



Heritage

JUDY
NUNN

They came to change the course of a river
and changed the course of their lives

About the Book

‘This land and its history are ancient, Pietro,’ Lucky said, ‘as ancient as time itself. But as a civilisation, it is only just being born, and we are part of that birth.’

In a time when desperate people were seizing with both hands the chance for freedom, refugees from more than seventy nations gathered beneath the Southern Cross to forge a new national identity. They came from all over wartorn Europe to the mountains of Australia to help realise a dream: the mighty Snowy Mountains Hydro-Electric Scheme, one of the greatest engineering feats of the 20th century. People of all races and creeds tunnelled through a mountain range to turn the course of a majestic river, trying to put to rest ghosts from the inferno of history: buried memories, unimaginable pain and deadly secrets.

From the ruins of Berlin to the birth of Israel, from the Italian Alps to the Australian high country, *Heritage* is a passionate and fast-paced tale of rebirth, struggle, sacrifice and redemption, and a tribute to those who gave meaning to the Australian spirit.

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Heritage

JUDY
NUNN



In fond memory of Bob and Rita Duncan

'Give me a man who's a man among men
Who'll stow his white collar and put down his pen
Who'll blow down a mountain and build you a dam
Bigger and better than old Uncle Sam.

Sometimes it's raining and sometimes it's hail
Sometimes it blows up a blizzardy gale
Sometimes it's fire and sometimes it's flood
And sometimes you're up to your eyeballs in mud.

Give me bulldozers and tractors and hoses
And diesels to ease all my troubles away
With the help of the Lord and of good Henry Ford
The Snowy will roll on her way.'

Extract from the song 'Snowy River Roll'

PROLOGUE

‘We can say goodbye to old Berlin, Mannie.’

Mannie Brandauer had never forgotten the look on his father’s face the day he said those words, or the sorrow in his father’s voice. And, from then on, Mannie noticed, whenever his father talked of the golden days of the Twenties, he always referred to ‘old Berlin’.

‘Before President Hindenburg was forced to appoint that awful little thug as Chancellor,’ Stefan Brandauer would say to his wife, Margit, recklessly careless of his young teenage son’s presence. Then Margit would gently warn Mannie that he was not to repeat his father’s views in public.

Far from heeding his wife’s concern, Stefan voiced his opinions with equal vigour to his close circle of likeminded friends, those who still gathered regularly at the Brandauers’ grand house on diplomats’ row in Tiergartenstrasse, overlooking the magnificent parkland which had once been a royal game reserve.

Stefan had been Director of Protocol in the Weimar Republic for ten years and, having been retained by Hitler for his brilliance in foreign diplomacy, such inflammatory conversation was certainly not in keeping with Stefan’s position. But then, as he pointed out to Margit, he had never before socialised with thugs and vulgarians, and if he was now forced to do so in the workplace, then he would at least recognise them for what they were. He was not impressed, he said, by their uniform and their pistols, nor was he intimidated by their loutish behaviour and bullying tactics.

But it was not Stefan’s political views that finally brought about his demotion; it was the company he kept. Despite his impeccable Aryan lineage and his staunch belief in the Roman Catholic faith, it was noted that the Director of Protocol was a Jewish sympathiser and the decision was made that he should be posted abroad. But not until after the Olympic Games.

Stefan Brandauer – multilingual, urbane, well known and well liked by the majority of visiting ambassadors – was an invaluable asset during the 1936 Olympics, when Hitler sought to disguise the anti-Semitic policies already strongly in place, and to impress upon the world Berlin’s sophistication and fairness. But when the Olympics were over and the dignitaries and tourists had departed, the placards of condemnation inspiring hatred and urging boycotts reappeared, the anti-Jewish publications returned to the newsstands, and Hitler refocussed on his major objective: purifying the city. It was then that Stefan was posted to London and obscurity, his duties at the German Embassy being those of any other minor civil servant.

By that time, Mannie was in his first year of Law at Berlin University and so he didn’t accompany his parents. He bade them a fond farewell, knowing that he would miss them sorely. As his father would miss ‘old Berlin’. He moved into a modest flat near the university with his childhood friend and fellow first-year student, young Samuel Lachmann.

