

A woman with long dark hair, wearing a large black wide-brimmed hat, is positioned behind a large, weathered, grey stone tombstone. She is looking directly at the camera with a serious expression. The tombstone is set in a field of tall green grass under a bright blue sky with scattered white clouds. The text on the tombstone is carved in a serif font.

A
GREAT
PUNCTUATION
TO LIFE

GENEVIEVE BALLARIN

A Great Punctuation to Life

Genevieve Ballarin



Strategic Book Group

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*I struggle to grow; I blossom or fall
I do it alone; I can't do it at all*

*I dedicate this book
to my long suffering and very supportive husband.
Thank you for believing in my dream.*

Chapter 1

Flexing Not-So-Angelic Wings

It was the summer of 1955, when I was about ten-years-old, and there was no TV in our house. As a matter of fact, we didn't even have a radio. Mum would play the piano in the afternoon or early evening and my three older sisters and I would all stand around her and sing. Dad smoked a pipe and read a newspaper by the dim light and listened.

"One day, you'll all be famous singers," he'd say. Well, we never were, but we loved music and some of us even learned to play the piano like Mum.

During one particularly hot and muggy afternoon, while we were going through our rendition of *That's Amore* for a school concert, Nanna and Pop came to visit with a deed to a property in their hands, which they immediately imparted to Mum and Dad – just like that!

The property was out west in opal country. We didn't really want to go out there but hey, beggars can't be choosers. The next thing you know, we packed up and went west. When we got there it was literally a hole in the ground. Can you believe that? A hole in the ground to live in. Odd, to say the least. But we moved in, and you know what? It was surprisingly nice down in our cool hole in the ground.

At first glance, it was just a large mound, like a little hill,

with a door in the side of it. The door opened onto earthen steps that led down into a large chamber. We had polished wooden furniture cut into the walls, and appliances that ran off a generator, running water, bedrooms, and even a loo! The piano acoustics were unreal!

We didn't have any windows, but we did have upstairs! Upstairs was our land, where we scraped and mined for opals, hoping it would make us all rich one day. But that didn't happen either, and after ten years of living there and not striking anything of significant value, I dragged a rather sad-looking suitcase up the earthen steps to the front door and left the family hole in the ground.

I travelled to the city and scored a job in a music store where I worked as an office assistant. Every day, musicians would come in and buy things like sheet music, instruments, or bits and pieces they could use to ply their musical trade. They were real odd types and not too many handsome amongst them.

Until the day Roger came in and asked to see a violin. I wasn't a salesperson, but I often looked after customers when the sales staff were busy, or at lunch, and this was one of those occasions.

Roger was an Adonis.

From that time forward, we were inseparable and dated constantly; being together was like breathing to exist.

We decided to marry so we could spend even more time together. Our wedding was quite small with immediate family, and a few of Roger's friends who provided the music with guitars and djembe drums. The weather was perfect as we stood on the beach, serenaded by the rhythmic waves that seemed to complement the music very well. Roger wore a white linen shirt, buttoned from the diaphragm down, with matching wide-legged linen pants. The gentle breeze caught the material at his ankles, revealing his beautiful bare feet. I thought he was the most gorgeous thing on earth.

I had white hibiscus braided through my hair, a full-length white-linen dress held at the shoulders by plaited straps, bare feet, and a bouquet reflecting the deep crimson pistils in the hibiscus in my hair. I sighed with the perfection of it all.

I thought our marriage would be the bee's knees and was

disappointed to say the least when I discovered it wasn't the bed of roses I dreamed about. How could I have been so blind? I guess I didn't see how needy Roger really was. In time, his Adonis looks faded, and he became podgy, out of condition, and very lazy.

I began to despise him, and he me, and after two years, we were divorced. I can truly say that his expectations of marriage were unrealistic. All he wanted was to have a mother to take care of him for the rest of his life – he was a wuss.

No wonder we didn't work out! I decided I probably didn't need anybody anyway, so why did I have such a fascination with Iain?

He was a tradie. I didn't even like tradies – they're so grubby when they get home. I like things to be clean and neat and tidy, and I was sure tradies didn't fit into that scenario very well. Iain was a builder's labourer, and his goal in life was to be a master builder and that's a good thing, right?

Question was – did I want to be involved with someone like that? Well, he hadn't even looked my way, even though he'd been into the music store several times. I couldn't help but wonder if I held any fascination for him. I was still good looking with a fabulous figure and what I imagined to be a *lovely* personality. Why wouldn't he find me interesting enough to ask for a date at least?

