

A Christmas Miracle



by Deirdre Hanna

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The rain had come in a way it hadn't in years. First in sheets, then in torrents, until the dry creek beds roared alive, swallowing fences, roads, and, finally, their home. Will clung to Ranger's collar, his small hands trembling with the effort, his voice raw from yelling.

"Hold on, boy! Just hold on!" he cried, the floodwaters surging around them.

Their house was in a valley, in what Dad called the flood plain. "We're so lucky," Dad often said, looking out over the lush, green paddocks that seemed to roll endlessly toward the creek. "The rain brings life to this place. Just look at the crops this year."

This time, though, the rain brought destruction. When the log came crashing down the creek, its branches twisting and thrashing like wild arms, Will lost his grip. Ranger was swept away, his golden coat a blur against the muddy torrent. The dog's bark echoed once, then vanished into the roar of the flood.

Ranger!" Will screamed, stumbling after him, but Dad's arms pulled him back.

"It's no use, mate," Dad said, his voice breaking. "We can't—"

"You said we'd save him!" Will shouted, his tears mixing with the rain that lashed his face.

Mum's face was pale, her voice sharp as she shouted over her shoulder, "Tim, let him go. Grab Will! The water's coming faster!"

Dad held onto Will by one arm and turned to help Mum, who was waist-deep in the water by then, dragging what she could from the house—blankets, a few clothes, their wedding album.

When the SES boats arrived an hour later, their house was gone, their belongings scattered downstream like leaves. And Ranger was gone too.



The Farm

Nan and Pop lived on higher ground, far from the swollen creeks and rivers. While the rain had raged in the valley below, hardly a drop had fallen here. Will sat on the verandah, staring at the dusty paddocks that stretched to the horizon. The cracked earth seemed to mock him. The contrast was maddening.

“How’s it fair?” Will muttered one evening as he sat beside Dad. “Our place is gone, and here? Nothing. Not even rain. No Ranger.”

Dad sighed, his gaze distant. “Life’s not fair, mate. Sometimes things just happen. It’s Nature. Nature changes things. Doesn’t mean they don’t hurt, though.”

Will didn’t respond. It wasn’t just unfair—it felt cruel. His home was gone, washed away in a matter of hours, while Nan and Pop’s place, just a few hills over, stood untouched, the ground cracked and thirsty. Even the old water tank at the back of the house rattled emptily in the dry wind.

“Could’ve used some of the rain here,” Will muttered under his breath. “Would’ve been better than us losing everything.”

Nan overheard him and laid a gentle hand on his shoulder. “Fair or not, love, we do what we can on the land. You’ll see.”

Making Do

The farm was dry, but it wasn't home. Nan and Pop's house was small and plain, with low ceilings and narrow hallways that made it feel cramped. His parents had squeezed into the spare room, while Will slept on the dining room floor on a mattress. Without Ranger, it felt unbearably lonely. Most nights, Will sobbed quietly into his pillow.

One morning, Mum and Nan dragged a battered Christmas tree out of the barn. "It's in better shape than I thought!" Nan said cheerfully, brushing off cobwebs. "Just needs a bit of love."

Will didn't share her enthusiasm. It didn't feel like Christmas. The tree was spindly, with uneven branches and a trunk that leaned to one side. Mum draped it with faded tinsel and mismatched baubles, while Pop untangled a string of lights, grumbling the whole time.

"You'd think they'd make these things to last," Pop said, holding up a frayed wire. "Half of 'em don't work."

Mum laughed softly, though her smile didn't quite reach her eyes. "We'll make do," she said, plugging in the lights. To everyone's surprise, a few bulbs flickered to life, casting a warm, uneven glow.

"What's the point of a tree if there's nothing to put under it?" Will muttered from the corner.

Nan handed him a cracked Angel. "The point, dear boy," she said, "is to remember that Angels are Messengers of Love, there's always something to love even in the worst of times."