On a clear summer evening in mid July, 1943, Mannie hefted his knapsack of groceries over one shoulder and walked down Kurfürstendamm through the gathering dusk. He thought, as he so often did, of his father and ‘old Berlin’.

Along either side of the broad boulevard, cafes, bars, theatres and nightclubs still bravely opened

for business, despite the increasing bombing raids that were systematically destroying the city. Life went on for the Berliners. But Kurfürstendamm catered to a different society these days. It had been a swaggering clientele at first, one of strutting uniforms and self-importance, loud, coarse and vulgar. Then, so quickly that it seemed to happen overnight, the same thugs had been empowered with the right to commit acts of shocking brutality. They were no longer mere louts showing off in their finery. They had become the feared Gestapo ordered to hunt out Jews, or they were the murderous Schutzstaffel – the SS – Hitler’s elite corps of race guardians bent on the annihilation of all ‘undesirables’ who tainted the purity of the Fatherland.

Mannie vividly recalled the ‘old Berlin’ of his childhood, and the circle of his father’s friends. He’d been ten years old when Stefan had taken him to the opening night of the outrageous new musical *The Threepenny Opera*. It had been staged at the Theater am Schiffbauerdamm, and he’d met its creators on a number of occasions. Both Bertolt Brecht and Kurt Weill were regular visitors to the house in Tiergartenstrasse, as were many members of Berlin’s thriving artistic society. Painters and writers, composers and musicians, actors and film-makers all gravitated to the salon created by Stefan Brandauer, where they could freely vent their anger at the ‘counter-renaissance’ movement which was already noticeable in 1928, the twilight of the golden age. Where were those artists now? Mannie wondered. All gone. Some had fled, but most had been murdered.

He turned into Joachimstalerstrasse, passing a playground which still bore the sign *Arischen und nichtaris-chen Kindern wird das Spielen miteinander untersagt*. These days there was no point in banning Aryan and non-Aryan children from playing together, he thought. There were no non-Aryan children left to play. The children, like the artists, were gone. They’d been forcibly removed. Unconsciously, Mannie quickened his pace. *And nobody’s doing anything about it!*

Just along from the house in Tiergartenstrasse had been the Papal Nuncio’s residence, and Mannie remembered how, as a child playing in the park, he’d watched the men in their sombre black occasionally venture out to stroll beside the meandering streams and bridle tracks of the Tiergarten, or to sit in quiet contemplation by the lake. Having been brought up a devout believer in the Church of Rome, Mannie had found the men impressive. They were men of the cloth; they had been called by God.

One of the men he’d seen walking in the park had been Cardinal Pacelli, the Vatican Secretary of State who’d spent nine years in Berlin. Mannie thought about him a great deal lately. Cardinal Pacelli was now Pope Pius XII – *why wasn’t he doing something about it?*

Manfred Brandauer was tortured by the Vatican’s silence. As a Roman Catholic he had felt a personal sense of guilt when the Pope first refused to speak out against the sickening persecution of the Jews. And now, years later, the Pontiff continued to maintain his silence. Mannie’s shame overwhelmed him. His own priest, the man who heard his weekly confession, had no answers about why the Vatican wasn’t protesting. Indeed, the priest had not wished to discuss the matter: ‘It is not for us to question the Holy Father, my son.’ Mannie had even visited the Cathedral in search of answers. ‘Why is Rome, the Vatican, the Holy Father himself, not taking a stance?’ he’d demanded. Still no answers came. So Mannie continued, day after day, month after month, to feel his ever-deepening shame.

Walking briskly, he rounded the corner into Viktoria-Luise-Platz, a picturesque square with a central park and fountain surrounded by townhouses. The flat Mannie rented was on the third floor of a six-storey apartment block built in the 1890s, in the ‘new Baroque’ style that had been so fashionable at the time. With ornate balconied facades, it was a gracious building.

Mannie’s best friend, Samuel Lachmann, lived in the apartment below him. The two no longer shared accommodation as they had in their student days. Both twenty-five years of age, Samuel was now a married man with a baby daughter, and Mannie was a qualified lawyer. But they remained as

close as they had been throughout their lives. Closer than brothers, they both agreed. 'You can choose your friends,' Samuel always said, with that cheeky gleam in his brown-black eyes.

