'A moving tale of belonging and bravery'
Catherine Johnson, author of *Race to the Frozen North*

MY FAMILY THE ENEMY



KAREN McCOMBIE

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BLOOMSBURY EDUCATION
LONDON OXFORD NEW YORK NEW DELHI SYDNEY

BLOOMSBURY EDUCATION
Bloomsbury Publishing Plc
50 Bedford Square, London WC1B 3DP, UK
Bloomsbury Publishing Ireland Limited
29 Earlsfort Terrace, Dublin 2, D02 AY28, Ireland

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First published in Great Britain, 2025 by Bloomsbury Publishing Plc

This edition published in Great Britain, 2025 by Bloomsbury Publishing Plc
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A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: PB: 978-1-80199-593-1; ePub: 978-1-80199-656-3

2 4 6 8 10 9 7 5 3 1 (paperback)

Cover illustration by Marco Guadalupi

Typeset by Newgen KnowledgeWorks Pvt, Ltd., Chennai, India

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For Kirsten Forrest

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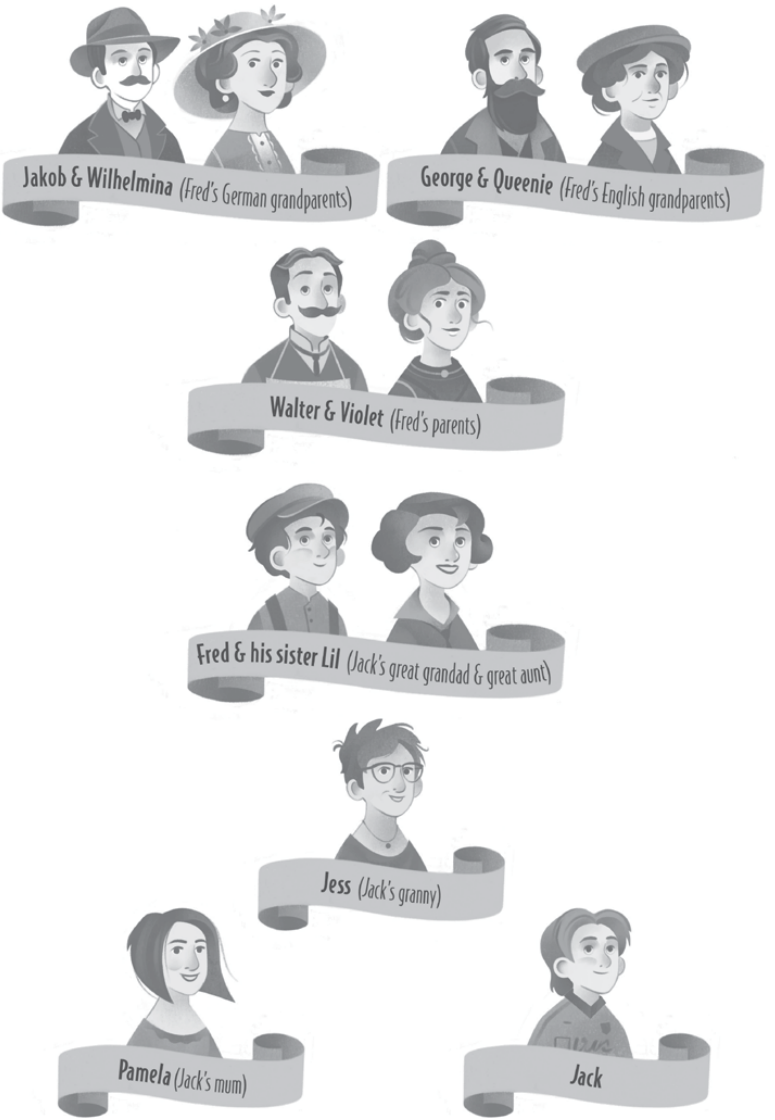
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Family tree


Jakob & Wilhelmina (Fred's German grandparents)
George & Queenie (Fred's English grandparents)
Walter & Violet (Fred's parents)
Fred & his sister Lil (Jack's great grandad & great aunt)
Jess (Jack's granny)
Pamela (Jack's mum)
Jack



1998

Jack (aged 10)

Every Saturday afternoon, Jack and his mum had the same routine. It involved biscuits.

To get to the biscuits, they'd jump on the Tube for three stops, arrive at the tall block of flats in north London where his gran lived, then zip up in the lift to her ninth floor flat. As well as the biscuits, Granny Jess always had something for Jack to read – it was a funny comic when he was a little kid, and it was a football magazine now he was ten. While Jack read and ate, his mum and Granny Jess would laugh and chat.

