

Chapter 1



I COULDN'T OPEN the present. Not now, not after hearing the news. And certainly not with Mum and Molly gawking at me. I couldn't bear the thought of anyone else seeing what he'd chosen for me until I'd seen it myself.

I needed time to get over the shock. We'd open it later, in my room, Lucky and me. I pushed the pile of presents aside and stood up. 'I'm going for a walk with Lucky. I'm not in a birthday mood anymore.'

'Okay.' Mum looked at me blankly, as if she'd heard my words but hadn't taken them in. 'Okay, then.'

'Do you want me to come?' Molly's eyes were welling with tears.

'No. You stay with Mum. I'll be all right. Come on, boy.'

As soon as he heard the word 'walk', Lucky started to wag his tail, running back and forth to the front door. I clipped on his lead and headed for the creek.

Then we walked. For ages.

The tears started at the footbridge. They wouldn't stop.

Grandpa was dead.

It was my twelfth birthday and I'd been in the middle of opening my presents. Unbelievably, the one I was about to open – I actually had it in my hand – was Grandpa's. The postman had delivered it that morning.

The phone had rung and Mum went to answer it. She came back into the room, her face the colour of milk. It had been Gran with the bad news.

A heart attack.

I couldn't believe it.

When we got back from our walk, I couldn't open Grandpa's present straight away. I waited all day and unwrapped it in my room before I went to bed. Lucky was eager to help. Inside the padded post bag was a parcel wrapped in rainbow birthday paper. Gran would have chosen that. Stuck to it was a card with my name on it in Grandpa's handwriting. On the outside it had a boy fishing – I was crazy about fishing – and inside, some birthday wishes signed

with love from Gran and Grandpa. Underneath, in brackets, Grandpa had written:

This present is from me. Gran will give you hers when you come up in the holidays. She is still knitting it.

I could tell by the shape and feel that it was a book. That wasn't surprising. Grandpa was a poet. He always gave me books. Ever since I'd been little, he'd read me poems. It was important to hear poems read aloud, he'd said. It didn't matter if I didn't understand them. Just enjoy the swish and swirl of words dancing off the page.

Maybe this was a poetry book. It was smaller than a novel and had a hard cover. I ripped open one end of the paper and Lucky helped with the rest. While he ran off around the other side of my bed with a huge chunk of the paper, shaking it from side to side as if he was trying to kill it, I held the book in my hands, thinking of Grandpa.

The tears started again. I cried so hard my whole body shook. Lucky looked up at me with his head to one side. He dropped the chunk of paper and jumped up on the bed. He practically sat on top of me and leaned his head on my knee.

'Grandpa's dead, boy. I can't believe it. He's dead.'

The book had a bright orange cover with the word 'Journal' on the front. I flicked through the pages which were blank, apart from a fishing rod and a bucket with some fish in each corner. Inside the front cover Grandpa had written a note:

Dear Ish,

A place for your poems.

Poetry - the best words in the best order.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge.

Love Grandpa