

WHO DISTURBS  
*the* KŪKUPA?

## Praise for *Who Disturbs the Kūkupa?*

Kayleen Hazlehurst has produced a haunting tale of love and loss in wartime, made all the more memorable for its cultural inclusion and sensitivity. The adventures of Sonny Wirima, a Māori soldier on the run in German-occupied Greece, longing to be reunited with his great love, Atarangi Tahiri, are evocatively rendered without ever descending into cloying sentimentality. A great read.

PETER EWER. AUTHOR OF *FORGOTTEN ANZACS*

This is an inspired taonga by a gifted writer whose story joins the old world and the new during a time of turbulent change. A must-read for those who ever wanted to know more about those brave soldiers of the 28th Māori Battalion, like my grandmother's brother (Lt Hone Te Kauru Green, C Company, killed in action, 1941). Hidden gems of poetry give the book a spiritual identity you won't find in books on this era. Inspirational and emotionally gripping.

RANGI HAPI. CREATIVE ENTREPRENEUR, HAPIARTS

A truly heart-warming and pleasurable read that leaves persistent psychic vibes long after the last page has been turned. Māori practices and beliefs are knitted seamlessly into military events thousands of miles from home. Tender and descriptive though Hazlehurst's characterizations are, she does not shrink from stark wartime realism where necessary. It is a most impressive work.

JOHN CARR. AUTHOR OF *THE DEFENCE AND FALL OF GREECE 1940-41*

A unique and extremely precious contribution to our understanding of what happened during those events. The book informs future generations of the sacrifices that their tūpuna made.

MATTHEW MULLANY. HISTORIAN AND PUBLIC SERVANT, OF NGĀTI PĀRAU DESCENT

Cover artist: Sarah McBeath, 'On Taylor Road, Wharauroa/Kūkupa'

Also by the author: *A Caramel Sky*

‘*A Caramel Sky*, Kayleen Hazlehurst’s moving historical romance novel, is a heart-breaking love story set in wartime New Zealand and bookended by 21st century vignettes. Hazlehurst’s prose is a love letter to this beautiful country. At its core, this is a novel that defines and redefines what it means to claim for oneself “a life well lived”.’

MAGGIE TRAPP, KETE BOOKS, NZ.

‘Taut, swiftly paced, engaging. Scenes beautifully textured and vibrant with dialogue, personality and mood.’

MARK SPENCER, FAULKNER AWARD WINNER, USA.

‘*A Caramel Sky* is in one aspect a family saga, and in another a historical coming of age tale. [Hazlehurst’s] interpretation and retelling of this period is truthful. I also enjoyed the fact that this novel is “real” and treats life with cool clarity, rather than rose coloured glasses.’

ESTHER PERRIAM, ELDERNET GAZETTE, NZ.

‘This was a mighty read. I feel certain that such stories happened in real life. The war stories in the book are harrowing. The romance story was harsh at times. The writing had me lock, stock and barrel. I would recommend it to anyone that enjoys a good New Zealand story. It’s a long time since any book has moved me to tears. I just loved this book.’

TERRY TONER, BOOK SHOW, RADIO SOUTHLAND, NZ.

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WHO DISTURBS  
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KAYLEEN M. HAZLEHURST

*Dedicated to  
the men of the 28th (Māori) Battalion  
and to their loving whānau.*

*Kō wai ēnei tāngata e pakanga nei i ngā maunga?  
Who are these men who would fight mountains?*

*Ki te kāhore he whakakitenga ka ngaro te iwi  
Without vision the people will be lost.*

— Māori proverb

*I am emotional ... I also have difficulty  
in separating one aspect of the life of our people from another.  
We cannot think of the dead without reference to the living,  
or speak of the forester without considering the forest,  
or the child without thought of the parent,  
or the warrior without consideration of warfare.  
Thus, I know, try as I may not to do so,  
I tend to digress and to wander  
along subsidiary pathways before my highway.*

— Harry Dansey

*O my friend, listen with heart and soul to the songs of the spirit,  
and treasure them as thine own eyes.*

— Bahá'u'lláh



Artist: Kayleen Hazlehurst, 'Soldier with memory of fantail'

*part one*



# Rangitakō Lands

1947

Miriama Wirima leaned on her hoe and gazed out to sea, aware of the pungent odour of seaweed rising from the overturned soil. Kūmara, carrots and greens lay beside her kit for the evening meal. Low clouds rolled over the darkening waters. Soon the sun-warmed cliffs that ushered travellers deep into Ngā Puhī country, and departing souls north on their spirits' flight, would be cooled by swirling yarns of white.

