The Domestic Ideal and the role of New Zealand Women during World War II

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Abstract

This thesis comprises two sections: an original Young Adult novella, entitled, *Looking at the Stars,* and a critical research essay, focusing on Patricia Grace's 2004 novel, *Tu*. In both the creative and critical portions, I undertake an exploration of the role of women during World War II.

In the creative portion, a work of historical fiction, the domestic ideal which prevailed in New Zealand during the 1930s and 1940s is central to the narrative. The implications of women joining the workforce in considerable numbers during wartime, and their direction into essential occupational areas, previously more like to be the province of men, are central to the advancement of the plot. *Looking at the Stars* traces the effect of industrial conscription on the central character, a young unmarried woman, who is forced to leave her city home and move to a rural area to engage in farm work. The novella also highlights the wartime undermining of ascribed gender roles.

In the critical portion of the thesis I investigate participation in the war effort by female characters in Grace's *Tu*. I argue that the multifaceted nature of the role of women is portrayed in the text, although it is essentially a war novel which traces the experiences of Tu, the central character. Tu and his two older brothers join the 28 Māori Battalion at different stages of the war and the novel's structurally complex narrative goes back and forth in time, interspersing Tu's experiences on the battlefield with issues his family face as they endeavour to adapt to city living after leaving tribal land beneath Mount Taranaki.

This thesis makes a contribution to women's history by emphasising the ubiquitous, but largely undocumented activities of women on the home front during World War II.

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Introduction

This thesis explores the social mores which prevailed in New Zealand from the mid-1930s through to the mid-1940s. It examines the strategy utilised by the New Zealand government to ease the wartime shortage of male labour by directing women into fields of employment which were previously more likely to be the province of men. It focuses especially on the women who worked in the agricultural sector and became known as 'land girls'.

The central research question of both the critical and creative portion is: To what extent did women's participation in paid and unpaid work during the war years (1939-1945) contribute to the war effort, and to what level did female engagement in war service disrupt ascribed gender roles? In partial response to this question, the project will consider the fact that the service of land girls was largely overlooked until 2010, when the few surviving former members of the New Zealand Women's Land Service received official recognition for their service to this country.

The critical portion of the thesis is a work of historical literary criticism which has necessitated a close reading of *Tu* (2004) by Patricia Grace. The novel is a work of historical fiction, set in 1940s New Zealand and Italy during WWII. It is based on a diary kept by Grace's father whilst he was on active service, as well as letters and memoirs written by other soldiers who served in WWII. In this thesis I suggest that Grace's novel is about more than three brothers who served with the 28 (Māori) Battalion. Interwoven within the text of the novel are snapshots of the lives of women on the home front: the expectation that they would participate in the war effort on a paid or voluntary basis; the influence of the Manpower Office in directing women into paid essential war service; and the character of Ma, who exemplifies, but also to

some extent challenges, the dominant ideology operating at the time. That is, women were essentially domestic workers, and married women could be relied upon to keep the home fires burning, and the children clothed and fed.

My interest in war service and how the war years impacted upon the lives of New Zealanders stems from remembered conversations with my father (64369 Private Edward James Doak), who served as a Bren gunner in WWII with 'C' Company, 24 Battalion, 6th Infantry Brigade. I recall that on Sunday afternoons when I was growing up in the Auckland suburb of Mount Wellington, which is now more commonly known as Sylvia Park, my father would drive the family to South Auckland, where aunties and friends of my parents lived. Heading down the Mount Wellington Highway, I was always intrigued by the old army storage sheds that we passed. Occasionally an army jeep or truck crept in or out of one of the sheds and that was especially exciting. The single-storey detached fibrolite constructions, all identical in shape and size were seemingly laid out like a maze and my father told me that the sheds were built by the Americans during the war years. "They were once stockpiled with food and military supplies. More food than you can imagine was inside those sheds," he said. At the time, this explanation meant very little to me. The fibrolite sheds, along with other buildings, were demolished to make way for the Sylvia Park Mall Complex presently on the site.

Each ANZAC Day was a solemn remembrance day in my household. I was taught the importance of acknowledging the sacrifices of those who did not return home after active service. In addition, the pain and trauma which my father carried as a result of serving overseas was evidenced by him experiencing recurring nightmares. In my mid-teens I learned that my father served in the North Africa campaign and later in Italy, with Field Marshall Montgomery's Eighth Army. I was

conscious that it was important for women on the home front to keep in touch with loved ones through letter-writing during the war years, but had little awareness of other responsibilities which women shouldered during the period. I became better informed decades later, when I read *The Women's War: New Zealand Women 1939-45* by Deborah Montgomerie. This text was enlightening to me on many levels because I was not aware of the extent of New Zealand women's participation in war service at home. I had not previously heard of 'manpowering' or 'land girls.' Manpowering, I learned, was introduced in 1942 and was a form of industrial conscription which saw women--as well as men deemed unfit for active service or who did not meet the conditions of military conscription--directed into industries and areas of employment considered essential during wartime. The women who worked on farms, orchards, and high country and coastal stations became known as 'land girls.' They were members of the Land Corps (later renamed the Women's Land Service), which was established in 1941 to provide female labour in the agricultural sector. When I mentioned wartime land girls to friends and acquaintances, some thought I was referring to the British Land Army. None had heard of the New Zealand Women's Land Service (WLS) and few knew that young, single, New Zealand women were directed to work on the land during WWII, irrespective of whether they had experience in the farming, orcharding or pastoral sector.

This lack of knowledge and my own limited understanding sparked the idea for this study. My aim in writing the creative portion of this thesis is to raise awareness of land girls and the contribution they made to maintaining agricultural land production in Aotearoa during the war years. I questioned why land girls were largely missing from New Zealand war history narratives. I was interested to know why land girls were issued with a military-style dress uniform, but not a New Zealand

Defence Force service number. Without a service number they were not permitted to become members of the Returned Services Association and they were not invited to participate in ANZAC Day parades. I wanted to explore why the sacrifices and war service of land girls was not officially recognised until 2010. From 1940, women over 17 years of age and from all walks of life took the place of men involved in agricultural land production who had enlisted. Land girls were essentially tasked with maintaining and increasing production from the rural sector during the war years, and this was achieved (Bardsley 2).

In her book, *The Land Girls: In a Man's World, 1939-1946,* Dianne Bardsley presents the personal stories and diverse experiences of more than 200 former New Zealand land girls, and includes images and diary entries. This book was a useful resource in a number of ways, including emphasising that New Zealand was a primarily agricultural nation during WWII and that initial proposals to extend the use of female labour in the rural sector drew attention to the cynical and conservative attitudes of many farmers (7-22). The placement of women on farms to address the labour shortage challenged ascribed gender roles and undermined the widely held belief that women's lives were best focused on family and domestic matters. As recorded in the *New Zealand Woman's Weekly* dated 31 October 1940, a South Island member of the New Zealand Farmers' Union (later NZ Federated Farmers) worried that, "Women who can cut the throats of sheep and carry heavy loads will not make healthy future mothers of the race" (25). Bardsley's narrative, Grace's novel and other primary sources, such as newspapers and women's magazines from 1935 through 1945, provide contextual information. They reveal that economic roles in New Zealand society were heavily gendered and the domestic ideal was vigorously endorsed. In 1943, as a self-described woman raising a family of young children, Christina Guy petitioned for State assistance for Kiwi mothers struggling with the

hardships associated with looking after a home, a husband and a family (5). In her opinion, adolescent children grew to maturity and would almost certainly marry, "hoping to enjoy homes and families of their own" (58). However, the flip side of this idyll, according to Guy, was that given the many responsibilities that wives and mothers were expected to assume, caring for a home and family could potentially become onerous. Guy felt strongly that in order for future home-makers to be competent and experience a measure of contentment in their role, it was important for all adolescent females to be trained in the domestic sciences, because as well as being a companion to her husband and a mother to her children, a married woman was expected to perform a variety of household tasks (12).

Secondary sources which discuss the social history of New Zealand, especially the Depression era, have also been useful for understanding the labour market in New Zealand, the prioritisation of male breadwinning and the widespread adjustment in attitude to gendered employment which occurred during this period of struggle and deprivation.

Crucial to this study has been my exposure to artefacts held by the National Army Museum (NAM) Te Mata Toa. In the course of my employment at NAM I have read diaries written by soldiers who served in WWII, and letters and cards written by male and female service personnel. I have held a Bren gun under supervision by the Curator of Weapons, Terrence Seymour, who demonstrated how the weapon works and how it fits into the bi-pod for firing from a trench position. The Curator of Vehicles and Artillery, Grant Hays, drove me around the Waiouru Military Camp in *Te Rau Aroha,* and demonstrated how it functioned as a mobile canteen during the war years. *Te Rau Aroha* is a YMCA (Young Men's Christian Association) mobile canteen, which was gifted to the 28 (Māori) Battalion by children of the Native Schools of New Zealand after extensive fund raising (Nepia 2). YMCA mobile

canteens in trucks followed units on campaign, making comforts available for purchase. These comforts included cigarettes, chocolate and books (McGibbon 626-627). *Te Rau Aroha* provided members of 28 (Māori) Battalion, and other infantry soldiers serving overseas, with a wide assortment of items, including preserved muttonbird, tinned fruit--grown and canned in New Zealand--and essentials for personal grooming. *Te Rau Aroha* has been restored and is part of the vehicle collection at NAM. In Grace's novel, the narrator refers to *Te Rau Aroha* on more than one occasion.

As part of my research into the creative portion of this thesis, I have drawn on my own experience of moving from a townhouse in Auckland to bare land in Hawke's Bay. My husband built our home and as a family of four we lived between two caravans for 10 months. We raised cattle and sheep, although we had little understanding of sustainable head per acre and seasonal feed fluctuations. Calves and lambs were born on our property and animals were butchered. My assistance was required with challenging and unpleasant tasks. As former city dwellers, our rural experience was very much a learning experience and mistakes were made. In the process of my research I have come to understand that for many WWII land girls, their rural experience, too, was very much a learning experience. Others felt that farmers' wives resented their presence and felt aggrieved that land girls were exempt from performing domestic duties.

The novella I have created and the novel which is central to the critical portion of this thesis are set in the same period. That is, during the war years. In *Tu,* the role of women on the home front is considered marginally, which I believe reflects the marginal status attributed to female participation in the war effort by war historians generally. Through the development of *Looking at the Stars,* I have highlighted the

extent to which women were directed into essential occupational areas, and the impact and implications of such direction. The value of volunteer work undertaken by Kiwi women is also revealed, as it is in *Tu*. In addition, both *Tu* and *Looking at the Stars* are epistolary works of historical fiction.

It has been useful to address my research question in both a critical and creative fashion because both provide material through which to consider the way that the lives of women in the decade 1935 through 1945 can be viewed. The critical essay does so through the lens of historical literary criticism, which will likely appeal to an entirely different audience to the reader of Young Adult historical fiction. By creating a novella for young adults, I hope to bring a fresh perspective to a different generation. *Looking at the Stars* narrates the little known historical story of how women challenged patriarchal norms, and proved themselves worthy employees, even and especially in roles which once would have been denied them, because of their gender. My motivation as an author has been less about drawing attention to unsung heroes, and more about raising awareness of the contribution to the war effort which women on the home front made. Comparatively little has been written about them and I would have liked to have had an opportunity to interview a former land girl, in order to hear of her experiences in her own words. Although I was passed the contact details of a former land girl, I was unable to arrange a meeting, due to the COVID-19 Alert Level 4 Lockdown taking place in 2020. Almost all former New Zealand land girls are deceased, or in a poor state of physical and mental health.

That the women in Grace's novel are largely insignificant characters, with the exception of Ma, intrigues me as a researcher. The novel reflects a period in New Zealand's history where numerous women were selflessly raising families in a time of deprivation and upheaval. Some of these women had lost a loved one in the First

World War and then had to raise their children through the Depression years. Or, as in Ma's case, their husbands returned from the battlefield scarred and damaged, emotionally as well as physically. Their efforts and their sacrifices did not make headlines. Their lives were impacted by food rationing, too, and yet they found ways to cope, and to fulfil their multiple roles of mother, housekeeper, cook and household budgeter.

Completing this thesis has contributed to increasing my understanding of the issues faced by women in the decade 1935 through 1945. The war years saw a temporary significant increase in the number of women in the paid workforce and engaging in previously male-dominated employment. These ground-breaking women discovered new capabilities, responsibilities and a degree of economic independence, albeit at a time of consumer shortages and limited leisure and entertainment options. However, rather than contributing to a lasting destabilisation of the traditional domestic role which New Zealand women typically occupied, these women experienced life beyond the front gate. In other words, they participated in a relatively short-term alternative to an ideology that defined women, almost exclusively, as full time (or future) mothers and home-makers. As Montgomerie notes, "The war years were not a divide or rupture in the gender order, but a more complex period in which that order was tested but not radically reconfigured" (187).

By being better informed about what life on the home front in Aotearoa looked like during WWII, different generations have the opportunity to reflect on and consider the relevance and validity of internalised ideologies and social mores. Furthermore, the level of control the government had over its people during this period was extraordinary. Along with conscription, there was manpowering, and

petrol and food rationing. It was a level of control which was recently imitated during the COVID-19 Alert Level 4 Lockdown.

My hope is that this thesis will encourage women to share their stories, particularly women who were adults during the war years, or who are daughters of such women. I regret that I was unable to interview the former land girl that I was given the contact details for, and hope her experiences are conveyed to another generation in the form of oral storytelling or written text, in order that they are accessible to future generations. Accounts of personal experience add to what is not generally found in traditional historical records. They bring depth and clarity to subjective aspects of research. The industrious, but little-known land girls, the numerous women who successfully transitioned into roles formerly the province of men, and the many thousands of women who cared for their children alone during the war years, deserve more from a society with a history of being indifferent to the sacrifices made by women.

Part One

Looking at the Stars

The railway carriage swayed gently and clicked past the miles. It was a clear evening in the first week of spring and it was unusual for me to travel by train on my own. I boarded the train at Napier, where an elderly gentleman and a number of women wearing hats of different shapes and colours waited on the platform. One of the women had two children with her. Absent from the railway station were young men. Sadly, there was an eerie absence of young men all around the neighbourhood I grew up in. One exception was Mrs O'Connell's Down Syndrome boy, Daniel. He liked to march around his front lawn with a rifle made from wood, and salute people who walked past. But fit and able young males had all been whisked away to war, like sand with the tide. There was an emptiness and unnatural quiet about the streets, which was hard to get used to.

Approaching Waipukurau Station, the engine slowed and then stopped, with a clattering rumble, a squeal of brakes and a hiss of steam. I swallowed hard and not for the first time, wondered what lay ahead of me.

After checking that Clifford's letter was safely back in my handbag, I picked up my suitcase and hat box and stepped on to the platform. I looked around and soon became aware of a man striding towards me. He wore belted dark baggy trousers and a collarless shirt with the sleeves rolled up.

"Well, I'm betting you'd be Emerald Dineen," the man said. "My, but you're a slight wee thing ain't ya."

His smile was warm and welcoming and the skin around his nut-brown eyes crinkled. The apprehension I felt as the train entered the station began to dissolve.

"Yes, I'm Emerald, but please call me Emma. And you must be Mr Evans."

His handshake was firm and his skin felt rough.

"Walt will do just fine. It's less formal and that's how I like things."

Walt took my suitcase and hat box from me and we walked to his truck. Memories flooded my mind when I noticed that the truck was a Bedford. My uncle had owned a Bedford with a flat tray at the back and as a child I would sit in the tray with the farm dogs while Uncle Clem drove around the farm checking the farm animals and seeing if any fences needed fixing. I remembered that my uncle talked a lot about his 'faithful old Bedford' and Ma and Aunty Gladys thought it was funny that he referred to the truck as 'he'. Ma and Aunty Gladys would sit and drink tea in Aunty's kitchen full of warm colours, and talk about Uncle and his strange way of talking about his truck as if it were his cobber.

As Walt drove, he talked about the difficulties of running a large, dry stock farm without help. I wanted to tell Walt that I didn't know what 'dry stock' meant, but the words wouldn't leave my mouth.

"Esther, that's my better half, she does all she can, but she damaged her shoulder a while back and it's never been properly right since, so she's had to slow down a bit. We used to have three workers; a shepherd, a cowman who also did fencing, and a part timer who did gardening and odd jobs. But of course they were called up and that was that."

Walt stared hard at the windscreen for a few seconds without saying anything. I sensed he was troubled.

"Conscription," said Walt, shaking his head slowly. "Emma, I just don't know what to think. Some of our boys are so young and think it's their chance to see the world and experience thrill and adventure, but really they haven't the slightest clue what's in front of them. It's too easy to persuade them that they're doing their bit for God, King and Country. Just too damn easy."

I fell silent, thinking of Clifford. I had read his latest letter on the train from Napier, although I had read it a dozen times previously.

Dearest Emma,

I think a soldier appreciates a bath more than anything. Bathing in a tub has become a luxury, but if I can bathe in the sea, then I rush to it like a duck goes to the first puddle of water after a long drought. You see, I have arrived in Egypt. We had a wonderful journey and the sea was calm nearly all the way.

We are in Maadi Camp now, which is a New Zealand camp not far from the bustling city of Cairo. After arriving on shore we had a long train journey across a portion of the desert. The desert is very much what I expected, just mile after mile of tawny sand, dirt and rocks; some parts hilly and some parts flat. We have been here less than a week so I haven't had time to look around much yet.

We were taken to Cairo the other day; to buy clothing and other things we need for this climate. I have quickly come to understand that thirst, flies and vermin are relentless enemies from sun-up until sundown. We travelled alongside the green serpent-like Nile, which winds its way tirelessly through the desert. We saw tethered cattle that looked like water buffalo, as well as camels, donkeys, fat-tailed sheep and goats. All except the goats looked skinny, just like the locals. The women envelope their heads in mystery with scarves, so that you can't be sure if they are old in years or young.

I was pleased that waiting for me here in Egypt was a number of letters, but none was more welcome than yours. I am in good spirits, but I miss you and when I look at the stars I think of you and wish I was in your arms.

All my love, my darling. Take care of yourself for I cannot do without you.

Clifford.

It was only Clifford's second letter since he stepped aboard the troopship *Empress of Japan* 14 months ago. His first letter had been different. He seemed cheerful then, but from this most recent letter I sensed Clifford was less certain and possibly uneasy about the part he was playing in the war. In his first letter Clifford wrote that as the ship left Wellington Harbour, and even as it ducked and tumbled in the Tasman Sea, he stood happily for hours gazing over the rails into the swirling water. Others were violently ill, but he felt at peace. He felt that he was doing the right thing. He wrote about marching before boarding, bands playing, and banners and streamers fluttering in the breeze. Embarkation was a lengthy and painstaking process, according to Clifford, but once aboard the soldiers waved to the sea of faces below them and the crowd on the wharf cheered and waved back. My Clifford is nearly two years older than me and he is smart. He noticed that not everyone at the wharf seemed thrilled and excited. Some of the women smiled and waved, but then dabbed their eyes with their hankies. Some of the older men had grim looks on their faces and stood with their hands at their sides or pressed their fingertips together. Clifford finished off his letter by assuring me that his heart was full, that a spirit of comradeship had quickly developed amongst the men, and that leaving New Zealand for the first time and being on the sea was a truly marvellous experience.

The sky was asphalt when Walt stopped at the farm gate. He unlatched it before driving through and although I offered to jump out of the truck and close the gate, Walt insisted on doing it himself, explaining that there was a method to it and that it would be best if he showed me how to do it in daylight. We continued slowly up the long, tree-lined driveway, the headlights gobbling up the darkness. Through the window I gazed out at the thick blanket of darkness that covered the land, broken only by the lights of the farmhouse we were approaching. In Napier the street lights

weren't as bright as they were before the war started, but the streets were still lit. Along the country roads that Walt had just driven on, there were no street lights at all, not even dimmed ones. And there were lights in the windows of the few houses that we passed. In Napier we all had to have black-out curtains. It was important that not even a sliver of light was visible from outside our houses, and there were wardens who walked the streets checking. You could be fined if you didn't comply. It just hadn't occurred to me that country people didn't have to worry about black-out curtains.

Compared to the small two bedroom cottage that had been my home all my life, the farmhouse was a sprawling villa. The front door opened as I climbed out of the truck and Walt collected my things from the back seat. Mrs Evans stood in the doorway and the light from the hall fell on her auburn hair, which was generously streaked with grey. Her hair was slightly tousled and I wondered if she had quickly pulled off a pinafore, which is what Ma used to do if a visitor arrived at the house and she had been busy in the kitchen. Mrs Evans was a big lady and hugged me fiercely.

"Welcome to our home, dear. We are glad to have you here."

Before I could answer, she instructed Walt to take my suitcase and hat box to my room and he walked quickly down the wide hallway. Mrs Evans and I walked more slowly and I thanked her for her warm welcome.

"I can tell straight away that you have been taught good manners because you just called me 'Mrs Evans.' But it would please me if you used my first name, and that's Esther."

"Thanks, Esther, I'll try to remember."

We had reached the kitchen at the back of the house and I was surprised at how spacious it was. In the middle of the room was a rectangular scrubbed wooden

table and the wood burning range had two ovens. Steam rose from an unlidded enamel stock pot on the range and a vegetable broth fragrance filled the room.

"Take a seat at the table, Emerald. You're a slight wee thing, but there's no shortage of food here. No one works well on an empty stomach, that's for sure."

"Yes, that's probably true. But I'm used to working hard, even if I've never worked on a farm."

"Well there'll be another girl working alongside you before too long, so the people at the Women's Land Service tell me. A letter came today to say that …"

"Stop your chat, Esther, and bring some broth for the girl and me."

Standing in the doorway was Walt. His tone was light and his smile broad.

"Blow me down, Walter Evans, you've got some cheek in you. Yes, alright then, I'll serve up some soup. And you can make yourself useful by taking the bread knife from the drawer and slicing some bread for us. The butter dish is already on the table."

