

Hopping for a Change

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Karen was driving down the Stuart Highway at night, gazing up at the beautiful sight of the night sky, when a dark blur jumped out from the bush on her left. She screamed and hit the brakes, but not soon enough as a sickening, bone-crunching hit the front of her ute.

“Shit, shit,” she said to herself as she pulled to a stop. She leapt from the ute and ran around, hoping the red kangaroo that had leapt out in front of her had survived the impact. She quickly saw that it had, and realised how much worse that was. The great poor thing had taken the brunt of the bull bar, one of its poor legs wrapped over it in a way that would not ordinarily be possible. Its chest heaved, its paws shuddering as the creature went into shock.

“Oh my God, I’m so sorry! I’m so sorry!” Karen had always loved wildlife. It was one of the big reasons she’d decided to move out into the country in the first place. And while there was always a lot of roadkill along the highways, this was the first time she’d ever contributed to it. The large, gorgeous roo looked to her with hurt, pleading eyes. A trace of drool dribbled down from its mouth as it shuddered slightly on its side. It didn’t have long.

Karen was distraught. She had a rifle in the back, which she’d only fired once or twice but would at least put the poor critter out of its misery. She went back and got it, and managed to load it up even with the tears streaming down her face. “I’m sorry,” she said, getting ready to fire. And that’s when she saw it, a sight which turned her stomach to ice. She dropped the gun immediately.

It was small. Likely weight less than two kilos. It had a fine coating of fur, but was not yet old enough to stand on its own. And it was, miraculously, still alive. A baby joey, head emerging from its mother’s pouch. Unscathed from the crash, but shaking terribly, and keenly aware something was wrong. Karen rushed the roo’s side, petting the creature, soothing it as best she could. “It’s okay,” she whispered to the mother feebly, “everything is alright. I’ll take care of your joey, somehow.”

She petted the roo’s soft fur, and the creature seemed to lock eyes with her and give a knowing look. For just a second, she felt as if the creature was looking at her with total understanding, and a pleading trust that she follow through on that promise.

“I will,” she responded, “I’ll take care of your little one.”

A flash overhead. A shooting star. She remembered what her mother had once told her about wishing on shooting stars, and how they brought good luck to those wishes.

“I wish for the ability to care for this little one,” she whispered to it. The comet passed, and a tingle set across her skin. The mother roo looked at her one more time with that knowing look, and then rested for the last time. Its eyes closed peacefully. She closed its eyes with her fingers, and again that tingling came over her, as if it had passed from

the deceased kangaroo and into her very being. Carefully she extracted the joey from its mother's pouch. It was male, and trembling. Uncertain. "There, there," she said, brushing it lightly and covering it with her jacket.

It was then that she noticed her nails had turned black.

"What the -!?" The tingling sensation increased, shooting up her arm as her fingernails became harder and pushed out to form animalistic claws. Her skin itched like wildfire as tufts of fur began pushing out along her arms and up her shoulders. She gave a shriek, stepping back from the roo and falling over as one leg became paralysed, then the other. They twisted, snapped, extended, her thighs bulging forward and becoming rounded, her toes stretching out to form flattened feet.

"W-what's h-happening to meeeaaaaugh!"

Her toenails sharpened, became black and hardened like her fingernails. She kicked at the ground as she regained control, raking up dust as her new marsupial legs scratched deep into the red dirt. Her fur coating continued to sprout all over, covering her new legs and spreading upwards to her chest until her breasts too were covered in fur, followed by her neck. The itching continued up her face as she desperately tried to stave off the changes, groaning and rolling in the dirt as a pressure built up in her backside. "Nnnnoo, not a tail, please not a tail!"

It erupted from her anyway, splitting her shorts open so that they fell down at her altered feet. Outwards it stretched, further and further behind her until it was nearly 2 metres in length. She looked back on it with awe as it wagged slightly behind her, providing enough heft and weight to allow her to stand back up properly. Her genitalia had shifted with it, further behind her. She squirmed in discomfort as it repositioned. Her face was now entirely covered in fur. Her jaw began to push forward, her ears shifted up to the top of her head and became pointed, furry things that jutted out from her scalp. Tears blinked in her eyes, and she clutched her stomach in response to yet another development; the growth of a mother's pouch. She locked eyes with the joey, who was now looking at her most quizzically.

The changes slowed, and finally set. Wobbling uncertainly on her new legs, Karen marvelled over her altered form. Her lower half had become almost exactly that of a female red kangaroo, albeit in proportion to her humanoid top half. She felt at her face in shock; it had become a cross between a kangaroo's and her old human one! She had a small snout, floppy marsupial ears, but retained the ability to express her lips, and her eyes were thankfully still pointed forwards and not further at the sides of her head. Her hands had become furry clawed things, but still retained a human shape thankfully. All in all her upper half was still feminine, with human breasts and an overall human body shape, though now matted in brown fur.

"Crikey, what have I gotten myself into?" She snapped her clawed hands up to her snout in surprise. "Oh I can speak still. Well thank you great comet for turning me into a kangaroo woman but still letting me retain the ability to speak."

She looked up to the last trails of the comet in the sky and quickly had an idea. "Please turn me back into a woman!"

No tingle. But she was still a woman, wasn't she? She tried again. "I wish I was human again!" Still nothing, and the comet soon passed.

