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The Good Son: A Story from the First World War, Told in Miniature

By **Pierre-Jacques Ober**

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Candlewick Studio

Sydney

Hardback, 104 pages

Illustrated

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The Good Son, written by Pierre-Jacques Ober, is truly an 'homage to all the men who fulfilled their patriotic duty unprepared for the horror unleashed upon them.' It 'tell[s] the stories of the "little soldiers" who submitted to dramatic events far beyond their control,' conveyed through the extraordinary photographic and filmmaking artistry of Jules Ober and Felicity Coonan. Each image is carefully constructed using the author's World War I miniature figurines, yet there is nothing leaden about the emotions conveyed by the characters.

Ober's story about the French deserter Pierre illustrates the bleak war front in tones of grey and muted sepia. His sparingly written account of his first battle, 'We won. It was terrible,' is punctuated by the images of the scattered corpses of his compatriots, enemies and fallen mounts. These bitter images are contrasted with vivid passages envisaging the future Pierre will never have—married and shopping with his wife, his young

daughter carried on his shoulders through the streets of a brightly lit Paris.

On the night before he is executed, he writes to his mother telling her he 'wanted to be a good son' and defend his country as the newspapers had urged him to do. He reflects on his 'capture' of German soldiers, deserters who begged him to take them prisoner. 'They weren't huge and scary like I'd been told. We were all just soldiers caught up in a big mess.'

Ultimately, there is no reprieve for Pierre. He is executed and his mother is left to fend for herself.

This is a picture book that deserves a treasured place in every secondary school library. There is scope for inclusion in any study of war where the focus is to challenge jingoistic notions of nationalism and mateship. The universal nature of the suffering caused by war is central to this story, as is the complexity of who, and what, we honour as individuals and as nations.