Breaking Lucky

The Thornton Series
Volume 2

Bruce Mitchell

BREAKING LUCKY

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To my wife, Marilyn. Thank you for
Your everlasting support and honest feedback.

'The Royal Hotel Act says we judge people by their behaviour, not by the colour of their skin, and as long as our customers behave themselves and respect others, we don't give a rat's arse where they come from, or what colour they are–please excuse my French.'

Jim Thornton, 1918.

The Thornton Family

The Pioneers:

Mick Thornton (1808-1883)

- married

Cate Connor (1810-1890)

Children:

1. Michael (b.1835)
2. John (b.1836)
3. James (b.1843)
4. Margaret (1844-1858)

The Next Generation:

James Thornton (b.1843)

- married

Sarah MacDougall (b.1853)

Children:

1. James (Jim) (b.1880)
2. Catherine (Cath) (b.1887)
3. John (b.1890)
4. Danny (b.1895)

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A Beginning

The Gallipoli Peninsula, Turkey. August 6, 1915.

An eagle soared on warm updrafts above the Aegean Sea, hunting mullet and wrasse. In the forests of Samothrace, a brood of hungry chicks nested high in a pine tree, waiting for her to return. She circled in a wide arc above warships and supply vessels scattered across the sparkling blue - their funnels belching black smoke. In the distance, the rugged cliffs of ANZAC Cove rose from a thin crescent of sand, and as the thump! thump! of artillery fire rolled across the water, she banked away from the commotion, and beat her wings further northward.

Nineteen-year-old Private Danny Thornton of the 4th Battalion, 1st AIF hunkered down in the mud, counting down the minutes to the 5.30pm 'zero hour' when the artillery barrage would cease, and he'd 'hop the bags' and go over the top with the Anzac force. A four-month veteran of the Gallipoli campaign, he'd waded ashore on April 25th and stormed across Anzac Beach under a hail of Turkish gunfire.

Thousands of men stood crammed together in the forward trench for the attack on Lone Pine. Some fixed their eyes eagerly on the parapet ladders, some gazed down at the dirt in silent prayer, some scratched a final letter they hoped would find its way home if

they didn't survive. Danny's thoughts strayed to home-his loved ones flickered like a silent movie across his mind. Would he ever see them again?

The guns fell silent, and the bugle sounded the charge. Along the snaking trench line, the diggers shook hands and wished each other the best of luck. Danny took a deep breath, thumbed off the safety catch of his Lee Enfield .303 rifle and climbed the ramparts with his mates.

Upstairs at the Exchange Hotel, Orange, NSW Australia, 1895.

Sarah Thornton watched raindrops zig zag down the windowpane as the seconds ticked away to her next contraction. Outside, rivers of muddy water cascaded down Anson Street; heralding the end of the drought. *'Good rain for the farmers'* she thought, as another cramp hit her, right on schedule.

Edna Brown sighed and glanced at her watch. 'Your contractions are hotting up, darlin'. We'd better get this baby arse-upwards before your water breaks, or it'll be in there 'til Christmas.' She brushed aside a straggle of grey hair and pulled back the eiderdown. Edna had been a midwife longer than anyone could remember - she'd ushered most of Orange's townsfolk into the world. It was said that if the populace lined up on Summer Street on a dark night with nothing showing but their bare arses, she could name most of them with one eye closed.

Sarah's mother had told her each birth gets a bit easier, and after six children, she ought to know. But this little bugger of hers was breaking all the rules. Morning sickness stayed over for lunch and dinner, her veins bulged like fire hoses, and to top it off, the damn thing was upside down; a fact that thrilled James, as he was born arse upwards too, back in 1843. A "family tradition", he'd called it.

Anyway, whether it was a boy or girl, she couldn't tell, but at 42, it was definitely her last. James would have to tie his willy in a knot.

Edna gently laid her hands on Sarah's belly, feeling the contours of the baby, getting her bearings. Sarah looked at those hands- rheumatic knuckles like knots on a tree, a battered wedding ring in the eroded groove of her finger. Old hands, but capable hands. Hands that had delivered Sarah into the world, 42 years before. Hands she trusted.

'Now darlin', I've done this more times than I can remember. It only takes a minute or two, and it'll feel like one of his little kicks. I say "his", because if it can't tell its arse from its head, it must be a man. You know our beloved Mayor, Sean Hetherington?' Sarah rolled her eyes and gave Edna a nod. 'I turned him round three times in his poor mother's womb, and three times he turned back again; which explains why he's such a stubborn bastard to this very day. Finally, I grabbed him by both feet, took the cord from around his little neck and brought him out safe; but now, everyone tells me I shouldn't have tried so hard.'

She pressed down gently and Sarah felt a warm ripple. Edna moved her hands higher and cupped a section of Sarah's swollen belly, thumbs pushing rhythmically in and out in a slow, careful downward arc. Sarah's insides bucked for an instant, then settled like a hand in a soft woollen glove. Edna smiled. 'That's the curtain raiser, darlin'; now let's get on with the main act.'

When Sarah's contractions were only 60 seconds apart, she could feel the baby moving downward to its first lungful of air. Edna's voice was a soothing balm. 'That's it darlin', you're doing fine. Not long to go now, the little bugger's on its way.' Sarah smiled through the pain of another contraction and continued to push.

Sarah's husband James was downstairs in the public bar, one ear cocked for any hint of progress upstairs. It was unusually

crowded for a lunchtime - word had apparently gotten around that the missus was about to add another one to the family. Young Jim wiped a cloth over the bar and glanced at his father. 'You should do this more often, Dad, it's good for business.' James threw a bar towel at his son and pulled another beer.

The baby had ceased its rhythmic gyrations, and its crown emerged into the light. 'Alright Sarah, we have a mess of black hair down here, and I'm pretty sure it's not all yours. One more push, darlin', and the Exchange will have another Thornton to feed.' Sarah gritted her teeth and wailed loudly, and with a last desperate surge, felt the final, welcome release. 'We have one baby down here with ten fingers and toes, plus one other appendage, darlin'. It's a boy!'

A hush comes over the bar as Sarah's wail of pain drifts downstairs, and thirty or more knockabout blokes raise their heads and hold their breath, until the unmistakable cry of a newborn baby follows closely behind. A ragged cheer erupts and hands come from everywhere to slap James on the back. Jim shakes his father's hand. 'You better get up there, Dad; let us know if I've got a brother or sister.' James heads for the stairs.

