

HTAV

It is 1901 and 12-year-old Karl Muller has just moved to Melbourne from Germany. Karl is struggling to adapt to his new homeland and misses his grandma, Oma. When he agrees to sell souvenirs for the opening of the new Parliament, Karl meets a cast of characters who will be affected – for better or worse – by Federation. This story of separation and unity brings human texture to one of Australia’s great turning points.

Dear Oma a Story of Federation



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Karl squinted at the corrugated iron ceiling and tried to count the number of blowflies hovering there. His gaze travelled to the sunlight straining through the cracks in the walls and the hundreds of names carved into the door. Above the sound of the carts banging through the back alleyway, he could hear Mr McConnell through the classroom window: *If I had 12 shillings and subtracted 8 pence, how much money would I have?* Sometimes the school outhouse was the only place he could get some peace and quiet.

Although he had been at the top of his class in Germany, school now gave Karl a tight knot in his stomach. He found it difficult to understand Mr McConnell's thick Irish accent and he missed his friends. But most of all he missed his grandma, Oma. With her silvery white hair piled in a bun on top of her head and her twinkly blue eyes, she understood how shy he felt with new people.



Back home in Hamburg, Oma often received letters from childhood friends who had gone to Australia to seek gold. Her son, Karl's Papa, had devoured each letter, reading aloud the stories of a hot, dusty land full of strange animals. Papa had found an old book with pictures of the Australian bush in it, and it fanned the flame of adventure.

As the smoke from the factories and chilly Hamburg air made Mama's cough steadily worse, Papa had begun to make plans.



The Muller family had arrived in Melbourne the year before. Every evening, Papa would bring home leftover copies of the *Argus* newspaper and they would sit around the table cutting it into squares to use as toilet paper. Everyone in the street was happy that Papa worked as a newspaper printer and that the local outhouses were well-stocked.

Karl liked cutting up the newspaper. The squares were like a jigsaw puzzle – eventually he would piece it together and understand his new home.

For a while now, one word had kept popping up in the newspaper. Karl knew that soon there would be a parade to welcome the English Duke and Duchess and that the Australian parliament would sit for the first time in Melbourne. Papa had taken him to see the German Citizens' Arch being built, but he didn't really know what the word meant.

"Papa, what is Fed-er-ation?" asked Karl.

Papa scratched his beard with his inky hands as he wound a length of string through a stack of paper squares. "It means making all the Australian colonies into one nation," he said thoughtfully.

"But isn't Australia already a nation?" Karl persisted.

Papa tried to explain. "Do you remember going through Customs when we came to Victoria?"

Karl nodded, remembering some men asking Papa questions and searching through his suitcase.

