



The
LITTLE HOMES
on Honey Patch

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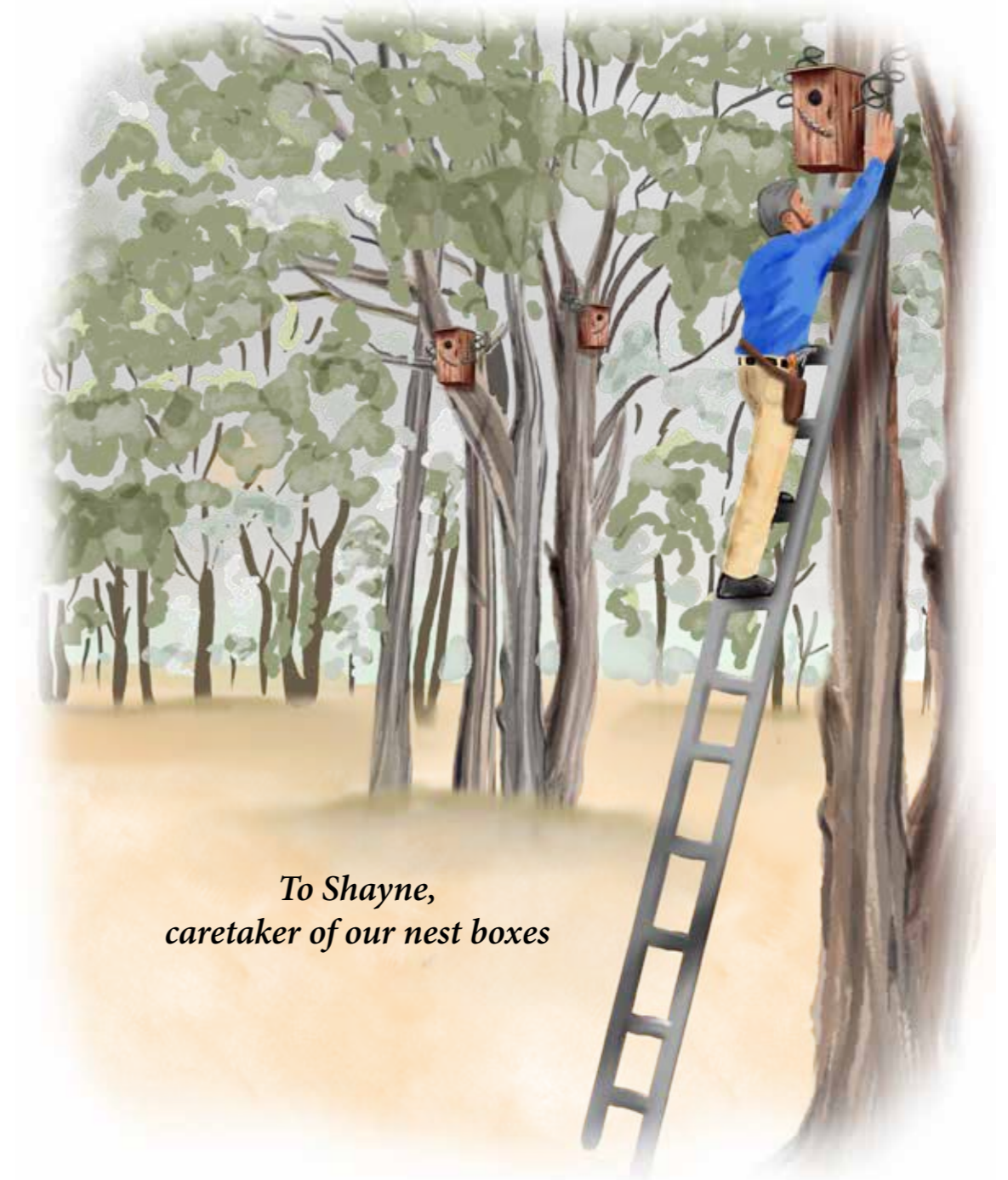
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*To Shayne,
caretaker of our nest boxes*

Chapter 1

JB AND ROONEY went with Grandpa to cut down a tree for firewood.