It had been an eventful day, saying goodbye to Ma and taking a train that whisked me towards the unknown, and I was thankful for the bowl of soup that Esther put in front of me. It was full of carrot, parsnip and swede and tasted delicious. The thick slice of home-baked bread that Walt cut was also welcome and, following Walt and Esther's example, I spread it thickly with butter. It felt like I was being extravagant because Ma and I thought of butter as a luxury, which we exchanged precious ration-book coupons for. We thought the same way about sugar, cream and eggs.

"You look tired, Emerald," said Esther.

"Esther, love, the girl prefers that you call her Emma," said Walt.

"Is that so? She didn't tell me. Well I have to say I'm a little disappointed. Emerald is such a pretty name and in all my years I haven't met anyone called Emerald before."

I set down my spoon in the empty soup bowl.

"Ma told me that she and my father chose my name because they thought of me as being precious. You see, when my father came home from the war he wasn't well and the doctors told Ma that she should stop hoping for a baby. But despite what they said, I came along and my parents thought of me as their treasure, their miracle child. I only have vague memories of my father and so I rely a lot on what Ma tells me about him. He died when I was seven."

"I'm truly sorry to hear that. Things must have been very hard for your mother; caring for a baby and a sick husband, and then being widowed. There was the big earthquake, too."

"Yes. We were lucky that there was no damage to our house, or any other houses on our side of the street. And none of Ma's friends were injured. The earthquake happened in February and my father died in June."

"So it's just been you and your mother for, let me see now, 11 years is it? Your mother didn't meet anyone else?"

"For 11 years, it's just been me and Ma."

"I think that's enough questions for now," said Walt quietly, looking at Esther. "You said it yourself, love, the girl looks tired."

"Aye, she does. Alright then, Emma, let me show you where the bathroom is and also which bedroom you'll be sleeping in."

When I opened my eyes the next morning I didn't know where I was. Then I clasped my hands behind my head and listened as the wooden farmhouse yawned,

stretched and creaked in the first rays of springtime sun. I thought about Ma; how she would probably be getting out of bed, making her way to the kitchen and switching on the kettle. She might take two cups from the cupboard, forgetting I'm not there. I remembered the day I came home from work and Ma looked up from her knitting and told me that a letter had arrived in the post and that it was addressed to me.

"I picked fuchsia and gerberas from the garden this morning and popped them in the crystal vase on the bureau. You'll find the letter propped up against the vase."

More often than not, Ma would be sitting knitting when I got home. This was because she knitted socks, scarves and mittens for the soldiers fighting overseas. It wasn't something she got paid to do, but she liked to do it. The National Patriotic Fund Board supplied the wool and the Red Cross made sure the knitted items reached the soldiers and the prisoners of war. Ma said that our fighting men looked forward to receiving Red Cross clothing and food parcels; and for the prisoners of war, these parcels were a lifeline.

It was unusual for mail to come addressed to me and although I was curious, I resisted the urge to immediately swing back into the hallway and pick up the envelope. My feet ached from being on my feet most of the day and I was weary, so before I looked at the letter I sat and untied my shoes and slipped them off. Then I stood and padded back to the bureau just inside the front door, feeling Ma's eyes on me as I did so. Taking Ma's letter opener with the mother of pearl handle from the drawer, I slit open the manila envelope with O.H.M.S. marked on it and wandered back to the lounge room.

I unfolded the letter in front of Ma and paused before I began reading it out loud. Ma kept her head lowered, watching her hands work the needles and wool, and yet I knew well that Ma could knit quickly and competently without looking. The

clicking sound of the needles competed with the ticking of the clock on the mantelpiece.

Sitting up in bed at the villa in Waipukurau, I blew out my cheeks and swung my legs over the side of the bed. The room was as warm as a sun-ripened peach. I walked to the camphor wood chest beneath the window, where last night I had carefully laid out my farm clothes ready for the morning and now it was time to dress in them. The off-white bib overalls with baggy legs were made from drill material and felt stiff and scratchy when I stepped into them. Ma had washed my overalls before she hemmed them for me on her treadle sewing machine, and she washed them again afterwards. She assured me they would soften with wear and after they had been laundered a few times. The overalls had two buttons on each side, which drew them in a little at the waist when fastened, and three buttons on each side of the bib which the shoulder straps fastened to. Standing in front of the mirror, I wondered what Clifford would think if he could see me now. I had never worn trousers before in my life, let alone dungarees. I placed the tan court shoes that I wore yesterday inside the wardrobe, picked up my work boots, and in my woollen work socks felt like I waddled down the hall to the kitchen.

Esther stood at the sink rinsing dishes and turned when I entered the room.

“Good morning, dear. My, that’s a sturdy and very clean looking pair of leather boots. Just pop them outside the door, if you like.”

The back door opened on to a partly enclosed veranda and against the side of the house was a low seat with a row of cloak hooks above it. Some had stained oilskin rain coats hanging from them, and sou’wester hats. I set my boots down beside some very strange looking footwear. Not quite shoes and not quite boots, they had thick

nail studded wooden soles and leather uppers that laced like my boots. I wondered how anyone could walk in those.

Before going back inside the house I looked up at the cloudless, cornflower-blue sky. From distant hills came the sound of dogs barking, cows complaining and someone whistling in short, sharp bursts, presumably Walt. The house was built on a flat area on top of a hill and overlooked a stream winding its way through umbrella elms and prim poplars. The trees reminded me of home because our cottage was nestled amongst similar-looking trees at the foot of Hospital Hill.

I began to reflect on how it happened. How I came to be standing here on the porch outside the house of a couple who were complete strangers until yesterday, wearing ridiculously clean and unglamorous farm clothes. Boiled cabbage. Yes the smell of boiled cabbage had a part to play because it was that smell which greeted me before Ma did, when I came through the door of home after I attended the meeting at the Municipal Chambers.

I remembered that the day was as warm and sunny as this one, and as I stood at the bottom of the concrete steps and looked up at the three-storey Art Deco building I began to sense that my life was about to change indelibly. I had walked past the building many times but had never been inside. When eventually I ambled up the steps and pushed open the reluctant door, I stepped on to a highly polished parquet tiled floor. It seemed a long walk to the desk and my shoes made a clip-clop sound, reminding me of when I was a child and I'd clomp around in Ma's high heels.

I passed my appointment letter to a woman with dark curly hair and she wordlessly rose from her chair and ushered me into a nearby waiting room. There were eight or ten young women seated on benches placed around the walls. Some were chatting, others were silent, staring into space and looking uncertain. Then my

eyes met those of someone who gave me a close-lipped smile and made room for me on the bench she was sitting on.

"So, you know anything about farming?" asked the girl.

It surprised me that the girl began a conversation without first introducing herself. She had fair hair caught in a bun at the back of her neck and she wore flame-red lipstick. Her heavily made up eyes searched my face and I cleared my throat.

"I suppose so. Not much. My name's Emma. Do you think *anyone* here knows about farming?"

"Mae."

She had looked at me when she spoke her name, then scanned the room, sighed deeply and looked back at me.

"Well, Emma, I reckon that most of us here are going to have to be shown the ropes. We're going to have to learn how to ride a horse, how to make fences, and how to kill a sheep, which will finish up in the roasting pan and then be carved up by the farmer at his dinner table. When you think about it, it's a bit like how our boys are being shown how to drive tanks, how to throw hand grenades and how to kill Germans."

I bit my lip and looked away, shocked at the way Mae spoke. Then a uniformed woman, who Ma would probably describe as being 'at middle age', entered the room.

"Righto ladies, let's have some quiet."

There was a pause and then the woman said, "All of you. Follow me please," and turned, spinning around on one foot. There was something mechanical about the way she moved and Mae and I looked at each other and grinned.

The smell of boiled cabbage often assailed my nostrils as I came through the door after work and it was the same on the day that I came home from the Municipal Chambers. After I kissed Ma on the cheek, she told me she wanted to hear all about my interview and that she would come and sit with me in the lounge room shortly. I remember going to my room, putting my bag down, kicking off my shoes and preparing myself. How was I supposed to tell Ma that there was no interview? That, instead, me and all the other young women who went to the Chambers building that day each waited their turn to be ushered into a room by a man carrying a clipboard and wearing a white doctor's coat over a shirt and tie. The man didn't introduce himself, which I thought was very rude. I stood on scales and he noted my weight, and then he asked if there was any possibility that I might be pregnant. He asked many more questions, mostly about my state of health and my willingness to serve the country I was born in. He made notes as I answered his questions and occasionally he would look up at me, nod his head, and make comments like, "I see" and "Very good."

After we had all met with the unsmiling white-coated man, we were taken into a meeting room, where we watched two short documentary films. One was about New Zealand's commitment to supplying Britain with meat, wool and dairy products and the other was about the importance of women's engagement in war work. The need for female labour in the agricultural sector was emphasised in this film and we were given a quick overview of sheep mustering, docking, ear marking, fly-strike, crutching and how to take care of a bearing ewe. Some of what I saw made my stomach turn. Many of the words used were terms I'd never heard before.

Heading for home, I dawdled and was glad of the opportunity to piece together my thoughts. I remembered feeling like I was being conscripted, just as Clifford was, but I wasn't leaving New Zealand and heading to a war zone. Instead, I

was joining the Women's Land Service, also known as the WLS. It seemed that because I was considered physically fit, because I wasn't pregnant and because I wasn't a mother of young children, the Manpower Office had the right to send me to work wherever they thought I might be useful. How was that fair? What about Ma?

I closed and latched the front gate, and a distant seagull chortled. Bees hovered around the lavender bushes on both sides of the path and as I walked, an uncomfortable realisation washed over me. I was reminded of the feeling of standing at the edge of the ocean in bare feet and then a chilling wave takes you by surprise and tugs the sand away from under your feet, so that you have to shift your feet or you will topple over. The wave that was washing over me was the realisation that I had very little control over my own life. I guessed that many other New Zealanders were feeling the same way. Our young men had sailed away on troopships, leaving the lives they knew behind and being removed from the people they loved and cared for. They were uniformed soldiers. They were in the army and they obeyed orders if they knew what was good for them. And, as Mae said, they were being trained to kill. Actually they *were* killing and being killed. Those left behind had to go on with their lives without the men that were special to them, hoping one day they would return, but there was no certainty that they would. On top of that, many were being slotted in to work that they weren't used to doing and possibly had no interest in doing. And there were probably others who, like me, weren't sure if they were capable of doing the work they were being assigned to. Pretty soon ladies would be sent to work in orchards, in canning factories, and in something called food dehydration plants. Some were even going to factories where ammunition was being made. Also married ladies were expected to go out to work - as well as cook and keep their homes clean and tidy, tend their gardens, and write letters regularly. And all the while they had the worry of their husbands or sons being on the battlefield.

I was probably one of countless people who faced moving out of home, and in my case the cottage that Ma and I lived in was the only home I'd ever known. Clifford and I had already said goodbye to each other and that wasn't easy, but soon I would be resigning from my job, farewelling Ma and my friends, and leaving the neighbourhood I grew up in. I felt torn, maybe a little desperate too. Part of me looked forward to the adventure that lay ahead and part of me felt sorry for Ma and sorry to be moving away.

"Dinner will be ready in ten minutes," called Ma from the kitchen.

I sat on my bed, trying to picture myself as a farm worker. When I was a little girl, Ma and I used to stay at Uncle Clem's farm and he let me feed a calf with a bottle. But I really don't know the first thing about cows and sheep and the only horse I've ever been up close to was Uncle Clem's mare. Uncle helped me up on to her and showed me how to sit straight in the saddle. Then he held the reins and walked her slowly around the paddock. Sadly the farm visits stopped when some years after Uncle Clem came back from the First World War the farm got sold. Uncle became ill and for a long time he stayed at the hospital at Hanmer Springs in the South Island. When I got older and asked about Uncle Clem, Ma explained that Uncle needed lots of rest and special care and Aunty Gladys wasn't able to look after him. He would have nightmares and try to hurt Aunty.

Uncle Clem is dead now and Aunty Gladys lives by herself in Christchurch. Soon Ma will be living on her own as well, and she and I will exchange letters, just as Ma and Aunty Gladys do, and just as Clifford and I do. At least I can take the train to visit Ma, but the farm is nine miles away from Waipukurau Railway Station. That's too far to walk, so I'd have to find a way of getting myself to and from the station. In Napier, fortunately, the railway station is a short distance from home and an easy

walk. I think I'm entitled to one weekend off every month, according to the WLS Handbook of Information, and as long as I wear my dress uniform when I'm travelling, then I don't have to pay full fare.

Stepping back through the door leading into the kitchen at the farmhouse, I watched Esther take a steaming kettle from the range and fill the teapot.

"Oh, there you are, Emma, I was wondering where you got to."

"I was looking out over the farm and thinking how beautiful it is."

"Yes it's nice looking out from the porch there if there's time for any of us to admire the view. I thought I'd make a fresh pot of tea for us both, so sit yourself down. Lambing time is upon us and Walt wanted to ride out early to check on the ewes and attend to any problem births. Right about now he'll be moving the steers into a different paddock with the help of the dogs. Anyway, we agreed that we'd let you sleep in a bit, since it's your first day and you seemed worn out last night."

"A cup of tea would be lovely, thanks Esther, and it was kind of you and Walt to let me sleep in."

"Tomorrow is another day, dear, and we'll soon have you milking Tess, and looking after the chickens and the dogs. We also keep a couple of pigs and their pen needs to be mucked out daily, and we'll see how you go riding Hazel. She's our mare. As a rule she's docile, but when the mood takes her she can be quite contrary. Once the other land girl arrives, Walt's going to show you both how to muster the sheep and get them into the yards. After that he'll introduce you to crutching and docking."

I sipped my tea slowly, replaying in my mind parts of the film about farm work that I watched at the Municipal Chambers. Esther was still talking as she placed a bowl of porridge down in front of me and I tried to focus on what she was saying.

"I think you'll find that milking Tess will be one of your more pleasurable tasks. We're dry stock farmers, so we graze the steers for meat and the sheep for their meat and wool. There's no milking sheds here."

I thanked Esther for the porridge, sprinkled it liberally with sugar and helped myself to milk from a porcelain jug.

"To be honest with you, Esther, milking will be a whole new experience for me, along with all the jobs you've just described. You see, I'm used to doing cleaning and chores that keep me indoors."

"Yes, the Manpower people made us aware of that and they also made it clear that land girls are to do farm work and not cooking and cleaning. You'll find that Walt is a patient teacher most of the time, but when things need doing, they need doing and sometimes they need to be done fast. That's when you'll see how short-tempered Walt can be. There will be times when he'll use words that you may not be accustomed to hearing. Words that, as a general rule, he wouldn't use in front of ladies. But he calms down once he's back inside the house and food is put in front of him. Of that you can be certain. Oh, and one thing that just popped into my mind, which has nothing to do with Walt, but which is important to remember since you're not too familiar with animals, is never stand at the back of them. Tess and Hazel are good girls, but they're not beyond giving you a swift kick when you least expect it."

"Thank you for warning me. Also, I was wondering … how often does your mail get delivered?"

"Ah," said Esther, nodding slowly. "You and your mother are close and you'll be looking for a letter from her quite soon. And perhaps you're expecting a letter from your sweetheart. Well, the answer is that we expect the mail truck every Monday. That's when our letters, newspapers and monthly magazines get delivered. Walt likes to read the *Journal of Agriculture,* and I like the *Mirror*."

"I see. And yes you're right about me and Ma being close and you're also right about me having a sweetheart."

Annoyingly, I felt my face begin to burn as I continued.

"Clifford left on a troopship 14 months ago and I've only had two letters from him, even though I've written loads of letters to him."

"Aye, it's a topsy-turvy world we're living in. Things don't always work out the way we'd like them to, that's for sure. Let me tell you about Walt's niece, Pani. She had a fiancée and for months she waited for her first letter. She had his baby and still there was no letter. The poor girl was desperate. But the worst thing was …"

Esther's face crumpled. She looked down, smoothed her apron and finished her sentence in a voice which was sadder than any voice I'd heard before.

"The worst thing was that poor Lindsay was killed at Gazala just a few weeks out from Christmas."

A chilling shiver ran through me as I thought fleetingly about how I would respond if I received the worst news about Clifford. I thought Esther had finished speaking, but I was wrong.

"It's been 10 months now and we all thought that having Lindsay's baby would somehow help Pani get over her loss, but still she pines for him. She lives with Iris and Aubrey. Aubrey is Walt's brother. I take my hat off to them. They accepted that Pani was carrying a child when there was no wedding ring on her finger and they love their wee grand-daughter just as if she wasn't illegitimate. Poor Pani. She's like someone lost in a fog."

"That is truly sad. I'm afraid I don't know much about babies, but I do know they take a lot of looking after. It's probably good for Pani to be living with her parents because they can help her. Do these people live in Hawke's Bay, Esther? Is it possible for you to visit them, or do they visit you?"

"They do live in Hawke's Bay, dear. Why do you ask?"

"Because it seems that this quite a lonely life for you here on the farm, and I thought if you could spend time with this family, they would be company for you. Your neighbours don't live close and it's not easy for them to just pop over for a visit in the way that neighbours in the city can."

"Aye, it can be a might lonely here, but I keep myself busy and manage just fine. I used to drive, but I haven't in a long time. And with petrol rationing, Walt and I are careful how we use the truck. If we go into town, we try to do as many errands as we can, so we don't have to make lots of trips in. But to answer your question, yes, I do see Pani and her family. Not as often as I'd like, though. Especially the bairn."

I yawned and placed the cap back on my fountain pen. It was my fifth night at the farm and I liked to spend my evenings writing in my room. Esther told me that the rural postman or 'postie' always checked the mail box for letters to be delivered, before depositing mail for her and Walt into the box. When I heard that, I set myself a goal to have a letter in the mail box addressed to Ma or Clifford, every Monday, ready for collection. I tried to write at least a paragraph or two each evening, sitting up in bed.

Setting my writing pad and pen down on the bedside cabinet, I hopped out of bed, turned off the light and settled down under the covers. I hadn't been asleep long enough to dream when something disturbed me. Perhaps my pen had rolled off the top of the cabinet. Then I felt a hand on my forehead. It was palm down, something that Ma used to do when I was little girl, to check if I was running a temperature.

"There, there," I heard a female voice whisper.

I closed my eyes tight and lay very still, trying to make sense of what was happening. It occurred to me that Esther and Walt might be playing a trick on me.

Although I'd been at the farm only a few days, I had come to know that Walt, especially, enjoys a joke. Then the hand was removed from my head and there was a swish and a rustling sound, and whoever it was moved away from my bed, slipped through the door and was gone.

The next morning, Esther sat with me and showed me yet again how to milk Tess. Esther made it look easy, but I struggled to keep a flow going. First we carefully washed the udder and as much as I tried to concentrate on what Esther was showing me, I kept looking at her hands. Was it her hand that I felt on my forehead last night or was I dreaming?

I placed the metal bucket under the teats and watched as Esther closed the teat at the top with her fingers and then gently pulled and squeezed to make the milk come. It surprised me that Tess appeared calm and relaxed during milking, because to me it looked like a process that should be painful for the animal. When I mentioned this, Esther assured me that our hands were more kind and gentle than a calf sucking. Even inexperienced hands.

"When a calf sucks he does so rapidly, as if his life depends on it. And most of the time it probably does. It's the same with the lambs. If you look closely at the way they suck from their mothers, you'll see that they do so vigorously, almost violently. They certainly aren't gentle."

I sat up close to Tess on a small wooden stool with three legs and attempted to milk her as I'd been shown.

"With practice, Emma, you'll become less anxious and more comfortable with what you're doing. Then you'll get a rhythm going and you might even be inclined to lean your head against her flank. I always find that soothing somehow, like you become one with the animal."

I nodded, but said nothing, concentrating on what I was doing and watching the milk squirt into the bucket.

The last day I worked at the Nurses' Home at Napier Hospital was also my 19th birthday, 26 August 1942. It was a day like any other day as I mopped floors, cleaned windows, wiped ledges and did kitchen duties. The girls I worked with hugged me in farewell and as I walked home the promise of spring was in the air.

That evening Ma and I ate beef stew and one small boiled potato each. There was no gift from Ma, but this was a special birthday meal and so was a gift in itself. After the dishes were done, Ma put the kettle on and soon we were eating rock cakes that Ma had made that morning. We drank tea from Ma's best china cups, which were usually reserved for visitors or taken from the china cabinet only on special occasions. During supper we talked about Father.

My memories of Father are vague, but there are a number of photos of him around the house, including one of him in army uniform which sits beside the clock on the mantelpiece in the lounge. I know that Ma still misses Father and twice a year - on what would have been their wedding anniversary and on the anniversary of Father's death – Ma and I walk to the cemetery and place flowers from our garden on his grave. When Ma speaks of Father her eyes mist over. It's inevitable. Their longest separation was when he left to go to the First World War. Ma told me she felt blessed that he returned, but was shocked to see how he had changed in little more than a year. According to Ma, he had lost too much weight, there was no sparkle in his eyes and he wasn't fit or strong anymore. Tending the garden, something he had always enjoyed doing, drained him of strength and patience. Ma said Father's tomato plants used to stand like soldiers in an orderly row. Father had difficulty sleeping as well. Ma told me she would often wake in the early hours and Father would be missing

from their bed. Then she would get up and find Father sitting at the kitchen table with a cigarette in his mouth and a full ashtray in front of him. Before he went to war, he hardly smoked at all.

When Father started coughing bad and complaining of headaches, Ma thought it was because of the cigarettes, but the doctor said the dreaded word, “influenza”. Many soldiers who returned from World War I got sick and died. So did their wives and children. Some people called it the Black Flu disaster - that’s what Ma told me. I remembered how her voice quavered when she said, “It was the terrible things that happened during the war, as well as the flu epidemic, that caused the death of your poor, dear father.”

