

LORETTA
GOLDBERG



BEYOND THE
BUKUBUK
TREE

Beyond the Bukubuk Tree

A World War II Novel of Love and Loss

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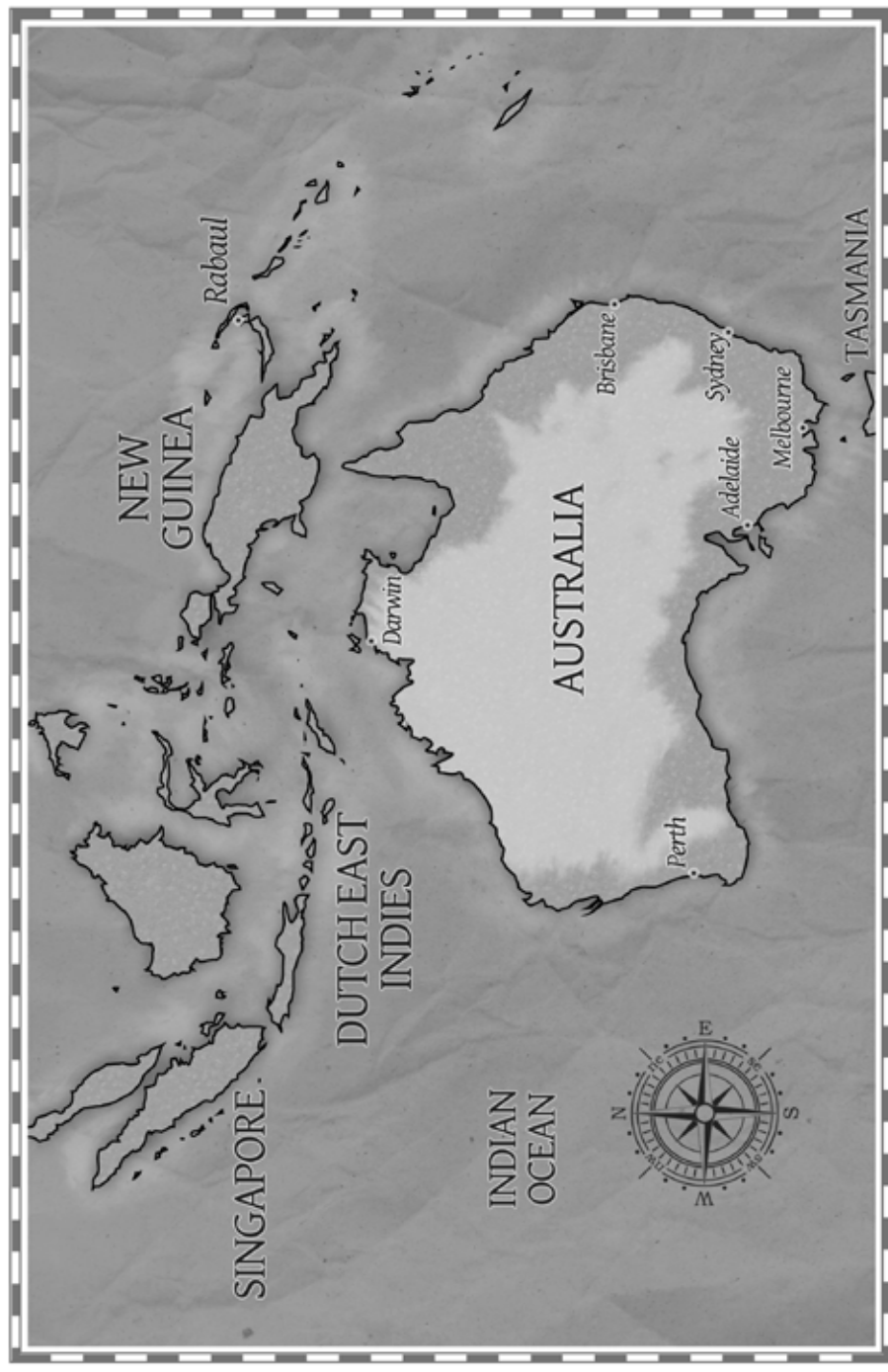
