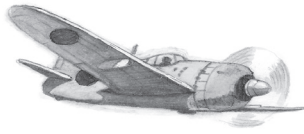


1
Bombs Fall



PEARLIE lay dazed as the smoke cleared. She held Tinto tightly to her chest. His little body was trembling with fear. Even though he struggled and scratched, she would not let him go.

The bomb had missed her, but other planes were heading towards Cavenagh Street, to Chinatown, to her home.

Pearlie gasped as she heard the planes machine-gun the buildings.

Tears streamed down her cheeks. There seemed to be a hundred planes covering the

sky over Darwin. Most were dark green, some were white, but they all had big red circles on their wings and sides.

Suddenly the police station and barracks burst into flames as a bomb hit it. 'Oh, no! Hazel!' Pearlie gasped.

She leapt to her feet, put Tinto in his pouch, and ran in the direction of the flames, wiping her tears so she could see where she was going. Many of the ships in the harbour were under attack now. Some were on fire, others were sinking. Plumes of smoke like grey-black mushrooms rose up from the burning vessels. The smell of oil was everywhere.

'Don't go that way!' a man said as he limped by. He was shirtless and covered in blood. Pearlie shrank back in horror. She turned around, looking for shelter. There was smoke everywhere and her ears hurt from the whistling noise of falling bombs and explosions.

Then she saw it – a plane flying low and coming straight down the street towards her. A double line of little explosions ran in front of the plane, kicking up the dust. The pilot was shooting at her! She held onto the pouch with Tinto in it and threw herself off the street onto her stomach, rolling over to watch as the plane flew past. The pilot turned his head to look at her, his goggles glinting; a white bandana with a red sun painted on it was tied around his head. It was only a quick glimpse, but Pearlie knew she would remember it for the rest of her life.

She wanted to crawl into a hole and hide there.

No, I can't stop, she thought. I have to find Hazel.

Pearlie struggled to her feet and made herself walk. There were men running everywhere, yelling, screaming.

The Police Station was engulfed in flames

when Pearlle got there. Its roof was caving in and all the windows had shattered.

Please be alive, Hazel, Pearlle prayed as she looked around in a daze.

Then she saw something moving. A grey ashen head rose up out of the ruins, followed by a body. It was Policeman Sandy!

Pearlle rushed over to help him. 'Have you seen Hazel?' she screamed as she pulled him from the smouldering building.

'Pearlle, go find shelter! I'll look for her,' Policeman Sandy yelled, brushing himself off. And he disappeared back into the wall of smoke.

That's when Pearlle suddenly remembered Grey Ears. She had been holding onto the donkey's halter, but when the bomb exploded she must have let it go.

'Pearlle! Thank god you're all right,' a voice cried out. Pearlle felt Hazel's warm arms around her, squeezing her tight.

‘I thought you were dead, Hazel,’ Pearlle whispered. And she burst into tears.

Hazel held her and stroked her hair. ‘I’m fine, hon,’ she said. ‘I got out before the bombs hit. I’m fine . . .’

Policeman Sandy reappeared and smiled in relief. Then he looked up, distracted, as the all-clear siren sounded. The planes had gone.

‘I’m glad you’re safe, Hazel,’ he said. ‘Take care of Pearlle will ya? I’m needed.’ And he rushed off.

‘Come on, love,’ Hazel said.

‘So you’re not mad at me?’ asked Pearlle.

‘Mad? If I ever see that Ron Beake again, I’ll kill him myself,’ Hazel sniffed.

Pearlle nodded in agreement, then she pulled back from Hazel. ‘I’m really sorry, Hazel, but I have to find Grey Ears.’

‘Who?’

‘My donkey . . . she’ll be so scared.’ Pearlle turned and ran off before Hazel could stop her.

The harbour was ablaze. There were about fifty ships out there and many were on fire. Even the hospital ship, the *Manunda*, had been bombed!

Pearlie slowed down as she passed the post and telegraph office – or what was left of it. She tried not to look, but she couldn't help herself. Bodies were being dragged from the ruins and laid in the open. She turned away, lifting Tinto up to her face to wipe away her tears in his fur. Then she stumbled forward, her head bowed.

Through the smoke and haze she saw what looked like a flock of small yellow birds searching for food on the ground. When she wiped her eyes, she realised they weren't birds at all but fragments of letters from the post and telegraph office being blown along by the wind. Some of the envelopes were whole but scorched. Others were black with dirt and soot.

Suddenly the world went silent. On an envelope at Pearlie's feet was a single word that seemed to fly off the paper like a beautiful black moth.

The word was *Naoko*.