

CHAPTER TWO

Fog

I was born to Frank and Lisa Heikes in Children's Hospital at 3700 California Street in San Francisco on Tuesday, November 2nd, 1976, at 5:42 in the morning. This time fell inside the liminal hour before sunrise at 6:38 and gave me a Scorpio sun with a Pisces moon and Sagittarius rising, Enneagram nine, and the Tarot of The Hermit. My parents cared nothing for astrology. They did, however, take my birth on All Souls Day as a sign that God had bestowed them with a heretic soul in need of redemption that only good Apostolic Pentecostals like themselves could achieve. My parents were really good at their faith. Think of it this way: If Episcopalians rate anywhere from one to five on an extremism scale that goes to one hundred and Oneness sects go the distance, then Apostolic Pentecostalism sits between eighty and ninety. My parents topped out somewhere around ninety-three. Some Christian sects consider themselves 'soldiers of God.' Mom and Dad were the Navy SEALs of God.

The church my parents attended had it all: speaking in tongues, laying on of hands, and belief in supernatural gifts such as discerning Satan's physical or mental influence and claiming to know things no mere mortal could know. Men ran home, church, and everywhere in between. Women submitted to men and displayed said submission by wearing long hair and even longer skirts while avoiding makeup and jewelry at all costs. This part bothered me because I never asked to be born sans penis and because no penis could exist without the vagina it emerged from. Besides, what qualified Adam's descendants to lead or manage anything given that Genesis 3:6 says that Adam willingly accepted the apple despite knowing God's prohibition? Eve rightfully saw this flavorful hand-carried source of vitamins C and K, potassium, and fiber as good nutrition for building sound brains and bodies. That's leadership—not least because she started a trend that culminated with California cranking out an average of thirty-nine pounds of apples per resident per year.

Music was important... and by important, I mean the lyrical stylings of Amy Grant (*El Shaddai* and *Thy Word*), Sandi Patty (*We Shall Behold Him*), Evie Tornquist (*Give Them All to Jesus*), and early Michael W. Smith (*Friends are Friends Forever*). Keith Green squeaked under the wire on family road trips or when Mom wanted to show off how progressive and fun our

family was. It was safe, clean, wholesome music that gave praise to God by reminding us just how fucking lucky we were to share the same universe with him—sorry, Him. Barry Manilow, Petula Clark, or Olivia Newton-John? Doubtful. Fleetwood Mac, Billy Joel, or Tracy Chapman? No. Prince, Madonna, Bowie, or Meatloaf? Hell no. AC/DC, Def Leppard, Black Sabbath, or even Van Halen? Fuck no. Me? I was an Yngwie Malmsteen girl to my stake-deserving soul, and Eric Johnson, Joe Satriani, and Steve Vai were my Holy Trinity.

Malmsteen shredded to dire warnings of the wicked running out of time and falling at the hands of those who saw the light. Voices screamed out in fury. Viking ships plied the seas and slew all in their path. These were songs of war and vanquishment—and why not? The End Times and Rapture were upon us, as evidenced by a state of eternal spiritual warfare that made Orwell's descriptions of ceaseless battles between Eurasia and Eastasia seem like Vince McMahon's World Wrestling Federation by comparison. By that standard, Malmsteen should have been gospel. My parents' church occupied a converted movie theater in the Ingleside district whose best feature was its location within a sixty-second walk of a Kentucky Fried Chicken. My church existed anywhere someone set up a Marshall stack with optional Roland TR-808. And yes, the eight-oh-eight kick drum did make this girlie get dumb. I couldn't roll Ranier because I didn't live in Seattle, but I could—and did—drink Ranier on Broadway between Chinatown, North Beach, and Telegraph Hill. Put a pin in that.