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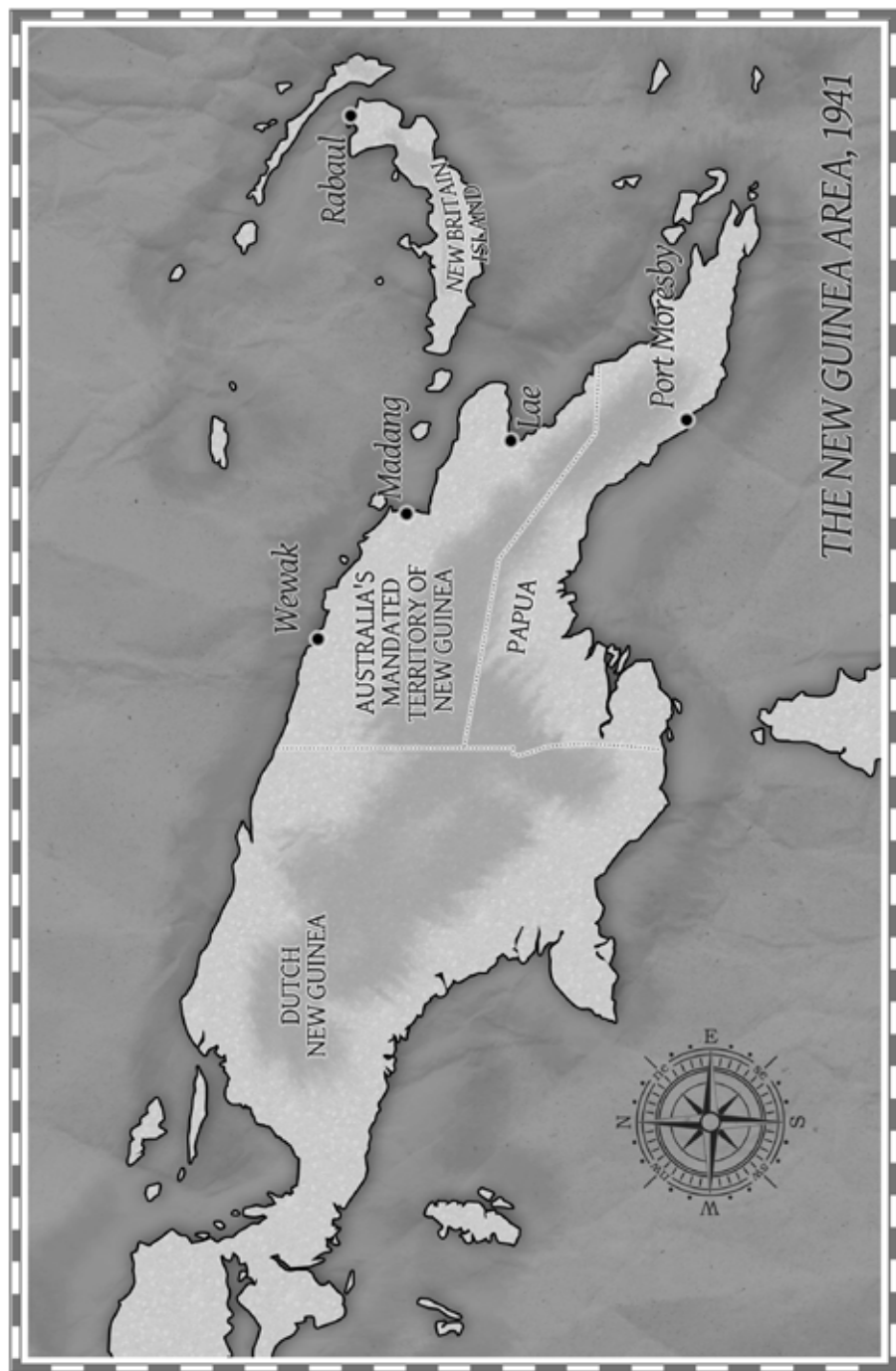
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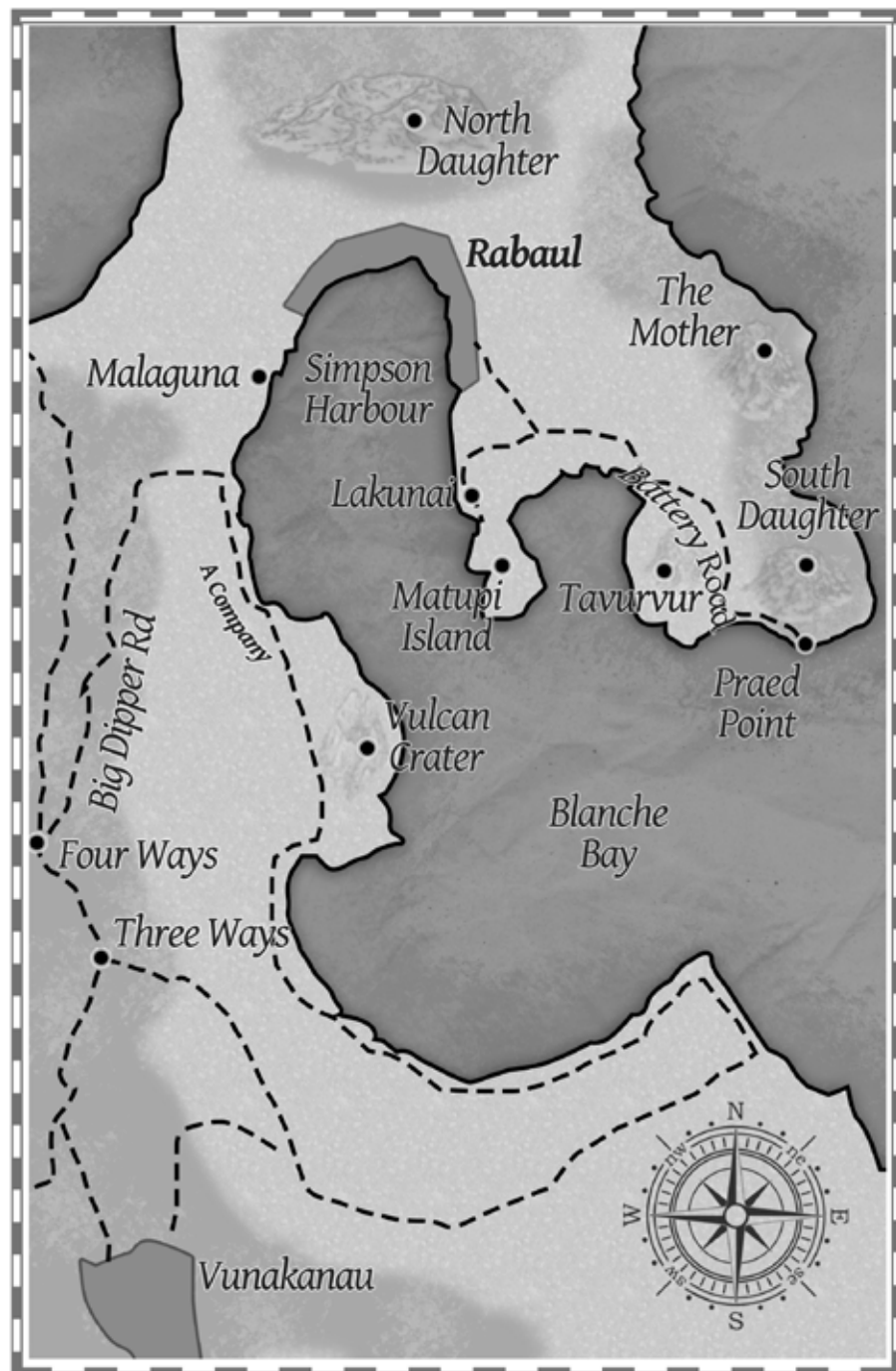
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THE NEW GUINEA AREA, 1941



