

## **The Great Pompydoo**

The Great Pompydoo was the best singer in the world. That's why his records sold millions, even though he never gave concerts or interviews. I asked my mother once why that was. After all, she knew him.

Mum said, maybe it was because the Great Pompydoo had a great secret. Then she looked a bit sad.

The Great Pompydoo came to visit us twice a year. My dad runs a little recording studio near Inchmurry, on the coast of New South Wales. It's in the middle of nowhere but that's why the Great Pompydoo uses it. He says it's his only chance for some real peace and quiet and, of course, my mother is an old friend.

Twice a year, the Great Pompydoo would sit with mum in our garden, both drinking brightly coloured drinks in tall glasses and watching the sun sink behind the mountains. They grew up poor in the same village in Spain, my mother told me, and everyone thought they would end up together. But the Great Pompydoo had gone off to seek his fortune and mum married my father instead.

My mother is extremely beautiful and the Great Pompydoo is very handsome. My father is funny and kind but he is also short, podgy and balding. I love my dad, but I'm glad I look like my mum.

Once night fell, the Great Pompydoo and my father would go to dad's recording studio and the Great Pompydoo would record another million-selling album. The next day his chauffer would whisk him off in a big pink Cadillac. A month later, my father would receive a cheque. I don't know how much, but it was enough that we could afford a nice house and dad never had to look for any other customers.

As for me, I liked living in the boondocks. There were trees to climb, bays and hills to explore and two or three kids in a nearby village to hang out with. Not a bad place to grow up, I guess. But I wasn't entirely happy.

Just like the Great Pompydoo, I had a secret.

And I was afraid our secret might be the same.

One Saturday, when the sun was shining and the air was still, I went to a cove near Sandy Point and sat on the beach. It's one of my favourite places, because there's a half-moon of cliffs around the small inlet that gives the whole place a natural echo. Wonderful acoustics.

So, I began to sing.

See, I want desperately to be a singer. But I can't let anyone hear my voice.

That is part of my great secret.

Here on the deserted beach, I was completely alone and so I belted out *I Better Leave Right Now* by Will Young. Why not? I can perform it better than him. I was just getting to the warbly bit I like, when a shadow fell across the rock I was sitting on.

I jerked around, my heart thumping.

Mother and father stood behind me, holding hands. They must have been out walking on the beach. My mum was staring at me, mouth open, and my dad had tears in his eyes.

"I didn't know you could sing like that," he breathed. "You sound exactly like...."

His voice trailed off and he glanced at my mother.

"Like the Great Pompydoo," she said quietly.

I bowed my head. I didn't know what to say. I knew who I sounded like and it made me afraid and confused. My father looked sadly out to sea. Then he sat beside me and placed a hand gently on my shoulder. My mother knelt on the other side.

"There's something we have to tell you," she said. "It's *our* great secret."

"The Great Pompydoo is a very private man," dad continued. "He never really wanted to be famous and have people treat him differently. He just wanted to sing, make a bit of money and live in peace with his family."

Mum pulled a crumpled magazine from her bag and smoothed it out. On the cover was The Great Pompydoo, smiling his dazzling smile. She tapped the cover.

"This man's real name is Raoul Catillana," she said. "As you know, I grew up with him. People said we were bound to marry one day."

I nodded, still afraid to look at my father. My mother leaned close and whispered in my ear.

"I didn't want to." She leaned back and winked at me. "You want to know what Raoul Catalina's great secret is."

I shook my head.

"He can't sing a note."

"But... but, he's the Great Pompydoo!"

"Raoul Catalina craved riches and fame." My father laughed and his stomach wobbled. "I just wanted to sing."

"Raoul and I will always be good friends," my mother smiled. "But I fell for a man who knew that my love was more precious than being important."

She squeezed father's hand.

"Well. Go on!" she urged. "Show our son who you are."

And my father began to sing. He had the most beautiful voice in the world. I should know. I'd heard it on a dozen million-selling albums.

My mother took my hand, eyes glistening, and nodded for me to join in. After a while I did, timidly at first. My father grinned and motioned for me to keep going.

And we sang together, on the beach, in front of my mum. The first of many times.

Singing the way people do, who have no more secrets between them.