Genesis 1:28 ensured that most of the wives in my parents' church cranked out children the way salmon spawn eggs. Birth control? What, and deprive God of arrows for His quiver? A vertical woman was a pregnant woman who cooked and cleaned while making damn sure dinner was piping hot the moment her husband returned from heroic battles in smoke-filled meeting rooms accompanied by the soundtrack of secretaries typing away with staccato clacks like machine gun fire. Women took their work deathly seriously. It took me years to understand what lay behind the preponderance of turtlenecks and sunglasses I saw every week.

A new mother got the full six to eight weeks of postpartum recovery she needed before adding Similac or Enfamil to her next Safeway or Rexall run and going horizontal for the next round. Side effects from having back-to-back children at a rate of fire that would make naval gunners weep with envy ranged from premature delivery and low birth weight to developmental

delays, cerebral palsy, and even miscarriage. None of this amounted to anything that devoted male hands pressed against the belly in divine healing couldn't fix. The sex act itself was as frenetic as Charlie Chaplin's conveyer in *Modern Times* and every bit as enjoyable from the looks of things. What's a little anemia, depression, pre-eclampsia, or even literally blowing a seam next to that? Get in, get off, get out... and don't burn the rice!

My father, Frank Heikes, was a U.S. Marshal—federal badge, leather belt, service pistol, and a face that never cracked unless the 49ers were winning or when watching some action or sci-fi movie on his fancy stereo set. Did I say stereo? I meant Hi-Fi. High Fidelity. The highest quality fidelity with more 'quads' of bass per channel that kicked, turned, curled up our guts, and made us get freaky-deaky, to paraphrase Don Cheadle as Buck Swope in *Boogie Nights*. Excessive? Maybe, but I will never forget hearing tank shells whizzing back and forth over my head during the tank battle in *Red Dawn* thanks to the baker's dozen speakers he had connected to racks of audio components with more combined knobs and switches than most astrostation stations.

Dad was a royal asshole and the kind of world-class hypocrite who frowned on Phil Collins while enjoying clean family flicks like *Alien*, *First Blood*, *The Road Warrior*, and fucking *Scarface*. Even so, we truly bonded over movies and shows, from *The Love Boat* to *Fantasy Island* and *Tales of the Golden Monkey*. But sci-fi was my first and forever love. I grew up on everything from Angela Cartwright wearing silver space jammies in *Lost in Space* to William Shatner in *Star Trek* and so many more. If I had crushes on Richard Hatch, Dirk Benedict, and Terry Carter from *Battlestar Galactica*, then my father was never the wiser. Louis Gossett Jr. in *Enemy Mine*? Yes, please! Gil Gerard from *Buck Rogers*? I'll be back in ten minutes. And yet, somehow, shows like *The Brady Bunch* and *Eight Is Enough* never made it into rotation. *Barbarella*, however...

My mother, Emma Heikes, was a medical transcriptionist who started her career in a doctor's office—a gynecologist, no less—before realizing she could better attend to her wifely obligations by freelancing for any doctor needing his chicken scratch transcribed into clean, clear notes that would pass scrutiny with both the patient's health insurer and his own malpractice insurer. Dad and I adjourned to the living room after dinner and Mom adjourned to her roll-up

desk in the sewing room, powered up the Dictaphone, and went to work. The clacking of her typewriter often added an extra dimension to the pitched battles being waged on the TV screen.

It took me a long time to realize just how subversive my mother really was. Working for a gynecologist gave her the perfect cover to do God's work by helping ensure the women who filed in and saddled up in the stirrups remained fertile. Something tells me the doctor she worked for kept women's machinery operating in peak form while quietly seeing to it they had agency over said machinery. Walking the dog was her one pleasure in life because those were the only two parts of the day when she could be alone with her thoughts. She walked that dog like the devout walk the Camino de Santiago come rain, fog, sun, or earthquakes. We lived at 44th and Anza near Sutro Heights Park, Lands End, the Cliff House, and Ocean Beach. It would not surprise me one bit if she kept a supply of birth control pills stashed in a bush somewhere, not least because I was an only child.

