

Newbery Honor-winning author of *The War that Saved My Life*

KIMBERLY BRUBAKER BRADLEY

The WAR I Finally Won



The WAR I Finally Won

Kimberly Brubaker Bradley



DIAL BOOKS FOR YOUNG READERS

DIAL BOOKS FOR YOUNG READERS
PENGUIN YOUNG READERS GROUP
An imprint of Penguin Random House LLC
375 Hudson Street
New York, NY 10014



Copyright © 2017 by Kimberly Brubaker Bradley

Penguin supports copyright. Copyright fuels creativity, encourages diverse voices, promotes free speech, and creates a vibrant culture. Thank you for buying an authorized edition of this book and for complying with copyright laws by not reproducing, scanning, or distributing any part of it in any form without permission. You are supporting writers and allowing Penguin to continue to publish books for every reader.

Ebook ISBN 9780698197138

Jacket art © 2017 by Josie Portillo
Hand-lettering by Maggie Olson
Jacket design by Samira Iravani

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents either are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously, and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, businesses, companies, events, or locales is entirely coincidental.

Version_1

To Jessica Dandino Garrison

Contents

[Title Page](#)
[Copyright](#)
[Dedication](#)

[Chapter 1](#)
[Chapter 2](#)
[Chapter 3](#)
[Chapter 4](#)
[Chapter 5](#)
[Chapter 6](#)
[Chapter 7](#)
[Chapter 8](#)
[Chapter 9](#)
[Chapter 10](#)
[Chapter 11](#)
[Chapter 12](#)
[Chapter 13](#)
[Chapter 14](#)
[Chapter 15](#)
[Chapter 16](#)
[Chapter 17](#)
[Chapter 18](#)
[Chapter 19](#)
[Chapter 20](#)
[Chapter 21](#)

[Chapter 22](#)

[Chapter 23](#)

[Chapter 24](#)

[Chapter 25](#)

[Chapter 26](#)

[Chapter 27](#)

[Chapter 28](#)

[Chapter 29](#)

[Chapter 30](#)

[Chapter 31](#)

[Chapter 32](#)

[Chapter 33](#)

[Chapter 34](#)

[Chapter 35](#)

[Chapter 36](#)

[Chapter 37](#)

[Chapter 38](#)

[Chapter 39](#)

[Chapter 40](#)

[Chapter 41](#)

[Chapter 42](#)

[Chapter 43](#)

[Chapter 44](#)

[Chapter 45](#)

[Chapter 46](#)

[Chapter 47](#)

[Chapter 48](#)

[Chapter 49](#)

[Chapter 50](#)

[Chapter 51](#)

[Chapter 52](#)

[Chapter 53](#)

[Chapter 54](#)

[Chapter 55](#)

[Chapter 56](#)

[Chapter 57](#)

[Chapter 58](#)

[Chapter 59](#)

[Chapter 60](#)

[Chapter 61](#)

[Chapter 62](#)

[Chapter 63](#)

[*Author's Note*](#)

[*About the Author*](#)

Chapter 1

You can know things all you like, but that doesn't mean you believe them.

"Ada! You need to drink something!" Susan's voice, scolding. Susan's hands, pushing a cup of cold tea into mine.

"I don't want to," I said. "Really I don't."

Susan curled my fingers around the teacup. "I understand," she said, "but please try. It's the last thing they're going to let you have. You'll be thirsty in the morning."

My right foot was twisted sideways at the ankle. It had been all my life. My ankle bones grew curled, so my toenails scraped the ground and what should have been the bottom of my foot faced the sky. Walking hurt like anything. Despite the calluses, the skin on my foot tore and bled.

This night in the hospital—nearly three years ago now—was September 16, 1940. A Monday. It was a little over a year into the war between Hitler and most of the rest of the world. Eleven years into the war between the rest of the world and me.

The very next day surgeons were going to chop my curled ankle bones up and rearrange them. Maybe into something like a functional foot.