He knocks softly on the bedroom door and pokes his head inside. 'Barmaid or cellarman?' Sarah beckons him in. 'It's a cellarman, love!' James grins and joins his wife and newborn son. A wizened pink face with enormous blue eyes stares up at him. 'Hello Daniel', he says, and kisses his son. Edna looks across at the three as she folds towels. 'With Sarah on the far side of 40 and that baby trying to walk down the birth canal, you'd better make his middle name "Lucky".'

And that's how Daniel 'Lucky' Thornton came into the world.

Life at the Royal Hotel Randwick. 1902.

The Royal's guest accommodation hosted a steady stream of travellers who turned up in irregular waves like a storm-surf at Coogee beach. They were a cross-section of Sydney's Victorian humanity: horse-owners, fancy goods importers, travelling salesmen with products and potions, land agents, brush-makers, saddlers, debt collectors with narrow eyes and sharp pencils, razor-strop manufacturers and gluemakers, to name but a few. They'd step off the tram with a frayed carpetbag and bloodshot eyes, brushing train-soot from their shoulders. Scratching their signatures in the guest ledger, they'd take their brass door-key and climb the stairway with the thud of travel-weary feet.

One of the Royal's permanent guests was Major Edward Finch-Hatton, known simply as 'The Major'. Having moved in when the pub opened in 1887, he was its longest-serving guest. A short, rotund man with a military bearing, he was approaching 70 years old, with snow-white hair, a florid complexion and an enormous walrus moustache. Hard of hearing, absent-minded and fond of a sherry, he walked with a silver-tipped cane that he'd tap on the wooden floor to gain the barman's attention. His grandfather had fought against Napoleon at the Battle of Waterloo in 1815, and his father faced George Washington's troops at Gettysburg. The Major upheld the family tradition, serving in the Anglo-Afghan Wars as a fresh-faced private.

One afternoon, not long after the Thorntons took over, James invited The Major for a drink in the bar. At the duly appointed time, wearing his customary three-piece black worsted suit and silver watch and chain, the Major entered the bar-and consulting a small piece of paper from his pocket, called out to the clientele: 'I'm looking for a Mr. James Thornton!', at which James rose and beckoned the old man over to his table.

'Thank you for joining me, Major.'

He stared across the table at James. 'And who are *you*, sir?'

'James Thornton, Major–the publican.'

The Major's eyes widened like saucers. 'Gad! You used to be a woman!'

'Ah, no Major, that was Jo Hoskins; she sold the Royal to me.'

The Major glanced around the room. 'Damn fine club it is too. What's its name?'

'The Royal Hotel.'

'Damn fine club.'

'Ah, sherry, Major?'

'Yes, of course! And I'll have one as well, if you don't mind.'

James walked to the bar as The Major followed him with his eyes. 'Pick up your feet, Lieutenant, this is a parade ground, not a Shanghai bordello!'

James returned with the drinks. 'Service is a bit slow this afternoon; we're short-handed.'

'And who are *you,* sir?'

'James Thornton, Major.'

'Damn fine club. There were no officer's clubs in Afghanistan; too busy with the damn 'Ghilji's' in the Hindu Kush. There's nothing like a good bayonet charge to liven things up though, eh Lieutenant?'

'No, Major.'

'Damn fine club. What did you say your name was?'

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Two doors down the corridor from The Major lived the other permanent guest of The Royal; the bohemian Minnie Fitzroy. 'Miss Minnie', as they knew her, was born into a farming family under the shadow of Mount Warning in the tropical northern coast of New South Wales. Her age was indeterminate, but guesses ranged between 50 and 60, depending upon what time of day it was, and how many gins she'd consumed.

She grew up in a wealthy household and was educated at a Brisbane girls' boarding school, where she excelled at oil painting, and in the 1880s, travelled to Paris to study at the École des Beaux-Arts with the likes of Claude Monet, Paul Gauguin and Alphonse Mucha. Following a disastrous love affair with a young French woman from Montmartre, she left Paris and boarded a steamer at Marseilles, bound for Australia. She sailed through Sydney Heads in the 1890s and again fell in love, this time with the sparkling blue harbour; and she'd graced The Royal with her unique presence ever since.

Sarah and Miss Minnie met under rather awkward circumstances. The artist had been setting up her easel on the upstairs veranda to capture the roofs of Randwick against the backdrop of Coogee to the east, which under normal circumstances would not have been a problem, except that she painted in the nude. Mrs Eliza Pardy, who ran the grocery store across the road, strode into the bar one afternoon in high dudgeon, demanding to see the manager, and in a shrill voice, told of Minnie's indiscretions, predicting a downward spiral of depravity and moral corruption across Sydney. Interestingly, not a peep came from Bootmaker George Cherry in the shop next door to Mrs. Pardy, even though George would have had a slightly better view. Being a sensitive matter, James considered that Sarah was better equipped to resolve the issue, and she knocked on Minnie's door one bright Saturday morning.

She opened the door in bare feet, dressed in a pink kimono and nursing a glass of gin. Smoke from a long cigarette holder curled upwards to the ceiling like a genie from a bottle, and from somewhere inside, a scratchy phonograph played Puccini. Her bright blue eyes shone with an air of bemusement from a finely crafted face framed by dark curls. It was a face that had weathered the years well, with none of the frown lines that mark a regretted life. Her kimono followed the contours of a lithe, sensuous figure; which perhaps explained the silence from the bootmaker across the road.

'Mrs. Thornton, is it not?'

'Ah, yes; do you ah, mind if I come in?'

'Please do.'

Her room resembled a Gilbert and Sullivan stage-set. Canvasses of all sizes and in varying stages of completion leaned up against each other like drunks at closing time. An enormous easel was parked in the corner beside a stuffed and fully plumed male peacock, and a human skeleton wearing a fez stood casually beside a hat stand draped with coloured silk scarves. A dressing table held a mixture of pots of coldcream, potions, waxes and three long wigs; blonde, black and red. A heady fragrance of perfume, salt air from the open windows, and the aroma of oil paints pervaded the room.

'I'm Sorry to disturb you, Miss Fitzroy, but there's been a complaint from the grocery shop across the road.'

'Please call me Minnie.' She smiled mischievously. 'They don't like my paintings?'

'No, it's more a matter of you apparently painting naked on the veranda.'

'They prefer me to be naked downstairs?'

'They want you to put your clothes on.'

Minnie took a long pull from her glass. 'Well, I'm not surprised; I'll bet it was that old battle-axe Mrs. Pardy–she has a large stick up her ample arse.' She winked. 'I'll bet you haven't heard from the bootmaker - I believe he's hit his thumb with a hammer quite a few times already.'

It was Sarah's turn to smile. 'Mr. Cherry is getting on in years; it can't be good for his heart.'