*O chiefs of old. Ye have vanished from us like the moa bird ...  
O lordly tōtara tree! Thou'rt fallen to the earth.*

She looked back along the cliff to gauge how light was falling on the village. Square wooden houses sat between the farmland and cliff like so many nesting seabirds—their faces set towards the sea, their backs against the pasture. Was this a protest against farming or was it just a preference of the heart? She smiled, knowing well the yearnings for the traditional ways of harvesting. *The sea will always have the strongest tow.*

Behind the marae were small farms that supported the local community. The paddock fences, which guided the cows to and from their milking, were fondly rickety and covered with lichen. There was occasional scorn from Pākehā neighbours when animals escaped or children meddled with things, but such derision was mutual.

Pockets of native trees occupied the crevices and folds of the surrounding hills, keeping her kinsmen anchored to the land. Further inland, the forested peaks of the Brynderwyns communed with the greyed roof of the world. Miriama watched a pair of wood pigeons, her kūkupa, winging their way from the forest to the pūriri tree at the back

of the churchyard. They liked to feed there on the berries and to roost in the branches at night.

She worked in her garden, not only for the pleasure of cultivation, but also for the companionship of the sea. In manual labour a person found purpose, her father had taught her. A wise one discovered meaning in solitude. Miriama's quest was to understand the devastation, to piece together the stories. It was a need that ran deep into her bones. She must explain the losses. She must give assurance and demonstrate a future more certain.

They were happy times, before the war. There was always singing.

~1~

## The Tears of One Whale

1939–1940

Api turned the knob and the radio crackled to life. Tama, his youngest, was sparring with Sonny. The stocky middle boy jabbed back, producing a yelp from Tama. Api, tired from his day of lambing in the September wind and rain, did not intervene. Hēmi, the eldest son and tallest among them, commanded the most respect. He kept the younger boys in line, giving their father some peace.

‘Oi!’ Hēmi growled. ‘Shut up, you two.’

‘Yeah, see.’ Sonny kicked out at Tama as a final assertion of sibling authority.

Mata and Heti, two visiting aunts, cackled over their tea. Miriama put a plate of scones on the kitchen table and flicked Tama’s ear with her tea towel. ‘Hush. Dad wants to hear this.’

Not everyone had a radio. News that something was afoot had swirled around the community, drawing people into the house like driftwood on an incoming tide. Two days ago, the Acting Prime Minister, Peter Fraser, had issued a statement to the newspapers that New Zealand was at war with Germany, declaring this was ‘a dark day in the history of the world’.

Api waved his hands, palms down, to quieten everyone. Then he set his jaw to listen as Prime Minister Michael Savage addressed the nation.

Savage spoke about the evils of Nazism and of the country’s loyalty to Britain.

Both with gratitude for the past, and with confidence in the future, we range ourselves without fear beside Britain. Where she goes, we go. Where she stands, we stand. We are only a small and young

nation, but we are one and all a band of brothers and we march forward with union of hearts and wills to a common destiny.

‘What do you think about that?’ Mata asked as Api switched off the radio.

‘Don’t like it one bit,’ Heti answered. ‘It will be no better than the last one.’

‘Worse, I think,’ Api said.

The speech that left the adults dejected had set the younger boys on fire, making them jump and prance.

‘Don’t worry, Auntie.’ Sonny smacked Mata’s arm, eliciting a shriek. ‘We’ll chase those Germans back to where they came from.’

‘Yeah.’ Tama punched at his brother again. ‘Kick their fat asses all the way back to Germland.’

Mata and Heti giggled.