Ma has never spoken it, but I am sure she fears for Clifford’s safety and how his war experiences will change him. I wasn’t part of the crowd that watched the troopship leave, nor did I farewell Clifford at the train station when he left for military training at Trentham. Instead, it was beneath cherry pink magnolia blooms and in slowly enveloping darkness that Clifford and I said our goodbyes. He stood with his back against the tree trunk, drew me to him and as we kissed his body began pressing into mine.

It was mutual first intimacy that night and it was like a great river - rushing, turbulent and uncontainable. I felt like a helpless bundle of flotsam being carried away on a wild swirl and when finally I opened my eyes, Clifford lifted my left hand, kissed my ring finger and promised we would marry when he got back. He is two years older than me and we had been going out together for nearly two years before he left. Clifford’s marriage promise stayed with me, like a photo inside a locket.

On the night before my 19th birthday, I wrote to Clifford and Ma posted the letter while I was at work.

Dearest Clifford,

You have been gone many months and I have received just one letter from you, in which you describe your departure from NZ and the beginning of your adventure. I hope my letters reach you faster than yours reach me.

As you know, I have been working at the Nurses' Home since I left school. But I had a letter from something called the District Manpower Office and I went to a meeting and now they want me to work on a farm. I have to leave home and leave poor Ma and live with a farmer and his wife at Mangatarata Road, Waipukurau. The Manpower people seem to think that because I went to Uncle Clem's farm during school holidays, I understand about working with animals. I wanted to tell them that I was a little girl then, but I didn't get the chance. Lots of help is needed by farmers with all the men away and they are willing to let ladies be farm helpers. I am anxious, Clifford, but the Manpower Officer says it is the right thing to do. The meeting was held at the Municipal Chambers and one of the ladies was wearing a uniform. She had on a matching brownish-khaki skirt and blazer, a cream coloured blouse and a neck tie the colour of greenstone. I thought she looked very official and no-nonsense. The lady said she was from the Women's Land Service and she told us all at the meeting that here was our chance to do wartime service, just like our men are doing wartime service. We watched a film about farm work and about how New Zealand farmers are struggling. I don't think I ever really thought about how Great Britain relies on this country for wool, meat and dairy products. Also now with American soldiers training in NZ, there is a bigger population that needs feeding.

I am sad to leave Ma, but we were both pleased that I was still at home for my birthday. Now I know how it must have felt for you and your mother when you

left, and you are so much further away from home than I will be, and danger surrounds you.

You are never out of my thoughts and I hope you are safe and well, darling. I was thrilled to get your first letter and look forward to your next one.

Emma

It was as I was lying in bed, waiting for sleep to overtake me, that I heard Esther raise her voice from the master bedroom across the hall.

"My mind is made up, Walt. Mabel won't be spending any nights in the house. You seem to forget that the land girls are not our guests. They are here to work, not to be pampered. It's bad enough that the Manpower people expect me to cook for them and say they're not supposed to help with the housework. It isn't that I'm not grateful to have them, and I don't mind them eating with us in the house, but they can sleep and wash down in the shearers' quarters. It's nice down there, close to the stream and the trees."

I saw Walt briefly at breakfast time and then he went to saddle Wilbur and ride to the neighbouring farm. Esther explained that Walt needed to talk to the farmer about droving the ewes to the upcoming ewe fair in Waipawa. It was as I got up from the table to go and milk Tess, and feed the chickens and the pigs, that Esther told me that when those chores were done, she'd like me to come back to the house and clear out my room.

"Starting tonight, you'll be sleeping in the shearers' quarters, dear. The other land girl arrives this evening and she'll be sleeping there, too. There's no electricity in the building and it might be a bit draughty, but at least you'll have each other's company. It's a decision that Walt and I made together."

I nodded and went outside to put my boots on. I could see the shearers' quarters from the veranda. The weatherboard building was rectangular in shape and the corrugated iron roof was spattered with rust. Even though I'd never been inside the shearers' quarters, I wasn't looking forward to sleeping there. I felt downcast and told Tess about it as I milked her, my head against her velvet flank. I had developed confidence with milking Tess and riding Hazel, and enjoyed doing both.

When I returned to the house I noticed there was a cane laundry basket full of crisp white bed sheets and neatly folded woollen blankets on the floor, just inside the door.

"You're back, Emma. That's good. I thought I heard the door."

Esther came bustling into the kitchen, tying the side of her pinafore at the same time.

"I'll leave you to pack up your things while I pop down to the shearers' quarters and make up two beds. I might do a spot of cleaning as well, so I'll see you down there shortly."

"Yes, Esther," I said, and walked towards the room that had been mine for three weeks. Passing by Walt and Esther's room, I noticed that the door was ajar and I stole a look inside. As a rule, the door was shut tight and I hadn't seen inside their room before. What made me curious was a framed photo on an oak dresser and I stepped forward to take a closer look. It was a photo of a smiling young soldier in uniform, and his uniform was identical to Clifford's. I wondered who this soldier could be. Walt and Esther had never spoken of a son, or mentioned children of their own at all. I left the door as I found it and crossed the hall to my room and began packing up my few clothes and trinkets.

With my hat box in one hand and suitcase in the other, I was soon making my way to the building which normally housed shearers, and which was now land girl

accommodation. How ridiculous I felt and must have looked, wearing stained dungarees and work boots, and carrying a hat box and suitcase.

The door was open and I could hear Esther humming to herself inside. Without taking off my boots, I stepped inside on to wooden floorboards and quickly became aware that the walls were unlined and there were no internal doors. I was reminded of a hospital ward, bereft of patients, as there was a neat row of five wire-wove beds on each side of the room, the head of each bed against the wall. Along the back wall stood a wood and coal range, a wooden bench and sink, and a fireplace with a claw-foot bathtub placed in front of it. The building was grimy with dust, cobwebs dangled from the ceiling, and a musty smell persisted. There were two narrow, pillbox-like windows in the building, above the rows of beds, and neither had curtains.

Esther had been on her knees, cleaning the bath, and now she stood up, wiping her hands on her pinafore.

"Welcome to the shearers' quarters, dear. I'm sure you and Mabel will be quite comfortable here, even if it's a little rudimentary. When all is said and done, it's only a place to sleep, isn't it? I think you'll find that if you light the range each evening, it will radiate heat through the night and you'll be warm and cosy. And we all know that stepping out of the bath in front of a crackling fire is quite a treat."

I knew enough about setting fires to know that they transferred heat only after they had been lit for some time. Beginning tonight, Mabel and I would be coming to the shearers' quarters after dinner. That might leave only two hours for the range or the open fire to take any icy edge off the weather outside, and chase the draughts from this building, before we went to bed. I hoped my face wasn't conveying the doubt and disappointment I was feeling and so I nodded and forced a smile. Esther returned to her cleaning and I turned and placed my suitcase and hat box on one of

two beds which were made up. Between the beds was a large steamer trunk with leather handles, which I guessed Mable and I would use to put some of our things in. There was no wardrobe or chest of drawers. I didn't feel like unpacking just then and so began to look more closely at my surroundings. There were wooden shelves above the sink with various cooking utensils and bowls placed on them, and I discovered a side door. Stepping through the door, I found myself in a lean-to which housed a copper and two concrete tubs, one with a hand-operated wringer attached to it. There were also two wood piles. There was a stack of small pieces, obviously for the kitchen range and for kindling, and one of larger pieces to burn in the fireplace. Splitting firewood was something I used to do for Ma and I filled several beer crates with kindling before I left home, hoping it would last until I was able to visit her and then split some more. With the arrival of spring and warmer temperatures, she would hopefully need to use the wood I'd split for the kitchen cooker only, and not for starting the fire in the lounge room as well.

There was a lime-covered narrow track leading from the lean-to to a small tin shed, and as I hadn't seen any sign of a toilet in the shearers' quarters, I was fairly certain I knew what was inside. The soles of my boots made patterns in the lime and agapanthus nudged me as I walked towards the shed. The wooden door had a large gap top and bottom, and creaked and groaned as I pulled it open.

"I see you've discovered the long-drop, Emma. Have you seen one of these up close before?"

I hadn't heard Esther approach and she startled me.

"Oh, Esther, I didn't know you were there. Yes, I've used a long-drop. Only once or twice, though."

Esther patted my shoulder.

"Oh, come now. Cheer up. In no time at all, you'll think nothing of it. At least we're in springtime and not the middle of winter. I don't suppose it would be ideal to have to find your way here on cold and rainy nights, or in a howling gale."

"No, I don't suppose it would," I said. Close to the farmhouse was a wash house, where I scrubbed my hands and washed my face at the end of each day. There was a toilet in the wash house and I made a mental note to stop in there each evening, before heading to the shearers' quarters.

Esther and I were soon making our way back up to the house for lunch and as we walked, Esther pointed out that me and the new land girl would be responsible for laundering our own sheets and personal items, and making up our own beds.

"The only exception will be when the shearing gangs are at the farm. In three of four weeks, it will be shearing time and the gang will stay in the quarters. That's when you and the other girl, Mabel, will sleep in the house and use the facilities; just as you have been, up until now, Emma. I don't expect the gang will be here for any more than five nights, but it all depends on the weather. It's not possible to shear wet sheep and that is a fact. Anyway, according to the Land Service rules and guidelines, I'm responsible for providing your meals and making sure you have clean work clothes to put on at the start of every week. That is what I'm required to do and that is what I'm happy to do."

Dearest Emma,

In your letter you mentioned the full moon rising over the hills on the farm and making a golden path across the grass, as you walked to the shearers' quarters. How I wonder about you being a farm worker! But I know you will work hard and I hope the farmer and his wife treat you well. Perhaps you have made

friends with the other land girl. I hope so and I'm pleased that she will be company for you.

Speaking of friends, I have chummed up with someone called Tiaki from the Māori Battalion. It turns out we were at school together at Takahue. That's where my parents farmed before they sold up and moved to Puketapu, and my father started working for your uncle. The Māori folk are a happy lot and they like to sing. One or two of them have guitars and when we are all back at camp they get us to join in singing with them and it reminds me of home and when I was growing up. Tiaki and I go to the YMCA canteen truck together sometimes. The truck even has a name. It is called Te Rau Aroha and we can get tinned food from home and all sorts of things there, like razors, soap and tobacco. I hope you don't think badly of me, Emma, but I have taken up smoking. I think every soldier has if they weren't smokers already.

I started this letter by talking about moonlight. Well several nights ago, under that same full moon that shone over the farm where you are staying, I had my first experience of being bombed from a low level. Someone in a Jerry plane cruising overhead must have spotted a glimmer of light from one of our trucks and the next minute bombs rained down and the ammunition truck was on fire. Emma, my dear, it was like Guy Fawkes Night, but a deadly one. I was safely tucked away in my dugout, thankfully. It's actually quite homely in a way. There are usually two of us in each dugout. But I don't think I'll ever forget looking up just before it happened and seeing a black shape, like an eerie big bat crossing the face of the moon. Then there was a sound like wailing and then explosions, shouting and confusion. I am experiencing many things, just like you are darling, and when we are together again we will talk about our experiences.

I think of you always, my dearest, and pray for God's protection of you.

Clifford

Mae used her compact mirror to apply her Tangee lipstick and smiled to herself. She remembered the wording of the advertisement for Tangee and its promise to deliver lips that appealed to men, but avoided a 'painted' look. *So I wonder if Tangee will appeal to Walter Evans, Waipukurau farmer*, thought Mae. Up until recently she had worked behind the counter of a drapery store in Napier and had been flatting with two girls who worked at the National Tobacco Company. Six months ago Mae had celebrated her 20th birthday and she was the oldest of three children. Her parents were trained teachers and typically her father accepted long term relieving positions in rural schools throughout Gisborne and Hawke's Bay, where a house came with the job.

Mae's father was presently working as teacher-principal at Kotemāori School and her mother also worked at the school part time. A fortnight had passed since Mae left her flat for the last time and moved back in with her parents and siblings. They had farewelled her at the railway station and at this moment in time she was aboard a train rattling towards Waipukurau.

Mae pressed her lips together and placed her lipstick and compact back in her handbag. She had dressed with care, choosing a navy blue suit over a cream blouse with ruffles, and a teal blue cloche hat. She also wore silk stockings and black patent shoes with a small heel. Mae regularly used cosmetics and was used to going out dancing, drinking and having a good time. She regretted that there were so few men to socialise with now, and that, as a rule, she went out with her female flat-mates and girls she worked with.

Mae hoped the other land girl at the farm in Waipukurau also liked to have fun. It had been a disappointment to her that she wasn't going to a big station

because there would be more people to connect up with. But from Waipukurau, it wasn't difficult to catch the train to Wellington, and perhaps she and the other land girl could take the train to Wellington together, ride the trams and meet up with American servicemen. There was no doubt that they were a bunch of young men far from home and looking for thrill and adventure. The newspapers said they enjoyed lively dancing and that they were 'lighting up' Wellington with their white teeth smiles, their pristine uniforms and their slicked-back, film star hair. And they had so much money to spend. They visited clubs with girls on their arms, and their lady friends were showered with gifts of flowers, chocolates, stockings, and cigarettes.

Dearest Emma,

I look at the stars and wish I was looking into your eyes. Today I went to a church service in the open air. My mind churns because fine fellows have been left behind and I thought that hearing the words of the padre might help with the pain and distress I am feeling. But I didn't feel like singing. The way I'm feeling has to do with the fact that I have seen dead people up close. I try not to think of it for tears threaten, a lump forms in my throat and a suffocating anguish comes over me. I have to take control of this anguish because feeling like this makes me want to yell and cuss over and over, as if somehow that will relieve me of my strain and struggles. Perhaps you will be surprised that I write like this and I hope you won't mind. I wish I had you in my arms now, so that I might feel comforted.

The padre talked about our homeland and those who fight the battle on the home front in a noble and unselfish way. He said it was for these men and women that what we are enduring is worthwhile. Hearing these words helped to reassure me, Emma. I was glad to hear them because in recent days my heart has been as heavy as the Bren gun I carry and the pack on my back.

I thought about your birthday and you know that I would dearly have loved to share that special day with you. However, I was lucky enough to join a group that went through the bazaars in Cairo recently. I saw all sorts of ornaments made from brass and silver and even saw furniture inlaid with mother of pearl. My darling, it made me think of the letter opener with the mother of pearl handle that your mother uses. Suddenly I felt lonely, even though I was in a crowded and bustling city where traffic whirls and people collide. You probably used that letter opener when the letter from the Land Service arrived. I bought an amber bracelet for you and hope it reaches you soon.

You are constantly in my thoughts and prayers, my darling. Yours forever, Clifford

Walt had been riding around the ewes, one last time that day, checking that there were no abandoned lambs or sick ewes. He was looking forward to having a helper and was pleased that Emma was showing promise as a rider. Walt grinned as he recalled the first day that he introduced Emma to Hazel. The mare seemed to take a shine to Emma from the start and didn't protest when Emma first tried to mount her. The girl was hesitant and uneasy to begin with, but learned quickly. It didn't take too many attempts for her to smoothly mount Hazel by holding the mare's reins, putting her foot in the stirrup and swinging her slim body up and over into the saddle. Emma had ridden slowly around the paddock a number of times under Walt's watchful eye, and in the next few days Walt intended to ride with her over the hilly parts of the farm, so that Emma developed the confidence to eventually ride out on her own.

Walt dismounted, walked Wilbur to the stable and slid a metal bucket full of water in front of his gelding. He knew he could rely on Emma to groom and feed Wilbur and Hazel before she finished for the day and came to the house for her

evening meal. The girl was polite, not afraid of hard work and willing to learn. She had come a long way from her first days at the farm, when he had spent time familiarising Emma with the animals and training her in what he supposed she would think of as the less desirable tasks that she would be expected to perform. These chores included mucking out the pig pen and changing the sacks used for bedding for the pigs, cleaning out the chook house and collecting eggs splattered with poo from the nesting boxes, and grubbing thistles. Walt remembered that the pig pen was almost too much for Emma, who backed out of the pen with the soiled bedding, let it drop from her hands as she placed her hands on her knees, and lost her breakfast in the long grass. He had been less than sympathetic and wished he'd been able to stop himself from laughing out loud. He recalled watching the girl straighten slowly and wipe her mouth with her sleeve, her face extraordinarily pale.

"Do excuse me for laughing, Emma. I had a feeling this might happen. It's not an enviable job this one, but believe me it's not the worst one. I'm sure glad you didn't heave inside the pen."

"Hmmm," was Emma's only reply, and then she picked up the fresh sacks and placed them neatly in the covered area of the sty. Walt had sensed that Emma was annoyed with him for laughing, but it was possible that she was simply embarrassed and a little cross with herself for having vomited. Walt wasn't sure, but Emma had proved she was tenacious by nature and not easily thwarted. These were traits he admired.

In the distance Walt thought he could hear Esther calling his name and he realised he should probably stop dawdling and set his mind on what was immediately ahead of him. He needed to allow enough time to wash and change into clean clothes before he drove to Waipukurau to collect Mabel from the station - and pick up a crate of Speight's ale from the Tavistock Hotel on the way.

The setting sun cast a long shadow behind Walt's truck as he parked at the station. The train was pulling away, continuing on its southbound journey. Walt hesitated when he saw a glamorous young woman standing alone on the platform, but approached her when he noticed she was looking in his direction.

"Excuse me. Would you be Mabel Crawford?"

"Yes, I would be. And presumably you're Farmer Evans?"

"Just call me Walt," he said, shaking the woman's gloved hand. "I'm mighty pleased to meet you, Mabel."

"I'm equally pleased to meet you," the young woman replied. "But, if you don't mind, I like to be called Mae."

"Mae," said Walt, nodding. "I'll try to remember that."

He lifted Mae's suitcases and as they walked towards the truck, Walt struggled with feelings of embarrassment. Typical of a farm vehicle, it was coated with dust and mud-splattered, and given the way that Mae was dressed and made up, Walt thought she should be stepping into a highly polished Cadillac. Maybe the girl felt that's what she deserved, too. He almost made an apology for the state of the truck, but stopped himself. After all, the girl knew she was coming to a farm. It wasn't a social visit. She was set to become a farm worker.

Dearest Emma,

The other day I sat under a tree in the sun and the soft warm wind smelled like hay and flowers. It was my imagination, Emma - they are smells I remember from your Uncle Clem's farm, when my father used to take me to work with him in the school holidays. I have penned a few lines of a poem which I will share. Putting these thoughts down on paper gives me something to focus on when lostness and loneliness threaten to overwhelm me.

The desert at night is stark,
desolate and cold.
So cold that in my slit trench
I suck stars from the quenching
dark, until they are inside me,
pepper hot and sharp.

My path is cobbled with chaos
and skeletons tossed. The lifeless
body is a chrysalis and I trust
that the soul departing these husks
flies on bright and tender wings
toward everlasting stars.

Emma darling, I have thought deeply in the quiet moments and have come to believe that the enemy are people like us with similar blood and a similar heart underneath their Jerry uniform. I believe we are two sides fighting for our souls and all that is dear to us.

By God's grace I will come back and we will always be together. I do hope it will be soon, because I love you and am very lonely for you. For now I will say God bless you and goodnight, my dearest.

Clifford

I scrubbed my hands in the concrete tub in the wash house and then walked to the back veranda to sit and remove my boots. They were heavy and my ankles were sore,

but I was glad to have them. I thought about Clifford and guessed he probably wasn't as lucky as me. There were probably many times that his boots stayed on, day and night. After I placed my boots tidily under the bench seat, I opened the door leading into the kitchen.

Sitting at the table opposite Walt was a well-dressed young woman and I let go a small gasp. She spoke first, but not before her eyes swept over me like a brushstroke.

"You and I have met, but damn you look different in those clothes. And an unpleasant smell entered the room at the same time you did."

I ignored the insult.

"I'm surprised to see you here, Mae."

Esther was bringing a steaming oven dish to the table and didn't appear to be listening.

"I must have misunderstood you, Esther. I was sure you said that someone called Mabel was expected."

"Emma, dear, this *is* Mabel," said Esther.

"Actually I forgot to tell you, love, but Mabel prefers to be called Mae," said Walt.

Esther carefully set the hot dish down, and twisted the oven cloth in her hands.

"Well, blow me down," she said, shaking her head. "Here's a second one that wants to be called something other than her real name."

Mae raised her thin eyebrows at me and, reading her look as an unspoken question, I told her that my real name is Emerald.

"Emerald. Just like the gem?"

"Yes, that's right."

There was a pause while I internally debated whether I'd explain the reason why my parents chose my name, and then Walt noisily cleared his throat.

"Perhaps one of you would be kind enough to tell Esther and I how you know each other."

I explained that Mae and I didn't really know each other, but we had met at the Municipal Chambers in Napier, after we and a number of others had received appointment letters from the District Manpower Office. I told them that the letters we were sent didn't tell us was that we were prospective land girls, but this became obvious when a representative of the Women's Land Service spoke to the group. I paused and Mae continued.

"After that meeting I got a letter from the Manpower Office telling me I was to be employed as a general hand at Papuni Station, near Wairoa. To be honest, I was looking forward to it. A big place like that must have lots of employees and I was keen to meet them and have some fun with them. But then I got another letter saying that someone had *volunteered* to work at Papuni and I was no longer needed there. I think the Manpower Office especially like girls that apply to join the WLS without having to be recruited, so they do their best to keep them happy. There was always going to be two land girls sent here to your farm, but to begin with, I wasn't going to be one of them."

Walt chuckled and we all looked at him.

"I just remembered something Merv from the garage in town told me only last week. He said a hairdresser from Auckland had started work as a land girl at Papuni and I thought he was pulling my leg. Apparently she's the niece of the head shepherd. A hairdresser from Auckland, if you please. How is *she* going to manage on the land?"