Minnie swung an unexpected arm around Sarah's shoulders. 'I'm think I'm going to like you, Sarah. It's good to have a woman around here with a sense of humour.'

'So, you'll dress for your veranda appearances?'

'What about just a tiny slit up the sides of my kimono?'

'That could be negotiated.'

Cath Thornton enrols in medicine at Sydney University, 1908.

The next morning she dressed conservatively to give herself a serious, 'bookish' air. She chose a charcoal-grey skirt and white cotton blouse, with a dark, wide-brimmed straw hat. She looked into her bedroom mirror: *'Suitably dowdy and shapeless—I could easily be a Quaker in this outfit.*' A tram trip up George Street past the newly completed Central Railway Station saw Sydney University looming in middle distance. Its imposing Gothic Revival buildings dated from the gold rush. Built of Pyrmont stone and cedar from the Tweed River, it recalled the great English universities of Oxford and Cambridge; frowning over the city like a humourless headmaster. A

gravel road led up the hill to high stone walls befitting the battlements of an English castle, and a central archway beckoned inside to its cloisters. '*I wonder if it has a drawbridge, and a moat full of crocodiles?*' She thought.

Stepping down from the tram amid a crowd of students, she glanced up at the formidable walls, her initial sense of excitement suddenly dampened by a malevolent voice telling her she wasn't good enough. But she recalled a day eight years before, when she stood at the gates of St. Vincent's, intimidated by her first day of high school; and with the knowledge she had conquered those fears, summoned her courage and pressed forward.

She discovered there was no moat, nor crocodiles, and followed a knot of new students heading to the enrolment offices. She entered a high-ceilinged hall, and spying a door marked 'Faculty of Medicine', went in. Students stood in knots of conversation in a room entirely populated by men. At the front, a tall, stern-looking middle-aged man wearing a grey suit was behind a lectern. Despite her underlying nervousness, her natural extroversion drove her to initiate contact, and she approached a young man standing off to the side.

'Hello, I'm Cath Thornton. Are you enrolling today?'

He was about her age and height, with curly ginger hair and a slight frame, wearing thick wire spectacles that magnified the size of his brown eyes. He seemed startled at being approached, and shook her hand with rapid pumps.

'Yes. How do you do? I'm Peter; Peter Hannigan.'

She glanced about the room. 'It's quite a formidable place, don't you think?'

Peter nodded. 'I'm from Armidale. Everything in Sydney is formidable to me.'

'I know what you mean. I'm from Orange, but I've been here eight years. It's strange at first, but it's home to me now. One eventually gets used to the city.'

The ring of a bell interrupted them, and the room fell silent. 'Please take your seats, gentlemen, we're about to begin.' Peter glanced at Cath, aware of the faux pas, but she pretended not to notice. Chairs scraped the floor, and the man continued. 'My name is Professor Charles Hammersmith, head of Sydney University's medical faculty, and I'm pleased to welcome you here.' As he continued, Cath noticed his eyes wandering in her direction. He was obviously aware he'd ignored the only woman in the room; but no acknowledgement followed.

The next two hours were a blur of information and form-filling, and her satchel was soon crammed with pamphlets, timetables and folders; her head reeling with half-remembered details. After the formalities, over tea and coffee she wandered to a small group of young men, presided over by a fellow student that she would soon come to know as Hugh Barrington–a graduate of the exclusive Kings School. He was tall and well-dressed, with a lick of dark hair falling over his forehead and small eyes that darted about as he spoke. He possessed an air of 'born to rule'; common among young men of wealth and privilege.

Barrington was holding court: 'My father is an eminent surgeon, so it was natural for me to follow in his footsteps. I intend to specialise in thoracic surgery after graduation.'

He glanced at Cath with a polite smile. 'I see we have a woman in our midst. What branch of medicine are you interested in, my dear?'

Her eyes darted around the group. 'Well, with the ink still wet on my enrolment form, it's a little early to say; but obstetrics interests me.'

Barrington tossed back his hair and smirked. 'Yes, but I understand that maids and midwives have the lion's share of that field.' A couple of chuckles sounded as he continued. 'It's a smaller specialisation; good for women though, as they find the physical work of a doctor much too demanding.'

Cath bristled at the insult; but remaining calm, fixed Barrington with a stare. 'Oh, so you ascribe to the view that women are the weaker sex?'

Barrington smiled. 'Well, miss……..'

'Thornton. Cath Thornton.'

'Miss Thornton; women are very emotional creatures.' He smiled at her again. 'Beautiful, but emotional, and not built to bear the stresses of the medical profession.'

She smiled… 'Mr……..'

He bowed slightly. 'Hugh Barrington, at your service.'

'Mr Barrington, are you familiar with a woman named "Zenobia?"

His brows knitted. 'No, I can't say that I am.'

'A Syrian Empress who conquered Egypt; defeating an army of 50,000 Roman soldiers. Perhaps you've heard of Mary Wollstonecraft, the women's activist who risked the guillotine in the French Revolution, or Joan of Arc?'

Attention was now on Cath as the group followed the verbal duel, and Barrington broke in. 'Joan of Arc heard voices, my dear; she was as mad as a March hare.'

'Mad enough to lead an army to defeat the English in the battle of Orleans in 1429.' She paused. 'Mr. Barrington, would you say that women who conquer empires, risk their heads on a chopping block and fight alongside men in hand-to-hand combat cannot bear stress?'

Barrington was forced into a corner and his calm reassurance of moments before quickly collapsed. His eyes flicked about the group with embarrassment. He mumbled, 'Well, those are just historical examples.'

'Yes, they are, but isn't it said that history has a habit of repeating itself?' Cath didn't wait for an answer, but went for the coup de gras. 'Mr. Barrington, hopefully your study of medicine will bring you to the realisation that opinions based on prejudice, and without solid data, are worthless.' Cath turned on her heel and walked from the room.

Danny Thornton on patrol, Coogee Beach, 1908.

The sea reflected glazed sun as 16-year-old Danny Thornton squinted out past the break. A sudden gust of wind whipped sand against his legs as he surveyed the conditions for his surf patrol in December 1911. One of a small crew of volunteer lifesavers, he was 'belt-man' for the day, and there was none better at Coogee beach to swim out through the break on the end of a rope.

One wouldn't guess this young man to be the five-year-old who'd stepped from the train in 1900 with weak lungs and unused muscles; gasping for breath from a life-threatening asthma condition. His broad shoulders, narrow waist and deep chest were testament to years of physical training, and his dark good looks made quite a few young women hope they'd be rescued one day. He'd just completed his final year of high school at St Mary's, and had started work as an apprentice watchmaker at 'Prouds' Jewellers in Pitt Street.