‘Tamati, watch your language.’ Miriama turned her frown on the older women. ‘Don’t you encourage them.’

‘Beat ’em from the bushes like hogs.’ Sonny raised an invisible rifle in his hands. ‘Pow! Pow!’

‘Turn Kete and Turi on them, hey?’ Tama responded.

Everyone laughed. Kete and Turi, mutts of uncertain lineage, and their favourite hunting dogs, were good at flushing out poaka.

Strength drained from Api’s limbs. ‘Auē! You boys don’t know what you’re talking about.’ He remembered the bad old war that ended over twenty years ago, the faces of the men who returned from Gallipoli and France. Uncles and cousins who had come home maimed and lost of soul. The elders wept when they saw them. All their soldiers wanted was to return to Te Ao Mārama, the world of life and light. Now, another generation was being called to walk the path to Hinenuitēpō.

‘Time for bed,’ Hēmi said. ‘We’ve got work tomorrow.’

Miriama showed the visitors the door and Tama padded off to the outhouse.

Sonny cornered his father. ‘We *can* fight them, Dad. We *can* drive ’em back.’

‘Not if I have anything to do with it.’

‘We’re at war. The radio said so.’

‘What makes you think you can fight them, eh? Those blighters are mightier than we are, and they’ve got some bloody big guns.’

‘Yeah? They don’t sound too clever to me.’

Miriama came back inside after saying her goodbyes.

‘Mum?’ The boy extended his hand in an appeal.

‘No, Sonny.’ She closed the door with a firm hand. ‘Those troubles have nothing to do with us. The Ngā Puhi have no business in this Pākehā war. Besides, Dad needs your help on the farm.’

Api read out the newspaper article as Miriama stirred her soup pot. On Ringa Ringa Beach, in the far south, six small whales had dashed themselves to death on the rocks while the rest of the pod cruised fretfully beyond the breakers. Miriama spread a cloth on the table to slice the bread. *Poor lonely ones, she thought. Do not the tears of one whale raise the level of the sea?*

In the same month a large spot had crossed the sun until half of it was hidden. Api and Miriama had watched the darkening sky as a stillness fell over the land. Gulls flew to shore and sheltered in clusters on the dunes, as if expecting a storm. Cows fell silent and so did the horses, neither mooing nor nickering at each other. The dogs were asking questions. They were sitting on their tails and staring up at Api with their eyes bulbous and their lips drawn back. A fortnight later it was the moon’s turn for a partial eclipse.

Miriama didn’t like the signs. The children of Tangaroa, flinging themselves on the shore. Flocks of birds flying inland. The sun and moon obscured.

‘This land is in trouble, Api.’



It was another cold night in June and Miriama had not been sleeping. An arrow of moonlight ran across the floorboards and onto the dressing table, its tip pointing at the photograph of her boys. The younger ones were pressing her to let them enlist. Hēmi, though, was more cautious. At twenty-five, he had a sense of responsibility towards their poor father. *They are good boys. What more could a mother want from her sons?*

She moved the blankets aside and slipped away from her husband's prone body. Pulling on a shawl she moved soundlessly to the window, lifted her salt-and-pepper hair over the wrap and looked up at the violet-black vault of the sky. Clouds were closing in around a diminished crescent, its soft edges predicting rain. When the moon was full it acted as a beacon for vessels steaming up and down the coast. Tonight, there was barely enough light to separate sea from sky.

Miriama studied the stand of trees on the hill. Why were the kūkupa so restless? Over many nights she had heard the beat of their wings. This land she so loved now spoke to her of violation and danger.

A ship had passed Bream Head and was heading for the open sea. Out on the water she saw the glint of aft lights but could no longer hear the thrumming of engines. Soon the ship would disappear over the rim of the earth.

A column of light outlined the liner, followed by a dull roar. *Flash ... Boom!*

Miriama spun on her toes, bounded across the room, and fell on her knees by the bed.

'Api. Api. Wake up!'

'Wha— What?'

'I think the Germans are here!'

'What are you saying, woman?'

'A ship ... A ship blew up. I saw it.'

'How do you know it's the Germans?'

'A bad feeling.'