I put the teacup Susan gave me to my lips. I forced myself to sip. My throat closed. I choked. Tea splattered across the bedcovers and my tray.

Susan sighed. She mopped up the spilled tea, then motioned for one of the nurses that was putting up the blackout to come take away my tray.

Since the start of the war, we covered our windows with blackout screens every night, so that German bombers wouldn't be able to aim at our lights. My hospital wasn't in London, which was getting bombed every night right

now, but that didn't mean it wouldn't be hit. You never could tell what Germans would do.

"Letter for you, Mum," the nurse said, handing Susan an envelope as she scooped up the tray.

"Delivered to the hospital? How odd." Susan opened it. "It's from Lady Thorton." She unfolded the letter inside. "She must have sent it before she got my note with the boardinghouse's address. Ada, are you quite sure you don't want something to eat? Toast?"

I shook my head. The mouthful of tea I'd swallowed swirled in my stomach. "I think I'm going to be sick."

Susan gasped. She looked up at me, snatched a basin from the bottom shelf of my bedside table, and thrust it beneath my chin. I clenched my teeth and held everything in.

Susan's hand shook. The basin shook too. I looked at her face. She'd gone pale, her eyes dark and wide.

"What's wrong?" I asked. "What does that letter say?"

"Nothing," she said. "Breathe deep. That's it." She put the basin down, folded Lady Thorton's letter, and tucked it into her handbag.

Something was wrong. I could see it on her face. "Is it Butter?" I asked.

"What?"

"Has something happened to Butter?" Butter was Susan's pony. I loved him. He was staying in Lady Thorton's stables while I was in hospital.

"Oh," Susan said. "No. That is, Lady Thorton didn't mention Butter, but she would have if anything were wrong."

"Maggie?" Maggie was Lady Thorton's daughter, my best friend.

"Maggie's fine," Susan said. Her hands still shook very slightly. Her eyes didn't look right. "Everyone's fine in the village."

"And Jamie's fine," I said. It was a statement, not a question, because it had to be true. My brother Jamie wasn't in the village—he was here with us. Susan and Jamie and Bovril, Jamie's cat, were staying in a rented room in a boardinghouse near the hospital. Jamie was there with the landlady now.

Jamie was six years old. We'd guessed he was seven, but we had his birth certificate now and he wasn't, not quite.

I was eleven. I had my birth certificate too. I'd known my real birthday for just over a week.

Susan nodded. "Jamie's fine."

I took a deep breath. "Is something stopping my surgery?" Before last week, when Mam tried to snatch us away from her, Susan had said she couldn't give permission for me to have surgery. She still couldn't give permission, but she didn't care anymore. She said that what was right and what was permitted were sometimes different things. I needed surgery and I was going to have it.

I didn't ask questions.

Susan smoothed my hair back from my forehead. I pulled away. "I won't let anything stop your surgery," she said.

There was still something off about her voice and expression. I knew it had to do with Lady Thorton's letter. Lady Thorton could upset just about anyone. When I'd first met her, before I knew her name, I called her the iron-faced woman. She was sharp like an ax.

Lady Thorton couldn't meddle with us here. We'd lost everything inside Susan's house, but I still had Jamie, Susan, Bovril, and Butter. And surgery tomorrow. It was more than enough.

• • •

You can know things all you like, but that doesn't mean you believe them.

A little over a year ago, I'd taught myself to walk in Mam's one-room London flat. I kept it secret, wiping up the blood before Mam came home every day. I'd only wanted to be able to leave the flat, not the city, but learning to walk saved me. When Mam sent Jamie away from London with all the other kids, because of Hitler's bombs, I snuck out too. We ended up with Susan and Butter in a seaside village, in Kent.

Susan didn't want us then. We didn't want her either, but I wanted her pony, and Jamie and I both liked her food and eventually we all three wanted to stay with each other. Of course that was when Mam showed up to take us back. Only a week ago, that was. Susan decided to fight for us. She followed us to London, which meant we were all away from Susan's house the night German bombers destroyed it entirely. So the worst thing—Mam's return—became the best thing—not dying from the bombs.