*To H. N. S., a dedicated physician
whose patriotism, love of his patients
and sacrifice inspired me to write this
historical novel. - Loretta*

“The bukubuk tree grows and stands alone, unlike any other fruit tree. An adult tree stands over 20 meters tall, its branches stretching out like mango trees. The fruit is just amazingly sweet, with a starchy texture. Since bukubuk trees can reach full height in five years, we often plant the seed, which is hard and shaped like a small brown rugby ball, to mark a place or event with spiritual significance. Tolai myth held that a bukubuk tree could be inhabited by a Tambaran spirit because the bark is rough at the bottom. Putting the bark on boils and lumps could heal them naturally. Now, people sometimes plant the tree to mark the anniversary of the bringing of the Gospel of Jesus Christ to East New Britain Province.”

Albert Konie, curator of the Rabaul Historical Society archives and initiate into the secret Tubuan Society.

BOOK ONE
IMPROBABLE SOLDIER,
FEBRUARY – APRIL 1941

CHAPTER 1

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Friday 14 February 1941: A Flat in York St, St Kilda West, Melbourne, Australia.

DOCTOR JAKE FRIEDMAN had that dream again, his balm-of-Gilead creation:

On-call doctor at Colac District Hospital. He's driving three nurses to pristine Apollo Bay. It's an urgent care call late Saturday night.

"The children! Is it polio?" Scared parents rasp over a crackling telephone line.

Jake and the nurses are halfway along Otway Range's seventy-mile road. The car reeks of anxiety, petrol fumes and disinfectant.

"Why are you slowing, Doctor?" asks Vivien.

She's beside him, kneading her hands as she wills on the car. Her foot grinds a book on the floor: "Treatment of Infantile Paralysis in the Acute Stage".

"Careful. My bible," Jake snaps.

Her foot jerks up, a sucked-in breath her apology.

Sister Elizabeth Kenney's protocols of hot compresses aren't

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officially approved for acute-stage polio, but Jake has seen them work at her clinics. There's no other treatment.

Grace and Ellen are in the open dickie seat behind, clutching their starched caps against gusts of broiling wind. It's a hot summer. Somehow, he sees around the next bend. Grunting, "Broken glass!" he swerves, swerving back to the right side of the road ahead of an oncoming car. On Saturday night, the maddest of the mad take to their cars.

"No worries," he soothes Vivien.