Api groaned as he climbed out of bed. From the window he could see a flicker of red. Out past the Hen and Chicken Islands something was burning. He was handed his woollen trousers and heaviest jumper.

'Dress warm,' his wife said, then she turned to light the kerosene lamp.

'Something has come to grief, that's for certain.' Api pulled on his trousers. 'She might stay afloat for a while ... Give us time.'

Miriama plaited her hair with rapid fingers. 'We'll have to get help.' She flung the single braid over her shoulder.

‘I’ll wake the boys,’ Api said. ‘They can take the horses. Hēmi and I will ready the boat.’

‘Our boat’s not very big, Api. How many people can we—?’

‘Six or seven. There could be a fair few floundering out there.’

‘I’ll take a lantern, see who can launch—’

‘Don’t be long, Miriama. Get someone else to do it. Meet us at the beach.’

They were able to ride bareback just as swiftly, but their father had cautioned Sonny against it. In the dark, a horse might stumble. In ten minutes, they had saddled up and taken to the road. Men and their horses. Shivering streams of energy. Sonny in front on the dappled white, Tama close behind on the frisky brown.

Sonny’s eyes grew round like an owl’s, focusing on the pale line of earth but imagining he could see all around him. Most farmers owned fishing boats. As kids, they had often visited their Pākehā neighbours, driving them mad with their thieving of fruit or touching things they shouldn’t. There were three households to rouse. Afterwards, the farmers would alert each other. Some of them had telephones. Angus Thompson was their nearest neighbour.

‘I’ll do this,’ Sonny told Tama. ‘You go on to the next one.’

‘How do you know they won’t shoot us?’

‘They’ll be curious, won’t they? Watch how I do it.’

Sonny raised his fist to thump on the front door as his brother shrank back.

‘Mr Thompson! Mr Thompson! Can you and your missus please come out? It’s Sonny Wirima, we need your help ... Hey, Mr Thompson!’

The dogs emerged from their kennels and set up a ruckus, but Sonny continued to hammer on the door.

‘I can’t do that.’ Tama hung his head.

‘Pretend you’re a policeman with news someone’s dead. You’re allowed to shout at them in an emergency. Go on. Get on your horse. I’ll catch up with you.’

Doors banged on the top floor. The farmer was swearing and his wife

was answering in a squeaky voice. Angus Thompson clumped down the staircase and burst through the front door, red-faced and clinging to his pyjama bottoms. On the steps behind him in a nightdress was his wife, clutching the family rifle she'd obviously confiscated from her husband.

‘What the *hell* are you playing at, Sonny Wirima?’

Tama sprang onto his horse and took off at full gallop.

Miriama hurried on the path to the beach carrying her lantern, two blankets and a kit of apples—the only supplies she could think of to satisfy both hunger and thirst. She slid one foot after the other on the crumbling clay. A canvas bag strapped to her waist contained ointments, bindings and a pair of scissors. Pieces of wood on the boat could be used for splints, if needed.

It was the kind of darkness just before the sky lightened. No one followed, but Miriama knew they would be coming. Mata and Heti had been assigned to raising the alarm. With the aunties on the job there'd be no more sleeping. A lot of organising would be needed before people turned up at their boats.

Below her, the figures of Api and Hēmi stood in the water holding the stern, and she swung her lantern as a signal she was on her way.

Hēmi leaned over to push aside deck-chairs, dunnage and other wreckage.

‘Blasted sea fog,’ Api muttered, as he steered them in a slow circle.

Miriama stared at the dark water. ‘Look for a piece of wood. I'm sure I saw a man—’

‘Can't see him, Mum. Your eyes must be playing tricks.’

‘Whoa!’ Api slowed the motor to a crawl.

‘What, Dad? Did you see the ship?’

‘Just shadows. I'm not going near that thing. We'll get sucked under.’

They were further out in the Hauraki Gulf than Api normally ventured. Long rising swells gave the sense they were approaching the mouth of the harbour. No white water. No foaming peaks to hint at shoals of sand beneath. This was deep water. Waves passed under the boat in wide, smooth rolls. They clustered close, staring ahead as puffs of low