Grandpa drove the ute down over the sandy creek crossing and up the hill to the gate of the gum tree paddock.

JB got out to open the gate.

“Leave it open,” said Grandpa. “No need to close it until we come out.”

“Look! Look!” called JB, pointing to the ground between two trees. “A big, big lizard.”

The lizard scuttled across the dead leaves on the ground and climbed quickly up the back of a gum tree.

Rooney and Grandpa got out of the ute and came around the back of the tree to look.

“Ah,” said Grandpa. “A small goanna. I have seen goannas here sometimes. This is only a young one. They can grow quite big.” Grandpa

stretched his arms out to show how big.

The goanna clung to the tree trunk and stayed very still.

“Keep watching him, if you like,” said Grandpa. “I will look about for a tree to cut down for firewood.”

“Well, you can’t have that tree,” said JB. “That’s the goanna’s tree!”

“No,” said Grandpa. “I think that tree is a bit big anyway. There is a smaller one over here.”

He walked a little way up the hill. JB and Rooney followed him and looked up into the branches.

“This tree has white leaves as well as green,” said JB.

“The white bits are flowers,” said Grandpa. “Look they are all over the tree.”

“And this tree is singing,” said JB. “It sings ‘buzz, buzz, buzz.’”

“That’s bees,” said Grandpa. “The bees fly to the tree, creep into the flowers and get nectar.”



Then they fly back to their hive and change the nectar into honey. They store the honey and use it for food.”

“Here is a low branch. Watch closely. See the bees coming and going?”

“I know about bees,” said Rooney. “Auntie Jo showed me bees on the flowers in her garden.”

“Anyway,” said JB. “We can’t cut down this tree, it’s the bees tree.”

Grandpa pointed to a very big tree.

“I think the magpies build their nest in that one,” he said. “Do you remember

getting swooped by magpies last spring?”

“We always make sure we are wearing hats when the magpies are nesting.”

“Ah, the magpie’s tree,” said JB. “You can’t cut down that one.”



JB looked around. “What about that tree?” he said, pointing. “It is very old and nearly dead.”

“No, I don’t want to cut that one down,” said Grandpa.

“True enough it’s dead, but it has a hollow in the trunk just above that second branch and every spring

a pair of rosellas nest there. It must be a pretty safe nesting spot because I usually see young rosellas later in the spring.”

“Right,” said JB. “Not that old tree, that’s the rosella’s tree.”

“And there are possums,” said Rooney.

“Nana said there are possums. Which tree do the possums live in?”

“I’m not sure where they live,” said Grandpa. “But they come over to the garden at night and eat the flowers on Nana’s roses. Nana said she doesn’t mind too much because she likes possums.”

“Once we found a dead bat on the ground near Nana’s roses,” said JB. “It was like a little mouse with big papery



wings. Nana said it probably came from these big trees. She buried it in the garden and made us come inside and wash our hands, because sometimes bats have germs. Do you know which tree has little bats hiding?”

“No,” said Grandpa. “There are probably little colonies of microbats in quite a few of the older trees. They hang upside down to sleep in the daytime and fly out at night to catch insects like mosquitoes.”

“I don’t like mosquitoes,” said Rooney, “I hope the bats eat all of them.”

