husband’s 70th birthday, he was a week or so younger than me, but they had cancelled their trip.

That day sitting beside Gus who would never talk to me again, I took stock. I was not an atheist, nor an agnostic. I had adopted my own version of humanism: I believed in the inherent value of the human beings with individual and social potential, and who are endowed with the ability and responsibility to lead ethical lives recognizing moral values founded on the knowledge of human needs and experience. But unlike other humanists, who believe in a life of personal fulfillment aspiring to the Greater Good without theism or other divine intervention, I had always kept a window open to God. This was perhaps obvious to Gus who often quipped when I would read a leather-bound bible my Dad had put into my hand on the ship at our send-off from Australia. When I had periods of heartache because of the children or a crisis at work, I would often resort to this copy of the Bible, which after forty years of furtive reading, had become rather tattered and torn. Gus’s laconic remark was always the same:

“Juliet, you are such a slow reader! When will you ever be finished with that book?”

Then he would grin magnanimously at me, put his thoroughly-read newspaper down on the floor, and turn out the bedside lights.

## THE NOON OF MY WOMANHOOD

The next day, Thursday, Pernille came rushing into the room:

“Chaplain Mads is here,” she exclaimed, “do you want to talk with him?”

“Yes,” I was as eager as she was, “but not here. I want to talk with him first, somewhere where Gus can’t hear us.”

Pernille ushered me into a tiny office behind the reception desk. Chaplain Mads was already there, his big frame hiding most of the chair he sat on from view. I sat on the twin of his chair. There was no table between us, the desk was pushed back along the end wall. He leaned forward clasping his hands, his elbows on his knees. His body language and the gentle trace of a smile in his eyes inspired confidence.

“Pernille said you would like to speak with me.”

I reacted positively to his choice of words, it wasn’t “talk to me”, but “speak with me”.

“Yes, please,” spluttered out of my mouth.

He said nothing, just waited, but with an enquiring expectancy in his eyes.

“You see, my husband is dying, and now he is in a coma, and I don’t want to frighten him, like you see on TV when a priest comes to offer “The Last Rites”. But Pernille tells me he has some kind of child-like faith, and he was, is so afraid of dying, and I have nothing to offer him.”

It took some time before he answered, but he seemed to be thinking. His next question surprised me.

“How long have you been married?”

“We have just had our 41st wedding anniversary,” I replied.

He sat quietly for a while as if he were gathering his reflections over my dilemma:

“What would you say to me coming in to you and your husband and praying the Wedding Prayer that is in the Church’s liturgy? There is no mention of Death there, and I can give you the Benediction afterwards.”

His gentleness was combined with great strength, not only in his physical frame but in his eyes, his whole being. I led the way to Gus’ and my room. On the way, he asked what we called each other. I crossed over to where Gus lay and bent over him.

“Darling,” my mouth close to his ear, “This man, Mads, is a pastor who want to bless us. Hope that’s okay?”

There was no reaction. Mads came over to Gus’ bedside. I sidled in between our two beds on the opposite side so that I could see Mads’ face when he spoke. He read the beautiful wedding prayer:

## THE NOON OF MY WOMANHOOD

“Dear God, our Father in Heaven, you have blessed your creation with abundant life. Pour out your blessings upon Juliet and Gus that they may be joined in mutual love and companionship, in holiness and commitment to each other.....”

He may have said more, but I didn’t hear his words. The bit about mutual love and companionship and commitment to each other was enough. This was true of us, had been true of us. This was not frightening, just comforting.

Then he beckoned me to lean over as near to Gus’ forehead as possible. His tall body leaned over so that we two created an arch over Gus. He put one hand on Gus’ head and one on mine. Then he lifted his eyes as if he personally were beseeching the living God:

“The Lord bless you and keep you

The Lord make His face to shine upon you, and be gracious unto you

The Lord lift up His countenance upon and give you peace,

This day, this night and forever more. Amen”

In a stifled voice I echoed his Amen.

Gus died on Saturday morning. All the nurses had interpreted his vital signs as indicating that he would die on Friday. That is, except one nurse: a retired nurse who helped out occasionally and who had a lot to do with Gus over the past few days. She assured me, and her colleagues, that as Rebecca was expected Friday evening, Gus would wait until she arrived. If that nurse had said it once, she said it a dozen times:

“He’s waiting for Rebecca.”

And he did. Rebecca came that Friday evening in a bustle of bags and eagerness to see Gus alive. She seemed appalled when she saw him. Last time she had seen him in the flesh was on my birthday when she had taken charge of him, and he had been so adequate and gracious despite his weakness. And then she had seen him on Tuesday, on Skype. He seemed so perky, with Philip and us all together. Now it was hard for her to look him. He seemed lifeless, skin and bone, but he was breathing. All this decay had happened in the space of days. The head nurse came in and said they had a room vacant if Rebecca would like to sleep over. She thanked the nurse profusely and got her gear stashed in the vacant room.

There was a comforting nurse beside Gus the whole time now, so we went out to the kitchen to get something to drink and eat. I slept fitfully that night. Each night I was told that I should try to get my sleep, that I needed strength for the day and they would wake me if there were developments. I had faithfully done what they said, but on that Saturday, I woke at little before seven a.m. At once I noticed that there was a change in Gus. 7 a.m. is when they shift the staff. The nurse who was going off duty noticed my concern and

## THE NOON OF MY WOMANHOOD

alerted the mature and experienced Day-nurse who came in. She went straight to the end of the bed and examined Gus' feet:

"Yes, his life signs are diminishing, Fetch his daughter immediately!"

The off-duty nurse ran out, and Rebecca was with us within five minutes with a pink jumpsuit over her pyjamas. I had donned my dressing gown. I stood in the gap between our beds on Gus' right hand side with his right hand in mine. Rebecca stood on his left side. She held his left hand in her left hand, as the nurse asked her to keep the fingers on her right hand very gently near his carotid artery. The nurse stood at the bottom of the bed with his cold feet in her hands. She massaged them gently with her fingers. At last Gus had a woman in his life who massaged his feet. It was a bitter thought that struck me. I leaned close to him. I didn't want him to be afraid.

"I am here for you Gus, we are with you, my darling," I whispered in his ear, over and over.

It seemed like ages, but within a quarter of an hour, the nurse said, "He is going!" Rebecca started crying, her fingers still on the side of his throat. She could feel the pulse in his carotid artery weakening. Suddenly he opened his eyes, but he didn't focus, just looked out:

"I am here for you Gus, we're here for you," I cried out loud. "We love you!"

"He's gone," the nurse said, a finality in her voice.

"Yes, he has gone," affirmed Rebecca, there was no more pulse.

Rebecca had crumbled down onto the chair beside the bed. I managed to get over to her and held her shoulders as she wept. She stood up and then I started to cry, the tears on our faces mingled as we held each other tight, face to face. The nurse broke the silence as our sobbing quietened.

"We need to look after a few things. Is it okay if you go out for a little while and then you can come back and spend time with him. Is there any one I should ring in case they want to come and see him?"

"Yes, Amelie." I choked. The nurse went over to Gus and closed his open eyes, gently.

THE END



# **VOLUME II**



## **The salon group - Victor's inheritance**

“An unexamined life is not worth living” - Socrates

(469 B.C. - 399 B.C.: Quote supposedly uttered at his trial, Plato's *Apology*, 38a5-6)



# Prologue

One of my more theatrical, female friends threw out her arms flamboyantly and exclaimed:

“I can’t bear the thought of turning seventy!”

I couldn’t help myself.

“Silly you,” I said, “the alternative is much worse! Think of poor Gus, dead at sixty-eight.”

There was both sarcasm and an undertone of bitterness in my voice. Being single wasn’t easy for me. The timbre of my story changed, naturally enough after Gus’ death. Being on your own reduces the amount of interaction, conversation and the ability to laugh unadulterated. Maybe Volume II is more contemplative, in a minor key, where I seem to be on the side-line of my life, observing, describing, telling myself how to engage, how to act. It is exactly how I was at the time. But my wholeness got a boost. After an extraordinary turn of events, I became an active participant in my life again.

## Chapter 12 “A House is not a Home”

### JULIET - 70 YEARS – WIDOW: NEW CHAPTER, NO PLANS, LONELINESS, FRUSTRATION, LIBERATION

Gus (68) died ten days later than the Specialist's prognosis: "Six months to live". His cancer ridden body held out for my 70th birthday, a heart-wrenching, poignant unforgettable day. Now twenty days later we were trying to celebrate his life in the funeral service. Pernille, his special nurse had been on night duty the night before he died, but was not assigned to him. She heard the news of his death on her way out and begged a day nurse to give me a note with the name of a song I could google: It was Lage Wedin's song, "Att komma hem".

"Som när ett barn kommer hem om kvällen  
Och möts av en vänlig famn,  
Så var det för mig att komma hem till Gud.  
Jag kände att här hörde jag hemma."

"Like when a child comes home in the evening  
And is met with a kindly hug,  
It was like that for me to come home to God.  
I felt it was there that I belonged." (My translation)

Sitting in the front row in our local church, I couldn't see who attended the funeral service. Before it began, I had asked that Gus' favourite Glenn Miller tunes, among them Moonlight Serenade be played over the loudspeakers while the over 200 people, including representatives from Gus' work, sat quietly and waited. His boss gave a heartfelt and appreciative speech. My eyes were swimming with tears.

Lucas our eldest grandchild, had been sick all night, coughing and wheezing, so he sat dolefully on Louisa's lap, clinging to her. He probably felt that the hymns, bible readings and the minister's sermon were never-ending. Philip was to be one of the coffin bearers, so he couldn't hold Freya. She was now ten months old and, in my arms, startled and staring at the strange happenings around her. Rebecca looked after Katarina who seemed oblivious to the mood of the moment and hummed small tunes to herself as she petted her toy, a faded blue rabbit with long, floppy ears. The two especially chosen songs were played: "Som när et barn kommer hem om kvällen", Pernille's song - I wondered if she had sung it for Gus? And "Thine be the Glory, Risen Conquering Son", Gus' Easter favourite.

## THE AFTERNOON OF MY WOMANHOOD

The white painted coffin decked in wreaths and trails of deep red roses, like the Champs-Elysées from Olav's garden, was borne out on the shoulders of the coffin-bearers to the strains of Charlie Chaplin's "Smile" played by the organist. They marched slowly, silently with him, placing him in the gaping hole in the back of the black hearse. The coffin slid in. The back door was locked. Freya and I stood there at the back, sobbing. And then the motor started, and Gus was gone.

80-90 people came to the Wake at a pleasant venue opposite the Church. Among the other eulogies, Philip who was the master of ceremonies read a two-page speech from my brother, Freddie. He was now a marine scientist and an acclaimed underwater photographer doing research on The Great Barrier Reef. My attention became fixated on one phrase that Freddie directed to me:

*"Julie, you are entering a new chapter of your Life."*

An emotion of writhing indignation permeated my body. I was so tired. The past six months had been so all-consuming. It was all so unfair. I didn't want any "new chapter". I wanted my old life, my old Gus.

At the Wake I was however unable to dwell on myself amidst the churning of people, the voices, the handshakes, the tear-shiny faces. Most mind-blowing of all, three people I hadn't seen for decades turned up: Ivar and Therese proffered their hands and their condolences. I hadn't heard from them for forty years. They explained that they had seen the funeral notice in the newspaper: We had notices in both Swedish and Norwegian newspapers:

GUSTAV GUDESEN, aged 68 years,  
My beloved husband and best friend, Gus,  
G.G., to his closest family, Gustav, to his friends  
Pappa to our precious children, Rebecca and Philip,  
Grandfather to Lucas, Katarina and Freya  
died xx.xx.xxxx after six months of illness...

They had returned to Norway the year after Gus and I but they didn't settle in Stavern, where Ivar had his roots. He obtained a good job at the prestigious University of Trondheim. We had made a few phone calls to each other in the beginning, but at the time, Gus was employed internationally and travelled back and forth to the United States and South America. We had no common friends or colleagues, so their lives became shrouded in mystery. I got a shock when I saw them. Thankfully I recognized them. Ivar gave a speech at the wake. Ivar's witty stories about the start of our romance in Australia lightened the atmosphere. It felt good to have them there and be reminded of happier times.

The other person whom I hadn't seen for around twenty years was Ulrika, called Rika for short. She had been a feminist, one of the Redstockings from 1968 and Erik's partner

## THE AFTERNOON OF MY WOMANHOOD

when Gus and I arrived in Sweden. Erik being one of Gus's closest friends, we had a lot to do with them especially as their daughter, Annika, was just a year older than Rebecca. The two little girls got on really well.

Erik had been a womanizer in his youth. Both he and Rika were avant-garde, refusing to get married and having three children in a de facto relationship. As the saying goes, "a leopard never changes its spots": one-night-stands and summer flirts were Erik's speciality. They had agreed on an open marriage where sex outside of their union was a mutual option, but Rika became increasingly obsessed with building a stable family life for the children. Her mother had deserted her father when Rika was a teenager to settle in Iberia with a Catalonian Real Estate Agent. Rika's feeling of vulnerability increased over the years so that she could no longer condone Erik's excesses. When Annika was a teenager Rika finally had the guts to kick Erik out.

Gus stood by his best friend from school, being indifferent to Erik's morals. The disheartening consequence of their breakup was that Rika and I had developed a very close friendship, but she wouldn't tolerate Gus's willingness to include Erik's newest flame. She rejected us both, although I pleaded with her that we two could still be friends. I now tasted the bitterness and sorrow of my own medicine with Deidre. It was like a healing balm to be hugged by Rika again.

I chose a marble headstone for Gus' grave. He was cremated, but the graveyard where his ashes should be laid to rest had two possibilities, a plot with a headstone, or a common flower garden with a tiny lake where the ashes were strewn. I wanted to be with him when my turn came. I had promised him: "I am here for you, Gus." So, I chose the plot. The white marble headstone was delicately veined with steely white, pale rose, grey and streaks of ebony. The inscription was placed high up, so that my name could be inscribed beneath his. The day arrived when the urn with the ashes was to be placed in the grave. We were all there. That is all those that mattered for me, Rebecca, Philip, Louisa, Lucas, Katarina and Freya, Amelie and her husband.

I had brought ten glorious, red roses with me, again as similar as possible to Champs-Elysées. It was late October, the deciduous trees were bare and there was frost in the air, but mild enough for a gaping hole to be dug in the ground to accommodate the urn. The graveyard official in black attire was dignified placing the urn carefully, then covering it with a mound of earth. I gave each of us a rose, very ceremoniously, even little Freya, keeping two for myself. I asked Lucas and Katarina if they would like to put the first roses on Gus' grave. They nodded and stepped forward. I expected them to lay the roses down on the mound. But instead, they stuck them down into the earth, so they stood up like sentinels. Louisa followed suit with hers and Freya's, then Rebecca, Amelie, her husband and me. The roses we had placed splayed outwards like a huge, open, crimson poppy.

Three weeks later I visited Gus' grave. The wintry cold had frozen the roses exactly as they had been placed, still standing, perfect in form like crystal replicas, majestic. I blew

## THE AFTERNOON OF MY WOMANHOOD

Gus an icy kiss, and cried out loud a phrase that he normally had used cryptically when I did something he didn't approve of:

"This wasn't in the contract, Gus!" I turned and wept.

The loneliness was all consuming. No job, no baby-minding, no boating, no shrimps, no plans, no Gus, no nothing. My body longed for Gus. It ached for Gus. We had always been around each other. No footsteps that always ran so quickly down the stairs, no eating routines, no weekend walks, no lovemaking, no Sunday dinners, no parties for friends.

Dione Warwick's song "A House is not a Home," especially these words...

"A room is still a room even  
When there's nothing else there but gloom....

And a house is still a house,  
But a house is not a home  
When there's no one there to hold you tight.  
And no one there you can kiss goodnight."

... got all muddled up in my frenzied brain.

We were one of the few couples in our circle of friends who had a shared a double bed. Philip, probably aware of my need for physical nearness, had given me a piece of advice the day after the wake before they left to drive back to Norway:

"Mamma, say YES to everything, but NO to married men!"

I did what Philip said more out of a duty to honour his words of advice, rather than out of my own volition. I said Yes to every invitation I received. Benedikte, the mother of one of Philip's former classmates, pestered me again to join the local Kayak Club. After my retirement, three years before, I had said No to her, several times. Why? I was forced to consider why I previously declined her invitation. But now I said Yes!

What was the reason behind my former negativity? I loved the water, I loved swimming. Growing up in Australia had given me an affinity with water sports. I had also been keen to use my body after years of a sedentary existence at the University. The No was because I was obsessed with my grandchildren. I had only two then. I so wanted to spend time with them and said 'no' to other commitments. They lived such a long way away. Gus and I found out that it was feasible for me to drive the Highway E6 to Strömstad, take the Car Ferry direct to Sandefjord and live in the summer cottage at Kjerringvik weekdays and help Louisa with the children. She had started working again full time in an administrative job in the municipality.

Gus was also happy with the arrangement. He began to organize his schedule so that he worked longer hours from Monday to Thursday and had Fridays free from work. From late

## THE AFTERNOON OF MY WOMANHOOD

February he usually managed to drive up on Thursday evenings and join me in babysitting on Fridays, and then we had the weekends for ourselves in the summer cottage. On the way home from delivering the kids late Friday afternoon, we would call in at the local fish shop where they had reserved 600 grams of freshly caught shrimps. When the weather was warm enough, we dined on the terrace with the climbing roses recovering from winter with new green foliage against the white lattice. There we munched our shrimps with thick slices of white, buttered bread and drank the white wine Gus had brought with him from Sweden, much less expensive there than in Norway. When the weather turned hot and sunny and the sea quiet, we would pack the picnic basket and go down to the Marina to our 15-foot day cruiser to find to a sheltered nook in one of the many inlets. These Friday evenings were a treat. When the weather turned again and harsh winds whipped up the ocean to a seething froth, the cottage was protected by a huge rock at the back, so we warmed each other, relaxing beside the crackling, molten red and gold birch logs in the fireplace.

Not long after the wake I drove up to our cottage at Kjerringvik and cemented my friendship with Ivar and Therese in Stavern, just a short drive away. They had moved to Ivar's childhood home after his retirement. I recalled the words of the hymn:

"God moves in mysterious ways His wonders to perform".

I had sited these words in connection with an essay I had written at Secondary School on the topic, "How we got the English Bible". I had researched the train of events in Tyndale's attempt to translate and publish in spite of so many barriers, but in part succeeding, I felt there was a meaning in reuniting with Therese again after all these years.

Back in Gothenburg I had smiled graciously at Benedikte and said 'Yes!' to the kayak club. It was marvellous, a 60 years+ group of about thirty men and women. The Municipality supported the Club financially as its members were willing to give our group instructions both in safety and paddling and a program of energetic warm-up exercises to insure our general fitness. The warm-up program was accompanied by music: at least ten, rhythmical, old-time hits gave us a good half-hour of "Friskis and Ssvettis" (Healthy and Sweaty) building muscles and developing good balance.

In the summer months we paddled in quieter bays. It was both challenging and exhilarating, and with the help of seasoned paddlers I "mastered the art". During winter we trained in the Club's training studio. We each took a cut lunch with us and the Club provided coffee, so it was also a social outing for the members. The training sessions and socializing were only once a week and lasted for maximum of four to five hours, but that left the remainder of my week, approximately one hundred and sixty-three hours with little structure or meaning.

I got on well with the leader for our group. He had just turned 70 also, and seemed a bit roly-poly for a paddler, but he had obviously taken a shine to me and suggested private

## THE AFTERNOON OF MY WOMANHOOD

lessons. At first, I was keen, but something made me suspicious that his mind was set on more than paddling. He wanted to meet me at the Club alone in the evening. I baulked at this, feeling I was on safer ground and in command of the situation if he came to my house. He may have misunderstood this gesture, but I was right that the so-called theory lesson was just a ploy. After I had managed to stave off his advances and had taken charge of the situation, I offered him snacks and asked if he were divorced or widowed.

“Oh no, I’m married. But my wife hates paddling, and most of the things I like, like skiing. She doesn’t like our mountain cabin either. It has been in my father’s family for years. But we do folk-dancing together.”

I may have raised my eyebrows, I tried not to laugh, and to look disinterested. I didn’t want to go deeper into his personal life.

“Where is your cabin?” I asked

“Sälen! I believe I heard you say that you have a cabin in that region too.”

I extricated myself as civilly as I could from his hopes for me as a clandestine lover. I didn’t want to give up my newfound hobby, but I had experienced for myself the value of Philip’s advice – “Say yes to every invite, but NO to married men.”

But I was lonely and lost. I hated being alone in my big, empty house. I was no longer a wife, no longer a Dean, no longer a University lecturer although I did mark exam papers once a year. Gus my lover, my team-mate, my crutch and the one who defined my social and family identity was gone. Everything was different. The family treated me differently. Men treated me differently now that I was single. I wasn’t keen about staying at Kjerringvik anymore without Gus joining me. I felt bereft.

The cabin in the mountains was, however, still an attraction. Both Rebecca and I loved it, but she was playing in a musical in Luleå, the largest city in Northeast Sweden, situated by the Baltic Sea. My next challenge was therefore to hop in our four-wheel drive, powerful station wagon with my gear stashed in the back and drive to the cabin at Sälen alone. It was the second Saturday in October, exactly one month after Gus’s death, and it felt like this solo drive was now or never. I wanted to make it before the first snow fall, but I did get the tyres changed to winter tyres just in case. It was time to ‘get back on the horse’ so to speak. I had never driven the car alone to the cabin. I was always a passenger and had relished sitting beside Gus. I trusted his excellent handling of the wheel, and everything else from flat tyres to manoeuvring the vehicle on slippery roads and avoiding traffic incidents. Now it was my turn. I was just 70, so I ought to manage it. In fact, it was the ‘forced independence’ with emphasis on ‘forced’ that rattled me and made me timid.

I managed to arrive safely at the cabin. The drive had gone well. I got the water running into the taps, (we were not connected a municipal water supply), plugged in the fridge and lit up the ready-made fire of birch logs which we always left ready in the fireplace for our next visit. It was cold inside, so I put on the radiator in the bedroom, made the bed for one

## THE AFTERNOON OF MY WOMANHOOD

for the first time, and proceeded to the kitchen where I poured myself a glass of wine and made a simple, evening meal. I even managed to get the TV functioning before the 7 p.m. News. The cabin was equipped with an inside toilet for 'number one', as we used to call it at primary school. But for 'number twos' there was an earth closet (a dunny in the Australian vernacular) beside the woodshed about fifteen meters from the front door.

All of a sudden, I needed to do a bigger errand. If I were to relieve my bowel, I would need to go to the outside toilet. It was 10.30 p.m. I opened the top half of the cabin's stable door, like they use in stables and barns. A slight, chilly breeze met my fire-warmed face. I looked out into the moonlit night. The shadows were awesome in the flickering light. The small fir trees danced like vächter, dwarf-like elves and the larger firs swayed like threatening, spiky, black trolls. The night seemed scarier than I had contemplated. How on earth dare I venture out into pitch darkness of the woodshed nestling under a huge fir tree?

My mind flashed back again to Selma Lagerlöf's book, "Gösta Berlings Saga", and the howling wolf pursuit. Last time it had influenced my decision-making, now it hindered my autonomy. The horror of the horse and sleigh heaven bent with the wolves on its heels, gliding recklessly over the icy track to ensure help for a person with a life-threatening illness, paralysed me. In that moment and for the first time in my life, I experienced panic anxiety. Irrational fear turned into real immobility. I felt rooted to the floor. I closed the top half of the stable door tight, and went inside, I was breathing rapidly. What should I do? Then I remembered: Rebecca's performance started at 6 p.m. on Saturdays. Fumbling with the mobile phone I found her number and rang.

"What are you afraid of?" she asked in a gentle, subdued manner.

"Wolves!" my naked honesty blurted out the picture in my head, the essence of my fear.

"Mamma," I almost heard her swallow her astonishment and mirth. But instead of chiding me for being completely batty, she said quietly and patiently in a controlled voice:

"Mamma, Juliet," she had started calling me Juliet after Gus died. I think it was because I was less of a parent after his death. She felt a responsibility for me.

"You know that there are no wolves in the vicinity." She paused.

"In all our years at the cabin, we have never seen a wolf." She paused again

"Just the same. Hold the phone to your ear, and I will talk you through your visit."

With trepidation, but with Rebecca's soothing voice in my ear, I managed to open the stable door, both sections, and walk warily to the out-house, complete my errand, turn on my heels and rush back to the cabin where I slammed the door sections hard and locked them. I was still breathing rapidly, but with Rebecca's help I had made it, and I have never been bothered by wolves again. But I was bothered by the fear of the future, loneliness and uncertainty. I decided that I had to make some plans, so that I wouldn't be paralysed by irrational anxiety again.

## THE AFTERNOON OF MY WOMANHOOD

First, I decided to take the whole family of seven to Sorrento outside of the city of Naples, Italy, for a week's holiday the next summer. Forty-two years before Gus and I had taken an excursion to Sorrento on the final day of our delayed honeymoon cruise. We were astonished and thrilled by the awesome cliffs and exquisite coastline. We used the last of Italian currency to pay for a ride in a sulky for two drawn by a dappled grey horse with red and gold plumes plaited into his thick mane. It trotted pleasantly through the narrow cobblestoned streets and along the cliff-edge path with expansive and stunning views of the Bay of Naples.

I chose a hotel at a tiny village nestling at the end of the cliffs for the holiday so that the children would have ample opportunity to bathe in the sea as well as the hotel pool and play on the beach. A narrow winding path took us up to the town itself with all it had to offer of cliff-side restaurants, dainty and exclusive boutiques, beer-gardens, small romantic churches and burgeoning bougainvillea in deep pink, purple, orange and cadmium yellow. It is the one and only time we seven have spent more than a day or so together. Rebecca and I took a boat trip to Capri, and we all took the bus to Amalfi. I felt it was worth the price I had paid, and for the first time after Gus' death I enjoyed a sense of liberation: Gus would never have approved of us being all together like this in a hotel for seven days. Three generations at the cabin was tolerable, but elsewhere? No.

Another liberating experience was when Amelie's best girlfriend who was also newly widowed asked if we could join a cruise together.

"Where to?" I enquired excitedly.

"By plane to Sydney, Australia, the cruise starts there, then to both North and South Islands of New Zealand and via Hobart, Tasmania on the way back."

"Wow! Why not?" I gesticulated eagerly. "I have never visited New Zealand, we could maybe say hello to Claire and Jamie, and some of my other friends."

Looking through the schedule for the first day in Sydney I discovered that the excursion tour visited places I knew well. A bright idea hatched in my brain. Do something you really want to do, even though it may seem extravagant! If my traveling companion was willing to do the tourist thing on her own, I would emulate "Babette's Feast" (1958) calling it "Juliet's feast" for all the people I longed to meet up with.

The famous Danish author Karen Blixen (1885-1962) wrote the story about the French cook, Babette, who came as a political refugee to live in the tiny town of Berlevåg in the far north of Norway. Babette's magnanimity in the feast was inspired by charitable love: the desire to share her small fortune with her pietistic friends who were unversed in culinary delights. My intentions were more egoistical. I sent out thirty invitations: seven to my immediate family and twenty-three to close friends, some of whom I hadn't seen for decades. Twenty-nine people accepted, among others Helen and her husband, Beverley, Cecily and Jim, Olivia, Patricia and Alan from primary school and his wife. The venue was

## THE AFTERNOON OF MY WOMANHOOD

a restaurant just up from the International Terminal at Circular Quay at the Rocks where our Cruise Ship was berthed. The food was well received, the wine good. Everyone was elated. It was a mingling and a reunion for many who had been separated from each other for long periods of time because of the vast distances in Australia, and they had all bothered to pay what it cost to come all that way to meet me! Like Babette I was thrilled by my guests' response. It was well worth my magnanimity. Bonds that were revived that day helped me find my new identity as a single, liberated woman. A seemingly frivolous lunch became for me an emotional "*hole in the wall*".

Home again in Sweden, the exhilaration of liberation left me. Nervousness, fear of loneliness and despair descended over me again. I continued with the Kayak club and occasional social events with colleagues and Gus' family, but in my daily life, the emotional yield was sparse. I had only one, good girlfriend in Gothenburg, Kristina. She was born the same year as Gus and had not yet retired, so her time was tied up. All of Gus' friends from school were divorced or separated, and their wives whose company I had cherished were banished from my life when their men got involved with someone new.

On the bright side, I loved my house and many of the items Gus and I had inherited. They meant a lot to me and consoled me. The aforementioned special memory we had taken over as part of Victor's inheritance was the salon group, Empire in style. Gus and I had spent quite a large amount of money engaging qualified furniture makers, a furniture painter/artist and seamstress to restore the furniture to its previous glory. So, there I was with seven chairs with lions' heads in the naves of the backs of the chairs and lions' gilded paws at the end of the chair arms, a sofa to sit three people with similar decoration and a beautifully carved and gilded coffee table. I had felt honoured to possess this exquisite furniture and felt both Victor's and Sofia's presence in the room. Of course, I invited people as often as I could, but the hours alone with all this and no one to share it with on a daily basis, again brought Dionne Warwick's song into my brain.

"A chair is still a chair,  
even when there's no one sittin' there.  
But a chair is not a house  
and a house is not a home  
When there's no one there to hold you tight.  
And no one there you can kiss goodnight."

Winter was terrible in the big house. It was as if all the neighbours were hibernating. I saw no one. The shutters creaked in the wind. The roads were icy and slippery. The darkness enveloped me. If it hadn't been for Susanna, a few doors up the street, I think I might have gone mad. She was the one who begged me to sing in my 70th celebration. She would ring at least once a week an hour or two before dinner time and say,

"Sven and I will be eating dinner at 5.30 p.m., Please come over and join us."

## THE AFTERNOON OF MY WOMANHOOD

And off I trotted or shuffled if it were snowing or icy on the pavement. I would spend just as long as it took us to eat our meal at a leisurely pace, drink caffeine free coffee with the dessert, before thanking my wonderful hosts for their company and the food and creeping back to my Empire sofa with the lions' paws.

Philip worried about me, so he began to look at apartments for sale on the web. It would be a horrible job moving, but he meant it would be to my advantage. We found an apartment under construction. It would not be available to move into for a little over a year, so I had time to make a project of my downsizing: from 250 square meters to 85, plus a garage and storage room. It was hard work and heart wrenching, my grandchildren only read Norwegian now, so all the Swedish children's books and comics from Gus' childhood were either given away or went into recycling. The same with little used clothes, old crockery, slightly battered utensils, cracked vases, worn-out bed linen, stained tablecloths, extra beds, kitchen and office chairs and bookshelves. The cupboard space in the apartment was limited, and there were only three rooms plus kitchen, two bathrooms and a hall. I made miniatures of the furniture I loved best, including my piano, trying to find places for them on the architect's drawing board plan of the living room and the two bedrooms, but I was petrified that maybe things wouldn't fit or suit.

The worst day was when the container arrived. I had help to clean out the attic and gave away as much as I could to young relatives or the Salvation Army's "recycling" project, people that needed my surplus furniture, glass and crockery. Philip came to help me. He was strong and carried out the Indian carpet that over the years had become threadbare in several strategic places. With distress I watched him topple it over the edge of the container. I personally had to throw in all my textbooks, these were of course outdated, but they had been so precious to me. Only my own writings and my favourite books in English from my youth after the fire and adulthood and the photo albums were spared. The house had thankfully been sold some months before the move, so financially I didn't have to worry. But I did worry about the Empire salon group. Would it enhance the new apartment, all squares and rectangles and all white walls broken only with a thousandth of a lighter grey in the paint mixture? Or would it look or feel like me, an outsider, a lost soul, not fitting in. Fortunately, when the move finally happened Victor's furniture with its pure, classical style glided in, harmonizing with the purity of the apartment's interior; and it was in fact enhanced by the lack of patterned wallpaper and other mementos that had cluttered its style. Also, my piano, not the original from Australia that had given up the ghost because of difficulties tolerating the major transition from East Coast Australian humidity to the dry, warm air from the central heating, but a new one Gus had bought me, found its place of honour.

The apartment was really lovely with views west over Skagerak and the Southern Archipelago. A song by a popular Swedish song writer Evert Taube struck me:

## THE AFTERNOON OF MY WOMANHOOD

“Så Skimrande Var Aldrig Havet Och Stranden  
Aldrig så Befriande”

The Sea has Never Glistened like this Before,  
And the Beach never been so Liberating (My translation)

I became mesmerized by the magnificent view over shimmering, blue water. I loved it, and not for one moment regretted moving. But “a chair was still a chair,” and the apartment was just an apartment, not a home. I was frustrated. I wanted so desperately for someone to share it with me.