As is often the case with the youngest child, his older siblings had overshadowed Danny. Jim, at 31, managed the pub now that their father was taking a back seat. Danny and Jim were similar in personality - quiet, thoughtful, imaginative and practical. Cath, 24, in her third year at university, was outgoing, smart and fiercely determined, and John, 22, was a born socialiser and risk-taker. He'd found a career at the Royal and loved the pub business. The Thornton children were all different, but they were close; there was nothing they wouldn't do for each other. The asthma had gotten Danny off to a slow start, but the experience had tapped a deep inner resilience that could overcome any obstacle put in his way, and this would serve him well in the years to come.

His love affair with the sea began when he was nine, with swimming lessons at Wylie's Baths. Sarah had rightly assumed that exercise would improve her son's breathing, and had invested her hopes in Wylie's as though it contained the miracle waters of Lourdes. Danny had only ever seen the sea in story books, but from the first time he plunged into the cool, salty water and felt the warm sun on his shoulders, he had found his element. The soft eddies caressing his skin as he stroked through the water became a soothing balm; and as he became stronger, he enjoyed nothing more than a long, hard swim, and that 'spent' feeling at the finish, when mind and body tingled with life.

He'd been body surfing at Coogee for years - he knew the sea's moods and the power of its waves. Instinct told him when to rise over the lip before it curled over into an avalanche, or dive deep beneath the crushing weight of white-water from a 'dumper'. He could spot a rip, its direction and strength, and keep his head in a dangerous situation. His membership of the Coogee Life Saving Brigade had refined his natural self-discipline and sense of teamwork-he knew all the knots, drills and signals of beach safety and rescue work. He was a volunteer, but his attitude was professional.

The conditions that day were not ideal. A four to five-foot surf was breaking in deep water about 50 metres out, but the south-east wind was kicking up a chop, making the waves sloppy and unpredictable. The current had churned a deep channel close to shore–swells collided with each other and swept back out in a boisterous rip. He planted the bathing flags beyond the danger zone, keeping swimmers close. At this early hour, only about a dozen people cavorted in the waves, enjoying the early sun. He blew his whistle and signalled the flags' position, and the crowd waded slowly back into the safe area.

The patrol crew monitored the conditions as the day progressed. The wind lifted in strength around midday and the waves were peaking their froth a little higher. The crowd had also grown, and the lifesavers continued to blow their whistles above the sound of crashing surf to keep them between the flags. Danny was at the water's edge when something caught his attention further out. He narrowed his eyes and scanned the spot, but white-water obscured his line of sight. Then suddenly, there he was-a young boy, a long way out-arm held vertically to signal distress. He had strayed from the flags and was caught in the rip.

He spun on his heels for a sprint to raise the alarm, but his mates had already caught the signal and were on the move toward him with the surf-reel. The team went into action in a drill they'd rehearsed many times. Team captain Matthew Staunton directed traffic as Danny secured the cork-filled vest and belt, and sprinted down to the water's edge. Four team-members had already fallen in behind him; lifting the rope above their heads as the lead man set the pace for line payout. Danny hit the water like a torpedo; hurdling the shore break and diving beneath waves in a bee-line to the struggling boy, now drifting out beyond the break.

The rope became heavier with each stroke as he propelled himself through the waves and more line was paid out. The team on

the beach watched him like a hawk; keeping a steady pace. A knot of onlookers gathered as word of the rescue got around; and a couple of lifesavers kept them clear of the action.

Danny had covered more than half the distance to his target, and could now see the boy clearly. He was about 12, and drifting further out to sea, trying frantically to swim toward Danny against the rip-a futile attempt that would only drain his strength. Danny increased his stroke rate to close the gap.

He drew up to the boy, and the rope slackened as the team stopped paying out. Panic filled the boy's eyes, and he made a violent grab for Danny's neck, and in an oft-practiced manoeuvre, Danny spun around to grab the boy under the arms from behind.

'What's your name?'

'Help me, please!'

'What's your bloody name?'

'H, H, Henry,'

'Alright Henry, you're going to be fine. I've got you now and we're just going to relax while my mates pull us in like a couple of prize flatheads, you understand?'

The boy appeared to calm. 'Yes, yes, I do.'

'Alright. Just breathe easy, and we'll have you back on the beach in no time.'

Before signalling 'all secure' to the beach team, he gauged the time between sets, to get back through the break-line and avoid being caught in heavy white-water. He scanned the swells and rode over a couple before he sensed the lull, then gave the signal, and the rope began tugging the pair back toward safety. He maintained his backward hold on the boy with one eye on the swells as they moved swiftly shoreward; then, without warning, he caught sight of a

threatening wave building up 'out the back', and his guts turned a somersault.

It was big; maybe 8 to 10 feet. A rogue swell, probably a freak combination of two swells into one, and it was coming fast. Immediately Danny felt a hard pull on the rope as the rescue team caught sight of it and were doubling their efforts to get him in. He manoeuvred his hold on the boy so he wouldn't see the wall of water behind them. 'Henry, we're not far now. There's a wave behind us that might break close, so when I tell you, take a deep breath and hold on. Don't worry, I've got a good hold on you and you'll be fine, you understand?' The boy merely nodded this time, but Danny could feel his entire body tense with fear.

The beast is rising to its full height as it spits spray into the wind with contempt; the sea hushing for the oncoming avalanche. It's going to break right on top of them, and the rope stops its pull as the team waits anxiously on shore. Danny speaks calmly. 'Henry, take a deep breath on 3; 1, 2, 3!' Their world becomes black as the beast pushes them down deep. Danny's grip on the boy loosens for a millisecond under an avalanche of pressure, but he holds on grimly. After what seems like minutes, he feels the tail of the beast pass above them, and pushes up to the light.

They broke the surface; sucking in grateful gasps of air as the rope renewed its pull. Danny looked towards the shore and thanked God he had such a skilled team on his side. They sprinted into the water and took Henry from him while Danny strode wearily up the beach and removed the belt that had just saved a life. Staunton sat on the sand beside him and ruffled his sodden hair. 'Great wave, mate–why didn't you catch it? Could've saved us the trouble of hauling you in.'

The outbreak of war, 1914.

