

## **PART TWO: SHADES OF THE PRISON HOUSE**

[At this point Frances quoted the whole of Wordsworth's 'Shades of the prison house begin to close Upon the growing boy' – which I have decided to omit from this version. MB].

### **Chapter XI**

That September morning, in 1924, as we stood watching, we were coming ever closer to the Western Australian coastline. Edgar wrote his aunt's address in a tiny red notebook I always carried. Tearing off the bottom of the page I gave him mine. Such small things often change our lives, or I should say affect them. Less than half a page in a small notebook, the piece was about one inch by three!

It was, of course, spring and the sunshine seemed wonderful after such a miserable summer in England. The Barretts (our old friends from the 'Ajana' days) had found us a very pleasant bungalow to rent while we considered what we would all do. It was within a stone's throw of the sea and about a mile from the river. After a swim in the river at Mosman's Bay and walking back along Glyde Street, Mother and Father noticed a tiny corner shop, part of a bungalow really, which was for sale. The widow who owned it wanted three hundred pounds – cash – which was cheap even for those days. She had three hates – electricity (my father's first job was to install this), the wireless, and banks, so my father had to take three hundred pounds in notes to the Lands department to pay for the house. She asked Mother to help her put it into pockets in her petticoat! She had one pocket full of ten shilling notes which Mother thought spoke well for the little shop. My father applied to be reinstated in his old job; in the meantime, he wired the house for electricity. Mother decided to keep the shop to help with the pension; we could always live on the stock and we had somewhere to live.

The garden enchanted us – it was all deep sand, with an avenue of vines running down the centre and a pomegranate tree. At the side of the house stood a large trumpet lily tree with its delightful tropical fragrance filling the garden in the bright moonlight. At a certain distance from the house was the usual earth toilet (which was emptied every week) and a little workshed – both covered with the red and pink blooms of ivy geranium. Later, when my father built a proper bathroom where it drained into the sand, he grew a mass of tomatoes. Geoffrey and I put our stretchers under the vines and I thought it just heaven to wake up in the night and stretch out my hand and nibble grapes.

We discovered that the WA education was behind England at that time and, because I had taken the 'Oxford', I could get a teaching job in the bush without having to go to teachers' college. Like my father, I am a born teacher. Correspondence classes hadn't really come to WA in 1924 and the Government Assisted Teachers were very much in demand. If a farmer, or a small community, so many miles from a school, could find a teacher of the right standard, could provide a room for lessons, accommodation and full board for the teacher, the Government would pay half the salary. All this was explained to me and I was advised to watch the paper in January.

Early in February, I found myself in a new Dodge (1925 model) on my way to the Brookton district, via Kalamunda, on a new backbush track – 50 miles of narrow bush track with the scrub often scraping the sides of the new car. First we stopped at Kalamunda to fill up. Kalamunda was then a station, a pub, and a store-cum-garage, and it seemed miles from Perth – 16! Little did I realize that over 50 years later I would be living in the picturesque little hill town of Kalamunda, writing this book. I thoroughly enjoyed the life on the mixed farm. Oats and wheat, a large orchard, hundreds of sheep, a few milking cows and a prize bull whose hind legs would collapse if he tried to chase you because he had once eaten the seed of the Zamia palm! There were two breeding cows and hundreds of fowls, or so it seemed, and a couple of teams of horses. The milk was separated and the cream made into butter, any milk left over from the house was given to the calves and sows. The little pigs were sold as weaners, generally. Once a week a sheep was killed – nothing seemed to be wasted: the pigs waited like vultures for the insides. The mutton fat was poured into a kero tin and sent to the soap factory. For the first breakfast after the kill we had the liver, etc, but for every other breakfast we had grilled chops. There was one cold meat meal a day and one roast. Sometimes

the meat might not last the week and then about five fowls (or chooks as they call them in Australia) were killed. They ground their own oats for porridge and, of course, made their own bread, biscuits, etc. As well as making jam from their own fruit, pickles and chutneys were also made, and dried fruit and peel. All the vegetables were grown, except potatoes which didn't like the soil. All the time I was there I did not see a potato, or bacon! The corks of the chutney and pickle jars were sealed with beeswax. The gum from blackboys and beeswax made a stain and polish for the floors. A tank had been placed high above the house so that water came from a tap in the kitchen and bathroom. A chip heater gave hot water in the bathroom and a huge cauldron with a tap was on the wood stove for hot water in the kitchen. The bathroom and kitchen were part of the back verandah – the rest of the verandah around the house had honeysuckle, asparagus fern and potato creeper climbing the posts and rail.

As yet there were no tractors on the farm. We went to one demonstration but no one seemed impressed, not even me. The demonstrator was very disgusted when I told him – correctly – that he only had one gear!

