

**WILLA**  
*and* **WOOF** 

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Grandparents for Hire

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PUFFIN BOOKS



## CHAPTER ONE

# The Worst Best Day

**M**y name is Willa Jane Tait and today is the best worst day ever. Or maybe it's the worst best day. I can't decide.

I'm sitting at the kitchen table with Woof at my feet. He's my albino Irish wolfhound. His proper name is Wilfred, but when I was little my tongue got all twisty trying to say that, so Wilfred became Wilf and Wilf became Woof and it stuck. He's my best four-legged friend.

My best same-age friend is Tae. He lives across the road from my house at number eight Cricklewood Crescent and he's in my class at school – that's where the best worst/worst best day started.

Our principal, Mr Newton, finally told everyone the big surprise he's been teasing us with for ages. Next week we're having Grandparents' Day. I can't believe Mum didn't tell me. She's the office lady at our school. (I guess one of the reasons she's so good at her job is because she never blabs secrets.)

Grandparents' Day also explains why our music teacher, Mrs Olliffe, has been teaching us songs from the olden days all term. We've never had Grandparents' Day before – at least not since I've been at Hibiscus Gardens Primary (and that's



nearly four years – I’m almost at the end of Year Three).

Mr Newton said that as well as our performance there are going to be competitions too – with really cool prizes – but then he said that the details were still being worked out. I think that’s code for the grown-ups haven’t got around to organising things properly yet.

When we got back to the classroom, my teacher, Miss Wallis, had an even bigger surprise. Her new dog, Lola, is joining our class. She's a Maltese poodle (a Maltipoo for short) She has big brown eyes and curly brown fur, and she wears the cutest red coat. Lola will be like our own support-dog superstar for kids.



Lola

Woof is a support-dog superstar too – at Sunset Views Retirement Village, which is at the end of the cul-de-sac where I live. Tae and I take Woof there once a week after school, and sometimes on the weekends, to cheer up all the old people. Everyone loves Woof.



So, it really was turning out to be the best day ever – until Miss Wallis told us we were making special cards to give to our grandparents and a girl in my class called Trinity started crying because her Granny died. Then a boy called Adamu was crying too. His grandparents live in Kenya – I think that’s a lot further away than where we go to the beach for our holidays. Then the next minute, half the class was bawling.

‘My poppy’s in hospital,’ sobbed Levi.

‘My granny plays golf on Tuesdays,’ shouted Rachel.

‘My grandad’s in the big house,’ cried someone else. (I didn’t understand why that was a problem until Tae whispered that the *big house* is what grown-ups sometimes say when they mean prison. That was surprising.)

Okay, so it wasn't the *best* day, but it wasn't that bad . . . until I got home and Mum reminded me that Grandma is leaving to go on a trip to England this Wednesday, and she won't be back for a month. She's on her own now because Poppy died a while ago. I miss him but I have lots of happy memories.

My dad's parents, Nana and Grandad, can't come either because they're driving the whole way around Australia with their caravan. Dad says they've just been to see the Big Potato. I'm not sure where that is but it sounds funny.

I pick up another one of Dad's homemade choc chip cookies from the plate on the bench. I have to get Woof ready for our visit to Sunset Views soon.

Wait, that's it. My best old-age friend Frank is a grandad. He's not mine, but he



has two grandchildren, Maisie and Angus. Frank lives in a villa at Sunset Views. He's right next door – there's even a gate that goes straight from our garden to his. It's very handy, because I visit him almost every day.

I'll borrow Frank for Grandparents' Day. He'll love it.



## CHAPTER TWO

# Cutbacks

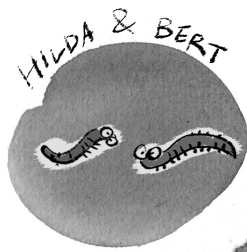
**A**t Sunset Views, Tae and Woof and I have to wait for Mr Babbar before we're allowed to start our rounds, so we're sitting in the office while he talks to Mrs Wilson.

She's the big boss, and last week when we arrived to begin work she growled at us (she and her caterpillar eyebrows had only just got back from a long holiday). Mr Babbar had to explain that while she

was away, he made Woof the support-dog superstar for the retirement village (I'm the professional animal handler and Tae is our assistant in charge of treats).

For a second I thought Mrs Wilson was going to sack us on the spot, but then Mr Babbar said Woof makes everyone happy – even Mr Allen, who never smiles. Mrs Wilson grunted and sniffed and said we could stay . . . for now. She also said that she'd be watching us closely. I bet she won't watch us as closely as I watch her caterpillar eyebrows. I call them Hilda and Bert and make up stories about them in my head sometimes.

Mr Babbar also said that we're very reliable. I think that's stretching the truth a little bit, because Tae usually spends half the time catching bugs and wandering off. He's easily distracted – probably because



MRS WILSON

he's super smart. Tae's always thinking about one hundred and one different things at the same time – not like me. It's best if I concentrate on what I'm doing.

'What's taking so long?' Tae says.

He stands up and wanders over to read

a poster on the wall about the residents' weekly outings.

Tae is dressed in soccer gear (except he doesn't have the proper boots on because he says you shouldn't wear those inside). He's not actually playing soccer today – he's trying out being a player for Manchester United. Tae's name means 'person of greatness' in Korean, and every

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*'A Person of Greatness'*



week he tries out being a different person of greatness to decide which one he'll be when he grows up. It's a lot of pressure if you ask me. We *do* have soccer tryouts tomorrow at school though, so his outfit this week is very appropriate.

The door to Mrs Wilson's office is open. I lean around on my chair as far as I can. Mrs Wilson sounds cross (that's normal) but Mr Babbar is laughing. It's not a happy laugh – more like nervous. I know how he feels.

Her voice is getting louder.

'Well, Vachan, I can see that with you in charge while I was away, Sunset Views has gone to the dogs. You'd better work out a way to bring in some more money soon or there will be no more resident outings,' Mrs Wilson barks.

I frown, and Tae spins and looks at me. Woof raises his head from where he's lying on the floor. I'm not sure what she means but it sounds bad.

'The outings are Mrs Zaman's favourite thing,' Tae says. 'She talks about them all the time. Last week they went to a Japanese garden and there were scones for morning tea.'

I lean out a bit further. Uh oh – too far. I start to fall off the chair just as Mrs Wilson tells Mr Babbar that they may have to do away with afternoon teas as well.

Woof growls and tilts his head to the side right at the same time I thud onto the floor. He loves his afternoon teas at Sunset Views.

I can hear Mrs Wilson before I see her.



‘Willa Tait, what *are* you doing?’ she barks. Hilda and Bert crawl closer together.

I scramble to my feet. ‘Nothing,’ I say, blinking as innocently as I can.

‘I don’t believe that for one second,’ Mrs Wilson snaps, and points her finger at me. ‘You’re up to something.’

I shake my head and swallow hard.

Woof stands up and walks over to Mr Babbar, who gives him a pat, but he quickly hides behind the man’s legs when Mrs Wilson glares at him.

‘Come along, children, we’d better get going,’ Mr Babbar says. ‘The residents are looking forward to seeing you.’

‘Not a word to anyone, Mr Babbar,’ Mrs Wilson growls as we walk towards the door. ‘But you’d be wise to start thinking about what I just said and how we’re going to fix it. You know what will happen if you don’t.’

Mrs Wilson doesn’t need to worry. I’m already thinking so much my head is starting to hurt.