"She'll certainly be in for a few surprises," said Esther. "But who knows, she might take to farm animals and to the land with gusto. May I remind you, Walt Evans, that only the other night you said to me that Emma here has a special way with animals? A way that's natural, you said, and not something that can be taught. And we both know that she's a city girl."

Walt made a grunting sound, muttered something about beer and got up from the table. Turning to Mae, Esther continued.

"It's a shame things didn't work out as you'd hoped, but perhaps you'll find working here is more homely than working at a large station. When you're dealing with huge stock numbers, it can be very high pressure, especially for someone unaccustomed to working with animals. I think that because the girl at Papuni is related to the head shepherd, there will be allowances made for her. My hunch is that less will be expected of her than might have been expected of you."

"Yes, I suspect that will be true," said Walt, returning to the table with a brown bottle in his hand. "However, I say we stop the chat and get food into us. One thing you can be certain of here, Mae, is that you'll eat well, so tuck in. You look like a gust of wind would blow you over, you're so thin."

Walt carved the meat and soon all four of us were enjoying a meal of roast chicken with potatoes, parsnips and carrots, all dripping with butter. Once again my thoughts turned to Ma and I wondered what she was having for dinner. I knew she wouldn't be eating as well as me and it was hard not to feel guilty. And Clifford. Was he getting a hot and hearty meal every day? Somehow I doubted it.

It was nearly eight o'clock when Mae and I made our way from the house to the shearers' quarters, carrying hurricane lanterns. It was a starry night and I stole a look upwards and silently prayed for Clifford.

Dearest Clifford,

Thank you so very much for the beautiful bracelet which arrived at the beginning of the week. It fits my wrist perfectly and I wish you could see how it looks on me. I have put it carefully away with the few treasures I brought with me from home, including a photo of you and a photo of Ma.

The post comes every Monday and every Monday I walk down the driveway to the mail box. The driveway must be 500 yards long, I think, and it's lined with trees, mostly blue gums. I like looking at the patterns on the ground as the sunlight filters through the leaves. On Mondays my heart is light because I wake with an expectation that a letter from you will be waiting for me in the mail box. I have to go through the gate to get to the box, not like at home. The wooden gate is wide and heavy, and Walt showed me how it needs to be lifted and walked when it gets opened and closed for his truck to go through. I am sorry for writing about such trivialities and you must tell me if you have no interest in these. My life is so different now. I feel like I'm learning new things every day, even silly things like how to open a farm gate.

I am getting used to sleeping in the dreary and draughty shearers' shed. It is a rectangular weatherboard building and in some ways it reminds me of the Coronation Hall in Napier, where we first danced together. My how I wish we could be slow dancing together again tonight, and every night.

Tears came to my eyes when I read your last letter. Your pain and distress is clear to me, but I need you to stay strong because by staying strong you will come back to me. That is what I believe.

I long for our reunion, whenever that will be. I am well and always thinking of you. God keep you in His care, my darling.

Emma

Six weeks had passed since Mae first arrived at the farm and I was a little in awe of the way she seemed so relaxed about farm work. I think Walt and Esther were impressed with Mae as well. Tasks which threatened to make me retch, such as scooping up pig poop and changing the sacks used for bedding in the pig sty, didn't faze Mae at all. She'd make a face, but the job would seemingly be done in no time and with no complaints. And Walt said that anyone would think Mae had been *born* on a horse. Mounting, dismounting and posture seemed to come naturally to Mae and she rode Walt's hack horse and Hazel the mare equally well, calmly letting them know who she was in charge. Wilbur, the gelding that Walt referred to as the hack horse, made me uneasy. He was bigger than Hazel and he was feisty. Walt informed me that Wilbur is referred to as a gelding because he is a castrated stallion, and he's a hack because he's used for 'everyday' purposes – meaning he's not a race horse or a show jumper, and obviously he's not used for breeding like a stud horse is.

I liked the way Walt patiently explained things to me when I showed interest. Prior to coming to work at the farm, animal mating, animal castration and the killing of animals was very seldom talked about in my hearing. I knew that farm animals left farms to go to the freezing works and ended up on dinner plates, but the process around slaughtering animals was something I didn't like to think about and so I didn't.

Within days of meeting Walt and Esther, I learned that ram lambs have their testicles removed at docking time and docking is when all lambs, male and female, have their tails removed. I also became aware that a steer is a castrated male calf raised for beef. Walt tossed back his head and chuckled heartily the first time I rode out with him to check on the steers and I referred to them as cows.

"Emma, my dear girl, the only cow Esther and I keep is Tess and she keeps us in milk. What you see here are bull calves with their private bits removed and that makes them steers. These young lads are six months old and we're growing them for their meat. We'll see to it that they're slaughtered before their second birthday."

I noticed that Walt quickly developed a fondness for Mae and I think it was partly because she was self-assured and seemingly fearless. She was also pretty and possessed a captivating smile, even when it wasn't framed by red lipstick. I remembered that she was wearing bright lipstick the first time we met and every morning here at the farm she applied her 'Tangee' or her 'Victory Red' lip colour religiously. Walt and Mae enjoyed banter and laughed a lot in each other's company, but we saw him became angry and irritated on the first day that all three of us did docking.

Early in the day, Walt had explained the docking process and showed us how to grab and hold a sheep on the railing, while someone else did the cutting. He also passed us both a sheath knife.

"I've sharpened the blades up on the stone for you girls, so don't do a fool thing and cut yourselves. Get comfortable with using it because you'll find it's a very useful tool. Frankly I'm surprised that the WLS doesn't supply them. Be that as it may, the next thing we'll do is muster the ewes and lambs, bring them to the yards and pen them together. I'll show you which pen I want them in. We don't want them to have enough room to run around, but we don't want them packed tight together neither, because we're going to grab the ewes and toss them in the pen alongside. We'll give them a dose of drench and after that, each *lamb* will be caught, drenched, earmarked, and be minus a tail before being tossed back over the rail to mother up.

We'll also castrate the boy lambs and I sincerely hope that neither of you are prone to fainting at the sight of blood."

With the dogs running alongside, Walt and I rode off to round up the sheep and bring them to the yards. All went smoothly and Walt and I dismounted, and I tethered the horses to the railing. From behind me I suddenly heard Walt shout and swear, and turning, I saw a procession of sheep moving past him and towards me. Walt's face had darkened and Mae was standing at the half-open gate to the pen looking unusually flustered.

"If you can't latch a gate properly, then damn it all, you're no use to me here, city girl. Let them all out. Go on. Open the bloody gate wide and shoo them. Then once they're in the yards, we'll do this again. But next time we'll do it right."

Walt whistled the dogs and they sprang into action to bring the ewes and lambs back into the pen. Not for the first time, I thought the dogs, Jack and Cass, were worth their weight in gold.

Mae shut the gate to the pen after the sheep were back in, and Walt made a point of checking it was latched securely.

"Could have been worse, I suppose," said Mae, looking at Walt. "At least the gate to the yards was shut tight."

"Aye," said Walt. His tone was gruff, but he smiled unexpectedly. "Yes if they'd nudged their way through the big main gate and scattered themselves over the farm, then there would've been chaos. No doubt about that. It's like Esther says, 'We must be thankful for small mercies.'"

I marvelled at Mae's easy way with Walt, and was possibly a little envious as well. His ill-temper vanished and although Mae and I made mistakes, the rest of the day was relatively uneventful. Some of the tails were cut too short or not short enough, according to Walt, and holding the sheep still on the railing for the person

cutting wasn't easy. They'd wriggle and squirm and kick with their back legs, while their front legs were held tight, and sometimes slip out of our hands. At one stage a particularly boisterous boy lamb slipped out of my hands and Mae came close to cutting off his ear, instead of his testicles. Walt gave us a stern warning to take care and seemed equally concerned about Mae cutting herself or me, as he was about the lamb losing an ear. In response, Mae made a quip about which body part the animal might prefer to do without, given the choice, and this immediately appealed to Walt's sense of humour. To my way of thinking, Mae was becoming 'too familiar' with Walt. It was something that Ma had taught me: *Always do your best and show respect, but don't become too familiar with those in authority over you.* I wondered where the line between 'respectful' and 'familiar' lay, and how you could know for certain that you or someone else had stepped over it.

Dearest Emma,

I received your most welcome letter and want you to know that I am interested in every word of every letter you write. I adore you and feel proud of you, for all you are learning and all the hard work you are doing. I suppose you have little opportunity to wear your bracelet, but the day will come when I will see it on your pretty wrist. I am so very glad you like it and that it reached you.

Each day a red fiery sun climbs up the sky until the atmosphere is like the breath of a furnace. In my mind's eye I can see all the beauty and splendour of springtime in New Zealand. Blossoms and roses bloom within my being and for a short time I am transported from the loneliness of this wild desert, and uplifted to greater hopes and desires of good things which will emerge out of the chaos that surrounds me.

It is hard to find the right words to adequately describe how I am experiencing a deep and unrelenting longing to return home. My prayers are ever with you and I find rest and security in the knowledge that after the storms of winter, roses bloom once more.

You may think it strange that I refer to desert heat and winter in the same letter, Emma. The truth is, a cold greyness has entered my spirit and I am weary. Please remember that wherever you are, and wherever I may be, I will always love you.

Take great care of yourself. You are never out of my thoughts and I ache for you at times. I do long so terribly to stroke your hair and again feel your arms about me. God bless you, my darling.

Clifford

Docking was strenuous and messy work and Walt estimated that it would take us at least two and a half days, given we were drenching and ear marking as well, and he was having to supervise us closely.

"I haven't had to do this job with unseasoned workers before, so it's slowed things down a bit. However, it's not something I could do on my own. Lord knows, there's only one way to become experienced at anything, and that's to muck in and do whatever it is."

At the end of the first day, Mae and I almost stumbled into the kitchen and Esther was surprised and pleased at the amount of food we ate.

"It's great to see young ones with a healthy appetite, isn't it, Walt? You must have been working these girls hard today."

"Aye, we've had our moments, but they'll be dab hands at docking come next season."

Later that evening, on our way down to the shearers' quarters, I turned my neck from side to side to loosen a kink. I'd been tense throughout much of the day, being unused to using a sharp knife repeatedly. Or I may have wrenched my neck when I was lifting one of the heavier ewes.

After bathing, Mae and I lay on our beds. I was too tired for letter writing and felt uncomfortable from overeating. I knew I shouldn't have accepted a second helping of apple crumble and custard when Esther offered it, but how could I refuse? It was delicious.

"Do you ever feel like you want to do something different with your weekends off, Emma? Go someplace else, see different people?"

My mind had drifted to thoughts of Clifford and I imagined us holding hands and walking together, in fading twilight, along a track edged with tall trees whose branches met above our heads. Mae's voice seemed very distant and I asked her to repeat what she said.

"I was just wondering if you ever felt like you wanted to get away from the farm on your weekends off."

I hesitated before answering. On Sundays I liked to sit under a shady elm by the stream and write to Clifford or to Ma. Sometimes I'd lie on my back and watch the poplar leaves stir in the breeze - glittering in the sunlight like a million gold medallions – and listen to the trilling of cicadas, the twittering of birds, and the bleating of lambs in the distance. In a country not war-ravaged but not unaffected by war, the farm was a place which offered peace and solace. The last time I had a whole weekend to myself, I saddled Hazel and rode around the farm. When I asked permission from Walt, he was more than agreeable. His only caution was to not let the farmhouse out of my sights.

"Always keep the farmhouse in view and that way we'll be able to find you if anything should go awry. If the house isn't in view, then you're probably just a bit too far away to be safe. I wouldn't like to think of you lying injured and spending a night outside because we couldn't find you. Hazel's a good girl, but falling off a horse can happen to anyone, so mind how you go."

I thanked Walt and he suggested I ask Esther if I could borrow the Thermos flask and take a scone or two out with me on my ride. That way I could choose a spot to dismount and have a picnic.

Esther wasn't in the kitchen when I went to the house and so I called out and walked up the hall, looking for her. She was in the master bedroom, dusting with a long handled feather duster, and humming. My eyes were drawn to the framed photograph I'd seen some weeks earlier. I wanted to ask who the young man in uniform was, but before I could do so, Esther asked me if there was something she could help me with.

"Oh. Yes. I wanted to know if I could borrow the Thermos flask and pack a small picnic basket."

"For yourself and Mae, is it?"

"No. Mae's busy doing the laundry for us both. We take turns, you see. I'm actually taking Hazel out for a ride and when I talked to Walt about it, he suggested I might like to pack a small picnic lunch to take with me."

"Did he now?"

Esther's hand had flown to her hip, but she was smiling.

"In that case, young Emma, you'd best follow me and I'll show you where to find what you need."

I enjoyed riding around the farm, past the trees reaching up to the sun, past the ewes munching the lush grass, while their lambs jumped and frolicked in

between feeds, and past the steers. They were inquisitive creatures and, at the sound of the horse approaching, would stop eating and look, following us with their gaze. With the wind blowing through my hair, I felt free, and stopped worrying about Clifford, stopped being concerned about Ma being on her own, and stopped thinking about how long the war was going to continue.

Eventually I spied a grassy flat spot beneath a London Plane tree, and decided that would be perfect for picnicking in. While I drank tea and ate a sausage roll and a date scone, Hazel nibbled at the grass. I could have stayed in that spot forever, looking down at the farmhouse in the distance, and looking up at low blousy clouds, billowing like smoke.

"Sometimes I feel like getting away from the farm, but when I ride around on my own in my free time and see different parts of the farm, then that's a change of scenery and I quite like it. I come back feeling rested and refreshed."

"I really miss being around people, Emma. Lots of people, I mean. I was talking to Walt about it and he was really sympathetic."

"That was nice of him."

"Yes, it was. Anyway, we started talking about Wellington. Walt thinks it wouldn't be a bad idea if you and I went there for a visit on one of our free weekends. He said he'd drive us to the railway station at Waipukurau, so we could catch the train on the Friday night, and then pick us up from the railway station again on the Sunday night and bring us back to the farm. All we have to do is decide which weekend we want to go."

"Honestly, Mae, I don't want to think about this just now. It's been a long day and I'm ready for sleep."

I had doubts about this plan of Mae's. I had never been to Wellington, but knew it was a big and bustling city, and right now it was brimful of American

marines. They were here in New Zealand for training before they went to the war in the Pacific. Some people called it an 'American invasion' and there was concern that large numbers of handsome young American soldiers were in this country at the same time that the majority of the male population of New Zealand was absent. Newspapers contained headlines such as, *Young girls headed for ruination; Temptation in an olive green uniform* and *Jitterbugging towards damnation*. The jitterbug was a fast-paced dance which included lifts and spins, and was not known in New Zealand prior to the arrival of the Americans.

Docking came to an end and Walt said, "Thanks be! That job's done and the three of us are still in one piece. I had my doubts there for a while, I can tell you."

Mae and I rode the horses to their stalls and fed and groomed them. Drenching rain was falling by the time we reached the farmhouse and we came inside to hear Walt telling Esther that he felt like he was a lucky man because his helpers had proved they were up to the task and the weather had held out long enough for docking to be completed.

Later that evening, after Mae and I had both had a hot bath, or tepid more precisely, we sat in rickety wooden chairs drawn up to the wood-burning range. Rain could be heard swirling, beating and splashing on the tin roof, and it wasn't long before Mae spoke again about the possibility of making a trip to Wellington. She wanted to know if I'd thought any more about it.

"I have thought about it, Mae, but …"

"I've thought about it too. We could stay at the YWCA hostel. Staying there will keep us out of harm's way, you can be certain of that. We'll have a whale of a time, Emma. I just know we will. And we'll get to see people. There's a lot of fun in Walt, and Esther feeds us so well, but sometimes I feel as penned up as the animals around here. To me, it's a cocoon-like existence and after all these weeks I'm ready to

break free, take in a change of scenery and breathe in something other than the smell of animal dung."

"I'm just a bit unsure. I read in the newspaper that there's been some trouble. A number of those American marines aren't behaving very gentlemanly."

"You're not going to tell me you believe everything you read, are you? Besides, scoundrels always make headlines. There's bound to be some good boys amongst them. And you know that they all have to be off the streets and back at camp by midnight, don't you? Perhaps we could go to a dance hall. We know that alcohol isn't served at dance halls and you're not allowed to bring it in, so there'll be no bad behaviour because no one will be intoxicated."

I wasn't convinced that all questionable behaviour by the Americans was linked to alcohol consumption. However, the thought of going to a dance hall appealed to me and I admitted to Mae that I enjoyed dancing.

"Then here's your chance to shed your grimy dungarees, slip into a dress and do something you like. There's something else, too. I read somewhere that it's our patriotic duty to be friendly and charming to the Americans, when they are so far from home. They're normal, healthy men, Emma. You do understand what I mean by that, don't you?"

My face reddened and I nodded mutely.

"Trust me when I say that there are ways of showing men a good time without getting yourself in the family way. Surely you know that men find it hard to do without certain pleasures for very long. Your Clifford will be dealing with urges, I'm willing to bet."

"Clifford and I made promises to each other. I would never betray him and he would never betray me."

My tone was indignant and I fumed inside at what Mae was implying. For a time, neither of us spoke, and the silence was filled by the sound of driving rain. When Mae eventually spoke, her voice was barely audible.

"Let's call it a night, shall we?"

"Yes, let's," I said.

Picking up my lantern, I left Mae to feed more wood into the burner. The sheets were stiff as I turned them down and I felt like I tore my way into bed. I slept fitfully at first, replaying in my mind the conversation Mae and I had just had, and tossing up the pros and cons of visiting Wellington. I also thought about the differences between Mae and myself. She talked a lot. She seldom wrote letters, and she was someone who had trouble sitting still. Ma would've described Mae as a 'fidget.' But here we were, together, on a farm in the wop-wops. Perhaps I needed to try harder to be friends with Mae and make allowances for difference.

Morning came, finally, and I pushed back the bedclothes and washed and dressed hastily. At some point during the night, the rain had ceased and stepping outside was like stepping into a fresh and fragrant yellow day. Magpies qwardled, swallows swooped and the stream babbled and sparkled. On our way up to the house for breakfast, Mae made an apology.

"I'm sorry if what I said about Clifford last night hurt you. I'd like us to be friends, Emma, and if you really don't want to come to Wellington with me, I won't twist your arm or say anything more about it."

"Thank you, Mae. I did feel offended. Also, I did a lot of thinking during the night and I've changed my mind. I'd like to go to Wellington, and not just because I'll have an opportunity to go dancing. The other reason is that Clifford left to go overseas from Wellington. I didn't watch the ship sail and I'm interested in looking at the harbour and imagining the fanfare, the bustle and the excitement of the day that

his troopship left. And maybe you're right. Maybe it is only troublemakers who make headlines in the newspaper."

Mae put her arm around my shoulders and her face was a picture of delight.

"You're a champion," she said. "We'll make plans."

Dearest Clifford,

We went out to muster before dawn the other day. The air was fresh as Walt and I rode out with the dogs running alongside and there was even a few remaining stars, and I thought of you. I hope you are safe and well, my darling.

The early lambs have been weaned and my how they bleat and cry for their mothers when they are first separated. It is a sound that pierces my heart. The ewes need shearing and Walt says it's easier to move them in the early hours because it's cooler then and the ewes are docile. They make less fuss about being moved. There are just two horses and two dogs and Walt rides one horse and commands the dogs. I am surprised sometimes at the language he uses to them. It was Mae's job to pack up our things because we are moving back into the farmhouse while the shearing gang is here. Walt says me and Mae will need to help the shearing team by keeping the sheep moving, just as if they were on a conveyor belt. He took us inside the woolshed and showed us around. It sure was smelly. I am interested in seeing how the gang works. Everyone has a job to do and they have to work quickly, Walt says.

It is busy at the farm and I am learning many things. Walt even lets me ride the mare on my own sometimes. I have found that I enjoy horse riding, and milking the house cow is a pleasure more than it is a task.

Mae and I get along, but we are very different and I don't think we will ever be close friends. She is keen for me to travel to Wellington with her on one of our weekends off and has probably talked me into it. I wish I could talk directly to you

to see what you thought about this idea. I have also written to Ma about this, but have received no reply so far. In some ways I feel glad that Mae wants me to join her. It can get lonely here at the farm and I see no one apart from Mae, Walt and Esther. I want to visit Ma, but she tells me that she is doing well and I shouldn't spend my money on train tickets. My dress uniform should arrive soon and if I wear it on the train, then I am entitled to a fare concession as a member of the WLS.

The farm is a distance of nine miles from the Waipukurau Railway Station, so if I do any train travel, I have to find a way to get to and from the station. Walt is a kind man, but I don't like to ask him to drive me. Petrol is rationed and he should really be using the truck only to pick up supplies for the farm and things like that. Mind you, he promised Mae he would drive me and her to and from the station at Waipukurau if we went to Wellington. I guess you have heard about the Americans and some of the unrest that their behaviour and their very presence in this country is causing.

I do so miss you, darling Clifford, and pray that God will bring you home safe to me.

Emma

It was wonderful to be back in a comfortable bed for a short time and away from the dingy, dreary and dusty shearers' quarters. The team of seven shearers and fleece girls, or shed hands, or 'rousies', were sleeping on the lumpy mattresses there and they were welcome to them. Mae and I were sharing the room that previously I had slept in on my own, prior to Mae's arrival.

We are expecting the shearers to arrive today. The sheep were driven into the covered yards yesterday and they stayed there overnight. With the help of the dogs,

Walt and Mae drove the sheep and I stood at the main gate to the yards. As I waited, I remembered what Walt said about sheep when Mae and I were new to the farm.

"There are lots of things to keep in mind when you're bringing sheep into the yards, but if you remember these two, you won't go far wrong. The first thing is that a mob of sheep flows like water and the second thing is that sheep run along a fence line and look for a gap. They think they're escaping, but what the silly animals don't know is that they're running into the space where we want them, and once they're in that space, which is the yards, we shut the gate swiftly and we've got them right where we want them."