Masked and gloved, they enter a modest red brick house, a closed universe of terror and wails. His examination rules out polio—gastric flu. Ecstatic parents shower him with praise, which he modestly demurs. Jake and the nurses take a tension-lifting sip of the offered whisky and return to Colac.

Jake's alarm clock jangled him upright. Rolling over, he shut it off, tasting the memory of the celebratory whisky on his tongue. He bent over, head in his hands, as his satisfaction drained away.

Because that's not what happened. He hadn't seen around the curve in the road. He hadn't seen the spilt gravel or broken beer bottles, nor had he felt the tyre flattening. The car had skidded and overturned. He and Vivien had gashed their faces against the windscreen, and he had got a concussion. Ellen had been thrown clear of the car, relatively unhurt, but Grace had been crushed by the vehicle.

They had never reached Apollo Bay. Ellen, the only sentient passenger, had hailed a driver who had taken them back to Colac. At the crash site, no one had realised how badly Grace was hurt. She had died in the hospital of internal bleeding. Compounding Jake's shame, when he had returned to his room from the hospital, Kenny's book had mocked him from his desk; he'd left it in their hurry to get on the road. *Failure*, he'd curse himself after these nocturnal re-writes. The crash had been three months ago, but his dreams invented details as more time passed.

When the police had established that he hadn't been drunk, they'd cleared him of all responsibility. Blame had belonged to the gravel spillers and glass breakers. Still, he couldn't clear himself. He'd learnt that the children he was rushing to treat *did* have paralysis polio and were immobilised long-term in the standard protocol. He went about his duties—lancing abscesses, setting bones, delivering babies, referring tuberculosis cases to the TB clinics—feeling like an impostor with a neon-green “F” for failure on his white coat—green, so that it wouldn't be confused with blood. His creativity while asleep only sharpened his daytime grief.

He glanced at the clock. 5.30 a.m. He shuffled into bathers, shorts, a singlet and runners. Had he woken his sister and her husband? He was living in the spare room of Talia and Simon's flat. Since graduation four years ago in Melbourne, he'd worked as a substitute doctor, a locum, in Brisbane, the capital of the northern state of Queensland; Julia's Creek, an outback hospital in western Queensland; Sydney; and Colac, a rural town one hundred miles from Melbourne. Talia insisted he live with them between contracts, and he was grateful for the convenience. Today, he wanted to swim in nearby St Kilda Beach before he saw them. He needed solitude to get comfortable with his decision and let his future roll around his insides from fingertips to toes. He was going to volunteer for the Army. His family would hate it; not only would he be far away, he'd be in danger.

He hadn't woken the family. A blessing of being a heavy snorer like Simon was that you knew where things stood in terms of consciousness. Snores now rumbled from two rooms away. *Is Tal superhuman to share that bed without appearing sleep-deprived?* he wondered as he tiptoed to the kitchen. Summer's heat warmed the wood and infused the curtains with a tired mustiness.

In the kitchen, he opened the refrigerator. 'You're a bit under-tall for your weight,' is what he'd tell a patient of his age

of 30, he thought, rubbing his stomach ruefully. ‘Lose a half-stone, or you’ll be sorry, and your family will be sorrier.’ He was surprised that his hard work and sprawling travel hadn’t kept him trim; he wasn’t a glutton. *Heredity*, he assumed.

He drank cold tea and ate a piece of leftover roast lamb. Talia would cook breakfast later, near-kosher porridge, eggs and toast. Slinging a towel around his neck, he went outside. Dawn grey seeped up the horizon as he ran under palm and eucalyptus trees. He sniffed the stimulating scent of the eucalyptus, feeling intensely alive. A woman was walking a beagle. It barked at Jake and barked again. A kookaburra cackled, and white cockatoos screeched. In the distance, a dog answered the beagle. Jake cocked his ear. It wasn’t a real dog but a lyrebird imitating the beagle’s bark.

The beagle didn’t get the joke. It broke free, trampling a garden-bed of peonies. Jake chased it, grabbing its leash.

“Lyrebirds are such comics, they even fool dogs,” he laughed, handing the leash to the woman, who clucked in dismay at the broken flowers.

She thanked Jake profusely. Eyeing his bare ring finger, she looked him up and down with frank interest. *Not bad. Is he available?* he imagined he heard her thoughts click. Her calf-length skirt suggested she was conservative. *War changes manners, along with everything else*, he mused as he disengaged and began his run.

Lampposts sported new recruitment posters for the army, the Second Australian Imperial Force. *More colourful as the war drags on*, he mused. He stopped to wipe his sweating face at one amusing poster: a clean-cut fellow with a pearly-toothed smile, the spitting image of Clark Gable. *Better than a long-faced Not-Gary Cooper*, Jake thought.

