



## A Country Road, A Tree: A Novel (Random House Large Print)

By Jo Baker

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**A Country Road, A Tree: A Novel (Random House Large Print)** By Jo Baker

**From the best-selling author of *Longbourn*, a haunting new novel of spies and artists, passion and danger, hope in the face of despair**

Paris, 1939. The pavement rumbles with the footfall of Nazi soldiers marching along the Champs-Élysées. A young, unknown writer—Samuel Beckett—recently arrived from Ireland to make his mark, smokes one last cigarette with his lover before the city they know is torn apart. Soon he will put them both in mortal danger by joining the Resistance . . .

Through it all we are witness to the workings of a uniquely brilliant mind struggling to create a language that will express this shattered world. Here is a remarkable story of survival and determination, and a portrait of the extremes of human experience alchemized into one man's timeless art.

*From the Hardcover edition.*

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## **A Country Road, A Tree: A Novel (Random House Large Print) By Jo Baker Bibliography**

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**Editorial Review**

Review

“It is a daring project, to enter the mind of a man known for his withdrawal and silences, but Baker succeeds triumphantly in prose that is both intimate and austere . . . Unbearably poignant . . . Though Beckett kept characteristically quiet about it after the war, the raw material is nothing short of sensational: hiding up a tree to escape the Nazis, seeing a companion throw himself from a window to escape capture, digging a roadside grave for dead German soldiers, disguising a case of explosives with potted geraniums . . . Do you need to be interested in Beckett to engage with this novel? Well, as with the Longbourn servants, if you’re not, you should be, because again this is an extraordinary story that shines a light both on individuals caught up in the sweep of history and the way life is transmuted into art.” —*The Guardian*

“Jo Baker manages to offer a fresh perspective on World War II as well as an elegant imagining of one of art’s most enigmatic figures.” —*Sunday Express (Best Books of the Month)*

“An exquisitely crafted novel.” —*O magazine*

“A moving, beautifully written, and riveting historical novel.” —*Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*

“Beautifully written, empathetic, and unflinching, it is very, very good . . . *Longbourn* threw a new light on Jane Austen’s Bennet sisters, but this homage to Beckett is far more daring and courageous, diving deep into the formative shifts in the writer’s psyche as he confronts the moral choices that the war posed.” —*Daily Mail*

“An exceptionally moving and enthralling piece of historical fiction . . . Before the reader is halfway down the first page, the endorphins are released and the mind smiles at the knowledge we are in great hands.” —*New York Journal of Books*

“In this worthy successor to *Longbourn*, Baker skillfully captures Beckett’s world, the rhythms of his bare-bones prose, and the edginess of his point of view . . . Baker details how wartime experiences provide the key to Beckett’s transformation from Joyce disciple to distinctive literary voice.” —*Publishers Weekly*

“Baker builds a convincing case for how Beckett’s experiences in a world shattered by war shaped the dark, spare, tragicomic voice he developed to express the despair, absurdity, and surprising fortitude that characterize human existence.” —*Heller McAlpin, LitHub*

“I read Anthony Doerr’s *All the Light We Cannot See* just before beginning this book. Both novels are sensitive, well written, with great compassion for their characters . . . *A Country Road, A Tree* demonstrates, in impeccable detail, that even war can become the stuff of daily life.” —*Minneapolis Star Tribune*

“Baker’s historical drama deftly explores the psyche of one of the greatest writers of the twentieth century . . . Harrowing.” —*Booklist*

“A most enjoyable read. Baker’s Beckett is likeable, accessible, even, and *A Country Road, A Tree* is a stunning tribute to the life-changing experiences that shaped a literary giant . . . Baker wonderfully captures the toll of war . . . Beautifully precise and unadorned.” —*Irish Independent*

“The novel perfectly captures the deprivation, the despair, and the constant, creeping fear of an occupied people.” —**Red magazine (This Month’s Must-Reads)**

“A *Country Road, A Tree* is a revelation, a joy . . . A stunning historical novel . . . We know the real Beckett better by consuming his fictional portrayal here, as though we are privy to a lost diary from his youth.”  
—**Stuff (New Zealand)**

“The tension, the fear, the sheer grind of life under occupation and the toll that it takes are here. The story is beautifully paced, the research lightly worn.” —**Irish Times**

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About the Author

**JO BAKER** was born in Lancashire and educated at Oxford University and Queen’s University Belfast. She is the author of *Longbourn*, a national best seller and *New York Times* Notable Book. Her previous novels are *The Undertow*, *The Telling*, *The Mermaid’s Child* and *Offcomer*. She lives in Lancaster, England.

*From the Hardcover edition.*

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COOLDRINAGH

Spring 1919

The tree stirred and sound of the needles was *ssh*, *ssh*, *ssh*. The boy swung a knee over the branch, heaved himself up, and shifted round so that his legs dangled. The scent of the larch cleared his head, so that everything seemed sharp and clear as glass. He could still hear the faint sound of piano practice, but he could also see out across the fields from here; he could see for miles and miles, and the sky was wide open as a cat’s yawn.

He heard the side door of the house go, and then her voice calling out for him, sing-song: “It’s ti-ime.”