## Chapter 13 “What a Diff’rence a Day Made”

### JULIET 2013-2016 HOPE, FRUSTRATION, RESCUE, FORGIVENESS

In June, three months after my move to the apartment, Therese rang. We had kept in touch, and it was good to hear her voice again.

“Juliet, will you visit me at my cabin in the mountains this august? There is a good chance we will find both Chanterelles - yellow, funnel-shaped, edible mushrooms - for the picking and cloudbERRIES.”

Still following Philips mantra, I said Yes, forgetting to ask how far it was or if it were difficult to find. All I got was a date, 12th August. True to form, August 12th, nearly two years after my 70th and Gus’ death, I was sitting on a large warm stone in the Fulu mountains. Rebecca and I had been at the cabin, and I had driven for an hour after delivering Rebecca to the Bus terminal in Sälen Centre. She had to get back to Gothenburg.

I had found a secluded spot sheltered from the cold, northerly wind on the edge of a gorge. I rummaged in my knapsack to find my cut lunch and the thermos with hot, milky coffee. I was high up just over the tree line and just below the brow of a dark, ominous range still dotted with long streamers of the previous winter’s snow. The sound of melting waters rushing ten meters below me pierced my ears.

I was on my way to Therese’s cabin on the route to the Sylan Mountains, due to arrive there in about four hours’ time. I loved this special spot by the gorge, ideal for a bite to eat. I would also take a break at Røros, a picturesque town, a tourist magnet in Norway, well-preserved with its quaint, colourful palette of wooden houses from its heyday as a rich, copper-mining centre in the 17th century. The large, white, wooden church with an impressive tower is magnificent, and featured on many postcards. Its interior design really takes one back to what were the good old days for some: men and women were segregated and the wealthy managers and the poor workers even more so, all in the bosom of the church.

Amazingly enough, being so high up and normally out of range of everything, especially phone calls, Therese has just rung me.

“Juliet, sorry, but you can’t sleep at my place tonight nor tomorrow night.”

I was stunned, but she continued without stopping for breath:

## THE AFTERNOON OF MY WOMANHOOD

“The owner of a Riding School situated in the valley flanking the north side of the plateau has rung to say that he has eighteen school pupils on a horseback holiday camp and is desperate for them to stay here at my place tonight and tomorrow night.”

She had explained to me before that her cabin was not a traditional cabin. It had originally been a Stage Coach Inn from the 1700s, where travellers could sleep over night before continuing their journey to Trondheim. She had eighteen rooms on the 1st floor in addition to her double room and a single guest room on the ground floor.

“So they’re coming,” she said. “You’ll just have to stay where you are for tonight and tomorrow.»

I looked around at my somewhat treacherous surroundings and smiled as I imagined myself rolling over the edge in my sleeping-bag and muttered to myself: “Easier said than done!”

To Therese I voiced no hint of disappointment. The satisfied tone of her voice had an air of finality about it that left no room for discussion:

“The revenue from such a booking is “an offer you can’t refuse”,” she continued.

She must have sensed my reticence:

“Where are you?” she asked, at last.

I did my best to describe my location and what I had planned for the day.

“OK,” she concluded: “Drive past my place, “Wine House Inn”, you’ll see the sign, and then on another 20 kilometres toward Stugudalen. Take a right at the turnoff there and follow the track to the Sylan Mountains Norwegian Tourist Lodge. They usually have plenty of available beds. Alternatively, there is a small hotel at the crossroads to the Tydal Skiing Centre. They may have a room. See you Wednesday. There’ll still be plenty of cloudberries and chanterelles left for us!”

She rang off cheerfully.

I was non-plussed. I opted for the hotel rather than sleeping in a dormitory at the Tourist Lodge and drove there first. Wonderfully they had a single room for me for two nights. I had time on my hands, so I asked for a map at reception and decided to drive out to the Lodge and have a look at the terrain there before dinner was served at 7 p.m.

With 48 hours all by myself, my mind was wheeling. I started to recap the jumble of events of the past two years, and also the deeper issues like my concern about Gus, his fear of being on his own and where he was now. I didn’t really know. I had turned my back on God, but had difficulties believing that there was no life after death. The assurance of his palliative nurse that Gus’ child-like faith was intact had given me reassurance, a sort of peace about him, that he wasn’t alone.

## THE AFTERNOON OF MY WOMANHOOD

In November the year he died, the parish, as was their custom, held an Evening Service before All Saints' Day. They sent out invitations to all who had lost a loved one during that year. The presiding minister was to be the same as in Gus' funeral. I had been feeling depressed, and didn't feel like meeting people, but I went. Except for his funeral and the odd wedding, I hadn't been in the church for years.

It was November and dark. I remember lots of candles. On the way in, I met a woman a couple of years my senior. She had a good singing voice and had often sung for us when we needed entertainment at the Activity Centre in the 1980s. I had seen in the newspaper that her husband, whom I knew faintly, had died earlier that year. We greeted each other simultaneously with sympathy for the other's loss. She held my hand as she guided me to two available seats. The Service is a blur apart from the feeling that it was good to be there.

Suddenly they announced that Communion was starting. I felt uncomfortable. Communion. I hadn't taken communion since Philip was baptized, 36 years ago. The woman beside me got up and quite naturally leaned down to take my hand once more. I complied. Hand in hand we walked to the alter rail. I knelt there and my mind was blank.

I don't know how it happened, but as I knelt, I was encompassed by a warm, yellow light, almost as if it were a sulphuric gas, but with no unpleasant smell, just translucent, warm, caressing, a massive candlelight. Wrapped in this diaphanous veil I saw into Heaven. The light in Heaven was bluish, not cold, but blue-bell blue and with shafts of white light from the firmament illuminating the space before they pierced the floor that looked like crystal. There were only two people standing there that I recognized, Gus and my mother, even though I sensed that they were not alone. Gus wore a white, linen robe with a golden belt around his waist, my mother in the same blue, lace, evening dress that she was buried in. They looked serene, safe, at home. Gus smiled.

My reverie was broken by the woman taking my hand again and leading me back to our seats. I must have taken communion in a perfunctory fashion, with absolutely no recollection of the paper-thin bread or the wine. My only recollection was my two beloved people standing there beside each other in the light. I remembered their faces.

Gus seemed happy in Heaven, and temporarily it eased my mind and I was glad about it. But I was not happy. I missed him terribly, my friend, my companion, my lover. One night I was having a wet dream about Gus, but instead of it ending up in a type of orgasm and some sort of release, I found myself floundering in a choppy sea with a menacing rock face close by me. The sky was blue. It was a sunny day, but terror grew inside of me as I seemed to be sucked by the waves closer and closer to the sharp-toothed stones protruding from the jagged cliff. When the white-peaked waves crashed they looked and felt like crushed ice, crunching in my head and waiting to crush my body.

## THE AFTERNOON OF MY WOMANHOOD

Then I caught a glimpse of Gus. At first he was standing on the promontory. He looked so beautiful. So cool and fresh in his white golf trousers and a navy, blue and white checked cotton shirt, bought way back in Australia. He was tanned and lithe, just as I remembered him. He saw me, and with a distraught look on his face started to climb down the cliff face using his hands, down to a flat platform of rock that jutted out from the cliff. It was just high enough that it wasn't immersed in water every time a wave crashed. He was now so near I could see his face, his concerned, loving face. He waited for a dumper-wave to recede, looked warily down to ensure that his stance was stable, and then stretching his arm and hand out to me he shouted insistently, "Juliet, Juliet!" I managed to grab his hand. He hauled me up. I was safe. In the next instant I was lying on the green, grassy eiderdown of the promontory, drying in the sun. But he was gone.

These sorts of dreams leave you in a cold sweat, dank and frustrated. A song I mentioned from Kjerringvik: "En natt forbi" by the artist Jan Eggum, now became the theme song of my days and especially my nights. My translation of the song captures the sentiments that echoed the longings on my heart:

A Night is O'er

My creep-in's cold,  
Its dull grey curtains  
shut out  
the blinding sun.

My bed is narrow.  
The floor, it whimpers.  
My pillow-talk's for one.

A night is o'er,  
a lonely monarchy.  
Song of my soul,  
let go of me!  
I need someone to wake with me.

A dream is set for two persons,  
dust gathers on the setting.  
A chain of silent telephones,  
and fear of too much drinking.

A night is o'er,  
a parody of liberty  
Foggy thoughts,

## THE AFTERNOON OF MY WOMANHOOD

It's peace I need.

I need someone to wake with me.

A night is o'er,

A melody that died.

Foggy thoughts,

It's peace I need.

I need someone to sleep by me

Then they'll be there to wake with me.

(My translation of Jan Eggum's lyrics)

I needed a man, someone to sleep beside me and with me; someone to wake up with; someone to give my tortured body peace. this song was me! I hated being a widow. I don't think I drank excessively. I only drank white wine, but the purchasing of wine cartons, where you can't see or test how much you drink, can be a snare. I discovered that I probably had been drinking overly much when I attended a Seminar for pensioners on health issues: alcohol consumption was one of the themes. My consumption was at least at the top of the maximum suggested intake weekly.

I still trained at the Kayak Club and accepted all the invitations I was offered (except of course those from married men). Kristina and I travelled to Florence and Venice together and lolled on the beach at Lido di Jesolo. Kristina had even danced barefoot on the burning, creamy-beige sand, her flimsy beach robe fluttering around her in the welcome breeze. She was so eager that her feet blistered, but I salved them with cooling cream, and everything was great while it lasted. But back home again in the apartment alone, I felt miserable. I functioned in my daily life but felt desperate in the nights without a man to hold me, talk to me, kiss me, stroke me, make love to me.

After the traditional Mid-Summer celebration with friends and family that year, where nearly all the young girls were dressed in traditional, white cotton dresses with lace trimmings and with wreaths of wild- and garden flowers in their hair; and where we all danced round the Swedish version of a Maypole until midnight in the fading pale pink and yellow dusk, I opened my front door feeling heartbroken and alone. I closed the door noisily, threw myself on my knees beside my bed and cried out:

"HERRE, förbarma dig över mig! Jag behöver en man!" ("Lord, Have mercy on me! I need a man!")

And now here I am in Tydal near the Sylan Mountains, (Storsylen, the highest, towering 1762 meters over sea level) in South Trøndelag in Norway, only because Therese invited me to pick mushrooms, but got a better offer from a riding school.

## THE AFTERNOON OF MY WOMANHOOD

The hotel room was not like you imagine a hotel room to be. I think it must have been a building project gone wrong. Maybe someone thought they would invest in a bunch of terraced houses out in the middle of nowhere, just because it was at a junction near a popular mountain climb. When they realized no one would want to live permanently in this lonely place they sold it as a potential hotel. My room was on the top floor, which would have been the bedroom floor of the terraced house. It looked nothing like the quaint and beautiful Lodge I visited earlier that afternoon. The Lodge was built like many Norwegian cabins: big wooden logs stained black, white checkered windows with red checkered curtains, verdant, green grass dancing in the wind on the roofs of the sprawling one-storey buildings, with daisies and bluebells sticking their tiny faces up through the green.

At the hotel there was no view, no vista, no creek dazzling in the afternoon sun as there had been at the Lodge. I felt I was all alone, but as I came down to dinner in the seemingly makeshift cafeteria in a separate building, I found that other people were there too. Not many, but I heard someone talking about their coming back to this hotel regularly at wintertime. The cross-country skiing terrain through the Mountains and beyond was apparently well-known and well used for 50-kilometre skiing trips. As the mountains were practically a part of the border between Norway and Sweden there were visitors from both countries.

I sat alone at a table by a window and ate the Meal of the Day: pork chops, potatoes, vegetables and gravy with traditional lingonberry jelly. The food tasted good, I was probably really hungry, but when a typical Road Diner caters for semitrailer drivers and the like, it needs to maintain its reputation. My mind backtracked to my last evening at our cabin in Sälen with Rebecca. We had experienced something strange.

It had been a typical late summer day. A little humid, fairly hot with bright sunshine. The wasps, butterflies and flies were busy with their own tiny lives. They didn't bother us much, only when we drank refreshing Aperol with Cava with the obligatory orange slice, then the wasps showed real interest. Suddenly the stillness that had drowned in their slight buzzing was disturbed by a cold, biting wind. It rustled even the huge fir trees, and its tendrils blew icy kisses in our faces. We looked up simultaneously, the sky was dark, glowering. The dark sky was transformed to a sulphuric yellow grey and the wind increased in strength. Then the hail came, tumbling down at first, and then crashing down until the whole terrace was full of white miniature golfballs. Just as rapidly as it all started, the hail stopped, and the whole world around us was engulfed in a deep, amber light. The fir trees were ghostly dark shadows in the glow of it all. I wondered if we were in the the pot of gold that is said to be at the end of the rainbow. We certainly felt like we were in the middle of the lighting effects that the end of a rainbow must embrace. I felt exhilarated. My pulse was racing. I didn't know why, it felt as if something important was imminent.

And now here I was a day later in Tydal, with normal pulse, sitting in a simplistic venue that seemed disproportionately meagre to the magnificence of the Sylan Mountain Range that I

## THE AFTERNOON OF MY WOMANHOOD

had caught a glimpse of earlier that afternoon. It was nearly 9 p.m. I had been in a reverie and was now toying with my second cup of coffee dreading going back to my lonely room. I had indulged and ordered proper coffee, not caffeine-free to accompany the uninspiring dessert of canned peaches and cream when I heard the deep timbre of a man's voice:

"No thanks, I'm too tired to eat. I have driven for thirteen hours today. I just have to hit the sack. See you in the morning!"

"Good Night."

The host's voice echoed in the corridor, and I caught a glimpse of the hotel guest as he fumbled with his key on his way to his room. He was dressed in khaki, typical hiking clothes. He had on a handy vest with lots of pockets and a Tyrol hiker hat, both in a greenish colour that harmonized with the khaki. He was medium height, well-built, probably about sixty, too young for me, I reasoned. He glanced in at the guests who were sitting at their tables as he walked by.

"Good Night," he called back to the host.

What an amazing voice. The instant I heard him speak it was as if by some reflex the muscles near the hair follicles on the back of my neck contracted and caused the hairs to rise.

I had to occupy myself the following day, so I drove in to the Lodge and took a hike. It was drizzling with rain, and the marshes were saturated. Luckily the Tourist Foundation had laid out planks for kilometres so that it was possible to traverse the marshes to the base of a mountain. It was different, spectacular in its own way. From where I was I couldn't see any range, although from the aerial, Google Maps photo I knew there was one. What I could see was just one, majestic, midnight-blue peak rising up from a flat plateau. Green wavering grass tinged with red covered the marshes that caressed its base. There were no buttresses of rock or grassy mounds leading up to it, but nearer its sheer rock ascent where the grass subsided, I was delighted to discover a myriad of minute mountain flora in pinks, whites and yellows. The mountain looked intimidating, its highest point hidden by clouds.

I was alone, the skies were thickening and the rain was heavier, and my feet were soaking wet in spite of my Gortex hiking boots, so I felt I had better get back to civilization. The boots squelched underfoot the whole way. Wet and cold I drove back to the hotel and was glad that I had a good-sized, modern bathroom with a rejuvenating hot shower to get some life back into my frozen fingers and toes.

I had dressed for dinner in a white summer skirt and a pretty, floral blouse in blues and white and sat down alone at the same table as the night before. It was a table for four, and I sat nearest the window on one side. There were just a few people scattered around the room, not as many as last night. The host had already informed me that the menu tonight was Fried Trout, Creamy Potatoes, Butter Sauce and Cucumber Salad, a Norwegian

## THE AFTERNOON OF MY WOMANHOOD

speciality. Now he approached me again, leaning forward with both his hands on the table, he whispered.

“You are on your own.” It was more of a statement than a question. I nodded.

“There are two gentlemen here tonight who are also on their own. Would you mind if I suggest that they come and join you?”

I didn’t need to consider the matter. Based on Philip’s instruction I said my perfunctory, ‘It’s quite okay’ , but my heart started pounding.

I didn’t look up at first, but suddenly there he was, the man with the voice, asking if he could sit down. And then a new man joined us, politely asking if it were okay?.

“Please, of course!” we said in unison.

I felt the blood rush to my face, blushing like a teenager. I tried to get hold of myself, telling myself not to be silly, just because two, single, Norwegian men were sitting at my table. Thankfully Olav’s accent and our regular visits to Kjerringvik meant that I understood Norwegian pretty well. I hoped they would understand the Australian inflection in my Swedish.

The host came over to our table again: “Would you like white wine with the trout?”

“Yes please,” I said and smiled, and the more elderly man that had introduced himself as Edvard, concurred.

“Yes, for me too, please.”

The host looked inquiringly at the man with the voice:

“What about you?”

“No, thanks iced water is fine for me.”

I must have looked quizzically at him, as it seemed the man with the voice felt that an explanation was required.

“I’m a Christian,” he said, “and practice moderation.” He smiled a wry smile.

Now I was non-plussed, one glass of wine was not exactly excess. I put it down to the fact that he was stingy, miserly despite his pleasant looks, but I was still curious about him. Not to seem too eager I directed my attention to Edvard, asked him about himself, why he was here in Tydal and where he was heading.

Edvard was 84, he had lost his wife three months before. He was on his way to his son and family in Trondheim. He was sorrowful and missing his wife terribly. He felt he ought to stop when he saw the ROOM VACANT sign as he was afraid he might fall asleep at the wheel. His wife and he had always driven together.

## THE AFTERNOON OF MY WOMANHOOD

We both expressed our condolences. The evening was spent with both Hubert Ulf Bergman (the voice had a name) and I listening to Edvard and proffering advice and sympathy. Edvard had had an interesting life and was now trying to make a go of it alone.

Hubert's nickname was "Hu", not only because of Hu-bert, but also because of his initials, H.U. The Norwegian pronunciation of the nickname sounded like English "who", the "h" being a whisper. I didn't want to be reminded of Dr. Who from the science-fiction films every time I used his name, so I asked if I could pronounce his name in an English fashion, Hugh, and he agreed.

He had landed in this prosaic hotel because the single rooms at the Lodge were being renovated, and sleeping in a bunk in a dormitory was not his style:

"Not now, at my age," he explained, "before, yes, many times in my youth."

He grinned. He had a charming smile and a lilt in his voice as he spoke. He sounded as if he were no stranger to the outdoors, strong and adventurous. What hair he had was peppered white shaved close to his skull. He had fine chiseled features, very few wrinkles, and those he had were around the corners of his eyes indicating that he was no stranger to smiling. He was tanned, but with a rosy flush in his cheeks. He had extremely good posture, had been a sergeant in the Army during his compulsory military training as a twenty-year old and his body had maintained a type of military authority despite his paunch. His freshly ironed, deep blue, linen shirt was open at the neck, but tightly buttoned and strained a bit over his belly. He wore a broad, brown, leather belt with a brushed brass buckle that held up his navy, cotton trousers. He still worked even though he had passed the normal retiring age (67) by five years. A simple calculation, this meant that he was the same age as me. My heart skipped a beat. I lifted my eyebrows in amazement. That was a coincidence. He had had leading positions in several, financially solid firms, and was presently employed in 80% as an economy director.

One's mind works fast when one discovers a lot about a person you are attracted to. My body wasn't in its prime. I thought of my sagging breasts concealed in a bra with uplift, and the expanding tyre of flesh around my waistline. The only thing it was good for was when I had to take blood-thinning injections before flights of more than three hours. Then I managed a good bulge of tummy flesh between my fingers in which to insert the needle. But the most important thing in the here and now was Edvard:

Hugh and I had a common denominator here, we had both been where Edvard was struggling, trying to make some sense of 'going it alone'. In sharing our experiences with Edvard, we learned lots about each other's lives. As I had calculated we were both 71, Hugh turning 72 the week after me, both Virgos. He had lost his wife to breast cancer over ten years ago. My bereavement was much closer, going on two years. Edvard appreciated both our company and our empathy.

## THE AFTERNOON OF MY WOMANHOOD

Edvard's time schedule meant that he couldn't manage a long walk the following day, but he longed to get out into the terrain. I was due to drive back to Therese and her "Winehouse Inn" which wasn't far, so I suggested I drive Edvard a certain distance toward the Mountain Lodge the next morning and he could walk back. Hugh had plans for a Top Tour i.e. to climb to the summit of the highest peak on the range.

At breakfast, Edvard was nowhere to be seen, but Hugh was there and we sat together. He told me he had especially wanted to see this group of mountains because his daughter had attended a Sport and Skiing High School and they had organized long, skiing trips in the vicinity. He was an avid hiker, and he said jokingly that he had developed a sort of ADHD after his wife died: Top Tours had been his way of getting rid of some of his consuming frustration. He had visited all the well-known mountainous areas in South Norway. Sylan was further North-East and something new. The peak, Storsylen, was his goal for the day.

I felt he was a bit too daring and adventurous for me. I'd never been on a Top Tour and doubted my capacity to follow such a guy. But he was attractive and fascinating, speaking about his life in the Property Investment Business on Norway's South Coast. He also spoke about the Lutheran Free Church there, where he had sung both in a men's choir and a mixed choir. His father's family was Swedish, his grandfather having emigrated to Norway to build the train track between Kristiansand and Oslo, not single-handed of course: many Swedish engineers and tradespeople crossed the border looking for work. His father had first chosen a military career, but became a "born-again" Christian as a 25-year-old and found the barracks-life too tough, with so much drinking, swearing and fornicating. He left his promising, military career to join a Bible School, studied to be a minister in the Lutheran Free Church and settled in Arendal after marrying a qualified nurse from this coastal town. They had three children, Hugh being their second child.

I told him I had worked at the University, that I was a humanist and had no church affiliation. I'm not sure if he heard me correctly. Later on, Hugh told me he was sure I had said I was an atheist. My philosophical or religious status could be called confusing to say the least:

It was Sister Lisa from a Dominican Order near me who coined the phrase, "baptized heathens", and I was certainly baptized, both as a baby in the Presbyterian church and as an adult by immersion in a Baptist tabernacle. My 40 years of "desert wandering", to use an euphemism borrowed from the Hebrew race's 40 years in the desert after their exodus from Egypt in 1440 B.C., had been a time of fulfillment for me personally, socially and careerwise. My relationship to God during this time was more like back-sliding than being an apostate. My history was not unlike that of the Hebrews when they thought their God had forgotten them. They sculptured the forbidden Golden Calf in the desert and danced around it, worshipping it. That Hugh misunderstood my religious or philosophical position was no surprise. I didn't understand it myself.

## THE AFTERNOON OF MY WOMANHOOD

We exchanged mobile phone numbers and wished each other 'Good Journeying' after Edvard joined us. He was packed and ready to leave. Hugh had been delighted to hear of the plans for my stay with Therese. Picking cloudberry was a major past-time of his, and after his two days of walking here, he was heading back, not home, but to his cabin in Setesdal on exactly the same mission: cloudberry and chanterelles.

After a glorious five days with Therese, I was now driving home from the incredible Wine House Inn, full of history and traditions from the region. The building was amazing, elongated in two storeys with whole stained logs comprising the walls. The floors on the ground floor were slate stone, cold, but beautiful. My bedroom, one of the eighteen on the upstairs floor, was prettily furnished with a China jug and washing bowl on the bedside table and a potty concealed in the little cupboard underneath, all patterned in the same blue and white porcelain. The bedcover was a brightly coloured patchwork and there was a crochet throw-over blanket. The Wine House Inn was around 1000 meters over sea level, so it could be cold at night.

Each morning after a lazy breakfast in the huge kitchen which was like a museum with a yellowed enamel wood stove, water drawn from a well with a pump outside and an ample, solid wood dining table in one corner, we would don our helmets and gather our rattling bikes. We were now intent on the business of cycling five kilometres on a very bumpy, dirt road to the marshes under the range that formed the border to Sweden. It was exciting. Armed with wicker baskets that had been strapped onto the carriers at the back, we were met with a sight the likes of which I had never seen before. I'd seen cloudberry in the Rondane Mts., but the year Gus and I were there we were too early, they were deep-red and hard, not ripe for the picking. Now sitting on the mossy surface of the dryish marsh - in order to save our backs from all the bending - we were surrounded by thousands and thousands of these precious, molten gold small, furrowed berries. They grew like strawberries close to the earth, but were like boysenberries in shape and texture, but are the colour of amber.

A meticulous and careful picking technique was required. It is considered a crime to pick berries that aren't ripe. They are hard and sour and spoil everything, and in addition you ruin their chances to become as beautiful as their golden-red, mature siblings. When our muscles were aching and our eyes tired of deciding which berry was or was not ripe enough for the picking, we cycled back to some shady spots under the dwarfed trees that grew on the plateau that just brushed the tree line. Therese had her secret haunts where she knew the Chanterelles were likely to nestle. And there they were. Also yellow, but brighter, like a yellow signal flag, tougher and easier to gather. Imagining the aroma of them sizzling in butter in the frying pan for supper spurred us on.

We had caught up really well after the long hiatus in our relationship. She asked lots about Gus and me, our lives and his death. And I heard a lot about Ivar and their two daughters and grandchildren. She had hoped that The Wine House Inn would be a magnet for her

## THE AFTERNOON OF MY WOMANHOOD

family in the summer months, but it hadn't eventuated. They considered it either too far to drive or the timing wasn't right. Ivar drove occasionally with her. It was a long way. After the car ferry from Sandefjord in Norway to Strömstad in Sweden, north into the Swedish highlands before crossing back into Norway again. This summer she was alone and glad for my company. I was delighted to be there, and not least because Hugh's and my paths had crossed. I couldn't get him out of my mind. I hoped that the exhilaration I felt was positive for Therese. The chemistry between us was perfect. It was so wonderful to meet someone who knew me from before, who knew my background, where I came from. Whom I was.

My reverie broke. I needed a wee. Now I had to find a place to stop the car. Traipsing through the long green grass to find a place secluded enough to relieve myself, I came over a patch of apricot-coloured cloudbERRIES. They were so beautiful. I didn't pick them, just took a photo and sent it to Hugh. I said I hoped he was having as good a time as I had spent with Therese. I mentioned the abundance of cloudbERRIES. I remembered the name of the peak, Storsylen, that he had hoped to climb, so I asked how it was.

More than four hours later, I was approaching Gothenburg when I heard a text message tick in. A couple of kms before the turnoff to my new apartment there is a public wharf and marina. The parking lot there is generous with a view over the sea, so I stopped, and my heart skipped a beat. The text message was from Hugh, matter of fact, but a real answer:

"Storsylen was great, the weather fine and the views magnificent. The cloudbERRIES here are not as prolific as you described. At the moment I am surrounded by women, all family. Bye for now, Hu."

I didn't quite know what to make of this, but maybe it was to tell me he wasn't alone, so a phone call was not an option. In those days we didn't have a device to confirm a message, so I did nothing, thinking that writing an answer would disturb whatever he was up to with his brood. But I dreamt about him that night, and I began to play love songs again, among them, "My Foolish Heart".

"There's a line between love and fascination  
That's hard to see on an evening such as this..."

As I sat at the piano this stanza bugged my heart, reminding me that It's only "fools who rush in".

The days went slowly. I didn't know if I should make another move as far as Hugh was concerned and decided not to seem too eager. I dreamt about his voice. I dreamt about the tautness of his hiking body. He exuded masculinity, which was not exactly a politically correct term to use, especially by me who, from an early stage in my career, had been intent on erasing boundaries, stereotypes about so-called feminine and masculine attributes. And he was a Christian. Hadn't I had enough of "born-again" Christian men?

## THE AFTERNOON OF MY WOMANHOOD

A month before my meeting Hugh something unusual had happened. Alan, who had attended my ‘Juliet’s feast’ in Sydney, wrote to me quite literally out of the blue. Mid-July, on a long plane flight from Perth to Melbourne, he sat beside a young woman who wanted help for a girlfriend. These two passengers had started talking about the challenges of living abroad especially the difficulties involved in adapting to new languages and cultures. The young woman’s friend was finishing off her master’s degree in international law in Sweden in Gothenburg. She was feeling ‘down’ due to several things and needed someone to talk to. Her name was Donna, and she was in her late twenties.

Alan proffered my help impulsively:

“But I know someone living in Gothenburg, maybe she can help. She is much older, my age. Can you ask your friend if it is okay that I contact her. Her name is Juliet.”

The woman on the plane was positive. She contacted Donna in Gothenburg, who gave her the green light for me to make contact. The very next Sunday at lunch time, Donna and another Australian girl living in Gothenburg arrived at my apartment.

Donna and I, despite the age difference, became a rare type of “kindred spirits”. We had both grown up in the same town in Australia. We had migrated to Sweden because of a man in our lives. My relationship with Gus had lasted, whereas Donna’s had crashed. I knew what it was like to live with a crashed relationship, but not how it was to have this happen to you on the other side of the world. We jelled.

Donna’s situation had become precarious: She was in Sweden on a Student Visa. She had completed her master’s and was obliged to leave the country by my birthday at the end of August. She didn’t know what her next step should be.

I was worried about Donna, but also about Hugh. It was over a week now since we corresponded. Donna and her girlfriend were again at my apartment. We were about to have dinner but decided to take a breath of fresh air first. It was a fabulous day; the August sun warmed us as we walked down to the marina. I had been trying to pluck up enough courage to ask them if I should send Hugh a text. They had already heard the whole story of our meeting.

“Go for it!” the two girls yelled in chorus. “There isn’t any good reason not to send the message!”

“Go for it!” Their enthusiasm startled some passers-by.

I think I may have even asked Donna to read through the message before I sent it. She may even have pressed “Send” for me.

I received an answer almost immediately:

“Dear Juliet, this is intriguing. I am out in the wilderness on the top of a range searching for cloudbERRIES. There is never telephone connection in this area, but suddenly your message

## THE AFTERNOON OF MY WOMANHOOD

ticks in. Although I am alone here, when I get back to the cabin I will still be surrounded by all the women again. I'll contact you when I get back home, i.e. before I leave for Crete, 1st. September, Bye for now, Hu."

The girls were ecstatic, as thrilled and excited as I was. It was the last time I saw Donna before she left Gothenburg for London. She had received a visa and a work permit to stay there for at least a year. She was a new angel in my life.

I had just one song in my head:

"What a difference a day made,  
twenty-four little hours....  
Brought the sun and the flowers,  
where there used to be rain.  
My yesterday was blue, dear  
Today I'm a part of you dear...."

## Chapter 14 “He touched me”

### JULIET – 2013: FASCINATION, BITTERNESS, TURNABOUT, FORGIVENESS, ASSURANCE, FAITH

Hugh was true to his word; he texted me on my 72nd birthday. He of course didn't know that it was my birthday, but it was a pretty nice gift anyway. He left for Crete the next day. While he was there, he rang me early every morning. He was on a type of Bible Study Retreat with friends from his Church as well as participants from other congregations. The leader was well-versed in the Old Testament, and the theme of the Bible Studies was, amazingly enough, the Hebrews' exodus from Egypt and their 40 years of desert wandering before they reached the Promised Land. I could hardly believe my ears. This fitted like hand-to-glove to my pondering about my own ca. 40 years of my spiritual “desert wandering”. Hugh gave me a summary each morning of what had been presented and discussed the evening before. The Bible Studies were all held in the evenings when the temperature was cooler and refreshing. During the daytime the participants preferred to swim or do touristy things. Hugh was active, either walking or visiting popular tourist sites. But he found the heat exhausting.

There was so much relevance to my own experience in these ancient stories that my interest was not feigned, and his verbal renditions gave food for thought. A week later he was back in Arendal and about to celebrate his birthday.

Now it was my turn to be busy with other things. Philip and Louisa tried to keep sacred a love-holiday each year, just the two of them, four days every September, which was also Louisa's birthday month. Only Lucas was school age. Missing a few of days at school in the first grade triggered no reprisals. All three children could stay with me in Gothenburg. Philip and Louisa flew to Palma, Majorca from Gothenburg. Louisa's Mum from Småland came to stay as well, so that we could share the burden. We got on well. She had lost her husband to bone marrow cancer five years before Gus died. She was younger than me, still in her 60s, and had a great sense of humour.

