

## Chapter 2: Born in a Burrow

Lucky and her brother were born in a long, deep, snug burrow that their mother, Wadhu, had dug. Wadhu grew in the River and knew no other life. She knew Bingi the turtle, Daroo the duck, and Bilargan the water rat. She knew the fish, the snakes, and Magil the water dragon too.

She knew where to find food even in the muddiest water. She knew how to build burrows in the banks for sleeping and hiding. She knew all the other platypus in the River as well. Her mother lived downstream from her, as did her father. In her own stretch of the river were her aunts and uncles and cousins, her sisters and brothers, and her favourite platypus, her beloved mate, Bani.

Bani and Wadhu lived separate lives for most of the year, but they came together in late winter each year to play with one another and to mate. Then Bani went back to guarding his section of the river from other male platypuses, and Wadhu built a nest to prepare for the coming of her children.

Wadhu was a very good nest builder and mother. This was her third season and she knew just what to do. First, she visited all her different burrows looking for just the right one. It was not always the same burrow. If she smelled that Gabul, the rock python, or Bilargan, the water rat, had visited the burrow she rejected it. If it was too shallow, it was not suitable for her children.

She found a good deep burrow with no smells of predators and she began digging it out and making it deeper. She made tunnels and dead ends. She hollowed out bedrooms and carved exits both above and below the waterline. She made it as confusing as an Egyptian pharaoh's tomb so that any predator who did venture down into it would get confused and be less likely to find her.

Finally, Wadhu chose one room to be the nursery. She patted down the dirt with her tail to make the floor smooth. She hauled in grasses from the riverbank to make a soft bed. When she was satisfied with it, she went back to the river for a last good feed of shrimp, worms, and insect larvae. She had a good bath too, and then climbed back into her burrow.

Deep inside the nursery, Wadhu inspected her room for the last time. Then she used mud from the back wall to seal the entrance tight to ensure her safety. At last, she curled up into a ball and went to sleep.

While she slept, two eggs grew in her body. Wadhu woke up briefly to lay her eggs and then, curling her body tight around them to keep them warm, she went back to sleep. The babies inside the eggs began to grow.

The next time Wadhu woke, it was to the sound of an egg hatching. Slowly the shell was broken from the inside, and out wriggled Lucky the platypus. Her mother nuzzled her and she nuzzled back. Wadhu pushed Lucky into her side, where warm milk was oozing from the glands in Wadhu's skin. Hungry from her struggle to escape from the egg, Lucky lapped up her first meal. When she was full, she curled up next to her mother, and they both went back to sleep in the warm darkness of the sealed chamber.

Hours later, Lucky's brother Banahm broke free of his egg and took his first meal. Lucky and Wadhu nuzzled Banahm, and then the three platypuses went back to sleep.

For the next few weeks, the three platypuses lived together in Wadhu's den. Wadhu preferred to sleep because that conserved her fat reserves to make the milk that her babies needed to grow. At first Lucky and Banahm did nothing much but sleep, feed, sleep again, and feed some more. While they slept, they grew. Their bodies grew warm coats of fur and they put on weight. Then their eyes opened and they began to play with each other.

Lucky loved her mother and her little brother, though she had no words to say it. She loved to nuzzle Banahm and curl up with him. They began to move around on the grass beside their mother, learning to use their legs and developing their muscles. They found their voices, growling at each other in the darkness as they played hide and seek in their mother's fur.

Lucky showed her love by touching and nuzzling her mother and brother, and they showed that they loved her by nuzzling her back. Lucky's mother loved to curl around her babies and hold them close to her heart. The weeks that they spent together in the darkness of that burrow were filled with love.

Wadhu lost weight as Lucky and Banahm grew. Her body robbed itself of fat to feed the growing babies. At last, Wadhu could wait no more. She had to leave the burrow to feed or she would die. It was time for Lucky and Banahm to leave the burrow with her.