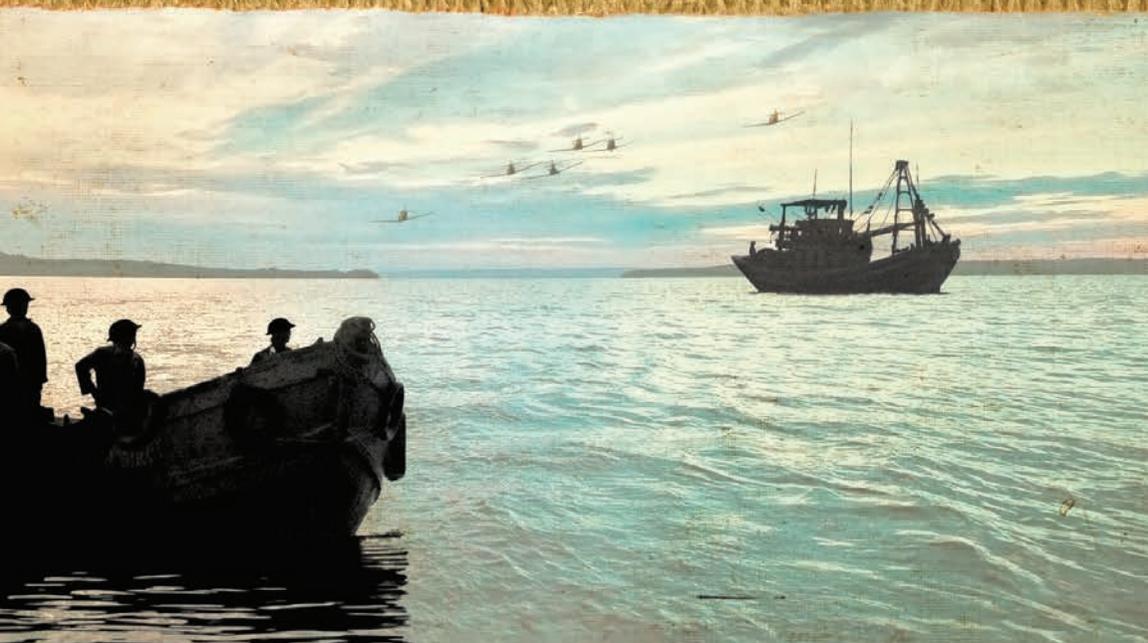


A NOVEL OF DUNKIRK

*Any boat that goes may not return  
yet this may be her finest hour*

THE  
MAGGIE BRIGHT  
TRACY GROOT



# Praise for novels by Tracy Groot

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*PUBLISHERS WEEKLY*

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WEST MICHIGAN CHRISTIAN NEWS

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PUBLISHERS WEEKLY, STARRED REVIEW

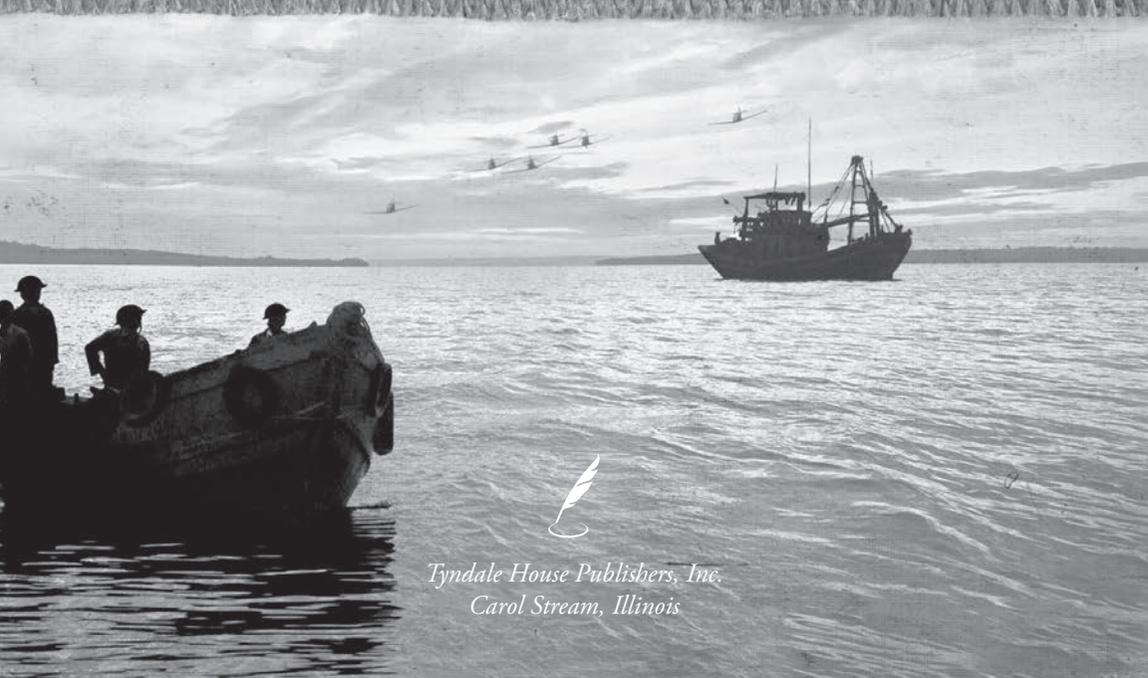
“Groot cleverly combines historical research, Scripture, and thrilling imagination to create an ingenious story built around the Gerasene demoniac described in Mark’s and Luke’s Gospels. It’s one of the best fictional adaptations of a biblical event I’ve had the pleasure to read.”