Freya was not so easy to put to bed. She was two years and ten months, so for her it was a big hurdle not having mummy at home at sleeping time. I had to coax her out to the pram and walk the streets with her until she slept. But this gave me the opportunity to talk with Hugh on our mobile phones. He seemed as keen as I was. On the second evening I asked him about his birthday and if he had received any gifts he liked. He was an avid reader, unlike me. After years and years of reading research articles and reports, reviewing curriculum books, pouring over key documents for Faculty Board Meetings, I was tired of

## THE AFTERNOON OF MY WOMANHOOD

reading. My eyes and brain needed some time to recover, so I heard novels recorded on CDs and followed TV series but was not a great reader of either fiction or fact.

Hugh had received a book he was interested in. He was especially interested in history and historical books. The book he was reading was Helje Kringlebotn Sødal's book "Norge I Brann - 1934-1940", the history and interpretation of the Oxford Movement in Norway. I pricked up my ears:

"That's interesting" I said. "Did the Oxford Movement exist in Scandinavia? I thought it was confined to the UK, Australia and America?"

"Being an atheist, how do you know so much about the Oxford Movement?" he asked.

I ignored the bit about my being an atheist.

"My mother was a member," I said.

"What," he exclaimed, "how so?"

"I may not have mentioned it, I grew up in a Christian home, and before my mother married she was an active member. Nearly all the younger members of her church congregation were. It petered out when the War started, and when my parents married, she moved to another suburb."

"Well, that's a surprise." Hugh concluded. He sounded as if he needed time to think. Freya had been asleep for a while, and I had turned around and was heading home.

"I have to go in now," I said. "We can talk more tomorrow."

"Yes," he said, thoughtfully, "tomorrow it is. Ring me when you are on your way out. Good Night."

"Good Night." I echoed.

Again, I was generally non-plussed. My adrenalin soared every time I talked to him. I liked him so much and respected his interests. He was different from Gus and his family. He sang. I could imagine that he was a beautiful baritone. He had told Edvard and me, that he had a piano and played it a lot for comfort after his wife died. This was in addition to the mountain hikes. He wasn't an academic, but very well-informed in history, philosophy and theology for a businessman with a degree in commerce. Gus had read one book in all the time we were married, a biography of a U.S. Car-Magnate. He had devoured newspapers but was never engrossed in anything deeper than the National Geographic.

The next evening as Freya and I were strolling through the lanes of our suburb. I had been singing Gus' childhood evening prayer softly to her as we glided together over the polished asphalt: his Father's song:

"Dear God I am content.

Thanks for everything I have.

## THE AFTERNOON OF MY WOMANHOOD

You are Great, You love me.  
Dear God, never leave me!"

I peeped through the transparent window in the canopy. She was asleep, so I rang Hugh. We spoke about our day. There was a long pause.

*"I sense a great deal of bitterness in you, Juliet."* Hugh said at last and paused again.

His words were spoken quietly as if he had been in deep thought before he dared to voice them, so out of the blue.

They hit me in the face like the heat from a ferocious furnace.

*"Bitterness? Yes!"*

The word screamed inside me. Yes, that is what has eaten me up on the inside for so long! I shuddered, taken aback by the admission, and then the whole of my history fell from under my feet. I was walking as if on air, this time cold air, icy air, the fog of bitterness that had invaded me after Theo. I saw that my denial box, a Pandora's box, was open. For decades I had pretended everything was all right. Now all of Pandora's evil moths, the truths about me, were flying around my head in a mad frenzy: all the sadness, the disillusion, the shame, the feelings of failure as a woman, as a wife, all the hate of Theo, and the disappointment of never revealing my true self in Gus' family.

*"Yes, bitterness,"* I echoed his words out loud.

I saw my sorrows and my sins piled up in an ignominious heap. I was impervious to Hugh on the phone. I was impervious to Freya, now sleeping peacefully in her pram. Then, all of a sudden, my mood changed. The subliminal longing for the Creator who created humans in His own image, and Who desires their friendship, their company, their return to the intended relationship with the Almighty flooded over me. The words of a chorus from The Billy Graham Crusade in my hometown in the 1959 cut through the biting cold:

"Cleanse me from my sin, Lord.  
Put Thy power within, Lord.  
Take me as I am, Lord  
and make me all Thine own.  
Keep me day by day, Lord,  
underneath Thy sway, Lord.  
Make my heart Thy Palace  
and Thy Royal Throne."

In that moment I experienced coming face to face with God's love and grace again, I experienced that Jesus' death and sacrifice had atoned for my sins. I recalled the chorus we used to sing in Sunday School: "He's blotted them out", that is "the sins"! I felt I was being raised up into a renewed fellowship with the Almighty. The bitterness, the shame, the

## THE AFTERNOON OF MY WOMANHOOD

hatred were being flushed away. I saw Gus and my mother again in Heaven, this time the vision was the memory of the experience I had on All Saints Evening in our local church, nearly two years before. I wanted to be enveloped in Jesus' love here and now and felt a desperate need to join them there when my human life was over.

I couldn't tell Hugh this there and then. I was too overwhelmed. I didn't have words. I made up some plausible story that Freya needed me. I had to prioritize her, but I would ring him again tomorrow. He asked if he had offended me.

*"No, no, It's not that,"* I whispered. *"You mean the world to me, Good Night!"*

Back at the house, the need to cry suffused me. Louisa's mother was watching TV so I made some excuse. In my room the tears came, I not only wept, I sobbed. It is impossible to explain why or how, but some sort of psychological and spiritual release, catharsis, was happening to me. It left me with a hole in my heart, but also with a feeling of liberation.

Elvis Presley's song

"Shackled by a heavy burden, 'Neath a load of guilt and shame,  
Then the hand of Jesus touched me, And now I was no longer the same."

resembles what I felt. I didn't know it then, but when I heard it, it was the word "shackled" that enticed me, reminding me of how bitterness had bound me.

Claire was over the moon when I told her, Gillian too. Then they sheepishly revealed their secret: They had made a pact when I left Australia, that they both would pray for me every day, pray that I would return to my Christian faith. They prayed specifically that a Christian friend would come my way and lead me to trust in Jesus. They had been true to their promise and prayed for 42 years. When I told them it was my new acquaintance, Hugh, whose words had struck me in the way they did, it tumbled out of them:

"But we prayed for a woman friend!"

"God moves in mysterious ways...." I retorted.

In spite of the utter happiness, I felt uncertain: that I was a so-called backslider one moment and then in the proverbial twinkling of an eye redefining myself as a Christian, a follower of Jesus was too mind-blowing, too unstable. That simply one sentence from Hugh could have such an effect was irrational. Was it just because I was attracted to Hugh, gullible? But he had said nothing that could be called sapid, trying to gild the pill of what Christianity is or isn't. He just put his finger on something pertaining to me. Later I acknowledged that the Holy Spirit can work in such a way: sharpening intuition, supplying insights or comforting with reassurance, merely as a result of a potent word from a friend or stranger.

Next day, I was again walking with Freya in her stroller in the sunshine. She had dozed off almost immediately after her strenuous play-morning with her two grannies. We had made

## THE AFTERNOON OF MY WOMANHOOD

pancakes for lunch, and now we two were on our way to the shop to buy dinner things. It was a pristine, autumn day. Small red apples were maturing on the avenue of apple trees that one Spring, many years ago I had christened my “White Way of Delight” after Anne of Green Gables’ epiphany: the orphan girl’s first experience of nature’s wonderment: the magnitude of the blossoms with each perfect, white flower tinged with pink and encompassed by a halo of small, pale green leaves. For her, the opportunity to live with her foster parents and be a part of such beauty was life changing. For me too, the sight of these flowers the first time I was pregnant. There were no apple trees where I came from in the subtropics.

All of a sudden, I felt a presence drawing closer to me from behind. I became keenly aware of someone, something, but heard no footsteps. My adrenalin was up, charging me to be ready for “fight or flight”. But I seemed to understand that there was nothing to fear. I felt the person come closer, as it was a person. I could feel his body warmth, his tender breath, see out of the corner of my eye the dull grey, twill weave fabric of his habit. It seemed he had a hood covering his head and face, but I dared not turn around. Suddenly he spoke in a warm, reassuring and loving voice:

*“Juliet, Hugh needs you, just as much as you need him!”*

I couldn’t fathom what, in particular, this heavenly apparition was referring to. All I knew and felt were that the words were soothing, spurring me on. I knew it was the risen Christ telling me not to be afraid of my feelings for Hugh, but that somewhere there was a mutual purpose for us, a way forward. Again, I was alone on the path pushing the stroller in the direction of the shop, but His words were with me. They had been spoken, out loud, but quietly, tenderly, not in my head. I was quite certain: Jesus had visited me, spoken directly to me.

Now I could tell Hugh about my conversion, my return to my faith, whatever it was. I felt like the “prodigal son” back in my heavenly Father’s arms, reinstated in my heavenly Father’s house, his lovingkindness showered on me. When I told Hugh he was amazed: He reflected over his part in this. He said he had never in his life before remarked about a person’s feelings or character traits. It was completely out of character for him to see feelings, reflect upon them and share them with the person involved. He felt that the words had come from outside himself, as if God himself used him as a marionette or a mouthpiece to touch me.

## Chapter 15 “Every time you touch me I become a hero”

### ANTICIPATION, SURRENDER, TOGETHERNESS, DOUBLE STANDARDS, CHALLENGES

Hugh came to visit me in October. He stayed with a third cousin from his Grandfather's side of the family that had roots in Ed, north of Gothenburg. This cousin, now living in Gothenburg was the same age as Hugh and had studied at the same School of Commerce as Hugh in Oslo.

Before he arrived, I was scared that I wouldn't recognize him. We had only seen each other twice in Tydal, that evening with Edvard and at breakfast the following morning. I remembered that without the alpine green, Tyrol hiker hat, he was bald on top with close shaven back and sides. I remembered that he was tanned, had a fine forehead and a twinkle of mirth in his eyes. But I was unable to recollect his face. I had asked him to send me a photo of himself the day after I was so overwhelmed by his comment about my bitterness. Either he didn't have one, or he wasn't into that kind of thing: instead, he sent me a black and white facsimile of a self-satisfied looking Winston Churchill with his shirt slightly open over his bulging tummy, a whisky glass in one hand and a cigar in the other. I had to laugh. Louisa's Mum was still with me. I had told her about Hugh. When she saw the picture, she laughed too.

“He has at least a sense of humour,” she hummed between giggles. “Why don't you ask him for a naked photo next time.”

Her suggestion amused us both, but by October I still couldn't remember his face.

When I opened the door for him, he handed over a gorgeous bouquet of pale pink roses, tinged with white and green. Now I recognized his face, and I was thrilled. His voice, that I had come to know over the phone had the same resounding and warm timbre. I thanked him for the flowers and arranged them in an elegant crystal vase from Sofia. I placed them on the sideboard from Victor under a painting with the same delicate hues as the roses that Gus and I had bought together. But I was not dwelling on the past, I was excited about him, Hugh! I asked what he would like to drink before lunch. He declined, saying he didn't need anything for the time being. He then walked over to the open piano, pulled out the piano stool, sat down and began to play.

Hugh played by ear and started with St. Louis Blues. I had mentioned on that very first evening in Tydal that Gus and I were fond of jazz. I applauded as he finished playing. He smiled, then he went on to “Swing Low, sweet Chariot” a poignant Gospel Spiritual and I sang along quietly, as I knew the lyrics. He nodded his appreciation. His next melody was

## THE AFTERNOON OF MY WOMANHOOD

Kärlekens tid, "Give me my Song", composed by Swedish Benny Andersson from the ABBA group, about Benny searching for the song that was intrinsic to his being. I was impressed. His touch on the hard 'ebony and ivory', which is, in fact, a mechanical, percussion instrument, was gentle, almost sensual, and not just his hands, but his whole body was engaged when he played. I was mesmerized. For years there had been almost no other music in my life than dance music He made the tones of the different genres come alive.

We ate lunch in my apartment. Then we had a marvellous day walking together. There were so many beautiful promontories and inlets where I lived, with small, sandy beaches and other tempting bathing possibilities. Aluminium ladders were fastened to the age-worn, rosy-beige rocks that, in colour, resembled those at Kjerringvik, so one could immerse oneself in the open sea. We opened up for each other properly. I told him about my first marriage, and Gus' death. He told me about his wife's death, now eleven years before. We exchanged notes about our children and grandchildren. He confided in me about a close friendship with a widow whom he had previously worked with. After eight years on and off, she had moved on leaving him feeling bereft. This had happened about the same time as Gus died. He longed for a reconciliation, but his children had applauded her exit as they didn't fancy her; and she wouldn't change her mind. So, we had quite a few parallels in our lives, also our Christian upbringings that had many similarities despite the geographical antipodes, one difference being that the cinema and learning ballroom dancing was not banned for me. After dinner, we relaxed and he held my hand as we lay outstretched on deck chairs on my terrace in the fading, orange sunlight. He not only held my hand, he kneaded it so gently and tenderly it was like lightning striking my private parts. He tried to kiss me when we came inside, but I said, very gently...

"No..."

I didn't want my physical desires to get in the way of my good judgment. He seemed confused, but I smiled, placing my forefinger gently over his lips and said:

"It's too early. Maybe next time."

He left in time to meet his cousin at 9 p.m. to get a lift back to his place. We agreed to keep in touch.

By mid-November Hugh was insistent that I visit him. He felt a sense of responsibility for me for getting me into a predicament: Rebecca, Amelie and her husband, and all from Gus' subculture, cousins and friends had been surprised and hurt by my proclamation that I had re-embraced my Christian Faith. For them this was an enigma. They understood themselves to be Christians, except one of Gus' friends, who had been my favourite dancing partner. He was a professing atheist. They couldn't understand why I was making a big deal about it:

"But, you've been a Christian all your life!" Rebecca protested.

## THE AFTERNOON OF MY WOMANHOOD

Looking back, and especially looking at my Bible, tattered and worn from frequent sneak peeking, so much so that Gus had accused me of being a slow learner, she was probably right. Had I really been an apostate, having renounced my religious origins and beliefs, or was I just confused child of God wandering in my own private, spiritual desert for those odd 40 years, seeking guidance and solace from the Bible when I had nowhere else to go?

The only real change in my life's practice as a result of my new-found Faith was that I started going to church regularly, and I became frugal with the alcohol I served at parties and frugal about what I myself drank at other peoples' social events. Temperance and/or moderation in use of alcohol is generally applauded as health-enhancing in all areas of life, but if a more careful attitude to intake of alcohol was the only evidence of the outpouring of the God's love in my life, this was an anaemic representation of the spiritual awakening that I had experienced.

I had invited thirty relatives and friends to a Musical Evening at Home late November. I wanted to give my friends and members of Gus' extended family a Juliet's feast similar to the party I had thrown in Sydney for my Australian family and friends. This evening was however in hindsight, a prototype of my ambivalences. A young, adept pianist who was a imitator of the Danish American pianist and comedian, Victor Borge, was the attraction. He was virtuoso, explosive and fun. It was my dear friend, Kristina who had put the idea into my head. We had been to a few, such evenings together in another home, and had experienced his performance. My piano teacher had also arranged musical evenings that my parents and I attended. They were classical music only, neither she nor her husband were entertainers, but I thought they were glorious, rising on wings to the tones of the ethereal duets for violin and piano. I invited Hugh to come to Gothenburg, but he declined feeling it was too early to be presented to such a crowd of friends and members of Gus' family.

Rebecca was wonderful helping me with the cocktails and tasty tapas, but she was embarrassed about the fact that I served nearly as much alcohol-free drinks as alcoholic and had made a point of announcing it. She felt there was an embarrassing dearth of the latter. Thinking back, the pianist cost the same as an extra fifteen bottles of genuine champagne or thirty bottles of good wine, so I wasn't being miserly, just trying to replace one kind of fun with another. And to be honest, everybody loved the entertainer! But the guests wanted "both". Like Winnie the Pooh, who, when offered a choice of Honey or Condensed Milk on his bread, answers "Both", then adds, so he won't appear greedy, "You can drop the bread". My guests wanted a larger, open bar in addition to the pianist.

As Christmas was coming up at the time of "the feast" I suggested that we sing a song, a well-known carol which the pianist happily accompanied with sensitive brilliance. But this was also a departure from my guests' expectations of the evening. It contained the message of Jesus' birth. In Swedish, "Mitt i vinteren var det...", in English:

## THE AFTERNOON OF MY WOMANHOOD

“In the bleak midwinter.  
Frosty winds made moan  
Earth stood hard as iron  
Water like a stone.....  
In the bleak midwinter  
A stable-place sufficed  
The Lord God Almighty Jesus Christ....

What shall I give Him, Poor as I am  
If I were a shepherd I would give a lamb  
If I were a wise man I would do my part  
Yet what can I give Him? Give my heart.”

Rebecca and the majority of my guests were most likely aware of my feeble, and not very subtle attempt to evangelize by singing the carol. A few found it appropriate. These were my neighbour, Susanna, who loved singing, a couple from my Church who were affable and who mingled well, and Kristina.

I wanted so much to demonstrate my rediscovered faith to Gus’ family. They, however, and several of Gus’ friends interpreted the singing stunt as a different Juliet, not the one they were used to and had known with Gus. Gus never sang songs. He was in fact tone deaf. Many thought it was a novelty, but strange. The song in their view heralded a development in me that they weren’t comfortable with. Everyone was courteous and said they had enjoyed the evening, but there was a wave of uncertainty that filtered the clear honesty in their eyes. Here in Sweden in the bosom of Gus’ family and our mutual friends I had no sense of the liberation I had felt at my Juliet’s ‘feast’ at the Restaurant at The Rocks in Sydney. Here I felt confined and judged by the guests’ memories of what had been customary before, the unspoken rules for the way their family and social class socialized. My investment hadn’t matched their expectations. My family began to patronize me like ‘a pleasant enough freak’.

Going to church regularly didn’t compensate for my feeling of loss. I loved taking communion and the liturgy in our church and had become friendly with a few members in the congregation. They were a good support to me. But nearly everyone at church had previous history with each other and long roots in the congregation’s traditions and practices. It was as if I were trying to gate-crash another type of establishment as an alien. Hugh felt guilty that he hadn’t been able to supply me with a compensatory social network, and a spiritual culture that could meet my needs and longings, but such things take time. My general sense of being displaced increased as not only my family, but my friends from my former life with Gus began to patronize me rather than accept me.

Maybe Hugh had physical, romantic, even erotic feelings for me when he invited me to his home, but he never let on about these. His rational reason for inviting me was that it would

## THE AFTERNOON OF MY WOMANHOOD

become evident that he was 'a man of means' who wasn't 'just after me for my money'. Not that I had much money, i.e. cash in the bank, and I have never owned a share or used the Stock Market. My lovely apartment in an attractive suburb, and the mountain cabin were the sum of my assets, plus of course my old VW station wagon and a good pension.

I chose to stay at a hotel near the centre of Arendal. It was late November, cold, dark and drizzly, and the late autumn squalls rushed through the wind-corridors formed by the streets that fanned out from the central wharf, Pollen. I used this particular hotel chain, owned by the notorious Mikael with the German Shepherd which had attacked P2, because I had accumulated points from when I travelled and used hotels for work: These had earned me a good discount in Mikael's hotel chains which operated in both Norway and Sweden.

Hugh was a bit abashed, embarrassed about where I was staying because there was a flashy Night Club next door. The boundary markers of his Christianity would have preferred that I stayed in another hotel that until recently had been a Temperance Hotel where no alcohol was served. It would have been regarded in his circles as a more appropriate place for my accommodation. I think he felt a bit weird parking his car outside the night club when he came to meet me at reception. He had never been inside this particular hotel in all his business-years of working in Arendal.

But he came to collect me, and we drove the eight kilometres to his home. He had prepared an evening meal. Fresh apricot-coloured roses in a crystal vase graced the dining table with their delicate hues and slight perfume. He lit the candles in what looked like sterling silver candlesticks. Outside was cold and miserable, so he had lit the wood stove in the dining room and the logs in the open fireplace in the living area. The stove was crackling and warming even though the electric driven heat pump was the main source of warmth. I had deliberately worn a white, fine cotton blouse with fancy buttons opening at the front and a lacy bra. I was feeling romantic and had shaved downstairs and sprayed the back of my neck with my favourite Burberry fragrance, very sparingly mind you, in case he was allergic to perfume.

The interim between our meeting in August and this date in late-November had been unusual and in some ways preparing me for my unforeseen adventure, the new chapter that Freddie had foreseen: Philip had a friend from the Student Union in Gothenburg whom he had stayed in touch with, a gynaecologist and sexologist who had created a new App on "Thought Training". He himself was homosexual, but his Danish co-author, a psychologist and sexologist, was a heterosexual woman, so these two felt they were well equipped to describe and offer advice pertaining to all forms of sensuality and sexuality.

The Thought Training process had to do with "not thinking": surrendering one's body, without the mind's interference, to tactile and kinaesthetic sensations and reactions without monitoring these by thoughts, memories or conscience. The body was thus liberated to reach the orgasm, the epiphany of a sexual act. There was quite a bit of theory connected

## THE AFTERNOON OF MY WOMANHOOD

to the Thought Training and lots of case presentations, either from patients the two authors had treated who had consented to their stories being published anonymously, or questions they had been posed. The App was to be published in Swedish and Danish and designed to be interactive: subscribers were invited to write in, ask questions and receive advice about personal issues, or supervision if they were health workers. The authors wanted also to reach a larger public by having the texts translated into English. Philip suggested me to his friend. He meant that with my academic background and hospital experience I would have the necessary insights and vocabulary to do the job.

The translation became a journey into a surrealistic world for me. I realized that my academic mind had kept tight reins on my body and had partially inhibited its surrendering to the intimate, tactile stimuli that good sex provides. I had had a satisfying sex life with Gus, but I now understood that it could have been even more. All this whet my appetite for sex, increasing my deep longing to have Gus in my bed again with his arms around me and my legs open for his body in mine. I had regularly experienced vaginal contractions and a warm rush of lubrication, a flood of vaginal fluid that made everything so heavenly. Now I understood that I had seldom experienced clitoral orgasms. Was the euphemism of “the red ruby” really meant for this minute body part? I casually mentioned my work on the Thought Training App for Hugh and hinted that I had a change of heart about kissing. Maybe I was even open for more intimacy. I used the euphemism that maybe we could discover what lay “under the wrappings”. I believed he understood, but he said nothing.

“Hors d’oeuvres”, as previously mentioned, were not part of the repertoire practiced by Theo nor Gus. I doubt if they have been men’s speciality down through the ages. I recalled a couple of lines in Johan Falkberget’s book, “The Bear Marksman” (1925). He described an affectionate gesture made by Sjur, the nineteen-year-old bear shooter’s father: “he stroked over the hair of his coming wife with the back of his hand”. “The back of his hand”, the absence of sensuality could not have been described better. In the dark, Scandinavian mountains and forests in the mid 1600s this was obviously the only thinkable caress for a grown man. Only once, on Gus’ 50th birthday, when we cohabitated like a couple of teenagers without inhibitions in our luxury cabin on a cruise liner in the Caribbean, he had caressed me down there, stimulating me with his tongue and kisses. I was over the moon. I had kissed and fondled him heaps of times as foreplay before penetration. Why hadn’t I asked for more for myself? If only we had talked. Maybe I could have even learned to love, massage and kiss his slender, erotic feet.

Hugh had filled my life with music, song and heavenly forgiveness, but my body ached for more. And now I was sitting beside him at his dining table. He must also have been starving for want of physical contact and warmth, because all of a sudden, after dinner, he asked,

“Is it chilly here?”

“A bit,” I replied.

## THE AFTERNOON OF MY WOMANHOOD

I didn't want to give him the impression that I was criticizing his home and the temperature there. But I was a bit cold. He stood up and crossed over so that he was standing with his back in front of the wood stove.

"Come here", he said.

I obeyed facing him. He turned me around so that I had my back to him. He held me, very close. I could feel the warmth of the fire in the stove and the incredible warmth of his arms crossed over my chest, pressing me close into him. Then he released the pressure of his arms and allowed his hands, fingers to linger on my breasts. He began to knead my breasts between his nimble fingers and thumbs, searching for my nipples. The gentle, but firm pressure of his movements was scintillating. I could feel my vagina responding to his hands.

I had been on a type of HRT (hormone replacement treatment) insertable, oestradiol, vaginal tablets for ten years after I had a thrombosis in my groin. These were to replace the pills I had taken orally since the menopause started in my late forties. I hadn't stopped the twice weekly doses after Gus died. Now I could feel myself getting humid.

Hugh turned me round and kissed my face. I put my arms around him. The warmth from the stove was tremendous, his back was hot, my hands crept up to his neck. I felt his hands fumbling with the tiny buttons on my blouse. I wasn't going to help him, I was just going to "go with the flow", not think, just feel, just sense all that this man had to give. Soon he had released me from my blouse and bra. His hands were firm, but not hurtful, tenderly fondling my nipples, now my tummy, then round to my buttocks.

"You've got marvellously firm buttocks and thighs," he said, breathing in deeply as if he were thinking out loud to himself. My pulse was racing:

"Yes, paddling does keep one's backside firm," I thought, but I said nothing.

He beamed as our eyes caught each other's glance. Then his hands were under the waistband of my slacks, and I stopped thinking. The slacks were pretty tight, so it was now or never for me to help out. I opened my zip that released them, and my panties were soft and lacy and easy to traverse. I was so aroused that I opened his belt. His proud virility revealed itself under my searching fingers. His warm, sensitive fingers were now caressing my red ruby, first andante, then allegretto. My conscious being, always bound by thinking, rationality, observing, evaluating, determining, finally succumbed to my body's wholehearted reflexivity.

The magical moment vanished however when he whispered:

"Juliet, you have a delicious pussy!"

His admiration, expressed in this surprisingly crude fashion, took my breath away: this seventy-two-year-old, dedicated Christian mountain hiker with the glorious voice uninhibitedly declaring that he liked my body caused me to nearly laugh out loud. Instead, I

## THE AFTERNOON OF MY WOMANHOOD

coughed. He looked at me anxiously. He hadn't released the pressure of his fingers. His eyes searched for my response. My mouth was dry, but I managed to blurt out with delight in my eyes:

"No man has ever before touched me like you do."

He smiled, relaxed. The spell of sensual surrender enveloped us again. My mind left my body. I was somewhere in outer space.

As a therapist we often say that putting feelings into words helps refine, even quell the urge or desire to act out - unhealthily or destructively. In this moment, Hugh's hands, his fingers, his thumbs were like the fabulous tones he evoked from the piano. There were no spoken words to refine these sensations, just music and song:

"I wanna feel this way, longer than time  
I wanna know your dreams and make them mine  
I wanna change the world only for you  
All the impossible I wanna do.....

I wanna make you see just what I was  
Show you the loneliness and what it does  
You walked into my life to stop my tears  
Everything's easy now I have you here...  
And baby, every time you touch me  
I become a hero.....  
I'm shining like a candle in the dark."

When I came to myself again as a rational being, I understood why Hugh thrilled me to the uttermost. We seemed to complement each other, body, mind and soul.

Hugh and I were now in what is considered to be "a relationship". We committed ourselves to each other in a private ceremony, but we weren't ready to go the 'whole hog' to use the vernacular turn of phrase, neither sexually, familywise nor financially. We indulged completely and unreservedly in "hors d'oeuvres", but we avoided "the main course", the euphemism coined to describe Frank Sinatra's proficiency or lack of the same as a lover. We also quelled our desire to marry and live together. We felt and meant that we should keep our families, finances and homes separate, as they had been from before.

Living apart, two car ferry rides embracing three countries, plus a 100 kilometres or more drive, was hard. A part of me so wanted to be involved with, intertwined with him twenty-four-seven. I couldn't really understand the point of his restrictions. The bible admonishes a man and a woman who desire each other to marry as a stable arena for good and fulfilling sex and to provide a solid foundation for the raising of children. The latter wasn't an issue at my age. But it was quite evident that being designated as 'lovers' was not a proposition that Hugh was comfortable with. Maybe, when I thought about it, he was still

## THE AFTERNOON OF MY WOMANHOOD

bound by the decorum of what is, or was, considered to be suitable behaviour for a minister's son. I recalled him telling with amusement the story about the inconsequential moral values he was exposed to at home:

In Arendal where his father was the minster in the City Lutheran Free Church, he and his older brother had never been allowed to go to the Cinema. The two boys aged thirteen and nine were, one summer in the school holidays, staying in Oslo with their aunt and uncle. The aunt suggested that they visit the cinema to see the classic children's movie "Heidi". The aunt was mildly astonished when the boys retorted that they weren't allowed to go to the cinema and that she had better ring their mother. Their father answered the telephone.

"Yes, that's quite okay," he said, in reply to her query.

Now it was the boys turn to be surprised: how could it be a sin to go to the cinema in Arendal, but not in Oslo? They went and loved the film, feeling touched and excited by the story on the big movie screen.

"Keeping up appearances, holding standards, being a good example in the flock": it was several years later that Hugh understood all about different standards for minister's children. Arendal, his hometown where his father was the shepherd for his flock and a preacher, lay further burdens and put demands on his children than in places where their father had no responsibility. Now I felt that Hugh was still bound by the rules of decorum: on the streets and assembly places in Arendal we never held hands nor wandered arm in arm, whilst in Paris and Venice we could surrender to the romantic codes of these wonderful cities, holding hands, wandering arm in arm, and maybe sharing a kiss under our single umbrella in rainy London.

Whatever rational arguments I produced about being more open about our commitment to each other, seemed futile. His adherence to the rules of decorum in Arendal made me feel somewhat rejected. But I rallied out of a bout of self-pity and tried desperately to see the advantages of our relationship.

As time went by, I could see that the periods of austere, wintry aloneness were abundantly compensated for by the excitement of the oases of tropical bliss when we were together. The good thing about the arrangement was that it reminded me of my girlhood, conjuring up the thought of clandestine, teenage trysts. And Rebecca could remain close when she was working in and around Gothenburg. I watered her pot plants and she mine. And Philip and the family could freely visit when they came to see Louisa's Mum and me. Living together with Hugh, most likely in Arendal, Norway, would have placed many restrictions on me. At last, I could now applaud our "together apart" arrangement: individual autonomy with respect to use of money and commitment to family, founded on mutual caring, trust and tenderness. We spoke nearly every day in the telephone.

Hugh had been used to this type of erotic relationship without indulging in intercourse during the four years while he and his wife were engaged to be married. Part of this time

## THE AFTERNOON OF MY WOMANHOOD

was spent doing his compulsory military service and he had learned to be a connoisseur of "hors d'oeuvres" from his fiancée, Solveig, who was a nursing student. She, like Amelie was neither afraid nor ashamed of her sexuality. I was a novice to such fulfilling intimacies but was thrilled to be reminded that the Bible has a whole book, "The Song of Solomon", about the strength and beauty of sexuality between two people who are betrothed, committed to loving and cherishing the other.

On our trips Hugh and I didn't normally share a bed. Ordering twin beds was Hugh's resolution, but he succumbed to common sense when it was a question of price. After one trip to Israel with a Christian group where we paid 600 Euros extra each for two separate bedrooms for a week, he gave up the idea of being so bound by the rules of decorum at least when we were traveling. He began to relish the joys of the double beds that came our way.

We started our travels abroad during the first months of our togetherness: Barcelona being our first port of call. How we loved it: from the incredible Market off La Ramble - to the Picasso Museum, the Basilica Santa Maria del Mar or "Cathedral of the Sea" so brilliantly depicted by Ildefonso Falcones in his historical novel of 2006 and Antoni Gaudi's zany, colourful park and the mind boggling Sagrada Familia, the same Catalonian architect's masterpiece, still under construction. Another highlight was El Clasico, the soccer match between Barcelona and Real Madrid which we saw on a big screen in a football restaurant together with hundreds of screaming, Catalonian fans. Thank goodness, Barcelona won! The streets of Barcelona rang with jubilation on our way back to the hotel.

All of this was new to Hugh because he had spent his life building his career as manager for 1200 employees in the nation-wide firm. And his vacations were spent building and maintaining two cabins, one high up in the mountains at the source of the Otra River in Setesdal and one in beautiful, coastal Lindesnes, Norway's most southerly county. I had been to many European cities before, either on work or with Gus, so Hugh always referred to me as his Cicero.