"Streuth, streuth, streuth, I'm stuck as a bloody roo. I need to get home and figure this out." She turned to the side and fell over immediately, not used to her new legs. "Damn, I guess I have to hop now." She managed to push herself up. Her kangaroo legs were much more powerful before, and while it was strange having an enormous flesh tail behind her, she could at least appreciate the counterweight it provided. She made an attempt to hop forward and ended up leaping much further than anticipated, crashing onto her chest and hurting her furry boobs. Another leap, and she made a hasty landing, nearly but not quite tumbling over. "Wowee, I think I'm actually getting the hang of this." Another jump, successful this time. Another. Another. A series of them in succession, her powerful legs pushing off from the ground in unison and landing as one, before pushing again. A seamless bouncing movement that saw her travel a fair distance much faster than she could ever have successfully run before. She gave a shriek of delight, only to quickly stifle it.

"No, no!" she called out to the lonely desert. "I am not going to enjoy this! I refuse to do so! I am not going to live the rest of my life as some furry kangaroo lady!"

But the desert was quiet and empty, and there was no cosmic force interested in granting her a wish back to her human body. Still she waited, bouncing slightly on the spot in what she suspected could become a long-lasting behavioural tick in this form. She tried to flex her tail and found it only mildly in her control, but oddly enough when she squatted down (and easier thing to do in her new body) she found she could point it down and use it as a sort of fifth leg to hold her in place. "Too weird," she muttered, "this is all just too out there. Oh God what am I gonna do?"

She remembered the poor Joey, and the nature of her wish. "Maybe, if I take care of him, keep him safe, I'll turn back once he's grown." It was an outside bet she knew, but it was the middle of the night and she'd just been turned into half an animal. She hopped back over to the joey, her hops becoming increasingly more natural, and positioned herself over the dead roo with its son still in the pouch. Carefully, aware of her new claws, she extracted the shivering boy from the pouch.

"What am I going to do with you, little fella?"

A stirring within her pouch and within her breasts provided the answer for her. Her furry chest pressed against her shirt ever so slightly more. "Oh, you have got to be kidding me with this," she whined. She held the cute critter a few seconds longer, and finally decided. She lowered him slowly into her pouch, holding it open for him, and he settling within, stirring and squirming within her new protective fold.

"Getting comfortable?" she asked sarcastically. It was truly a strange feeling. To think that only half an hour ago she'd still been human. She hopped around to the car and

hoped she could find a way to keep driving it, at least until she got home and figured something out. The tail would be the biggest problem. It was only once she'd worked out an awkward arrangement that her new joey made it even more awkward. He pushed his furry head from her pouch and raised himself up, pushing under her shirt.

"Hey now, what are you – oh!"

He latched onto her nipple and began to suckle, and within moments she could feel the flow of her new breastmilk out into his mouth. She was nursing a baby kangaroo with her own furry breasts. "Jeez, this wish thought of everything. I guess – I guess I'm your mum now, little one, at least for the foreseeable future."

And despite the weirdness and fright of the changes, there was something pleasant in the way her little kangaroo boy contently suckled at her furry teat.

She held him with her free hand steady against her breast as she began to drive, her tail awkwardly bumping into the back of the ute and big feet against the pedals. Slowly but steadily, she began the drive home, occasionally shifting her gaze to the baby kangaroo nestled in her pouch and feeding at her breast.

"I think I'll call you Joey," she said..

In the years that passed, she raised her new baby boy until he was a mature kangaroo. She taught him how to hop, continued to feed him her mother's milk, and took care of him in every way not as a pet, but as if he were her own son. Together they hopped across the outback away from prying eyes, and the pace and freedom of that travel brought her great delight amidst the strangeness of her body. Joey of course couldn't speak, and yet she always felt a total understanding between him and her, a bond between mother and son that was unbreakable. Whether it was because he had fed from her own half-human form or simply because kangaroos were more intelligent than people gave them credit for she felt as though he understood her quite deeply, particularly when he came to nestle up against her in those moments in which she reminisced sadly on her human life. Those came less frequently as time passed.

She never did change back, and eventually she made peace with that. She was part-kangaroo now, which meant she had part-kangaroo instincts and a part-kangaroo libido. It took her a long time to work up the will to present herself to another red kangaroo, and slightly longer to complete the act she had been in tormentable oestrus for. It was her destiny now, she realised, to give back to the kangaroo population. At least that was how she liked to rationalise it, once she birthed her first joey, and again when she became pregnant while her first was still suckling from her pouch. A female kangaroo – a flyer, as they call them – can support up to three joeys at once; one in the pouch, another growing in the womb, and one foetus kept on pause until the second is born. Karen got used to this state of affairs, after all kangaroos are baby-making machines, why should she be any different? Eventually she left her home and the human world behind her entirely and began to live with a mob of kangaroos that included the red boomer that first impregnated her. They accepted her as one of their own, and she

quickly became her boomer's favourite sheila. She called him Boomer as if it was his name.

And so she continued to live, all thanks to one stupid, silly, amazing wish. She didn't know it yet, but her joeys, including Joey, would have lifespans that far outstripped the usual 8 to 10 years of the average kangaroo lifespan, matching her human own. They would have their own intelligence, able to understand her even if they could not respond. But Karen knew it in spirit anyway, and more importantly that she was loved. She had found her family, and had become a breeding roo woman for life.