Walking past a construction site one afternoon, I stopped to see Iain on a platform of scaffolding, cementing his bricks together in the shape of a wall. I just stood there and watched for a while, but then it got really embarrassing as the other workers started to whistle and point and carry on like real goons.

Iain turned around to look at me. My first instinct was to run, but then I thought, "No, I'll just stand here like a real idiot and wait for something to happen" – and that's what I did.

Soon it was knock off time for the crew. They packed up and walked right past me, making the usual wisecracks girls hear from these sorts of blokes. As repulsive as it was, I stood my ground until Iain went by. And I mean that! He went by.

You could have knocked me down with a feather! Not even a wisecrack out of him. I didn't know what to do so I just followed him. I know what you're thinking, but I *wasn't* stalking him. He headed for the pub on the corner of Riley Street and I followed him in.

I almost died of embarrassment when I realised it was 'men's only' and the ladies saloon was around the corner. Well, I decided I didn't care, and so to avoid looking stupider I went up to the bar and ordered a beer. I hate beer! But hey, it got me on a stool beside Iain. The barman just stared and didn't bother to get the beer. I knew he wanted me to go around the other side to the ladies saloon to rectify my social faux pas. But I couldn't do that, and I was sure my attractive looks and figure would hold me in good stead. Much later, Iain said it had nothing to do with how I looked, but it was my absolute brazenness that held me in good stead. Interestingly, I never thought of myself as brazen.

Iain started a conversation and within thirty minutes, we were making out in his rusty old Ute in front of the building site. Another thirty minutes, and we were at my little flat above the butcher shop making out again. It seems I'd found my forte.

Six months later, we were married and living in a suburban home in the western suburbs. It was a working class area but not trashy or rough, and I did quite enjoy it.

We divorced four years later. Tradies *are* grubby when they get home. They never bother to look where they're sitting, never fix anything around the house, and are always at the pub with their mates. They swear like troopers and don't care to be tied down to a wife! Just looking at him sideways got a, "stop nagging will ya?" Honestly, a man's low intelligence and minimal education will always spell disaster for marriage.

For the next two years or so, I drifted in and out of short term relationships like I was attached to a revolving door. I had, of course, found a better quality of man to be with but wondered at the end of it all if I shouldn't have been charging them for my time instead.

I came to the conclusion that love had to be found in other places rather than the bedroom. After all, my relationship with Iain was based on a physical experience rather than whatever else a relationship should really be based on, which I was sure wasn't in any way related to plain, carnal, steamy sex. I was also sure that perfect looks and a gorgeous body, like Roger's, made a shallow basis for a perfect marriage.

So there I was, almost thirty-one years of age and a happy, independent woman of the world with my own little unit in the

suburbs, still looking good and feeling great!

Then my father died, and I went home to attend his funeral.

I hadn't been out west for over ten years, and the old place looked pretty much the same: piles of barren dirt yielding little opal to boast of and the door in the side of the mound leading down to where we lived underground.

The mine looked abandoned now, but I couldn't blame them for that – it was very hard work. There were timber lengths over the top of the hole with a few sheets of iron sitting on top of them and a couple of rocks to hold the iron in place in case of a wind storm. It made a cruel statement of finality.

At the funeral, I thought it quite ironic that the family, having lived and worked underground for years, was now putting my father and his coffin into yet another hole in the ground. Why not just cremate him?

It struck me as so odd that I laughed, then quickly realised everyone was staring at me as if I were insane. As I looked back at their faces, I realised one more thing: it was only immediate family that stared back at me.

I looked around for the other mourners, the friends, the neighbours, and the acquaintances, but apart from the old, weather-beaten Reverend O'Donnell, there weren't any.

When we got back to the family plot, I expected to see people arriving for the wake, but none came. We were alone in our grief with none other than ourselves to share it with.

For months, this played on my mind. What if when I died and all my family had already died before me that no one came to my funeral? I would have to make sure I died first before any of the others did, just to make certain someone came. How tragic was that? I should have *lots* of people at my funeral!

Then it struck me! Was there really anyone who would genuinely call me their friend? What about all the people I worked with? What about the people at the gym? What about the people in my neighbourhood? I wasn't close to any of them and certainly would think twice before putting myself out enough to go to *their* funeral. I became very upset at the prospect of such a solitary send-off that would punctuate my life. This revelation led me into a very strange past-time indeed.

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