Hugh was however my Cicero when it came to mountain hiking. For my baptism of fire he chose Glittertind, Norway's second highest mountain (2.452 meters over sea level). He had climbed it once before, but from the northern side, from the Spiterstulen Tourist Hut in Jotunheimen. Now we were attempting it on the anniversary of our first meeting. from what I assumed to be the south-easterly side. The mountain was awesome and strenuous: a climb of 1.100 meters in height straight up from the Tourist Hut, Glitterheim, which nestled at its base at 1.300 meters over sea level.

He parked the car in the parking lot, seven to eight kilometres from Glitterheim. Here there were bicycles for the taking. One just has to find one that is the right height/size. I had been practicing on my bike at home ever since April and was in reasonably good shape thanks to the Kayak Club and the bike riding. So, we managed the ride into our starting point okay. But I had just got new glasses, bifocals. I suffered both from astigmatism and

## THE AFTERNOON OF MY WOMANHOOD

long sightedness: the latter being a very common condition in our age group. The top part helped my focus which was important, but having bifocals where the bottom half was to cure the long-sightedness and meant that every time I looked down, everything became magnified.

After the first couple of hundred meters up over and along the grassy buttresses I was surprised to find the mountain was compiled solely of rocks and boulders. Many are loose, not wedged tightly and they tipple or rock under your feet, or may start to roll. Everything went well on the upward trail. It was so steep that my sight was constantly through the top half of the glass lenses.

It was completely glorious being in the heart of Norway's most famous and attractive mountain area. Strips and streamers of eternal snow dotted all the rising mountains that surrounded us. High above us we could see our goal, it was a good day, and the sun glistened on the cap of snow and ice that permanently covers the upturned V-shaped peak, like bone-hard frosting on a wedding cake. We didn't have spiked climbing boots with us, so we didn't expect to get right to the top as normal hiking boots slip, but we came near.

When we reached the base of the white cap, I have never been so knackered in my life. I knew I would need my asthma spray and had used it regularly, but when we reached our goal, I was almost too worn out to cheer. But I was chilled by excitement, and this was good, because I was red in the face and terribly hot under my walking gear and knapsack. We ate our cut lunch and drank water sparingly, I was afraid I would need a wee, and here there were no bushes, and if there was a crevice, one may never be able to make it up or out again. I was terrifyingly aware of the fact that we had to climb down.

Hugh's son and family had done this climb the year before, and they suggested we take with us plastic bags that we could cut holes in for our legs and use them as gliding pants to slide down the slopes. I will never know if I would have dared to try this, but we didn't get the chance: the unusually hot Spring and Summer had melted most of the snowy slopes, so jagged rocks stuck up everywhere. We had no choice other than to scramble down the way we came. On the descent the bifocals got the better of me. When I looked down everything was magnified. When I looked up and out the landscape under my feet changed in size. Boggling! Picking our way down from boulder to boulder I felt completely dizzy. But there was no way out, I just had to get down.

You can't hold each other's hands in such terrain. You are on your own. I called to Hugh to go on down ahead, not to wait for me. It stressed me. I had to find my own way down through this precipitous mountain desert of boulders. I stubbed both of my big toes so badly against the inside my boots that they turned blue and by mid autumn I had lost both toenails. But I didn't even notice the pain, so concentrated as I was on the task.

## THE AFTERNOON OF MY WOMANHOOD

Finally, I made it down to Glitterheim nearly an hour after Hugh had reached the base. His sweat was cold now in the fading sun. We had started climbing at 9 a.m. It was now 7 p.m. and we had to cycle to the car and drive to the hotel we had booked in an isolated place on the other side of the Valley in Rondane. He was probably freezing.

He didn't say "well-done!" My legs were like jelly, I doubted my ability to cycle. He just looked stonily at me and said abruptly:

"If we are going to reach the hotel in time for dinner, you'd better hurry."

I could have screamed at him in anger, but I didn't have the energy or the breath. I just waddled toward the bicycles and begged God to help me. It was starting to rain, just lightly, but it would blur my glasses and make my life and my situation even more miserable. Desperately inside myself, this prayer left my lips:

"Lord Jesus, help me. Stop the rain! Help me to get to the carpark!"

The rain stopped the instant I mounted the bike. I stopped and wiped my glasses. Hugh was already 200 meters ahead of me. Amazingly, cycling must use completely different muscles than walking vertically down-hill. The jelly-like sensation in my legs eased, my legs seemed strong, so strong that I caught up with Hugh who was having trouble with his muscles, maybe because they had grown cold. He struggled even more than me.

When we got to the car the thought of not having anything to eat after this feat was depressing. We were exhausted and hungry. I rang the hotel. Hugh reckoned it was no use, but I insisted.

"I am ringing to tell you that we will be arriving late, and to ask if there is a chance of getting something to eat. We have just come down from Glittertind."

"No problem," the host assured us, "the dining room is open until 9 p.m. and there is a buffet tonight. The staff will be sitting in there having their dinner until at least 10, so just come in even if the "Closed" sign is hanging there. Please help yourselves, and don't mind us."

Finally, we could relax. Hugh patted my thigh.

"Well done, Juliet! Sorry I was so abrupt."

"Never mind, everything is okay," I smiled at him.

We parked outside. Reception at 8.55 p.m. and were greeted like heroes. They were impressed that we two, going on 73 years old, had conquered Glittertind. The dinner tasted heavenly.

Since then, we have hiked in Rondane and on the Dovre mountain where we saw the roaming herd of musk (bison) bulls with their mates and calves, their thick shaggy coats and horny protuberances on the heads shading their eyes and protecting them from the

## THE AFTERNOON OF MY WOMANHOOD

freezing winter temperatures. We have picked thousands of cloudberries in Telemark and Setesdal as well as blueberries and Chanterelles. We have visited Therese in her Wine House Inn on our way over the border to my cabin in Sälen, Hugh indulged in a glass of white wine with Therese. Always moderate, and we two enjoy a glass whenever we have shrimps, which is often. It is not as relaxed and cosy as it was with Gus at Kjerringvik, but shrimps without white wine is like the piano's 'ivory' without the 'ebony'. Our lives have been richer a thousand times over after our meeting in Tydal. "Hugh needed me and I needed him" as Jesus said when I met Him with Freya in the White Way of Delight that prodigious, Autumn afternoon. And the Lord also answered my fervent prayer that former Mid-Summer Night; "Lord, have mercy on me! I need a man!" We live our lives in an original way, together, apart.

## Chapter 16 “He shall carry the lambs in His arms”

### **RESTITUTION, SHARED GRIEF, POWERLESSNESS, BEING CARRIED.**

It's late afternoon, a time for reflection. I recall my Mother's brother, Uncle Bill. He was about ten years younger than she. He was the one that had been a teenage POW (prisoner of war) in Germany, 1942-1945. After the war he got a job in their uncle's shoe factory and did well but hated working inside. The claustrophobic atmosphere and the intense smell of the leather brought back horrible memories of his time in captivity. He longed to get out into the great outdoors. His wife who had been in the Women's Army in Australia (the WAAF) had a platonic girlfriend from her time of service who was married to a sheep station owner. Their property was about a thousand square kilometres in area with a few thousand sheep out on the plains behind the Darling Downs, and their nearest neighbour was a hundred kilometres away. The owners needed a manager while they took a well-earned holiday, around-the-world trip lasting a year. Uncle Bill got the job.

Not long after I came to my parents' home after being ejected from my life with Theo, my mother suggested I use the weeks before I started working to travel out to Bill's place and experience station life. Uncle Bill thought it was a great idea. I could lend a hand wherever I could. Frankie and Freddie had just started school holidays, so they accompanied me. The long train ride and working experience would be good for them too. They were fifteen, I was twenty-six.

The sprawling traditional station homestead was beautiful, but hot. The greyish straws of grass were few and far between on the light brown, sandy, barren plain. The gracious gums with white and grey bark and the stringy barks were sparse but provided welcome shade for the animals. It was at the end of lambing time. But there was a crisis. The sheep were infested with blowflies.

These insects do a magnificent job of reproducing themselves, laying eggs which hatch into larvae which then live off cow or sheep dung until the metamorphosis when a new batch of blowflies take flight in search of sustenance and a new round of procreation. The crisis was this: the blowflies don't know the difference between piles of dung on the ground and dung caught and hanging in the wool around a sheep's anus. The dung here was moist and attractive and the instinct of the blowflies could not be contained. They laid their eggs in and around the anuses or the faeces contaminated hooves of the unsuspecting sheep and the larvae knew no bounds. They ate their way through the dung and into the soft tissue in and around the sheep's backside or in the hooves, causing terrible pain. The infestation was potentially fatal if the process wasn't stopped in time. Plunge dipping the

## THE DUSK OF MY WOMANHOOD

sheep in a medicinal solution was the only answer, and to get the sheep to the sluices and troughs they have to be mustered.

The men were already in their khaki riding gear, riding boots, typical Australian style, broad-brimmed, Jackaroo hats. Their horses were straining at the bit, and the black and white border collie sheep dogs were restless, rearing to go. The three boys, Frankie, Freddie and Will, Bill's son who was 4 years younger than my brothers, and I were dropped off by a jeep, some place a long way out in a lambing area. Our marching orders were to walk toward the homestead, Will being our guide, and shoo the sheep and lambs we came over toward the homestead.

Some of the horsemen and dogs were around us, flanking us, the men cracking their whips, and whistling to the dogs to get the sheep on the move. We were there as part of the guard to flank the mob from behind, so that they didn't turn heel and run backwards. Our main task however was to 'shoo' lambs that had been separated from their mothers and couldn't manage to keep up with the running mob. We shoo-ed them forwards, and we carried the lambs that were too small or wobbly to keep up. It was heartbreaking to see the poor, confused, wee animals, not knowing what was going on around them. We picked them up, they looked small, but boy, were they heavy.

The Hollies song "He Ain't Heavy, he's my brother" was recorded 25 years after this event, but if I had heard it, I would have asked if the person proffering his services in the song if he had ever carried a lamb. A lamb is heavy enough, carrying a brother must be twice as heavy. I myself had sung another song in my teens, the duet with my mother: she sang the contralto part:

"He shall feed His flock like a shepherd, and He shall carry the lambs in His arms and gently lead those that are with young."

It is the allegory and prophecy of Jesus as the Good Shepherd tending to His flock and when necessary, carrying the lambs in his arms. There are many simplistic paintings of Jesus throughout the ages depicting him with a sheep hung around His neck, or Him carrying a lamb in one arm and leading His flock of sheep aided by his crook.

In Australia the 'shepherds' drove "utes" (trucks) and rode horseback to cover the wide expanse of the bush, but my brothers, Will and I were on foot, like Jesus. My arms ached, the two, small, white bundles that I carried bleated, longing for their mothers' teats. And the bigger lambs that could run were not gently lead, they were shooed and hustled, frightened into panic, desperate to follow the mob and find the only thing that mattered in their lives, their mothers.

The dust was churned up from the dry plain by the hooves charging ahead. We coughed and our eyes stung, but even Will managed to carry a lamb all the way. When we finally reached the homestead, we were exhausted and almost crying with fear that our little burdens may never find their mothers in the chaos of the dipping area. There was a

## THE DUSK OF MY WOMANHOOD

special enclosure for the lost lambs, not just the ones we had carried, but also the sturdier ones that had come apart from their mothers. There were at least a hundred of them waiting and hoping to be reunited with the dipped mother-sheep. The mothers were just as frantic, their instincts and their heavy udders telling them they must find their offspring. We hoped and prayed they would find each other. The majority did, and the whole experience of being "lost, found and carried" became a vivid practical and spiritual reality for me.

It happened like this: I had renewed my relationship with Deidre, Theo's sister when I returned to Australia after Gus' death. She was delighted and relieved to see me. She felt we had so much unfinished emotional business. We had coffee and talked. She expressed sincere gratitude for my sending the letter about Theo's abuse. I wanted to explain why I had turned her away so heartlessly that day when she implored me to continue our friendship.

Looking at me with deep sadness, she said, "Juliet, didn't you understand that he cut us off too, not only you? Just think, my mother and father never saw their grandchildren. Theo would never let them near his girl and boy. It may have been understandable that he kept away from my parents when he and Beth were so-called "living in sin". But they got married. Yet he never relented!! You can't imagine my Mother's grief. As you know I have no children. She never got over Theo's rejection of us. And Dad withered. Not being able to preach was like an amputation for him, the phantom pain was with him the whole time. Dad followed the admonition in one of Paul's letters in the New Testament that if a preacher's children do not abide by the decorum reflecting a Christ-like life, then the preacher should not preach to nor guide others.

She stopped for breath; she was heated and upset. I had tears in my eyes. This had never occurred to me, that Theo had erased all of us that had meant most to him, Lizzie too. It was crushing, devastating to think of his tired-eyed mother who had doted on him being cast out in this way. Growing old, and never experiencing reconciliation, never rejoicing over the blessing of grandchildren. I couldn't believe that he was so callous. Then I remembered the puppies he had drowned and the smirk on his face as he told me.

Deidre continued, now in her moving, well-modulated voice:

"He wouldn't take our phone calls or reply to our letters. Of course, it was easier for him while he and his family lived in Japan, but when they came back to Australia, Mum and Dad did meet up at his doorstep once, without notice. They got a glimpse of the children, but were impolitely told to get cracking, to get out of his life and never come back. Resigning to the fact that they were for him objectionable, despised, "personae non gratae" was like a prison sentence."

I was shocked, hurt and sorry. Sorry because I hadn't known, hadn't understood that they had suffered as I had done. I had been angry with them for him being whom he was. It was

## THE DUSK OF MY WOMANHOOD

too much for me to take in. Deidre understood my sorrow, my confusion and also my empathy for her now that I knew.

I enquired about her life, her new husband. I knew that she had been widowed early in her thirties, her somewhat older husband who was a widower dying tragically and unexpectedly of a heart attack. Fortunately, she was blessed financially, so that she could maintain their house in a nice area, and she received a compensation for his death that meant that she wasn't destitute nor having to rely solely on her own income.

Her widow status had opened a door for her. Her husband had been a member of the Uniting Church, and as she had an Art Degree from before, teaching languages as her speciality, she now trained at a Theological College supported by the Uniting Church. Her goal and call were to work in the slums of Nepal especially among the Buddhists. Being a widow she would be treated with respect. As a single woman she would be alienated, eyed with the greatest of suspicion.

It was life changing, but debilitating health wise for her: dysentery, pneumonia, bedbugs and scabies. After two terms of five years each, she returned, extra thin, but happy for what she, with the Lord's help, had achieved. There was a new medical centre in the slum area, a school for the youngest children was established, and she felt the women had a better understanding of health and hygiene. She came home to what she felt was a "cushy" position: a 75% grant to finish her PhD and a 25% lecturing job at the Theological College. She became Dr Ph. Deidre Llewelyn, and although her parents were proud, she understood that grandchildren would have been more to their taste.

A new man came into her life around her 50th birthday, a minister of the Uniting Church, also widowed, with two children and three grandchildren. Her story was abruptly interrupted by Frankie coming to pick me up. Deidre had been his French teacher at High School, so he had a soft spot for her, and she for him. They embraced and we left. My sympathy for their plight after Theo's rejection didn't justify the way they had brought him up, nor the way they had repressed the abuse, but it made a difference in my attitude toward them.

Three years later, I read an advertisement for the latest of Deidre's books. She also contacted me on Facebook and asked if I would like a copy. During the last fifteen years her second husband and Deidre had established a spiritual counselling service where they were co-therapists. Their intention was that clients be encouraged to be completely honest about the wrongs they had suffered, but also receive help to find it in their hearts to forgive.

For a couple of years, since my return to my faith, I had been plagued by the need to forgive Theo. I felt I ought to say, like Jesus had said regarding his offenders, "Forgive him Father, he knew not what he did". Anyway, Theo was dead, and couldn't be there to hear my confessional, and would probably have rejected it. Deidre on the other hand had been

## THE DUSK OF MY WOMANHOOD

delighted when I confided in her that I had invited the Lord Jesus into my life, and that I wanted so much to ask for her forgiveness for my rejection at a time when our need for comfort and solace was mutual. I hadn't done this explicitly when I met her. Reading her book, I recognized the hurt I had caused her, and I wanted to ask actively for her forgiveness.

I wrote a letter to her by email. She was as always glad to hear from me and absolved me from my sin, accepting my plea for forgiveness, but like most, I guess it was hard for her to forget how she had felt. We had close contact over the months that followed, and I told her about my qualms about being able to forgive Theo. She wanted to know more, especially about the way Theo had treated me. During one phone conversation she was curious about what in particular caused me to turn my back on God. I felt like I was in a witness box, having to defend my decision and my position. She could understand that I was bitter about Theo, but not about God.

"The Bible says God is All-Powerful," I retorted, "You prayed, Lizzie prayed, my Mum and Dad prayed, your Mum and Dad prayed and I prayed too to the All-Powerful God that Theo would come back to the fold, come back into fellowship with us and God. He didn't. What kind of sovereign power is that?" There was sarcasm in my voice.

"Can you believe this, Juliet?" Deidre was almost whispering, "Can you believe that our Lord God felt just as powerless as you did?"

She couldn't see me on the phone, but my face was covered with astonishment, bewilderment.

"A sovereign God powerless, you say, what is that for an answer?" I retorted.

"Juliet, listen! Human beings have free will. God gave us free will. He didn't create us to be puppets or robots. He wants us to love Him, stay close to Him of our own free will. He never forces anyone. Like the picture of Christ at the door knocking, the one we have in Revelations 3. 20. He will never break the door in. If the person inside won't open, God is powerless to change or force that person. God gives people the prerogative to hear, evaluate, decide. His power works in and through open, willing, receptive souls. He stood beside you when you grieved. And He grieved beside you in your mutual powerlessness."

This was a turn-up. I took a deep breath, and we said our good-byes.

And suddenly it was as if Jesus, stood beside me. It was the middle of the night. Deidre had forgotten about the time difference between East Coast Australia and Sweden. He turned to me:

"I was powerless." He said gently, repeating Deidre's words, looking distressed, but at the same time comfortingly at me.

"We were both powerless, when Theo hardened his heart to us all."

## THE DUSK OF MY WOMANHOOD

Then Jesus added:

“But I carried you, Juliet, I have been with you all this time, all these years, carrying you, looking out for you, helping you make decisions. I have never left your side. It is just that you couldn’t see me through the veil of disappointment and disillusion that strangled your hope and shaded your perception of things.”

All of a sudden I was in another time and place. It is as if the Lord Jesus’ affirmation of my being ‘carried’ caused my memory to make a “fast-rewind” to the emotionally demanding and physically exhausting experience on Uncle Bill’s station. Jesus had carried me, just like I had carried those two small, powerless lambs. I must have been a heavy burden at times, but He had carried me.

## Chapter 17 “Behold, I stand at the door and knock”

### **MUTUALITY, SYMMETRY, KINDREDNESS, DISBELIEF, BELIEF, LOSS, FORGIVENESS.**

My middle of the night conversation with Deidre caused me to contemplate about many things. Artists over the centuries have been inspired to paint the verse from Revelations depicting the door with no handle on the outside, in front of which Jesus stands. He just knocks. The verse doesn't end there. It continues with the enigmatic words “If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him and he with me.” I understood the eating bit as a reference to His last meal with his disciples where He instituted the sacrament of Holy Communion. But why the reiteration at the end of the verse, “I with him and he with Me”? The quality of togetherness described here was vibrant with meaning I felt, and I had experienced the personal quality of this togetherness after my opening my heart's door to Him again.

I discovered that three qualities seemed to be intrinsic to this sense of togetherness, both in human relationships and in human beings' relationship with their Creator, God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit: Mutuality, shared desires, attitudes or preferences; Symmetry, having equally valued parts or roles where neither party dominates the other. Kindredness the sense of being related by affinity, a natural liking, born of a feeling of understanding and being understood that thrives on confidentiality, trust, intimacy in brotherly or sisterly love.

When I looked back over my life, wasn't it the search for these three qualities that had been the theme? With Theo, I would say we started well with intellectual and faith-based mutuality, symmetry also, we really respected each other's worth, but kindredness, I'm not so sure. The natural liking or attraction which is an attribute of kindredness was originally not present from my side, nor the shared type of upbringing, but my admiration for Theo and my sympathy in connection with the abuse and how it was handled was transformed into loving caring for him. Our mutuality took a blow when he turned his back to Christianity. This upset the balance of our symmetry in his quest to dominate me with his newfound philosophies and patterns of behaviour. Then what we had of kindredness, which had encompassed understanding and confidentiality was turned to stone because he couldn't bear my caring anymore.

With Gus I felt our mutuality lay in our respect for each other as good mates and bedfellows, although politically I was more to the centre than Gus. Our origins in two different languages didn't seem to threaten our mutuality either. The zany song sung by Ella Fitzgerald and Louis Armstrong about different pronunciations of potatoes and

## THE DUSK OF MY WOMANHOOD

tomatoes, “Let’s call the whole thing off” was more of a wedge between Louisa and Gus because of dialects, culture within cultures, than the Australian/English intonation in my Swedish.

When it came to symmetry, we matched and complemented each other, as for example in our financial planning, our holidays, our dancing and being wonderful hosts. We were a team. In Australia I had probably been the more dominating party, whereas he and his family took over this role in Sweden. My lacking authenticity in Sweden meant however that we, as a couple, permitted an unfortunate form of asymmetry to develop. He could be himself, but I couldn’t be myself: our deceitfulness was like the chain of garlic cloves my mother often used around her neck to prevent colds or flu if a singing engagement was coming up. It prevented closeness, the development of kindredness, confidentiality and understanding with other women.

Our kindredness was built on a natural liking, attraction for each other that was there from the start. The fact that we were both newcomers to the city where we lived without already established networks, enabled our kindredness to be nurtured. Back in Sweden the ties of kinship between Gus, his mother, Amelie and some female cousins meant that his preferences and attitudes changed. He became increasingly grounded in family characteristics and culture. These blood ties often replaced his need for kindredness with me, making me feel on the outside. After Sofia died, and Amelie and her husband moved from our suburb, Gus sought to revive our bonds of kindredness.

With Hugh, these three qualities have existed in varying degrees: we have mutuality in our desire and our preferences in literature, music, entertaining friends, hiking and our faith, but we differ in some attitudes, me being more liberal minded. Symmetry we have maintained because we don’t live together. Even if we could afford to buy an apartment large enough to accommodate the essentials in our past histories, I doubt if the mix would have worked, one of us being forced to give up their geographical and social feeling of connectedness. It would not have been popular with our children either, and their approval is important enough for us both not to want to challenge the status quo. Kindredness has existed from the start: an affinity that stemmed from a natural liking or attraction for each other and an understanding that sprung out of the quality and substance of our upbringings. Confidentiality, trust and intimacy in our sharing of our thoughts, desires and faith has nurtured this quality and been enriched by our exciting travels to mutually desired destinations throughout Europe, the Middle East and Scandinavia.

But what is this natural liking, attraction, appeal (without the adjective “sex”)? I haven’t discovered any analysis of the phenomenon described in Roman mythology as Cupid, the God of love, son of Venus, drawing the bow and releasing the arrow toward the target, the chosen one. There is no conscious choice, no evaluation of the object, one is just drawn toward one person in preference to another. Gestalt theory focusses on Holism, where the bodily reactions are given equal weight as feelings and thoughts. In my search to

## THE DUSK OF MY WOMANHOOD

understand this phenomenon, I engaged two female colleagues who also had been “unlucky in love” in a search to discover what it was about a person, man or woman, that appealed to us. For two weeks we sought out faces, bodies, on trams, buses and on the underground that appealed to us. Was there a common denominator? It turned out from this highly informal research project that we three differed enormously in what attracted us. For one the appeal had little to do with appearance, it was their body language, how they talked, gestured, smiled. For the other it was very physically related to how the person moved, especially posture, stance, and their backsides were very important, therein was sex-appeal for this woman. For me physiognomy seemed the most important, facial features and expressions, foreheads, eyes, jaws and lips.

In other words when I first heard Hugh’s voice and reacted so violently to it, this was a new ingredient in the “natural liking, attraction, appeal” register. But on the other hand, it had been my voice that first attracted Theo. So, Cupid’s matchmaking can be fickle. The attraction I felt for Hugh was however a springboard for our relationship. Hugh often referred to coincidences like his and my meeting in Tydal, as “God-incidents”. I am certain that our meeting was a God-governed occurrence, but my natural attraction to him was what prompted me to send the first text message.

Another ‘incident’ reaffirmed for me that God had guided Hugh’s and my decision not to consummate our relationship and not to weave our lives too intricately together by marriage. Just two years after we met, we were holidaying in Paris staying on the 35th floor of a hotel with a fabulous view over Montmartre, when Hugh received an unexpected phone call from his GP. The recent, laboratory tests he had taken revealed a serious, but not fatal case of prostate cancer. On our return, Hugh underwent a complicated operation to remove the cancer which had grown out of the prostate capsule. Other complications arose, first an infection and then thromboses in his lungs. At one stage his life was threatened.

I was completely numbed by all this. If I were to feel like accusing God of being fickle, giving a gift, then taking half of it back, I didn’t. My total preoccupation was that I needed to be with Hugh, beside Hugh. He confided in me that when he woke up after the five-hour long operation, feeling confused, unreal, wondering where he was, all that filled his mind was a picture of me in the mountains wearing my unique, Falun sweater.

“Impotence is a side-effect of many such ‘successful’ operations,” proclaimed the specialist with a hint of irony in his voice when he said “successful”. “Incontinence also,” he continued.

Hugh was fortunate to be spared the latter. The specialists advised that he could try certain chemical treatments to try to regain his potency, but Hugh abstained. Like many other men who have been operated on to remove prostate cancer, Hugh would never again sense the rush of blood and energy that had been the emblem of his desire, masculinity and procreativity. It was a loss for us both. His erection had aroused me.

## THE DUSK OF MY WOMANHOOD

Rationally and pragmatically, we tried to focus on rejoicing that his Prostate Specific Antigen (PSA) levels were zero and this indicated that the operation had totally removed the cancerous growth. Gradually we became the richer for staying close to each other “in sickness and in health.” We didn’t have wedding rings on our fingers, but we considered ourselves equally bound by our commitment to each other.

Many of my dearest friends from Australia, most of whom had attended the feast in Sydney, were ambivalent to my change of heart and change of direction, and maybe my commitment to Hugh. Helen, my absolutely oldest friend, felt I had alienated myself from her and her way of thinking and believing. It seemed she felt our mutuality was threatened. Helen had visited Gus and me in Gothenburg before, and also Sälen. I’ll never forget her marvelling over the range of autumn colours in the mountains there. I hadn’t seen her and her jovial, second husband since the feast.

Not long after Hugh’s operation they arrived in Gothenburg on a boutique cruise ship that berthed at the Terminal near the city. Hugh had come to Gothenburg to meet them, and we drove in to fetch them at the wharf. Helen was not one for indulgent amusement. During lunch she launched her genuine sorrow and bewilderment over my return to belief in God and Jesus. She shook her head and said she thought I was daft. We knew each other so well that I wasn’t offended. She looked disapprovingly at Hugh, putting the blame on him for my change of heart and mind. Her husband looked abashed, but Helen was on fire and continued:

“How can any rational person believe when there are, according to statistics around 2.5 billion adherents to the Christian Faith in the world and they are all praying to God every day, that God can hear them? How ridiculous can you get? You know I am an atheist; I couldn’t wait to get out of the clutches of the Methodist Church!”

She looked at me in disbelief, astonishment and with desperation flickering in her eyes. Helen’s husband was getting even more disconcerted. I think he felt that she was hurting me. But no, I wasn’t the least bit hurt, and an answer tumbled into my head.

“Are you a member of Facebook, Helen?”

“Yeah, Jules,” she said. She had always called me ‘Jules’, “but not very active.”

“Just think about this: Mark Zuckerberg and his Facebook Server know my whereabouts every second of the day, and not only mine, but that of over 2.5 billion other users. Just about the same number as there are Christians. If a human device, data-technology in the atmosphere, is able to locate and communicate with so many users in a flash, don’t you think the Designer of the Universe, the designer of all this,” I took a breath, looked out the window at the sea and sky opening my hands in a gesture of reverence, “is able to hear every baby when it cries and knows the difference between them.”

Helen shook her head and the furrow between her eyebrows deepened, but this time more in disappointment than desperation. Then the kindredness that we had enjoyed since

## THE DUSK OF MY WOMANHOOD

childhood triumphed over mutuality. She grinned at me intensely, indulgently, and murmured:

“There, there, Jules. It’s okay, let’s agree to disagree.”

Her husband also proffered some ameliorating words, and Hugh asked if they would like another cup of coffee or a scone with jam and cream.

Kristina and I had also discussed faith. Her second husband had put his life in God’s hands before he died. One of his best friends was a minister and they talked often and prayed together. Kristina desperately wanted to meet her husband again in Heaven with Jesus, but protested that she felt affronted in church, especially the liturgy about sin. She was a model citizen and had no sympathy for the idea that she was a sinner and needed to confess her sins.

I understood this sentiment. I felt however her desire to be with Jesus in Heaven after death was illogical when she didn’t want much to do with Him here on earth. She concurred, a baffling paradox, wanting a life after death in the heavenly realm, but oblivious to the King of Heaven here and now. We laughed together over this. Despite our differences in understanding of the spiritual realm, we have continued to love each other and nurture our deep and meaningful friendship which contains loads of kindredness developed out of our bilingualism and shared experiences of English culture, having both grown up in former British colonies.

My recently regained kindredness with Deidre became threatened early in 2017. She wrote saying that she had been diagnosed with bone-marrow cancer. It was an aggressive sort. Although they would try to treat her, she had a death sentence hanging over her, somewhere between six to twelve months. I felt this like a blow. I couldn’t believe that our understanding of each other and thought-provoking confidences, enabled by our mobile phone conversations, would end so soon.

Now she wanted to talk with me about her impending death. It wasn’t death she was afraid of. It was the pain, the physical pain. There was not much I could tell her that would alleviate her fear. I told her about morphine pumps, but from my experience with Gus, there was never complete relief. She would have to resign to suffering, a hard road ahead. We also talked about Life eternal, and she surprised me by saying she longed to meet Theo again in Heaven. I could not fathom nor believe what she said. Then I remembered some passages in her book that she had drawn my attention to. She wrote that she had vacillated between secret criticism and deep love for her brilliant brother who had always “outshone her in intelligence and vision”:

“I never fully resolved this tension particularly as my parents grew weaker and their prayers for his return to the faith remained unanswered... His bitterness towards my parents’ offering him only a Christian life option was distressing for me”.

## THE DUSK OF MY WOMANHOOD

She described how emerging from viewing his body in the funeral parlour, she was sickened by the horror of how judgmental she had been, when in her missionary life and her therapy she had accepted so many others' "messy pain stories":

She continued:

"At that moment, a huge rainbow circled the funeral parlour. Immediately I knew God would never forsake His own - not my brother, not me, not any of us. The rainbow... contained assurance in the midst of unrelenting pain."

Deidre's reflections went on:

"[After] we discovered the disturbing abuse and hidden traumas that had haunted his relationships, (it was) no wonder that he abandoned the confines of our conservative faith. The dark currents of my seemingly good family were demanding my embrace."

Reading this was for me a reassurance that the letter I had written, more than twelve years before was the right thing to do. But the thought of meeting Theo again in God's Heaven, was not something I had imagined. I had said I wanted to forgive him, but when I took a raincheck of my feelings, I wasn't sure that I had it in me to forgive.

I have recently read Valérie Perrin's book "Fresh water for flowers" (2020). Lucid descriptions of her feelings and life experiences have touched chords of remembrance in my past history, especially in connection with her husband, Phillippe's self-chosen death. His sudden insights, his anguish, his acknowledgement of how his actions had destructively impacted the wife he deserted, their daughter who died and his transient lovers, made me wonder about Theo. Phillippe's final admission that he wasn't able to face himself nor others in the light of these recognitions, meant that I asked myself: Could Theo also have been in a similar state of mind before his suicide? Phillippe still abhorred and rejected his father's Catholic faith when he accelerated his motorcycle to 200 mph, his helmet deliberately unhinged, and swerved into the lethal copse of forest trees. Had Theo maintained his abhorrence of his father's religion? Or had he relented as Deidre believed and heeded the call of his Heavenly Father to come home?

When Deidre died, she left a huge hole in my life. Discovering that I had been 'carried' all those years, had been life changing. I discovered also that God had a plan for my life ahead. I recognized that my good health and sound mind could be a tool of service: His eyes, His voice, His arms, His love and comfort through me to others who were suffering. The naive allegory of the Shepherd I discovered was reaffirmed in Psalm 23 and this psalm became a tool of comfort in my hands as a spiritual carer.