Will glared at Nan, and stared at the Angel, its chipped wings glinting in the weak light. He left it on the ground and stomped outside. He didn't even have his own room to go to now. If he had, he would have slammed the door.



Christmas Eve.

By the day before Christmas Eve, the dirt road into town was still underwater. They had planned to pick up the ham and turkey they'd ordered, but the rising floodwaters had left them cut off from the butcher. Mum and Nan scavenged through the pantry, managing to scrape together a meal of damper, baked beans, a tin of peaches and some golden syrup.

Will sat on the verandah that night, staring at the stars. The silence was heavy, broken only by the faint rustle of the dry wind through the trees. He thought about Ranger, about how unfair it was that everything—his house, his dog, even Christmas—had been taken from him.

As he lay in bed later, he whispered a prayer. He hadn't thought of praying in years. "Please let Ranger be okay. Please bring him home."

The dawn broke on Christmas Eve, a day that normally Will loved. As the sun rose in a wash of pale gold, soft and quiet, Will woke to a heavy feeling in his chest, then he heard a faint sound—something between a bark and a whimper. His heart raced as he bolted upright. For a moment, he thought he'd imagined it.

"Will!" Dad's voice called from outside, sharp and urgent. "Come here, mate!"

Will threw off the sheet, his bare feet slapping against the wooden floorboards as he ran outside.

At first, he saw only Mr. Carter, the farmer from two paddocks over, standing near the gate with his hat pushed back and a grin splitting his face. Then he saw the shape at Carter's feet.

Ranger.

The dog stood unsteadily, his golden fur matted with mud, but his eyes alert. His tail thumped against Mr. Carter's boots as he let out a bark—hoarse, weak, but unmistakably Ranger.

Will's breath hitched. "Ranger?" he whispered, frozen.

The dog turned, his tail wagging harder. In an instant, Will was running, his feet kicking up dust as he threw himself at Ranger. He sank to his knees, his arms around the dog's neck, the rough tongue lapping at his face.

**"YOU'RE HERE," WILL CHOKED
OUT. "YOU'RE REALLY HERE."**



"Found him near the bridge," Mr Carter said, "Figured he was yours." Mum appeared in the doorway, her hand pressed to her mouth, her eyes glistening. "Oh, Mick," she said, stepping forward. "Thank you. Thank you so much."

"I brought these along, too," Mr. Carter said, lifting a cooler bag. "Some sausages, damper, beer and a plum pudding. Figured you could use a bit of Christmas cheer."

That afternoon, they gathered on the verandah, the mismatched chairs pulled into a rough circle. The sausages sizzled on Pop's old barbecue, their rich aroma mingling with the faint scent of eucalyptus from the paddocks. Nan placed the warm damper on the table, alongside a jar of plum jam Mr. Carter's wife had sent.

Mum cut into the plum pudding with a reverent expression. "It's not a turkey, but I'd say this is a feast," she said with a small laugh.

"It's better than a feast," Pop said, ruffling Ranger's fur. "Especially with this old bloke back."

Will sat on the floor, Ranger's head resting heavily in his lap. He stroked the dog's ears, his heart full in a way it hadn't been in days.

"See, mate?" Dad said, smiling down at him. "Christmas isn't about the stuff. It's about being together."

Will looked around at the faces of his family and then down at Ranger, who wagged his tail as if to agree.

Outside, the clouds parted just enough for a single beam of sunlight to break through, casting the paddocks in a soft, golden glow.

Maybe they didn't have a feast or a pile of presents. But they had Ranger. They had sausages and damper and a plum pudding. They had each other.

And in that moment, it felt like the whole world had been made new. And tomorrow was Christmas Day, the happiest day of the year.



The Invitation

Christmas Day dawned hot and clear. The kind of bright, endless sky that seemed to stretch forever, like it had forgotten all the rain. Will woke to Ranger's soft snoring beside him, the dog sprawled on the mattress as though he belonged there. He stretched, rubbing the sleep from his eyes, when he heard the rumble of a truck pulling up outside.