At the time, it was hard for me to imagine sheep flowing like water, but now, as I watched them run down the hill, they appeared to cascade. It's probably not something that's immediately obvious when you're mustering as an inexperienced rider, but from a distance it's very evident. I tried not to become distracted. I knew that within minutes the first sheep would be approaching and looking for a space to flee into - the space I was creating by holding the yard gate open. It was important to keep my mind on the job I'd been assigned, and close and latch the gate swiftly after the last sheep hurtled through.

Earlier in the day, Walt had taken Mae and I through the woolshed, which reminded me of a maze. There were all sorts of passageways, compartments, cubicles and pens for the sheep to be driven into. And then there were the chutes, like slippery slides in a children's playground, which the sheep would be bundled into immediately after being shorn.

"As a rule, the shearing gang work four sessions of two hours duration, with breaks in between. I'm going to need you girls to be at the shearing shed at seven tomorrow morning and I'll make sure Esther has a hot breakfast ready and waiting for the three of us by six thirty at the latest," said Walt.

Walt explained that it was usual for the gang to come to the shed at seven and start moving and hustling the sheep so that by seven thirty, each of the four shearers were set to take up their hand-pieces and grab a sheep from the catching pen directly in front of them.

“Sheep shearing is a fast-paced and extremely systemised process, which is best understood when you see it in operation. Each member of the team has a specific job to do and must work quickly. With the help of the dogs, it will up to you, Mae and Emma, to keep the sheep moving, so that there’s always a sheep ready for each shearer to grab, drag and shear.”

We wandered about the shed and I noticed that names had been carved into the walls and the many wooden posts inside the shed. One that stood out to me was ‘Pani E’ and it didn’t look like it had been there for as long as some of the other names. I asked Walt whether inscribing names inside woolsheds was some kind of ritual amongst shearing gang members.

“It’s something that shearers and fleece girls have done for donkey’s years. I don’t rightly know how it all began or why. *When* it became a tradition is probably fifty odd years ago, when it became common for shearing sheds to be built on farms.”

“I noticed one inscription that looks like ‘Pani E.’ Would that be your niece?”

“Aye, it would be. Pani was born into a family of shearers from up the East Coast and, amongst other things, she’s done skirting in this shed.”

I felt my eyes widen and I searched Walt’s face.

“But she’s your niece. I don’t understand. Esther told me that Pani is the daughter of your brother and his wife.”

“Now is not the time for these questions, Emma,” said Walt, frowning. “What’s more important is that I explain to you and Mae a bit more about what to expect tomorrow, and also make you both aware of shearing shed lingo, so that you’ve got

some understanding of what's going on and why, when the shearers and shed hands are working."

We walked over to where Mae stood looking at the shearing equipment, seemingly intrigued.

Walt explained that the shed housed what is known as a four-stand overhead shaft-driven shearing system.

"The four stands are where each of the four shearers will work. They will bring their own shearing hand-pieces and attach them to the metal stalks you see hanging down. Tomorrow, girls, when this shed becomes a slightly frenzied place to work, there's a chance that one of you may be called upon to do more than keep the sheep coming, and lend a hand up here where all the action will be taking place. The board, as it is known, is where we are standing now and obviously it's where the shearers work. And it's from here that the shorn sheep are tossed down the chutes into the outdoor counting-pen, all pristine pink and naked."

I doubt anything Walt said could have prepared me for the frenetic whirl of activity that the woolshed became, when the gang started work. Firstly there was the cacophony of noise. Dogs barked, sheep protested, shearing machines buzzed and members of the shearing gang shouted instructions and cursed loudly. The shed lacked ventilation and the smell of lanolin and excrement, combined with the smell of sweaty bodies was almost overpowering. The rousies performed many tasks, including collecting up the fleece and throwing it out over a slatted table, where scruffy and stained ends were removed, and bits of twigs and things. At some stage I became aware that this process is called skirting. I also caught glimpses of the girls sorting the wool into piles, according to the quality or grade of the wool, which is called classing. Another task was operating the wool press, which compressed the

wool into a hessian sack. All the while the board was swept regularly and without interruption to the shearers.

Mae and I were responsible for keeping the sheep moving from the large holding pens, to the smaller pens, and finally to the catching pens. It was important to keep the catching pens topped up because it was from the catching pen that each shearer grabbed and dragged a sheep across the board.

Dearest Clifford,

What a week this has been! My first day in the woolshed with the shearers and the rousies was quite an education. Isn't 'rousies' a strange word? I think it's more polite to call them fleece girls or shed hands, but I've noticed that shearing people are not very polite. They are loud, they cuss frequently and they drink a lot. I couldn't believe my eyes when I saw how many beer crates were being carried into the shearers' quarters when they first arrived. But it is amazing to see them work. The shearers grab the sheep by the front legs, drag it over the board on its back and hold its head between their legs and shear so that the fleece came off in one piece, just like peeling off a jacket that's still in the shape of the animal. It's so clever and done so fast, I just wanted to keep on watching, but I needed to keep my mind on the job of keeping the sheep coming. I also watched the rousie collect up the fleece, bundle it up and then throw it over the wool table, so that it landed on the table back in the shape of the sheep. It must take a lot of practice for that to happen. Then someone picked out poopy bits and things like biddy bids from the fleece, then it was graded by a 'classer' and then someone worked the press. The press is hand-operated and pushes the wool hard down into a sack, so it becomes a wool bale. Then the top of the sack is sewn together by hand with baling twine threaded through an enormous needle.

When you think that four shearers were going flat out and each fleece is processed the same way, that's a lot of work for the rousies. They must have to keep their minds on what they are doing the whole time. The board, which is where the shearers work, also has to be swept regularly and the rousie has to stay out of the way of the shearers. I don't think I ever really thought about how bent over shearers are the whole time they are working. They must be very fit and strong, and I understand why they take long breaks.

Mae and I are enjoying being back in the house briefly, and we are making plans to travel to Wellington when shearing is over, and the ewes go to the Ewe Fair, and the farm is less busy. Mae suggested that we visit a dance hall in Wellington, which I am looking forward to, but the only person I really want to dance with is you. My darling, I wish I knew of a way to take from your mind the horrors you have experienced and the disillusionment that hangs over you. Stay strong for me, and stay well, and one day you will be in my arms and we will dance together, under the stars. Perhaps we will look up at the stars and imagine that we are dancing amongst them and through the vast heavens.

Until then, my love, may God bless you and may the trouble and strife that ever haunts you soon end. My days are long and busy, but you are always in my thoughts.

Emma

"Mae, have you ever peeked inside Walt and Esther's room?"

Mae and I were sitting in a shady spot under a fir tree drinking black tea. It was lunchtime and we'd finished eating the cold meat sandwiches, pikelets and raisin buns, which Esther had packed into a picnic basket for us. She had passed it to us as we left the house after breakfast. The shearing gang wasn't due to start back after

their break for another forty minutes and we were waiting for them. They usually took a one hour break for lunch.

"That's an odd question. I haven't *peeked* inside their room, but yesterday I was in their room. It was in the morning. I was up before you and when I came back from the bathroom I saw Esther sitting on their bed, rubbing her shoulder. When I asked if there was anything I could do for her, she said her shoulder was aching and it was wash day for their sheets, and would I mind helping her strip the bed. And so I did."

"Did you notice a framed photo of a young soldier in the room?"

"Yes I did, and I asked Esther about that handsome young man. But I soon wished I hadn't. She said it was her son, Lindsay, and that he was in a better place. I felt awful and wished I'd kept my mouth shut. I don't know who I thought that person was, but I didn't expect that it would be her son. I'd never heard her or Walt mention children and I figured that if they had a son, then he would've stayed at the farm because he was needed, and that he would be exempt from conscription."

I swallowed hard.

"Did you just say that Lindsay is the name of the soldier in the photograph and that he's Walt and Esther's son?"

"*Dead* son, yes. You've gone pale, Emma. What is it? And why did you ask if I'd peeked inside their room? What do you take me for?"

Before I could begin answering Mae's questions, we became aware of loud talking and laughing and saw that members of the shearing gang were making their way back to the shed. The one in the lead went to the motor room and started the petrol engine which drove the shearing machinery. It was like a signal that the third session of shearing for that day was about to begin. Mae and I packed up the picnic basket and walked quickly towards the pens, where we would continue to shoo

woolley sheep up ramps and through gates by swinging our arms and making woofing noises, as needed.

Dearest Emma,

Day broke behind a cloudy sky and the bang of an early gun caused my heart to beat very fast. It pecked at me from the inside, like the sharp beak of a frightened bird. How I wish for days which begin peacefully, and for nights when I don't have to sleep in my uniform and boots.

Yes, news of the Americans in New Zealand has reached us. There is quite a strong feeling of prejudice against them, which gets worse when one of our chaps receives a letter saying that his sweetheart has jilted him and taken up with a Yank. You may be surprised to know that this is already happening. My darling, I have every faith in you and it is better that you go to Wellington with someone, than go alone. You will be able to look out over the harbour, which is quite beautiful. I remember well the caress of brisk clean air on my face as I stood and looked back at the city of Wellington as the ship steamed away from the docks. The colourful rooftops of the houses scattered on the hills seemed to bask in the sun that day. A day that seems far away now. A day when I would never have imagined that I would be subjected to the horrors that I've been subjected to, experience disillusionment to the level that I've experienced it, and witness the appalling behaviour I've witnessed. In all honesty, there have been occasions when I, too, have behaved badly and in ways that I now regret.

Just to see your handwriting, Emma, does me good and takes my mind away from the ugliness that surrounds me. Somehow the separation seems less when I read your letters, so please don't be worried about what you write because I am interested in everything you do. You are honest and sweet and I pray that God will

keep you safe in Wellington. I long for the day that I will return to that harbour and find myself in a place of peace and serenity, and feel your arms about me once again. I love you and miss you so very much.

Clifford

"I'm picking that by the end of tomorrow's second session, Esther, all our sheep will be shorn."

"That's marvellous," said Esther, bringing a lamb roast to the table on a meat plate. There was already a pan of roast vegetables on the table and a jug of gravy.

"I suppose you girls will have a pretty good understanding, now, about wool handling and raising sheep. Lord knows, they can be very annoying animals. They have a knack for finding a hole or a weak spot in fences and squeezing or pushing through to nibble at grass on the other side, because it might be just that bit tastier that what's in their own paddock. But our Lindsay was so clever at spotting fences that needed repairing, and fixing them before we had escapees. Isn't that so, Walt?"

"Aye, he was."

Mae and I exchanged glances, but spoke nothing.

"Oh, silly me. Now I've gone away from what it was that I wanted to say."

"You were talking about sheep, love."

"Ah, yes. That's right. It's a blessing that you've come this far and neither of you have had a sheep charge you. I don't know what it is. They can look like they're all going to follow the leader, and then one will just take into their head to turn and run at you, and leap, especially rams. Some city folks think that sheep can't jump, but they most certainly can."

"Woolley jumpers," said Walt with a wry grin.

Mae and I laughed at the pun. We had seen a few sheep jump, but thankfully none had jumped towards us, or leaped out of the pens.

"I was being serious, Walt. There are some things these young ladies have yet to see and learn."

Walt's grin had disappeared and he looked pensive.

"Esther, I'm not sure …"

"While you two were busy over at the shearing shed, Walt found a dead ewe in the paddock with a dead lamb close to her. It was dead because the mother wasn't able to get up and lick the mucus away from its nose, because she had become what we call 'cast' very soon after giving birth. In this case, the unshorn, cast ewe had rolled over on to her broad woolly back, legs flailing in the air, and wasn't able to stand up again. She would've become very distressed and died fairly quickly. It's one of the reasons for riding out and checking on the ewes at lambing time. Pregnant ewes are prone to becoming cast, but this proves that it can happen *after* birthing, as well. What I'm leading up to, girls, is that Walt plucked the wool from the dead sheep. The smell of a dead sheep is terrible and plucking the wool from one is a job that I felt should have been shared between the two of you. But Walt felt differently. I'm telling you this because although you've learned a lot, you need to understand that there's still a lot of learning to do and a number of not-so-nice tasks you haven't been asked to perform yet."

I couldn't think of anything to say in response and looked at the slices of roast lamb, smothered in gravy, on my plate. Images of the lamb that died before it took its first breath crept across my mind and I wished Esther hadn't spoken of it at the dinner table.

"Thank you, Walt. Me and Emma are very grateful to you for sparing us that awful job. But Esther is right. We're here to work on the land and with the animals,

and if there's a dead sheep that requires plucking, then we should be doing it. If you make things too easy for us and Esther keeps cooking delicious meals for us, such as the one we have in front of us right now, then we might not want to leave. Even when the war comes to an end."

Walt sniggered.

"That's the spirit, young Mae. And, Esther, I do believe you were just complimented on your cooking. The girls haven't tasted your shortbread yet, either. Been so long since you made it, I just about forgot what it tastes like myself."

"Walter Evans, you are incorrigible," said Esther.

Later that evening, after a long soak in a hot bath, Mae and I lay on our beds, enjoying the comforts of the farmhouse. I thought about the response Mae made at the meal table, after Esther spoke about the cast sheep.

"It was nice of you to include me when you thanked Walt for plucking the dead sheep for us, Mae."

"What? Oh that. I figure Esther needed to tell us about it because it bothers her that we're out of the house so much, and spend a lot of time with Walt, while she's stuck inside on her own, cooking and cleaning. Also I thought it was interesting that she mentioned Lindsay's name. At lunchtime you looked shocked when I told you about Walt and Esther's son and I'd like to know why."

"I'm not sure where to begin."

"You can start by telling why you think I'd sneak into Walt and Esther's room."

"Not sneak. Peek. Their door is almost always closed, but the other day it was open just a bit, so I stuck my head in. That's when I saw the photo. It's all a bit mysterious, Mae."

"What's mysterious? You're being mysterious."

"When I was here on my own, I was feeling low because Clifford's letters were few and far between, and I talked to Esther about it. She didn't really offer any comfort, but what she did do was tell me about Walt's niece, Pani, who had a fiancée called Lindsay. And Lindsay died without Pani ever receiving a letter from him."

"Maybe it's not the same Lindsay."

"Yeah, but there's more."

"I thought there might be."

"You know how there's all those names carved around the walls and posts in the shearing shed?"

"Yes."

"Well I found Pani's name and I checked with Walt and he said it was indeed his niece who had signed that name. Then he went on to say that this Pani had worked in the shed doing skirting. But the most puzzling thing he said was that Pani had been born into a family of shearers from up the East Coast."

"Did Esther say anything about Pani's family?

"She said that Pani's parents are Walt's brother and his wife, Aubrey and Iris. She also said that Pani had Lindsay's baby and lives with Aubrey and Iris, who adore their *grand-daughter*."

"Holy smokes! That's confusing. Perhaps I misunderstood what Esther said. But I'm too tired to try and figure this all out just now, so I say we get some sleep. How about you do us both a favour, Emma, and hop up and turn out the light."

Dearest Emma,

It is a thrill to read your letters and I can tell that you are enjoying learning about farm life, even though your days are sometimes long and arduous. Do you

think about life after this terrible war ends? You will know so much about the land and about animals that I wonder if you and I might go farming after we marry, and raise animals together. I have to keep looking forward and believing that I will return to you, or I fear I will lose my sanity.

Too many good blokes have been lost and now my cobber, Tiaki, is gone, which saddens me more than I can say. We were taking part in a campaign. There's no point in telling you where because I know the location will be blacked out by the censor. We had performed our duties as soldiers automatically, feverishly. A peculiar refrain throbbed in my brain and hammered in my heart – "I don't want to be here! I shouldn't be here!" – and then I heard Tiaki's deathly cry for help. It was to be the last thing he would utter. At last the explosions stopped and dark descended, but the sound of confusion and yelps of pain and terror were like a continuous bombardment.

These are things I cannot write about to anyone other than you, Emma, and there are times when I think it selfish to burden you with accounts of my suffering. But I do find it helps to write about how I'm feeling and what I'm experiencing, even if I don't go into a lot of detail. Right now I'm looking up at a patch of blue sky and thinking about you and the stream you described at the farm. How wonderful it would be to sit with you beneath a tree, and listen to the twitter of birds and hear the soothing sound of water flowing through rocks. And then, looking up, we would see not merely a patch of blue sky, but a vast blue canvas. Maybe we would sit there and watch the sun go down, and the sky become ink-black, punctuated by stars.

Did I tell you that I have seen women tending crops and working as farm and field labourers in the desert? Perhaps they have done so since Biblical times. Many of us marvelled at the stamina of these women, working in the heat in their robes and carrying loads on their heads, presumably sacks of barley, which they

transferred to camels and donkeys – their equivalent of pack horses. How sad it is that some farmers in New Zealand thought that ladies wouldn't be useful on the land, and that farm work was unsuitable for young women. No doubt Walt is grateful to have you and Mae as helpers, and I hope he continues to treat you well.

I will wait to hear of your experiences in Wellington, although I know you are only there for a short time. Apparently the American soldiers and marines shower young ladies with compliments, cigarettes and stockings and are hopeful of something in return. I am convinced of your love and commitment to me, so I pay no mind to these reports.

God keep you safe, my darling. You are forever in my thoughts.

Clifford

Mae and I had settled back into the shearers' quarters and were looking forward to travelling to Wellington on Friday night. It being Monday, I walked to the mail box, replaying in my mind a conversation that Esther had with me briefly when I was in the wash house, cleaning myself up. I'd spent the day shovelling horse manure from the paddocks into sacks, and grubbing thistles with a spade. Walt and Mae had gone out to crutch sheep with blade shears.

"Emma, dear, I've been waiting for a chance to speak with you on your own. I think an apology from me is long overdue."

"Whatever for, Esther?"

"Very belatedly, it occurred to me that I probably confused you that day that we talked about letters and Pani and her fiancée, Lindsay. At the time, I just couldn't bring myself to admit that Lindsay was our boy. Our dear boy, who …"

Esther never did finish that sentence. When she hesitated, I placed my hand on her shoulder and then we both became aware of Mae laughing loudly and Walt

gesticulating, as they made their way up the path. In a flash, Esther scuttled back inside the house, muttering something about having to check on her steak and kidney pie.

After dinner, and on our way down to the shearers' quarters, I told Mae that I knew for certain that Lindsay was Walt and Esther's son.

"Are you still taken up with that? I'm taken up with heading to Wellington in a few days."

It was the first opportunity we'd had to wear our Land Service dress uniforms and the first time either of us had worn a neck tie. Mae tied mine swiftly and masterfully, but I struggled with tying hers. In the end, I held a mirror in front of her and she did her own. I thought that Mae looked particularly elegant in her matching skirt and blaze. Fixed to her uniform beret, as stipulated in the WLS handbook, was the oval-shaped Land Service copper badge, with its inward curving fern on each side and sheath of wheat in the centre. The beret was tilted, so that Mae's left ear was exposed, and her hair was pulled neatly back into a bun at the nape of her neck.

We picked up our suitcases and walked up to the house. It felt strange not to be wearing boots and the neck tie felt uncomfortable. A surprised look came over Esther's face when we entered the house, and she said, "Oh my, but don't you two polish up real good."

Walt clicked his tongue and agreed.

We farewelled Esther and made ourselves as comfortable as we could in Walt's truck. It looked cleaner than I had ever seen it look before. The three of us sat along the bench seat in the cab and Mae was in the middle. I hopped out to open and close the gate, and once I was settled back inside the truck, Walt announced that he had some things to say.

"I don't want any interruptions, what's more. There are times when a man needs to speak what he needs to speak, and this is one of those times."

Mae looked at me with raised eyebrows. We were unused to Walt being less than jovial.

"Firstly, Emma, I'm obliged to you for keeping your curiosity in check, and not asking Esther about Pani's name in the shearing shed. If you had, it would have made her upset and very possibly re-opened old wounds. The truth about it is that our boy was mad keen to go to war. It seemed like the more Esther and I tried to talk him out of it and the more we warned him about the dangers and told him he was needed on the farm, the more determined he became to sign up. He was our cowman and fencer, and my oath, he had a knack for getting fences ruler-straight. Anyway, we lost our Lindsay on the battlefield and Esther nearly lost her mind. She damaged her shoulder because she rushed at a tree in a heightened state of grief."

Walt paused. I bit my lip and looked out of the window, fighting back tears. I heard Mae murmur something like, "Dear God."

"As for Pani, I honestly do think of her as my niece. My brother, Aubrey, is married to Iris and her people practice whāngai. Pani's birth parents are members of a shearing gang, but she was raised by Aubrey and Iris. She's been with them since she was 10 months old, if I remember rightly. And now Pani has a daughter around the same age, and that little one is Lindsay's child, our grand-daughter."

We arrived at the station and Walt stopped the truck. My mouth felt dry and it was hard to find words of thanks and farewell, when Walt passed us our luggage.

"I'll see you ladies back here on Sunday afternoon. Mind how you go in the capital city and watch out for those devilish and smooth talking Yankee boys," he said with a wink.

It was reassuring to see that Walt was back to his usual, good-humoured self. We thanked him, promised to behave ourselves and waved as we watched him drive away.

We went to the ticket office and then sat outside on the platform.

"Blimey, Emma. Those things that Walt told us. It's taking time for it all to sink in."

"I'm feeling such a mixture of emotions, Mae. I feel sorry for Walt and Esther, and sorry for Pani, who I've never met, and annoyed with myself for asking questions. But mostly I feel relieved that I didn't press Esther for answers."

In the distance we heard the familiar sound of a train whistle and soon we were stepping inside a carriage and heading down the North Island Main Trunk line. As the train rattled and clattered along, I thought about Clifford, heading along this same railway line, stopping first at Trentham Military Camp for training, and then on to Wellington, where he began his long journey to the other side of the world.

Mae gazed out the window, her carefully rouged face and red lips reflecting in the glass. We passed through farmland and I smiled to myself, thinking about how different Mae and I looked now, compared to a typical day on the farm. As Mae seemed content not to talk, I pulled Clifford's latest letter from my handbag.