Not-Rhett-Butler wore a black business suit and fedora hat. His jacket had large-patterned blue stripes. Some advertising expert must have said that blue stripes were just the right touch to attract volunteers. Not-Rhett’s right hand

hoisted a rifle, while his left carried army khakis. The caption read: *We're Coming! Join the AIF Now!*

Jake ran on. Other posters featured a smoky seductress handing her hapless suitor an infantry digger's slouch hat with the caption *Here's your hat, Mister, and Make Your Mother Proud.*

He didn't have to volunteer. There was no conscription despite the war being eighteen months old. Even if there were, his concussion could have got him an exemption as an essential worker at home. Yet he was certain of his decision. It wasn't Blue Stripes or the hope for some femme fatale's approval that brought him to his certainty. It wasn't the car crash, despite his anguish. But Grace's death had clarified things. When his cotton ball brain allowed thought, the absurdity of wasting death and injury in Colac overwhelmed him. In wartime, casualties should be like ration coupons, redeemable for worthy items in war service. He loathed fascism and loved the British democratic system that provided dignity and safety to Jews. Any future accidents involving him must happen in uniform.

He stopped at a traffic light at the main road, Beaconsfield Parade. Military lorries rumbled by, passing clapping horse-drawn carts that would deliver fresh milk and hot bread to individual homes. While he waited, he pulled out a folded paper where he'd noted that the Army was seeking volunteer doctors, which he'd heard at the University of Melbourne's Department of Medicine. The call sealed his decision and his sense of urgency.

Crossing the road, he ran past an empty playing field to the esplanade and beach. Stripping, he ran into the waves. There was an undertow. A faint tang of industrial metal and sewage hit him as he dived into waves to get further out, to clean water. A few people were fishing from the pier. He hoped it was sport, that they'd throw the fish back and not eat them. Otherwise, they'd turn up at his office with food poisoning.

A child squealed, "I saw it, Dad, a fairy penguin!"

Yes, there were some among the rocks.

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He rolled on his back, imagining he was in the pristine waters of Queensland, with their scrubbed, dazzling sands. He often lived superimposed realities. At St Kilda beach, he thought himself to the Great Barrier Reef. During Queensland monsoons, when all was sodden and rotting, he thought himself to dry Colac. A wave broke over him. He spat out foam and swam against the current for forty minutes. He had to get fit for basic training.

A big military parade was advertised for later that morning. Well, an infantry march, no tanks or planes. He would meet Talia there—Simon worked in the barracks at logistics. After the parade, he'd tell her he was enlisting.

As he punched through the waves, invigorated at last, Esther's face, the curve of her ears, and the reassurance of her touch on his shoulder took shape in the foam. She was his most intimate friend. A nurse in the obstetrics ward, half-Jewish by her Sephardic father, she was the only woman with whom he felt at ease. Her stocky, muscled torso felt manageable, unlike the perfumed opulence of the single women at his shule.

Esther was good-humoured, efficient, kind, and loved children. They'd drifted together, two lonely Jews in Christian farm country. He'd succeeded in making love to her three times in one night. In the morning, blushing with relief and pride, he'd proposed. He confessed his teenage passion for a high school football champion and occasional attraction to men, but she wanted him despite his ambiguous nature; they were united in the desire to make a family. They considered themselves secretly engaged—secretly, because having a Jewish father didn't make Esther Jewish in the eyes of Jake's orthodox community. Jewish blood passed through the mother, and Esther's was Methodist. "Jake married out," the gossips would complain, and he wouldn't be there to protect her. They'd agreed on discretion until after the war.

When he'd shown her the army's call for doctors, she'd cried, "You rotter, you're abandoning me!" Hurling a vase at his

still-concussed head, she'd thrown him out of her flat. He'd had no idea she had such temperament, but he loved being wanted. She'd left a remorseful note in his mailbox the next day, writing that she'd volunteer when her contract ended. He imagined her being in the same battalion. But that wasn't reality. Her contract ran another six months. She'd be posted thousands of miles away. For Australians, everything was always thousands of miles away.

Jake dog-paddled ashore, towelled, then ran home. The family was still asleep. He didn't want to see them at breakfast, as his head was buzzing with colliding thoughts. After showering, he left a note for Talia to meet him on Princes Bridge at 10:00, and then he took the tram into town. At his favourite side street cafe, he wolfed down steak and one egg—rationing kept eggs to one—and washed it down with a milkshake. *NOT kosher*, he chuckled as he read the newspapers. *Mark today with Aussie fare.*

When his meeting time with Talia neared, he strolled along the city's main road, Swanston Street. Crowds were spilling out of the central Flinders Street Station. Its great old clock showed 9.50 a.m.

CHAPTER 2

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THE TRAMS had stopped running, and the street was filled with women in floral dresses and perky hats, men in summer suits, and uniformed soldiers and sailors. Some children played hide and seek, bumping and squealing, while others unfurled streamers. Jake pushed past the town hall, where the governor general would accept the salute. He made his way along the footpath of Princes Bridge and climbed onto the base of a broad lamp standard. He craned his neck for Talia. As church bells tolled ten, he waved her over.