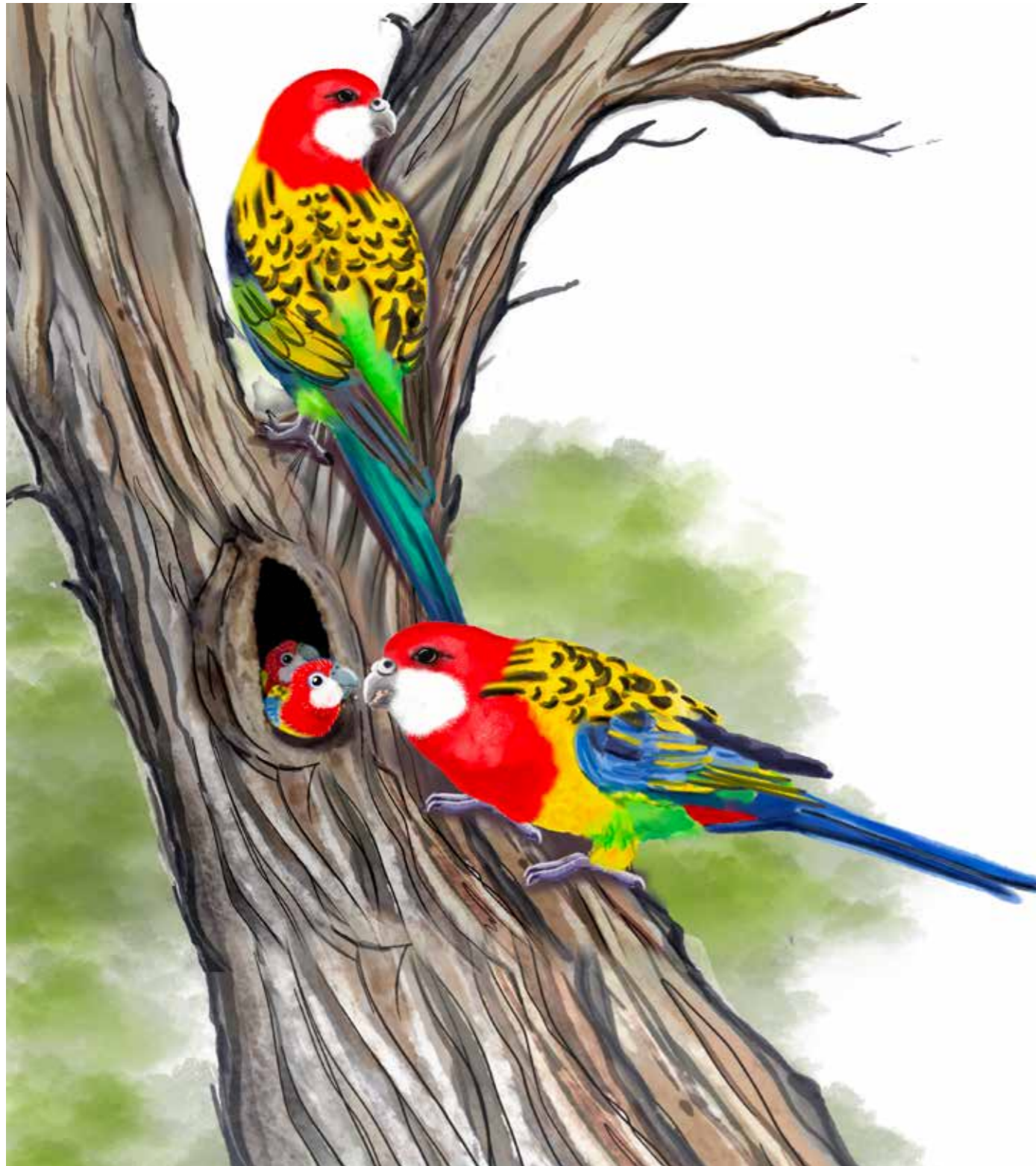
“Are there koala’s here?” asked JB.

“I don’t think so, I have never seen one,” said Grandpa. “I think koalas like different kinds of gum trees, kinds that don’t grow here. These trees are mostly two sorts, called grey box and ironbark. The grey box are the ones with grey bark, and the ironbark’s have very rough black bark.” He pointed.

Rooney said, “There are trees like that in our street and beside the playground where we go to the swings”.

“Yes,” said Grandpa. “There are lots of ironbark trees in Bendigo.”

“There are lots of trees here but if you keep cutting them down, soon there won’t be any left.” said JB.



“I don’t cut down very many, maybe two or three for firewood each year,”

said Grandpa. “And new ones keep growing you know.”

“How do new ones come?” asked Rooney.

