

A Spider in the Palace

Jeanne Pricer

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Understanding and Overcoming Anxiety and Social Phobia



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Unless otherwise noted, all Scriptures are taken from the *King James Version* of the Bible.

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This book is dedicated with love to
Francis and Virginia, my wonderful parents,
huge encouragers who taught me faith and perseverance.
I am so grateful for you!

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SECTION I
ANXIETY DISORDER WAS MY LIFE:
CAN YOU RELATE?

CHAPTER 1

IT HAS COME TO THIS

Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thine health shall spring forth speedily: and thy righteousness shall go before thee; the glory of the Lord shall be thy reward.

(Isaiah 58:8)

T*his is not me*, I thought. Yet wired with supercharged nerves, disabled in anxiety, I succumbed to the realization that I was indeed afflicted with the unspeakable: mental illness! I sat across from the doctor, frozen and staring, feeling foolish and small. The psychiatrist was broad-shouldered and shorter in stature than I, a fair-skinned Italian man in his late thirties, wearing glasses that made him look scholarly, and sporting a clean-shaven head. I was sure he was devoid of any personality. His blue eyes remained focused on his notepad lying on a small wooden fold-out desk attached to an old school chair. His watch occasionally clunked against the desk, punctuating each left-handed scribble. My mouth felt numb and my tongue stuck in place. I dared not move lest I feel myself shake. The doc was sure to crack the soothing hum of the central air unit at any moment with a clinical question. How was I going to talk?

Desperate, I had sought the doctor's help. Since arriving in Japan on Navy orders several weeks earlier, I had been tormented

with nervousness and fear, feelings of panic around people, and lack of sleep and appetite. I had known these symptoms for most of my life but never to this degree. Now, in a state of urgency, I wanted to know what was happening to me, and my prayers begged for some miracle of relief. However, my first impression of the psychiatrist, although clouded by my mental state, was abysmal. He was very busy and kept leaving the room, breaking my train of thought, which was hard to keep on track anyway. At first he spoke very little. When he did, he asked me scripted questions, such as: How are a seed and an egg the same? He hardly ever looked up at me, and he never smiled. To him, I must have been another psycho patient from the assembly line, wearing a number on her pajamas, who had lost her ability even to think. I was, in fact, in military uniform. So was he. As the session crawled along, I began to believe that the whole thing was a waste of time. He was most certainly incompetent, unfriendly, and too busy for me. *This isn't going to work*, I thought, and during one of the doctor's momentary absences, I contemplated getting up and leaving. I did not, however, and that was a very good call.

Suddenly Dr. Sarachene looked up at me and announced, "OK. You have anxiety disorder." Oh, thank You, Lord! This thing has a name! I was stunned at the simplicity of the statement, while at the same time felt some of the anxiety and desperation slip away under the warmth of reassuring comfort. After so many long years of struggle, perseverance, and prayer, the Lord's healing light was breaking forth! I felt as though I had just been informed that someone I cared about, who I thought was dead, was indeed alive! Lifelong insanity was no longer a certainty. This man was about to help me become myself again. Had I not been so befuddled by joyous relief mixed with the lingering grip of nerves, I would have given a hug to this man of few words. He probably wouldn't have noticed anyway.

I listened as the doctor described the disorder. He said that anxiety disorder is biological; that is, the wiring in my brain was faulty. It is also genetic, inherited from one or both of my parents. This information alone brought me tremendous relief, since I

realized I wasn't going crazy and that there must be a biologically based cure for this torment. The doctor broke a brief smile. This was the first moment in a long time I had felt some hope. We sat talking for several more minutes while a twinge of calm crept over me as some of the darkness seemed to retreat. I was no longer wearing pajamas with a number as we two naval officers stood and parted ways. As I headed toward the elevators, I felt normal for a few moments, and I breathed a little easier for the rest of the afternoon as I took my girls to the swimming pool. Life was about to begin!

For twenty years, I had prayed for relief from anxiety, as its many forms had become the story of my life. Maybe you can relate.

"Whoa! What are you doing? What's your problem?" Chris was in disbelief. The softball I had just fielded at shortstop was like a bullet, headed anywhere but to first base. I could still feel the tense, gripping sensation in my right hand as I watched the ball nearly cut down the dodging runner before it flew low, mean—and off target—into the dirt, just missing a diving-for-dear-life second baseman. A few laughs arose from players around the diamond while the right fielder came forward to retrieve my wayward throw. I laughed out loud in mock anger to cover up my growing panic and confusion. My face felt flushed, and my body was now wired with the shakes.

"Oh, wait! Here's a chance to redeem myself," I hoped, as another bouncing ground ball headed toward me at shortstop. I scooped it up, and with perfect, graceful form, launched a highflying throw over Chris's head, over the fence, over the dugout, and into the woods. "Jeanne!" Chris cried. My quivering hand was out of control! What was happening to me? A college senior and valued softball player, I was now in consuming panic and wanted more than anything to be off that softball field. Even worse, tomorrow would be another day of practice. Most terrifying, of course, was that there would be games!

That night I was in turmoil as I tried to sleep. Images of fearful encounters invaded my dozing moments and my dreams. All night, it seemed, I was in the school cafeteria, too fearful to eat and too

filled with panic even to try. So many people—even my friends—were crowding around everywhere. Their presence was monstrous. As my alarm sounded in the morning, I longed to remain hidden under my covers. The world was too frightening. There was no way I could function out there. “Oh, God, be with me,” I breathed. With a sick feeling, I got dressed.