These are just a few of the many paradoxes we survived by pretending they didn't exist. In the beginning there was the Word of God. Scripture and church doctrine saw Dad as God's anointed ambassador to the Heikes nation, which gave his every utterance the weight of divine law. If he contradicted himself too many times to count on a daily basis let alone any longer period of time, then it was because Mom and I were mere women taking his words out of context since we couldn't possibly see the big picture. It was enough to fog the brain, especially when one day saw me being praised for something I'd be grounded for the following week. I kept my mouth shut and rolled with it because I had no way to tell which way was up.

Looking back, I think that's why I loved the fog that rolled in overnight and often lingered into the next day. I took long walks in the parks, especially along Ocean Beach or the Lands End Trail that wound through Lincoln Park along the cliffs behind the Veterans Administration hospital and golf course all the way to El Camino Del Mar at 32nd Avenue just behind Burke School and above China Beach. On clear days, the view extended past Baker Beach to the Presidio, Golden Gate Bridge, and the Marin Headlands. Being surrounded by that much fog reminded me that my brain was very little in the grand scheme of things and that whatever internal fog I felt was equally minor... and that comforted me a great deal.

Mom helped me weather all this the best she could, usually by playing schmaltzy Christian music duets on the upright piano that occupied a wide spot in the long corridor that ran from the front to the back of the upper story flat we lived in and sprouted rooms along the way like bronchi sprout alveoli. My playing eventually reached the point where she bought me a gently used Magnus Chord Organ powered by a wheezing electric fan that pumped air through reeds—a cross between a keyboard and an accordion. The right side of this wood-brown plastic instrument had a three-octave keyboard while the left side had six white and six black buttons that each played a chord in either a major or minor key.

I was seven or eight years old before my parents finally let me go outside on my own to visit and play with other girls in the neighborhood. Looking back, their lack of oversight was astonishing. Or was it? Maybe they assumed that browbeating me with my penis-lacking, second-class lot in life would keep me in line, just as it did countless wives and daughters. At any rate, I soon realized that my time with my friends was mine because my parents trusted me, or at least their vision of me. No phones rang to check up. Nobody asked where I was or who I was with. If I occasionally came home late, it was because I'd gotten so worked up over Barbie's outright disrespect for divine mandate that I lost track of the time. Her lavish lifestyle and flamboyant wardrobe weren't signs of growing feminine agency, autonomy, and freedom from the patriarchy—they were cautionary tales. Barbie would pay for her few decades of insouciance with an eternity of hellfire. Come to think of it, we never paid Ken much mind.

One day, I told my parents I was heading to a friend's house. I never got there. Instead, I ended up on Ocean Beach, walking all the way to the zoo and back wrapped in fog as thick as whipped cream. I saw no one and barely heard the traffic on the Great Highway above the crashing waves, whistling wind, and seagull cries. At one point, I stopped, stretched out my arms, and slowly began to twirl as I realized that I was alone for the first time in my life. My spinning quickened, my laughter erupting in gasps and whoops until I collapsed on the sand in a dizzy heap, heart pounding and breathless. The fog rolled over and around me until I lost track of where it ended... until the fog in my brain trickled out to mingle with and poison the gray mist rolling in off the Pacific. That terrified me.

I stood up, brushed myself off, and started walking as fast as I could, but I couldn't outrun my growing dread. Cold, salty air burned my throat as I strained to move faster. I veered away from the water toward the dry, shifting sand that impeded my steps. My legs strained and my lungs processed air like steamship boiler men at flank speed. My fists clenched. My jaw locked. I fought my fear the only way I knew how—by moving. But it didn't help, because I couldn't deny the awful truth that I had no idea who the fuck I was.

"This makes no sense," I screamed into the wind. "None of this makes sense!"

I collapsed onto all fours screaming and pounding the sand with my fists until my throat was raw and no sound came. Back home, if my mom suspected anything more than a cold—or maybe strep—then she never let on. I suspect she knew as well as I did that the diagnosis was complications from living a life steeped in contradiction where I was always one small yet crucial step behind whatever God the Father and God's Ambassador my father wanted or thought of me at any given moment. One thing was constant: my vagina ensured I could never catch up.