Now everyone was acting like my surgery tomorrow would be the best thing ever, which made me worry it might turn out bad. Susan said it couldn't be bad. She said she hoped my foot would work properly after the surgery, but if it didn't I would be fine. I was fine now and I would be fine afterward, no matter what.

Maybe.

Depended entirely on what you meant by *fine*.

We were still in a war. The nurses claimed they'd be able to get all the patients into the basement quickly enough if the air raid sirens went off. They hadn't had to do it yet, so who knew if they really could.

Susan leaned forward. She hugged me. It was awkward for us both. I let out my breath. My stomach still churned. "Don't worry," Susan said. "I'll see you in the morning. Go to sleep."

• • •

I couldn't sleep but the night passed anyhow. In the morning Susan held my hand while a nurse wheeled my bed down the hall. We stopped outside a heavy white door. The nurse said to Susan, "This is as far as you can go."

I hadn't realized Susan would have to leave me. I clung to her. "What if it doesn't work?"

For a moment her fingers tightened around mine. "Courage," she said, and let go.

• • •

In the operating theater a man in a long gown held a mask in front of my face. “When I put this over your mouth,” he said, “I want you to very slowly count to ten.”

I only made it to four before I fell asleep.

• • •

Coming out of the ether was harder. My right leg was pinned, trapped. I couldn’t move. I broke into a sweat struggling to pull myself free. I’d been caught in a bombing, buried in rubble. I couldn’t move my leg. Then somehow I was trapped again in the dank cabinet beneath the sink, in our old flat in London. Mam had locked me inside. The cockroaches—

“Shh.” Susan’s voice, soft in my ear. “Settle down. It’s over. You’re fine.”

I was not fine. Not in the cabinet, not with Mam—

Someone pinned my arms. Threw a blanket over me, tucked it tightly around my sides. “Open your eyes,” Susan’s voice said, still gentle. “The surgery’s over.”

I opened my eyes. Susan’s face swam blurrily in front of me. “You’re safe,” she said.

I swallowed hard. I said, “You’re lying.”

“I’m not.”

“I can’t move my leg. My right leg. My clubfoot leg—”

“You haven’t got a clubfoot,” Susan said. “Not anymore.”

• • •

I woke properly in the middle of the night. Screens surrounded my bed. A dim light shone behind them. “Susan?” I whispered.

One of the night nurses came to my bedside. “Thirsty?” she asked. I nodded. She poured me water and I drank. “How badly does it hurt?”

I couldn't move my right leg because the doctors had put a cast on it after the surgery. I remembered that now. Beneath the plaster, a strong dull ache centered around my right ankle and pulsed toward my knee. "I don't know," I said. "It always hurts."

"More than you can bear?"

I shook my head. I could bear almost anything.

The nurse smiled. "That's right," she said. "Your mother said you were a tough one." She handed me a pill. "Swallow this."

I said, "Susan's not my mother." Thank God for that. I swallowed the pill and fell back asleep.

• • •

When I opened my eyes again Jamie's face was inches from mine. His hair looked like it hadn't been brushed in weeks. His eyes were red and swollen. He was crying. I pushed myself up in a panic. "What's wrong?"

Jamie launched himself onto the bed. He banged into my cast. I winced.

"Easy," Susan said, pulling him back.

Jamie burrowed against me.

I put my arms around him and looked over his head to Susan. "Tell me what's wrong," I said.

"It was in Lady Thorton's letter," Susan answered.

I nodded. I knew that.

Jamie said, "Our mam's dead."

• • •

You can know things all you like, but that doesn't mean you believe them.

Chapter 2

I knew my mother—Mam—worked nights in a munitions factory in London. I knew bombs were falling on London now, every single night in fierce, horrendous waves. I knew the Germans targeted factories, especially munitions ones. I'd been caught in a bombing raid myself. Brick walls exploded above my head. Afterward shattered glass drifted across the streets like snow.