Dearest Emma,

I received a most welcome parcel from your mother. She sent a hand-knitted scarf and hussif, made from calico. It is a small fold-out sewing kit, useful for mending. She also included a fruit cake, and some toiletry items. It was so thoughtful of her, and I am humbled because I expect that it is difficult for her to make ends meet. Your Ma also enclosed a card and wrote that she expects that I would probably rather receive a parcel from you, but it's just not possible for you to

bake or put a parcel together. She seems in good heart and I think she is proud of you, for all you are doing for the war effort and all you are learning.

"Is that a letter from Clifford? Does he know you're heading to Wellington?"

I stopped reading, folded the page over, and met Mae's eyes.

"Yes it's a letter from Clifford, and I did let him know that we were planning a visit to Wellington."

"I don't think I've ever told you this, Emma, but I think you're very lucky. Clifford seems like an angel of a man."

"He's very special and dear to me."

Massive and seemingly circular in shape, Wellington Harbour was very visible from the train carriage as we approached the station, and I was quite taken by its beauty. We passed office blocks, harbour buildings and wharves, and wedged against one wharf was a huge warship, which I assumed was American. Before I had a chance to fully take in the sights, it was time to step down off the train and in that instant I felt bombarded by sound and movement. Carriage doors banged shut and the station hummed and buzzed and swarmed with people. Outside the station, trams rumbled and appeared to compete with taxis and private cars for road space. Pedestrians chattered and laughed and occasionally collided. People were spilling out of shops and lining up to enter others. I wondered if Clifford's first experience of Cairo was similar to this.

Mae put her hand on my elbow and steered me in the direction of the tram stop. We needed to make our way to Cuba Street, where the hostel was, and Mae was certain that there was a dance hall in the same street. Mae seemed in no doubt as to which way to go and I wondered if she had travelled to Wellington previously.

Although this was my first visit to the capital city, it wasn't necessarily Mae's, I realised.

"You seem very sure of where you're going. Have you been to Wellington before, Mae?"

"I have a good sense of direction. But since you ask, yes I have been here before."

Young men in smart green uniforms strolled along and looked our way, some with a young woman on each arm. Others stopped and gestured for us to go first, if they were coming towards us and the footpath was narrow. Two offered help with carrying our bags and their accent intrigued me. Mae thanked them, but declined their offer, saying that we were only going as far as the tram stop and that we were almost there. On the tram, uniformed soldiers happily gave up their seats for us, and one asked Mae about the uniform she was wearing. My first impressions were that the Americans took pride in their appearance, and they were courteous. I liked the way they doffed their hats when we came close to them.

In the gathering dusk, the tram took us up Cuba Street and I caught glimpses of the harbour from a distance. Buildings of different sizes, shapes and colours clustered around the harbour, reminding me of people jostling for a better view. Thrusting skyward above the buildings were wharf cranes; rusty, rigid and purposeful. Wellington Harbour seemed to beckon to me and I resolved that one of the first things I would do the next morning, would be to stroll down Cuba Street and find my way through the maze of inner city streets to King's Wharf. I remembered that Clifford wrote that it was from King's Wharf that the *Empress of Japan* sailed, with him and other members of his Battalion aboard.

"Stop daydreaming, Emma, this is our stop!"

I picked up my things and Mae and I stepped off the tram. The hostel was a two-storeyed weatherboard building and the front door opened into a high-ceilinged hallway. The woman at the front desk smiled and welcomed us and, moments later, was leading us up the stairs and unlocking the room we would share. She pointed to the bathroom at the end of the hallway, and explained that all guests shared the same facilities. We were also made aware that there was strictly no alcohol to be consumed in the building, and that drunken behaviour would not be tolerated. Also smoking was prohibited in the building, and there was to be no male visitors.

Mae asked the woman if she knew where the Empire Dance Hall was.

"Yes, I do. It's in this street, about two blocks further up. The Empire is above some shops and has the most beautiful dance floor, made from native timber, so I'm told."

"Thank you. We'll probably go dancing tonight and tomorrow night. It might be quite late when we get back."

"The dances usually begin at eight o'clock and finish on the dot of midnight. The band takes a break around ten and supper is served. Perhaps you could walk back after supper. It might be safer. But if you do stay on at the hall, please be mindful of the other guests and try to be as quiet as you can when you come in."

Mae nodded and thanked the woman, and she left us. Then we flopped on to our beds and agreed that they were much more comfortable than our beds in the shearers' quarters. We decided that after a bath, we would change out of our uniforms and walk to the dance hall.

The excitement of the evening began as we walked up the staircase and heard the band. And then we were in the room, seemingly packed to the rafters with Americans who looked like film stars. They were all smiles, had pearly white teeth and their

short hair was slick and shiny. Their uniforms had a tailored look about them and were immaculate. I turned to Mae, intending to make a joke about the benefits of Brylcreem, but stopped myself when I noticed she had linked arms with a Clark Gable look-alike. They made their way to the dance floor and I watched in amazement as those who were already dancing performed the most incredible dance steps. It seemed to me that the women were being thrown about like rag dolls. Clearly the slow dancing that Clifford and I enjoyed so much wasn't the kind of dancing that took place at this dance hall. And then a handsome man with gentle brown eyes and a dazzling smile came and spoke to me. He asked me to dance, but I said this kind of dancing was new to me and I'd rather not. The young man told me his name and asked if it would be all right if we just sat and talked.

"Of course," I said and I could feel myself blushing.

Elmer seemed genuinely interested in getting to know me. He told me he came from Mobile, Alabama and I admitted that I'd never heard of that place.

"Well, now, you might find this hard to believe, and I don't mean to offend you, but some of us boys didn't know anything about New Zealand before there was talk of us coming here. A few of us even had a notion that New Zealand was part of Australia."

"Really?"

"I swear, it's true. But about my home town. Mobile is in the state of Alabama, so that makes me a Southern Boy. Mobile is well known for its dockyards and ship building, especially since the war started."

"So Mobile is a port city. I grew up in a port city as well. It's called Napier and it's in Hawke's Bay. It's a port that goods are ferried in and out of, but ships aren't built there.

"Is Hawke's Bay in what you people call the North Island?"

I chuckled and tried to explain to Elmer where Hawke's Bay was in relation to Wellington. I also told him some things I thought would interest him about Hawke's Bay, such as it's an area where there are many farms and orchards, and that there's a canning factory south of Napier, which employs many people. Elmer listened and nodded and I went on to tell him that I'd been directed to work on a farm in Hawke's Bay, even though I had no previous farm experience.

"Here, in New Zealand, it used to be that men did farm work, and farmers' wives. But now, of course, there's a shortage of male workers on farms."

"Me and other boys think that the milk that comes from the cows on your New Zealand farms is pretty good. It's creamier and tastier than what we're used to. I'm interested to hear you say that womenfolk are doing work that men used to do, though. That's very similar to what's happening in Mobile. We've got women working in the shipyards and doing jobs that men who joined the military used to do. They have to do risky work, like welding, and jobs where they have to do heavy lifting, and they get dirty and grubby. My sister has a child and she's being put under pressure to join the labour force, just like everyone else. It's all for the greater good of the country is what the ladies of Mobile are being told."

Elmer offered me nothing other than warm and interesting conversation, and before I knew it, supper was being served.

I thought about Mae while I drank a cup of tea and ate a pikelet. If the pikelet had been spread with butter, I couldn't see or taste it, but it was generously topped with plum jam. My guess was that the jam was home-made, because it was equally as tasty and fruity as Ma's. There was no sign of Mae as I looked around the room. Before we left the hostel, she gave me the bedroom key because she thought I'd take better care of it than her. Or was it that she didn't expect to return to the hostel with me? I pushed that thought from my mind.

I told Elmer that I was ready to leave, but I couldn't find the friend that I came with. I checked the toilets and looked around the hall once more, but Mae was nowhere to be seen. Elmer insisted on walking out with me and we linked arms and he escorted me back to the hostel. A warm wind was blowing, and now and then the moon came out from behind the sailing clouds. In the milky light, the footpath was pale silver. We stopped when we reached the hostel and I felt Elmer's lips brush my forehead.

"Sure was nice meeting you, Emma, and getting to know you some. I've got duties at camp tomorrow, but I'll be at church on Sunday morning, if you'd like to meet up. St Paul's. Mulgrave Street."

"I'll keep that in mind, Elmer. Thank you for seeing me home. This has been a wonderful evening and I've really enjoyed talking with you."

"The pleasure was mine."

As I headed towards my room inside the hostel, all I could think of was how charming and polite Elmer was, and how much I adored his accent. Every syllable was spoken slowly and distinctly.

But my thoughts returned to Mae as I got ready for bed. I was concerned for her safety and wished I knew where she was. Leaving the door to the room unlocked, I pulled the bedclothes up over my shoulders and tried to stay awake, willing Mae to breeze through the door. During our walk, Elmer and I had passed one or two small groups standing in shadows, smoking and drinking beer. Their silhouetted forms stood out, inky black against the luminous sky, and the tips of their cigarettes glowed. As far as Elmer and I could tell, no harm was being done. They were just people milling around and talking.

Sleep overtook me and I woke when light began to peak through the window. Looking over to Mae's bed, I was relieved to see her in it. She was sound asleep, flat on her back, her fair hair scattered across the pillow.

I washed and dressed, and as Mae was still sleeping, I left a note to say that I was heading down to the harbour. On my way, I picked up a paper from the newsagent, where men in uniform browsed the stock as it if were a free library. They sniggered over comics and leafed through magazines, looking at the pictures. Someone with an American accent greeted me and asked if I was going their way, but I ignored him. I was captivated by a headline about New Zealand soldiers being due for furlough. It was confirmation of something Clifford had written in his last letter. I paid for the paper and continued walking, intending to find a quiet place to read the article properly, and re-read Clifford's letter.

It wasn't long before I found myself across the road from the railway station, and from there I could see the wharves. Through tall wrought iron gates, I was able to read the *King's Wharf* sign on a rectangular brick building surrounded by wooden crates. I could also see that a ship was docked at the wharf, and immediately I thought of Clifford boarding the troop ship on a day such as this, when the sun shone and the sea sparkled. I found a seat, close to the waterfront, and breathed in the salty fragrance of the sea. It was an oddly stirring scent, which made me at once nostalgic and restless, and yet warm, happy and expectant.

Blocking out the noise and bustle of pedestrians and traffic, I unfolded the newspaper and read the article about the Prime Minister's intention to offer extended furlough to those who served in the Middle East with the First, Second and Third Echelons of the New Zealand Expeditionary Force. Then I re-read the paragraph in Clifford's letter which had occupied my mind since I first read it at the farm.

The men are in a state of weariness and physical and mental exhaustion, Emma, and it is for this reason that the decision has been made to send us all home on extended furlough. This will be hard for you to believe, I know, but very soon I'll be coming home for possibly three months. It will be a truly wonderful break. I feel myself quivering with excitement and anticipation as I write this.

My darling Emma, I'm coming home. I'm coming home. I'm coming home.

Yours forever,

Clifford.

On my walk back to the hostel, I stopped at the Kiwi Milk Bar in Manners Street. I'd never seen a Milk Bar before, and although I'd heard of milkshakes, I'd never tasted one, so I decided to order something called a 'double malt.' Several men in uniform greeted me when I entered the shop and I nodded politely, but didn't engage in conversation. My mind was full. The likelihood of Clifford returning in the near future was all-consuming. I'd been sceptical when I first read his letter, but now it felt safe to believe it.

The milkshake was frothy, tasty and refreshing, and I sipped it slowly. Continuing on my walk, I marvelled at the many and varied shops in Cuba Street, which all seemed to be attracting customers. I passed tobacconists, florists, jewellers, confectioners, booksellers and stationers, dressmakers and tailors, shops offering laundry and pressing services, barber shops, men's and women's shoe shops, and shops selling souvenirs and curios. There was even a shoe-shine boy, working industriously at his task in an alleyway.

At last I reached the hostel, wishing I'd worn more comfortable shoes. It also felt odd to be wearing court shoes, instead of boots. I opened the door and saw a

young man with a brown leather satchel standing at the reception desk. The receptionist seemed agitated.

"Oh, I'm so pleased you're back. You're Emerald Dineen. Is that correct?"

"Yes, that's me. Whatever is the matter?"

"There's a telegram for you."

The young man with the satchel turned and spoke my name. He placed a feather-light envelope in my hand and it felt like a stone. I walked slowly up the stairs, deciding to read the telegram in the room, and mindful that telegrams usually contained very good news, or very bad news. And bad news was more common at wartime.

I entered the room, to find Mae in her housecoat and wearing a towel, like a turban, on her head.

"Emma. There you are. The receptionist was looking for you. Something about a telegram."

"I have it. I haven't opened it, though."

I sat on the bed and Mae sat close to me, sliding her arm around my shoulders. Together we read the following message:

YOUR MOTHER NEEDS YOU. TAKE FIRST TRAIN TO NAPIER. ESTHER

We looked at each other and laughed like schoolgirls, which wasn't very fair to Ma. But I think we both felt a sense of relief that it wasn't news that Clifford had been captured by the enemy, or had been fatally wounded, or was missing in action.

Mae said she'd get dressed and towel-dry her hair while I packed my things.

"We'll take a taxi to the railway station. We need to get you on a train as soon as we can. Whatever's happened to your mother, I hope it isn't too serious."

I was grateful to Mae for taking control. Concern for Ma was mounting and it was difficult to think clearly.

Mae and I left the hostel and were soon riding in a taxi. I'd never been in a taxi before and didn't know how to hail one, but Mae knew what to do. As we headed towards the station, I thanked Mae for accompanying me.

"Someone has to steady you and keep an eye on you. Speaking of which, last night it looked to me like you were getting more than a little bit friendly with a certain Marine."

"He was nice. We were just talking. His name is Elmer and he comes from Alabama. Where did you disappear to?"

"I danced for a bit and then went outside for a smoke and a smooch. Someone suggested going to a nightclub and before I knew what was happening, that was where I was headed. There was a group of us, so stop looking doubtful, Emma. But some of what I saw going on between couples in shop entranceways was an eye-opener, I can tell you."

The cab reached the big brick railway station and I paid the driver. Compared to last night, the station was quiet. I changed my ticket and the cashier told me I wouldn't have more than a 15 minute wait for the next north-bound train.

Mae and I hugged briefly and she left. I sat and re-read the telegram and my thoughts drifted to Ma until the train steamed up to the platform. It wasn't long before there was a final whistle and I was once again experiencing the now very-familiar sway of a railway carriage. Unlike yesterday, when at every stop small groups boarded the train and few people left it, today many of the stations were empty of people waiting to board. At Woodville I changed trains and entered a carriage where another woman sat, who, before I could sit down, asked what uniform I was wearing. I told her and she frowned, but said nothing. With all that was in my mind, I didn't feel like chatting and chose to sit alone and read the newspaper I bought in

Wellington. The train eventually reached Waipukurau Station and I thought I caught a glimpse of Walt's truck outside the Tavistock Hotel.

Heading towards Hastings, I was surprised at how dry and yellowish-brown the hills of Havelock North looked. They reminded me of huge sand dunes, and I thought about one of Clifford's early letters, when he wrote about going on a long train journey across the desert and seeing tawny sand hills. I took out Clifford's latest letter and read it again, and finally the train crawled to a stop at Napier.

I stepped down from the train and walked quickly to Ma's house. The street was the same, the house was the same, but I was not the same. I fumbled for the house keys, opened the door and called out for Ma.

"In here, dear."

She was lying on the sofa with a cast on her arm. I placed my arms around her and we wept.

"I'm sorry to have caused fuss and bother, my darling girl. The blasted cat from next door got under my feet when I was bringing wood in for the range and down I went. And the doctor says my elbow is fractured."

"I'll make a cup of tea, Ma, and we'll talk."

Ma told me that neighbours were visiting every day, bringing food and helping out with household chores.

"But I don't want to be talking all about me. I want to hear about you. You look healthy. Farm work has put colour in your cheeks. And my how smart you look in your uniform."

"I'm well, Ma, and I have some happy news."

I told Ma about Clifford's letter and the extended furlough that the Prime Minister had approved. She reached for my hand with her good arm and held it tight for some moments before she spoke.

"This is hard for me to say, but I fear it needs to be said, so that you can prepare yourself. The Clifford that left to go to war will not be the same Clifford who returns. War coarsens a man and that's the truth. The sweet and gentle soul who you farewelled has seen things and done things that will probably haunt him for the rest of his life. He will be changed. You have changed, too. You've not said much in your letters, but I imagine you've had to things at the farm that you wouldn't have enjoyed doing. But you did them all the same because it was expected of you. Perhaps in some ways you have become hardened and you don't realise you have. All I'm saying is this: Be understanding. Don't be alarmed by his inevitable changed appearance and demeanour. Persevere with kindness and you'll coax the old Clifford back to life."

The clock dinged six o'clock.

"I'm going to get some tea ready for us, Ma. But first I'll put my suitcase away and change out of my uniform."

"Thank you, dear. You'll find a half a cabbage and some carrots in the cupboard, and Mrs O'Connell was kind enough to drop in one of her tasty Cornish pasties, which we can share."

I went to my room and found it just as I left it. It felt like I hadn't seen it in years, rather than months. Sitting on the bed and slipping my shoes off, I thought about Ma's words. Part of me was cross with her for not being more enthusiastic about Clifford's return, but another part of me knew that she had spoken truth. Neither of us were the same. It would be naïve to believe that Clifford and I could simply pick up where we left off, like you do with knitting.

On my way to the kitchen, it occurred to me that I couldn't remember the last time I cooked. Preparing the meal was a pleasure and the familiar smell of boiled cabbage brought a smile to my lips.

I heard Ma calling, reminding me about black-out, and I went through the house, closing the curtains tightly. In the lounge I looked hard at Father's photo on the mantelpiece and realised that I'd never seen a photo of him with me. In baby photos, I was in Ma's arms or in the pram. Photos of me as a child were taken with Aunty Gladys or Uncle Clem.

Ma and I sat down at the dinner table and Ma remarked that I wasn't very talkative.

"Nothing's wrong, Ma. I've just been doing some thinking. I don't think I've ever seen a photo of me and Father."

"Your Father adored you, Emerald. But he was sick."

"Were you alarmed by Father's changed manner and appearance when he came home?"

"Not alarmed. But he was changed and I thought it was my duty to warn you that Clifford will be changed, too."

Changed, yes, but I imagined Clifford and I in the future, sitting on the veranda of our farmhouse in the warm evening air, purple clouds sweeping low over the paddocks. I imagined him looking at me the way he used to before he went away to war. I imagined us making love beneath cherry pink magnolia blooms.

Part Two

Tu: Reading the novel by Patricia Grace for insight into the role of New Zealand women during World War II

The critical portion of my thesis focuses on the female characters in *Tu* by Patricia Grace, published in 2004. Essentially a war novel, *Tu* traces the experiences of Te Hokowhitu-a-Tu, more commonly known as Tu but also referred to as 'Little Brother,' 'Tuboy'and 'Tu Bear.' Te Hokowhitu-a-Tu is a reference to the many warriors of Tumatauenga, the god of warfare in Māori mythology (Grace 7). Te Hokowhitu-a-Tu is also the name given to the New Zealand Māori (Pioneer) Battalion in World War I (1914-1918). Tu is the protagonist of Grace's novel and the youngest of three brothers and two sisters who grow up in a Māori whānau. Tu and his whānau live in rural Taranaki before he and his siblings and his mother move to central Wellington, a move that occurs after the death of his father, a former WWI serviceman. At no point is the reader made aware of the first names of Tu's parents, nor is there mention of Tu's surname. This missing information may indicate that the experiences of Tu and his family could be common to many twentieth century Māori whānau who experienced the upheavals of wartime and who left tribal lands and migrated to the city.

The novel's structurally complex narrative goes back and forth in time and intersperses Tu's experiences on the battlefield with issues his family face as they engage with city life. *Tu* is largely narrated by Tu, although between the chapters of Tu's war narrative is the third person perspective of the eldest child in Tu's family, Pita. Themes peppered throughout the text include watchfulness and being watched, culture and identity, and escape and running. At times Grace's unadorned prose in *Tu* imitates the easy, informal language of letters exchanged between family

members, or entries in a personal journal or diary. On no occasion previously have I seen 'back home' written as one word, but 'backhome' is a word that appears many times in *Tu*. Grace tends to use 'backhome' to convey a state of mind and Māori understandings. It is a word which connotes cultural awareness, collective identity and belonging.

Through the lens of dominant gender ideologies operating in New Zealand during the 1930s and 1940s, this essay will argue that the structurally complex nature of Grace's narrative mirrors the complex nature of war and its propensity for disruption, dislocation and destruction, on the battlefield as well as at home. It will also examine Grace's portrayal of what life looked like for the women who remained in Aotearoa while fathers, brothers, nephews and uncles went to war by joining the 28 (Māori) Battalion. This essay will show that Ma, although not the protagonist of Grace's novel, is an important character, who lived her life within clearly defined boundaries dominated by the social mores of the time, economic uncertainty, and her devotion to her whānau, her culture and her religious beliefs.

World War II lasted six years, 1939 through 1945. According to JF Cody, the 28 (Māori) Battalion was comprised entirely of volunteers and was one of a number of units which participated in direct tactical ground combat as part of the 2nd New Zealand Expeditionary Force (1). Throughout the war the Battalion was made up of approximately 700 men.