My parents began letting me stay out later as I reached middle school age. I took advantage of every opportunity to get outside to Ocean Beach or Lands End, where I began wandering further and further off trail through forests, along deserted beaches, and on the edges of crumbling cliffs. I discovered natural rooms made of interlocking tree branches, hidden glades, and driftwood structures built by those who visited before me. I played with sticks and stones, held butterflies, tried to make cups from the patches of clay I found, and even climbed the occasional tree. Girls my age began whispering about boys and the things they did with boys, such as meeting for clandestine make-out sessions at the Bouncing Bushes tucked away in Lincoln Park between the VA hospital and the US Park Police station. Their talk was infectious because I soon started thinking about boys who grew into men that swashbuckled their way across distant galaxies. Have I mentioned Gil Gerard? Make that fifteen minutes.

Puberty introduced a whole new set of problems. I knew that girls became women and that certain parts of our bodies grew and changed shape to accommodate her one and only job in life: making babies to swell God's ranks. Nobody bothered explaining what that entailed, and Judy Blume could only tell me so much. I learned about menstruation as my dad leered at Brooke Shields during one of many screenings of *Blue Lagoon*. I knew that girls were supposed

to like boys, that boys were supposed to like girls, and that making babies had something to do with genitals. How that transpired was utterly lost on me until the day I visited one of my favorite glades, noticed what looked like a magazine sticking out of a pile of branches, and discovered a stash of pornography. Moving on...

The initial surge of existential dread I felt that afternoon on Ocean Beach returned with division-level reinforcements as every gas light I'd grown up merged into an inferno of confusion, anger, and despair. My parents routinely let me stay out after dark once I hit thirteen. Most girls my age had slumber parties and played with 'cootie catchers,' folded paper games that told fortunes, meted out dares, picked crushes, and dropped shade. I kept to myself because I fucking hated how they wore the cloak of divine misogyny like queenly robes instead of straitjackets. The one universal middle school truism was viciously shunning anyone who didn't fit in or who fell short in the eyes of the cool kids. I was pretty enough, my parents had enough money to afford a Caprice Classic with all the trimmings, and my attire blended in. My defect was being an only child.

"Why should we be friends with you when God hates you so much that you don't have any brothers or sisters?"

What they didn't know is that being an only child saddled me with anywhere from three to eight times the parenting any of them received. Screaming into the Ocean Beach night became a regular pastime.

One night, I was returning from a particularly bad bout of screaming when I saw a flickering light in the distance that became a bonfire surrounded by high-school kids drinking 40-ounce bottles of Rainier malt liquor. One boy took a long swig, turned to pass the bottle to a buddy, and stopped when he spotted me.

"What are you doing out here by yourself?"

I shrugged. "Just walking, I guess."

"Come over here. You cold?"

"A little. Thanks."

I altered course and walked up to him as someone popped a tape in a boom box and started rapping to *Posse on Broadway*. I stamped my feet and held out my hands to warm them. It took a few seconds for me to realize that I was moving in time to an eight-oh-eight kick drum. It took a few more seconds for me to notice that I'd become the center of attention, boys and girls whispering, laughing, and pointing.

Another boy jogged my elbow. I looked over to find him holding a twenty-dollar bill. He waved it in my face then stuck it between his clenched fingers. "Pick this up and kiss it, and it's yours."

Cheers and jeers erupted as I did just that. I remember thinking I'd arrived—that I was finally one of the cool kids. I mean, how many of my classmates could say they got invited to party on the beach with high schoolers?

"We're braggin' cuz we ain't broke!" someone shouted as *Posse on Broadway* segued into *Hip Hop Soldier*. He looked at me and held up a fresh bottle of Ranier. "Hey, little girl, you want to party up or what? Twenty bucks and this can all be yours!"

