

## SAYING GOODBYE

'There won't be any mangoes like this where you're going, Lilli girl!' said Lilli's grandmother. She slurped her mango noisily and the yellow juices ran down her chin. Lilli thought other people might think her Nan was disgusting, the slobbery way that she ate mangoes, pulling them straight from the trees, tearing the green skin off with her teeth, and biting into the rich sweet insides. But Lilli liked eating them that way too. Biting into the skin gave the mango a wild tang and the juices spurting everywhere was great fun. This was just one of the many things she would long for when her family moved to the city.

'I'll really miss you, Nan!' sighed Lilli. 'I wish we didn't have to go.'

She loved talking and laughing with Nan, sitting together on the old blanket under the big mango tree with the dogs.

'Don't look so sad,' Nan replied. 'You can ring me every day and visit me on the school holidays too!'

Lilli knew that was true, but it just wouldn't be the same.

'Come on,' said Nan, getting up stiffly.



'We'd better get you home. Your mother will be going mad, finishing all that packing on her own.'

Nan passed Lilli the washer she kept specially for mango clean ups. Lilli wiped her face and looked around Nan's beautiful garden one last time.

'We'll call in at your Uncle Bernie's house on the way,' Nan said. 'He wants to say goodbye to you and so do your cousins.'

Lilli felt even sadder. She came from a big family and she would miss every one of them when she was living in the city.

*I'll be so lonely,* she thought miserably.

Uncle Bernie was a great artist and as usual he was sitting on the front verandah painting when they arrived. Some of the paintings were about his country, some of them were just for fun, and others were things he had seen in his dreams.

'Oh that's wonderful!' Lilli cried when she



saw his latest one.

It was full of mango trees with bright golden fruit and red shrubs with rainbow birds perched in them.

'Thank you, bub,' Uncle Bernie smiled.

'That tree looks just like the one at Nan's place!' Lilli said. 'But what's that hidden in the

shadows under the tree, Unc?’

Uncle Bernie chuckled. ‘That’s a little creature who visited me in my dreams, bub. He’s a dingo cat and he lives inside that mango tree. I’ve painted him just for you. When you move to the city, he’s going to take care of you!’

Lilli felt excited. *A dingo cat*, she thought in wonder, *a little creature to look after me in the city. Maybe I won’t be so lonely after all!*

## PACKING UP

Lilli tearfully kissed Nan goodbye then went to her room to pack all her things into the small suitcase her mum had given her.

‘What are you doing Lilli Pilli?’ Fatty Phil demanded, as he barged right in. ‘Aw, you’re not crying are you?’

Lilli spun around angrily. ‘Don’t call me Lilli Pilli!’

Just because her brother was excited about moving to the city, he expected her to be too.

‘I have to pack my stuff,’ she snapped crossly. ‘Now go away!’

‘How about I call you Grumpy Pilli?’ he joked.

Lilli threw a pink teddy at him.

Fatty ducked, then darted out the door yelling, 'Dad said to tell you dinner's ready, Grumpy Pilli!'

Lilli felt so mad she almost chased after him, but then something quick and shadowy flitted across her desk.

*What was that?* she wondered. She looked again, but there was nothing there.

'Lilli!' her dad called. 'Come and have dinner. It's our last meal before we hit the Big Smoke, so it's yummy fish and chips.'

Lilli loved fish and chips but she felt too upset to eat much. Fatty Phil didn't mind — he gobbled down her dinner too. After dinner Lilli finished packing then turned out the light and went to bed early. She was nearly asleep when she heard a scrabbling sound under her desk. Lilli sat up. A pair of small glowing green eyes blinked at her in the half-light. The creature, which was darker than the shadows in the

room, climbed onto her desk and sniffed the air. Then it slipped over to her dressing table and looked at itself in the big mirror. It was such a strange thing to do, Lilli almost laughed.

All of a sudden the creature grew so large it was as big as the mirror. Then it turned sideways and it was so thin it looked like a flat sheet of black paper. With a satisfied air, it floated down from the dressing table and





slid into Lilli's open suitcase. Lilli watched in astonishment as it folded itself under her clothes. Then two green eyes blinked at her and vanished.

*What is it?* wondered Lilli.

She was too scared to touch the suitcase, let alone pull everything out. She tugged the blanket over her head and closed her eyes.

*Maybe I'm dreaming,* she thought. *Maybe I'm really asleep and this is all a dream.*

When Lilli woke the next day she remembered everything that had happened. Bravely she checked her suitcase. It was filled with her clothes and special things, but there was nothing else in there.

*I must have imagined it,* she thought.

She zipped up her suitcase and carried it out to the car, where her dad squeezed it into the boot.

'The Big Smoke's waiting for us,' he said cheerfully. 'It's time to hit the road!'

## THE CITY

The new house in the city wasn't as bad as Lilli had imagined it might be. In the back garden there was a huge pepper tree that reminded Lilli of Nan's big mango tree at home. Four young boys were in the garden next door. Instead of helping with the unpacking, Fatty Phil leaned over the side fence and started joking with them.

*Who lives on the other side of our house?* Lilli wondered. *Is it a girl my age?*

As Lilli watched, an elderly lady stepped out onto the front porch. When she saw Lilli she smiled and waved. Lilli waved back politely, but she was disappointed. It was

going to be harder for her to make friends than Fatty Phil.

‘Can I have the room that looks out over the pepper tree?’ Lilli asked her mum.

It wasn’t a lovely mango tree, but it was big enough to sit under and she knew that whenever she looked at it she would think of Nan.

‘Of course you can!’ Mum replied.

It took hours to unpack and organise the house, but by the time they were finished, everything looked really nice.

*Almost like home*, thought Lilli in surprise.

Then her dad came bustling in with dinner. ‘We’ve all been working hard, so I thought we could do with an early tea to celebrate our first night in our new home.’

It was chicken and chips!

‘We can’t have takeaway every night,’ said Mum. ‘It’s too expensive. Tomorrow night we’ll cook.’

Lilli felt much hungrier than she had the night before, so when Fatty Phil greedily eyed her plate, she moved it away. It was a great feed.

After dinner, Lilli vanished into her bedroom to finish off the last bit of tidying up. Unlike Fatty Phil, she liked to have a place for everything and there were still a few special things in her suitcase she needed to put away. She lined up her pink teddy, her jewellery box, her favourite books and some shells she’d collected on a shelf near the window. Then she hung her best dress and two school shirts in her new wardrobe. The suitcase should have been empty, but when she went to close it she saw a black scarf lying in the bottom.

‘This isn’t mine!’ she said out loud as she picked it up. It was soft and silky, almost like fur. It reminded Lilli of something, but she didn’t know what. Suddenly the fur twitched.

‘Arrgh!’ Lilli screamed, dropping it in

fright and falling backwards onto her bed.

She watched in horror as the thing grew large and hairy. A pink mouth with razor sharp teeth appeared, then two sparkling green eyes blinked up at her.

'Hello Lilli!' a small voice said.

It was the creature from the night before. It looked like a cross between a cat and a dog, with its long pointed ears and dingo tail.

'What are you? What do you want?' Lilli demanded in fright.

The creature laughed and licked its paw. 'Don't you remember me? I was in your Uncle

Bernie's painting! I've come to look after you for a while.'

Lilli didn't know what to think. What if it was something horrible and it was trying to trick her?

'I'll tell Mum and Dad about you!' she warned.

The creature grinned. 'No one can see or hear me except you!'

Then it pressed itself against the pale blue wall and, turning itself the same colour, disappeared completely.

*Great, thought Lilli. What do I do now?*