Samuel hadn't changed, Mannie thought. Even as the times had grown darker, Samuel Lachmann had remained as cheeky and buoyant as he had been throughout their shared childhood, and Mannie admired his friend's strength. But he worried incessantly for Samuel's safety, and for that of his wife Ruth, and their little girl. They should have left Berlin long ago – he'd been nagging them to do so for years – but it had been Ruth who'd been adamant about staying. Just as she had been in 1938 following the murder of her father.

It had been on the evening of November 9, Kristallnacht, the 'night of broken glass', when hordes of rioters, bent on a bloodbath, had smashed the windows of Jewish shops and businesses. Hiram Stein, along with many others, had been dragged into the street and bashed to death by the mob.

'This is my father's home,' Ruth had said of the apartment in Viktoria-Luise-Platz, when Mannie had urged her to leave. 'I have lived here with my father for over fifteen years, ever since my mother died. Papa was my world and I will live in his home.' The patrician, honey-haired looks that Ruth Stein had inherited from her Gentile mother not only belied her father's Jewish blood, but the indomitable strength that lay beneath her beauty.

Ruth's uncle, Walter Stein, had fled with his young family following the death of his brother, but Ruth had refused to accompany them. She had shouldered her grief, completed the second and final year of her degree in languages and, eighteen months after her father's death, she had married Samuel. The two of them had set up home in the old apartment, and when the flat upstairs had become vacant they had suggested Mannie rent it.

'We are family, after all,' Ruth had insisted, and Mannie had readily agreed to the arrangement. It meant that he could be of assistance to them in these increasingly threatening times.

When Jews were denied regular employment, Samuel had accepted odd jobs labouring for those he could trust, while Ruth had worked from their apartment as an English tutor, many of her pupils being the children of wealthy Jews preparing to flee Germany. These days, however, she had only one pupil, young Naomi Meisell, the daughter of her friends who had a ground-floor apartment on the opposite side of the square. Eighteen-year-old Naomi, always a rebellious girl, fearlessly refused to forgo her English lessons.

In the Thirties, the vibrant suburb of Schöneberg had been home to a vast Jewish community; now it appeared that Ruth and Samuel and the Meisells were the only ones left. They didn't know for certain: they didn't dare enquire.

Hiram Stein and Efraim Meisell, both forward-thinking businessmen, had many years previously purchased their apartments under fictitious non-Jewish names. It had been their intention to protect their investments, but their prescience was now protecting their families. Jews were not allowed to own properties, and the families lived in secrecy in the prisons of their homes. Occasionally they would venture out to purchase meagre supplies or to scavenge for food. But every such excursion was fraught with danger, for it was imperative they wear the yellow Star of David, emblazoned with the word 'Jude', on the left side of their outer garment. To be discovered without their badge could mean death. But always, upon leaving their apartments, and upon their return, they clasped a bag or some other object to their chest to cover the Star. Jews no longer lived in Viktoria-Luise-Platz.

Mannie bounded up the two flights of stairs to the Lachmann apartment and gave the secret knock on the door, which then opened immediately.

'Mannie!' Her arms were about him, her soft cheek against his, warm and welcoming, just like the sister she'd always been.

'You haven't lost a brother, Mannie,' she'd told him when she'd married Samuel, 'you've gained a sister.'

There had been a time during their days at university when Mannie had wished with all his heart that Ruth could be more to him than a sister. But Ruth had had eyes for no-one but Samuel. It had been love at first sight for them. Although Ruth was a freshman studying languages and Samuel was in the second year of his engineering degree, they would study together side by side in the reading room, and they would hold hands as they strolled across the campus to the library. They'd been inseparable from the outset. And Mannie could do nothing but embrace the sisterly friendship Ruth offered, and be happy for the man he considered his brother. It had been a painful time for him, but he'd accepted his lot. Now he merely worshipped from afar, or rather from the apartment upstairs.

'Mannie! Mannie! Mannie!'

Little Rachel was toddling comically towards him as fast as her two-year-old legs could carry her. Mannie closed the door, picked up the infant and dumped the knapsack of groceries on the living room table.

'How's my favourite girl?' he said to the child as he followed Ruth through the open archway into the kitchen. 'Something smells good.'

