

*Saturday 24th May 1915 - Anzac Cove, Gallipoli*

The faint outline of cliffs will paint the horizon, shadows weaving in and out of the canvas with shades of red, orange and yellow dripping down the sides and peaking through the mass of bushes and stony outcrops lining the slopes. It'll be a pretty sunrise — a real ripper.

Jack will know that if he was in another world, he'd call it art and take a photo to show his kids.

It'll remind him of their family camping trips in the bush where they sit in their camping chairs in a shape more or less reminiscent of a circle, listening to Uncle Tim spin yarns of kangaroos and crocodile fights and those savage wallabies that only come out at night, while they wait for the array of colours to fade and make room for a sky of stars. 'Always good to sit back and watch a bit a' bush telly,' Uncle Tim would always say.

The Aussie troops will be positioned halfway up the slope, overlooking their landing beaches which the sun will peak her curious head over.

She'll be a beautiful golden. The colour of hope, amongst other things: eucalyptus haze and the outback's sickly sweet caress. Golden for those tiny wattle flowers that bloom after a storm as if to say, 'I'm here. It'll be alright.' She'll promise of ceasefire and nine more hours of peaceful rest before Hell opens its gates again and the Devil puts out the welcome mat.

Later, Jack will be crouched down on the ground, his feet blistering and hot inside brown leather boots.

There'll be another soldier beside him, too. He'll sit with his legs crossed in front of him, like they used to do in kindergarten, tossing a small rock from one hand to the other, then again before abandoning it in a bush a few metres away.

‘Ceasefire’s nearly over, Jacko,’ he’ll say and it’ll remind him of his Grandpa Joe who spoke in that rugged Australian drawl which sucked you into its warmth with every exaggerated vowel and misplaced ‘r’.

The soldier will put one hand on the ground to hoist himself up, ‘Gonna have a last squiz ‘round. Reckon we should get a good feel for the terrain, y’know? Coming?’

‘Nah, I’ll stick around here. Cheers Thommo.’

Jack will watch as Thommo nods his head and walks off, weaving around the trenches and depressions in the earth.

A few metres away, a Turk will be standing on his own. He’ll have a strange smile stained across his face like the stubborn kiss of red dirt on new white runners — the kind that makes your eyes wrinkle at the corners.

Jack will think about how he used to smile at people on the train. He’ll want to smile then, like they were taught in kindergarten. He’ll be older now, though.

The Turk will catch Jack’s gaze and start towards him.

‘Mehmet,’ he’ll say, balling his hand into a fist and placing it on his heart.

Jack will guess that that’s his name. Or perhaps it meant ‘G’day’. Or maybe he’ll have been saying, ‘I wish you die a hundred deaths by a hundred cuts, you unscrupulous swine.’

Nevertheless, he’ll hold out his hand to have it taken in both of Mehmet’s and shaken vigorously up and down.

‘Jack. From Australia.’

‘Jack from straya — g’day,’ Mehmet will say, grinning at his best attempt at an Aussie accent. ‘One day, I visit Australia. Soon, maybe, if I can go home. You miss home, Jack?’

Jack will nod and smile then instead.

The ceasefire will end at 5:00 pm. Red flares will explode and bleed their brilliant hue into the sky, cascading down a backdrop of fading blue and lighting up the sky like a fireworks show. Rifle and machine gun fire will break out from the Turk’s trenches just beyond No Man’s land, creating billowing clouds of dust as bullets meet with rocky terrain and pepper chips into the air.

Jack will stand at the frontline alongside an assembly of other men, some of whom will already be laying limp on the ground. A glance to his left will alert him of a crouching Mehmet running into No Man's land.

They'll stare at each other for a second before Mehmet raises his rifle towards him.

There'll be no click when he pulls the trigger. The bullet will glide smoothly through the air and Jack will wait for the corker's cloying puncture.

In another life, they'd exchange photos and Jack would tell him about his missus and their three red-nosed children waiting at home by the door, writing letters that would never be posted, addressed to '*Dearest Daddy*' and '*The best Dad in the world*'. Mehmet would tell him about his cat, Neko, who liked cardboard boxes and shopping receipts and chewing on old socks. From somewhere, a perfectly prepared steak would be delivered to them on silver platters and they'd slice it fervently with their bayonets while drinking beer and slurring out delectable secrets.

In another life, a cricket bat would appear in Jack's hands and he'd send the bullet flying back over his head while everybody would cheer for the six he'd just hit.

In another life, he'd have pulled out his rifle first.

In *this* life, he'll close his eyes and when he opens them again, there'll be no silver plates, no cricket bats and no secrets to be shared. There'll be four white walls and three nurses dressed to match, whispering something about bad aim and injuries sustained only to the leg — no vitals damaged.

With time, the white will fade and the steady whirring and flickering of machines will be replaced with the sound of waves breaking on shore, the shout of 'howzat' drifting up and down the length of the beach and the cry of a thousand cheap rubber thongs (from the servo, Jack will guess) melting onto feet already blistered and peeled raw from the heat.

Jack's granddaughter will sit beside him, inspecting whether he would be a fair dinkum candidate for her routine sand burials.

Upon studying his legs, she'll scrunch her nose up and cock her head to one side, 'What are those dents in your legs, Grandpa?'

‘A present from a very brave soldier,’ Jack will tell her, ‘He did it to send me back home to you.’