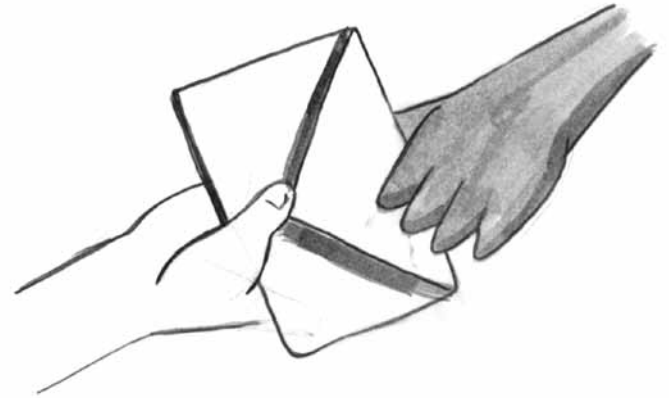


Chapter One

Lilli's Holiday

'Bye, Lilli, I'm going to miss you,' said Alice.

Lilli was going to miss Alice, too, but she was really looking forward to spending the school holidays with her grandmother. She was also looking forward to getting away from the hustle and bustle of city life and being with her big extended family in her home country again.



The girls hugged a last goodbye and Alice gave Lilli an envelope.

'Don't open it until you are back at your Nan's house,' Alice whispered, as Lilli got into the car.

As they drove away Lilli leaned out the car window waving goodbye, goodbye, goodbye, until she couldn't see Alice anymore.

'What's the big deal — it's not like you'll never see each other again!' said

Phil, rolling his eyes. Lilli glared crossly at her brother and ignored him.

Lilli thought over her first year in the city. She had made lots of friends and liked most of her subjects, especially writing and art. She was going to miss school and her new home, but tomorrow was the day she had been waiting all year for — there was a special secret someone that she really wanted to see again!

The next day the family — Mum, Dad, Lilli and Phil — flew up north. When they landed the air was dry and hot. As they walked into the terminal Lilli was smothered with kisses and cuddles from her extended family. She laughed with happiness and excitement. Lilli

looked around as she made her way through the crowd, searching for one person in particular — Nan.

‘Lilli girl!’ Nan shouted.

‘Nan!’ Lilli yelled, and she ran to Nan for a big hug.

As Nan squeezed her, Lilli felt a black fluffy scarf tickle her nose.

Nan smiled her cheeky grin and Lilli felt a surge of happiness. She knew exactly what that black scarf was!

After they got their bags from the conveyer belt, Uncle Bernie herded everyone into a minivan and they drove through the small town. Lilli would be staying with Nan on her own while Mum, Dad and Phil would be staying with Uncle Bernie and his family. Lilli was so happy. She loved her Nan most

of all and this holiday was going to be just like old times.



Chapter Two Back with Shadow

When Lilli opened the creaky old door at Nan's house, she realised just how much she had missed being there. Lilli went straight to the bedroom. Taking a deep breath she sat down on the bed with her back snug to the wall. She started to count to herself, waiting for something to happen. She closed her eyes and suddenly she felt a warm spot behind her head.



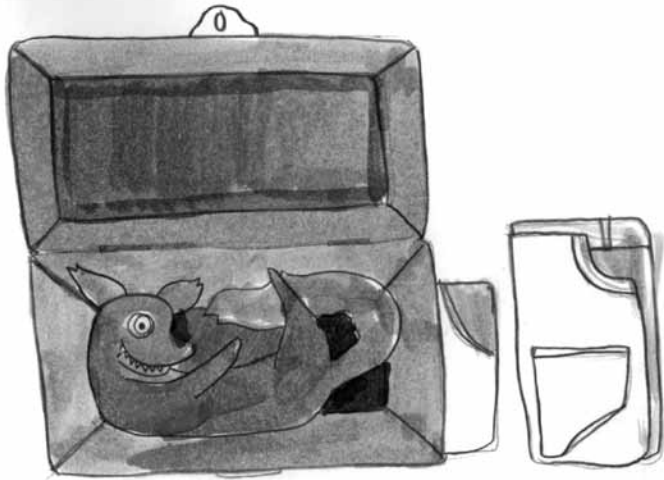
'I knew you would be here,' she smiled. But when she turned to the wall — nothing was there. She felt something brush lightly around her ankles, smooth like silk. She looked down quickly but again, nothing was there.

Lilli listened and watched for the slightest sound or movement. She

was waiting for Shadow, her magical dingo-cat friend. Shadow lived in Nan's mango tree, but Nan had sent him south with Lilli to keep her company when she first moved to the city. Lilli had really missed him since he'd returned home.

Feeling disappointed when he didn't appear, Lilli started unpacking. When she got to the bottom of her suitcase she found a black scarf.

Lilli held the scarf, gazing at it with happiness and expectation. It started to twitch and change from smooth to warm and furry. It wound around her hand and slid up around her arm all the way up and across the back of her neck. It tickled and Lilli laughed as it twisted itself back down her other arm



to her hand. It jumped off her hand like a little black rabbit and landed perfectly on the bed beside her. A black dingo cat rolled around in laughter.