Hugh and I visited Therese at her "Wine House Inn" on the plateau between Røros and Tydal two years after we met and were heartily welcomed. She was delighted to see us. While we were eating breakfast in the Inn's spacious kitchen I thanked her for her role in my meeting Hugh. She laughed, because indirectly she had also played a role in my meeting Gus. The fact that she had taken time-out and travelled to Norway to visit her

## THE DUSK OF MY WOMANHOOD

family, meant that Gus had rented a room at their place and I had been invited to Patricia's together with the two men. I called her 'my angel'. But for her that was a provocation: all her former left-wing political ideology reared its head. and she retorted.

"I don't believe in such things. It is just ordinary human kindness, and coincidence."

I was humbled. I saw that I had belittled her, attributing her loving kindness to a god she didn't know nor care about. I knew that both she and Ivar had been members of the Socialistic Youth Party way back. I had studied Social History in my first year at Uni, and although I had sympathy with the Christian Socialists in England who influenced society for the better in the latter part of the 1800s, I also knew that left-wing socialists had usually grown as a wild shoot out of communism. For them God was an anathema. It was outrageously thoughtless of me.

I voiced a strangled "Sorry!"

But Hugh was curious, and gentle. In his beautifully modulated, mild, but warm voice he asked Therese, what, if anything, she did believe in.

"Nothing", she said, but this time with no hostility in her voice, "I am an atheist".

We had no further words on the issue. The atmosphere was calm, the breakfast, delicious. We just revelled in her hospitality, the terrain and the Wine House.

Over the next two years, Therese and I were in touch regularly. She visited me on several occasions in Gothenburg. Because of the ferries, it wasn't an arduous drive from Stavern to Gothenburg. She preferred to come to me, because her relationship with Ivar was often strained. It felt good to get away on her own. Their house in Stavern was Ivar's family home since childhood, so he had many cronies from way back. She felt like an outsider.

She complained about the involuntary movements in her hands. I wondered if it were Parkinson's disease. She said that her doctor had excluded Parkinson's because other signs and symptoms were not present. He had not referred her to a Neurologist for a more intensive investigation, so she just put up with the inconvenience of the jittery hands. I felt it was negligence from the local doctor's point of view.

Each time I saw her I realized the hand movements had worsened. During this time, she had started to attend a group for refugees in the local church's regime. The church in Stavern is beautiful, and she enjoyed it aesthetically as well as the social involvement. As a former social worker in Social Services, she had a lot to offer. It was mostly Syrians who came to the group. She needed something new in her life beside being in the house with Ivar, and both her daughters and their families lived in other cities.

I was delighted about her newfound involvement in the local church. Her English was excellent as was her Norwegian. This was a great advantage when mingling with persons who have recently sought refuge in a foreign country where language is an awesome challenge. She was positive, cheerful, easy to understand, and well-versed in the

## THE DUSK OF MY WOMANHOOD

Norwegian Welfare System, proffering advice when needed. The group-members adored her.

One day she rang me. She sounded desperate. She told me that the movements were so bad that she couldn't write text messages anymore. I was sad for her, but insisted that she must see a specialist. When she finally got to hospital and had X-rays and scans, their findings were shattering; she had a brain tumour. It was so large that there was no hope of operating. Her prognosis was three to four months to live.

The situation for Therese revealed itself as being even worse. When she tried to ring home to tell Ivar the bad news, he didn't answer. She rang her daughters; they tried to ring him. No answer. Finally, she rang the local gardener. He often did odd jobs for them in the prolific terraced rose garden which she had inherited from her mother-in-law. He said he would go and have a look. He knew where there was a hidden key.

He rang back in panic. He had looked through the window on the ground floor and could see Ivar slumped over the table. He called his name, no answer, he didn't know whether he was alive or dead.

"Ring the Emergency numbers, all of them," Therese shouted.

The ambulance and the police arrived simultaneously. The gardener had the key, so they came in swiftly. Ivar was alive, but in a coma, utterly helpless. When Therese got back home, he was already admitted to hospital. Fortunately, both their daughters arrived to try to get some clarity about what had happened. Ivar had suffered a massive stroke, he had recovered consciousness after a period in intensive care, but he was paralysed in both legs, confined to a wheelchair and his speech was also affected. He was aphasic.

The church group became a support for Therese during those first weeks after her diagnosis and Ivar's debilitating illness. The minister visited her often, Therese was glad for the comfort and peace he shared with her. We spoke often, also about faith, but I could also hear that her health was deteriorating. After Ivar was moved to a convalescence facility, Therese was admitted to the same facility, but a different ward, a palliative ward. Then everything moved quickly. I tried to ring but was only able to speak with the staff. I posted a beautiful card: a photo of a peaceful, green meadow where a small, wooden rowing boat was moored on the edge of a shining lake. Tall, deep, pinkish-rose Fox Bells grew in profusion beside the mooring place. The accompanying text was from Psalm 23,

"The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want;  
He makes me lie down in green pastures.  
He leads beside the still waters;  
He restores my soul.  
He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake  
Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil;  
for Thou art with me, Thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

## THE DUSK OF MY WOMANHOOD

Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of my enemies;  
Thou anointest my head with oil, my cup overflows.  
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I shall  
dwell in the house of the Lord for ever."

I didn't hear from her, but I hadn't expected to, either.

A month later I received a message from her daughters that Therese had died and that her funeral was to be held in the Stavern Church. It was a long drive, and it was quickest to take the car ferry between Moss and Horten. I wanted to be there for her. The minister praised her engagement with the refugees and continued:

"The last time I spoke with Therese, she asked me to read the text printed on a card she had received. It was Psalm 23. I did this, and I shall read it now as our parting gift of comfort for her on her journey into Eternal Life with the Lord, her Good Shepherd!"

He recited it in a moving, dignified way. Tears filled my eyes. I guessed it was the card I had sent her. Ivar died six months later. His funeral was at in a secular hall with a presiding master of ceremonies from the Human Ethics Association.

Within a year after Therese's death, I followed my sister-in-law, Petra, to her death. Her husband had died six years after Gus, and after this we found a kindredness that had eluded us both in our husbands' family. The kinship kindled by their blood ties had excluded both of us. But as long as our husbands were alive, we had never been allies. We spoke about this and comforted each other. By sharing our feelings, we gained new insights and understood the past. The last time I visited her she asked me to find the card I had given her and read it for her. It was the same picture with the same text, Psalm 23, as I had sent to Therese.

Petra was completely immobile and could only give me instructions, but I couldn't find the card. I asked if I could recite in English, as I had never learned it by heart in Swedish. She had been an exchange student in USA before studying medicine. She nodded. I recited it slowly, distinctly. She smiled at me. I asked her if I could bless her, she nodded again, and I blessed her. I could see that she was tiring, but she seemed at peace. I kissed her forehead and left. Three days later she died.

These three deaths, Deidre's, Therese's and Petra's were like having holes punched in my side. With every new blow more kindredness was drained from me. This stage of life was so confronting. Death could be just around the corner, not just for myself, but for the peers that I treasured. It made me tread cautiously, trying to avoid thoughts of imminent loss that would leave me bereft. Simultaneously being so grateful for Helen and her husband for their visit, for Hugh and all the other inspiring, elderly people that were "still going strong".

Rika, Erik's partner who also proffered a renewed friendship after Gus' Wake, I have also prioritized. She suffered terribly with violent involuntary movements as a result of her

## THE DUSK OF MY WOMANHOOD

Parkinson's disease, a frenzied prisoner in her 'possessed' body. Her mind however was as astute as ever and her speech clear, even though she often spoke in a whisper.

Rika had been a revolutionary in her youth, but was now glad to borrow an illustrated, 'Easy to hold, easy to read' Bible, and to receive this same card, photo and text from Psalm 23 that I had given the others. Unfortunately, she experienced no peace. Heavy medication, monitored by the nursing home staff had helped quieten some of the movements, but she was a troubled soul, constantly seeking reassurance that she would meet her deceased daughter on the other side. It was the circumstances relating to her daughter's death that plagued her.

After she threw her husband out of their home because of his ongoing relationship with another woman, she and her then nineteen-year-old daughter, Annika, had quarrelled bitterly about Rika's handling of the break-up. The daughter had walked out in a huff and gone off to stay with her boyfriend. One day, soon after the altercation, Annika, while driving her boyfriend's car was involved in a fatal head-on car collision. Both drivers died.

Rika had never come to terms with the circumstances surrounding this horrible death of her first born. She grieved daily as if the accident were yesterday, even though it happened over thirty years ago. Before she had nightmares, now she has flashbacks. I listened and tried to proffer some insights here and there and hoped she would receive strength just to survive through all the unwelcome jitters and pain. She believed that her daughter was in Heaven, but the thought of joining her there seemed to give no solace, maybe because of the unresolved issue. I hoped that one day Rika would also sense that she was being carried in the everlasting arms. All I could do was stroke her, bless her and tell her I loved her, and that Jesus loves her, her Good Shepherd.

Through all of this, Hugh and I have had one constant in our lives, a Quiet Time each morning, emulating my parents, and in the spirit of the Oxford Movement that triggered my life-changing conversation with Hugh. Prayer and Bible reading, either together or apart, we read from the same devotional book by deceased, former Swedish Bishop, Bo Giertz. We feel we have been abundantly blessed by this aspect of our kindredness.

Parallel with all this, Hugh and I have been working on a website: a playlist with well-known songs from childhood and youth, not only to listen to, but to sing to. with serene screen pictures and accompanying text for the use of families and friends of persons with dementia who have trouble holding a conversation. The website is an alternative to spoken communication. My research into the subject matter, and involvement in the NGO provided valuable insights, and Hugh's choir, conductor and musicians provided the substance for this experiment to facilitate this alternative form for communication. We have in other words been creative in our Mutuality, maintained our Symmetry and nurtured our Kindredness.

## THE DUSK OF MY WOMANHOOD

But dancing? Hugh doesn't dance, at least not in public. I have tried to teach him, but as the saying goes, "You can't teach an old dog new tricks.» It also applies to elderly men. Anyway, that was Gus' and my specialty, and it's nice to keep it that way.

## Chapter 18 “Close Every Door to Me, Keep those I love from me”

### **LIES, DECEIT, THEFT, MURDER, SHAME, PARALLELS, LOVE, FORGIVENESS, PEACE**

There was still unfinished business in my soul concerning Theo, a longing for closure, a wish for understanding, forgiveness and reconciliation. I was bothered by Deidre's presumption that Theo, in the seconds before he died, like “the lamb that had gone astray”, was searched for, hunted, and finally with a crook around its neck dragged back from precipitous danger to God's fold. I could not refute this possibility. But I was not happy with it. My sense of justice was disturbed. And then I reflected on God's unconditional love, His grace, freely given to the just and the unjust. But I felt just the same that there was and is a condition: one must desire to be rescued.

In latter years I have been infused with this longing to learn more about this baffling paradox: God's part and our part or response to His outstretched finger in our living. I have studied Michelangelo's painting of God's outstretched hand and forefinger on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. It embraces not only His first gift of breath to Adam, His first human creation, but His continual longing for kindredness between the Creator and the Created.

Not long after Deidre's death, I started leading a group of Senior Citizens in my local parish, a monthly gathering with an approachable bar to membership. Although Hugh was seldom able to attend, we both hoped that people in our age group with wonderings about sickness and health, life and death, justice and injustice and other existential issues, but who were not necessarily affiliated with any church, would venture inside and be made to feel welcome. The theme that I, with Hugh's help, had chosen for one season of monthly Monday meetings was “God's Hand in our lives”. It was inspired by my concession to what seemed like a fact: that we met, not by coincidence, but by a God-incident, a God-governed occurrence. I wanted to learn more about this in the fabric of other peoples' lives and had good reason to believe that many of my peers had similar thoughts and doubts about these issues.

The program alternated between Bible stories that specifically revealed how God had transformed dire needs, tragic circumstances or misdeeds into something of ultimate value and significance, and narratives from friends or acquaintances who were willing to share their personal experiences with similar substance. The audiences would in most cases be familiar with the Bible stories, but for those without a traditional Christian upbringing maybe these stories would come as a surprise.

## THE DUSK OF MY WOMANHOOD

The first story, a Bible story, was told by a Radio-pastor. He enlightened us about “dysfunctional families” in the Old Testament, exemplified in the offspring of Isaac. Isaac was Abraham’s legitimate son. Abraham is recognized as founder of the three great world religions, Judaism, Islam and Christianity. All this happened about 4000 years ago. Isaac’s wife favoured the second-born of their twin sons, Jacob, and connived with him to deceive his father, Isaac. Esau, the older twin had flippantly traded his birthright in return for a pot of stew from his brother earlier in the piece, but Jacob the younger of the two had to use subterfuge to convince his father that he was Esau to obtain their father’s blessing and inheritance. Esau swore revenge, and the deception meant that Jacob had to flee and settle in a foreign land.

Jacob married there. He had ten sons by his first wife, a marriage of arrangement, and two by his second wife, a marriage of love. Jacob, who is recognized as ancestor of the twelve tribes of Israel, favoured his two youngest boys from the love-marriage. This evoked an evil plot by the jealous sons of the first marriage to kill their half-brother, Joseph, known for his mystical dreams and his precious coat of many colours, a special gift from his father. Joseph’s life was spared. He was instead sold to nomadic slave-traders and became a slave in Egypt. The offending brothers then lied to their father telling him that Joseph had been killed by a wild animal. Deceit, jealousy and lies are the fabric of this story.

In Egypt, Joseph was blessed by God. Despite suffering some plots and intrigues against him, Joseph gained favour in the eyes of the ruler of the land, Pharo, and because of his special God-given gift of foresight, had risen to be a prominent administrator in the Egyptian government. When the whole of the Middle East was laid waste by a devastating drought, Egypt had grain and food to offer to both their own people and to foreigners.

Jacob, his family and kin numbering hundreds and their livestock numbering thousands, were starving. Jacob’s sons travelled for days after having heard that Egypt’s silos were full of grain to sell. Joseph became their benefactor, saving his family of origin and eventually being reunited with his father. Being a visionary, he saw God’s Hand in his life: in spite of his brothers’ plans to murder him, and his being sold to a life of slavery in a foreign country, all things had worked together for the good for him who loved God.

The next narrative was from the present day: It was relayed in the quiet, modest voice of a former colleague from the University. He was not a member of the academic staff but had a leading position in the administration. This diligent, well-educated bureaucrat told of the nightmare his and his wife’s lives had become having a son dependent on narcotics from age sixteen. He described roaming dark alleys and dismal streets in the worst part of town in the middle of the night trying to find their boy, only to have him spit in their faces when they tried to pressure him to come home. They continued to offer their love and concern, but to no avail. He had chosen this path and refused their help. They prayed and they prayed.

## THE DUSK OF MY WOMANHOOD

For twenty years they prayed, and their son was in and out of prison mostly because of unpaid debts and fines. One day, like the story of the prodigal son in the Bible, he “came to himself”: a kindly helper saw him in a way that reflected his misery back to his own heart. He saw whom he had become and he wanted better. This significant woman who looked at him with warmth and hope managed to give him the key to open a door to a new life. After a period in rehabilitation, he took his license to drive semi-trailers and today is self-sufficient economically, living in harmony with a family of his own, his parents and siblings.

My colleague attributed the significance of this one woman to God’s hearing and answering their passionate prayers: God’s Hand, God-governed intervention in their son’s life through to them an unknown woman who cared.

A serene and impassioned, good friend from the parish contributed to the third session. She painted portraits of two biblical personalities from the Old Testament: Ruth, and her great-grandson David. The story is around 3000 years old. I shall hop over Ruth because she has already featured in my life earlier in the piece. Suffice to say that Ruth, a foreigner in Bethlehem, married Boaz, a prosperous, Jewish kinsman of her dead father-in-law, and had a son, grandson and great grand-son David, the shepherd boy who slew Goliath with a single slingshot.

He became King of Israel and Judah. Earlier on he had been a king “after God’s heart”, as it says in the Bible. But at one stage he was overwhelmed by lust for very young, but stunningly beautiful, married woman, Bathsheba. He became not only an adulterer, but an accessory to murder: He, as King and general of his armies, deceitfully ordered the woman’s husband into the firing line in a battle. As David had hoped and planned for, the husband fell in battle.

David married the beloved, teenage widow, but they lost their first born just days after his birth. In his recognition of what evil he had done and his consequent anguish, shame and regret, David begged God for forgiveness.

The overview was this: Ruth, a young, destitute, widowed immigrant with a loving heart, and her great grandson, a middle-aged, deceitful, egoistic, and adulterous, but finally repentant King, were participants in a God-governed plan in the ancestry of Jesus through the birth of David and Bathsheba’s second son Solomon. Jesus was born in Bethlehem, David’s city, because his humanity belonged to the line of David.

Absurd as these baffling paradoxes may seem, God seemed to be telling the listeners, and me, that despite all our failures and weaknesses, our worldly power or lack of it, that He both loves and guides us: our unique situations may be transformed to our own and others’ ultimate benefit.

My mind flashed back to Theo: Without his adultery and rejection I would never have been in Sweden. Without Gus’ untimely death I would never have been a lonely widow invited to gather cloudberries with Therese on Rørosvidda in Norway. Without her changing our

## THE DUSK OF MY WOMANHOOD

agreement because a riding school needed a guest house, I would never have been at that unconventional hotel in Tydal the evening I met Hugh. I could see God's colourful pattern in the fabric of my story: "God-incidents", not unlike Deidre's proclamation that I had been "carried" along the way.

The fourth session was a tragic account told by the parents of a young woman in her twenties, Tania, who had been holidaying in Nice when an ISIL-terrorist murdered scores of holidaymakers. Tania had been one of the victims who was violently killed when the terrorist drove a heavy vehicle onto the beach esplanade, mowing down the holidaymakers in his path.

These parents' intolerable grief was transformed to dedicated service for others when they donated all the insurance money received after their daughter's untimely death to a refuge for abused women in Africa. They called it "Tania's Shelter". They were appalled by the thought of using it to buy a new, expensive car or a holiday cabin. These worldly things could never compensate for her precious life. So it happened that many young, African women who suffered abuse, violence or neglect, together with their fatherless children, found protection, comfort and love in Tania's Shelter. Their love, and how their abhorrence of the perpetrator was transformed to good, impressed me.

Fifth and finally the owner of a bookshop specializing in Christian literature chose to illustrate God's yearning for a sense of kindredness with all His children by recreating the scene featuring a fishing boat out on the Sea of Galilee, and a figure standing on the sandy shore.

Jesus' friend and follower, Simon Peter, had lied when Jesus was being questioned and indicted in the house of the High Priest in Jerusalem. On three occasions he denied knowing Him to protect his own skin. A month later after Jesus' unjust trial, his death by crucifixion on a criminal's cross and his unexplainable resurrection from the dead, Jesus met Peter again:

The disciples had been in a quandary about their future after the revelation that Jesus had conquered death and was alive: His features and even the nail-holes in his hands were recognizable, but different, no longer a mortal body confined by time and space. After a week or two they decided to go back to Capernaum and resume their lives as fishermen. Peter and a few other disciples were out fishing on the Sea of Galilee. They had fished all night but caught nothing.

The bookstore owner set the scene for us:

"As the dawn was breaking the disciples were disgruntled and set sail for the shore. In the early morning, pearl-grey light, shafts of silver severed the mist, making gaping windows that illuminated the crests of the waves with an indescribable lustre. They were too exasperated and exhausted to notice all this. They turned their tired eyes toward the

## THE DUSK OF MY WOMANHOOD

shore. A stranger was strolling there. The stranger shaded his eyes to distinguish them better, and then he called out:

“What have you caught?”

“Nothing!” they shouted in unison. Their hollow voices echoed in the shrouds of the mist.

“Cast your net in the other side!” the stranger shouted back.

What was the use of that, they thought, but on the other hand, what was there to lose? They hauled in the huge net, folding it as they went so that they could manage to cast it out from the other side of the boat. To their utter amazement they could see the water churning as fish after fish was ensnared in the net. The boat tilted to one side with the weight of the catch. And then John, the other disciple, cried out, recognition dawning in his disbelief:

“It is, it must be the Lord!”

Peter was out of his mind’s control; he just had to get to Jesus. He wrapped his loincloth round his naked body, threw himself over the rail and swam ashore.

Jesus had already kindled a fire of driftwood and had some fish grilling on the coals. The others reached land with their phenomenal catch and then joined Jesus and Peter for a welcome breakfast.

A little later Jesus took Peter to one side toward the end of the cove. In a voice clothed in love and understanding, He asked Peter a simple question:

“Do you love me, Peter?”

Peter had lied three times during the trial, and now on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, Jesus repeated the question three times:

“Do you love me, Peter?”

Peter was ashamed and bothered by the repetition but exclaimed,

“You know everything about me, Lord, you know that I love you.”

The words “You know everything” meant that Peter felt he was seen, understood and loved in spite of himself. Kindredness with Jesus was restored. The close, endearing relationship between the two was given new life and his call to be a Good Shepherd to Jesus’ followers was reaffirmed. Peter’s self-imposed status of alienation evaporated like the early morning mist as it succumbed to the sun’s warm caress.”

The bookshop owner’s words reminded me of what had happened to me that day Hugh asked me about the bitterness that had warped my heart toward God. My heart-wrenching confession of guilt was quietened by my certainty of pardon and inclusion. I felt that God

## THE DUSK OF MY WOMANHOOD

had 'seen' me in all my fragility, and I wanted to 'see' Him, learn more about Him, follow Him.

At this time our inner-city congregation was in financial difficulties. By 'coincidence', or a 'God-incident', a local theatre group was searching for a location to perform in. After some soul-searching our leaders decided to let them hire the church on the condition that their productions did not defile God or Christianity. The first play was "Mistero Buffo" by Dario Fo, a daring choice as the Roman Catholic Church had initially banned it. The setting was in Jesus' time with the milling crowd thronging around Him wanting to witness a miracle. The clownish antics of the single actor, mimicking the many people portrayed in the horde was mind-blowing: and especially one scene, where two handicapped people, one blind and one lame, collaborated to get near enough. The blind man was bowed down by her weight, but carrying the lame, sighted woman on his broad shoulders she guided them through the horde to Jesus.

My memory was jolted back thirty years to the day when I witnessed the elderly woman in the wheelchair with the visually impaired woman who was physically fit whom I had matched at the Activity Centre. By chance I saw them careering down a private road toward a forest path, laughing as the wind muddled their hairdos. Their collaboration was parallel to Nobel prize-winner, Dario Fo's portrayal of humankind's ingenuity and propensity to find meaningful and workable solutions. But I was still trying to fathom how the intricate workings of God's interventions influence human beings without removing their autonomy, enhancing but not determining their struggles to find good solutions for themselves and others.

Gus' fear of death had challenged me and changed me. I needed to know, what happens to the soul after death, and had tried to alleviate his fear. I wanted him to find peace. The contrast of my two husbands' deaths was almost too much to bear: Gus' forced death, initiated by a galloping cancer. Theo's chosen death, or was it really chosen? Was it perhaps forced by his being the prisoner of a depression he was unable to control? These stories from the lecture series about of wrongdoing, failure, love, understanding, repentance, restitution and endurance in the face of hopelessness intrigued and inspired me. I felt comfortable about Gus and his soul's whereabouts, but I was still uncomfortable with regard to my conflicting feelings about Theo. The vestiges of hate were still there.

One of the therapeutic heroes from my working life in Australia, decades ago, was British Psychoanalyst, Donald Winnicott, (1896-1971). Recollecting an article he wrote, "Hate in the countertransference" inspired me to analyse and understand this hatred I had preserved in connection with Theo. I use the word 'preserved' deliberately: it is as if I had boiled bitter oranges (Seville oranges) to make marmalade - one knows that they are bitter - you need to add sugar, lots of sugar, to preserve it. Instead of tasting the marmalade properly to get the sweetness right, trying it, getting used to it, savouring it, I had hidden

## THE DUSK OF MY WOMANHOOD

the unpleasantly bitter marmalade of memories away, allowing it to ferment until it was inedible.

Winnicott wrote this insightful article about 'hate' from a personal experience during World War 2. He reasoned that hate seems to be a common response or reaction to the expenditure of engagement and caring i.e. love and energy on another person who is passive or directly obstructive to one's efforts. The amount of time spent with the rejecting person is also an integral factor in his thesis.

His story went like this: During the Blitz in World War 2 (1940-41) when Germany continually bombed London, many city children were deported to the countryside to live with foster families for the duration. Donald Winnicott and his wife opened their home to a boy. I don't remember his age, but I imagine he was between ten and twelve.

This boy reacted badly to being sent away from his family and home. He was belligerent, acted out, refused food and kindness, and was blatantly unhappy. Nothing could change his state of mind nor his behaviour. Winnicott discovered that this boy's attitude got to him if he spent too much time with him trying to cajole him into a different frame of mind. Winnicott felt that he even began to hate the boy.

In the end he gave up trying to make peace with him, telling the boy that he could stay in his room as long as he liked, but he was welcome to join the family and come down to meals if and when he could abide by the house's routines and try to fit in.

This worked - after a day or two the boy came down of his own free will and volition and joined the family. This was the start of a better relationship with family members, and Winnicott's hate of the boy disappeared.

In the article Winnicott pointed to a parallel to the therapy room. If the therapist is not rigid about keeping to the agreed time-space for his or her sessions with a client, he or she can develop an unconscious hate toward the client if this person either refuses to leave or manipulates the situation in a way that eats up more and more of the therapist's time and energy. It is a case of the old adage: "Give him your little finger and he'll take your whole hand". And the clients will gradually sense the animosity growing in you, in spite of your professional effort to conceal it. It will make healing therapy impossible. You are doing them and yourself a disfavour if you don't abide by your timetable, your limits.

In light of Winnicott's reasoning I could see that I had tried too hard. I had assumed that Theo needed my loving care after he confided in me, but he didn't. I felt I had to stand by him. He didn't need that either. At the time, the only need Theo had for me was my financial support, my proficient typing and editorial skills during his final years of study, and as he himself had put it, a convenient fuck.

I had been subservient to his desires, his acting out and later his antagonism rather than setting my own limits. I had been eaten up by my own self-sacrifice, when he didn't want or

## THE DUSK OF MY WOMANHOOD

need it. Only after the divorce, I became conscious of the hate I bore him and the injury I had suffered by my self-imposed denial of my rights in the relationship.

Today as I write, it is the eighteenth anniversary of his death. Remembering Theo on this day, searching for his face in my memory chest without result, I searched instead in Wikipedia, trying to find a photo of him. But there was no photo to be found, just his biography that listed a series of firms in which he had served in senior positions as CEO or Board Chairman. Finally, I googled the firms and found a photo, a photo of him at a huge general meeting of investors in the company where he was, at that time, Chairman.

He was in his early sixties, still an imposing figure, a little broader, older, more weathered, but still himself, tanned, his hair still brown, a little thinner, but wavy. His green eyes were sad, but his demeanour seemed powerful, authoritative. The corners of his mouth were pointed down.

Suddenly I experienced the same expression of emotions as Jesus showed when he felt deep empathy for a sick, a suffering or repentant person. I hadn't seen Theo, nor a photo of him in 55 years, but suddenly the feeling came - a deep sympathy, a whisper of the love I once had held in my heart for him. The author of the extensive article in the newspaper after his death had described him as "a self-made man", a success at the top of the ladder, career-wise.

Self-made was meant as a compliment. But I saw the loneliness in it. Theo had cut off his past life when he met Beth, she had never known about his pubertal trauma, never met his parents, never learned to love Lizzie, nor been friends with Deidre. What had this done to his Y-axis? He must have been bereft of something valuable, even if it were judgmental, hurtful.

No God, nor Jesus, no nothing from his childhood and youth. He meant he was a free, but he was alone in his life's history. My hurt, sadness, shame and anger had been rekindled as I searched for the photo, but as I studied it, the hateful feelings, like Winnicott's feelings for the boy, evaporated. My resentment burnt out. Like the fragments of the pages of my beloved books found in the still seething rubble after the fire, the fragile, charred pages disintegrated into diaphanous grey moths fluttering away on the breeze.

I saw that with Theo the dawn of my womanhood had soured, tasting of angostura. But then my life became a flower garden burgeoning with blooms: Gus, my precious children and grandchildren had filled my heart, and my work and writing heightened my awareness of the excitement connected to using one's intellectual talents. With Hugh, mountains, cloudberries, music, sea and sky became my playground, and my return to an ever-loving God had enriched my life with all the sweetness that getting close to people can give. My hatred of Theo was gone. I could finally open that old jar of mildewed, fermented, bitter orange marmalade, scrape out the contents and throw them out in the bin to be burnt in the furnace at the recycling station.

## Chapter 19 “Something New in my Life”

### HONESTY, PRAYERS, ANSWERS, ROOTS, CONNECTEDNESS, COHERENCE

The time has come to use an analogy for my unfolding. Where I grew up, the subtropical climate was ideal for butterflies. We children relished the mysteries of nature and would search for chrysalises. They were around three-four centimetres long and hung on a short thread to a tiny anchor under leaves. We knew that the caterpillars that hatched from minute eggs could, during the night, be transformed to hard, iridescent black and gold cylinders with a metallic sheen. We picked the leaves they were attached to and put them carefully into cardboard shoeboxes with air holes in the lids. Some days later we could watch the metallic case grow dark and brittle and then the transformation, the casing cracked, and the folded wings began to fill with the sap of life. A delicate butterfly materialized with wings embossed with intricate, multicoloured patterns, ready to fly. Whooping with joy we would return the new creation to the protective bushes of the garden.

Like the chrysalis, the time has come to cast my outer, protective casing: the guise I chose was to protect others from recognition and because of my fear of embarrassment connected to the intimate disclosures about my womanhood. Fear, the cocoon, has now been superseded by the sap of honesty bred by the longing to uncover my roots in the United Kingdom. The name Spencer has been my chrysalis. As a butterfly I must use my real surname from childhood, my father's name, Speare, and reveal my mother's maiden name, Loosemore. These are the names that are carved on the cathedral floor in Exeter and on mossy gravestones in churchyards in Devonshire. I longed for Hugh to share my roots with me.

In 2006, Gus and I accompanied Gillian and her husband to a “Speare extended family gathering” starting in Plymouth, South England. Here we met our Dad’s youngest and only surviving cousin, Gilbert Speare, whose family never migrated to Australia. Gilbert’s father was the youngest of eleven children, four of whom had settled in the Antipodes. Gilbert, aged 84 at the time, was like Victor, a natural head of his family in England. After his retirement, he had taken it upon himself to discover the family’s genealogy. Genetic data matching programs were just becoming available, but he had started his search by reading Church records of births, marriages and deaths. Most of this was done in Devonshire where the earliest records of the family were found. It became his obsession, and because he had worked with figures and calculators all his life, it was natural for him to engage the ‘ether-based’ assistance of the World Wide Network.

## THE DUSK OF MY WOMANHOOD

By 2006 Gilbert had over 1100 names on his list and could trace the origins of us all. All these relatives were spread over the globe, in addition to Great Britain. We received invitations to the gathering and nearly two hundred family members turned up. It was very moving to stand on the top of a grassy ridge and look down on the humble, stone cottage which remains an active farmhouse. Here in 1750 or thereabouts a couple made love, or to put it more bluntly, copulated and started a strain of events that we were all a part of. We got to know some Speare descendants from Australia whom we had vaguely heard of, but whom we had never met, plus so many others who were proud to be a piece of the tapestry of our lineage. Gillian and I had borne the family name, Speare, until we married. Being there, at the place of origin and peering at the weatherworn names on the gravestones we were sorry that we hadn't kept the name after we married. I was also sadly reminded of the complications my name changes had caused.

Rebecca and I had taken a trip to South England thirteen years before and with our own eyes seen the gravestone of my mother's ancestor, organ builder John Loosemore. He died in 1681 and was buried under the sandstone floor in Exeter cathedral. We were also permitted to read the records in the tiny church in the countryside surrounding Lyme Regis where my great-grandfather, John Henry Speare's confirmation is recorded in the mid-1890s, just prior to his going to sea with the Coast Guard.

He was described at thirteen as "A bright lad with a ruddy complexion and flaxen hair, the only hint of a beard being a light, golden down on his upper lip, his lower cheeks and jaw." He ended up marrying the Coast Guard's daughter, a match that elevated him in society. It was a great opportunity for a third or fourth boy in the family being assigned to the Coast Guard, when, as in many European countries, it was always the eldest son who inherited the farm.