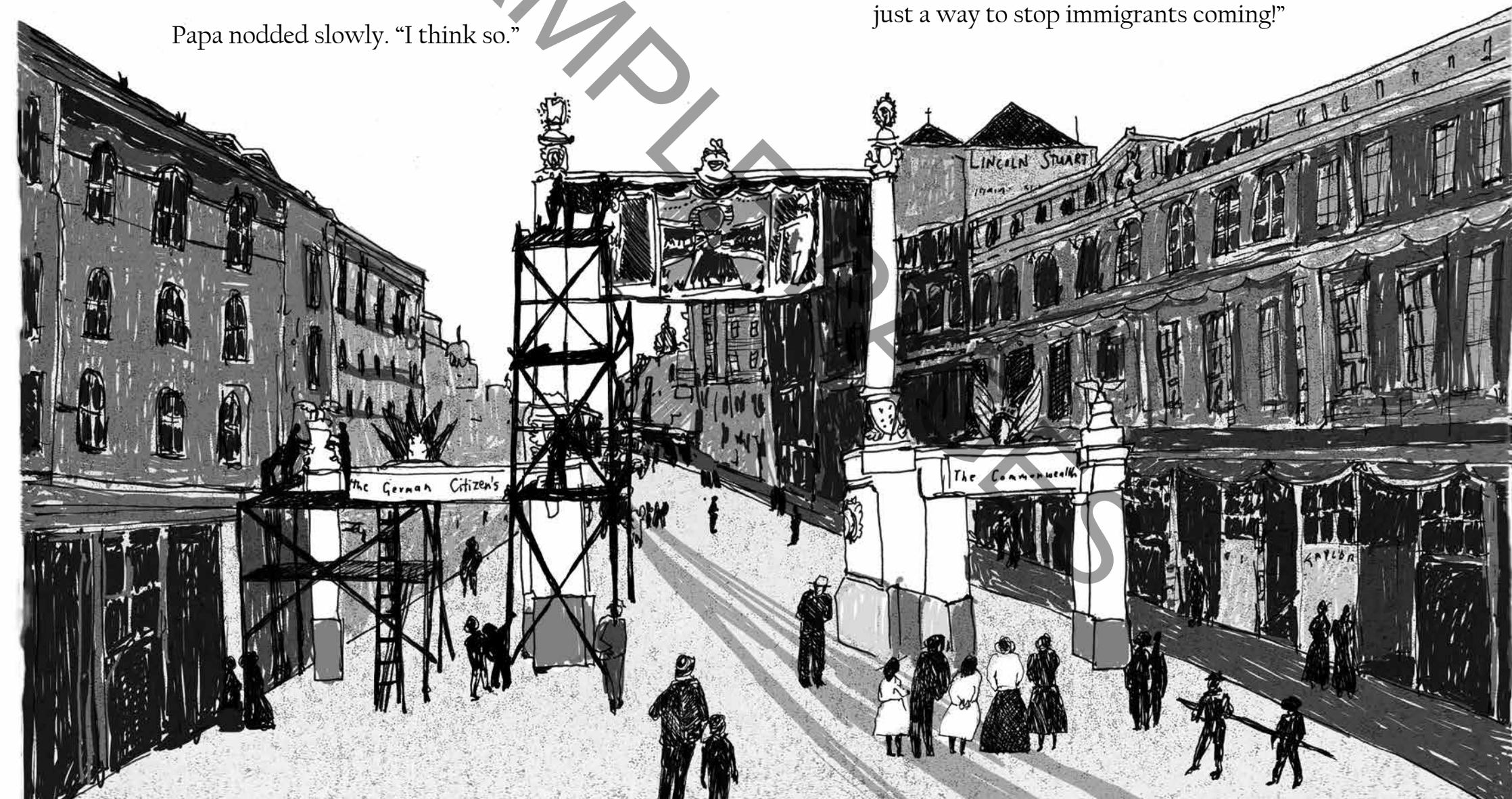
“Well,” Papa continued, “Australia is like a lot of small countries, and when you go across the border it is like going overseas. After Federation, it will be a single country.”

Karl paused. “So, Federation will be a good thing?”

Papa nodded slowly. “I think so.”

“The newspapers say that unity is strength,” he went on. “Australia is a very good country and Federation will make everybody feel a part of it.”

Karl’s brother Frederick piped up: “But lots of people don’t want Federation.” He was 15 and had just left school to become a paper boy. “They say it’s just a way to stop immigrants coming!”



Papa shook his head. "That can't be right," he said. "All Australians except the native people are immigrants. It wouldn't make sense."

As Papa and Frederick continued to argue, Karl wondered what Oma would think of their new lives in Melbourne.

In his head, he composed a letter to her.

Liebe Oma,

Melbourne is very different to Hamburg.

Karolina spends most of her time hanging around Jack Moran who works at the dairy stall in Queen Victoria Market. It is not far from our house. Frederick wants us to call him Fred. He says it is more Australian.

Mama's cough is much better. The German Relief Society nurses visit regularly but she hardly laughs anymore and doesn't go out. Mrs Danielli from next door said that her illness is not in her body but in her heart.

I wish you were here,

Karl

"That's it!" thought Karl. "Mama will be much happier if Oma comes to live in Australia. Oma will make Frederick's favourite foods, shop at the market with Karolina, argue with Papa, and in winter she can help Mama make bright colourful quilts to keep the cold away."

How much would a ship's passage cost? Karl realised he needed money.

As he snipped away at the newspaper, a solution popped into his head. He cut out an advertisement from the sheet he was trimming and pressed it deep into his hand.

BOYS (100), sell Federation Buttons, Flags; good commission. Alfred Wood, wholesale news agent, 140 Swan st., Richmond.