ASPIRING RETAIL MAGAZINE

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*The Maggie Bright: A Novel of Dunkirk*

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*The Maggie Bright* is a work of fiction. Where real people, events, establishments, organizations, or locales appear, they are used fictitiously. All other elements of the novel are drawn from the author's imagination.

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# 1

SOMEWHERE IN BELGIUM

MAY 1940

There is nothing more disturbing than the sound of an animal in pain. Animals can be put out of their misery, but men, men cannot.

“What in me is dark, illumine! What is low, raise and support!”

“Will someone *please* shut him up?” shouted the British officer.

Artillery shook the hut. Bits of dried earth rained down on the officer’s map. He flicked away a single lump. The British Army was in *retreat*. Had England ever met such a rout as this? How would they face those at home—if they made it home?

The man in the corner howled. When he didn’t shout strange things, he howled, and not just any old howl; it came up in an eerie building groan and let loose at a peak, put the hair straight up one’s neck.

At the peak of the latest unholy howl, a figure appeared in the doorway, hesitant, uncertain—just the person.

“You there!” said the officer. “Yes, you. See the man over there? He’s yours.”

The private looked at the bandaged man. “What do you mean, sir?”

“Get him to Dunkirk. He’s done something heroic.”

“I only came to tell you—”

“Yes, yes, we’re overrun!” A boom shook the hut. “Bronson!” he shouted over the private’s head. “Get *over* that canal and tell McIntire’s unit to *pull out*. *God*, have mercy!” He stared at the private. “Still here?”

“But, sir—”

“Let me be clear: You are no longer part of any unit. You’ve been plucked from your lovely little fraternity, you now have an independent commission, and *he* is *yours*. Move!” Then, bellowing, “Bronson!”

Private Jamie Elliott went to the bandaged man making the horrible sound. A medic finished the last of his dressing, and looked at Elliott with some sympathy.

“All yours, mate. At least he can walk.”

“What’s wrong with him?” said Elliott.

“Shell went off, right by his head. When he’s not howling, he quotes Shakespeare.”

“Milton, actually,” said another medic, bandaging another man.

“Who cares? It’s poetry, and it’s awful.”

“I think it’s rather interesting. I like to listen to him.”

“That’s because you’re a pansy, aren’t you?” said the first medic. He looked at Jamie and shook his head. Then he looked at his charge, who had quieted at last, and said, gentler, “He’s a captain. Lost all his men, poor sod. Risked his life to bring a message to another unit, saved *their* lives, came back to his own and they were blown to bits. Last one died ten minutes ago. A brigadier put him in for the Victoria Cross.”

A boom, and earth rained down.

“Their fatal hands no second stroke intend!” shouted the bandaged captain.

“Well, that was relevant.” The medic grabbed the captain’s rucksack and stuffed in rolled bandages. “Change it as often as you can; keep it clean as you can. It’s a great rotten hole, but I have no time to stitch it. Keep the bandage *tight*. He’s lost a lot of blood. He’ll need water as often as you can scrounge it.” He thrust the rucksack at Elliott. “Go.”

The ground shuddered, earth rained, and Elliott grabbed the captain’s arm.

“Which way to Dunkirk?”

“That way, mate, twenty miles or so. You can’t miss it—it’s burning.”