So I knew Mam could die. I just didn't believe it. Even despite all the bombs. I thought Mam would live forever.

I thought Jamie and I would never be free.

I hugged Jamie. He sobbed. He thunked my cast again. I managed not to scream.

Susan tucked a pillow between Jamie and my cast. She eased herself onto the corner of the bed. She rubbed Jamie's back.

"Is it real?" I asked.

"It's real," she said.

"Really real?"

"I'm sorry," Susan said.

I said, "Are you sorry?"

Was *I* sorry? I supposed I was. Maybe? My mother hated me.

You'll never see us again, I'd said to her, a week ago in London. She'd said back, *Is that a promise?*

Now it was.

"This isn't a happy ending," Susan said. "It's not the worst possible ending, but it isn't happy, and I'm sorry for that. I am grateful to have an ending, though. Your mother can't hurt you anymore."

“No.” I don’t know whether Mam and I could have had a happy ending. I always hoped so—of course I did, she was my mother—but it was another thing I didn’t fully believe. I turned to Jamie. “Why are you sad? Mam hated us. She said so.”

Jamie sobbed harder. “I loved her,” he said.

Jamie was nicer than me. He probably did love Mam. I didn’t. I wished I did. I wished like anything she loved me.

I looked at Susan again. “How am I supposed to feel?” A good daughter would feel sad, I supposed. But if Mam was dead, then I was no longer anyone’s daughter.

I wasn’t sad. I wasn’t happy. Or angry. Or anything.

Susan’s hand clasped mine over Jamie’s narrow back. “However you feel is fine.”

“Is there a word for feeling nothing?”

“Yes,” Susan said. “Stunned. I felt stunned when I first heard my mother died.”

I looked at her. “When did your mam die?”

“A few years ago. Several months before Becky.”

Becky, Susan’s very best friend, died of pneumonia three years before the war. I knew that. They had lived together; Susan’s bombed house had belonged to Becky first, and it was Becky who gave Susan Butter.

“Both deaths were hard,” Susan said. “My feelings about my mother’s were more complicated.”

I let go of Susan’s hand. “How did Lady Thorton know about Mam?” Before last week, we’d heard nothing from Mam for an entire year, not one word despite all the letters Susan and I wrote her, until she showed up in person to drag me and Jamie back to London.

“I’d given the WVS your mother’s new address,” Susan said. “One of the WVS groups in London contacted Lady Thorton. I suppose they’re monitoring casualty lists.”

The WVS was the Women’s Volunteer Service. They did war work. Susan was part of our village’s WVS. Lady Thorton was its head, which made her in

charge of evacuees like Jamie and me.

Susan reached for my hand again. I pulled it away. Jamie kept crying. I wanted to comfort him, but my insides felt hollow. I didn't know what Jamie and I were, if Mam was dead. Could we still stay with Susan? Were we still evacuees?

"What happens next?" I asked.

Susan paused. "I don't know," she said. "I'll ask Lady Thorton about the arrangements."

I blinked.

My heart stuttered.

It wasn't the answer I expected.

It wasn't the answer I wanted.

Arrangements.

The word came ringed with worry. It arrived on a wave of panic. It fell to the pit of my stomach. Where had I heard that word before?

Susan didn't say, *Don't worry*. She didn't say, *Of course you'll live with me*. She didn't say, *I'll make sure you're taken care of*.

She had said all those things the day she rescued us from Mam for the second time, the day her house was bombed. She said we'd stay together always.

I'd believed her.

Had she been lying? Or did everything change because Mam died?

"Is there a word that means children with dead parents?" I asked.

Susan swallowed. She said, "Orphans."

Orphans. Jamie and I were orphans now, not evacuees. We wouldn't stay under Lady Thorton's protection. Susan wouldn't be able to keep us. Something different happened to orphans.

Pain gripped my gut. It hurt worse than my foot ever had. I tightened my arms around Jamie. I would hang on to him no matter what. I would never let us be separated.

