FinForce

FINFORCE BEDTIME STORIES · SERIES TWO

The Three Jars of Wattle Street

One summer story in seven short chapters, ages 5 to 10

THE CHRISTMAS SERIES · BOOK 2



With Frankie, Paddington and Winston from the FinForce Dog House

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THIS BOOK BELONGS TO

A CHRISTMAS GIFT

for

With love from the FinForce team



Before you start

Summer has come to Wattle Street, a little street in Brisbane where the jacarandas drop purple confetti and three dogs live in the FinForce Dog House. This is one story, told in seven short chapters: one for each warm night of the Christmas break. Each chapter ends with a question to chat about in the morning.

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MEET THE FINFORCE DOG HOUSE



Frankie
The oldest and wisest. Fluffy, apricot, with a white chest. Always says “Righto boys.”

Paddington
The puppy. Red-gold curls and a white nose. Has a trick for every occasion.

Winston
Big, black and curly. Kind heart. Thinks about sausages a lot.

Also on Wattle Street: Ruby (8) and her little brother Theo (5), Mr Okafor next door, and Mrs Ling at the corner shop.

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Three jars and twelve days of kindness

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CHAPTER 1

Six Little Pots

Two weeks before Christmas, the jacarandas on Wattle Street had turned the footpath purple, and Ruby had found the bike of her dreams in the window of the bike shop. It was red, with a silver bell and streamers, and it cost one hundred and twenty dollars.

“That,” said Ruby, who was eight, “is a lot of dollars.”

“Righto boys,” said Frankie, the oldest and wisest of the three dogs. “Then we’d better get to work.”

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Next door, Mr Okafor leaned over the fence. “Ruby, I’m off to visit my sister for a week. Would you water my poinsettias? Just the six pots on the front steps.”

It didn’t sound like a bike-buying sort of job. But Ruby said yes.

Every morning, before it got too hot, she filled the watering can. Frankie walked beside her. Winston sniffed every pot, in case one was secretly a sausage. And Paddington, the puppy, did a little bow to each plant, because Paddington believed plants enjoyed an audience.

On Wednesday it rained, so Ruby checked the pots anyway. On Saturday her friends went to the pool, and Ruby went later, once the pots were done.

“Nobody’s even watching,” said Theo, her little brother, who was five.

“I know,” said Ruby. “But I said I would.”



When Mr Okafor came home, his six poinsettias were glowing red, brighter than when he had left. He looked at them for a long time.

“You looked after a small thing very well,” he said. “So I wonder if you’d like a bigger job. My vegie garden and my four chooks need minding over the holidays. A proper job, for proper pay.”

So Ruby picked tomatoes, collected eggs and learned the names of all four chooks: Pavlova, Lamington, Biscuit and Mrs Fluff. At the end of each week, Mr Okafor counted ten dollars into her hand.

Ruby ran all the way home. “A few more weeks,” she puffed, “and I’ll have my bike!”

Frankie wagged slowly. “Righto,” he said. “But first, I think you’ll need some jars.”

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CHAT ABOUT IT IN THE MORNING

Why did Mr Okafor give Ruby a bigger job? What is one small job you could do really well this week?

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CHAPTER 2

Three Jars

Ruby wanted one jar, a big one, with BIKE written on the front. Frankie had other ideas.

“When there’s plenty,” he said, “some is for now, some is for sharing, and some is for later.”

So Ruby found three clean jars and tied a ribbon on each: Spend, Share and Later. Every time money came in, a little went into each. Clink, clink, clink.

“Later is boring,” said Theo. “Later isn’t even here yet.”

“That’s the point,” said Ruby, though secretly she agreed with him.

Meanwhile, Paddington had a project of his own. It began with one tennis ball, found under the jacaranda in the park. He carried it home and hid it in the old cubby house. The next day he found two more. Then a squeaky reindeer, a frisbee, a cricket ball and four more tennis balls.

“Coming to the park?” asked Winston.

“Can’t,” said Paddington. “Busy guarding. When my pile is big enough, I’ll sit back and relax for the whole summer.”

But Paddington didn’t relax. He worried a possum would take his things. He couldn’t sleep. And through the cubby window he could hear everyone at the park, laughing so hard that Theo got the hiccups.



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The next morning, Paddington pushed the cubby door wide open. He carried the balls to the park one by one and dropped them at the feet of every kid and every dog he saw. By lunchtime the whole park was playing, and Paddington was in the middle of it, doing his famous trick of falling over with style.

“You gave it all away,” said Winston.

“I know,” puffed Paddington. “And I’ve never felt richer.”

Ruby watched from the swings. Then she went home and looked at her three jars for a long time. The Spend jar, the bike jar, was filling fastest. The Share jar had one lonely coin in it.

She moved two dollars across. Clink. It felt surprisingly good.

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CHAT ABOUT IT IN THE MORNING

Why was Paddington lonely with all those toys? What would you put in a Share jar?