Hugh was easy to convince to take a train trip through Great Britain i.e. Scotland, England and Wales to share my family history. Except for Wales, I had previously visited nearly all the cities and towns we intended to visit, but not as a tourist, mainly on University business. Hugh delighted in reading up about our destinations, often sharing extra information and making suggestions about what to see or do that were new to me. We started our trip in the north.

In Edinburgh, I had no family history, only a dream of hiking up a mountain ridge: A few years before my retirement as the Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences I was invited as guest associate professor to visit an Institute in Edinburgh, situated a way down the Golden Mile. The Institute specialized in a field in which I was far from an expert. My leadership portfolio covered this field of knowledge, so I received a grant to attend a special crash course lasting two weeks. Here I was ensconced in one of the four by four square meter office cubicles that were allocated visiting professors.

The auditoriums were small and airless. The sleeping quarters were adequate, but with glass lookouts in the walls, instead of windows. It was early Summer, but unusually hot

## THE DUSK OF MY WOMANHOOD

and I felt I was suffocating. From the tiny kitchen adjoining the office area where one could brew one's own tea, there was a proper window that could be opened. Looking out, breathing in the fresh air, I saw the Salisbury Crags and Arthur's Seat. I didn't know the name of the ridge at the time, and this was before we googled everything we don't know about. I longed to be outside in the fresh air with the hikers making their ways up the glorious, green, grassy mountain paths. I was so envious. But I was pretty monitored where I was: each evening and during the weekend, there were events that the Course members were expected to attend. It was almost like being in an open prison: One could move around within a confined area, and outside when personally accompanied. It was both relevant and enlightening academically, but I found it stifling.

The memory of those green crags had beckoned me for years. Hugh was the perfect hiking companion. We had four things on the agenda in Edinburgh, the Salisbury Crags with Arthur's Seat in particular, Edinburg Castle, The Golden Mile and Holyrood Palace. We had seen the historical drama movie "Mary Queen of Scots" (2018) not long before we left, so we felt we had some historical background.

We had not decided in which order we would achieve these goals, but when I looked out of the expansive bedroom window in our Bed and Breakfast, mid-afternoon the day of our arrival, I was overwhelmed by the sight that met me. The Crags and Arthur's Seat loomed up in the clear almost cloudless sky and looked as if they were in the near vicinity. I called out to Hugh, insistent that we hike straight away. He was exasperated. We were doing everything by public transport, with a minimum of luggage. This was a prerequisite as we were traveling by train, using the Great Britain Rail Pass we had bought online. So, after the flight, the tram to the city and a local bus to the B&B, Hugh couldn't hide his irritation at my suggestion. Fortunately, we had eaten lunch in the city before the bus ride.

I argued: "Come, look at the sunlight on the ridge, It's glorious! We don't know what tomorrow will bring."

Reluctantly he came over and looked. He breathed in the vista. I had told him how much that ridge meant to me. He turned to me laughing indulgently.

"Okay, you win, let's get cracking!"

As he donned his hiking clothes, I caught the flicker of desperation in his eyes. He must have read that I had observed his emotion:

"You are a determined woman, you know that, Julie." There was a hint of irony in his voice. Then he winked at me.

I had told him about the term "tenacity" that Sam had used in his valedictory speech for me. I had asked Sam a few years later what he had meant by the term: Was it praise or was he also suggesting that I was domineering?

## THE DUSK OF MY WOMANHOOD

“Did I say that?” he looked astonished. “What I meant was that you were “determined”. You can be domineering now and then, but I meant it positively. It was a good quality for the faculty.”

Like all mountains, they look closer than they actually are. It took us some time to reach the base, but Arthur’s Seat was glorious, and we managed to traverse a long stretch of the ridge. A gusty wind churned my hair into a centrifugal mess, but I loved it. Fortunately, Hugh loved it too with the marvellous views over the whole of Edinburgh city, the harbour and out to sea. We got our bearings for the following days sightseeing, something Hugh always liked to do. He glowed with satisfaction. I sighed gratefully out loud:

“Thanks, Hugh, my dream, conceived in the suffocation of guest professors’ quarters, has come true today!”

After Edinburgh we boarded the train for Durham, where my maternal grandmother was born and baptized as a baby in the christening robe that I had inherited.

We arrived there early afternoon. The B&B, “Forty Winks”, was difficult to locate. We asked several kindly passersby on the way down from the train station. Either they didn’t understand me because my command of the English language had deteriorated after speaking Swedish for 45 years or perhaps our aging ears didn’t catch what they tried to say in their Northern dialect. Either way we had traipsed unwillingly around with our cabin luggage on wheels and our knapsacks and were beginning to feel disgruntled, even irritated when we suddenly discovered that we were there.

“Forty Winks” was outside the downtown area. We had trundled up a path that slung along the high, upstream, right-hand bank of the River Wear. From the path we had magnificent views of the Durham Castle, dating from 1076, which now housed Durham University, and the impressive Cathedral in Norman architecture with three Romanesque towers. These lofty, splendid buildings rose above the willows and other greenery lining the opposite bank, their yellowing, sandstone facades glowing in the afternoon sunlight.

Although “Forty Winks” can’t hold a candle to the grandeur of the “Regency Grand Hotel” where Molly, from Nita Prose’s bestseller (2022) worked as “The Maid”, I felt that there surely was a similar maid at our establishment. As B&Bs go, it was out of this world: a stuffed cheetah met us in the lobby, a full-scale human skeleton dangled under the curved balustrade up to the first floor where our bedroom was. Deep crimson velvet drapes, gathered gracefully in folds with gold tassels accentuated the areas of the walls that were bare, but otherwise decked with all sorts of antiques and curiosities. Stuffed tropical birds slept their eternal sleep in gilded cages, shining silver swords with impressive, embossed sheaths alluded to wars and rivalries of the past.

A crystal chandelier hung on a long, silver chain and gleamed with scores of dancing rainbows from its prisms and fragile bulbs illuminating the stairwell. It trembled as we climbed the plush red carpeted winding staircase on our way up to the first landing. There

## THE DUSK OF MY WOMANHOOD

was so much stuff all around, but I found it exciting and exhilarating because it indicated that the owners had roamed the world with enough capital and confidence to get their treasures shipped home.

Parading on the landing was a half-sized, carved, wooden effigy of Napoleon. I could imagine the artist was an expert at carving figureheads that decorate the prows of stately, sailing ships. Napoleon's stance was typical, legs apart, feet firmly planted on the ground, oozing with self-confidence. He was painted with white breeches, royal blue and gold jacket, and his trademark, the bicorne, (hat), part of his naval uniform, was also in deep blue and gold.

The bedroom was a surprise, refurbished and elegantly modern in appearance, with no stuff, just pristine and impeccable. A huge double bed with a mahogany bed head, shone with the crispest of white sheets, two sets of plumped up pillows in crisp, white pillowcases. A sumptuous throw over in mushroom brown velvet with bronze tassels was fluffed up just enough to look relaxing and inviting, not intimidating.

There was a well-appointed desk with writing paper, pens, expensive art books and magazines from exotic places and hotels around the world. The two, fashionable wine glasses with a complimentary half-bottle of white wine and a fruit basket, meant that the whole room smelt and looked as if the Maid had her heart in her work. We were thrilled, because although we never slept together in the usual sense of the phrase, we loved the togetherness of lying close in each other's arms, my head as often as not resting on Hugh's strong shoulder and chest. His amazing, sensual hands and fingers had not lost their touch over the years.

Whenever he massaged my naked body his thumbs and fingers were like sparklers, infinitesimal electric shocks that sent ripples through my aging skin and flesh. All my nerve endings and muscles responded, and I caressed him too, as sensitively and stimulating as I could. Often when we lay together the muscles in my lower abdomen hardened, my legs and toes stretched to their full length, my spare tyre flattened for at least 60 seconds making me feel young again. We were like teenagers. And when night descended, going to sleep together in a beautiful, squeaky clean, double bed like this, kissing each other scintillatingly "good night", I could hear the strains of Barbra Streisand's song, "Something New in My Life, the New Key to a New Door..." The something new was Hugh!

I praised God for hearing my cry after Gus' death that Mid-Summer night when I fell on my knees almost screeching the words from Jan Eggum's song:

"I need someone to sleep by me.  
Then they'll be there to wake up with me".

In Durham however night had not yet descended, it was still afternoon, so we went out of to explore our surroundings. We found a beautiful, old, stone bridge a little upstream that we could traverse to the other side of the river next morning. It was Saturday and the

## THE DUSK OF MY WOMANHOOD

rowers were out on the water, training. The club house was a quaint, but large, stone house on the same side of the river as "Forty Winks". I thanked God also for what my kayak club had meant to me, the countless days savouring the paddling trips on the water. I wondered where my grandmother may have lived. Having emigrated to Australia as poorer villagers, it was unlikely that her parents' abode was in the posh part of town, more likely she'd been born in a humble, thatched cottage in a rural part of the county. It was probably a far-fetched dream to think she may have been christened in the Cathedral, but our plan was to worship there tomorrow, Sunday.

Our luscious, full English breakfast, partaken after a good night's sleep, couldn't have been surpassed by "The Regency Crown". The sumptuous dining room was full of red: plush carpet and thick velvet drapes. The elegant, long windows with white painted wooden frames, sills and sashes and framed with delicate, white lace curtains peeking from under the heavy drapes let the sunlight in and an impressive view of the Castle and Cathedral. The mahogany walls were almost littered with mementos, but there were also appropriate oil paintings with heavy gold-embossed frames adorning the niches.

At the polished walnut dining table, sitting luxuriously in dark leather chairs, we had an enlightening conversation with a North American, Presbyterian couple who, like us, were traveling around U.K. by train. We had seen the movie, "Mary, Queen of Scots" where John Knox, former Roman Catholic priest and the founder of the Presbyterian Church was portrayed so ob(k)noxiously- excuse the pun in my spelling - as a ruthless, belligerent puritan, so I was somewhat hesitant to flag my denomination of origin. The Americans were however proud of their Calvinistic theology, the austere, moral values, and last, but not least the democratic organization of our common church community which Knox had conceived.

After breakfast we hurried over the stone bridge and stopped to admire the glistening Wear River which meanders in a half circle round the city of Durham. We climbed up the steep path on the opposite bank which joined a lane to the Cathedral.

Entering the Cathedral, we were surprised to see that it was full of people. It was monumental, huge and glorious with a beautiful, stained glass Rose Window far ahead of us at the end of the chancel. The sunlight shining through it cast a luminous, bluish light on the altar, lifting it out of the shadows. The magnificent pipes of the organ looked like polished bronze. The vaulted ceiling was expansive.

It was only 10.45 a.m., but we noticed that two babies dressed in white flowing robes and their immediate and extended families were preparing for their baptisms. The mixed choir members were donning their royal blue robes and a stream of worshippers of all ages filled the aisles. We found two seats just behind the Christening parties. For me it was a potent occasion with so many wonderful images of what may have been the origins of my precious christening robe: The babies in their white innocence were surrounded by curious, older sisters and cousins with flowers in their hair and shy, little boys straining

## THE DUSK OF MY WOMANHOOD

against their starched collars, and received the cleansing water and the blessing of the Holy Spirit to the magnificent harmony of song rendered by the Cathedral Choir and organ. It was an ego-orgiastic happening. I felt connected, a cornucopia of blessings.

Hugh loved Durham too, but also for another reason. In a quaint, little bookstore facing onto the cobblestoned street that wound down from the Castle he found a new Bill Bryson book on "The Body: a Guide for the Occupants".

York, our next stop, was only a short train ride from Durham, and we had timed it so that we would get to Evensong there in York Minster. First, we visited my father's still surviving cousin, Gilbert, now 99 years of age and confined to a wheelchair who had invited us to afternoon tea. His daughter who was over seventy had popped in to put the kettle on and prepare sandwiches but then popped out again.

It was delightful to spend time with him, alone, revitalizing the contact from 2006. He had moved to a new, easily-to-look-after, one storey bungalow with almost no threshold, so that he could wheel himself without effort onto a paved, pleasant, common garden area.

Hugh was in awe of Gilbert's clarity and enthusiasm for the kin he had bound together by his tireless work on the family-tree. He still used his personal computer daily, keeping births, divorces and deaths a-jour in the archives that he had painstakingly systematized. He desperately wanted to last the year out: he was due to celebrate his 100th birthday in December and looked forward to receiving a congratulatory birthday card from Her Majesty, the Queen. When I got home, I painted a special congratulatory card for Gilbert and sent it off.

Just before Christmas I received a yuletide greeting and a photo of my card propped up beside the one from the Queen!

Gilbert inspired us also with his other passion: After his retirement and losing his wife, he had designed, built and financed a Youth Centre, named Speare in his honour, as part of his parish's outreach program in the locality. He showed us a photo of himself and the African-born Archbishop of York laying down the foundation stone for the Centre. And now, on this very Sunday, there was to be a farewell Evensong for his beloved archbishop in the Chancel of York Minster. Gilbert encouraged us to go, he himself being restricted by his wheelchair and unable to attend.

Hugh and I rushed in at the side entrance of York Minster. Its history is impressive as it is constructed on a site which has been blessed as a bastion of Christianity since the 7th Century. It is regarded as one of the most magnificent cathedrals in the world. The Chancel was heaving with people sitting in the ornately carved and decorated, wooden stalls rising up along the walls. We looked at each other hopelessly. It wasn't worth waiting for if we were assigned to sitting in the stone corridor flanking the chancel where we could neither see nor hear.

## THE DUSK OF MY WOMANHOOD

Suddenly, a lady stood up gesticulating at me and pointing at one unoccupied seat just in front of her. Hugh was gallant and nodded at me to oblige myself of her offer. I extricated myself from him, the crowd was crushing on all sides, but I managed to access the seat, accepting it graciously. But I was worried about him, if he had to stand during the service or sit behind the wall? Then an elderly man stood up, beckoning to Hugh: there was an unoccupied seat two seats down from him. We felt utterly blessed by these strangers who saw us, our elderly faces and posture, our predicament and they provided! As newcomers to the place, we were inside, moved and thankful.

Thanksgiving was the theme for the Evensong, reminiscing about what the retiring Archbishop, originally from South Africa, had accomplished in the region comprising several dioceses. It was a moment of grandeur with opulent robes for the Archbishop and Bishops under his care, a glorious choir performance, an almost deafening, but brilliantly executed pipe organ solo, and wonderful community singing by the congregation. It was an hour of praise that we would never forget. They even sang Gus' song, "Thine be the Glory, Risen, Conquering Son", as a finale.

Wales was our next stop, far out on the tip of the Northwest coastline. Our train destination was Fishguard. We had managed to see Old Trafford stadium in Manchester and a very wet Liverpool on the way, but they weren't the highlights, just part of the transport route. Why were we traveling via Cardiff and Swansea to a seaside village in a tiny train that only had two carriages? The answer is that Hugh and I had read some inspirational books about a middle-aged preacher and his wife who had bought a rather large, stone farmhouse and adjoining buildings in an isolated Welsh valley, the Gwaun valley. This couple had received a God-given calling to transform the rambling property to a House of Prayer, not as a live-in Retreat Centre primarily, but a place where one could pray for an hour or two, either alone in the circular stone chapel or with a group of others using tidal prayers, morning, noon, evening and night.

It was certainly off the beaten track. We had been advised to book a B&B about three kilometres down the road from the Fold as it was called. A fold is a movable, temporary pen or shelter for the protection of sheep. Jesus had said to Peter, "Feed my sheep", so I guess the name reflected the Christian's need for nutrition and protection through prayer.

We knew that the distance from the B&B to the Fold was a comfortable walk for us. We were also advised that there were no shops in the vicinity, nor restaurants, only a tiny local pub, Betsy's Arms, on the ground floor of her blue painted cottage by the stream. The B&B catered for breakfast only; so, we would need provisions. In Swansea, we stocked up with sliced bread, sliced cheese, tomatoes, bananas, apples, raisins, some biscuits and a couple of litres of juice that didn't need refrigeration. We calculated that we could survive without dinners for at least three nights.

The taxi drive from the station took nearly half an hour. There were no buses, and the road was narrow and winding, so we had no other option than to relish the wavering, emerald

## THE DUSK OF MY WOMANHOOD

green of the verdant Gwaun Valley from the vehicle. The driver spoke very little. We learned later that most of the residents of this part of the world speak Gaelic. But he smiled when we tipped him generously and he promised to come back at the assigned time four days later.

The B&B surpassed our wildest imagination. It was a part of a Manor House, elegant and expensive-looking with a huge garden of glorious, spreading trees, vine-covered trellises and roses interspersed with late summer flowers, blooming in the garden beds. The hosts, Rick and Adele, explained that they were the caretakers of the whole house, the owners who lived in London only used the house in summer vacations and an occasional weekend. In the section they occupied, Rick and Adele were permitted to have B&B guests to supplement their income.

They showed us to our bedroom. It was delightful, huge, old worldly, with a plush pale-yellow carpet with three large medallions in crimson, pink, gold and pale blue. The delicate flower-patterned wallpaper on the walls featured a gold leaf stripe. White muslin curtains with ruffles peeped out from under drapes of luxurious, yellow brocade, a stately, double bed. A pristine section of windows let in the pale sunlight and looking over the garden toward a low, stone wall, we discovered the local Church on the neighbouring property. We took a deep breath. It was gorgeous.

There were two, comfortable lounge chairs in cream coloured cretonne and a mahogany coffee table with a glass top on the right-hand side by the window. The en-suite bathroom was minuscule, and Adele explained that if we wished it, we could use a larger, shared bathroom across the landing. We said that wouldn't be necessary. We could make coffee and tea on the dressing table also with a glass top under a gilt mirror. We had been advised that there was no Wi-Fi in the valley, no mobile 4G or 5G connection and no TV. We had a book each and Hugh had his diary, and we intended to walk back and forth along the narrow road to the Fold for the three-four days we were staying there. We unpacked our groceries, settled in, and went for a hike following the stream downwards towards the tiny school and Betsy's Arms to get our bearings.

The next morning, we were greeted in the dining room by Adele. We were the only guests. The newly gathered roses on the table had a pleasing fragrance competing with the mouth-watering aroma of bacon, eggs and fried tomatoes from the kitchen. In addition, the sideboard offered cereals, a variety of rolls and bread, fruit, preserves, jams, sour cream, scones, yogurt and juices. Tea and coffee were on the table with a jug of milk. We had told ourselves that for the next mornings, our main meal of the day would be breakfast.

We arrived at the Fold a half hour before the beginning of a prayer session, and just long enough for a lovely, gentle woman called Janice to show us around. As we departed from the tiny, white painted, circular chapel of stone, Janice asked if we would like to be blessed. Without any hesitation from our part or ostentation from hers she blessed us, one

## THE DUSK OF MY WOMANHOOD

after the other, making the sign of the cross on our foreheads as she prayed for God's blessing over us and our stay in the Valley.

There was a large rock pool in the magnificent garden fed by a Spring, and a dark wooden cross on a grassy, green knoll somewhat removed from the buildings. It rose up against the sky reminding me of Jesus looking up to Heaven just before his death saying, "It is finished".

Janice spoke quietly as we surveyed the cross from a distance:

"Jesus died on the cross for us, to bear the punishment for our sins, so that we can be incorporated in God's fold. Now the cross becomes a place of wonder, reverence and hope. And here at the Fold it is the custom to take a small round, weathered stone, a large pebble most likely gathered from a sandy shore behind the ridge," (she waved her hand in that direction) "write the name of a person needing special prayer on the stone and place it at the base of the cross."

She paused for breath, checking that we were interested in her message.

"It could be a prayer for healing, for forgiveness, for protection, for wisdom, for anything. Other people have already gathered stones from the beach, so it is just to select the ones you would like to use. Have a nice day!"

The idea was to place one or two there with the hundreds of others as a witness to the need for and the power of intercession.

"We will certainly avail us of this opportunity," we said smiling gratefully.

We then walked back to the assembly room in time for common prayer.

When I got home to Gothenburg after our trip, my grandchildren visited me for their autumn holiday, and I showed them photos on my computer of our journey and our time at the Fold. I told them the story of the prayers with specific names on the stones at the base of the Cross.

Lucas, spoke up immediately, asking:

"Gran, did you put one there for me?"

I hesitated before I answered. My thoughts flashed back to my actions and prayers for my sick friends. My main preoccupation had been to dip three handkerchiefs I had deliberately brought with me in the Spring, purported to have healing properties. The Spring trickled into a pleasant, round rock pool bordered with burgeoning flowers in all colours and had only recently started to run again having been dried up for years. So, this had been a mission for me with their permission. I feared that like Deidre and Therese before them, Petra and two other dear friends would die, punching new holes in my heart.

## THE DUSK OF MY WOMANHOOD

All this was a flash. I had heard the eagerness in Lucas' voice, but I was ashamed that I had been more preoccupied with pebbles and handkerchiefs for my sick friends than my grandchildren. I had placed three small stones with his and the girls' names on under the cross and I had, before we left, lain prostrate under another wooden cross on the cold floor of the tiny, stone chapel and prayed for God's mercy, protection and blessing over my children and grandchildren.

"Yes," I started hesitantly, but then enthusiastically, "I placed a pebble with your name on under the cross, Lucas."

Lucas hadn't noticed my uncertainty. He looked at me with trust in his eyes. He believed in the pebble. His face shone with contentment.

"And I prayed for you too," I added intimating the girls, but they were preoccupied with the photos of the exquisite flowers.

Both Petra and one other friend died during the pandemic. They had kept their handkerchiefs unwashed after the dip in Spring water, folded in their bras over their left breasts, close to their hearts. It gave them a feeling of peace and hope in God, they said. They knew that they had been prayed for and by proxy blessed by the good and loving people at the Fold.

We walked home in the evenings somewhat peckish after not having had any food apart from coffee and a biscuit since breakfast. We threw ourselves immediately into the job of making sandwiches and cutting fruit for our evening meal. Then we reclined in our deep, comfortable, lounge chairs and wondered what the evening would bring.

The second evening we were getting a bit bored with reading, doing quizzes and sudoku. The abstinence from TV and news on mobile phones etc was beginning to take its toll, so I asked Hugh off the cuff:

"Can you recall the times your prayers have been answered?"

He frowned. Then shaking his head warily as if to brush off the question, his eyes turned upwards to the left, seeking inspiration. Biting his teeth together, he answered with an air of uncertainty:

"I suppose so."

"Can you please tell me about them?"

By now he was relaxed and not uncertain as he had been when I caught him off guard by introducing this deeper form of conversation.

*"The most concrete answer to prayer that I recall was when Jonas (our eldest son) was seven. He had started school a few weeks before. My wife, Solveig, was expecting our fourth child. She was eight months pregnant, and because, as you know, we lost our*

## THE DUSK OF MY WOMANHOOD

*second child, premature with a hole in his little heart, she was nervous. Terrence, Jonas' little brother, our third was at home, but he was not yet two, so not much help as such."*

*Jonas had pestered me since I came home early from work to go out and pick lingonberries. His grandma, Solveig's Mum, was coming next week to stay until after the birth of the baby. Grandma lived on the East Coast of the Oslo fjord. Jonas knew that she was very partial to lingonberries, the perfect supplement to meat dishes and a speciality called 'komper'. These are a type of dumpling shaped as a ball and made from a concoction of grated potatoes with a piece of salted pork in the middle. Komper were one of Jonas' favourites.*

*I gave in. It was early autumn, and daytime was getting shorter. Just a short trip I assured Solveig as we took on our forest boots, jackets and caps, and found a couple of buckets for the Christmasy, crimson-red berries.'*

*I was in local politics at the time for the Christian Democrats, and because I sat on the committee that covered property issues in both private and public sectors, I knew that a section of forest, high up on the hills that surround Arendal like a horse-shoe, had been cleared, early Spring, following damage from a violent, winter storm. Forest clearings such as this provided perfect growing conditions for Lingonberries. I told Solveig that we would drive up the timber track that leads to this special part of the forest."*

"We will be back before dark," I said, reassuringly.

Hugh looked around, his eyes searching for a glass. He breathed a little faster than usual. I could see that it was costing him, reliving the scenes. I hopped up and fetched a glass of lukewarm apple juice (we had no fridge), but he gulped it down vigorously. He searched my eyes for reassurance.

"Go on," I said when he put the glass down.

*"It's hard going walking through such a clearing", he explained. "There is so much debris and fallen branches, you lose all feeling of direction. And you have to search in between all this to find the berries. It is easy to go round in circles."*

He took a new deep breath.

*"I knew that the clearing ended in a ledge leading down to a path that ensconced a rather steep and rocky gorge. A rivulet flowed at the bottom, at times rushing with frothing rapids, then calming into still water, shallows and pools; all depending on the topography."*

*"We had found lots of berries and Jonas was delighted, but this was just before I noticed a sudden change in the weather, a damp coolness descended on us. An isolated cloud, I thought, it can't be fog, but I felt uneasy."*

"We had better be getting back," I said, and Jonas nodded.

## THE DUSK OF MY WOMANHOOD

*But easier said than done. Berry-picking distracts you in every direction. You go with the flow of the berries. In the fog I now had no idea which way to head. Then I remembered the path under the ledge. We picked our way, heading for I know not what. We had to traverse so much debris, and we knocked into fallen branches, twigs and boulders, scraping our knees and hands. Jonas was getting tearful.*

*I had been praying inside myself for a while, begging God to lift the cloud so that I could fathom where we were. But to no avail. Suddenly I noticed that there was less debris, we must have reached the edge of the clearing, but which edge? My heart was beating uncomfortably fast. If we were unlucky, we would step out onto the ledge at its steepest and if we were to abseil down without ropes, it would be at a pace that would catapult us over the path wall and down into the gorge. If the ledge were over a more undulating part of the cliff face, like a roller coaster, the upswings would break our fall and we would have a chance of ending up on the path, probably scratched, but at least with the wall protecting us from drop behind. If we weren't near the ledge at all we were as lost as ever in the looming, dark forest. I picked Jonas up in my arms his bucket dangling.*

*“Don’t spill my berries!” he cried.*

*“No worries.” I said, “But we are in a predicament. We can’t see anything, only fog, but we believe in Jesus, so we must pray that He will protect us and guide us home. Will you kneel down with me and pray?”*

*He nodded, but with fright in his eyes. I put him down and we cleared a little patch of ground under us so that we could kneel. We put our buckets safely down. I took his hands in mine.*

*“Dear Lord God and Jesus, our Saviour, please help us, please guide us, please bring us home!”*

*I could feel his little hands shivering in mine. It was all I could do to keep from crying and shivering myself.*

*When we had quieted ourselves, I noticed that the ledge slanted downhill to the right, so I decided to follow its fall. If my calculations were correct, the lower we went, the shorter the distance between the ledge and the path. We could see nothing, but picked our way along the ledge, careful not to put a foot out into nothingness. Suddenly the ledge stopped, a huge boulder blocked our blindfold journey.*

*Hugh looked up at me. I was watching every muscle in his face, every hint of emotion. He saw that I was there with him.*

*“Come here”, I said to Jonas, “come here and sit on my lap! I will try to wriggle over the ledge and hopefully land on the path downhill from us.”*

*He had been holding my hand, but now he turned obediently placing himself on my lap hugging his bucket. Fortunately, I had brought lids with me. So, while we sat, I secured*

## THE DUSK OF MY WOMANHOOD

*both our buckets. My own I managed to place securely in the knapsack behind me, acting as a sort of buffer, but Jonas was unwilling to let go of his, so I secured his lid and hoped for the best.*

*My legs had to be as if they were glued together, like Jonas was sitting on a sled. My forest boots were vertically placed, my toes turned upwards toward the sky. My feet were supposed to be the upturned runners in the front of a sled. I turned my face to the Heavens that we couldn't see, but to which we had appealed, and began to wiggle my buttocks over the uneven, stone face. I gripped Jonas hard, my arms clasped tightly around his slight, little body. The cliff face was pretty jagged, extremely uncomfortable under my thighs, but that didn't worry me, as long as we didn't pick up a speed that I couldn't control.*

*The careful wiggling didn't last for long. Soon we were careering down a smooth cliff face. It felt like minutes, but it was probably only seconds. We stopped with a violent jolt, my boots smashed hard against the stone wall that protected the path from the depths below. The pain in my ankles was excruciating, as if they had been stabbed. Were they broken? I took a deep breath, releasing my hold on Jonas, and managed to pull one foot up, rested it, then pressed it down against the sandy path. It hurt lots, but it seemed to carry my weight. The other was the same. I tried to stand up, painfully, dragging Jonas up with me. He was as white as a sheet. My whole body hurt, but I smiled a wan smile. It was meant to be reassuring, but he probably didn't see it: the fog was still too thick.*

*"We'll be okay now," I said. "Just let's rest awhile." I leaned my whole body backwards against the cliff face and held him tight into me.*

*Then I heard a sound, it was the rattling of the shuttle train between Nelaug and Arendal: a God-given sound. The sound guided me. Now I knew which direction we should take: we followed the path downhill to the right, still hazardous. It was like being in a grey fuzz in the pitch dark.*

*As suddenly as it had come, the fog dispersed, and I could make out some miniature lights way down ahead. I had no idea of where the car was parked. My only thought was of Solveig. She would be worried stiff. We trudged a long way after we left the path along the gorge. We stomped along the edges of some fields until we reached the light which came from a small farmhouse.*

*A wary looking, elderly woman opened the door gingerly when I knocked. When she saw the boy with scarlet scratches on his face, she melted.*

*"Do you have phone? May I use it please?" My voice sounded desperate in my own ears. She showed me the way, then she toddled off to the kitchen to get some cordial for Jonas. He was still clutching his bucket of lingonberries. The berries and the cordial were the same colour. He had taken the lid off to show her. The cordial tasted like strawberry.*

## THE DUSK OF MY WOMANHOOD

*Solveig was frantic. It was nearly midnight. She had already called the local police constable. He had tried to console her saying that Hugh was so well versed in mountain and forest terrain, that he was sure he and Jonas would be all right. But she had insisted that they gather a search party. The party were already on its way to the timber track where my car was parked.*

*I asked our kind hostess for her address, and if we could stay until someone picked us up. I gave the address to Solveig, and she rang the constabulary post haste.*

*After about an hour during which our compassionate hostess had listened intently to Jonas' version of our nightmarish adventure, our rescue team arrived. While I chatted with the constable whom I knew well, Jonas related for our benefactor how he and I had knelt and prayed there in the clearing while we were enveloped in fog, she closed her eyes, laying her hand on his, and murmured:*

*"God bless you, my child. Your faith had made you whole!"*

Hugh finally stopped for breath. I crossed over to him and kissed his forehead which was beaded with sweat. He smiled up at me. He began again:

*"And then how we two met, that was an answer to prayer. I had prayed that my former girlfriend, - the widow a couple of years my junior - whom I had an off and on relationship with for years would relent and start over again. For a year I had prayed for a reconciliation, but she wasn't interested. In this case God knew better. Of all the blessings in my life, you showed up in Tydal: God answered my deep needs and longings "exceedingly abundantly above all I could ask or think".*

"The feeling is mutual." I responded with warmth in my voice and joy in my heart.

Two days later another prayer was answered. I so wanted to see the Welsh Coastline behind the Fold. I had heard that it was quite a hike up the hill and then over on the other side. It had rained heavily all morning and also during the coffee break. We were due to leave early the next morning. Hugh had doubts about the hike. He thought that the ground was too wet. But I prayed for myself that we could make it up to see the coastline. We agreed that if it stopped raining by two p.m. we could probably manage, over the moors, over the ridge and down the other side overlooking the coast.

At two o'clock we walked toward the cross on the grassy knoll for a last private prayer before leaving the Fold. As I surveyed the huge, wooden symbol of our faith the sun broke the clouds. The rain had stopped just minutes before. I was filled with the humbling realization that Jesus had borne my punishment, but He had also risen from the dead to a new life, just like the shafts of sunlight breaking through at this precise moment. They severed the heavy rain clouds and dispersed them. He had broken the chains of sin and death and given us light and life. I turned to Hugh. He had finished his private prayer.

"Shall we go?" I asked.

## THE DUSK OF MY WOMANHOOD

He smiled magnanimously, "You know you always get your way, my dear, determined Julie!"

I gave him a quirky smile that transformed to a happy look of affirmation. I was really grateful that he would hike. I sent a fleeting, silent prayer of thanks to God as well.