'Chicken soup.' Ruth stirred the pot on the stove. 'Fresh stock. Samuel had a job this afternoon and he came back with five chicken carcasses – isn't that wonderful? We'll have real soup for a whole week.' She didn't look at him as she spoke; she knew Mannie would be cross. And he was.

'Read story, Mannie, read story.' Rachel was tugging his hair demanding her customary bedtime story, but Mannie put the child down.

'Not just now, *liebchen*. Why did he go out looking for work, Ruth? You know how dangerous that is. Where did he work? For whom? Is he here now?'

'He's washing, he came back filthy.' She continued stirring the soup. 'It was Hoffmann's Garage in Wilmersdorf, we can trust Hoffmann. And they paid him well. But then you know how good Samuel is with cars – he says he shouldn't have bothered studying engineering, he should have been a mechanic ...'

'Yes, yes, I know how good he is with cars. But to actually look for work! Someone could have reported him. They could have followed him back here! It's too ...'

'Too dangerous, I know.' She turned to face him at last. 'I tried to warn him, but he just said he was off to make some money and we were going to have chicken soup.'

'But I've brought the groceries, Ruth. He didn't need to ...'

'Darling Mannie.' She kissed his cheek fondly. 'What would we do without you?' She turned down the flame under the pot. 'Let it brew, come and sit down.' She picked up Rachel and they walked into the living room to sit at the table that looked out over the balcony to the square below, although these days the gauze curtains were always drawn.

'I saw Sharon Meisell this morning,' Ruth said. 'She told me that they're getting out. Efraim has arranged false papers.'

She looked weary, Mannie thought. Not the ever-present signs of fatigue that resulted from inadequate diet and lack of exercise, but a weariness that came from deep within. It was hardly surprising under the circumstances, but Mannie was unaccustomed to seeing what he perceived as sadness in Ruth's eyes. Clear blue, they were always alive and positive. Like her husband, Ruth was a creature of humour and spirit, of resilience and determination; the two were made for each other. Concerned, Mannie waited for her to continue.

'I never thought the Meisells would leave. Well, not of their own accord,' she added, her tone heavily laced with irony. 'They've been here longer than my father. It came as a bit of a shock, I was so sure that we'd all stick it out together. We were the strong ones, we agreed at the beginning, the Meisells and the Lachmanns. Now Sharon says that we were the foolish ones, and I've no doubt she's right.'

‘Anyway,’ Ruth bounced the child on her lap, Rachel raking her tiny fingers through the fair honey-brown of her mother’s hair, ‘I suggested to Samuel that we should try to get out too. Sharon’s given me the contact for the false papers.’

‘Excellent,’ Mannie agreed enthusiastically. ‘I’ll pick them up for you. I’ll do whatever I can ..’ She interrupted him. ‘Samuel won’t go.’

‘Why?’ he asked, but she wasn’t listening.

‘He would have, years ago when you said that we should. Samuel would have listened to you, Mannie. But he stayed because of my stubbornness. No,’ she corrected herself with a rueful raise of her eyebrows, ‘my selfishness. My determination to live on in my father’s home, regardless of the danger to my husband and child. And now Samuel’s the one who refuses to leave.’ She disentangled the child’s fingers from her hair and put Rachel down on the floor. The child toddled over to Mannie to tug at his trouser legs.

‘Samuel says that “the tide has turned”,’ she continued. ‘He says that it’s only a matter of time before Germany is defeated, and we must “weather the storm”.’ Ruth smiled as she imitated her husband. ‘You know Samuel, Mannie – the constant optimist, and how he does love a cliché when he’s being dramatic.’ A humorous twinkle returned to her eyes as she fought to lighten the moment. Besides, she realised, she did feel better now that she had admitted her guilt, and to the person to whom her admission was most important. ‘He always thinks if he says something passionately, and often, it will come true.’

Mannie remained silent, but he nodded.

‘So we shall “weather the storm” together. Who am I, having demanded we remain in the first place, to now decide otherwise? Then he said he was off to earn some money and we were to have fresh chicken soup. I told him if anyone should risk going out to work it should be me. He looks so damn Jewish!’ She shrugged, refusing to admit to the fear she had felt all afternoon, and her laugh was one of loving exasperation.

Ruth’s laughter was normally contagious, but this time Mannie didn’t join in. ‘I’ll speak to him, Ruth. I’ll convince him.’