"Mick's back," Nan called from the kitchen. Will padded out barefoot, Ranger's toenails clicking on the lino as he followed.

Mick Carter climbed out of the truck, his wide-brimmed hat tipped back and his arms full of plates and baskets. The smell of freshly baked scones wafted toward them, warm and buttery.

"Morning, all, Happy Christmas!" Mick greeted, his grin as bright as the sky. "Brought some ham and eggs for breakfast—and these hot scones from the missus. But that's just to tide you over. We'll be seeing you at the hall for lunch, won't we?"

Mum hesitated, glancing at Dad. "Oh, we wouldn't want to impose..."

"Impose?" Mick interrupted with a chuckle. "You've been through enough. The hall's packed with folks who've lost their homes, but there's plenty of food, and we could use all the hands we can get. It's what Christmas is all about."

Nan stepped onto the verandah, wiping her hands on her apron. "He's right, love. We're not letting Christmas go to waste, and neither should you. Get your things—we'll head over after breakfast."

Mum nodded, her smile faint but genuine. "Thank you," she said softly.

Will stood, his hand still resting on Ranger's neck. "Can Ranger come too?"

Mick laughed. "Course he can. That dog deserves a plate of sausages as much as anyone else."

The Community Miracle

The community hall stood at the top of a hill, its modest white walls glowing in the sunlight. Cars and Utes were parked in rows, their surfaces caked with dirt and mud. People bustled in and out, carrying trays of food, blankets, pillows, and supplies.

Inside, the hall was already full of people, many of whom had slept there the night before. Sleeping bags and makeshift mattresses were folded and stashed away in corners, clearing the space for long tables which were covered in mismatched cloths, their surfaces dotted with festive touches: bowls of glistening cherries, sweating pavlovas, and cheesecakes dusted with cocoa. Puddings and jugs of custard glistened on separate tables, with tinsel and baubles scattered amongst them. It looked festive. Alive.

Nan set a platter of warm damper, butter dribbling onto the plate, on the table while Mum and Dad helped unload chairs from a trailer. Will stayed close to Ranger, who wagged his tail at every passing stranger. A group of younger children gathered around, stroking his fur and laughing as he licked their hands. Some of the kids from his school were there too.

“This,” Nan said, standing beside Will and gesturing at the bustling hall, “is a true Christmas.”

Will frowned. “A true Christmas? We don’t even have a home, or any presents.”

Nan looked at him, her voice soft but firm. “Christmas isn’t about what you have, Will. It’s about what you give. Look around—people giving their time, their food, their care. That’s the real miracle.” Will’s face flushed, how had he forgotten so quickly to be grateful for his answered prayer?

Will looked down at Ranger, his miracle, and then back at the hall. He noticed the way people moved together, their hands full of plates, their laughter mixing with the clatter of cutlery. It wasn’t perfect. It wasn’t home. But it was a gift.



Christmas Lunch

When lunch was served, the noise in the hall swelled to a cheerful din. After grace was said, people lined up with plates in hand, their chatter rising over the scrape of serving spoons. Volunteers carved slices of ham and turkey, while salads and sausages were passed along the tables.

Will sat cross-legged on the floor with Ranger at his side, the dog's nose twitching eagerly as he eyed Will's plate. The damper was warm and crumbly, its golden crust gleaming under a smear of plum jam. The ham was salty and tender, the pudding rich and spiced, its sweetness balanced by the cool cream spooned on top.

"It's amazing how one pudding can feed so many," Will said, glancing at the seemingly endless stream of plates. Pop, sitting nearby, chuckled. "Funny thing about Christmas," he said. "Somehow, there's always enough to go around."

Will smiled faintly, stroking Ranger's ears. For the first time in days, he felt a strange sense of peace. The loss of their house still hurt—his games, his computer, his bike, all washed away. But here, surrounded by neighbours and friends, he didn't feel so empty.