“Well,” said Grandpa. “You saw the tree with flowers. All these trees have flowers at different times in the year. And after the flowers die away, they grow into gumnuts. The gumnuts grow big and when the weather gets hotter, they split open. Inside the nuts are lots of tiny seeds and the seeds fall to the ground and get scattered about. They lie on the ground until the weather gets cooler and perhaps some rain comes along. Then some of the seeds grow little roots and little leaves and become baby trees.”

“The baby trees grow bigger and bigger each year, until they are big enough to fill the spaces of any trees that have died or any trees we have cut for firewood.”

Grandpa pointed to a clump of little trees at the side of the paddock. “See those young trees,” he said. “They started growing in the wet spring last year. By the time you two are old enough to get your driving licences those trees will be as high as

the biggest ones here.

“That’s when we are 18,” said JB. “That’s a long time.”

“Well, I’m sure this little patch of trees will still be here,” said Grandpa. “Because I will always be careful not to take too many for firewood and I won’t let other people take them either.”

“Now I will do a deal with you two. See that tree over there. It has one stump but two trunks. I will cut one side of it down for firewood and leave the other side for the animals and birds to use.”

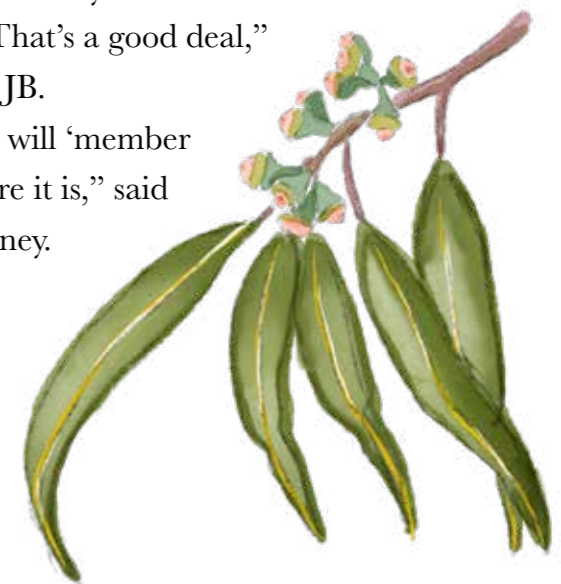
“We’ll cut it up into firewood and stack the blocks back home at the wood heap. They need to dry out for a year or two, so they burn cleanly.”

“Then it will be time for lunch.”

“After lunch I will make a bird nesting box for you, and we will bring it over and fasten it to the stump. You can check it out when you visit in the spring to see if any birds use it for a nest.”

“That’s a good deal,” said JB.

“I will ‘member where it is,” said Rooney.



Chapter 2

GRANDPA MOVED THE ute a little bit further away, so it couldn't be hit by branches when the tree fell.

"You two get up on the back of the ute and put on your earmuffs. You must stay there while I am cutting the tree down. When it has fallen, I will tell you when it's safe to come closer."

"First, I will cut out a little bit of wood on one side, then I will make a big cut from the other side. When I have nearly cut through, the tree will groan and start to fall. I shall step back out of the way. The tree will make a great big crash when it hits the ground."

"Now you stay right here and watch!"

Grandpa took the chainsaw out of the ute. He put on his earmuffs and safety glasses.

He walked down to the tree and started the saw.

JB and Rooney held on to the rail on the back of the ute and watched.

They heard the saw motor revving. They saw the tree start to bend over

and heard it groan.

They saw Grandpa step back with the chain saw.

Then the tree was falling, falling and it hit the ground with a giant crash.

"Okay," called Grandpa. "You can come down and look now."

JB and Rooney scrambled out of the ute. They ran down to the tree and walked around it.

Grandpa brought the ute closer.

"I will cut some of the smaller branches up into blocks," he said. "Then you can help me throw them up into the ute. Stand back while I am using the saw."

JB and Rooney stood and watched while Grandpa sawed a branch into small pieces. Then when he stopped the saw, they helped to throw the wood into the ute and drag the leafy branches out of the way. Grandpa cut up another branch and then another until the back of the ute was full.

They drove back to the wood heap near the house and while JB and Grandpa stacked the wood, Rooney

