

# Chapter One

## Nan's Story

Sarah and her brothers, Jay and Rene, lived with their parents and Nan in a white house with a red roof. The house sat high in the hills on the Darling scarp, nestled amongst the tall white gum trees. Many birds made their homes in



the trees and Sarah loved to listen to them, and watch the bush animals eat and play. She was a Noongar girl, so for her family the bush was a spiritual place where people could learn many special things.

One hot summer's night, just as the sun was setting, Nan called Sarah and her brothers out onto the back porch to tell them a story. Sarah had a feeling the story was going to be scary and important — and she was right.

Nan's twinkling brown eyes grew serious as the shadows deepened in the yard. 'This is the story of the *woordatj*,' she said softly.

'Nan, why are you whispering?' Sarah asked.

'The *woordatj* doesn't like to be disturbed. I don't want to wake him up in case he gets angry. Now, sit still and listen carefully.'

## Chapter Two

### The *Woordatj*

'The *woordatj* is short, but he has a long chin, long arms with long fingers and long legs too, only he walks bent over like an old man. He is really hairy – hairy from his fingers and his toes all the way up to his head and his nose. The *woordatj* doesn't like to show himself off to

people, but that doesn't mean he's not watching. If he's close by, you might just see the red of his eyes.'

Is he close by now? Sarah wondered, staring nervously into the dark garden. She glanced at Rene, who was frowning. She thought Rene wouldn't like to see him either. But Jay, who was the oldest, just grinned and tried to look tough.

'The *woordatj* is always around us. He is part of nature, so he is in contact with all living things.

'He talks with the trees, animals and birds like *chitty chitty* (willy wagtail), *koolbardi* (magpie),

*djakal-ngakal* (galah) and *doornart* (parrot). But he likes to stay hidden.'

'Where does the *woordatj* live, Nan?' asked Sarah.

'There is a cave at Rocky Pool, tucked away next to a big shady old *wornt* (gum tree). The inside of the cave is a little wet, so it's a chilly, dark place. The *woordatj* camps there.'

'Now,' Nan continued, her voice becoming even softer, 'there is something very important you need to know about the *woordatj*. One of his jobs is to make sure children behave themselves and



listen to the wise things their Elders tell them. If you don't ...'

Nan's voice trailed off.

'Then what, Nan?' asked Sarah quickly.

'Then at *kedalak* (sunset) the *woordatj* comes with an old sugar bag to look for naughty *koolongka* (children). So — *barlay!* (watch out!).'

A loud laugh rang out, startling them all. Sarah and her brothers jumped in fright.

Nan chuckled. 'It's only a *kaa kaa*. But I think that kookaburra is telling us it's time to go inside.'