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CHAPTER 3

The Extra Ten Dollars

The week before Christmas, Mrs Ling's corner shop was the busiest place in Brisbane. There were people buying ice, people buying prawns, and one lady buying forty-two candy canes.

Mum sent Ruby in for milk and bread with a twenty-dollar note. Mrs Ling, who was serving three people at once, counted the change into Ruby's hand without looking.

Outside, Ruby counted it again. There should have been fourteen dollars. There were twenty-four.

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Ten extra dollars. That was a whole week of chooks. That was ten dollars closer to the red bike.

“Nobody would ever know,” said a small voice in Ruby’s head.

Winston sat down on the footpath and looked at her. Winston was very good at looking. He had looked at a lot of sausages in his time, and he knew the difference between a sausage that was his and a sausage that wasn’t.

“I know, I know,” sighed Ruby.

She marched back into the shop, waited in the long queue behind the candy-cane lady, and put the ten dollars on the counter. “You gave me too much change, Mrs Ling.”

Mrs Ling stopped. The whole shop went quiet.



“Ruby,” said Mrs Ling, “do you know how many people would have kept that?” She put the note back in the till. “Honest hands are worth more than a full till. I won’t forget this.”

Then she pointed to the end of the counter, where a big wicker hamper sat with a sign: *For families having a hard Christmas.*

“Every year the street fills it,” she said, “and on Christmas Eve I deliver it. This year it’s going to the new family moving into number twelve. Their truck broke down near Rockhampton with everything they own, and they’ve got a brand-new baby.”

On the walk home, Ruby didn’t feel ten dollars poorer. She felt about ten feet taller.

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CHAT ABOUT IT IN THE MORNING

Why do you think Ruby went back into the shop? How does it feel to tell the truth, even when it’s hard?

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CHAPTER 4

The Biggest Gift in the Hamper

All week, people came. The Brennans brought a giant box of groceries. Dr Patel brought two puddings and a cricket set. Mr Okafor brought a tray of eggs from Pavlova, Lamington, Biscuit and Mrs Fluff.

The hamper grew so tall that Winston could no longer see over the top, which worried him, in case there were sausages in there he hadn't met.

Ruby tipped in her whole Share jar. It wasn't much. But it was all of the Share jar.

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Theo watched from the doorway. He had exactly one coin. It was gold and it was his, and he had been saving it for a lolly snake.

He looked at the giant boxes. He looked at his one small coin. Then he walked up to the counter, stood on his very tippiest toes, and put the coin in the hamper.

Winston, who had carried his afternoon sausage very carefully all the way from home, thought about it for a long, long moment. Then he dropped the sausage in too.

“Was that your only one?” Mrs Ling asked Theo softly. Theo nodded.



Mrs Ling knelt down. “Some people gave big boxes, and that’s wonderful,” she said. “But you gave all you had. That makes yours the biggest gift in the whole hamper.”

Theo felt something warm and fizzy in his tummy, like sherbet that never ran out.

“That feeling,” said Frankie, “is even better than getting a present.”

“Better than a lolly snake?” asked Theo.

Frankie thought about it. “Much better.”

Winston was still a tiny bit sad about the sausage. But mostly, he was proud.

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CHAT ABOUT IT IN THE MORNING

Why did Mrs Ling say Theo’s coin was the biggest gift? How does it feel to give something away?

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CHAPTER 5

Room for One More

On Christmas Eve, a little car pulled up at number twelve, and a tired family climbed out: Sione, Mele and their brand-new baby girl, Losa, who was only three weeks old.

Their truck was still stuck near Rockhampton. They had a suitcase, a pram and not much else.

High above number twelve, the first bright star of the evening came out, right over their roof.

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Ruby, Theo and the three dogs went over to say hello. They didn't bring anything fancy. Ruby carried a box of mangoes from the tree. Theo carried a bag of ice for the esky. And Winston carried, very bravely, a sausage, which he did not eat even once.

Then Mrs Ling arrived with the hamper. Mele opened it, saw Theo's gold coin sitting right on top, and laughed and cried at the same time.

Baby Losa looked up with big dark eyes, and Paddington did his softest, quietest trick, which was just wagging.

That night Wattle Street had its feast: long tables down the middle of the road, fairy lights in the frangipani, prawns, ham and three kinds of pavlova.

"But every seat is taken," someone said. "There's no room."



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Frankie stood up very straight. “Righto,” he said. “Then we make room.”

Dad carried out the old card table. Mr Okafor brought his camping chairs. Mrs Ling found a tablecloth covered in flamingos. Everybody squished up a little, and suddenly there was a space right in the middle, just the right size for a new family and a tiny baby.

“We thought we’d spend Christmas alone, with nothing,” said Mele, with tears in her eyes.

“Not on Wattle Street,” said Ruby.