He chewed his lip and stayed put. The door popped open, he could hear more distinctly the bright ripple of music, a stumble, and the phrase caught and begun again. Frank was trying hard to get it right. He, though, would not oblige. With her watching, he couldn’t lose himself while playing; and if he couldn’t lose himself, then what was the point of playing at all?

“I’m wai-ting.”

He didn’t move. She gave out a sigh and the door clacked shut behind her, and she came down the step, out into the garden, looking for him.

He dug at a scale of bark with a thumbnail.

“Where have you dot to now, you wee skitter?”

But it was herself that she was talking to as she marched through the garden, searching him out. He shuffled

in against the trunk, wrapped an arm tight around it.

He watched her pass under his dangling tennis shoes—the white dividing line of the parting in her hair, her skirt snapping out with her stride. Her feet moved like darting arrows, pointing the way. The wrong way, but she wasn't going to give up on it. If she were to stop, and plant her feet and crane her head back, that would be that. But it didn't cross her mind: he simply couldn't be where he was not allowed to be. Up there, he had climbed out of her imagining.

The music ended. Frank had finished the piece. He was waiting to be excused.

She was out across the lawns now, and there was just the spiral stair of larch branches down towards the brown earth, the mat of fallen needles, and the sound of her voice, calling again and fading round the far side of the house.

He waited until he heard her footsteps return, and then the click and clack as she opened the side door and shut it again behind her. A moment later and the music started up again. Poor old Frank, he'd been lumbered with it; Frank was paying for his little brother's escape.

He too would pay for it, he knew, and in spades, when she found him; his mother had a strong arm. But for now, he had disappeared, and it was a miracle.

He shuffled forward on the bough, tweaking the legs of his shorts down, one and then the other, between the rough bark and the tender backs-of-knees. Gravity tugged at him now, teased at his core, making it lurch and swoop. A bird was singing somewhere—a blackbird, pouring its song up and out into the Easter air.

He sucked in a breath. It tasted of sap, and of spring, and of his rubbery tennis shoes. He let go of the branch; he let go of the trunk. He lifted his arms and spread them wide. The pause on the cusp, the brink. He dived out into the empty air.

Gravity snatched him. Air stuffed his mouth and ballooned his shirt and his shorts and pummelled him, and it was stacked with branches and they smacked and scurried past; twigs whipped his cheeks and legs and arms and belly and tore at his shirt.

The ground slammed up. It knocked the breath out of him, knocked the light out of him. Made him still.

He lay, his cheek on hard earth. No breath: empty, red and pulsing, and no breath. Gaping, but no breath; then, in front of his eyes, the dust stirred and the fallen needles shifted: he dragged in a lump of air and heaved it down him, and then pushed it out again. It hurt.

He felt too a hot pulse in his hand, a burn on his thigh: he noticed these particular discomforts, alongside the tenderness of bruised ribs and the hard weight of the earth pushing up against him.

He creaked up onto hands and knees as his breath became normal again. Then he sat back on his heels and brushed the needles off his palms. After a moment, he twisted himself round to stretch out his legs. He considered the scratch across the ball of his thumb, which was not so bad after all, and another on his thigh, which wasn't bleeding much, and the pink bald patch where an old scab had come off a knee. He licked the ooze off his hand, tasting not just blood but the salt-sweetness of unwashed skin and medicinal pine. He brushed down his shins and tied a trailing lace. Then he eased himself upright, unfolding like a deckchair, all angles and joints. He tugged his shorts straight, and they more or less covered up the scratch on his leg, so

she wouldn't notice that.

His head swam, just a bit. But he was all right.

He looked over to the house: the windows stared straight back at him. The music laboured on. No doors were flung open, no one came thundering out to grab him by the scruff and drag him in and thrash his backside blue for doing something so very dangerous indeed, for putting himself in harm's way, for risking life and limb, when it had been impressed upon him so soundly not to do such an idiotic thing again. She must be standing over the piano, her stare flicking from Frank's hands to the score, the score to his hands, making sure that Frank, at least, was going to get something right.

And knowing the piece, he knew he had a good while yet before Frank would be done with it.

He glanced up through the helix of branches to the sky, where clouds bundled and tore towards the mountains from the sea. On the lowest branch, near the trunk, the bark was polished smooth with the wear of his own hands. He reached for it, grasped it in his stinging palms, and heaved himself up till his elbows locked and his belly was pressed against the bough. Then he swung his right knee over the scaly bark, making the blood bead again. He stretched a hand up for the next branch, where it hung just above his head. He began, again, to climb.

This time, this time, *this* time, he would skim up to join the clouds. This time, he would fly.

## **Users Review**

### **From reader reviews:**

#### **Dawn Campbell:**

Now a day people that Living in the era exactly where everything reachable by connect with the internet and the resources in it can be true or not need people to be aware of each data they get. How people have to be smart in getting any information nowadays? Of course the answer is reading a book. Looking at a book can help individuals out of this uncertainty Information mainly this A Country Road, A Tree: A Novel (Random House Large Print) book as this book offers you rich facts and knowledge. Of course the data in this book hundred percent guarantees there is no doubt in it you know.

#### **Kristine Toomey:**

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**Doris Garcia:**

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