“Nothing beats a musician for being on time,” he grinned. “Did you get that pun?”

“Bad one.” She wrinkled her nose.

They found places in the second row. It was near 90 degrees. Everyone was fanning themselves between waving away flies. A few opened umbrellas to curses and clutching at eyes. A vendor pushed a cart selling ice cream and lemonade.

Talia frowned. “The paper says it’s for the Great War Victims’ Fund. Hasn’t that been done? What about our boys today?”

Jake fingered the note in his pocket about the Army calling for volunteer doctors. “They’re brewing up enthusiasm for this one with a good show. Look at that recruitment booth...”

He was drowned out by cheers from people waving Australian, New Zealand and British flags. Talia stood on tiptoe to look at the object of excitement: several young men at a booth near Flinders Street Station. Soon, martial drumming and tunes boomed from the Shrine of Remembrance, the new war memorial on the tree-lined thoroughway of St Kilda Road leading to the city centre. Brass bands led a few thousand lean, tanned soldiers in summer khakis marching three abreast. The infantry wore digger slouch hats, officers in caps. Rifles sloped, and boots pounded the pavement. Unit badges marked each company. Confetti, streamers and torn paper whirled from upper-floor office windows.

A purple triangle on top of an inverted red triangle adorned the shoulders of the band leading the 2/22 battalion. To delirious approval by the sweating crowd, this band swung into the “Wizard of Oz”, the hit movie of 1939. Since Oz was a nickname for Australia, the crowd sang along. “We’re Off to See the Wizard” was followed by “The Merry Old Land of Oz” and “Ding Dong the Witch is Dead”. A single voice behind Jake chanted, “Ding Dong the Kraut is Dead”. Hundreds of voices took it up. As the band marched out of view and neared the reviewing stand at the town hall, the band changed to “God Save the King”, but a version enriched by exotic harmonies.

Jake stared intently at the men of the 2/22, wondering if, by any chance, this battalion was seeking doctors; they had a new demeanour. Talia followed his stare. She frowned, and he felt her anxiety spatter over him. He tensed. Had she known about his teenage lusting for Izzy, the high school football champion? She’d been ten, he’d been fifteen. They’d never spoken about it, but she may have overheard his quarrel with their dismayed father. Those were years when his stutter was worst, which he’d conquered by winning every elocution contest he entered. He’d won control of his tongue, but not his desires, not for a while. Or had she sensed his intention to join the army? He put a reassuring hand on her shoulder.

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She brightened. “They’re great musicians.”

“They’ve been written up in the papers for original arrangements. Salvation Army blokes volunteered together, hoping to serve together. It worked. *Perhaps she’ll accept me doctoring army musicians, even if they’re Salvos.* Her support was vital, given the troubles of the Friedman family. “Salvos, who are a bit of a wag,” he added.

“Salvos and humour? Oxymoron,” she retorted. “I can’t stand them and the other proselytisers who knock on our doors and tell us Jews are damned.” She sighed. “Maybe these are different since they do joke in sound. Thickening *God Save the King* with chromatic harmonies is pretty daring. ‘Don’t generalise’, Mum always told us.”

“Tal, let’s go to the riverbank. I’ve got something to show you.” It was time.

The parade was nearly over. They ran down stone steps to a footpath that followed the river’s contours. Vendors were selling fish and chips, ice cream, meat pies and Cornish pasties. Talia bought fish and chips wrapped in greasy newspaper while Jake took a pasty. Benches were filling, so they walked down the grassy slope and sat. On the river, oarsmen in eight-man racing shells were practising. Their competitive focus offered a lulling illusion of normal life. The grass was a sad end-of-summer beige, but sprinklers kept the shade trees green. Children squealed with delight as they ducked in and out of the spray.

Jake and Talia ate in a silence prickling with tension. Jake felt a heart-pounding dread of upsetting his family again when he revealed he was volunteering for the army; they’d never liked his far-flung doctor contracts. Talia knew something was coming; news was rarely good these days. He could smell fear in her sweat.

When they’d finished, he handed her his paper. She read it, crumpled it and tossed it on the grass.

Leaning over, she ruffled his hair. “It’s your concussion, Jakie. Your brain’s still fuzzy, I can tell. The crash wasn’t your

fault. Simon says even only Jewish sons can't be expected to see around road bends. You can't go and do dangerous things to make up for guilt you shouldn't feel." Frightened coal-black eyes willed his hazel ones to drop in compliance. When he held her stare, she sighed. "Men!"

Inwardly, he smiled at Simon's irony. It took one Jewish son to recognise the expectations draped on another. "It's not the concussion. I'm the doctor here. I'm fine."

"But why now? There's no conscription. It's overseas, isn't it? Please don't. We need you here."