Honestly? That was the easiest transaction of my entire life. I handed over the Jackson, tossed the cap in a pocket, and somehow managed to avoid spewing my first taste of a carbonated beverage that somehow paired bitterness with cloying sweetness and the tang of regret in every mouthful. War whoops, cheers, and nods of approval erupted as I chugged several mouthfuls before coming back up for air.

"You look like you've done this before," one of the girls said.

I belched. "Only every fucking night!"

The fog suddenly glowed red and blue. Kids scattered as Park Police rolled in to bust up the party. The daunting logistics of trying to run while carrying coolers, backpacks, bottles, and whatnot made escape damned near impossible. Unburdened by all that, I slipped away and took cover in a nearby clump of tall grasses. In retrospect, nearly getting busted should have been a wakeup call. That evening, it was a call to arms. One, I'd flirted with punishment and walked away clean. Two, whatever malt liquor tasted like, it was the magic elixir that soothed my inner

demons. I buried that bottle, noted the exact location, and stopped at the Cabrillo Safeway for a pack of gum before heading back home.

Those few sips set my head to spinning and I woke up a little queasy, but the mental and spiritual dulling was so worth it. I pulled on that bottle for the next six increasingly rancid nights as I set off on my five-mile walks. The lightheaded giddiness was my own private heaven. There were just two problems: my supply was finite, and my normal dose was starting to lose its effect. No corner market would sell to me, and shoplifting was out of the question. I needed two things: enough money to pay the battlefield prices commanded by the armies of willing teenagers who attended Washington High School or lived in the neighborhood. I also needed to find and befriend said teenagers.

I approached my dad one Saturday afternoon as he washed the car in the driveway. “Ten bucks and I’ll wash it for you.”

He glared at me. “What do you need money for?”

I shrugged. “Well, Amy Grant came out with a new album. I also figure it’s about time for me to learn how to manage a household for my future husband.”

“Women aren’t good for figuring anything,” he grumbled, “but I’ll let it slide since you want to learn how to serve His glory. Vacuum the inside and wipe down the windows—really wipe them, not like those wetbacks at the gas station who leave streaks—and I’ll pay you twenty. But don’t get used to it. Consider this your sign-on bonus.”

That old Chevy looked like it just rolled off the lot by the time I finished. By then, I’d already decided that my dad wasn’t the only local adult with a wallet and a lazy streak. I started taking on every odd job I could find. Babysitting? Sure. Packs of smokes for Ella and Claire, the little old ladies down the block? Any time. Mowing lawns? Absolutely. If you lived in the Outer Richmond and needed something done, Lisa Heikes was your (wo)man.

“Where you off to now?” Dad snarled one afternoon.

I checked the list I kept in my pocket. “Mrs. Watson needs her dog walked, Ella and Claire need TV dinners, and the Nakanos asked me to water their plants while they’re gone. I’m picking up a set of keys.”

“Since when does God want women to work outside the home?”

I wanted to ask what he thought Mom did but thought better of it and smiled. “Sorry, Dad, I thought Genesis 2:38 said God created women to help men.”

“Yeah, their husbands, not Orientals like the Nakanos.”

I shrugged. “Well, Proverbs 31:24 talks about women making and selling clothes, as does Acts 16:40. Lydia was even a homeowner.”

“Maybe, but—”

“But what about Deborah and Huldah?”

“Who?”

“Deborah was a judge and general, and Huldah was a prophet. It’s right there in Judges 4 and 5 and in both 2 Kings 22:14-20 and 2 Chronicles 34:22-28.” I paused. “Can I go now?”

“Um.” He blinked. “Yeah. Go with God, daughter.”

“May He watch over and protect you, Father!”

Middle school turned into my freshman year of high school at a deeply Christian school that shall remain nameless to protect the innocent. By then, I settled into a routine: wake up early, bathe and dress, finish my homework on the bus to school, make a dent in that night’s assignments at lunch and on the bus home, knock out a chore or two, tick a few items off my growing to-do list, and then head to Ocean Beach, Lands End, the Bouncing Bushes, or anywhere I thought boozy teenagers might be found.