Sometimes, Jack would go onto Granny Jess's balcony. It was pretty cool, looking out across the rooftops towards Alexandra Palace, which wasn't a fancy palace at all, but just some random old building

at the top of a nearby hill. To be honest, Jack wished his gran's flat faced the *other* way; then he would've been able to see White Hart Lane Stadium in the distance, home of Tottenham Hotspur, only the BEST FOOTBALL TEAM IN THE WORLD, in Jack's opinion. A boring old building versus a famous football venue; there was no contest!

Anyway, today was Saturday, so Jack was here at Granny's, but everything was… well, not quite right. Granny Jess wasn't as lovely and smiley as usual, probably 'cause her knee still hurt after the operation she'd just had.

'Try to cheer your gran up, Jack!' Mum had whispered to him, right after she'd seen how empty Granny Jess's kitchen cupboards were, and nipped to the shop.

But in the five minutes since Mum had left, Jack hadn't managed to cheer Granny Jess up at all. His gran usually liked hearing his school news, but not today. First, Jack told her about the pigeon that flew into his classroom (his teacher Mrs Hudson screamed more than anyone). Then he rated his school lunches from first to worst (10/10 for the lasagne, minus-zero for the rock hard jacket potatoes). But Granny Jess just sat in her armchair and stared out of the window, watching the clouds skidding past the palace on the hill.

‘Hey,’ said Jack, suddenly remembering something else. ‘I showed everyone your evacuee card last week. They all thought it was really cool!’

‘That’s nice,’ Granny Jess replied.

Jack’s class was learning about the Second World War. And since Granny Jess had been an evacuee, Jack got to stand up at the front and show the faded identity label that was tied to her coat when she left London for Essex, aged just eight. It read ‘*Jessica Mary Miller*’ and looked like something you’d fix onto a parcel.

‘*And* I told them about my great-grandad Fred!’ said Jack, talking about Granny Jess’s father. ‘I told them he was a super-brave firefighter in London during the war, and that he put out fires *and* rescued people from bombed-out houses!’

‘Mmm,’ muttered Granny Jess.

Jack noticed that her eyes looked a bit twinkly. Uh-oh; was his gran about to cry? Jack’s mind whirred, trying to think of a distraction.

‘Hey, you know the country that used to be called Yugoslavia?’ Jack blurted out.

‘Yes, of course,’ said Granny Jess.

‘Well, my teacher was talking about it yesterday, ‘cause Lara in my class has family over there and was upset. So Mrs Hudson explained to the rest of us that

all the different regions in Yugoslavia decided to be independent countries. But then lots of wars broke out between them all.'

What Mrs Hudson told them sounded really scary and quite complicated. And it made Jack sad to think of all the wars that happened around the world…

'It's been on the news the last few years,' said Granny Jess. 'So where is Lara's family from?'

'I can't remember,' Jack replied. 'I don't even know if her country is one of the goodies or baddies.'

Jack suddenly noticed that Granny Jess was frowning at him.

'It's not about people being 'goodies' and 'baddies', Jack!' she burst out. 'It's just a tragedy, with ordinary families caught in the middle of politics and war, and lives being ruined on ALL sides!'

Jack gulped. What had he said that was so wrong? He wished Mum would hurry up with the shopping and the biscuits…

And then Granny Jess let out a sigh and leant over to pat his leg.

'Oh, Jack – look, I'm sorry if I was a bit sharp,' she apologised. 'It's just that while I've been stuck indoors, I've had nothing to do but stare at Ally Pally, and it's got me thinking about a lot of things from the past…'

Alexandra Palace was nicknamed ‘Ally Pally’; Jack knew that much. But he didn’t know what Granny Jess was talking about right now.

‘What sort of things?’ he asked.

‘Oh, just the difficult times my dad went through, and his parents,’ said Granny Jess.

Jack’s family tree was a bit of a mystery to him. There was Fred the World War Two hero firefighter, of course. And he also knew that Granny Jess’s family had always lived in this part of London. Once, when she took Jack to Ally Pally and the park around it, she told him that rolling down the huge grassy hill was her favourite thing to do when she was a little girl… but that was about it.

Then Jack remembered *another* thing Granny Jess had told him about her childhood.

‘Little Sparrow… didn’t your dad call you that?’ he asked.

‘Yes, yes, he did,’ Granny Jess said wistfully. ‘Listen, can you get me that box, please, Jack?’

Granny Jess was pointing to the shelf under the coffee table. Jack knelt forward and grabbed hold of a battered tin box, one he’d never seen before. It had an old-fashioned picture of a cute dog on the lid and the words ‘Quality Biscuits’ in swirly lettering.