‘Speak to me about what? Convince me about what? No, no, don’t tell me. You’re going to read me the riot act.’

Mannie rose, and Samuel, a towel around his neck, his black hair wet and tousled, gathered his friend in a boisterous hug. ‘No lectures until after the soup, though, Mannie, we’re dining early – I haven’t eaten since breakfast and I’m starving.’

‘Someone has to talk sense to you, for God’s sake ...’ Mannie began as soon as he could extricate himself from the embrace.

‘After the soup!’ Samuel had picked up Rachel and was whirling her about, the child squealing excitedly. ‘No lectures until after the soup, promise me.’

‘All right, all right,’ Mannie agreed. ‘When Rachel’s gone to bed.’

‘Read story, Mannie, read story,’ the little girl called at the mention of bedtime.

‘After the soup.’ It was Ruth giving the orders, as she rose and crossed into the kitchen.

Mannie followed with the bag of groceries, unpacking the bread, the powdered eggs, several tins and producing, with a flourish, a precious small brown paper bag.

‘Coffee!’ Ruth exclaimed delightedly upon opening it. ‘How on earth did you manage that?’

‘We lawyers have excellent black-market connections.’ He grinned, proud of himself and pleased by her reaction.

Upon Ruth’s instruction, Mannie rejoined Samuel and Rachel in the living room and, through the open archway, Ruth watched the men play with the child as she stacked the supplies into the cupboard and cut up the bread. Chalk and cheese, the two of them, she thought, but such a bond they shared.

They'd both spoken to her a great deal about their childhood. Samuel was always the one who got them into trouble, they said, and Mannie was always the one who got them out of it.

'Son of a diplomat,' Samuel would say. 'It obviously rubbed off.'

Ruth had never met Stefan Brandauer but she'd seen his picture many times in the newspapers. Stefan Brandauer had been a prominent member of Berlin society, and Mannie looked just like his father. Tall, fine-boned, elegantly handsome, his hair always groomed. A tidy man. The antithesis of Samuel. She smiled as she watched Samuel piggy-backing Rachel around the living room. Nuggetty, athletic, his dark curly hair refusing to be tamed – not that he'd care to try anyway – Samuel was an unruly man in every way.

But the differences between them had always meant nothing. Just as being Gentile and Jew had had no influence upon their friendship. It never had. They'd been children of Berlin, they both maintained. 'True Berliners, and proud of it,' Samuel always said. That's why it had been such a shock when he'd been dismissed from university before he'd completed his degree.

'They say I'm not a German,' he'd told her, hurt and bewildered. 'They say that I'm a Jew. What's wrong with being both? I'm a German who happens to be a Jew.'

Samuel had never thought of his Jewish heritage in terms of race. His upbringing had been unorthodox, and Ruth remembered, when she'd first met him, being faintly shocked to discover he ate ham with gusto, jokingly calling it smoked salmon. His father had been a professor of physics at the University of Berlin, an intellectual and, like Stefan Brandauer, a staunch patron of the arts. Leonard Lachmann and Stefan Brandauer had become firm friends, and it was in the Brandauer house at Tiergartenstrasse that the lifelong friendship of their sons had been forged. Leonard had lost his position at the university around the same time as Stefan had been posted to London. 'A sign of the times,' Stefan had wryly remarked, then more seriously he'd added, 'We'd best pray for our sons.' Shortly after Stefan's departure, Leonard Lachmann, too, had left Berlin, having accepted a post at Zurich University.

'So there we were,' Samuel had told Ruth when he and Mannie had given her their potted history, 'thrown out into the storm, left to fend for ourselves, two lonely orphans.'

'Two lonely orphans whose fathers paid for their education, set them up in a flat, and forwarded regular allowances,' Mannie had corrected him.

'It sounded better my way. Don't listen to him, Ruth. He never lets me get away with anything.' Samuel had cast a caustic look at his friend. 'What on earth would I do without you, Mannie?'

What indeed? Ruth thought as she spooned the soup into the bowls.

They ate at the kitchen table, Ruth helping Rachel messily devour her soup and Mannie staring thoughtfully through the gauze curtains at the Meisells' ground-floor apartment opposite. Their curtains were also drawn, but the light within was clearly visible. He prayed that the Meisells would get out safely. Just as he prayed that Samuel would heed his advice, and in his mind he rehearsed his 'lecture'.