The Old Orthodox Church rang its bells across Sarajevo, calling the faithful to worship, as it had since 1539. But on this bright Sunday morning, June 28, 1914, to Gavrilo Princip the bells tolled for freedom as the Serbian Black Hand Society struck a killing blow against Austrian tyranny. He felt for the bulk of the Belgian 32 calibre pistol in his coat pocket and thumbed the safety off. Down the street, the Latin Bridge over the Miljacka River had earlier thronged with onlookers hoping to glimpse the royal motorcade, but now, after an earlier failed bomb attack, the streets were deserted-eerily quiet. He leaned against the window of Schiller's Delicatessen; eyes trained on the intersection where the Archduke's limousine would pass. Traffic was light-police prowled Appel Quay's surrounding streets, but none had shown interest in the young man with the battered felt hat and dark eyes.

Growling engines heralded a motorcade approaching. The leading car of grim-faced security officers turned right into Franz Joseph street, and Princip's heart skipped a beat as it passed, just metres away from him. His body tensed with adrenaline-palms sweating and pulse quickening as the second vehicle carrying the Mayor and Chief of Police took the turn; the two officials muttering quiet words as they glided past.

Princip's target was the third vehicle, carrying Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the throne of Austria-Hungary, and his wife Sophie, Duchess of Hohenberg. The 1911 Phaeton convertible rounded the corner as the driver dropped to low gear, and to Princip's astonishment, braked slowly to a halt only a few steps away.

There's confusion in the car and voices are being raised about a wrong turn as Princip moves trance-like toward the vehicle, drawing his pistol and taking aim at the couple in the back seat. Sophie's eyes widen in terror. Ferdinand

follows his wife's gaze-turning toward Princip while the assassin mounts the running board and opens fire at point blank range. The Archduke dances like a marionette as the 32 slug slams into his neck; severing the jugular and spraying the car with crimson. Sophie screams and Princip fires a round into her abdomen. She slumps forward like a rag doll across her husband's legs. Princip turns the pistol toward himself and his world collapses into darkness.

The assassination reverberated across the world, igniting an avalanche of long-held grudges and nationalist fervour among European powers Austria-Hungary, Germany, Russia and France. There were scores to settle and territories to seize, and after demand and counter-demand, the tide of war rose to its peak. Austria-Hungary and Germany faced up against France and Russia; and it wasn't long before Britain threw its hat into the ring and joined the France/Russia alliance. By association, Australia was also committed to war.

John and Danny Thornton sail for Egypt, 1914.

John and Danny Thornton marched side by side in slouch hat, khaki belted jacket and breeches, woollen puttees and tan leather ankle boots. The 4th battalion's distinctive horizontal white and green patch was missing from their shoulders, and would not be issued until early 1915; such was the hurried formation of these first units. They had been inducted into the army several weeks before, and undergone rudimentary training at Sydney Showground. At the end of the voyage the training would continue at an undisclosed location; most believed it would be somewhere on the English moors.

The brothers had been assigned to the 4th due to their enlistment within an hour of each other. James had made peace with

Danny in the realisation that the young men of Australia would follow their passion despite counsel from their elders. And after all, he decided, these men belonged to a different era. They teetered on the edge of a new world, and whether that world was better or worse than the old, was not for James to say. His job was to love his family, give guidance, and allow his sons to take that world to a future that he was not to be part of. He just hoped his boys would come home again.

The troops climbed the gangway of the *'Euripides'* to the 170-metre upper deck that pulsed with frenetic activity. The ship's fore-and-aft derricks swung cargo up from the wharf like a pair of storks delivering babies. Huge wooden crates stamped with the Commonwealth coat of arms disappeared into the shadowed hold at a feverish rate. A horse flew sedately overhead in a leather harness suspended from the derrick's boom, while dropping fresh manure. When a consignment hit the deck, narrowly missing one digger, he called out: 'Lunch is served, gentlemen!'

The column of soldiers moved like a long, khaki snake down a labyrinth of narrow companionways into the bowels of the ship; and as they descended, the temperature rose, and the air became oppressive. They came to a large mess-hall where rows of canvas hammocks hung from the ceiling. John slung his kitbag into a vacant space as a hand from behind clapped on his shoulder. 'That's my spot, arsehole!' He swung round at the familiar voice of Bill Bradley, his old school mate from St Mary's–they laughed and shook hands.

Bill gave John's shoulder a playful punch. 'Well, fancy seeing you here, mate! I thought you'd be up on the first-class deck.'

John smiled. 'No such luck; at least until I make Colonel. 'Didn't know you'd joined up. What battalion?

'Fourth. And you?'

'The same. What about Charlie Schumacher? Seen him lately?'

Bill's smile faded. 'He tried to enlist, but when they saw his name, they said he was German, and didn't want him in the AIF. Turns out the whole bloody family was hauled off to internment camp out at Liverpool. "Enemy Aliens", they called them.

John shook his head in disgust. 'But he's bloody Dutch!'

'Turns out his mother's German, and that was enough to lock 'em up.'

~ ~ ~

The sun spread over Sydney Harbour in the morning stillness, casting a warm glow on Mrs. Macquarie's Chair, where 100 years before, the Governor's wife sat watching British tall ships sail into the harbour. A few hundred yards to the south, the funnel of the *'Euripides'* issued a plume of grey smoke as its boilers gathered steam for the voyage to Albany, Western Australia on Tuesday, October 20, 1914.

On board, the men of the 3rd and 4th battalions had been roused early from their bunks for an hour of callisthenics, and were in the mess-hall devouring breakfast. Danny had stumbled into his brother as he tumbled from his berth into the companionway, and they'd grabbed a spot on the same bench with their tin pannikins of bread and porridge. The word had gotten around that the *'Euripides'* would sail that day, and on deck that morning they'd noticed the gangway being hauled up.

In keeping with Australia's war footing, a dark cloak of government secrecy surrounded all troop movements, and transport ship A14 (aka *'Euripides'*) was no exception. No newspapers carried the story of Sydney's first departing AIF troopship; but the masterminds of Australia's military intelligence hadn't counted on one highly efficient unit that had eyes and ears across the city–the

bar of the Randwick Royal, where those 'in the know' shared the contraband news of the departure.

James, Jim, and Cath got off the tram in William Street for the walk down to the wharf, and to their surprise, a steady stream of like-minded people was doing likewise. Sarah had remained at home; this was the day she'd dreaded ever since the boys had joined up, and it was more than she could bear to watch them sail away; perhaps forever.

As the Thorntons walked down Brougham street to the harbour, A14's superstructure loomed above Woolloomooloo's rusted iron roofs. At the wharf, the ship's deck was lined with khaki as diggers leaned over the gunwales from bow to stern, waving their hats to the crowd below. A cascade of coloured streamers was being hurled upwards from the dock, and the diggers vied with one another to catch the paper coils and tie them to the ship's rail.