Baby Losa slept through the whole noisy, happy feast, the guest of honour at her very first Christmas. There is always room for one more, if everybody squishes up a little.

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CHAT ABOUT IT IN THE MORNING

How do you think the new family felt when they saw the space at the table? Who could you make room for?

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CHAPTER 6

The Boxing Day Stranger

On Boxing Day, Wattle Street went to the beach. The sand was hot enough to fry an egg, the sea was the colour of a mint lolly, and everybody had too many eskies.

Halfway down the beach, a boy was sitting by himself, holding his foot. A bluebottle had stung him. A man with a surfboard hurried past. A lady with a big umbrella said, “Oh dear,” and kept walking.

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Some teenagers looked, then looked away. But Frankie stopped. And because Frankie stopped, Ruby stopped. And because Ruby stopped, everybody stopped.

“Are you okay?” asked Ruby. The boy shook his head. His name was Arlo. He was visiting from Toowoomba with his grandad, who was asleep under a tree by the car park.

Ruby gave him her water bottle. Theo gave him his hat. Winston gave him a kind lick. Paddington lay down next to him and didn’t do a single trick. And Dad walked Arlo gently to the lifesavers’ flags, where they knew exactly how to help a bluebottle sting.

When Arlo’s foot felt better, they woke his grandad, Ted, who was very grateful and a bit embarrassed about the snoring.



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That afternoon Arlo and Grandad Ted came to the biggest backyard cricket match Wattle Street had ever seen. The wheelie bin was the wicket. Paddington was the umpire (he mostly did tricks). Winston fielded near the sausages. And Arlo hit a six right over the mango tree.

Over leftover pavlova, Grandad Ted asked Ruby what she was saving for. “A bike,” said Ruby. “But I don’t have enough yet.” Ted rubbed his chin, said nothing, and wrote her address on a paper napkin.

On the way home Theo asked, “Why did all those people walk past Arlo?”

“Busy, I suppose,” said Frankie. “But a neighbour isn’t just someone who lives next door. A neighbour is anyone who stops.”

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CHAT ABOUT IT IN THE MORNING

Why do you think the other people walked past? What could you do if you saw someone hurt or left out? (Always tell a grown-up straight away.)

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CHAPTER 7 · THE END

Enough

In the hottest week of January, the old fan in the kids' bedroom went clunk, wobble, wheeze, and stopped. Mum looked worried. January is a tight month after Christmas.

So Ruby and Theo fetched the Later jar. There was enough for a new fan, with a little left over. "Later," said Theo, "turned out to be pretty good."

The next Saturday, a dusty ute pulled up. Out climbed Grandad Ted with a bike: not the shiny red one, but a blue one, a bit scratched, with new tyres and a new bell. "I fix up old bikes," he said. "This one needs a girl who stops." Ruby held out her whole Spend jar. Ted took twenty dollars, "for the tyres," and gave the rest back.

That night the dogs lay on the cool verandah. "Did Ruby get everything she wanted?" asked Paddington.

Frankie looked at the porch light at number twelve, the blue bike by the gate, and the bright star. "Not everything," he said. "But enough. And enough is a lot."

THREE GOOD THINGS

Before bed, each say three things you were thankful for today.

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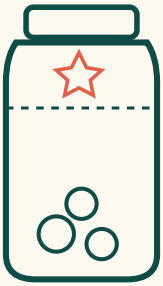
MAKE AND DO

Your three jars

Colour them in, cut them out, and stick them on real jars, just like Ruby. A little goes in each, every time.



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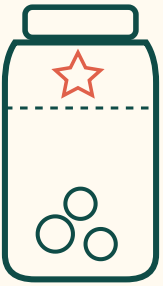
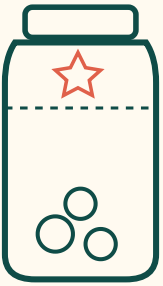


Share



Later

Twelve days of kindness

Count down to Christmas. Colour in each square when you've done it.

1 Say thank you to your bus driver or teacher	**2** Make a card for someone who lives alone	**3** Help cook the Christmas Eve feast
4 Give a toy you've outgrown	**5** Share your snack	**6** Water a neighbour's plants
7 Ask someone new to play	**8** Put a coin in your Share jar	**9** Draw a picture for Nan or Pop
10 Help tidy up without being asked	**11** Say one kind thing to everyone at dinner	**12** Make room at the table for one more

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Merry Christmas, with love from the FinForce team

Thank you for letting us be part of your family's year. We hope this story brings a few warm nights, a few good chats over breakfast, and a lot of doggy voices.

For grown-ups: this is a story about everyday values such as working hard, telling the truth, giving, sharing, saving a little and looking out for others. It is not about any product or plan.

Also in the series: Book 1, *The Littlest Gift*, for ages 0 to 5.
Printing tip: print at A5, or choose the 'booklet' setting on A4, double-sided. Officeworks and Kmart photo centres do lovely little prints.

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