When they'd finished dining, Ruth stacked the bowls and cutlery, preparing to leave the men alone for their talk.

'Read story, Mannie, read story.'

Ruth shared a smile with Mannie. He had always been Rachel's favourite bedtime storyteller.

'I'll take her to the bathroom and get her into her pyjamas and you can put her to bed, Mannie.' She dumped the soup bowls in her husband's hands. 'Samuel will do the washing up, after which we'll have coffee, and he'll give you his full attention. Won't you!' Her look defied Samuel to disagree.

'Yes, yes, I said I would. Not that it'll make any difference anyway.'

Samuel and Ruth were making the coffee together, measuring out the precious grinds and taking care that it didn't boil over, while Mannie read out loud to Rachel, tucked in her cot, the latest chapter of her favourite story. She never tired of Hans Christian Andersen's 'The Snow Queen'.

Then the quiet of the night was shattered by the clatter of boots in the street and, for a brief moment, all four of them, even the child, froze in a breathless silence.

Barely a second later, Mannie rose and turned out the bedroom light, noting the Meisells' apartment opposite also plunge into darkness. Dear God, he thought frantically, was there time to get the family upstairs to his flat? Then he heard the stamp of the boots on the wooden stairs. There wasn't. He gathered Rachel in his arms, whispering for her to be quiet.

In the kitchen, Ruth had turned out the light and Samuel had dived into the living room to extinguish the lights there. The boots were in the hallway now. Samuel returned to the kitchen and held Ruth close as they waited silently in the dark.

The boots stopped at the front door and there was a banging of fist on wood.

In the bedroom, Mannie clasped Rachel to him.

In the kitchen, Samuel and Ruth remained frozen.

'No,' she said, as he finally made a move. 'Let me go. I might be able to bluff them.'

She went into the living room, stared at the front door, then took a deep breath and turned on the light. There was another pounding, and she opened the door to a man in plain clothes. A Gestapo officer, she knew it immediately. Beside him was a uniformed Oberleutnant and behind them three troopers, also in the immaculate grey of the SS.

The Gestapo officer marched straight in, the SS men following, the Oberleutnant's pistol drawn, the troopers' rifles at the ready, all eyes surveying the room.

'You are Frau Lachmann, the owner of this apartment?' the officer demanded.

'I believe you are mistaken,' Ruth replied, disguising the tremor in her voice, her tone firm but respectful. 'This apartment is the property of Herbert Klaupmann.' She gave the fictitious name in which her father had purchased the apartment. 'The records will clearly show that he purchased it over twenty years ago.'

The Gestapo officer was momentarily confused. This woman was Aryan, and patrician at that. She was no Jew. He glanced at the Oberleutnant. Perhaps they had the wrong apartment. Perhaps they should check the records.

But the Oberleutnant did not acknowledge the officer's querying look. 'It has been reported that the Jews Lachmann live here,' he barked. 'Man, wife and child. Your papers.' He held out his hand peremptorily, and Ruth knew that all was lost.

'I am Lachmann.' Samuel appeared from the kitchen and the troopers immediately trained their rifles upon him. He walked slowly to Ruth, careful to give the men no cause for alarm, and put his arms protectively around her.

'Where is the child?' It was the Gestapo officer, annoyed at the Oberleutnant for issuing the orders, but more annoyed at himself for his moment of indecision.

'The child is not here,' Samuel answered. 'The child is staying with friends.'

'It is not wise to lie to the Gestapo, Herr Lachmann. Search the apartment.' The officer indicated the bedroom door, which was ajar, and two of the troopers started towards it.

'No!' Ruth ran to the door trying to bar their way, an act of sheer desperation. 'No, please!'

One of the men grabbed her by the hair and threw her to the floor, the other pointing his rifle at her. Samuel roared and leapt at the man. Two shots rang out from the Oberleutnant's pistol and suddenly Samuel was sprawled on the wooden floor, blood seeping from his head.

Ruth crawled to him, screaming hysterically, but one of the SS men dragged her to her feet. The door to the bedroom slowly opened, and Mannie stood there, Rachel in his arms. He was wearing

Samuel's coat which always hung on the peg behind the door, the coat with the Star of David stitched on the left side of the chest.