For many, the scene was far from joyous - the faces of those left behind were brushed with emotion. Here was a young, curly-haired wife with a lost look in her eyes, searching the faces for her husband. There was a father, battered hat in hand, staring grimly up to his only son. Over there was a thin young mother nursing her baby as tears streamed down her face; her shoulders heaving with sobs. As John Milton wrote in 1655, 'They also serve who only stand and wait.'

A14 sounded a long blast on her horn as the brothers searched for their family on the wharf. Danny shouted, 'There they are!' John followed his glance. 'Mum's not there,' and Danny nodded. 'Too much for her nerves, I reckon.' Down on the wharf, the Thorntons had seen them, and began waving back frantically as the ship sounded a second blast–it wouldn't be long now. James felt a lump in his throat as his eyes shone pearlescent. Cath waved a handkerchief like a flag of surrender to the fear in her heart. Jim felt a fierce tug of guilt as he watched his two brothers and thought of

their bravery. Was he staying at home because of family loyalty and love, or was it fear?

A third and final blast of the siren signalled departure as mooring lines were unwound and cast from bollards into the sea; freeing A14 from her bondage as the ship's triple propellers boiled white-water. Out on the street, a taxi pulled to a screeching halt and Sarah emerged at the run as the enormous ship pulled away from the wharf. From the ship's deck, the lone figure hurrying down the planking caught John's eye, and he yelled at the top of his voice: 'Mum!' Danny followed his gaze as Sarah heard her son's voice and halted; her eyes riveted on the two young men she ached for. She waved frantically as tears flowed from her pale blue eyes and her heart dissolved into sorrow. She stood on the dock, a solitary soul within a crowd, hugging herself in grief until A14 rounded the northern tip of Garden Island and disappeared from sight.

Landing at Gallipoli, 1915.

At 4am the convoy had steamed to within 800 yards of the Turkish coast as the troops mustered on deck to board the landing boats. The crack of small arms fire from the coast sounded like tentative spits of rain, answered promptly by Turkish machine gun fire flashing in the dark. The rain suddenly became a storm as the AIF's 3rd Brigade were the first to wade ashore on a deserted beach soon to become known as 'ANZAC Cove'.

The battalion was well-drilled in the disembarkation procedure. They would board the *'Lake Michigan's'* lifeboats and be lowered by davits to the sea, where steam pinnaces would secure a line and tow them to within 150 yards of the coast; setting them adrift to row

themselves ashore. Each pinnace was armed with a Vickers gun that would provide answering fire to the Turkish defences. The men themselves were merely passengers–they would be in no position to return fire from the rocking, crowded boats. They'd take whatever cover they could until reaching the shore.

Dawn's first glimmer silhouetted the Turkish hills. The battle was louder now - return fire from the ANZAC troops intensified as more boats landed. An on-shore wind blew smoke laced with cordite across the deck as the troops on board the *'Lake Michigan'* gave a cheer - 'Abdul' was getting a black eye. John turned to Danny, his face lit by shellfire, eyes wide with excitement. He grabbed Danny's arm. 'This is it, Danny!'

The troops took cover below the ship's rail, and each man steeled himself for what was to come. A few quips about 'cracker night' were heard, followed by ragged laughter. Smoking had been banned since the previous day, lest a flared match be seen by spotter planes; and now, the same telltale match could invite a bullet from a shore-based sniper - the Turkish army's German-made M1903 Mauser rifle could kill a man at 650 yards. As the sun rose in a misty beacon through the smoke of battle, the ship slowed and the men began moving in double file to their allocated boats. As the guns raged, the odd joke could still be heard:

'Nice day for a boat ride.'

'Oh shit–sorry, forgot my wallet–be back in a tick.'

'Yeah, no worries mate–I'll mind your spot.'

The sky was lighter as Danny boarded a boat crammed with 40 comrades. The davits let go, and the hull hit the water with a thud, bobbing in wait for the tow. They sat hunched over, gripping their rifles as the pinnace came alongside with a surge of bow-wave to secure the line. A sailor stood in the bow cockpit manning the Vickers gun; eyes wide, jaw set firm and knuckles white on the trigger

housing. Around the boat, men took cover; eyes darting back and forth, adrenaline pumping. The jokes had ceased.

The towline twanged taut, and they sped shoreward under a rain of fire. Bullets buzzed overhead like angry wasps; thudding into the hull as men ducked under the gunwale's fickle cover. A bullet slammed into one man, spinning him backwards into the water. Another was hit in the face, spraying the boat with crimson pulp. The pinnace's Vickers gun spat back in angry staccato; boiling seawater steaming from its barrel. The armada of landing boats weaved through the chop at full speed, scarring the sea with curves of frantic wake water. A shell exploded aboard one of the boats with a deafening roar, killing dozens.

The sun is now bright above rugged hilltops–the beach is only 200 yards away and enemy fire is intense. The cliffs rise almost vertically; perhaps 200 feet high. Danny can see soldiers scaling like ants up through scrub toward the summit. Enemy fire flashes from the ridges and more men in the boats are dropping; eyes glazed with the patina of death. The towline is released and the pinnace pulls away in a shallow arc to starboard. The skipper opens the throttle wide and retreats out to sea. The man on the Vickers gun is dead; one arm hangs limply over the stock; its barrel aimed upward to a sky smudged with smoke.

They try to row toward the shore, but oars clash and skate over the water in their clumsy fever of survival. The Lieutenant screams out a stroke rate and they start to make progress. There are bodies in the water–one still holds a rifle to his chest in a claw-like grip. A couple of blokes near Danny take hits, slumping together in death like a pair of sleeping drunks. He can see the sandy bottom through the green depths and the Lieutenant yells, 'Over the side!'

Danny rolls over the gunwale and drops into the water. For a moment, the murderous sound of battle is silenced as his head dips under the surface, but he finds purchase on the sand and pushes upward to the sunlight. The sea is cool on his face and he shakes the water from his eyes. He holds his rifle high and pushes off the sand toward the shore, less than 50 metres away. He looks around for John but can't see him. Bullets zip into the water everywhere. The yells of the

living and the agonised cries of the dying form a hideous duet. The water is getting shallower–his pack is sodden and he's in waist-deep water now, gathering momentum as the sea slowly releases him from its grip.

He reaches the shore. Bullets kick up sand and bodies lie on the beach like ink blots; some are dead, others are screaming and calling for help, but he can't stop. Many have abandoned their wet, heavy packs and they lie on the beach like stranded turtles. The Lieutenant is running alongside Danny and then he's gone; taking a bullet to the chest and falling dead to the sand. The beach is only 50 feet wide and he sprints forward, zigzagging toward hills rising like castle battlements.