We had on our stout walking-shoes. Although the ground was soddened, our feet weren't wet as we tramped up and up the muddy path flanked by verdant, grassy meadows. The gorse growing wildly beside the track was bright yellow with masses of tiny blooms.

At the top, reaching the ridge and crossing over the country road to the other side we caught our breath: opening up before us was a seascape of incredible beauty. The sea was the bluest blue, the sandy beaches in the small half-circle coves were pure white. The coves nestled between rocky promontories that were decked with the greenest, velvety grass. Here and there dips in the grassy carpet revealed crevices where tracks had been made with wooden steps down to the seashore. The prayer-pebbles, I felt sure, had been gathered down there. I longed to feel the sand between my toes, but there was no time. We wanted to try a pint of Betsy's famous ale before walking home, and the pub was already seven to eight kilometres away.

We veered away from the coastline and headed for the valley. Hundreds of sheep, possibly thousands, were grazing on the lush hillsides. We passed the occasional farmhouse, and many meadows with movable, temporary pens or enclosures full of lambs. Here they would be safe from prowling foxes or other predators during the night. They were the local folds.

Betsy, who owned the pub, was well over eighty and the only help she had was her granddaughter. Hers was the only commercial enterprise in the region, and we were told stories of how she stole patrons' car keys if they had imbibed a pint too many, forcing them to walk home, or if they were lucky enough, hitch a safe ride. Sitting in the miniature, dark, wooden booths in Betsy's pub, Hugh drinking her local ale, me sipping a shandy - undiluted beer not being my favourite - he seemed so relaxed, but I wanted reassurance, so I asked him about the hike:

"Was it worth it?"

"It was top!" he answered, giving me a broad, appreciative, foamy-ale smile.

It was hard to leave Wales, but family history was calling: this time to Exeter. In the bookshop in Exeter Cathedral, a Gothic Cathedral that was started around 1270 and finished a hundred years later, I bought a book "Heavenly Harmony", the history of the immense organ in the Cathedral, completed in 1665 and still used today. This organ's history is partially mine, this time on my mother's side.

The history of the Speare's, my paternal heritage and the history of the Loosemore's, my maternal heritage, had one amazing thing in common. Both the histories developed quite

## THE DUSK OF MY WOMANHOOD

independently in Devon. The Speare history from around 1750, compiled by Gilbert, had its origins in a humble, stone Farmhouse on a green hillside, with a gurgling, Devonshire rill trickling beside it toward the valley below. The history of the Loosemore family, compiled by another Victor, my paternal grandfather's cousin, Victor Loosemore from Bournemouth, dates even further back to a site called Rose Cottage at the end of the 1500s. This history features an illustrious organ builder, John Loosemore (1616- 1681) who is the main character in the book I'd just bought "Heavenly Harmony". He has a genealogy where I feature as one of the more than 8.200 descendants.

John's father, Samuel, was also an organ builder. Organs can be of very many shapes and sizes, and John most likely learned his trade from his father. It is recorded that John did some repairs on the then existing organ in Exeter Cathedral in the 1638.

The two Tudor kings that succeeded Elisabeth I, were said to be weak and incompetent. In 1640 the country was ravaged by tumult with the outbreak of a Civil War. Charles I had been extremely unpopular, as a decade before he had married a Roman Catholic and thereafter tried to curb the influence of Calvinism in the realm. He insisted on High Church Anglican practices resembling Catholic masses in England, Scotland and Wales. In 1648 he was overthrown, captured, tried for treason and in 1649 beheaded.

Charles I's demise was bad news for cathedrals. Although Oliver Cromwell, who became leader of Protectorate of the Republic of England, Scotland and Wales, liked organ music and even had a private organ installed in his abode, he banned organs in all churches and cathedrals. The general attitude of the Calvinists was that organ music and liturgy in places of worship was papist.

When the Monarchy returned to power after Cromwell's death in 1660, the interior of the Cathedral in Exeter was in a miserable state of disarray, the organ was dismantled and just a few original pieces and pipes lay strewn around on the cold, stone floors. But by 1665 John Loosemore had built an impressive new organ, using the few pipes he had retrieved from the rubble and building new pipes inspired by and fashioned after the design of the old.

I did so want Hugh to experience this organ. Rebecca and I had visited the Cathedral in the early 1990s, but on a weekday, so we missed hearing the organ. Hugh and I had organized our trip so that we were in Exeter on a Sunday and able to join Evensong. We turned up a good hour before it was due to begin.

Hugh made himself known to an elegant, uniformed deacon who was preparing for a choir practice before the service, introducing me as an authentic descendant of the illustrious organ builder. Hugh asked how we could get better acquainted with John Loosemore and his magnificent, handcrafted instrument.

The deacon left his post to accompany us to where John Loosemore's remains lie under an engraved stone slab in the North corridor. It was moving to see his name, my mother's

## THE DUSK OF MY WOMANHOOD

maiden name under our feet. To get acquainted with the organ one can walk around it on all sides, the huge case being so high up, so delicately carved and fashioned, and the pipes, so impressive.

“But to experience it,” the Deacon explained, “you will need to hear it.”

“Please take a seat and wait for the service.”

We sat, but we didn’t have to wait long because the organist arrived for a pre-service rehearsal with the choir and his own pieces of music. There were two christenings during the service. One bouncing baby was the four months old daughter of a soprano soloist in the choir. She sang Brahms Lullaby: “Sleep my darling, Good Night” (reminding me of my own Mum and my childhood) to a sublime organ accompaniment as her gift to her little one. The other baby was the tiny son of parishioners. The choir’s rendition of a hymn of blessing especially for him was as celestial as it was heartwarming. According to the liturgy, both babies, like the two in Durham Cathedral the previous Sunday, were now incorporated in the Body of Christ and my sisters and brothers in Christ, even though I would probably never see them again nor get acquainted with them. This was an incomprehensible, yet thrilling and comforting encounter.

Hugh was enthralled. I have seldom seen him so enthusiastic about anything in his life as that service. The deference and welcoming willingness of the deacon and the glorious organ music and choir that resonated in the exquisite, lofty vaults, were true to the promise in the title of the book: “Heavenly Harmony”.

A feeling of kindredness with my roots in Devon and the grand, musical heritage that was mine, was fulfilled in Exeter. Hugh’s need to feel a part of something larger and grander than himself in the realm of praise and thanksgiving was also fulfilled. We were overflowing with gratitude and song as we wandered back to our B&B, hand in hand.

The aforementioned song I have treasured since I met Hugh, pervaded my being:

“I guess I wanted something new in my life

A new key to fit a new door.

To wake and see a different view in my life

The one I’ve been waiting for

Dreams, like everyone I’ve had a few in my life

Who knew that this one would come true in my life?

I knew the moment when you touched me....

You’re like a sudden breeze that blew in my life

A new face, a new smile, a new song....”

The bonds between Hugh and I had grown even stronger during this adventure. Both my “axes” - vertical and horizontal had been replenished by Hugh’s sharing it with me. I had

## THE DUSK OF MY WOMANHOOD

evidence of belonging, connectedness in time historically. I had known it intellectually but had not felt it like this before. And now to experience this sensation in kindredness with him, was amazing.

At Oslo Airport, after using the Great Britain Rail-pass via Oxford to Heathrow our ways were about to part. Within four months of arriving back in Sweden, the first news articles of a pandemic jolted the relative lethargy of our globe. The borders between Sweden and Norway were closed for between one to two years. As we said our tearful, but grateful “goodbyes”, a prayer trembled silently on my lips:

“Dear God, Heavenly Father, Thank you for putting your mark on me, your brand like they do with sheep and cattle, when I was baptized as a baby in my grand-mother’s christening robe from Durham. This beautiful, almost transparent cotton, hand-embroidered, long, flowing dress that grand-ma had worn there in 1890, that was brought with her on a ship to Australia, that my mother wore in her little country town in the outback, that I wore in our modest, Presbyterian church in a suburb by the river, that was shipped back to Europe, Gothenburg with Gus and me, that Rebecca wore with pink ribbons in the small church in our seaside suburb, that Philip wore the following year adorned with blue and that Philip’s children have worn. “Kindred shall follow kindred”.

I thank you, Lord Jesus, for being beside me, even when I strayed from your side and didn’t acknowledge your existence. I thank you for bringing me to a place, to a meeting where I could hear your voice when you came up behind me on the “White Way of Delight” It was autumn and the apple trees were tinged with the vibrant red, orange and gold and Freya was sleeping in her pram. I thank you for your promises that like Gus, like my Dad and Mum, Dorothy, Theo, Therese and a host of others I will one day be borne by you into eternal life where we will share in your peace together forever.

I pray for your blessing over my children, Rebecca, Philip and Louisa and my grandchildren, Lucas, Katarina and Freya who are a part of the heritage. And for my other loved ones, my sisters and brothers, Hugh and his family and all the friends and angels in my life, everyone who has offered me kindredness, both believers and unbelievers. But not only them, I pray for every person, privileged and underprivileged in this wonderful, but also chaotic, painful and unjust world, that they will be touched by your love as I have been touched and carried.

Amen.”

## Chapter 20 “Did I not Love You before This Lifetime?”

### CLOSURE

Three years have passed. The pandemic wreaked havoc with many plans: minimalistic 80<sup>th</sup> birthday celebrations for both Hugh and I, one week apart. Confirmations for both Lucas and Katarina, a year apart where the family cohort allowed in the church was reduced to the closest family. Funerals, Petra’s funeral, among others, were streamed live for other mourners as only immediate family members could attend. Like most people Hugh and I could not move freely. The borders were closed; our loving bonds were kept alive by FaceTime. It was a time for renunciation, reflection and soul-searching.

As a woman approaching the end of her innings, I feel I have examined my relationships with the three men in my life along the parameters of Mutuality, Symmetry and Kindredness. Hugh’s and my trip through the U.K. patched a lot of holes in my Y-axis and enriched my X-axis by his being with me and sharing. The trip to Australia with Rebecca, where this narrative began, became another contribution to these axes, and this delightful experience I will elaborate. But a recurring theme in my life’s struggle has been the feeling of being displaced or on the outside, and my sense of uneasiness about this deserves further scrutiny.

Theo deprived me of the beauty and loveliness of good sex in a marriage. I was an outsider to what he perceived to be liberating and exciting. In hindsight I recognize my share of the blame for this. If I had known my body well enough and been progressive, maybe feminist enough to listen to its messages, I would have understood that my first reaction to Theo meant that he didn’t attract me naturally. His courting, flirting would have been lost on me. I would have been impervious, not open to his persuasion. And I was too innocent, a product of the middle-class female culture of the mid-fifties and early 60s, and far from inquisitive enough to meet what Theo desired of me. Later, when he didn’t find me attractive anymore, my pride and tenacity came to the fore. I couldn’t admit nor resign myself to the fact that I had made a mistake, for which I paid a huge price: confusion about my womanhood, an outsider to my sensual self and the sacrifice of my self-esteem.

I had, before Theo, known what being ‘displaced’ feels like. I felt displaced as a sixteen-year-old when our house burnt down to the ground and left us with nothing to wear, nowhere to live. I felt displaced when Theo forced a divorce. He literally threw me out. The cottage on the hospital grounds that had been assigned to him not us. I lost my home, pets, keepsakes, status, a friend, namely the wife of the other trainee, and the aspirations of my early womanhood. All this became enshrouded in shame and fear. When I got on the bus with all the belongings I had in the world, I felt like a whipped dog. But one photo, one

## THE DUSK OF MY WOMANHOOD

article in the glossy American Vogue Magazine gave me a pinch of dignity that fired me to “go further, love life, seize the day.”

There was one blessing in disguise, even though I couldn’t see nor feel it at the time. Theo’s unwillingness to have children was my ticket to freedom when we finally parted. There would have been no Gus, no Scandinavia with a child in toe. The move there with Gus was my own choice, but agreeing to conceal the truth about my being divorced, hindered me from being whom I was. Thus, I felt displaced from myself. I was someone else. I learned to cope with this and compensate through my work, but there was always a hole there, a feeling of dissatisfaction that part of me did not exist for his family and friends.

The one and only terrible fight Gus and I had about his flirting with Klara, Amelie’s girlfriend from the States, was also fuelled by this sense of outsiderness. Of course, Amelie and Gus had heaps to talk about with Klara, heaps of reminiscing about the Summer of 1957 and the likes. For them it was reconstructing their Y-axis, laughing about who was an item with who, who was too drunk to drive home, who puked or peed behind the boathouse. It wasn’t just that he had his arms around her, cuddling and laughing, it was that I was outside their fun, an observer.

During our forty-one years of marriage and especially after his mother’s death, Gus and I had built a strong sense of interdependency. When he died, I was retired. I felt like a boat without a rudder, flotsam, alone on the unfathomable, capricious sea. The frustrations and the liberation of widowhood were confusing. I had no family of my origin to fall back on. I had no structure in my life as when I worked. I was forced to learn the codes of being widowed, single, independent for better or worse on my own. I applauded the sentiment in a stanza from Jan Eggum’s song: “A night is o’er”. He called his aloneness “a parody of liberty”.

Abhorring this involuntary aloneness was in juxtaposition to a stance I had taken before I met Gus and Hugh. Then I had deliberately based my life on the adage “he travels fastest who travels alone”. Being alone was the reason Patricia invited me to her place for dinner the night when I met Ivar and Gus. Not owning a car and traveling alone on public transport, gave me the opportunity to accept when the two men offered to drive me back to my apartment. Being alone was why the host at the restaurant at Tydal, forty-three years later, suggested that Hugh, Edvard and I share a meal together.

Eventually I was brought back to a place that the famous author of the Narnia books, C. S. Lewis (1898 -1963) describes as the reason for his conversion to Christianity. Lewis held an academic position at Magdalene College in Oxford, and although he had been baptized as a baby, from adolescence he became a professing atheist until the age of thirty-two. Describing the reason for the turnaround in his life, back to Christianity, he phrased it like this:

## THE DUSK OF MY WOMANHOOD

"If we find ourselves with a desire that nothing in this world can possibly satisfy, the most probable explanation is that we were made for another world."

This is an extremely profound statement. One can make psychological or socio-cultural explanations for why I so often sensed the loneliness of being on the outside and hungered for a feeling of connectedness. C. S. Lewis proffers an alternative course to searching for earthly answers to this desire. He referred to it as 'another world'.

An example Jesus used to illustrate this duality was when he was answered a trick question by the Scribes of the day. Jews were committed to pay taxes to the occupying power, Rome, to Caesar, their oppressor and protector. Jesus acknowledged their duty to the material realm: Caesar's head was featured on their currency; therefore he was entitled to tax them. But Jesus followed up by emphasizing their parallel commitment to the spiritual realm, that was their trademark, monotheism. In other words, two realms of consciousness, an earthly, material realm and a spiritual realm coexist. It was this latter realm, 'another world' that Lewis discovered he had access to when he converted.

I believed that the seemingly universal feeling of existential loneliness could not be fully sated by another human being. No one could completely understand the unique other. I felt earlier that no mortal love could be unconditional, but I revised this statement. Some people may be empowered to love their children or their siblings or their parents unconditionally in the fashion that Patrisse Khan-Cullors loved her brother with a schizophrenic disorder and her father with his periodic addiction. In chapter eight of the "Black Lives Matter memoir" she attributes this empowerment to love to, "spirit and prayer". Her faith, conceived in the confines of a Jehovah's Witness community in Los Angeles, C. S. Lewis' faith conceived in the extreme anti-Catholic confines of the Anglican Church in Belfast, Gus' child-like faith in Lutheranism in Gothenburg and my faith from my origins in the Presbyterian Church in Brisbane, have all superseded the boundaries of denominations. The common denominator is that they could not embrace atheism because they believed in "another world" which empowered them to forgive and love unconditionally.

The biblical holism, born in Jewish monotheism and whose legacy is the cornerstone of Christianity, is illustrated in Psalm 139, and exemplified in verses 13 and 15 the idea of two realms, material and spiritual: "Thou (God the Creator, Father) didst form my inward parts. Thou didst cover me in my mother's womb..." (the material body that is me), and "Wonderful are thy works; And that my soul knoweth right well" (the spiritual soul that is me).

My acknowledgement that both the physical body and the soul were God's handiwork and that it was in the spiritual realm of God's love and grace that the universal desire for a sense of belonging was met, brought me back to the child-like faith of my Australian home after forty years of backsliding. Of course, adherence to the spiritual realm doesn't mean

## THE DUSK OF MY WOMANHOOD

that one is spared from living in a state of the splits: one foot in the material world and one on a diaphanous, heaven-bent cloud of love and peace with God.

On the material level, after Gus' death, I experienced a desire to liberate myself from the close-knit network of Gus' family, their culture and traditions, to branch out. Rebecca encouraged this, but it was at a cost. Without Gus by my side, I was even more than ever, an outsider. This same feeling of alienation arose at the church I joined. The equally close-knit network in the congregation where nearly everyone had previous history with each other, was ever present. Thanks to one woman from a Northern, Lapp-county, who most likely had also felt an outsider in the community, either because of her dialect or her Northern cultural background, I was encouraged. She begged me to stay, and I stayed.

Teaming up with a Christian man of my own age, Hugh, and having him in my life after two years of single existence reduced my loneliness, but I could never be a part of his enormous network of family, friends and acquaintances. This was inevitable after him having lived in the same county for over 90% of his life: he had gone to primary school locally, his father was a minister of a church with a large and dedicated congregation, his wife became the matron of a nursing home and he himself devoted much of his time to local politics having been elected to the City Council. All this was in addition to his work which not only embraced his county but the entire region. His mother had eight siblings, his father four, and they had both grown up locally and many of these had stayed put. At times, I felt it was as if we met a third cousin round every corner. He was enmeshed, in a pleasant way, in this web. I was happily welcomed into their circles, and they were extremely generous and kind, but their conversation was often so local that it was impossible to share or contribute in a relevant fashion. In other words, vestiges of the feeling of outsiderness were there in spite of the comfort and enjoyment of having Hugh in my life. My newfound faith and my intrinsic interest in other people have however carried me through.

In the material world it was academia that provided me with a real home and a feeling of material connectedness. Acceptance in academia relied on achievements regardless of race, colour, gender, sexual preference, culture or family background, but this was after one managed to get through the eye of the needle, as far as getting your qualifications reviewed and accepted. One factor that could be discriminating in the academic environment was politics. Many colleagues had gone through a slow metamorphosis from active communists to disillusioned communists, thereafter to socialists or social democrats. My political decision, way back, to remain a swing voter was often frowned on as spineless. But this was a minor hiccup. At the university there was also a good portion of expats from USA, some from France, Germany, most married to or divorced from Norwegian spouses. My colleague, Sam, who praised my tenacity in his speech at my retirement farewell probably didn't comprehend that he was praising my continuous effort to be on the inside, but this was not peculiar to me. All staff members had to achieve to be on the inside. At the university I was an insider.

## THE DUSK OF MY WOMANHOOD

It is strange how we develop. As a young girl, being tenacious, or determined, was the last quality I desired to cultivate. My ambition in life was to be like Cecily, sweet and serene, and like Helen, eloquent and slightly rebellious, at least sticking up for the rights of the fragile for whatever reason, at whatever the price. As a young woman I wanted to be fearless like Beverley, but also exciting like Olivia, a lover of the arts and embracing the new and challenging. What I didn't want to be was assertive and domineering. If I were the latter, I believed no-one would like me and that failure was just around the corner. The failure of my first marriage was fuel to the fire of uncertainty about whom I was, whom I wanted to be.

Motherhood brought its own challenges. I had no friends of my own to invite to meet the children or to introduce as playmates. Many neighbours were 'born and bred' in the suburb where we lived and had a long history with each other. My one and only attempt to introduce Rebecca to one of the children of the neighbourhood was a total fiasco:

We lived on and off for nearly a year with Gus in South America when the children were small. When we finally came home and settled again, they missed their playmates. The other children in the neighbourhood had already established friendships, so I felt obliged to try to arrange meeting places for my two so that friendships might eventuate. I chose to concentrate my efforts on Rebecca first.

Martha, the girl next door, was not the easiest to be friends with. From the first moment she came into our house she coveted Rebecca's favourite doll, even though there were at least four other dolls, two teddy bears, a cuddly rabbit and lots of other toys. She wanted Rebecca's doll. She even had her own cuddly toy with her. To please our guest, I asked Rebecca to share her doll with Martha. I put moral pressure on her by telling her it was "the kind and good thing to do". Frustrated and disappointed, my little girl unwillingly acceded, handing the doll to Martha, but she turned her back on me and Martha, sucking her thumb violently to suppress her acute feeling of resentment with tears welling in her beautiful, but sorrowful eyes.

Many years later, in a heated discussion, Rebecca reminded me of this incident and accused me of never taking her side nor protecting her rights. She was right. C. S. Lewis in a parallel example in his book, "Reflections on the Psalms", calls what I did "certainly not good nor kind, and certainly not Jesus-like": Jesus elevated "truth", "authenticity", "light", not "pleasers".

Under the pretence of being loving and kind through sharing Rebecca's doll, I had really wanted to be liked, and on 'the inside' with Martha and her mother. I had ignored the natural, inherent sense of justice of my four-year old, and thereby distorted the incident, placing the responsibility, the blame and the shame on her. The doll was rightfully Rebecca's. She had proffered all her other toys. I gave in to a conniving power-game of coveting the one and only thing you can't have, even when you have a world of other delights at your feet. I accepted injustice and failed my daughter.

## THE DUSK OF MY WOMANHOOD

My painful periods of identification with Gus' sorrow and desperation during his unemployment and when he feared disfigurement because of the carcinomas in his mouth, were alleviated by some amazing, rejuvenating holidays together which nurtured our kindredness. I also gained comfort and forgave myself for what I felt was my distraction from Gus' pain and anxiety during his illness when I read about "anticipatory grief". What I experienced was apparently a common phenomenon for next of kin when a loved one receives a fatal or debilitating diagnosis. I wrote that it was like we were on 'two different planets', and now I understood why and how this worked: I mourned what we were losing from the day he received his prognosis, while he was intent on fighting for his life.

The loss of structure and meaningful activities in my life due to retirement and Gus' death forced the outsider feeling to swell in me again. When I made friends with Hugh I hoped that I would be on the inside, but he made it quite clear from the beginning that his family came first: we could be very dear, close friends, not lovers, and continue to live apart so that our economies, our homes and our relative independence were preserved intact. This was ten years ago. We are still going strong, both blessed with relatively good health and at times treasuring the moments alone, satisfied with our FaceTime sessions and plans for our next rendezvous.

I don't know if anyone noticed any change in me after I felt I could forgive Theo. I myself felt encompassed by a new type of peace. I remembered my fear when I opened my heart's door to Jesus that I was afraid of what would become of me and what had been described as my 'bubbly personality'? I feared that I would end up like the prototype of pious Christians that James Joyce described in his book, "A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man": "a mirthless mask reflecting a sunken day... sour flavoured and devout, shot with the pink tinge of suffocated anger." This is exactly the opposite of what C. S. Lewis describes as the elevation and satisfaction of surrender to 'another world'. I was still uncertain of where I was in all this, the challenge of "being in the world, but not of the world". I wanted so much to manage this. Aaron Antonovsky's concept was that when life was comprehensible, manageable and meaningful then salutogenesis would permeate the person and personality. Was I able to manage my feelings, my hang-ups, my life and achieve a health promoting existence within two realms for both myself and those I loved?

This story began with Rebecca and I on an amazing trip to Australia. While we were there, Rebecca had seen me with other eyes. I was no longer what she had perceived after my return to my faith as a conventional, 'Christian freak'. She adored my fun-loving and not so devout friends. She couldn't believe I had "such a cool bunch of people" in my life: Helen, a former teacher, still eloquent and still a professing atheist, my dearest friend from when we were toddlers and her jovial and kind second husband; Beverley, a former social- and welfare worker, still fearless and determined, with a glorious singing voice, divorced from the father of her three children, now a quaker, a pacifist and a international expert in anti-violent communication; Cecily, a former physiotherapist, still serene and harmoniously married to Jim, struggling to retain her former grace and poise after a stroke. Cecily and

## THE DUSK OF MY WOMANHOOD

Jim and their family broke with Christianity and adopted anthroposophy as their option for life. Olivia, still exciting, elegant and embracing culture and life, my greatest supporter in my time of need, who most lovingly and generously adopted me after my move South. She could not be pigeon-holed with regard to any mind-set or faith. She was an actor, trained in London and had heaps to talk about with Rebecca from the world of Music and Theatre. She was divorced from the father of her two children, and now grieved her long-time lover who had died recently of a heart attack. Patricia was unavailable, but I had met up with her ten years before. She and her husband had broken up not long after Gus and I married. She remarried having four children from two marriages, but continued working as a valued, clinical therapist in child psychiatry. Six women, myself included, who had married in their twenties, and only one marriage had lasted, Cecily's. Statistically speaking, this awareness made me feel better. My marriage failure was not so exceptional, but a common occurrence. Why had it crippled my life? Or had it enriched me, spurred me on? Maybe both.

Both Alec and Prof Jay had died, but a surgeon who was an ancient acquaintance from Theo's time at Med School and who married a daughter of my mother's best friend, invited us to dinner. This event was at their enchanting, country residence. While partaking of a delicious meal and their own 'home-grown' wine, we had a serious, but warm discussion about beliefs and other happenings during our university years. The surgeon confirmed what Rebecca had suspected as being Theo's life's challenge: He meant that Theo, also as a student, displayed all the characteristics of bipolar disorder. This was heart-wrenching for me, the first time I had heard a diagnosis placed on Theo from others who had known him well. I felt sad and uncertain. I had once heard from a near colleague at the start of Theo's hospital career that he seemed unstable and had at the time wondered if his flirt with amphetamine during his years of study had developed into misuse. But bipolar disorder? Could I have done something more?

It was comforting to meet up with Alan, my classmate from primary school. He had played on the same football team as Theo, so his memories of him were as a bulldozer of a Rugby player. Alan continued as an active, retired professor, still professing his Christian beliefs and practicing as a good Anglican. He took me to a church service while Rebecca went to a Sunday matinee and saw Andrew Webber and Tim Rice's musical-theatre production, "Joseph and the Amazing Technicolour Dream coat". It was Alan who had sent my angel, Donna, to me just when I was getting to know Hugh.

The family also pitched in to make our holiday memorable: Freddie and his wife showed us an amazing, mind-blowing time caravaning round in far North Queensland; Gillian and her husband put on a marvellous, extended family do in Brisbane, and Claire and Jamie and their pride of children, sons- and daughter-in-law and twelve grand-children arranged an incredible family picnic on the grassy slopes of Green Park flanking the surfing beach near Cronulla, Sydney.

## THE DUSK OF MY WOMANHOOD

Beautiful Claire, through all the trials of the chronic disease she was battling with, still shone like a reflection of the face of Jesus every time we saw her, her eyes full of love. Frankie I didn't mention. He cut off the family five years ago when he finally came out of the closet. I wrote to him about my return to Christianity which he despised, so he was disappointed in me, but when he made his decision, it wasn't me who triggered it. Only Claire has managed to re-establish contact with him. I believe it is a result of her being empowered by the unconditional love I referred to in my reference to Patrisse Kahn-Cullors. All of us are ostracized, even his own twin and his twin's wife and children. But my memories of him are good when he took me to meet with Deidre, the last time I saw both of them. Sad.

Reflecting over all the cherished faces of these friends and family from my past and the fabric of their lives, I experienced a sense of material insider-ness. My vertical, historical line of connectedness, necessary for my feeling of coherence had received a new boost. My thoughts flew to my adventure in the U.K. with Hugh before the pandemic and my christening robe, first worn by my grandmother somewhere in Durham in 1890, still safely preserved in tissue paper in my camphor wood chest. Kindred had followed kindred in that robe, and kindredness had also been nourished by every single person we had met up with there in Australia, far beyond the bounds of kin. Rebecca saw it. I experienced it, a deep serenity, a feeling of belonging, everything connecting in time and space.

Two weeks later and mid-winter in Sälen in Sweden, Rebecca and I were staying at the cabin together. It was the Christmas to New Year break. I developed a Deep Vein Thrombosis (DVT) after our long plane trip home from Australia. I had also fallen, maybe of exhaustion after the trip, and gouged a hole in my left shin. This had become infected, a skin infection called erysipelas that can get into one's bloodstream. My Dad had suffered from this due to his incurable leg ulcers, so my doctors took it very seriously and gave me high doses of antibiotics.

Hugh was worried about me. We hadn't seen each other for two months. Our plan had been to meet before Christmas. All this planning ended in nothing due to my incapacitation. Hugh and I had a rather tearful, but heartwarming session on FaceTime. It was so difficult when we hadn't seen each other for so long. It was as if we didn't know where to start or what to say to each other. We wished each other a blessed and happy Christmas. He promised he would visit me as soon as we got home to Gothenburg in January.

In spite of these health issues, Rebecca and I had managed to drive up to our winter paradise, the day before Christmas Eve. It had been much like this every second year since Gus had died: with Rebecca and me at the cabin alone for Christmas and Phillip celebrating with Louisa's family. Now that the shine of our trip to Australia had worn off, we were back in the normal modus. Rebecca was always attentive and took charge of the

## THE DUSK OF MY WOMANHOOD

kitchen at the cabin after we had shopped for all our ingredients, accompaniments, and wines together. But occasionally our old unresolved demons still haunted us.

It was Boxing Day. Rebecca had made a delicious dinner with red wine to accompany the meal, and I had been ordered to lie on the sofa with my left leg up. She fussed over me, and I thanked her profusely, something she interpreted as a bit fake, unnecessary, too much. Not only had a portion of mistrust entered her life as a babe when she was hospitalized, but she had some unhappy memories of my aforementioned management of incidents around her play and playmates. Her training in acting as a part of her work, gave her a heightened awareness of how openly expressed words and actions often contain an underlying, unspoken motive or meaning.

Rebecca was obviously on guard after what she felt was my fake gratitude that evening. I had worried for some time that she, like Gus, had adopted the family's generous drinking culture. The world of theatre and music was also known for their late-night excesses after the show. But Gus and Rebecca had both managed their lives and the finances well, so I didn't dare say this openly. Maybe I scowled at her as she approached the carton of red wine to pour herself another glass. Maybe I was just uncomfortable lying with my leg up on the sofa. Rebecca perceived me, Juliet, as mirthless, joyless, sour-faced, grim and judgmental at the same time as I thanked her profusely. Rebecca glanced at me accusingly:

"You try to be polite and suck up to me, while all along you despise me, because you judge my love of red wine as 'too much'. Can't you just say what you're thinking, out loud!"

I had said nothing, but I saw myself in her eyes as the joyless Stephen Dedalus vision of himself in James Joyce's book. Again, I had been a slave to a fake culture of polite 'pleasing' more than a genuinely loving, health promoting, human being. I had no other option than bow my head in the silence of the room, only disturbed by the crackling of the glowing flames in the fireplace, and whisper a prayer in my heart:

"Lord, for Rebecca's sake have mercy on me! Help me find a way to take her side!"

I had violated Rebecca's rights, her right to be loving and generous with me in her own way, and I saw why she was disgusted with my way of being. I had done this inadvertently, but was conscious of my behavioural pattern, the hollowness of my phrases, the hallmark of this polite, artificial culture.

I comprehended in that moment of insight how I had refrained from protecting my rights as a woman, as a human being with Theo. My Christianity with Theo was nurtured by the humble, kind, good, female culture that I was brought up in. It had nothing to do with the Christlikeness I thought I had aspired to. Christlikeness would have been strong, truthful, authentic. I should have understood that my rights as a woman were being violated by him, and that my body was misused and abused when he introduced unpleasant and harmful infections to my body parts. I should have reacted to his disrespect of my

## THE DUSK OF MY WOMANHOOD

humanity when he related the details of his sexual intercourses with other women. Even though I may have believed I should stay with him because of my sacred vows at the wedding ceremony, if I had asserted these truths, maybe he would have been challenged to reconsider and respect me. It is too late to know now, realizing all this, sixty years after the event.

I looked up and said, "I'm sorry, Rebecca. I'm sorry, the tables are turned. Here I am lying on the sofa and you're doing everything for me."

She shrugged her shoulders and smiled wanly.

"That's the way it should be, Juliet. Have you forgotten what you've done for me?"

There was exasperation in her voice. Her words were true, kind, acknowledging, but a critique of the character traits that she despised were in her eyes: I don't want to be like you. I don't want to be pleasing, obsequious, self-effacing: the traits you adopted in order to survive.