'We will go with you quietly,' he said. 'We will cause no trouble. Come, come my dear, Rachel needs you.' The child was crying, and he held her out to her mother. The SS man released Ruth and she took the little girl in her arms, burying Rachel's face against her shoulder so the child wouldn't see the body of her father.

'The report stated there was a family of three in this apartment,' the Gestapo officer said. 'The family of Lachmann. Man, wife and child.'

'That is so,' Mannie said, his arm about Ruth. She was controlling her hysteria for the sake of his daughter, but her horrified gaze was focussed on the ever-increasing pool of blood around her husband's head. Mannie pulled her close to him. 'I am Samuel Lachmann, this is my wife Ruth, and this is our child.'

'And what of this man?' the officer demanded, pointing at the body on the floor.

'My brother – he was visiting us.'

'His bad luck,' the Oberleutnant sneered, and the other SS men exchanged smirks. The only good Jew was a dead one, they all agreed.

The Gestapo officer did not approve of the remark, just as he did not approve of the shooting. His job was to conduct good, swift roundups, neat and efficient. Get the Jews out of his jurisdiction and down to the Grunewald Goods Train Station. The gun-happy thugs of the SS made things messy. There were three more raids to be conducted that night, and God knew how many more bodies there would be for his men to collect in the morning.

'You are permitted to pack one suitcase. You have three minutes,' he ordered.

'We are packed already,' Mannie said. He knew where Samuel and Ruth kept the suitcase. They had been prepared for such a moment for the past two years.

One of the SS men accompanied him into the bedroom and watched while Mannie slid the suitcase out from under the bed and took Ruth's coat with its Star of David from the peg behind the door.

Mannie didn't know why he was doing what he was doing. Perhaps it was to assuage his shame as a Roman Catholic, although he was sure his death would serve little purpose. Perhaps it was his love for Ruth and his instinctive desire to protect her. Who could say? He only knew that what he was doing was right, and that he was prepared to pay the price.

He draped the coat over her shoulders and Ruth, in a state of shock, allowed him to guide her to the door. Mannie glanced back briefly at the body of his friend, the stream of Samuel's blood now gathering about one of the legs of the dining room table. Then, both oblivious to the officious barking of the Oberleutnant, he and Ruth stepped out into the hall.

'Juden raus! Raus! Schnell! Schnell!'

The Gestapo officer switched off the light and pulled the door closed behind them. How he wished the man would shut up.

BOOK ONE

They came from everywhere. Within a matter of months, the mountain work camps and townships of the Monaro rang with a cacophony of unfamiliar accents and languages which confused both the local and the hundreds of their fellow countrymen who had flocked to the area looking for work. Even city-bred Australians, who'd bumped into the odd 'Wog' and considered themselves relatively sophisticated, were confounded. They were outnumbered by the Europeans, and bewildered by the sudden onslaught of foreign accents and the sights and smells of strange foods. Garlic wafted from the kitchens of the Italians; the Poles and the Czechs ate evil-looking, thick sausages; the Germans downed sauerkraut by the bucket-load; and the Norwegians, incomprehensibly, relished soused herring and pickled rollmops with their beer. The previously sheltered Australians didn't know what to make of this avalanche of new sensations.

It had been on August 1, 1949 that fifty-three-year-old William Hudson was appointed Commissioner of the Snowy Mountains Hydro-Electric Authority. 'Ahead of us lie many years of toil, numerous obstacles to be surmounted and, I have no doubt, many disappointments,' he announced in his radio broadcast to the nation. 'But these are what make the achievement worthwhile. The nation has accepted the Scheme and if I judge Australians rightly, we will see that it goes through.'

The people of Australia listened in awe as Hudson unfolded the plans for the massive construction scheme, the most ambitious ever to be undertaken in their country.

The waters of the Snowy River were to be diverted from their path to the sea by a series of tunnels under the Great Dividing Range. The waters would be channelled westwards into the Murrumbidgee and Murray Rivers, whose flow would be regulated by the provision of two main water storage areas, Jindabyne and Adaminaby Dams. The Snowy Scheme had two principal purposes: the irrigation of dry inland areas, and the creation of a massive source of electrical power. As the accumulated waters were diverted through the system of tunnels and reservoirs, the energy generated by their movement would be stored at various stages in power stations where it would be converted into electricity. It was estimated that the Scheme would require the construction of approximately fifty miles of aqueducts, ninety miles of tunnels, sixteen large dams and seven power stations.