Danny dropped to one knee and worked at the bolt of his rifle to free it from sand. The magazine engaged, and catching the flash from a Turkish muzzle, he sighted on his target and squeezed the trigger. The Lee Enfield bucked against his shoulder and he worked the bolt and fired again. He had begun to fight, and the knot in his stomach had vanished.

He joined his comrades and weaved through sand dunes and clumps of gorse toward the cliffs. Amid the deafening pulse of battle, someone passed on a rumour that they'd landed on the wrong beach, adding, 'Perhaps if we let Abdul know we've made an honest mistake, they'll stop shooting at us.' A sergeant bleeding from a head wound joined the rush upwards. 'C'mon you blokes–there's a war to fight up on top. Fix bayonets and keep low. Bring yer packs if yer still got 'em, and follow me up to the party.'

The track climbed almost vertically through rosemary bush and stunted tree-roots poking from the sand. Machine gun fire became louder with each step - a man in front took a bullet in the thigh and fell spread-eagled into the undergrowth. Danny wondered at how a living, vibrant man could become a shapeless dead thing the next. After a while he stopped taking notice–he was already adapting to the horror. Stretcher bearers passed down the track carrying wounded to the beach. One man appeared, crawling along with half

a leg blown off. 'Other blokes are worse off than me' he said, 'Anyway, I don't think I'll last more than an hour.' Danny watched him descend to the beach, wondering at his resilience.

They breasted the top and immediately descended into a steep ravine recently christened 'Shrapnel Gully', that held troops in reserve. At the command to 'stand down', Danny dropped his pack and collapsed to the ground. The chaos of the landing crowded his mind in a maelstrom; the noise, the fear, the blood, the screams, the bodies, and above all, the exhilaration of survival–of being alive when so many around him were dead. He had risen to the moment despite his self-doubt, and had not been found wanting. Around him were the twisted bodies of Turks caught in the assault. *'Strange.'* He thought, '*Dead men all look the same, regardless of what side they're on.'*

Around him, all was confusion. The men who had undergone their baptism of fire now looked for leadership. His platoon had lost its CO on the beach, fighting units were intermingled, the command structure was unclear and battle plans were fluid. The entire Anzac invading force was spread across a two-mile front created by 16,000 brave men who pushed back the Turkish army with guts and determination. One undeniable fact though was certain; if the line didn't hold, the Anzacs would be pushed back to the sea, where no evacuation plan was in place. They'd be slaughtered on the beach.

Nutty leant against a tree; his face grimy with dirt and sweat. A crimson patch of blood surrounded a jagged rip in the shoulder of his uniform. Danny slumped down beside him and they nodded a greeting.

'What happened to your shoulder?'

'Piece of shrapnel got me. I thought it was a mozzie bite–we've got big ones in Young, ya know,'

Danny grinned. 'Don't you ever stop joking?'

'Who's jokin'?'

Danny braved the question: 'Have you seen John or Bill?'

'No, mate–I think they got off before us–they could be anywhere by now.'

As the sun passed its zenith on day one of the Gallipoli campaign, Anzac Cove had been cleared of all but intermittent sniper fire, and a battle headquarters of sorts had taken shape. Field hospital tents appeared, and barges had unloaded much-needed ammunition and other supplies. By the next day, the Commander of the campaign, British General William Birdwood, along with the commanders of the Australian and New Zealand Forces, would establish his headquarters in a gully overlooking the cove, but at this precarious point in the campaign, all attention was focussed on establishing and holding the front line.

Cath Thornton in a night of murder and mayhem, Sydney, 1915.

Cath stared at the stairs disappearing up into darkness. She checked her watch–11pm. Stokeland House was as quiet as a tomb, just like the night Mrs. Mitterrand called to her. *'Was that only a week ago? It seems like a month.'* She was restless. A powerful sense of frustration hovered over her. Never one to back away from a challenge, she felt an overwhelming urge to get Mitterrand away from Stokeland House. *'What if she's up there now, choking on her own vomit, or just quietly slipping away into a coma? Is she still alive?* Madeleine's words came back to her: *'I became a nurse because I just like helping people.'*

She thought about options–*phone Detective Wong? What for? He's moribund with legalities. Do nothing? Not likely. Get Mitterrand to safety? Yes. It has to be done–but I'm not going to climb over that damn gate with her over*

my shoulder.' She headed to Sainsbury's office–there had to be keys. She hurried up the corridor and tried his door–it was unlocked, and she rifled through drawers until her fingers found a key ring–one must surely fit the first-floor gate. She glanced out the window to Hermit Bay. A full moon drifted through clouds pushed by a northerly breeze. The harbour glowed softly pearlescent, and she longed for the calmness it promised. She headed for the stairs.

The first floor was silent, and the iron gate rose upward like the doors to a dark castle. She fumbled with the keys. Tried one–no. Tried a second–no, damn it. Tried a third and a metallic tumbling granted her wish–the gate swung ajar.

She edged down the walls in the darkness, opening the door to Mitterrand's room where thin moonlight outlined a shape in the bed. She turned on the bedside lamp and gasped. Mitterrand's face was ashen. What were once fine lines of age were now deep furrows eroded by suffering. Her mouth gaped open in a silent scream, breath rasping. She was bound to the bed by rope at her wrists and ankles, and her tiny body seemed to wither before Cath's eyes.

She glanced toward the bedside table at a buff-yellow legal document rolled and tied with purple ribbon. She read the heading that protruded"….terrand Last Will and Testam…." Answers bombarded her consciousness as pieces fell into place like an arcane jigsaw puzzle. She fumbled into her tunic pocket and snatched the scrap of paper with Wong's phone number; retreating out the corridor to a nurse's station. As she dialled the number, overhead lights blinded her like a bolt of lightning.

~ ~ ~

The phone chimed into life in Wong's Darlinghurst flat. He padded down the hall and picked up the receiver: 'Hello?'…'Hello?'

~ ~ ~

Sainsbury stood menacingly in the glaring light; the barrel of a Smith & Wesson automatic pointed at Cath's heart. Gone was the 'Man in the Moon' face–she was looking at a cold-blooded killer.

'You've gone one step too far, Miss Thornton. It's a pity you had to be such an impulsive young thing.'

~ ~ ~

Wong's grip tightened on the handset as he listened.

~ ~ ~

Stark terror gripped Cath's every fibre. She'd heard Wong answer–the line was open. She had to alert the detective. 'Sir Hugo–I had to check on Mrs. Mitterrand–I was afraid for her safety.'

~ ~ ~

Wong slammed the phone down and sprinted out the door; vaulting down the stairs three at a time and bursting out the back door to his 1913 Triumph TT motorcycle. He kicked it into life and roared down Victoria Street into New South Head Road.