If there're still biscuits inside, they'll be pretty mouldy, thought Jack, as he sat back down on the sofa and passed the box to Granny Jess.

'Now, Jack, I'm going to tell you something about my father and his family that I haven't told anyone before,' she said, loosening the rusty lid of the box.

'Not even Mum?' asked Jack.

'Not even Pamela… your mum, I mean,' Granny Jess confirmed.

Jack felt his cheeks flush with excitement.

'Is this like a family secret or something?' he asked.

'You know, Jack, it really is,' said Granny Jess. 'And it's a secret I'm very tired of keeping.'

All of a sudden Jack didn't want Mum to hurry back, even if she *was* bringing biscuits. It felt exciting to be trusted with a secret.

'So where do I start?' Granny Jess wondered aloud. 'Well, I suppose it's to do with my surname, before I was married, I mean.'

'Jessica Mary Miller,' said Jack, picturing his gran's identity label.

'Yes,' said Granny Jess with a nod. 'But the thing is, Jack… well, "Miller" wasn't my dad Fred's *original* surname.'

'Huh? So he had a fake name?' asked Jack, blinking.

‘No, not *fake*, exactly,’ said Granny Jess. ‘What I mean is, your great-grandad Fred was born Frederick *Müller*. With an umlaut – see?’

Granny Jess now held up a tatty-edged black-and-white photo; it was of a boy in long shorts and a jacket, holding a cap. She flipped the photo around; some swirly handwriting read: ‘*For dearest Father. Your son, Frederick Müller. 1916’.*

The two dots above the letter ‘ü’ – Jack guessed those were an umlaut. But he was more interested in the photo, and turned it back around again.

‘Wow! So this is your dad Fred when he was young?’ said Jack, studying the boy’s face. ‘Hey, do I look like him?’

‘Yes! Yes, I think you do, Jack!’ said Granny Jess.

‘*Müller*…’ Jack murmured, thinking about the name now. ‘It sounds kind of… German, maybe?’

‘It *is* German. Fred’s father – *my* grandfather – was a lovely man called Walter Müller,’ said Granny Jess, introducing a member of the family who Jack had never heard of before. ‘Walter came over from Germany with *his* parents when he was a little boy, back in about 1890, I think.’

‘Yeah?’ muttered Jack. ‘But that’s like… a hundred years ago!!’

‘Sounds like forever, doesn’t it?!’ said Granny Jess, with a soft smile.

Jack took a second to think about this totally new information.

‘So wait… this Walter; he was my great-GREAT-grandad… and he had a son called Fred… who was *your* dad,’ Jack muttered, trying to get the connections right in his head. ‘Then *you* had a daughter, Pamela, who is my mum. And then there’s me!’

It was a lot to take in – five whole generations.

‘You’ve got it, Jack! Anyway, Walter grew up and became a baker,’ Granny Jess continued with her story. ‘He had a shop not far from here.’

‘A baker?’ Jack repeated, his eyes wide. ‘So my great-*great*-grandad Walter made cakes and biscuits and stuff? That’s so cool!’

Granny Jess laughed at Jack’s reaction.

‘Hey, and ‘cause I’m related to Walter wotsisname with the umlaut… that makes me part-*German*, doesn’t it?!’ Jack added.

‘It certainly does,’ said his gran.

‘That’s so cool too!’ said Jack. ‘But how come you never said before?’

‘Because… because back during the First World War, having German heritage was a shameful thing,

Jack,' said Granny Jess. 'It broke families apart. People sometimes changed their names to hide their identity, to try to be safe.'

Jack suddenly realised what she was telling him.

'So *Müller* got changed to *Miller*, 'cause the family wanted to hide the fact that they were German?' he checked.

'Yes. But that's not the most awful part of it,' said Granny Jess. 'Early on in the First World War, all the local German men were rounded up and locked in *there*…'

Jack looked to where Granny Jess was pointing; out of the balcony window and towards Alexandra Palace! He knew that in Victorian times, it was built for concerts and dancing and shows, and nowadays it was pretty much still the same.

Is my gran saying that this long-ago relative of mine was a prisoner in a sort of theatre?!? wondered Jack, thinking how mad that sounded.

Before he got the chance to ask his gran for more info, she said something else; something strange.

'You see, Jack, once upon a time, not *all* that long ago, our family was the enemy!'

As she spoke, Granny Jess began to lift notebook after old notebook out of the biscuit tin, as stories of Fred and Walter – and their family's hidden history – began to unfold…

Fred's story

1914

War so far, war so near



Chapter 1

‘Psst, Fred!’