"I'll be walking soon," I said. "I'll be very useful then."

Susan blinked. "Your recovery will take a few months," she said. "You know that."

I said, "I'm very hardworking."

"Yes, you are," Susan said. "But you won't heal faster because of it. I don't know if you'll be allowed to leave the hospital, whatever else happens."

"Do I have to leave right away?" This day grew worse and worse.

"No, no, of course not." Susan sounded distracted. "I only mean for the funeral. If we have one. Whatever we do."

Funeral. Another word I didn't understand. Even after a year of living with Susan there were so many things I didn't understand. Mam hadn't been much for words, and there was a limit to how much I could teach myself, looking out the one window of our flat.

Arrangements. "Line up against that wall," Lady Thorton had said last September, in her crisp head-of-the-WVS voice. "We're going to make arrangements."

We'd just come off the train that had evacuated us to the village from London. A whole herd of dirty, shabby children, and Jamie and me the most wretched-looking of all. I was nearly done in from the effort of getting away, my clubfoot oozing blood and hurting so badly my knees shook. The villagers filed past us, looking us up and down.

No one wanted Jamie and me.

I was back to that place now, only cleaner and with my right foot in plaster.

"You'd better go," I said, turning my back on Susan. "You'll need to start making arrangements."

Chapter 3

At least when Mam locked me up I'd been able to move around the room. Now I was trapped in a hospital bed, helpless, immobile, away from Jamie and Butter.

I wouldn't have Butter if I had to leave Susan.

Susan didn't love Butter, not the way I did. He was left over from Becky. Maybe Susan would let me borrow Butter, if I ended up somewhere I could keep a pony. I was the one who took care of him.

I put my hands over my face. Tears soaked my pillow. I tried not to make any noise.

Probably Jamie could keep his cat. Bovril was a good mouser. Even Mam might have let Jamie have a cat.

"I'm that sorry about your mother," one of the younger nurses whispered. She pulled my blankets over my shoulders.

I didn't reply. Susan had tried to teach me manners, but I didn't know the manners for when people said they were sorry your horrible mother died.

"Is your father in the army?" the nurse asked.

I shook my head. "He's dead," I whispered. "A long time ago. Nothing to do with the war." I said, "We're orphans now."

The nurse looked stricken. "You poor dear!"

I rolled over to face the wall. "What happens to orphans?" I asked her. "Where do orphans live?"

"In orphanages, I suppose," the nurse said. "But surely your aunt—"

"She isn't our aunt," I said.

When Susan returned that afternoon, I pretended to be asleep. When she came back after teatime, she brought Jamie. She brought our book too, *The*

Swiss Family Robinson, the only book we had left. It had been inside our Anderson shelter when the bomb fell on our house. Nice to know the shelter saved something.

Susan opened to the beginning. “For many days,” she read, “we had been tempest-tossed—”

“No!” I covered my ears with my hands. “Please—I don’t want—”

The *Swiss Family Robinson* got shipwrecked onto a beautiful island where everything turned out splendid for them. Jamie loved the story. I had always disliked it. I hated it now.

Jamie and I were shipwrecked, but we hadn’t been rescued after all. We hadn’t reached an island. We were still struggling not to drown in the storm-tossed sea.

Susan closed the book. I held on to Jamie and wept.

• • •

Days passed without arrangements. I asked the young nurse about orphanages. “Oh,” she said, her face clouding, “I’m sure some of them are nice places nowadays. Nothing like how they used to be. I mean, you get enough to eat and all. Nobody starves.”

“Could I keep a pony?” I asked.

“I wouldn’t know about that,” she said, which meant no.

• • •

Every day doctors poked and prodded my leg. They changed my cast for another cast that looked exactly the same as the first one. They wouldn’t let me have crutches. They refused to let me out of bed.

Susan visited every morning, her face gentle and sympathetic. She brought Jamie to see me every afternoon, as soon as he got out of school.