~ ~ ~

Sainsbury chuckled mirthlessly and shook his head. 'It's too late for more of your fairy tales Miss Thornton–who were you calling?'

'No-one–I was just seeing if it was connected.'

Sainsbury's eyes hardened. 'You're lying.'

~ ~ ~

The Triumph screamed at full throttle through Rushcutters Bay and up the hill to Edgecliff. A car swung out from Ocean Street and

Wong swerved at 50mph through the intersection with inches to spare, fishtailing down the bends to Double Bay.

~ ~ ~

Sainsbury took a step closer. 'You know I can't let you live, Miss Thornton. You know far too much for your own good.'

As he spoke, further down the corridor a door swung silently open and Matron Dewhurst appeared. She moved silently toward Cath from behind.

Returned from the war, Danny Thornton embarks on a journey to rid himself of demons.

Danny finished his beer and signalled for another. 'Dad, I um, wanted to talk to you.'

'Yes, mate–what's on your mind?'

He let out a deflated sigh like a three-am party balloon. 'I'm not good, Dad–not good at all.'

'What's the matter, Danny?'

'I can't settle in–I don't know where I am anymore. I'm home, but I can't stop thinking about the war, about John. I get nightmares, headaches. A car backfires and I almost shit myself. Sometimes I want to hit someone–anyone, and sometimes I cry for no reason. He eyed the licks of froth inching back down his empty schooner-glass. 'And I'm hitting the piss a bit, too. What's wrong with me, Dad?'

James placed a hand on his son's shoulder. 'We've all noticed that you're not yourself, and we're worried for you. Cath has a word for it-"Shell Shock"–something that they don't really understand yet. I'm no doctor, but I've given it a lot of thought.'

'And?'

James leaned back in his chair. 'Nobody's seen a war like this before, Danny–not on such a scale, nor the huge number of casualties. We've been very clever, inventing more efficient ways to kill each other–machine guns, bombs, mortars, mustard gas, bigger canons. And look at where you've been - you've spent months in a trench where each breath could be your last - your nerves have been stretched tighter than catgut. You've seen blokes blown apart. James felt the anger rise.

He looked away for a moment, calming himself. 'Danny, I think the change from Gallipoli to Randwick has been too sudden for you–and don't think for a minute you're the only one going through this–I'll bet most blokes who've come back are going through exactly the same thing you are, and they keep it bottled up in case they're called "weak" or "soft'. Everyone expects them to be the big, tough outback stockman–and that's a bloody fairy-tale.'

Danny's beer arrived. He stared idly at the rising amber bubbles, but didn't pick it up. 'You know Dad, you were right - I shouldn't have signed up. James sighed. 'You can't blame yourself, mate–a car could have bowled you over in Pitt Street–nobody knows what fate has in store for them–we just have to play the cards we're dealt. The important thing now is getting yourself better, dealing with the demons on your back.'

'What should I do?'

It was hard for James to say it. 'Son, if I was you, I'd get the hell away from here for a while–go where nobody knows you; where nobody expects anything from you. Hop a train or hitch a ride to

anywhere and let fortune take its course. Sometimes a wanderer finds answers to questions without looking. Your uncle Michael and uncle John did exactly that during the gold rush in 1855–got on their horses and rode down to Ballarat–didn't come back for six months.'

'Did they find what they were looking for?'

'They found more–a little gold and a lot of self-knowledge.'

~ ~ ~

It was to be a long time before Sarah forgave James - in fact, he was convinced she'd never forgive him at all, and he couldn't blame her–Danny had been home only five months, and now he was off again on his father's advice - in Sarah's words, 'on some odyssey that would have him tilting at windmills, as crazy as Don Quixote himself.' James didn't really know if Danny would find any answers, but he was convinced that the Royal Hotel would not give him any.

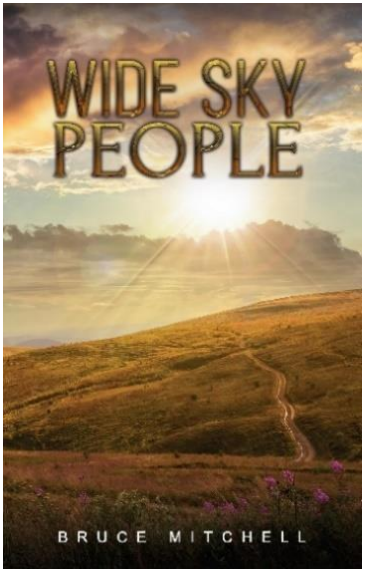
Danny ambled down to Randwick Racecourse one morning, shopping for a horse, and found a four-year-old bay mare of 16 hands for sale–a sleek, graceful animal. She cost a pricey 20 quid, but he had his army back-pay, and she was worth it. He'd done a bit of riding at Mena camp with the blokes from the Light Horse and had found he was a natural horseman. In the racing game, back when the mare was a skittish two-year-old, she was called 'Stout and Bold', but Danny christened her 'Balla', in honour of Ballarat, where his uncles had found answers in 1855.

On Friday morning, 21 April 1916, he climbed into the saddle and said goodbye to his family with the undertaking that he'd write home once a week. He was heading west, he said, over the Blue Mountains and into the plains–beyond that, he hadn't a bloody clue where he'd go. Sarah was transported back to Woolloomooloo wharf, 1914, with the *Euripides* pushing down the harbour and her two sons fading to specks in the distance. It seemed that at 63 she'd

never have a calm and peaceful life–the happiness and contentment she'd yearned for was to be forever just out of reach. *'Life'*, she thought, *'has a habit of making other plans.'*

He rode down Randwick Road and across Moore Park, heading for Parramatta - planning to make Emu Plains at the foot of the Blue Mountains sometime that night. He carried a swag, a billy and a water canteen. The morning was cool and bright - a light southerly whisked away the chimney-smog and the sun was at his back. Balla moved in an easy gait as motorised traffic gave him right of way up Cleveland Street. Passers-by gave him a nod or a wave when they noticed his slouch hat.

Somewhere in the crevices of his mind a faint voice told him he was moving in the right direction–that the road ahead held more promise than perfidy. He feared that if he looked back over Balla's haunches he'd think of his family - how he'd left them behind once more, and be tempted to turn around. He kicked Balla forward into a canter, and didn't look back.



If you enjoyed 'Breaking Lucky', Volume 1 of the Thornton Series is also available on Amazon. Join the Thornton family where it all began, on an epic journey from Ireland to Sydney and beyond in 1841. It's the story of the women and men who saw a wide sky full of promise, and turned a colony into a country.