Cody further notes that the 28 (Māori) Battalion was divided into five companies and, for the most part, organised on a tribal basis. The Companies became known as A, B, C, D and 'Headquarters' and each Company was comprised as follows: 'A' Company was based on recruits from Northland and Auckland (Ngāpuhi, Ngāti Whātua and other tribes); 'B' Company consisted of men from Rotorua, Bay of

Plenty, Taupō, and the Thames–Coromandel areas (mostly from the Arawa confederation and Tūhoe tribes); 'C' Company was drawn from the Tairāwhiti/East Coast region (Ngāti Porou, Rongowhakaata and sub-tribes); 'D' Company, unlike the other Companies, drew its men from a very broad area. It consisted of men from the Waikato–Maniapoto confederation, the Taranaki, Wellington and Manawatū–Horowhenua tribes, Ngāti Kahungunu of Hawke's Bay–Wairarapa, the entire South Island, the Chatham Islands and Stewart Island. A number of Pacific Islanders who were living in New Zealand during the war also served with D Company. The Battalion's fifth company, 'Headquarters', drew recruits from all over Māoridom, but chiefly from the surplus of A, B and C Companies (5).

Māori enlistment remained voluntary throughout WWII, but conscription for non-Māori was introduced at the end of May 1940. As illustrated in Grace's novel, a number of factors inclined Māori men to join the army, not least of which were opportunities for adventure and perpetuating Māori warrior traditions, as well as a chance to experience something other than the rural lifestyle, which was so familiar to Māori at the time. This was true of the protagonist of Grace's novel, Tu, who as a college student, felt compelled to run towards battle and away from all that was familiar and what he considered was the restrictive protection of his family. As Tu himself states, "Out there, outside the school gates, away from my family and my mountain, there was a whole world to see, a Battalion to belong to, a war to fight in" (25). Soutar claims that joining the 28 (Māori) Battalion reflected an eagerness by Māori to prove themselves equal to Pākehā in combat. He further suggests that enlistment by Māori was seen by them as a means of earning "the full benefits and privileges of New Zealand citizenship, for even in 1939 the sense of equality and acceptance was marginal" (qtd. in McGibbon 309). Despite Ma's misgivings and the

spoken objections of aunts and uncles, Tu and both his brothers join the 28 (Māori) Battalion at different stages of the war, and leave Aotearoa to engage in combat.

The war years saw lives interrupted and few New Zealand women, regardless of ethnicity, were not impacted by the changes brought about by conflict. Non-Māori men between the ages of 19 and 45 became liable for active service and conscription resulted in large gaps appearing within many industries throughout Aotearoa. For the first time in New Zealand's one-hundred year history, women joined the workforce in considerable numbers. Taylor claims that in September 1939 the female labour force was estimated to be in the vicinity of 180,000. Four years later that number had swelled to approximately 236,000, including 8,000 women employed in the armed services (1074). As noted by Brookes, prior to January 1941 the armed services in New Zealand did not employ women (259).

Throughout the 1920s, there existed in New Zealand an idyll of home, family and prosperity, which was based on the concept of male breadwinning (Frank 113). It was an idyll predicated on the Kiwi male's ability to fulfil his prescribed role as provider for his household. As the economic downturn of the 1920s led into the Great Depression of the 1930s, however, two fundamental issues regarding paid employment and gender were highlighted: "the place of women in the paid workforce, and the performance of men as breadwinners" (Frank 114). As lack of employment opportunities and recession conditions took effect, the traditional breadwinner's capacity to provide more than the basic necessities for his loved ones was significantly reduced. This led to many couples adjusting their attitudes to breadwinning being an exclusively male domain, and, as a result, they became more relaxed in their views about workforce participation (Frank 115). Depression conditions were most strongly felt in New Zealand during the 1930s, and it was this

decade which saw male breadwinner ideology notably disrupted. Youths, single women and, to a lesser degree, married women sought and secured work to supplement the household income. There was an uneasy acceptance of women's employment during the Depression years, which shook but did not topple the general social principle of male breadwinning, any more than female participation in paid work during wartime did (Frank 121).

In September 1939 the Labour Government enacted Emergency War Regulations; and with the dawning of a new decade--following the grim years of recession--the composition of New Zealand's industrial workforce began to change markedly (Frank 132). Industrial conscription saw Kiwi women directed into essential occupational areas, such as farming, construction, postal services and meat and dairy processing – areas of employment that were previously more likely to be the domain of men. As indicated by Montgomerie, it was a period of dramatic social upheaval (*The Women's War* 9). Although New Zealanders became inclined to loosen their grip on the ideal that women's lives were best focused on family and domestic matters, they were disinclined to allow themselves to entirely dismiss traditional gendered views on economic roles. It is noteworthy that women over 40, and mothers of children under 16, were at no stage required to register for work in essential industries, and a significant number of childless women under 40 discovered that they could use arguments about the extent of their domestic duties and responsibilities to avoid industrial conscription, or at least soften its impact on their lives (*Sweethearts, Soldiers, Happy Families* 163).

That economic roles in New Zealand society were heavily gendered is borne out in a text written by Christina Guy in 1943. Guy was raising young children herself when she petitioned for State assistance for Kiwi mothers struggling with the

hardships and responsibilities associated with looking after a home, a husband and a family (5). In her opinion, adolescent children grew to maturity and almost certainly looked forward to marriage and enjoying "homes and families of their own" (58). However, cautioned Guy, given the many tasks that a wife and mother was expected to perform, caring for a home and family had the potential to become burdensome, because as well as being a companion to her husband and a mother to her children, she was "expected to be cook, dietician, housekeeper, laundress, dressmaker and, sometimes, assistant gardener" (12).

It is important to keep in mind that at this point in time, automation in the home barely existed and electrical appliances were few. In the majority of New Zealand homes in the 1940s, doing the laundry, for example, was a time-consuming and laborious task. Laundry was done in a copper boiler set in a concrete surround and heated by a fire beneath. The 'copper', as it was widely known, was filled and emptied by bucket and after the clothes and items of linen were washed, they were fed through a hand operated wringer (Keith 36). Guy felt strongly that in order for future home-makers to be capable and find a measure of contentment in their role, it was essential that all adolescent females receive training in the domestic sciences and "be given every available opportunity of learning how to run a home and care for children" (58). Guy, along with representatives of prominent women's organisations of the time, also endorsed the expansion of crèches and kindergartens, with a view to offering practical support and assistance to mothers of young children (Brookes 273).

While wives and mothers kept the home fires burning, women of all ages contributed to the war effort in various ways. Government institutions and the nation's voluntary organisations strived to provide soldiers, wherever they served, with some of the amenities and comforts of normal peacetime life (McGibbon 414).

The National Patriotic Fund Board was established in October 1939 and co-ordinated and funded agencies such as the YMCA and the Red Cross. The Board also collected monetary donations for the provision of comforts to New Zealand soldiers and sailors. It was responsible for libraries being set up in base camps, hostels and convalescent facilities, and it despatched newspapers and periodicals to the troops overseas regularly. Sports gear and hundreds of musical instruments were also supplied to the troops by the National Patriotic Fund Board. To a large extent, the work of the Board was made possible by the willing assistance of hundreds of New Zealanders who engaged in wartime activities which were unpaid. With wool supplied by the Board, women at home knitted balaclavas, mittens, scarves and socks, which were amongst the items packed into Red Cross parcels and sent to prisoners of war (POWs). Along with other activities which contributed to the welfare of the Forces, volunteer workers staffed military hospitals, convalescent homes and clubs for servicemen and women overseas. Back home, unpaid workers sewed and rolled bandages, baked cakes and packed parcels to send to POWs and to military personnel serving overseas (McGibbon 441).

According to Soutar (4), during the war years Māori women were tireless in their efforts to gather and prepare seafood and non-perishable food items to send overseas. They used dehydration to preserve karaka berries, shellfish and kumara, whilst other food was preserved in pork fat, sealed and sent to their fighting men. This practice was a way of keeping food traditions alive and maintaining close connection with kin far from home. This claim is supported by Ebbett, who notes that many parcels which contained a variety of food items prized by Māori, “including pipis, mussels and edible seaweed” (112) were especially welcome to members of the Māori Battalion in the Middle East. In addition to gathering and

sending traditional foods and as supporters of the Māori War Effort Organisation--a government body established primarily to assist with recruitment and to manage Māori war-related activities--Māori women created knitted items, sewed flannel singlets, held fundraising hāngi, and packed comforts for the troops on a volunteer basis (Brookes 272).

On the battlefield, Tu makes mention of receiving "parcels from home delivered by mule" (95). He remembers his aunts and sisters preparing food and knitting various garments for packing into comfort parcels:

> Parcels included all sorts of things, such as oysters, chocolate, whitebait fritters, tinned pears, and fruit cakes or puddings that had been baked in Edmonds baking powder tins. I remember that while I was waiting backhome for my call-up papers I watched Aunty Dinah and Aunty Janey making these cakes and puddings for the food parcels. […]
>
> Aunty Dinah taught the girls to knit garments for comfort parcels too. She didn't have enough knitting needles for everyone so I helped Uncle Willy make a few sets for them from number eight fencing wire. They knitted scarves, socks and balaclavas whenever they could get wool (95).

Throughout WWII, the YMCA was the principal authority responsible for providing support, assistance and comforts to New Zealand soldiers. The YMCA, or Young Men's Christian Association, is an international and interdenominational welfare organisation which was established in New Zealand in 1855 (McGibbon 625). One of the ways that comforts were provided to the troops was through YMCA 'huts' at all major military camps, both overseas as well as in New Zealand. YMCA facilities typically offered space for reading and writing and playing billiards and other games.

They also offered non-alcoholic drinks for purchase, as well as canned fruit and other tinned products, cigarettes, and toiletry items. YMCA huts in the major camps, such as Maadi in Egypt, also provided free books, writing paper, and sports gear to New Zealand soldiers. The YMCA also arranged concerts, church services and Bible study classes, which soldiers were welcome to attend (Ebbett 76, McGibbon 626). As the war years continued, further services were provided by the YMCA, most notably mobile cinemas, and hostels for soldiers on leave. YMCA mobile canteens in trucks followed units on campaign, distributing a wide assortment of comforts, which included cigarettes, chocolate and books (McGibbon 626-627).

There was one YMCA mobile canteen which became "unique among YMCA trucks" (Nepia 5) and which features in Grace's novel. *Te Rau Aroha* was the name given to the truck, and in an interview with Rosie Reweti (Ngāti Tukorehe), she indicated that *Te Rau Aroha* loosely translates to "fronds of love" in English. The vehicle itself has been restored and is currently an artefact in the care of the National Army Museum (NAM) Te Mata Toa in Waiouru. Edward Henry (Ted) Nepia, Ngāti Kahungunu, served with the 28 (Māori) Battalion and states that *Te Rau Aroha* was gifted to the Battalion by children of the native Schools of New Zealand (2). This occurred after extensive fundraising and in late 1941, *Te Rau Aroha* was hoisted aboard a troop ship and shipped to the Middle East. It provided the men of the 28 (Māori) Battalion, and other infantry soldiers, with a wide assortment of items, including tinned fruit--grown and canned in Aotearoa--and "real New Zealand tinned cream [which] brought huge smiles of satisfaction" (Nepia 3). Tinned oysters, mussels and toheroas--a type of clam, endemic to New Zealand--as well as preserved muttonbird, and chocolate, sweets, and toiletry items were also available for purchase from *Te Rau Aroha*. Nepia further notes that mugs of hot tea were served

from the truck and that there was an “inviting warmth” (3) about the vehicle which drew the men and they were inclined to gather around it, particularly on cold evenings.

Artefact 1984.1612. Photograph of the 1938 Ford 3-ton truck fitted for use as a mobile canteen and known as *Te Rau Aroha*. 18 March 2019. Writer’s personal collection.

Throughout the war years and for hundreds of Kiwi soldiers, *Te Rau Aroha* served as a connection to home. It was a link which became evident from the day the vehicle arrived in the Middle East, when many men of the Battalion looked for an opportunity to touch the side of the truck in an affectionate way (Nepia 2). As the months passed, the soldiers became increasingly protective of *Te Rau Aroha*. Nepia recalls a time when the truck was known to be on its way back to the Battalion from Base Camp, when news came that the enemy had captured several vehicles carrying supplies. Concerned for the safety of *Te Rau Aroha,* gloom descended over the whole

Battalion, but when “their beloved van appeared”, hundreds of cheers rose from the throats of the soldiers (Nepia 4).

Another demonstration of the Battalion’s love for *Te Rau Aroha* occurred when Stuka dive bombers--German planes, renowned for howling, near-vertical dive attacks--straddled the Battalion convoy with bombs. Several men were killed, many more wounded and trucks were destroyed by fire. A bomb landed a short distance from *Te Rau Aroha*, spraying the sides of the truck with shrapnel and puncturing a tyre. According to Nepia, the distress the soldiers felt for their wounded Battalion members was equal to their concern about the damage to *Te Rau Aroha*, “and the convoy even waited until the tire [sic] had been changed” (4).

For a vast number of servicemen, *Te Rau Aroha* was more than a mobile canteen. The truck was an oasis in war torn areas and a comfort to members of the 28 (Māori) Battalion and other infantry personnel who served alongside that unit in Greece, Crete, North Africa, the Middle East and Italy. At the end of the war, the Battalion were adamant that their adored canteen truck should return to Aotearoa with them. Therefore, with special permission obtained from General Freyberg and the captain of the *Dominion Monarch*--the ship commissioned to take the Battalion home--space was made for *Te Rau Aroha* (Nepia 6). Today this unique and extraordinary vehicle is housed at NAM. Dents, scars, and patched bullet wounds and gashes bear testimony to its active service and wartime exploits.

Tu is set primarily in 1940s New Zealand and war-ravaged Italy. The main characters are three brothers--Pita, Rangi and Tu--and their mother, who the reader knows only as ‘Ma’. Pita, Rangi and Tu all join the 28 (Māori) Battalion, but enlist at different times. Tu’s yearning to shed his youth and become a soldier, although “no one else would hear of it” (25) is revealed in the second chapter of the novel. His

whānau have plans for him to study law and his education, followed by a well-paid career in the legal profession, is important to the family's economic survival. At the time of his father's death, Tu was seven and his eldest brother, Pita, twenty. It was some time after her husband's death that Ma decided the family should leave their rural home on tribal land beneath Mount Taranaki, and move to the city. This was because paid work was scarce in the area, and there was no college for Tu to attend when he reached college age (63):

> [Ma] told them she'd written a letter to her uncle who worked in parliament asking him to find them a house in Wellington. 'We want our Tuboy to go to a good college, have a good job, get clean work with good pay like our uncle in parliament,' she said (63).

Tu is the youngest child and the third son to enlist. He is also the whānau's "hope for the future" (63) and the whānau are wary of losing a potential breadwinner through active service. As a seventeen-year-old, Tu is convinced that the family will never consent to him enlisting, and he therefore gives permission to himself to do so, feeling the need to escape "the family protection that has always coated [him]" (25).

Rangi is the middle son and the first in the family to participate in active service. He is also one of the first to sail from New Zealand with soldiers of the 28 (Māori) Battalion in 1940. Unlike Tu, Rangi does not survive the war. Grace portrays Rangi as daring by nature and possessing an irrepressible fighting spirit:

> Rangi left his trench, going out on his own with a load of grenades towards one of the forward enemy tanks which was beating its way along. In among all the other sounds – of gunfire, explosions, the yells and screams of men – we heard the

> deep thump and crack of metal as he unloaded the grenades into the tank's tracks and demobilised it. It was the kind of action Rangi was known for (81-82).

Pita is the firstborn in the family and the second to enlist, although he is a "late joiner" (Grace 37). Rangi has been overseas for almost three years at the time Pita makes his decision to go to war and Ma and his relatives plead with him to change his mind. "One was enough from a family," they said, referring to Rangi's war service (37). They also felt that one war was enough and asked Pita to think about what participation in WWI did to his father and to the family (37). After years of being physically and mentally unwell, during which time Pita becomes known as 'Little Father' by everyone in their rural community, the children's father dies (51). Pita earns the nickname of 'Little Father' because, although he is still a child, Ma relies on him for help with household tasks. Pita is also expected to respond quickly when he wakes to the sound of his father crashing through the house and his mother urgently calling out to him from the bedroom door, to go out through the window and run for help from the uncles (55). In his early teens, Pita voluntarily takes responsibility for keeping Ma safe:

> While Rangi would go off and play up the creek with the other children Pita would not, for fear of what might happen to Ma while he was away. Even when Ma sent him out he would spend his time close to the house, usually at the woodpile cutting stove-lengths and kindling, afterwards remembering to put the axe away because everything like that had to be hidden from their father (57-58).

After his father's death, Pita slips comfortably into the role of father figure at twenty years of age. In Wellington he finds a job which pays well, and after Rangi leaves to begin training for war service, Pita becomes the principal income earner of the

household, accepting as much overtime as is offered (161). He becomes increasingly restless, however, and this restlessness is due, in part, to his coming "under the critical gaze of men who thought he should be away fighting for his king and country" (160-161).

Other reasons for Pita's unease include feelings of dislocation in the city. For more than two years he strives to free himself from memories of his former life, living under the mountain in Taranaki. He recalls "rage, hunger, hiding in trees, waiting, lying awake and listening in the dark" (139). He recalls being fearful of a fatal attack on his mother by his father. But the city has a "thousand eyes" that make "the colour of his skin a shame" and Pita struggles to assert his own identity among fellow city dwellers (140):

> [H]e kept himself quiet and worked hard, hardly opening his mouth because he always felt conspicuous. It was as though he had two heads sometimes, as though each of the heads wore a bell. He wished he could be more like Ma or Little Brother who seemed to fit anywhere, under any mountain (140).

Along with being unsure of how to adapt to his new life in the city, Pita is uncertain and uneasy about his feelings for Jess (161). Jess is a young Pākehā woman, who works as an assistant in a cake shop in central Wellington, which is frequented by the family. Pita's interest in Jess does not go unnoticed by others, such as when she makes an appearance at the Centennial Exhibition:

> Now Jess had turned up, and though the sight of her had made his heart flap about like a marooned fish, he suddenly felt cornered.
> 'Dodging her, or something?' Timi asked into his beer, looking at him sideways. 'We seen you talking at the tram stop. You like her, don'cha?'

> Pita didn't reply. He drank his beer and ordered another (142-143).

Jess has a ghost-like presence throughout the novel, although Pita, Rangi and Tu all care for in different ways and at various levels. Pita thinks of Jess as a 'dream girl' and that's all he wants her to be (159), because there is "no girl prettier than Ani Rose" (187).

Despite Ma's objections to Pita enlisting and regardless of the cautions of his aunts and uncles, Pita joins the 28 (Māori) Battalion. Before leaving New Zealand, he marries Ani Rose, a Māori girl who comes to live with the family after Ma learns that she lives alone and is in poor health. Ani Rose features little in the novel, although she is the girl that the whānau all think Pita should marry (186). And Pita *knows* "he should marry Ani Rose" (184). She is surprisingly assertive, as evidenced in Tu's letter to Benedict and Rimini at the end of the novel:

> It wasn't until a few weeks before Pita went off overseas that he wrote to Ani Rose and asked her to wait for him and marry him on his return. Ani Rose, who felt she'd waited long enough already, wrote back and said she wanted the wedding to take place before he left, and with one week to go before departure they were married (271).

The two girls in the family, Sophie and Moana, are little mentioned in the novel. They are younger that Pita and Rangi, but older than Tu. The two sisters are acquainted with Jess and suspect that she has a romantic interest in Pita. Rangi also thinks that Jess "has her eye on" Pita (102). Sophie and Moana seek Pita's permission to find employment soon after settling in Wellington, but Pita refuses. He feels that it is wrong for the girls to seek paid work because the responsibility for looking after the family, from a financial perspective, belongs to him and Rangi. However:

> One night at the club, after Rangi went into training camp, Sophie brought one of their friends to talk to Pita about work at the Woollen Mills where they made cloth for army uniforms. Pauline, who had been working there for three months by then, offered to take Sophie and Moana to apply for jobs. Now that it was war time there was work for everyone she told Pita, and she reminded him that everyone was expected to take part in the war effort (99).

That same night, after arriving home, Pita grudgingly agrees to his sisters applying for work at the woollen mills. At this point in time, the manpowering of women into essential war service is gaining momentum. For the most part, Sophie and Moana are insignificant characters and their personalities are not fleshed out on the page. Their cursory treatment in the narrative may be Grace's way of portraying their pinched lives under Pita's patriarchal inclinations, as well as the lack of control over their own lives, given that they were "bound to get manpowered sooner or later" (99).

There are a number of references to 'manpowering' in *Tu*. Manpowering was a form of industrial conscription and was so named because of the Manpower Office which administered the regime. Jess, who worked in her aunt and uncle's cake shop when Tu's family first arrived in Wellington, was manpowered into essential industry "on one of their raids" (184). Ma, who visits wounded servicemen, as part of her volunteer work at the hospital in Wellington, is the first in the family to become aware of Jess' changed circumstances:

> 'She's mucking out at the hospital,' Ma said, 'washing and scrubbing. You don't get much messier than that. She said hullo to me when I was on my rounds' (186).

According to Montgomerie (*The Women's War* 41, 86), industrial conscription was introduced in New Zealand in 1942. The primary function of industrial conscription, or manpowering, was to direct women into paid essential work, along with men deemed unfit to serve overseas and others who did not meet the conditions of military conscription. Prior to 1942, the women of Aotearoa contributed to the war effort almost entirely on a volunteer basis. Although their paid and unpaid participation in war work was acknowledged in a positive way in the media, the importance of the role of home-maker and nurturer of children throughout the war years did not diminish. Instead, women carried the responsibility of maintaining households "fit for soldiers to return to" (Montgomerie 62).

Ebbett argues that women of all ages "kept the home fires burning" (79) at the same time as they contributed to the war effort by donating unpaid labour to organisations such as the Women's War Service Auxiliary (WWSA). The WWSA was established in August 1940 to co-ordinate the efforts of women volunteering for war work. Its main function was to streamline the activities of women's organisations, such as the Women's Division of the Farmers' Union, the Women's Branch of the Labour Party and the YWCA (Young Women's Christian Association). According to Ebbett, members of the WWSA attended "classes essential to the war effort in such fields as signalling, transport and motor engineering, canteen work, first aid and clerical work" (79). Once trained in these areas of war work, WWSA members served on a voluntary basis and assumed their domestic roles outside of work hours. Harrison suggests that the ideal of female domesticity "took hold late in the nineteenth century and was not successfully challenged until the 1970s" (105).