I turned around and glanced at my best pal Alec, who sat in the row behind me in class. Our teacher Mr Shaw liked to keep us well away from each other, since we were always up to mischief, but it didn’t stop us.

Alec grinned and lifted up an imaginary rifle – he pointed it straight at me! Luckily it wasn’t a real one or I’d’ve been in trouble…

I weaved about in my seat, as if I was trying to dodge a bullet.

‘Fred, stop!’ hissed Prue Watkins, who sat next to me. I ignored her, like I always did. She was no fun.

How could Prue be so grumpy, when everything was so exciting? ‘Cause it really, *really* seemed like there was about to be a war!

All the older folk were constantly talking about it, though they stopped whenever any of us children were nearby. As if we didn't know! The blokes who sold papers on street corners shouted out the latest news at the tops of their voices. If *that* didn't tell us what was going on loud and clear, then there were boards on the sides of their news-stands with the headlines in huge black letters.

As well as that, the big lads stood around in the evenings on the street corner speaking about nothing else. Alec's brother Rob was one of them, so Alec got to hear all about it. Germany was getting too big for its boots, the lads said. If Germany started elbowing its way into other countries and trying to take them over, Britain would have to step up. France and Russia had already announced they were against Germany.

'Bang! Bang!' Alec mouthed at me, pretending to fire a shot.

'Aaarghhh!' I mouthed back, clutching my hands to my chest, pretending I'd been hit.

'Fred! Shh!' Prue hissed again.

Prue was such a spoilsport. She didn't like when we played war games in the playground. But our two playgrounds were separate – one for boys and one for girls – so I didn't understand why she had to nosey

through the railings at us boys and make a fuss about what we were doing. She should've just hung around with her friend Gertie and done skipping or whatever the girls did in *their* playground. (Though Gertie probably wouldn't be skipping; she caught polio when she was little and it made her right leg weak. She had to wear a metal and leather support round her leg called a calliper.)

'Bang!'

Arrgh! Alec scored another direct hit to my chest!!

Prue nudged me in the side with her sharp elbow, trying to get me to sit still and not muck about. But it was too late. I heard the sniggers of some of the other boys and girls, and guessed what was about to happen.

'Fred Müller! Alec Campbell! COME HERE NOW!' Mr Shaw bellowed, pointing to the spot beside his big wooden desk. He'd already opened the drawer underneath.

My grin disappeared. I could practically feel the fierce sting of the teacher's belt on my hands already.



Chapter 2

I felt shivery, even though the hot July sun beamed down on me and Alec as we made our way home from school. It was the shock, I supposed. That and the throbbing pain across the palms of both my hands.

Neither of us had said a thing since we left the playground, apart from a mumbled ‘’Scuse!’ from Alec as we passed goody-goody Prue and Gertie on the pavement. One tall, one short; Gertie was small like a doll and only came up to Prue’s shoulders.

‘You alright, Fred?’ asked Prue, staring at me. Her grey eyes were pale, her skin was pale, her hair was pale. She was almost see-through, like a ghost. She was the opposite of me and Alec, with our dark, wavy hair, brown eyes and faces ruddy from playing outside

all the time. People often thought we were brothers, we were so alike. I felt like he was my brother, anyway.

'Yes, I'm alright,' I mumbled. 'Why are you asking?'

Was goody-goody Prue trying to embarrass me? Get me to admit I'd nearly cried when I got the belt earlier?

'It just looked sore,' Prue said with a shrug. 'Mr Shaw hit you a *lot* of times.'

'Eight times each hand – I counted,' Gertie joined in, in her soft and wispy high voice. 'It's only meant to be six at the most.'

'Doesn't hurt at all,' Alec answered for me. He held up his red-striped palm for the girls to see. 'Does it, Fred?'

'No,' I lied, and hurried on. Alec was lying too. Maybe he'd managed to hide the fact that he was scared in front of Mr Shaw, but I'd seen my friend's father give him a smack around the head when he was angry and Alec *definitely* cried then.

As me and Alec turned the corner and headed towards the street where we both lived, I remembered I'd still got one of the rock cakes that I snuck out of our shop this morning. I never took any of the pricey cakes; the cream horns or the iced fancies. I'd get a sharp stare if Father saw me take one of those. Also, they'd just squash to mush if I tried to hide them in my pocket till lunchtime.

Now I quickly untied the big cotton handkerchief the rock cake was wrapped up in and offered some of the broken, raisin-dotted chunks to Alec. I knew he didn't get treats at home too often – everyone knew most of Mr Campbell's wages were spent at the pub.