"There will be conscription eventually. You're right about one thing, Tal. I decided after the car crash, but not because of my guilt. I feel that death and injuries shouldn't be wasted on a peaceful Saturday night. We're at war. What do you think it was like telling Grace's Mum and Dad over the phone? She's from Western Australia. Every time a telegram comes or the phone rings, they think it's their three sons in Egypt. Grace was the one they didn't worry about. 'Was it sudden?' 'Yes,' I assured them, though it wasn't. 'At least she didn't suffer...' I let them think that, but I don't know. Future injury to me has to be when I'm in uniform."

"Do you have any idea how *alone* I'll be?" Talia shouted the word 'alone.' "With Miriam sick, insane really, and you away, it's just me." Her face was stricken white.

Jake sighed. That was the impediment he'd struggled over. The Friedmans had been an energetic family of five a few years ago, but now were shrunk. Mum had died after a stroke in her forties in '37, and Dad of a heart attack just ten months ago, at 55. His death also felt premature. Jake was the head of the family, supposedly its protector. Their older sister—Miriam the beautiful, Miriam the lawyer and violinist, Miriam the advocate for women's rights—had had a mental breakdown after her divorce. Her husband—a revered spiritual leader—turned out to be a street angel/house devil, a vicious abuser. Untangling their marriage had been especially excoriating because the

failings of a man so deeply entrenched in everyone's lives had to be covered up. Miriam took the blame. She now veered from vicious verbal abuse to hysterical giggles; three years of medications hadn't helped. A close-knit family, the Friedmans felt that trust was only possible between blood kin. Talia was right; Jake's enlistment would be a burden on her. *Having one foot in the modern world and the other stuck in ancient orthodoxies makes life very difficult*, Jake mused.

"Jacob Mordecai Friedman, it's not those tan, lean blokes, is it?" Talia shot at him. There, in the open. Every muscle in his back knotted. Poking his stomach, she rushed on, "You're not fit. You'll look funny in a slouch hat. You're shorter and rounder than all of them."

"I won't be infantry, Sis. Doctors are officers with caps and pips on their uniforms. I know it's hard, but Simon's a good husband with a large family. Ask them to help. Look at the big picture. We know what the Nazis are doing to Jews. England's just holding on. Imagine Australia surrendered to Hitler, swastikas on the town hall." He gestured in the building's direction. "You want to be like Paris, Amsterdam? You own a rental house..."

"Mortgaged."

"Yes, but if tenants don't pay or damage it, you've got a remedy in good old British law. In the Depression, we Jews suffered *like* others, not *more*. That's precious."

Talia pivoted. "Don't *you* want to own a house?"

He smiled at her effort to tack. "No. The Depression cured me of wanting things. Medicine and travel, those are my riches. I won't be shooting anyone; I'll be in a hospital. The Geneva Conventions protect army medics. Even the Germans signed them."

She sighed. "Jake, I'm so sorry. I was horrible. Put yourself in the other person's shoes..."

"Mum's mantra. Dad's was 'look for an option; there usually is one'."

They squeezed each other's hands. Jake stared at the river while Talia looked down, tears on her eyelashes.

"It's hollow being orphans," she began, "even though we were grown up when it happened. What's your favourite memory?"

Jake thought. "Dad asking the Passover question: 'Why is this night different from all other nights?' Turning the service over to me, just Ba'mitzvahed, me struggling not to stutter the Hebrew, which felt like blasphemy." He smiled wryly as he let her hand go. "I still smell his bleached shirt cuff and smoke-fugged wool jacket as he leant over with the prayer book, the feeling of solid safety in him. With Mum, it was her pride when Miriam graduated Law School and was admitted to the Bar; how she cheered Mirrie on the dais. Her breath exploded out as if her destiny was fulfilled. She was too sick to glow when I graduated. You?"

"Mum was a not-too-bad pianist. When I dream, she's accompanying Mirrie at her violin exams, that cherubic smile on her lips, always late turning the page." She laughed. "Dad in the shop, returning imperfect fabrics, teaching me good from bad. They lived for us to go a step higher. We tried." She looked at him. "You'll be a very handsome officer."

"Not true."

"Yes, true. You have a lovely face." She reached over and kneaded his back, iron pianist's fingers loosening knotted muscles.

"I do?" He didn't think he was handsome. He lived in the shadow of sisters who were acknowledged beauties, shapely brunettes with dark eyes and fine features.

"Yes. Rudolf Valentino, with Ashkenazi Jew fat reserves."

He laughed, sucking in his stomach.

"Not those silly Rhett Butler and Gary Cooper look-alike posters"—so she'd noticed the recruitment posters—"they're delivering types. Rudolf, he's looking for something." She stopped, puzzled.