It didn’t take long to make acquaintances with some well-connected boys who kept me informed about the next hangout and well supplied with hooch. Malt liquor? Please. By then, I’d

discovered the joys of peach schnapps, root bear schnapps, sambuca, Kahlua, Irish cream liqueur, crème de menthe, Jägermeister... and tequila. I almost lost my cafeteria lunch the first time I licked salt off my thumb, slapped the shot into my mouth, and sucked on the lemon. It tasted fucking disgusting, but each bottle of Cuervo did the job of many bottles of Ranier with none of the cloying sweetness of everything else I mentioned.

I soon learned something else: My womanly body and Christian innocence made me prime real estate for boys. Promising to sit with them at bonfires earned me discounts that stretched my entrepreneurial dollars. There was something nice about warming myself by the fire with a boy's Derby, Ben Davis, or letterman's jacket around my shoulders. I didn't mind when that expanded to having an arm around me. From there, it was only a short step to playing baseball. It was easy: kissing a boy got me to first base. Letting him grope me above the belt got me to second, and so on. Every kiss got me a white poker chip from the supply they always carried. Second base got me a yellow chip. Third base earned me a green one.

Going all the way to home plate—I trust that needs no explanation—earned a red chip. I racked up white chips, collected my fair share of yellow, and maybe the occasional green—but never red. Well, not directly: Girls could trade ten chips for one of the next higher denomination and spend those chips on food, help with homework, booze, weed, and more. Girls bragged about their red chips and traded names—of the boys who were fun to be with and boys to avoid. One of them, Heather, earned more red chips than I did white. Back then, I envied her drive. Today, remembering that poor girl makes me weep.

It didn't take long for the girls to start teasing me about not earning a red chip. Epithets like, "You know there's a Mary Magdalene underneath that Virgin Mary, don't you?" became commonplace. If the boys were evil for devising a game to get girls to do whatever they wanted, then the girls were despicable for unrelentingly pushing me to take that final, irreversible step.

"Don't listen to them, Lisa."

I took a drag on my joint. "I can manage."

Roy Andrew Faulker was a senior. He hung out with our crowd but never entirely fit in. For one thing, he always wore olive, black, or patterned camouflage pants bloused above black

leather combat boots. The jacket he placed around my shoulders was an old bomber jacket. Rumor had it that he and his real crowd studied books like *Anarchist's Cookbook* and *Small Unit Dismounted Patrolling*, made weapons in Machine Shop, and mixed incendiary and explosive chemicals in their garages. His sidekick Nico Hunter sometimes joined in. They never talked about their rumored extracurricular activities, and nobody asked. They didn't quite fit into the group, but nobody crossed them either.

"Look, all I'm saying is be careful."

He sat on the sand against a log. I lay on the sand with my head in his lap and his trusty bomber jacket over me like a blanket. I took another hit from the joint and handed it up to him.

"What's your deal? You're not my dad."

He removed his glasses, wiped them on his tee shirt, and sat back with the joint for a while before speaking.

"Has it ever occurred to you that none of these guys like you? That they made up a sick game to get their way with you? Think about it, Lisa: You earn chips to get high and lose your inhibitions. They take advantage of you and give you more chips to keep the game going. Lather, rinse, repeat. It's barbaric."

"So that's why I've never earned a chip from you. I was starting to wonder."

"Whatever happened to two people doing stuff just because they like each other? Take us. We're hanging out by this fire smoking some fine grass and relaxing. I don't see why take this any farther unless we both want to."

A light went on in my head. "Wait... are you saying you like me? Like boyfriend like me?"

The poor bastard actually blushed. "Yeah, actually."

I could see he was telling the truth. That's why I reached up and pulled him down for my first real kiss.

“Lisa?”

I whipped my head around and saw my mother staring at me from across the bonfire.

“Fuck me!”