My mind flashed back to how I had vowed not to be like my mother. 'Caged' I had called it. I had freed myself from her cage, her lack of a feeling of realization. In my work role I was characterized as tenacious. Unwittingly in my wife role I crawled into another cage, pretending to be someone I wasn't, not standing up for my divorce. I had failed myself and Rebecca. The strains of Samson and Delila's love-duet permeated my senses. I recalled how affronted I felt when their true story dawned on me. Samson's adoration was showered on an enemy spy. Delilah's deceit and Samson's submissiveness cost him his strength.

"Why should you feel bad about it?" Rebecca's voice was stern, shattering my introspection.

"I don't know, I just do, I guess that's why I was profuse, trying to make up for my idleness, trying to please."

"Well, stop it, and don't scowl when I take another drink!"

"I'll try..." I hesitated not knowing what to say, how to appease her, how to make things right again.

Contritely I looked her straight in the eye, reminding myself of her acknowledgement: Have you forgotten what you've done for me? I then asked in a controlled voice.

"Can I have another one too?"

Rebecca shrugged and picked up my empty glass with her fingertips.

"I love you, Rebecca, you know." My words were measured, but sincere.

"I know." There was a long silence.

## THE DUSK OF MY WOMANHOOD

Rebecca came over with the glass of wine and put it gently in my hand.

“I love you too, Mamma.”

She paused; her silence was pregnant with something I didn’t understand.

“I didn’t tell you.... I didn’t want to spoil your Christmas, Mamma, but I didn’t get the role I had hoped for. My calendar is blank, not even one engagement for the coming year. I have economic reserves, so I am not broke. But I’m turning 50 and have nothing.”

She sat down wearily and reached for her glass. It was like an avalanche of ice crashing over me: my memories of Gus, his unemployment, his feelings of desperation, lack of worth, lack of dignity. I looked up at her, deep sorrow in my eyes.

“No one wants me anymore,” she mumbled looking down into the deep red, transparent liquid illuminated in her glass by the flickering candlelight, “at least not at the moment”.

“It’s sad, so sad, It’s a sad, sad situation....” The words of the song Gus and I had sung together when I miscarried that first time swept over me.

But instead I said, my voice breaking a little, but accompanied with a fleeting smile:

“There, there, everything will be all right, darling.” I paused.

I pushed the Christmas box of chocolates on the coffee table towards her.

“Have some chocolate.... I’ll transfer 10.000 Crowns into your bank account tomorrow, for your 50th!”

She looked up, shook her head, amused, and then she smiled indulgently at me.

Nine months have passed. It. Is autumn. I have started writing my narrative as well as painting again. Katarina has ‘commissioned’ a painting from me. I did one for her last year. It was expressionistic and she was pleased. Now she wanted a memory of their summer holiday, so she sent me some photos of Cinque Terre on the Northwestern Italian coastline. I can only manage an impressionistic replica of her experiences, but it is fun as well as effort.

I will be spending some time with Hugh this month. We have tickets to a Musical Theatre Production of “Amadeus” in the beautiful, theatre and concert hall on Norway’s south coast. I really love his new apartment. It is good that he has moved from his large, two-storey house. He is more relaxed. Kristina and her beau called in on us at Hugh’s summer cottage during their summer tour of South-West Norway. We prepared a tasty lunch for them, and they were impressed with his magnificent view. But before I leave to join him, I have a funeral to attend: Tears welled in my eyes when I read the text message on my phone:

“Rika died last night. Her son and daughter were with her.”

I wept. I was glad that her body, governed by the terror regime that was her variety of Parkinson’s disease for more than fifteen years, was at peace. But Rika, herself, her

## THE DUSK OF MY WOMANHOOD

person, her soul? I would miss her so much. My very first girlfriend in Gothenburg. Could I really trust that she was safe in the arms of her Good Shepherd like we had talked about? Could I really believe that she would meet her precious Annika now dead these thirty-two years again in the Life Everlasting? My thoughts flew to my Mum and Dad, Theo, Gus, Deidre, Therese, Petra and now Rika.

I have just come home after her funeral and wake. It was a beautiful service. Rika's second daughter held a compelling and truthful eulogy about her mother's staying power, her tenacity, her life. The young woman presiding in her priestly robes, white and purple, talked about everything we had talked about, "the promise of eternal life by grace alone, no more crying, nor pain, only peace in the valley, goodness and mercy." As the bell tolled incessantly, we reverently followed the procession in the footsteps of the priest and the coffin bearers, carrying Rika's austere, white coffin with its glorious wreaths of blues and purple flowers through the leafy, church graveyard tinged with autumn colours to the place that was prepared for her, beside Annika's grave. Rika's final wish was fulfilled as she was lowered into the earth.

Her ex-partner, Erik, the faithless father of her three children was at the wake. Despite his love affairs, neither he nor Rika had established new families. He had been Gus' best friend from childhood and one of my dancing partners from our parties way back. He was suffering from the early stages of dementia, but he recognized me, calling me "Julie".

"Come and dance with me, Julie," he said. Smiling broadly, he took my hands. He was a tall man, still athletic and good looking at eighty years of age.

I had been angry at him too, resented what he had done to Rika, blaming him for Annika's death, blaming him for bringing a new woman in Gus' and my life so that my friendship with precious Rika was destroyed. The wake was over, people were putting on their coats, but Erik wanted to dance. We danced, singing the children's rhyme where you hold hands and sing:

"The more we get together, together, together,  
the more we get together the happier we'll be.  
For your friends are my friends, and my friends are your friends.  
The more we get together the happier we'll be..."

Rika had reconciled with Erik, so that they could be friends, not lovers, but celebrating Christmases and other special occasions together with their children and grandchildren. Who was I not to forgive? We danced in a ring singing the rhyme and I forgave him. I smiled at him. He hugged me. A poignant feeling of closure.

Hugh and I have booked a holiday for April next year. It is really something to look forward to: Rhodes and the Aegean Sea, plus Ephesus and Kusadasi and lots of other historical places in Asia Minor. Before that Rebecca and I will be spending Christmas with Philip and his family at Kjerringvik. We are looking forward to being together as a family. Katarina's

## THE DUSK OF MY WOMANHOOD

painting is coming along. It will be her Christmas present. Painting has become an obsession, like writing, when you start It's difficult to stop.

I breathed a deep and happy sigh, and found a song I love on Spotify: I turned up the volume. It's about love, a deep, everlasting love, the melody and the arrangement were entralling. But because I have difficulty trusting and perhaps believing in unconditional, abiding love between a man and a woman, the lyrics appear to me to hint of 'another world', the spiritual realm: For me it is God singing to me and anyone else who wants to be sung to:

"Did I not love you before this lifetime?  
Did you not hear my music in your soul?  
Did I not need you beyond forever?  
And now I'll leave you, not forever more.

The widest ocean I have crossed over  
No boat did I row, but love to carry me  
I have been ever in constant motion  
I have been finding you eternally

And I've been traveling throughout the ages  
Down through the pages of history  
Just for this moment, this timeless moment  
This wondrous moment of you and me."

\* \* \* \* \*

# EPILOGUE

All of a sudden, I am struggling in the ocean again, fighting the waves, gasping for breath. The sky is black, the wind fierce, my lungs are burning, my heart screeching with pain. My mouth is full of salt water. My stomach nauseated. I need to puke. The crushed ice of the crests of the steel-grey waves smashes against the cliff's jagged splinters. As my heavy, fully clothed body bobs up and down buffeted by the storm I can see the end of the promontory, but Gus is not there, nor Hugh, to haul me up.

My heart sinks to the depths of my feet that are weighted with pumps, dragging me down. My lungs are on fire; my heart agonized with distress. Am I dying? Is this what dying is like? Or is this just a nightmare?

My Dad's voice penetrates the churning waters.

“Juliet, it is a rip! Go with the flow!”

The good advice from my childhood, my Dad always protecting us, telling us how to act if taken by a current in the ocean beyond the waves:

“Go with the flow, don't fight it; it will peter out. You will come to a calm place and be able to swim ashore.”

Obediently I turned on my back, floating, only my upturned face visible to the screeching gulls that were battling the winds as they circled over a steam of herrings forced to the surface by the conflicting forces of heavy breakers and the power of the current. The weight of my saturated clothes was thankfully not so heavy that I couldn't stay buoyant, and I had managed to wiggle my feet out of my pumps.

I had learned the trick of floating from Dad: my head forced back downwards into the water, my larynx and chin high, my hair streaming behind me, my ears dulled by the frothing waves that filled their canals, my arms outstretched as if on a cross, my belly and haunches forced upwards, surfacing, aligned with the oval of my face, my toes just breaking the surface, my hands, a hairbreadth beneath the surface of the swirling waters revolving gently like small motors helping to keep my body afloat.

Now that I am not fighting it, the powerful current carries me like a piece of driftwood over a vast expanse of ocean at a torrential pace past the V-shaped cliff and then dumps me. Like Dad had said. It had petered out on the other side of the jutting head where, protected from the wind, the sea was calm. The gentle tidal waves washed my motionless, corpse-like body nearer and nearer the shore.

I opened my eyes. The sky was changing. I could see the sun severing the clouds. I half-turned my face as shafts of light illuminated the cove and caught a glimpse of a cream coloured, sandy beach. There is a man on the shore. It isn't Gus, it isn't Hugh.

The stranger is wading out, his hands stretched out to gather my aching arms in his. He places one strong hand under my shoulders and the other arm under my thighs, and with me lying, my face still upturned to the heavens, he carries me through the water toward the shore, my hair trailing behind me.

Whether it was a dream or my life ebbing out I will only know if and when I wake. But I was not afraid. I recognized the stranger as Jesus, *“Son of God, the Father Almighty, Creator of Heaven and Earth, conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary”*. As he bent over me, lowering me gently down onto the sand, I could see the rough, jagged, crimson scars round the holes in the palms of his hands. It was the holes the nails had made when they hammered Him to the cross. I remembered that He had died to atone for the violations of mankind, that we might receive forgiveness for our sins. Fragments from the Apostles Creed rattled through my brain: *“He was buried, but rose again from the dead, giving to those who believe in Him the promise of Everlasting Life.”*

He held out his nail-pierced hand offering me the softest, whitest bathrobe. I quit myself of the rags that had been my clothing, still oozing salt water and clinging cold to my whitened flesh. He gave me a soft, white towel to bind round my matted, wet hair. I was still shivering like an aspen leaf. He sat down beside me on the sand. He had already made a fire of driftwood. Its warmth began to reach me. He looked at me with wonder and loving kindness in His eyes. My breath eased, my body unwound.

He sat completely silent for a little while. His composure in the silence was comforting, making no demands. At last, He spoke. His voice, I recognized it from that September day more than ten years ago, walking with Freya in the stroller down the *“White Way of Delight”* when He came silently up behind me. He told me not to be afraid of my involvement with Hugh.

Now He asked me a question with an endearing lilt in His voice: “Juliet, do you love me?”

He knew my name. We had met before. He knew me. According to the Bible, Psalm 139, He had known me since my conception. He had accepted me as His child from that day my parents carried me, clad in my fragile, pure cotton christening robe, hand-sewn in Durham to our humble, local church in Brisbane, Queensland, to be baptized. As a young person I had prayed to Him, sung for him, revered Him. Later I had turned my back on Him, disappointed Him, failed Him. I had also asked His forgiveness, thanked Him and been moved to love Him. He knew me.

I looked down and answered hesitantly: “*You know everything, Lord*”, I sighed. My face flushed in spite of the pale goosebumps that covered the rest of my body.

“You know that everything I have written has been under a guise, a manner of presentation, true, but not the whole truth: I am not really Juliet or Julie, I am Judith Anne, better known as Judy. My surnames have never been Spencer/Llewelyn/Gudsen, but Speare/Txxxxxxxx/Kokkinn. I used the camouflage so I could write without embarrassment, but also to avoid that others be unwillingly exposed.”

He smiled, “Julie/Judy, I have known this all along! Did I not love you before this lifetime? I have known whom you are, what you are and how you are.”

He chuckled, “But your first name? In the text you wrote that your father named you Juliet?”

“It’s true, Dad loved to recite the poem “The Play” and favoured the name Juliet.” I paused. “But Juliet’s fate was tragic.»

He nodded. “Mum and Dad saw the movie “Wizard of Oz” in 1940 and loved Judy Garland’s singing voice. Before I was born, they settled on Judy for a girl-child: Judy being a derivative of Judith, a Hebrew woman’s name meaning “praised”. Mum felt more secure with that.”

He looked appreciatively at me, “Your writing has opened your person and your life to me without reservation. I love that. To use the cliché in your title song: ‘At last your heart’s an open door, you have no secrets anymore’, not for Me nor anyone else.”

I looked up at Him. Was there amusement in His eyes? Was He mocking me? On the contrary, there was only approval.

I caught my breath, coughed and spat out salt water and mucous. I gazed up at Him, this time apologetically, and came back to His original question.

“You know, Lord.....?”

His eyes were vibrant now, aglow with vitality and goodness. I grew confident that He knew.

“You know that I love you.”

He smiled reassuringly, reached over placing his fingers on my forehead as a blessing. As I fell asleep on the sandy shore in the softness of the white bathrobe with the warmth of both the fire and the rays of the sun that had displaced the storm caressing me, I heard him whisper:

“Rest now, Judy, my child, my sister, my kindred, You are safe with Me here on the shore.”

**THE END**

# Playlist: The songs, most secular, some sacred

---

## Title song

*Secret Love ....at last my heart's an open door* by Fain and Paul Francis Webster.  
Performed by Doris Day

## Chapter 1

*Softly awakes my heart* by Camille Saint-Saëns. Performed by Diana Montague and Bruce Ford and the David Parry Philharmonia Orchestra

*Brahms' Lullaby Op.49 No.4* by Johannes Brahms. Performed by Céline Dion

*By the light of the Silvery Moon* by Gus Edwards. Performed by Doris Day

*I'm as corny as Kansas in August* by Richard Rogers and Oscar Hammerstein. Performed by Mitzi Gaynor

## Chapter 2

*Ah, Sweet Mystery of Life at last I found you* by Rida Johnsson Young and Victor Herbert.  
Performed by Jeanette MacDonald and Nelson Eddy

*Love Divine, all loves excelling* by Charles Wesley and W. P. Rowlands. Performed by the Tabernacle Choir at Temple Square

*The Last Waltz* by John Barry Mason and Leslie Davis Reed. Performed by Engelbert Humperdinck

*These Foolish Things* by Harry Link, Holt Marvell and Jack Strachey. Performed by Ella Fitzgerald

*As Long as He Needs Me* by Lionel Bart. Performed by Jodie Prenger

## Chapter 3

*Both Sides Now* by Joni Mitchell. Performed by Joni Mitchell

*Can't Live if Living is Without You* by Peter Ham and Thomas Evans. Performed by Louie Smith

*The Greatest Love of All* by Michael Masser and Linda Creed. Performed by George Benson

## Chapter 4

*Is That All There Is?* by Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller. Performed by Peggy Lee

*Moonlight Serenade* by Mitchell Parish and Glenn Miller. Performed by Glenn Miller and His Orchestra

*Can't take my eyes of you* by Bob Crewe and Bob Gaudio. Performed by Frankie Valli

*The 59th Bridge Street Song - Feelin' groovy* by Paul Simon. Performed by Simon and Garfunkel

*I'd Do Anything For You Dear, Anything* by Lionel Bart. Performed by Georgia Brown

*Nice 'n' Easy* by Marilyn Bergman, Alan Bergman and Lew Spence. Performed by Frank Sinatra

## Chapter 5

*Around the World I've searched for You* by Victor Young. Performed by Victor Silvester and his Silver Strings,

*Dancing on the Ceiling!* by Lionel Richie, Michael Frenchik and Carlo Rios. Performed by Lionel Richie.

## Chapter 6

*Song of Ruth* by Jesuit Music Ministry

*Du skal få en dag i morra* by Alf Prøysen. Performed by Alf Prøysen

*Thine be the Glory, Risen, Conquering Son»* by Edward Budry and George Fredric Handel. Performed by the Huddersfield Choral Society

## Chapter 7

*Sunrise, Sunset, Swiftly Flow the Years* by Jerrold Lewis Bock and Sheldon M. Harnick.

Performed by Chaim Topol and Norma Crane

*Sorry Seems to Be the Hardest Word* by Elton John and Bernard J.P. Taupin. Performed by Elton John

*Why Worry* by Mark Knopfler. Performed by Dire Straits

*Pick Yourself Up* by Dorothy Fields and Jerome Kern. Performed by Frank Sinatra

*Härlig är Jorden* by Anders Yngve Neglin and Bernhard Severin Ingemann. Performed by the The Real Group

*Hey Look Me Over* by Caroline Leigh and Cy Coleman. Performed by Louis Armstrong

*Rustle of Spring Op.32, No.3* by Christian Sinding. Performed by Joseph Cooper

*Hello Dolly* by Jerry Herman, Lionel Newman and Lennie Hayton. Performed by Louis Armstrong and Barbra Streisand

*St. Louis Blues* by W.C Handy. Performed by Louis Armstrong

*Warsaw Concerto* by Richard Addinsell. Performed by Frank Chacksfield's orchestra

*Clair de Lune* by Claude Debussy. Performed by Johann Debussy

*Belle off the Ball* by Leroy Anderson. Performed by Leroy Andersen and his orchestra

## Chapter 8

*Who am I?* by Alain Albert Boublil and Claude-Michel Schönberg. Performed by Hugh Jackman

*Turn your eyes upon Jesus»* by Helen Howarth Lemmel. Performed by Mark Rasmussen

## Chapter 9

*Feelings* by Morris Albert and Louis Gasté. Performed by Morris Albert

*Kuda Kuda* by Pyotr Illyich Tchaikovsky. Performed by Bror Magnus Tødenes

*Promise* by Alex Canion, Ashley Doodkorte, Daniel Estrin, Scott Kay and Simone Dow. Performed by Voyager at the Eurovision Song Contest 2023

*Eg Ser* by Bjørn Eidsvåg. Performed by Bjørn Eidsvåg

## Chapter 10

*Jesus loves me, this I know* by Anna Bartlett Warner. Performed by Whitney Houston

*An Englishman in New York* by Gordon Sumner. Performed by Sting

## Chapter 11

*Tonight I celebrate my love for you* by Gerry Goffin and Michael Masser. Performed by Roberta Flack and Peabo Bryson

*Smile* by Charlie Chaplin. Performed by Nat King Cole

## Chapter 12

*Att komma hem* by Göte and Agneta Strandsjö. Performed by Lage Wedin

*A House is not a Home* by Burt Bacharach and Hal David. Performed by Dionne Warwick

*Så skimrande var aldrig havet* by Evert Taube. Performed by Evert Taube

## Chapter 13

*En Natt Forbi* by Jan Eggum. Performed by Jan Eggum

*What a Diff'rence a Day Made* by Maria Grever and Stanley Adams. Performed by Dinah Washington

*Swing Low Sweet Chariot* by Wallace Willis. Performed by Johnny Cash

*Kärlekens Tid* by Benny Anderson. Performed by Shruk

*My Foolish Heart* by Ned Washington and Victor Young. Performed by Rod Stewart

## Chapter 14

*He Touched Me* by William J. Gaither. Performed by Elvis Presley

*Cleanse me from my sin Lord* by R. Hudson Pope. Performed by Bible Explorers, GBCS

## **Chapter 15**

*When you tell me that you love me* by John Bettis and Albert Hammond. Performed by Dolly Parton and Julio Iglesias

*In the bleak midwinter* by Christina Rossetti and Gustav Holst. Performed by Worcester Cathedral Choir

## **Chapter 16**

*He shall feed His Flock like a Shepherd* by George Frederic Handel. Performed by Musica Sacra, Chorus and Orchestra

## **Chapter 17**

*Behold, I stand at the door and knock* (Rev.3, 20) by Ishmael. Performed by Ishmael

*Let's call the whole thing off* by Ira Gershwin and George Gershwin. Performed by Ella Fitzgerald and Louis Armstrong

## **Chapter 18**

*Close every door to me, Keep those I love from me* by Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice. Performed by Stephen DeCesare

## **Chapter 19**

*Something New in My Life* by Alan Bergman, Marilyn Bergman and Michel Legrand. Performed by Barbra Streisand

## **Chapter 20**

*The more we get together, the happier we'll be* by Ken Whiteley and Raffi Cavoukian. Performed by Raffi

*Did I Not Love You Before This Lifetime?* by Rolf U. Løvland and Brendan Graham. Performed by Peter Corry

# Definitions

## Title page

The definitions of key words on the title page are gleaned from my studies and my work- and life experiences. I have also checked these against the literary definitions in the [Merriam Webster](#), [Cambridge](#) and Oxford (1992) dictionaries.

## Personal

*Personal* is an adjective that describes one's private life, relationships and emotions, rather than one's public appearances in life. It relates to a particular person or a body, an individual or an individual's character, conduct, motives and private affairs (cf. [Merriam Webster](#)).

## Narrative and narrative inquiry

A *narrative* is the process of telling a story. *Narrative inquiry* is a research method: a systematic investigation using storytelling as a source of information in order to deduce knowledge or truths (cf. [Merriam Webster](#)). Deduction is the process of learning something by considering a general set of facts and thinking about how something specific relates to them (cf. [Cambridge](#)). Narrative inquiry is person-centred, focuses on lived stories. Its intention is to uncover what truly matters to a person beyond clinical data, using storytelling to understand experiences within social/cultural contexts.

## Psychosocial health

Psychosocial as a term involves both psychological and social aspects. As an adjective to health, it refers to a state of overall well-being (cf. [Merriam Webster](#)). It focuses on the dynamic link between a person's internal psychological state (thoughts, emotions, mental health) and his or her social environment (relationships, community, culture) encompassing mental, emotional, social and spiritual dimensions. The definition of *psychosocial health* that my narrative is based on refers to a *state of well-being, body, mind and soul*. The [Cambridge](#) Dictionary defines the soul as the spiritual part of a person that some people believe continues to exist in some form after their body has died, or the part of a person that is not physical and experiences deep feelings and emotions. By including the body this definition embraces my womanhood, my sensuality and sexuality, the physical reactions which are connected to biological processes. This in addition to the

emotions, thoughts and beliefs and the environment which comprises relationships, community, culture and religion.

## **Chapter 2**

Transference: Subconscious redirection of childhood emotions to a new object, especially to a psychoanalyst or psychodynamic therapist (Oxford Dictionary, 1992).

# References

## Prologue

Ibsen, H. (1879) *A Doll's House*

Shakespeare, W. (1623) *Collected Works*

## Chapter 1

Hallesby, O. (1931) *Prayer*

John 3:16-19 *in the Holy Bible, English Standard Version (1946-52)*.

Calvin, J. (1536) *Institutes of the Christian Religion*

Mathew 4:19 *in the Holy Bible, English Standard version (1946-1952)*

Montgomery, L. M. (1908) *Anne of Green Gables*

Job, 19:20 *in the Holy Bible English Standard Version (1946-52)*

Kincaird, J. (1990) *Lucy*

Matthew 20:16, 25:40 & 18:11 *in the Holy Bible, English Standard Version (1946-52)*

## Chapter 2

1. Corinthians 7:1 *in the Holy Bible, English Standard Version (1946-52)*

Gibran, K. (1923) *The Prophet*

Freud, S. (1904) *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*

Nietzsche, F. (1908) *Ecco Homo*

West, M. (1959) *The Devil's Advocate*

West, M. (1963) *The Shoes of the Fisherman*

Hemingway, E. (1940) *For Whom the Bell Tolls*

Lewis, C. S., (1942) *The Screwtape Letters*

Linder, R. M. (1944) *Rebel without A Cause. A Hypnoanalysis of A Criminal Psychopath*

Kipling, R. (1888) *The Winners - a poem*

## Chapter 3

Poe, E. A. (1842) *The Pit and the Pendulum*

Psalm 46: 1 *in the Holy Bible, English Standard Version (1946-52)*

Schreiber, F. R. (1973) *Sybii*

Fromm, E. (1956) *Art of Loving*

Leiber, J., Stoller, M. (1967) *Is That All There Is?*

Steinbeck, J. (1937) *Of Mice and Men*

Henriksen, V. (1984) *Bodvars Saga Vol I*

Matthew 20:16, 25:40 & 18:11 *in the Holy Bible, English Standard Version (1946-52)*

## Chapter 4

1. Corinthians 7:12-16 *in the Holy Bible, English Standard Version (1946-52)*

Holberg, L. (1723) *Jeppe on the Hill*

## Chapter 5

## Chapter 6

The Book of Ruth *in the Holy Bible, English Standard Version (1946-52)*

Caroll, L. (1865) *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*

Kincaid, J. (1990) *Lucy*

Montgomery, L. M. (1908) *Anne of Green Gables*

## Chapter 7

Revelations 3:15-16 *in the Holy Bible, English Standard Version (1946-52)*

Knausgård, K. O. (2009-2011) *My Struggle Vol 1 and VI*

## Chapter 8

Antonovsky, Aa (1996) The Sense of coherence: An historical and future perspective  
Exodus 20:3-5 *in the Holy Bible, English Standard Version (1946-52)*

## Chapter 9

Carlenius, S. (2014) *Omsorg ved livets slutt*  
Lagerlöf, S. (1891) *Gösta Berlings Saga*  
Kokkinn, J. (1998,2005) *Profesjonelt Sosialt Arbeid*  
Franzen, J. (2001) *The Corrections*  
Lindgren, A. (1973) *The Brothers Lionheart*  
Eidsvåg, B. (1983) *I see*

## Chapter 10

Mathew, 19:13-15 *in the Holy Bible, English Standard Version (1946-52)*  
Falcones, I. (2006) *Cathedral of the Sea*

## Chapter 12

Lagerlöf, S. (1891) *Gösta Berlings Saga*  
Blixen, K. (1950) *Babette's Feast*  
Eggum, J. (1979) *En natt forbi*

## Chapter 14

Luke, 15:11-32 *in the Holy Bible, English Standard Version (1946-52)*  
Sødal, H. K. (2013) *Norge i Brann: Oxfordbevegelsen 1934-1940*

## Chapter 15

Milne, A. A. (1926) *Winnie the Pooh*

Falkberget, J. (1925) *Bjørneskytteren*

Song of Solomon *in the Holy Bible, English Standard Version (1946-52)*

## Chapter 16

John 10:11-18 *in the Holy Bible, English Standard Version (1946-52)*

1.Timothy 3:4-5 *in the Holy Bible, English Standard Version (1946-52)*

## Chapter 17

Mathieson, D. (2015) *Seeds of Joy*

Perrin, V. (2020) *Fresh water for flowers*

Psalm 23 *in the Holy Bible, English Standard Version (1946-52)*

## Chapter 18

Romans 8:28 *in the Holy Bible, English Standard Version (1946-52)*

Luke 15:11-32 *in the Holy Bible, English Standard Version (1946-52)*

Mathew 1:5-7 *in the Holy Bible, English Standard Version (1946-52)*

Fo, D. (1969) *Mistero buffo*

Winnicott, D. W. (1949) *Hate in the Counter-Transference*

Ephesians 3:20 *in the Holy Bible, English Standard Version (1946-52)*

## Chapter 19

Godwin, R. ( 2012) *The Grace Outpouring*

Ephesians 3:21-22 *in the Holy Bible, English Standard Version (1946-52)*

## Chapter 20

Lewis, C. S. (1958) *Reflections on the Psalms*

Mark 12:17 *in the Holy Bible, English Standard Version (1946-52)*

Khan-Cullors, P., Bandele, A. (2018) *When they call you a terrorist - black lives matter*

Psalm 139 *in the Holy Bible, English Standard Version (1946-52)*

Joyce, J. (1916) *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*

John 17:14-16, *in the Holy Bible, English Standard Version (1946-52)*

# About the Author:

Judith Anne Speare, date of birth 31.08.1941, Brisbane, Australia

Indooroopilly Primary School 1946 - 1954, best scholar, grade 8

Somerville House, Presbyterian and Methodist Ladies College, 1955 - 1958

(DUX of the School, 1958)

House fire: 57 Goldieslie Road, Indooroopilly, Brisbane, October, 1957

\*Bachelor of Social Studies, University of Queensland, 1959 - 1962

(NAPTI Prize for best final year student, 1962)

Married 19.01.1963 to Exxxxx Txxxxxxxx, born 1940, Brisbane, Australia

\*Social Worker: Institute of Cerebral Palsy for habilitation and education of children and adults, 1963

\*Researcher: Royal Brisbane Hospital Neurosurgical Research Unit, Sociological Study of Traffic Crashes. 1964 - 1967. Leader, Neurosurgeon K.G. Jamieson

\*Clinical Social Worker: Royal Alexandra Hospital for Children, Sydney, Social Worker to Professor Thomas Stapleton, Pediatrics, and Trainee in Clinical Child Psychiatry with Professor of Child Psychiatry, Julian Katz, in two periods, 1967 - 1971 (Institute of Child Health, Sydney)

\*Short term employment elsewhere 1967 - 1971: Commonwealth Social Services, Ballarat, Victoria; Royal Brisbane Hospital for Children; Royal Brisbane Hospital, PAV 4 for treatment and rehabilitation of alcoholics and drug abusers

Divorced from Exxxxxx Txxxxxxxx, 1968

Married 11.07.1970 to Axxxx Kxxxxxxxx, born 1943, Oslo, Norway

\*Master of Social Studies: University of Queensland, 1971

\*Clinical Social Worker: Emma Hjorths Hjem for children and adults with severe learning disabilities, 1972 - 1976 (maternity leave included) Bærum. Norway

Daughter born in Oslo, 1973

Son born in Oslo, 1975

\*Voluntary leader of a Musical Kindergarten, United Protestant Church, Puerto Ordaz, Ciudad Guyana, Venezuela, South America, 1977

\*Clinical Social Worker: Rikshospitalet: Institute for Asthma and Allergy, Voksentoppen, 1979 - 1980

\*Manager, Bygdøy Centre for Senior Citizens, 1980 - 1985

\*Lecturer, \*Associate professor, \*Head of School of Social Work, \*Dean of Faculty of Social Sciences, Oslo University College, now Oslo Metropolitan University, 1985 - 2008

\*Voluntary worker, NGO Nasjonalforeningen for folkehelsen, 1986 - 2024. Chairperson for Oslo District (for three periods) and member of Central Committee for one period

## **Judy Kokkinn's academic publications in English:**

Noonan, K., Porteous, N., Kokkinn, J. and Yu, J. (1970). Fantasy becomes Reality - The Effects of the birth of a second phenylketonuric infant to a Greek Family. *Australian Journal of Mental Retardation*, 1.123-126

Jamieson, K.G., Duggan, A.W., Tweddell, Judith A., Pope, L.I., Zvirbulis, V.E.: TRAFFIC CRASHES IN BRISBANE, AN ENGINEERING, MEDICAL AND SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY. Australian Road Board Special Report, No.2, 1971.

Kokkinn, J. (1988) Issues of Dependency and Independency and Social Network Strategy», *Nordic Journal of Social Work*, Vol 8, Special Supplementary Issue in English

Kokkinn, J. (1993) It's complicated as in life: humanistic values pertaining to the individual in professional social work (translated to Russian), *Journal of Social Pedagogues and Social Workers in the Russian Federation*

Kokkinn, J. (1995) The Values of Professional Social Work in Norway in Tutvedt, Ø. and Young, L. (editor) *Social Work and the Welfare State*, Nota Bene. 95:2

## **Best known publications in Norwegian:**

Kokkinn, Judy (1998). *Profesjonelt Sosialt Arbeid*, Tano Forlag, Oslo, Norway

Kokkinn, Judy (2005). *Profesjonelt Sosialt Arbeid*, 2nd edition, Universitetsforlaget, Oslo, Norway

## **THANKS to the commentators:**

to Anna Louisa Donovan (young friend, lawyer), Ben and Gail de Jong (family members, teachers), Robert Speare (family member, clinical psychologist), Penelope Spence (now

passed, friend, Chanel 9, Australia), Harald Koht, (former colleague, professor emeritus, administration and leadership/political science), Unni Oxaal (former neighbour, associate professor, physics), May-Britt Solem (former colleague, professor emerita in Social Work), Head Librarian and Skriftserien editor Anne-Inger Hellekjær at Oslo Metropolitan University, and Michael Seltzer (former colleague, professor emeritus, social anthropologist).