'Ta,' said Alec, helping himself to the biggest piece.

But it crumbled in his fingers almost immediately and dropped onto the pavement. He let out a loud, fed-up 'Ach!' sound – and we both burst out laughing.

'Ach!' is the word that brought us together, that made me and Alec instant friends when we were five and his family moved here to London from Scotland. The very first day he was hanging out in the street, two older boys raced through a puddle in their homemade wooden cart. A wall of brown water splashed me and I'd yelped, 'Ach!' out loud.

Alec had grinned and repeated, 'Ach!', with the 'ch' a rolling low sound in the back of his throat. Since I'd said it the same way, he thought I was from Scotland too. But I explained that my father was originally from Germany, where 'Ach!' means 'oh' or 'oh, well'. Alec said it sort of meant the same for Scottish folk.

The thing is, 'Ach' was about the only German word my father ever used. He was a very little boy when he came to London with his parents, and when his mother

died, his father remarried a local woman and so English was always the main language for Father.

He was very proud of the family name, though.

I could see it now above the shop in black and gold; *'W. Müller, Baker'*. The sign and the new canvas awning had just gone up that day. Father had been running the baker's shop for years, but when the original owner Mr Evans finally retired, the shop was properly ours – Father had rented it *and* the big flat above it.

The plate glass window had gold letters painted on it too, I saw. They read, '*Viennese and Fancy Bread, Cakes and Confectionery'*.

I ran over to join the neighbours, fellow shopkeepers and customers standing in the street, gazing at the shiny newness.

'Quite a sight, eh, Violet?' Father was asking Mother. Mother said nothing but just nodded quickly, her hands clutched to her chest. She looked as if she was bursting with wonder and pride.

My big sister Lil and Alec's big brother Rob were standing beside them, holding oval trays of cakes. Lil had turned fourteen, so she'd left school and was serving in the shop now. And Father had just taken on sixteen-year-old Rob as an apprentice baker.

I noticed that everyone in the small, admiring crowd was eating the pink-iced Tottenham cakes Lil and Rob must have been handing around.

'The shop looks very smart,' Mr Koslovsky, the tailor, was saying, as he brushed crumbs from his big, bushy moustache.

'Should do. It cost him a pretty penny…' I heard my nan Queenie grumble in reply. Nothing Father did ever seemed good enough for Queenie, no matter how kind and nice and hard-working he was.

'Have another cake. It'll sweeten you up, Nan!' said Lil, turning and holding out her tray.

'Enough of your cheek, Wilhelmina Müller!' said Queenie, using Lil's whole, proper first name, as if she was really annoyed with her. But then Queenie gave our Lil a quick wink and helped herself to another iced cake.

Then all of a sudden, the good mood was broken by an urgent shout from Father.

'NO, NO!' he called out. 'Not the window!'

A bunch of younger boys in the street were running too close with their battered old leather football. In that second, it looked like a pass had gone wrong and the ball was arc-ing towards the new shop-front!

Both me and Alec went to lunge for the ball, but we were too far away. Someone quickly stepped

in, though, with a clatter of a dropped tray and a scattering of cake over the pavement. I expected it to be Rob – he played in a Sunday league football team with lots of the older boys. But it was my sister Lil who took a dive and *whacked* the heavy ball away with a slap of her hand, before it smashed into the window.

A cheer and a round of applause went up for her. But Mother looked scandalized. She was always telling Lil to be more ladylike. Lunging after balls was hardly that. Neither was jumping around so that her long skirt flew up and gave everyone a flash of her knees and her black woollen stockings!

Mother was also tutting and looking sideways at Rob, as if she worried what he thought of our Lil. Mother liked to talk about him being a fine, young man. It was obvious she pictured Lil and Rob being a good match for each other when they were older. (But *I* knew that Lil thought Rob was a big-headed bore!)

'Fancy asking Lil to be our team goalie?' I joked to Alec.

My best pal didn't seem to be listening. He had his nose scrunched up, and his gaze was focussed on the glossy new sign above the shop.

'Alec?' I said. 'What is it?'

‘Huh?’ he grunted, suddenly looking awkward. ‘It’s, uh, I mean, I was just thinking, if we *do* go to war, and you’ve got a German name…’

He didn’t have to finish his sentence for me to understand what he was getting at.

‘Yes, but we’re not *German* Germans, like them over in Europe!’ I said brightly. ‘We’re British, aren’t we? Everyone knows the difference!’

‘Yeah, yeah, ‘course,’ Alec agreed with me, before thumping me in the arm in a brotherly way.

I tried to ignore the rush of worry in my chest and thumped him back.