There was a married couple on the farm: they lived in a little hut. The wife helped in the kitchen. At certain seasons there was another man as well. Then there was a teenage boy who milked the cows and fed the pigs, etc, took midday dinner out to the paddocks in the cart and other such jobs. He and the man slept by the stables as was the custom then. Their trestles were made of chaff bags with bush timber threaded through them, and the mattress another bag filled with chaff. There was a two-wheeled buggy we sometimes went in to tennis parties – not that I ever played tennis, my wrists were far too weak. (I played cricket at school – you can use two hands for that!) I was very impressed when a new married couple arrived in their own four-wheeled buggy with hood and all. Looked really wild west!

Once out walking I found a deserted new-born lamb. I knew the crows would peck its eyes out if I left it, so I decided to carry it back to the farm. (It was very heavy by the time I got back.) I had only seen lambs all white and pretty, but the mother had not stopped to clean this one and it was covered with horrid, dirty, yellow liquid. He became my pet lamb until he was old enough to be tailed. I cried when I saw his bloody stump, but I knew it was to stop him getting fly-blown.

One morning, after a thunderstorm, both sows littered at once. One had a couple of 'runts' (as they called small, weak ones). They were brought up to the house in the hope of saving them. They had to be fed every two hours with cow's milk from a spoon. We had to wrap them up in a sugar-bag, like a baby, to keep their little feet out of the way and to stop lots of milk being spilt all over the place. I used to feed them, and somehow I rather liked the job and the piggy-milk smell! One was put back too soon to the litter and, being too weak to prevent the others trampling on him, was killed.

While on the farm, I found the scrap of paper with Edgar Deacon's address on it. I wondered how he was getting on. I knew he intended to work on farms to get experience and to see where he might buy a farm. I couldn't imagine him roughing it as the men did, but then, at that time, I did not know that he had been in the trenches for two years, in the war. The letter I wrote was duly sent on to him and, as he was down that way, it was suggested he come and stay for the weekend as there was some land nearby. This he did and we became friends and discussed all manner of things that weekend. One evening, we were all sitting around the fire listening to this new wireless with earphones. Looking across at him, sitting on the other side of the room, I suddenly had the feeling that I would be doing that for many winters in the future. I decided it was all very stupid, as I had no idea of marrying at all, especially Edgar, who now had freckles on his arms from the sun. I didn't care for freckles anyway! It was obvious that he was worried about my being in the bush and he wrote this little poem to me:

Fairy, for the days of travail to come  
When the angel of destiny calls to you, too,  
Which will you choose, the gold or the dross?  
The city's glare with its gilded sin,

Or the quiet road of the soul within?  
Little one, little one, your spirit guard well,  
For little you know of the road to hell.  
(The primrose path so richly strewn.)  
Raise your eyes to the old, old moon,  
Her silvery light let your emblem be.  
Tread well the path of purity. EGD

I tried to answer it, but I could never write poetry, not like my mother.

When the silvery rays of the old, old moon  
Awake me from youth's fair slumbers deep.  
When the magpie sings his mate to sleep  
With his liquid notes so rich and so pure,  
And the scent of the wattle sweet as of yore  
Fills the air with the breath of its fragrance so rare.  
And the moon fairies dance in the silvery air,  
I will think of the emblem you gave to me,  
And it, through the years, my emblem will be.  
For the old, old moon will open my eyes  
And in the glare of her silvery light  
Show me the way to success in the fight. FMW

I loved the life. The walks, the farm life and my pupils, but when I went home in the August holidays, Mother wouldn't let me go back. But there was not enough to do at home. I might go shopping in Perth with Mother, or Fremantle. I took up pen-painting but it was too easy. I taught in Sunday school. I was in at the beginning of Toc H in WA. I sometimes took the two younger children across to the sea for the day. Every morning early I went swimming with Geoffrey in the river before he went to school. Although not yet 15, Geoffrey had suddenly shot up to six feet. He never had that silly period and we now had a wonderful friendship and understanding that lasted all his life.

We went to the Show which had greatly improved since 1912. It was still very sandy, though, with no proper paths. I thought people were so silly to dress up as though they were going to a garden party, and then rain would come and ruin their clothes. Marie Barrett was trying to pass music exams to be a music teacher, but she was only technically correct. She would get me to tell her what I 'saw' while she played and then she would do the same. She made a good teacher though. Strangely enough, her youngest sister, Muriel, only played by ear. I made a beautiful evening gown of scarlet *crêpe-de-chine* with a gold rose at the waist. But, somehow, I hated the rush and materialism of life and wished I was a Roman Catholic so that I could be a nun!

I more or less idled life away until after Christmas, our second in WA.

SCRAPS – Brookton, WA – 1925

Oh, the country is beautiful here: wonderful, huge boulders in unexpected places, strange, coarse, yellow grass; grey-trunked gum trees of all kinds with, now and then, the weird figure of a blackboy tree peering between them. Bright winged parrots flutter in and out among the foliage while crows guard the treetops. Perhaps a laughing jackass scents something amusing and bursts into hearty peals of laughter. All the time, either in the distance or close at hand, is the deep, strange, weird, unexplored, attractive bush looming over you.

When the sun sets the sky is a new, strange colour which makes the bush even more tempting, just as the sea on dark nights calls you to throw yourself into her depths, to be swallowed into her inky blackness of mysteries, then to know all her secrets, too late.