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Jake wondered if her intuitiveness had just outrun her words. “Well, thank you, I think. Rudolf, righto. But I hope to deliver value.” He rolled his shoulders. He’d won her acceptance of his enlistment. The second hardest task was accomplished. Now, the hardest: “There’s one more thing,” he ventured. Her frown tightened as her shoulders stiffened.

“I know you’ve read books saying that insanity’s hereditary, that after Miriam’s breakdown, you can’t risk having children. It’s nonsense.” He pointed at the children splashing through the sprinklers. “Don’t you want a few like them? Grow more Friedmans? Mirrie won’t, of course. Simon’s from a big family; you know how much he wants children, and before Mirrie’s troubles, you did, too. You can. I’m the doctor. Friedmans don’t have a madness gene.”

“When Mirrie went off, I said you go first. I still do. You’re older. Show me it’s safe.”

Their discussions on the topic hadn’t lessened her fear. Whether Miriam was in their living room, screaming that they were poisoning her with the pills and that her family wanted her dead, or living quietly in her own flat, the deterioration of a sister who’d been the pride of their Jewish community haunted Talia like Banquo’s ghost.

Avoiding her gaze, Jake stared at the rippling river, recalling years of consultations with Miriam’s doctors, the unpredictable resilience of some patients and the frailty of others.

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Talia’s nudge jerked him back to her. “You’re dreamy. The waves can’t be that interesting. You’re not Monet.” The French Impressionists were her lodestar.

He reeled back their conversation. He was to have children first and show her it was safe. “I intended to go first,

love, until I decided to volunteer for the army.” He squeezed her hand. “There’s a Jewish nurse, Esther, in Colac. We have an understanding for after the war. I can’t bring forth a perfectly sound baby right now, but I know Esther and I will produce good-looking geniuses with kind hearts and healthy minds.”

Surprise, relief, and then a touch of suspicion crossed her face. She sensed when she wasn’t hearing the whole story. “Have you spoken to her father? Should I plan an engagement party?”

“No.” It wasn’t the time to burden her with the complication that Esther was only half-Jewish. “It’s fairer to wait. Only tell Simon. She’s the one... I’m easy with.” His body gripped in a fervent wish to do this magnificent traditional thing with Esther. “You’ll love her.”

“I suppose you know what you’re doing. Thanks for telling me, though it sounds a bit theoretical. Look, I’m willing to read the books on insanity you recommend.”

“Good, love. I’m glad. You’ll feel better.”

“But I won’t tell Miriam you’re enlisting. Spare me that.”

“Of course. I’ll say you need her protection. Maybe that’ll jolt her out of her self-absorption. *Family life’s so complicated. The army will be simpler.*

They watched the racing shells, now on the leg back. Jake pointed. “Isn’t that your poet friend Rex, the leading boat’s stroke?” The oarsman in the bow seat was chisel-featured and loudly repeating the coxswain’s orders as he powerfully wielded his oar.

Talia stared. “Yes.” They stood, waving their hands. “Rex! Rex! It’s Tal and Jake!” Others started hailing rowers. Some rowers inclined a shoulder or hooted. Rex didn’t; he kept urging his team on.

“He’s fit. Will he enlist?” Jake asked.

Talia was quiet for a moment. “Don’t tell anyone, but while Joe Stalin has a non-aggression treaty with Hitler, he won’t enlist. He trusts Uncle Joe.”

“Peacock Rex a commie? You’re ragging me!” Jake didn’t

like Rex, but he'd married Talia's closest non-family friend, a soprano named Stephanie.

"He reveres Stalin for destroying feudalism and capitalism. Communism appeals to lots of young people. You know that."

"Stalin's just a butcher. Rex is a preacher's son; he has to know that."

"He says that's propaganda." Talia sighed. "Look, if you're posted overseas, I'll make you a going away party. Be nice to Rex."

"Deal," Jake promised. Watching the last racing shell pass out of sight, Jake frowned. "If you're set on a party..." Talia mixed very different people at her parties, hoping that loving hospitality would lead to new friendships. It wasn't his idea of fun, but the least he could do was to be a model host. "Can I ask you to be careful about mixing Zionists and anti-Zionists? The shule board's at loggerheads with our Rabbi and could split apart."

Zionists advocated an independent Jewish homeland in Palestine. Papa Friedman had been born in Palestine; the family were Zionists, as was Simon. But Rabbi Jacob Danglow, an Englishman and the shule's rabbi, advocated a permanent British Mandate there. German persecution of Jews heightened the dispute.

"Jake, I know far more than you do about who's on what side. That's what we talk about in the women's section while you gents daven, looking self-important."

Jake laughed. "Caught in the act. How could I doubt you?"

In the street, trams were rumbling again. They brushed confetti off their clothes and took a tram home. The soaring "Shrine of Remembrance," part Greek columns, part pyramid, part Mayan-inspired stairs, came into view then receded. They fell quiet. *How long before we pass this monument together, again?* was their common thought.