'I got you again! I got you again, ha ha ha ...'

'Shadow!' Lilli exclaimed with joy, looking at his big sparkly green eyes. As soon as she saw those eyes all the

memories of their adventures together came flooding back.

Shadow jumped into Lilli's empty suitcase. 'What's this?' he asked, handing a little blue envelope to Lilli with the curl of his tail.

'Oh ... I totally forgot about that! My friend Alice gave it to me and she told me to open it when I get here.'

Shadow leapt gracefully from the suitcase and wrapped himself around Lilli's neck, watching as she slowly opened the delicate blue envelope. It contained a beautiful ribbon bracelet with blue, white and light purple plaits held together with Alice's little lucky button. With the bracelet was a note saying:

Dear Lilli,

My mum said that the bush is filled with dangerous things, so I'm giving you my lucky button so you don't hurt yourself on your adventures.

Don't forget about me J

From your best friend, Alice xx

'That's a really good present,' said Shadow and they smiled at each other. Lilli was so happy that she had good friends like Shadow and Alice.

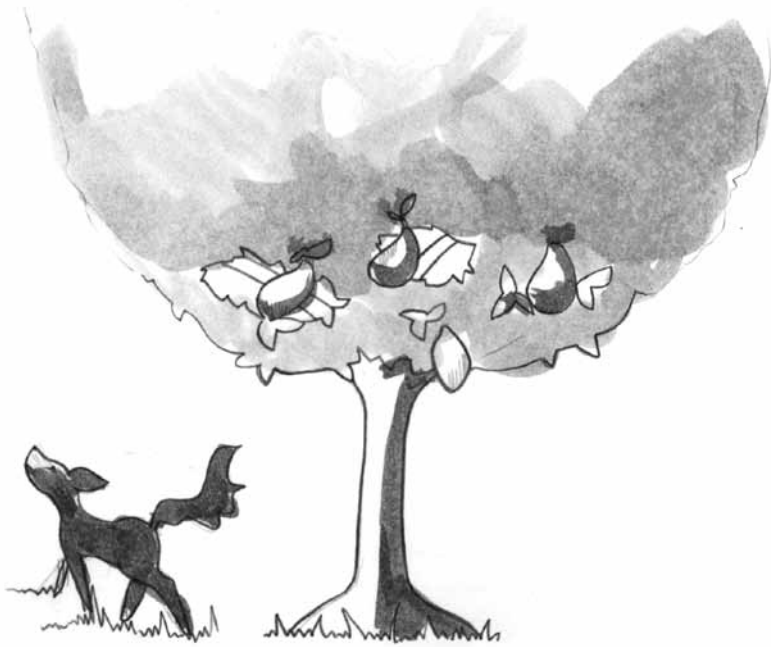
Chapter Three Shadow Fading

Before Lilli went to bed, she gazed out the window at the old mango tree where Shadow lived. Shadow was out in the moonlight, wandering around the yard and sniffing the damp air.

Nan came in to tuck Lilli into bed. She looked worried.

'What's wrong, Nan?' asked Lilli.

Nan hesitated, then replied, 'I'm worried about Shadow. He hasn't been



going to the mango tree lately. And he isn't as black as he should be. I think he is fading. See if you can find out what's bothering him. He is acting very strangely and I can't work out why.'

Lilli was surprised. Shadow seemed exactly the same to her.

Shadow was a magical creature — a guardian spirit. Lilli didn't know how old he was, all she knew was that he had been around since long before she was born and had been a very special friend to Nan from when Nan was a young child.

'Don't worry, Nan,' she said. 'I'll have a close look tomorrow.'

Nan tucked Lilli into her bed and kissed her good night. As Lilli drifted into sleep she felt Shadow snuggle into bed and cuddle up around her feet.

Lilli stared at Shadow in the morning light. Shadow had changed.

'Shadow, what is happening? Your colour looks different, it's as if you are fading!' she gasped. Shadow was a dark grey and the edges of his ears



were transparent. Lilli scooped him up in a hug, yelling for Nan.

Nan came bustling into Lilli's bedroom.

'Nan,' Lilli cried, 'Shadow is fading.'

Nan sat on the bed and put her arms around Lilli and Shadow.

'Shadow, you really need to tell us what is happening. Why are you fading?' Nan asked gently, peering

down at Shadow in Lilli's arms.

Shadow looked glum, his green eyes were not sparkling like they usually did — they looked a little faded as well.

Shadow sat on Lilli's lap, not speaking, but as Lilli gently stroked his back, he felt comforted and knew he needed to tell Lilli and Nan what was going on.

'I can't go back to the mango tree,' Shadow said sadly.

'Why not?' asked Nan.

'Because something else is living there and it won't let me in,' Shadow replied.

Nan was puzzled. In all the long years that she had known Shadow, this had never happened.