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Conker

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CONKER



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Illustrated by Petra Brown



EGMONT

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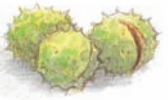
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Red Bananas





Chapter One

Most dogs have one name, but Pooch had three – one after the other. Pooch was what Grandma called him in the first place. But when Nick was a toddler he couldn't say Pooch very well and so Pooch soon became Pooh.

Then one day Pooh heard the rattle of the milk bottles outside and came bounding out of the house to say hello to the milkman – he liked the milkman. But today it was a different one. Pooh prowled around him sniffing at the bottom of his trousers. The new milkman went as white as his milk. Nick tried to drag Pooh back into the house, but he wouldn't come.

''S'like a wolf,' said the milkman, putting his hands on his head and backing down the path. 'You ought to chain it up.'

'Not a wolf,' Nick said. 'He's an old station.'

'A what?' said the milkman.

'An old station,' Nick said. 'Pooh is an old station.' At that moment Grandma came to the door.



'Nick gets his words muddled sometimes,' she said. 'He's only little. I think he means an Alsatian, don't you, dear? Old Station! Old Station! You are a funny boy, Nick.' And she laughed so much that she nearly cried. So from that day Pooh was called Old Station.



There were always just the three of them in the house. Nick had lived with Grandma for as long as he could remember.

She looked after Nick, and Old Station looked after them both.

Everywhere they went Old Station went with them. ‘Don’t know what we’d do without him,’ Grandma would say.

All his life Old Station had been like a big brother to Nick. Nick was nine years old now. He had watched Old Station grow old as he grew up. The old dog moved slowly these days, and when he got up in the morning to go outside you could see it was a real effort. He would spend most of the day asleep in his basket, dreaming his dreams.



Nick watched him that morning as he ate his cornflakes before he went off to school. It was the last day before half-term. Old Station was growling in his sleep as he often did and his whiskers were twitching.

'He's chasing cats in his dreams,' said Grandma. 'Hurry up, Nick, else you'll be late.' She gave him his satchel and packed lunch, and Nick called out 'Goodbye' to Old Station and ran off down the road.



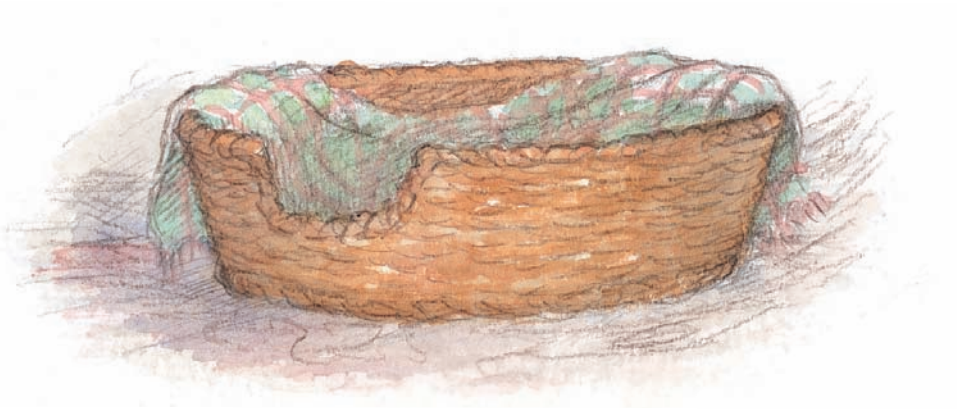


It was a windy autumn morning with the leaves falling all around him. Before he got to school he caught twenty-six of them in mid-air and that was more than he'd ever caught before. By the end of the day the leaves were piled as high as his ankles in the gutters, and Nick scuffled through them on the way back home,



thinking of all the bike rides he could go on now that half-term had begun.

Old Station wasn't there to meet him at the door as he sometimes was, and Grandma



wasn't in the kitchen cooking tea as she usually was. Old Station wasn't in his basket either.

Nick found Grandma in the back garden, taking the washing off the line. 'Nice windy day. Wanted to leave the washing out as long as possible,' she said from behind the sheet. 'I'll get your tea in a minute, dear.'

‘Where’s Old Station?’ Nick said. ‘He’s not in his basket.’

Grandma didn’t reply, not at first anyway; and when she did Nick wished she never had done.

‘He had to go,’ Grandma said simply, and she walked past him without even looking at him.



‘Go where?’ Nick asked, ‘What do you mean? Where’s he gone to?’

Grandma put the washing down on the kitchen table and sat down heavily in the chair. Nick could see then that she’d been crying, and he knew that Old Station was dead.

‘The vet said he was suffering,’ she said, looking up at him. ‘We couldn’t have him suffering, could we? It had to be done. That’s all there is to it. Just a pinprick it was, dear, and then he went off to sleep. Nice and peaceful.’

‘He’s dead then,’ Nick said.

Grandma nodded. ‘I buried him outside in the garden by the wall. It’s what was best for him, Nick,’ she said. ‘You know that, don’t you?’ Nick nodded and they cried quietly together.

After tea Grandma put Old Station's basket out in the shed and showed Nick where she had buried him. 'We'll plant something over him, shall we, dear?' she said. 'A rose perhaps, so we won't forget him.'

'We'll never forget him,' said Nick. 'Never.'

