

TRAPPED!

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TRAPPED!

The Entombed Miner of Bonnie Vale

JULIA LAWRIKSON



FREMANTLE PRESS



*Our educational authorities would do well to
find a place in the school reading books for so
inspiring a story from real life.*

'Back from the Tomb'
The West Australian
29 March 1907

DAY 1

4pm, 19 March 1907

Bonnie Vale, Western Australian goldfields, Australia

‘Quick, quick! Everyone, come quick!’

Joe thinks he hears shouting
over the rain
tap-tap-tapping on the tin roof
turning the floor to mud

Behind the canvas wall
Joe gathers rocks in his hands to throw
in case it’s the Aussie kids again

Papà told him not to
But Papà’s not here

He leans his ear
toward the path
that is now a river

thanks to the
endless rain

The voice calls again

'Everyone, help!'
Joe breathes out with relief
It isn't the Aussie kids
It's one of the workers
from the Britishers camp

Joe sticks his head
through the flap
while the mud squelches
through his bare toes

'The mine has flooded!'
the worker calls

Before he has time to think
Joe is running
to the mine
where his Papà works
deep underground.

BEFORE

September 1906

Gorno, Italy

‘Giuseppe!’

Zio Tommaso is yelling again

‘You haven’t chopped this wood
properly!’

Joe’s hands are red

and his arms are aching

He wants to yell, ‘I did so!’

No point

Zio Tommaso hates him

Nothing is good enough

He doesn’t turn the soil
the way he should

He yanks the apples off the tree
instead of twisting them

He once forgot to secure the pig’s pen

and the pig could have got out
(The pig didn't escape
but she could have)

On and on and on
Pick, pick, pick

Zia Olivia tries to make up
for her husband being harsh
She smiles and gives Joe extra slices of bread
when Zio isn't around
She reaches out and squeezes Joe to her
as she kneads dough
stirs polenta
chops vegetables for dinner

'Your Mamma would be so proud'
she says, her eyes full of tears
'I miss my sister every day'

But if Zio Tommaso catches her being kind
he yells
'He's nearly a man, Livia!
He'll be soft
if you keep treating him this way'

Joe wonders if his uncle is right
He still cries at night sometimes
when his sisters are asleep
He cries remembering Mamma's warm arms
the way she sang
when she was putting wood in the stove
the way she smiled
when the children
were all tucked in bed together

Joe doesn't mention Mamma
when Zio's around
If he does, his uncle snaps
'Your mother is in heaven
She's watching what you do
so don't shame her'

So now
when he prays to Mother Maria
he thinks of Mamma
asks her to help him

And sometimes
she does.

BEFORE

October 1906

Gorno, Italy

When Papà comes back from Australia
when he has slept after his long, long journey
Joe begs him

'Please Papà
Let me come back to Australia with you
I'll get a job
I can help on the mines
Anything will do
I could help send money back to Zio and Zia
Please!'

Joe is leaving school soon
along with the other boys in the village
When summer comes
he'll be herding goats in the mountains
Or he'll start work on the zinc mine

the mine Papà worked
before he left for Australia

Now Papà squints at his eldest son
Papà is wiry and strong
even though he is not much taller than Joe
His skin is so creased around his eyes
Joe can't tell whether he is pleased or upset
'La calma è la virtù dei forti' Papà says
'Calm is the virtue of the strong'

Joe wants to protest
that it is Zio who is never calm
But then Papà says something else
'Turn around, Beppe'

Joe is confused
That's what Zio Tommaso says
before he brings down a belt
on Joe's legs
But Papà's voice is soft

Joe turns around

Papà runs a rough palm over the welts
Zio left on Joe's legs a few weeks ago

because he let the fire go out

Now Papà turns Joe back around
and holds him by the shoulders

He says

'You have to be fourteen
to work in Australia'

Joe's stomach drops with disappointment

Fourteen is too far away

Fourteen means nearly two more years

of dreading the sight of Zio

of never being able

to do the right thing

of being kept awake

by hot pain after a whipping

Then Papà goes on

'But if you are willing to go to school

and learn some English

you will be ready to work

when you are old enough'

Joe doesn't have to think

before he says yes

He will have plenty of time to wonder
if he did the right thing
later.