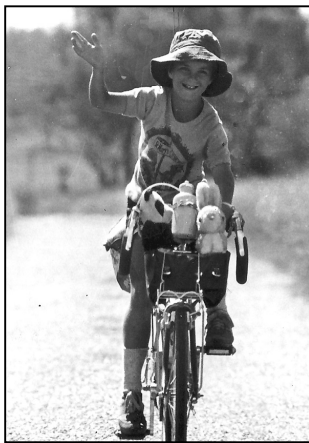


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Chapter 1 - On the Track

"Clicketty clack" "Clicketty clack"
"Going to Sydney" "Going to Sydney".

The train wheels were talking to Billy-telling him something he didn't really want to know. For all of his five years he had known only life in a remote Gippsland valley. He knew nothing of Sydney except that he did NOT want to go there!



He clutched his teddy bear defiantly and glared as he remembered the



photographs he'd been shown, photos of children in neat school uniforms-boys in ties, blazers, long socks, straw boaters and shoes!

Photos of tall buildings crowded together; crowded together on streets crowded with traffic and people. Even the photos of Sydney

harbour had not pleased him-he knew about sharks!

Billy looked quickly at his brother and sister but they weren't taking any notice of him. Peter was reading the paper and Robyn stared out the window.

Billy's eyes smarted with tears as he thought of his beloved creek in the foothills behind his grandparents' house. It was his favourite place. He would spend hours sitting on the tiny footbridge looking into the water and talking to the frogs.

"Going to Sydney", "Going to Sydney"
.....sang the wheels mockingly.

“We’re not going Ted”, mumbled Billy. Suddenly the train wheels changed their song to

“Running away”; “Running away”

The little boy snuggled further into the corner seat and shutting his eyes he began to plan his escape. In a few seconds he was fast asleep.

Eleven year old Robyn glanced at Billy and smiled at the blonde-haired child. He looked such a baby and so easily hurt. She reminded herself of the great responsibility that was now hers-to be both mother and sister to him, and hoped she could do the job.

The events of the last month had left Robyn stunned. Ever since Billy was three months old the children had lived with their only grand-parents. Their parents had died in a car crash, and Robyn scarcely remembered them. There had been little money but lots of happiness in their home in the tiny valley. Peter and Robyn rode their bikes each day over dirt tracks six kilometres to the school. Billy was due to join them after these summer holidays. But then the dreadful thing had happened.

A bout of Sars influenza had swept the district. The grand-parents became very ill and were put into hospital, where they died of pneumonia a few days later. The local authorities had located some distant relatives who would take the children. Neither the children nor the relatives, who lived in one of Sydney’s ‘better’ suburbs, were very keen on the arrangement. Robyn just knew she could never cope in the big city.

Peter had a plan. He’d been quietly working on it for several days, but he did not want to tell the others. He didn’t want them to be disappointed. Also he did not

want the child welfare officer to get even an inkling of the plan, or it would certainly be stopped.

Peter had phoned his relative, Mr Bingham-Jones, from a telephone box in the large country town where the children had been staying for a few days while the welfare officer waited for train day.

Peter had explained to Mr Bingham-Jones that he was getting a job on a sheep and cattle station and that if it was alright with him, they'd not be coming to Sydney after all. Mr Bingham-Jones was quite delighted, and as his idea of country life was taken only from history books, he saw nothing strange at all in a 14 year old supporting his younger brother and sister this way.



Peter had heard his grandfather's tales of 'humping his bluey' around the country as a lad, working at different stations, and he knew he could do the same. The wage for a lad was not great but he knew they could manage.

His one concern was to look after his little brother and sister. They would be most unhappy in the city, he knew that for sure. When the train reached Melbourne he'd tell them his plan.

To Peter the wheels sang;

"On the track,"

"On the track,"

"On the track,"

"On the track,"