Commissioner Hudson set about the task with all the energy and commitment for which he was renowned. Overseas contractors were employed, not only for their engineering expertise and the supply of heavy equipment and vehicles, but for the construction of temporary 'townships' at the many work sites.

The Snowy Scheme was to be a long haul – twenty-five years in all – and men couldn't live in tents forever, especially during the bitterly cold winter months.

Most important to the success of the Scheme was the supply of workers, both skilled and non-skilled. An undertaking of such magnitude demanded legions of workers along with the hundreds of specialists required and, with a population of only eight million and a critical post-war shortage of men, Australia had to look overseas for labour. The call went out.

The Australian Government's offer resonated throughout war-torn Europe and was answered in droves. Those whose lives had been destroyed by the ravages of war felt a new world was opening for them.

The Snowy Mountains Hydro-Electric Authority considered the combination of so many nationalities a potential danger and initially established separate camps for the local and migrant workers. An 'Aussie' camp and a 'New Australian' camp were erected on opposite sides of the Snowy River, just downstream from Jindabyne. The latter quickly became known as 'Wog Camp', the Aussies choosing to ignore the official term 'New Australians', referring instead to their fellow workers as Reffos, Balts, Wogs, Krauts, Eyeties, Dagos and any number of other derogatory titles.

None of these names seemed to overly bother the Europeans, though some new arrivals found the Australians' inability to distinguish between different nationalities irritating. Germans and Poles, bitter enemies in their home countries, disliked being collectively referred to as 'Wogs', and Hungarians and Czechs were annoyed at being dismissed as 'Balts'. But for the most part, the Europeans understood that the Australians' attitude was a product of insecurity and ignorance. Australia had no bordering countries, no immediate neighbours whose languages and cultures differed from their own. The European Snowy workers, unlike their counterparts in the cities, were not a lonely, stigmatised minority. They were not easily threatened. Buoyed by the strength of their numbers, they recognised the Australians for what they were: naive.

Cooma, the largest of the Monaro townships, with easy rail access from Sydney and Canberra, had been selected as the Authority's headquarters. Satellite townships of prefabricated houses and facilities were erected to the north and the east of the town. As the migrants continued to pour into the township, Cooma became a microcosm of Europe and proximity forced its local inhabitants to recognise and accept their new neighbours. In the nearby rural townships of Adaminaby, Berridale and Jindabyne acceptance was more gradual, with many of the townspeople fearful of the unfamiliar and 'different'.

But it was the workers themselves who first forged the bond that slowly spread throughout the mountains and valleys and plains. Workers started referring to themselves simply as 'Snowy men' and, although there was occasional friction, the Authority's fears of fierce racial disharmony proved groundless. Commissioner Hudson's policy from the outset had been one of assimilation, and his presence remained a daily driving force for harmony throughout the region.

By the early 1950s mobile houses were already replacing tents in many work camps. The prefabricated structures, built on sled bases and known as 'snow huts', were transported to each new site as the work progressed. In areas where labour was required over a long period for a particular phase of the project, mobile settlements became townships with married couples' quarters and prefabricated cottages, and single men's huts and barracks. There were canteens, mess halls, and entertainment facilities, and an overall sense of permanency prevailed as 'Snowy people' formed bonds that would last a lifetime. Communities flourished, gardens were carefully tended and the simplest of houses became nurtured homes.

It was to one of these townships that young Pietro Toscanini arrived in early 1954.

Twenty-year-old Pietro had been bewildered when he'd arrived at the picturesque railway station of Cooma and walked through the gates to the forecourt overlooking the town below. They'd told him in Sydney that he was going to the Snowy Mountains. But where were the mountains? Where was the snow? He'd anticipated a replica of his native alpine Italy, but all he could see were distant low-lying hills surrounding a vast plain, in the centre of which sat a shabby town with makeshift settlements sprawling either side. The heat, too, confused him. It was so hot that he was sweating beneath the fine wool suit he'd purchased before he'd left his home country. It was the only suit he possessed, the latest fashion with tapering collar and trouser legs, and he'd worn it to impress his new employers.

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