The war years saw the demand for female labour outside the home increase and disrupted relations between the sexes, just as it created conflict between Pita and his

sisters in Grace's novel. Pita is at first opposed to Sophie and Moana engaging in paid work, but comes to understand that it is something that they and other women can undertake "in order to free men to be soldiers" (187). As paid employees in essential industry, Sophie and Moana and other Kiwi women contributed to the war effort and enabled Kiwi men to serve overseas. In the case of Sophie and Moana, work in the woollen mills was seen as essential because all uniforms for service personnel were made from wool. That is, uniforms for New Zealand soldiers were made from wool, as well as the dress uniforms of members of the WWSA, the Women's Royal New Zealand Naval Service (commonly known as Wrens), WAAFs (members of the Women's Auxiliary Air Force), and WAACs (members of the Women's Auxiliary Army Corps).

At the end of the war, Kiwi women were encouraged to return to their traditional roles. Even before the war ended, courses on 'Adjusting Yourself to Married Life' and 'Furnishing and Managing your Home' were being offered to WAACs (Brookes 282). However, due to the disruptions of war and in the opinion of one woman:

> Young women in the years of the Second World War were among the last of those raised in a society whose main expectations were that they would make good wives and mothers, and which gave the title of 'respectable' to a woman because she was married (Edmond 234).

Just as the Depression years intensified the conditions permitting a greater percentage of women to participate in paid employment, so too did the war years. It was a situation which contributed to a shift in perspective. Many women developed a preference to be regarded as individuals, rather than the dependants of men. To this

end, seeking a career, rather than being 'tied' to the traditional domestic role and the concept of male breadwinning became desirable.

In Grace's *Tu,* one of the ways in which Ma demonstrates that she occupies the traditional domestic role is by her embracing of nurture tendencies and being supportive, in practical ways, to others besides her own offspring. In Wellington, Ma's concern for Ani Rose inclines her to bring Ani Rose into the home and treat her as a member of the whānau. Despite the demands of city life, including living in close proximity to strangers and mixing with people from cultures and backgrounds different from her own, Ma's connectedness to traditional Māori practice does not diminish:

> Somehow [Ma] made everything fit around her, never tried reshaping herself, never sought the city's love or acceptance. She treated it all like backhome and she treated the neighbours like backhome people, walking into their yards, calling through their doors, looking after them with their new babies and taking their children home with her sometimes. She shared out their wood and coal, their flour and potatoes, sent Tuboy next door with Maori bread or fish (139).

Ma actively creates opportunities to be a practical help to others, irrespective of ethnicity, and brings her Māori world view to the urban environment. Her collective, tribal identity is deeply rooted and she chooses not to let city living disrupt or change that. Instead, Ma demonstrates steadfast commitment to Māori values, and ways of doing and being which reflect the family's former community-based lifestyle in rural Taranaki. Just as Ma's relatives and her older children assisted her in that environment--when she had small children and a violent husband--so Ma assists others when she becomes aware of a need, in the urban environment.

Grace appears to use Ma to portray a Māori woman's perspective of the home front during WWII. Ma demonstrates her commitment to the prevailing domestic ideal when she cares for her husband following his release from hospital, after serving with the NZ Māori (Pioneer) Battalion in WWI. That this man is not named and the nature of his illness not stated, might suggest that his experiences were common to many returned WWI service personnel. The once proud father of the whānau "in soldier uniform in a photograph right there in the middle of the mantelpiece" (51) returns to his home damaged, physically and mentally. At times he is silent or makes only grunting sounds, sitting in his chair. At other times, he launches himself out of the chair and becomes a roaring, threshing man:

> It was the first time this happened that remained in Pita's mind most clearly – waking to the shouting and smashing and his mother in the doorway; then going out of the window and afterwards sliding across the plank under the dark trees, stepping across the bog-holes watched by ghosts and a ghosty cow moon.
>
> There were many times during the early years when he'd gone running for help while doors splintered, lamps toppled and pictures fell from their nails, as their father screamed and roared through the house… (56).

This behaviour occurs at the same time that Ma has Rangi to care for, as well as Pita. It seems that although the family is reunited with the return of this soldier, there is little joy in the household. Instead, there is fear and chaos and yet Ma continues to be a dutiful wife, seeing to the needs of her traumatised husband:

> There were cushions and a rug, and the dumpy that Ma had stuffed with rag and paper which she would lift their father's feet on to when she was settling him. To one side of the chair was a stool with father's medicines on it. On the

> other side were two boxes, draped with a cloth, where Ma put father's cup and plate… (52).

In difficult circumstances, Ma nurses her husband and strives to make him as comfortable as possible. Her care for him and her tenderness are evident in that she lifts his feet, rather than expecting him to do so. His medication is within easy reach, as is his cup and plate. And rather than setting his cup and plate down directly on to boxes, she disguises the boxes by draping fabric over them and thus they appear more decorative and homely. The detail Grace provides draws attention to the wide-ranging duties of women and the complexity of their role. Ma would have been one of many hundreds of women in New Zealand whose husbands fought in WWI and returned home damaged and forever changed. Ahead lay the decade of the forties, when those same women may have had to accept the decision of their offspring to enlist and fight in WWII, which was Ma's experience. Other Kiwi women would have to accept that their sons were conscripted to fight in WWII.

Ma's three sons volunteer to serve in WWII, despite her opposition to their participation in active service. Irrepressible by nature, Rangi is the first in the family to enlist and one of the first to queue up to join the 28 Māori Battalion when its formation is announced (90):

> Though Ma was against it, Pita was relieved Rangi was going. Rangi was spending too much of his spare time at certain addresses round town which were known as party houses, and one where there was often trouble (90).

To begin with, Pita is glad that Rangi has joined the Battalion because the army might "knock some sense into him" while the rest of the family "got on with their lives" (91). However, there comes a point when Pita feels that it is wrong for him to

be enjoying "comfortable Sundays" and he should be prepared to go and help end the war (187). When Tu indicates that he wants to leave school and enlist, Pita reacts and tells him that he hasn't received an education just so he could go and get his brains shot out (187). Pita's negative reaction is due, in part, to feeling that it should be him, not Tu, who should be enlisting. It is something that has been on his mind, along with his sense of duty to marry Ani Rose and the conflicting emotions he feels as a result of his attraction to Jess and her interest in him. He admits to Jess that he thought of marrying her and she laughs (119):

> 'And what did you think, after you thought of it?' she asked.
>
> 'I won't be getting married. Not for years' (119).

A short time later, during the same conversation, Jess tells Pita that she believes that when the time comes for him to marry, it will be to a Māori girl, 'a *good Catholic Maori girl'* (119). Although Jess makes this statement, she seems not to anticipate Pita's rejection of her. When Pita pulls away from their embrace and states that he is getting married and leaving to go to war (199), Jess is heartbroken (209). At a later point in time, Jess finds herself in the company of Rangi, when he is home on furlough (205). They conceive a child together and Jess becomes the unmarried mother of Rimini. Underlying Ma's opposition to her sons' participation in active war service is a want to protect her boys from harm.

Tu admits that he was just 14 years old when he realised that the 28 (Māori) Battalion was where he belonged. It was an awareness that came to him at the Centennial Exhibition, when he watched the soldiers march in and form their guard of honour, "buttons, bayonets, boots and faces shining" (258):

> On the day the Exhibition opened the Battalion became another home-place and I waited for the time when schooling would be done, the boy's things over with, and I would become a man of the Battalion (258).

Although Tu knows that his school uniform is "part of a pathway" and part of his mother's dream and the pride of siblings and relatives, he begins formulating a plan to enlist (244). He is eager to shed the cloak of protection he feels he lives under, as the youngest child and the family's security and "hope for the future" (63).

Along with the attendance of the 28 (Māori) Battalion, the presence of Princess Te Puea Herangi at the Centennial Exhibition is mentioned in *Tu*. On the day of the opening of the Māori Court, Pita and others recognise this dynamic and inspirational female Māori elder:

> They had seen Te Puea on newsreels at the pictures wearing her white headscarf and talking to important men dressed in suits. They had all expected her to be taller. It was she who had stood firm in refusing to allow her people to go away to fight for God, King and Country. They had their own god, she said. They had their own king. They had their own country too, but much of their country had been stolen. Why should they want to fight for the people who had stolen their country? (142).

To 'fight for king and country' is a reference to the wording of a recruitment poster. And Te Puea's comments about 'her people' and 'stolen country' referred especially to Waikato Māori, who, in the 1860s, experienced extensive tribal land confiscations (King 78). Te Puea was an anti-conscriptionist and Ebbett notes that to some extent Te Puea influenced the government's decision to exempt Māori males from compulsory military service (50). However, not all Māori shared Te Puea's

perspective. According to Brookes, Te Puea "angered those Māori who saw in war service a way to uphold their equality as citizens" (146). As evidenced by the formation of the 28 Māori Battalion, many Māori felt committed to serving in the New Zealand armed forces. Part of the appeal was a sense of pride and belonging, and kinship and comradeship; as in the case of Tu (Grace 258).

That Grace has created a character known only as Ma is significant because Ma's maternal and nurture traits are seemingly boundless. Pita was two years old and Ma was pregnant with Rangi when their father left to go to WWI. Ma relied on Pita and extended family members for assistance when she was exposed to actual and threatened domestic violence as her husband stormed through the house, raging and out of control. Despite these challenges, Ma remained committed to caring for her husband for more than a decade and gave birth to three more children; two girls and another son, Tu. Ma shows herself astonishingly resilient and strong in her resolve to nurture and care for her children, and at the same time meet the wide-ranging needs of her husband in difficult circumstances. As noted by Montgomerie (*Sweethearts, Soldiers, Happy Families*), it was women who shouldered most of the responsibilities associated with maintenance of the home and the rearing of children, as well as "ensuring the stability of the gender order" (166). Montgomerie further asserts that, "home was seen as a place where a society disrupted by war could be knitted back together" (186). The character of Ma can be seen as a personification of the dominant ideology operating at the time. That is, women were essentially domestic workers, tasked with running their household efficiently and raising children.

Thousands of miles from home, Ma's male children and other members of the 28 (Māori) Battalion became emotionally connected to *Te Rau Aroha*. The truck's

name is layered with meaning, however according to Regional Economic Development Minister, Shane Jones, "*Te Rau Aroha* is a term of respect and reverence given to those whose actions embody courage and service to their fellow citizens." Inscribed on one side of the truck was the name of each primary and secondary native school which raised funds to buy the vehicle. The other side of the truck has the following inscription:

> Presented to the Māori Battalion as a token of love from the children of the native schools of New Zealand.
>
> He tohu aroha na nga tamariki o nga Kura Māori o Niu Tireni ki te Ope Whawhai o te Iwi Māori e tau mai ra i te Pae o te Pakanga i te Mura o te Ahi.

The men of the Battalion were deeply moved on the day the canteen truck arrived in the Middle East, because to them *Te Rau Aroha* brought the "love and good wishes of every Maori child" (Nepia 2), as well as many material comforts. Although Nepia does not refer to *Te Rau Aroha* in a gendered sense, it is not unheard of to apply gender to inanimate objects. Referring to ships and boats as female, for example, was once a tradition, particularly ships of the Royal Navy. It was a centuries-old tradition which possibly reflected seafaring superstitions and religion, and the idea of a female figure, such as a mother or goddess, guiding and protecting ship and crew. And some units in WWII referred to tanks as 'she' - including 19 Battalion & Armoured Regiment. According to Sinclair, No. 13 tank used by No. 11 Troop, C Squadron, was always referred to in the feminine sense. This was because, "like many of that sex she was temperamental" (537). Sinclair further notes that No. 13 tank was awarded the nickname 'Lame Duck' and possessed a "lovable mechanical personality" (541). She earned both curses and affection from her crew and 'Discord' was her daughter and successor (541).

To assert that *Te Rau Aroha* could be compared to a maternal figure has merit. On the day that she arrived in the Middle East, "the men waited for a moment to touch the side of the van caressingly" (Nepia 2), when the traditional Māori blessing was postponed. Nepia also notes that the truck appeared to represent all that soldiers of the 28 (Māori) Battalion held dear back home:

> They had hastened to its assistance when it was in trouble on the desert; they had protected it; they had showed concern for its safety when it was overdue; they had sought it out in the night just to satisfy themselves that it was still in the convoy (7).

In the novel, Tu asserts that the driver and canteen-keeper of *Te Rau Aroha* was someone who stopped "at nothing to serve men in battle, venturing to forward positions in order to deliver all sorts of goods from trench to trench" (32). Tu further notes that:

> the old truck has its fair share of dents, scars and bullet wounds and has been awarded its own wound stripes and battle stars too – something we're all proud of. It's part of home to us, part of our backhome families, and part of our own Battalion family now as well (32).

As well as being a supply vehicle, *Te Rau Aroha* is a place where servicemen "gather to yarn and sing and listen to the radio" (32). There is a sense of community and sharing conveyed in Tu's description of the canteen truck, which echo, on a small scale, the social gatherings of peacetime at home in New Zealand. *Te Rau Aroha* had the ability to invoke a feeling of home and offered the warmth and security which was lacking on the front lines. That the truck was considered part of the Battalion's 'backhome families' suggests deep connection, possibly maternal. It aligns with Ma's

motherly treatment of her neighbours in the city, where she shared provisions and acted on her deep-rooted maternal instincts by helping mothers with new babies and occasionally bringing infants home with her (139). For Tu, whose place of belonging is now the 28 (Māori) Battalion, 'backhome' indicates a distinctive collective identity. At one point, Tu describes himself and other Battalion members as 'backhome boys' (110).

It is clear that amongst Battalion members a strong emotional connection to *Te Rau Aroha* develops quickly. After the vehicle becomes a 'veteran' of a number of campaigns, "and with three wound stripes to its credit," the Battalion decides the truck should remain at Base Camp, rather than enter the danger zone (Nepia 6). And so an abandoned jeep at Cassino was commandeered and, where possible, this substitute vehicle served the forward areas. Just as Pita--and later Rangi when he was older--and his uncles and aunties actively tried to protect Ma from physical harm when her husband became violent, so members of 28 (Māori) Battalion strove to protect and preserve their beloved canteen truck. There was an occasion when the wheels on *Te Rau Aroha* became immobilised in the soft sand of the Sinai Desert and, "with the enemy closing in, [the soldiers] all had to dig like blazes to get it out" (Grace 31). The canteen truck returned home from the war, as did Tu and his father before him, but not whole and not unscarred.

National Army Museum Te Mata Toa. *Te Rau Aroha*, January 2020, NAM, Waiouru

Letters written by Tu as a reclusive older man, emotionally and physically scarred, frame Grace's text, and these letters mention wartime letter writing. It is widely known that wartime letters were a crucial link between soldiers serving overseas and their loved ones at home. For those separated by distance and affected by the perils of war, letters were useful for exchange of information--despite censorship--and helped maintain relationships during lengthy periods of separation and uncertainty (Montgomerie, *Love in time,* 3-4). The women Tu loved wrote to him, although many of their letters remained unread by him until many years after he came home from the war (Grace 239). It was through one of these letters that Tu "learned that Jess married an American and went to the States to live" (271).

The letters written by Tu which bookend the novel are to his niece and nephew, Rimini and Benedict, both of whom are searching for answers relating to

their identity, their parentage, their cultural heritage. Rimini and Benedict were raised by Ma and believe that their relationship to each other is half-brother and half-sister, born only weeks apart. They are the offspring of Tu's brothers, who, unlike Tu, did not return from the war. And their mothers, Ani Rose in the case of Benedict, and Jess, in the case of Rimini, are no longer in their lives. Ma became the primary caregiver of Tu's niece and nephew when they were babies. This occurred after Ani Rose died of tuberculosis and Jess, an unwed mother shunned by her family, "with nowhere to live and no way of supporting herself and her child," came to Ma's door and handed her baby over (270, 14). It is thanks to Tu that his niece and nephew learn that they are first cousins, rather than half siblings.

Although not the protagonist of Grace's novel, Ma is a central character who shows herself devoted to her whānau and her Catholic Faith, and is stoic by nature. She inserts her culture and marae concepts into the 'culture' of city living, unreservedly sharing her nurture traits, knowledge, expertise and wisdom.

In Tu's second letter to Benedict and Rimini he states his belief that Ma was unaware that Rangi was the father of Jess's baby. It is likely that Ma assumed that the baby's father was Pita because he and Jess had long shared a mutual attraction. It is interesting to note that Tu finishes his first letter by simply writing 'With love, Tu'. However his second letter is signed off as 'Your loving uncle, Te Hokowhitu-a-Tu.' The closing words of this letter also serve as the closing words of the novel. Most of the novel is narrated by Tu and this altered way of signing off might indicate that he has achieved a measure of wholeness. Writing occupies his time and helps keep the "fear and madness out" (257). Tu also hopes that writing might help to untangle "the jumble of questions and contradictions" associated with his wartime experiences (257). Living back under the mountain he was born under, Tu has a "warmed-up

pen" and a "warmed-up heart" (282). He is ready to invest in the next generation by sharing his stories and the whānau's history with his niece and nephew, and possibly take them to Italy:

> Part of you lies there. If you accept, we'll make a journey –the two of you, Ma, your aunts, Anzac and me. There'll be others who will want to come. There are your fathers' graves to visit. There are graves of uncles and cousins (281).

Literally and figuratively rebuilding the herd, renovating the house and keeping it warm for family, Tu has transitioned from being bitter and despairing to being optimistic and proud of his identity, his roots, his people (282).

The complications of Tu's wartime experiences are explored through Grace's use of short, uncomplicated sentences, similar to diary entries, and honest dialogue. Evidence of this occurs when Tu, on the battlefield, reflects on the death of Choc, a member of the Battalion that he has befriended:

> Tonight we had a drink for Choc. It was a swig from a flask of brandy sent along with supplies. He's gone. Stepped into a booby-trapped doorway. Up he went. No more whistle. No more Chatanooga Choo Choo (182).

By including incomplete sentences in the narrative and excluding adjectives and adverbs, Grace captures a scene and portrays the men as not being bogged down by grief. Lack of sentimentality can be one way that soldiers deal with the horrors of war, and it lightens the tone of what might otherwise make for grim reading. In the example above, truncated sentences jar the reader and allow him or her to bring their own feelings and imaginations to the situation.

In this essay I have attempted to convey that although *Tu* is essentially a war novel whose protagonist joins the 28 (Māori) Battalion, along with his two brothers, it is also a text which alludes to the role New Zealand women played in WWII, particularly those who did not participate in the war effort overseas. My argument provides an overview of the social and economic climate operating in New Zealand throughout the 1920s and 1930s and contextualises the various factors affecting New Zealanders following the conclusion of WWI.

The concept of male breadwinning and its disruption is examined, as in the case of Sophie and Moana seeking permission from Pita, their father figure, to apply for paid employment. The far-reaching consequences of the enacting of Emergency War Regulations in 1939 are discussed, particularly with regard to industrial conscription. Industrial conscription was invasive and life-altering, as illustrated by the 'manpowering' of Jess, and shook traditional gendered views on economic roles. The nature of, and value of, paid and unpaid contributions to the war effort by New Zealanders is also investigated, and illustrated by including Tu's aunts' and sisters' contributions to comfort parcels.

The YMCA mobile canteen truck which becomes precious to the 28 (Māori) Battalion is likened to a maternal figure. *Te Rau Aroha* was the name given to the truck and it features in Grace's novel. Tu made purchases from the truck and he and other Battalion members congregated around it in the evenings (32, 68). They formed an emotional attachment to *Te Rau Aroha* and facilitated its return to Aotearoa aboard the same ship that the Battalion returned on. The canteen truck was presented to the Battalion as a token of love from children of the native schools of New Zealand, after extensive fundraising, and on the battlefield it was beloved by many.

In many ways Ma encapsulates the traditional and prevailing domestic ideal operating within New Zealand during the 1920 and 1930s. She nurses her husband, a traumatised WWI returned serviceman, and at the same time raises children and develops strategies to keep them protected from their father's violent outbursts. Her maternal and nuture tendencies are further evidenced when she offers practical help to others besides her own offspring after moving to Wellington. That Ma chooses not to allow city living to disrupt her commitment to Māori values and her former community-based lifestyle in rural Taranaki demonstrates her uncommon strength of character. And Ma is opposed to her sons participating in active service because of her want to protect them.

Another strong woman who features in the novel, albeit briefly, is well-known and influential leader, Te Puea Herangi, who is opposed to enlistment by Māori. This stance is borne out of a want to protect, due to historic wrongdoing. However, for hundreds of young Māori males, joining the army was a way to gain the respect of white New Zealand society while keeping their collective, tribal identity intact.

By interspersing Tu's memories and diary entries from the battlefield with the third person perspective of Pita, Grace has created a structurally complex narrative, which mirrors the complex nature of war - on and off the battlefield. At times the unadorned prose in *Tu* imitates the easy, informal language of letters exchanged between family members or entries in a personal journal. This is a narrative technique which allows the reader to bring their own feelings and imaginations to the words on the page, much as a letter does. And writing letters to sons and loved ones serving overseas was a task generally undertaken by women.

Grace offers the reader a Māori woman's perspective of the home front during WWII, through her development of Ma, a central character. Ma could also be seen as

embodying the dominant ideology operating at the time; that women worked primarily within the domestic sphere, were capable and resourceful nurturers of children, and could run their household efficiently. Other female characters in *Tu* reveal deeply internalised social principles and expectations through their experiences and attitudes, and thus offer the reader valuable insight into the role of women during WWII.

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