



CHAPTER 1

Woof

My name is Willa and I want to introduce you to Woof. He's my dog. His real name is Wilfred Connal Tate, but when I was little, 'Wilfred' never came out right. Mum and Dad thought it was cute that I called him Woof, so it stuck.

I have three best friends. Woof is my best four-legged friend. My best same-age friend is Tae Jin, but everyone just calls him Tae. My best old-age friend is Frank. His last name is Pickles, which is funny because he loves eating pickles on his sandwiches. I'm not a fan.

Frank is very old and very grumpy. Sometimes when Woof and I visit him he tells us to go home. But I don't, because my grandma says that I'm good company and my Dad says that my grandma knows everything. It never takes long for Frank to be less grumpy and maybe even smile – especially if I tell him a joke.

He makes me cracker biscuits with peanut butter, and lime cordial with ice cubes. Some days there's cakes that Frank says he's cooked, but I know he hasn't. His neighbour, Mrs Best, brings them over in Tupperware containers. Frank has a special bag of treats for Woof too.



When I visit, which is pretty much every day, Frank tells me stories. I don't always know if they're true, but I hope they are. I tell Frank everything that goes on at school and at home. I love to make him laugh, but that's like winning the lottery. It doesn't happen very often and, as my mum says, the odds are against you – whatever that means.

Before Frank came to live at Sunset Views – that's the name of the retirement village, which is next door to our house at the end of Cricklewood Crescent – he had more than fifty pets. That's exactly forty-nine more than me. But they were all the same. Pigeons.

Dad says Frank was a 'pigeon fancier', which means he liked them a lot (not just that they're fancy birds).



He has pigeon mugs and pigeon plates, pigeon wall hangings and pigeon paintings, and even a pigeon clock.

Frank's pigeons used to go in races. A truck would take them far away and then they would fly all the way home. The first one back was the winner. He says that they're the racehorses of the sky.

The pigeons didn't win gold medals like my brother, Sam, did when his cricket team won their grand final. Instead, they won all the pigeon stuff Frank has in his house.

I don't think pigeons would care that much about mugs and clocks. I'm sure they would rather win birdseed and swings and mirrors for the aviary.

Fifty pigeons all cooing and pooing in the same cage would be very loud and very messy. So it's lucky Frank only has one pigeon now. Her name is Mimi. She's grey with shiny purple and green feathers on her neck. But there's a big problem. **Mimi is missing.**