"See, mate?" Dad said, sitting down beside him. "This is what Nan meant. We've all lost something, but when we come together, we find more than we thought we had."

The Miracle of Christmas

That afternoon, the little church bell rang out, its clear tones soaring into the quiet air. People paused, some bowing their heads, others simply standing still. The sound carried through the hills, weaving through the dusty paddocks and into the hearts of everyone gathered.

Will looked up at Mum, who stood beside him, her hand resting lightly on his shoulder. "It's a reminder," she said softly. "Even in the hardest times, we're not alone. That's what Christmas is about."

The words settled over Will like the sunlight breaking through the clouds—a warmth he hadn't realised he needed. He glanced down at Ranger, who sat by his side, his golden coat catching the light. The dog wagged his tail, as if agreeing with Mum.

Later, as the sky turned dusky pink and lavender, Will and Ranger wandered outside. The paddocks stretched out before them, dry but still beautiful in the fading light. The evening star hung low, like a brilliant Christmas decoration. Will knelt beside Ranger, burying his hands in the dog's fur.

"Thank you," he whispered, not just to Ranger but to everything—the people, the day, the strange and unexpected gift of being surrounded by so much love.

Maybe they didn't have their home. Maybe they didn't have presents. But they had each other. They had the kindness of their little town and the hope of tomorrow. And that, Will thought, was the greatest miracle of all.





Paradise Kids Australia is the children's educational division of the Rev. Dr Ian Mavor Foundation. We provide grief education and support for children and teens experiencing loss from a death, illness or family separations and life changes. Our founder, Deirdre Hanna and her team have over 28 years of experience, helping to improve the emotional, spiritual and physical well-being of children. Our specialised programs and resources focus on equipping children through education, enhancing their well-being and providing a supportive community to assist healing and growth. Learn more on our webstie <https://paradisekids.au>

The Paradise Kids Storybook Collection is designed to help children and teens understand and deal with aspects of grief from various kinds of loss. The Paradise Kids Storybook Collection is available via our website <https://paradisekids.au/story-books/>



OUR STORYBOOK AUTHOR

Deirdre Hanna is an Australian author, transpersonal therapist, chaplain, and founder of Paradise Kids Australia. She is dedicated to helping children and young adults navigate grief and loss. Her deep understanding of young hearts in pain shines through in this story that gently explores the journey of a child grappling with the loss of a parent. With compassion and insight, Deirdre brings to life the healing power of grief support. Her stories are testament to her belief that even in life's darkest moments, there is light to be found.

A soft, painterly illustration of a young boy with brown hair, wearing a blue t-shirt, smiling and holding a golden retriever puppy. They are in a field of tall, golden-brown grass. The background shows rolling hills under a warm, golden light.

***A Christmas Miracle* is a heartwarming story of resilience, community, and the enduring power of love to bring hope and healing.**

When a devastating flood sweeps through their valley, ten-year-old Will loses not only his home but also his beloved golden retriever, Ranger. Forced to take refuge at his grandparents' farm on higher ground, Will struggles to adjust to life without the lush green paddocks of his home—or the comforting presence of Ranger. With Christmas approaching, the family faces a season without presents, a proper meal, or their cherished traditions.

But miracles can come in the unlikeliest forms. On Christmas Eve, Ranger is found, battered but alive, sparking a wave of gratitude and hope in Will's heart. On Christmas Day, the family joins their tight-knit community at the local hall, where neighbours gather to share food, laughter, and stories, despite their shared losses.

Amid mismatched decorations, folded sleeping bags, and the sound of a church bell ringing across the hills, Will learns that the true meaning of Christmas lies not in what is lost but in what is shared. Through the love of his family, the kindness of strangers, and the unwavering loyalty of Ranger, Will discovers that light can shine even in the darkest times.