

A SPECIAL CHRISTMAS WISH
FROM DOWNUNDER

An Original Story
by
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It was a starry night like no other had ever been before in the Candy Cane Forest just days before Christmas in South Australia. The children of the neighboring town in the valley below had given that section of the forest the special name. It was the massive twisting swirling trunks of the eucalyptus trees reminded their favorite candy. It was a very special place for two treetop resident koala bears in that Candy Cane Forest, Buffy and her cub Katie.

The glistening stars twinkled in the crystal clear Summer night of the Down Under sky as dawn approached. Only the sound of the rustling leaves could be heard as a warm breeze threaded its way through the forest below. The top branches slowly began to sway back and forth, providing a nice gentle lullaby rock for Buffy perched above. Only Katie's head could be seen poking from mum's pouch as Buffy completed her bedtime story, "... and they all lived happily ever after in the Magical Forest." "One like ours?", Katie whispered. "Just like ours sweetie", Buffy replied.

Suddenly Katie's eyes and mouth flash open in amazement as a shooting star blazed across the sky.

"Wow!. Did you see that mum? What does it mean?", Katie exclaimed.

"That was a shooting star and it means that you get to make a Special Wish. But think very carefully before making that wish. And remember that if you tell anyone what you wished for, then it may not come true.", Buffy explained.

"Do I have to decide right now?", Katie asked.

Gently tucking Katie down into her bedroom pouch, Buffy replied, "No, I think you can wait until tomorrow."

As the sun finally sank below the horizon Katie could hardly wait to share her shooting star experience with anyone who would listen. As she and Buffy made their way down the tree trunk Katie called out,

"Hey! Hey Mister Squirrel, I get a special wish and... I am not so nuts. But it is making me a little crazy.", Katie exclaimed as Buffy nudged her down the tree.

Katie continued to announce her news flash to the entire forest as she descended, "You won't believe it! I saw a giant shooting star last night. So bright I had to wear sunglass... I mean starglasses."

"Katie, don't get carried away", Buffy exclaimed, "Or you just might loose that wish."

"No way mum... I'm saving that Special Wish for Christmas. My lips are sealed from now on.", Katie replied as they reached the forest floor.

Running late for that last minute shopping trip to her secret spot Junk City, the town junkyard, Buffy placed Katie on her back and scurried over to the hollowed out tree of the local baby-sitter. Katie's thoughts swirled with all the wish possibilities, and only two more days until Christmas. What a confusing decision she thought, "I could wish for... any of those toys the children in town have... but would a bear look funny on a skateboard?" And then the solution came to her, "I'll just ask wise old Mister Owl when he comes for our midnight story. He has an answer for everything."

Buffy handed off Katie to kindly old Miss Roo. All the baby animals including wombats, wallabies and bandicoots immediately began to give Katie their suggestions for her Special Wish. "Okay, okay that's a good idea too but... I'm so confused", she yelled out.

In the meantime, Buffy finally had reached the bluff at the edge of the forest overlooking Junk City and the Christmas lights of the town beyond in the valley. She paused to catch her breath and then quickly scurried down the hill to the high chain-link fence that protected outside world from the junkyard. It was eerily quiet again in Junk City again. No more frightening growling and barking from that old junkyard dog Buster since had disappeared weeks ago. Buffy suspected that a pack of dingoes had gotten him. Several jumbuck has also recently disappeared in the area. She actually missed him running after her around the piles junk. Especially since he never really tried to catch her. It seemed a bit lonely and just wanted to play a little chase.

Climbing over the fence she stopped a moment to see if she could spot her other occasional junkyard buddy Danny. He was a five year old boy from town who would bring Buffy a dinner plate from home of cookies, candy and a soft drink full of straws. He was hoping to attract Buffy so he could try to pet her. He was too young to understand that koala bears only feed on the leaves and bark of the myrtle (eucalyptus) trees in the forest. The boy didn't know that the empty plate he found each time had been consumed by Junk City's mayor, a reclusive old bachelor named Ed White. But this time she decided to take the pile of old candy stripped straws that Danny usually left with the soft drink. They would make great decorations for their myrtle tree.

Reaching the spot where Danny usually waited for her, she found instead a group of older boys who almost ran over her. They were scattering into the piles of junk fleeing from the slow moving mayor waving his cane and yelling, "How many times do I have to tell you varmints to stay out of the junk!" Buffy quickly took cover in a pile of tires nearby. Stopping out of breath adjacent a pile of old refrigerators, Ed murmured to himself, "Aren't those kids old enough to know better. This stuff is dangerous. There's only so much I can do to keep this place safe for them." Even though Ed was quite a scary cite to the children with his flowing white beard and long hair, he really loved children and worried about them constantly.

Assured that the last boy had cleared the top of the fence, he confidently turned to walk back to the comfort of his old shack. As he sadly murmured to himself, "I'm getting to old to do Buster's job", there just beneath his feet he spotted his dog's old collar. He sadly reached down to retrieve it with his cane, spinning it on the end of his favorite old waddy. His focus slowly changed from the spinning collar to the pile of refrigerators. He noticed that one really old ice-box still had a door on it. His head tilted sideways as he tried to figure out why the old box was leaning way back. And then he remembered the back legs had broken off when he tried to pry the door off last month. He walked over and yanked on the ice-box door which surprisingly swung open and knocked him down before swinging back. As he struggled to stand up his already aching arthritic hands began to swell from the door hitting them. He looked around the yard and pondered the predicament for a moment, "Well, I guess that old box is safe for now. I'll get to it tomorrow", rubbing his hands, "Yes, tomorrow is a better idea." Feeling confident and secure as he also recalled previously drilling holes in the top of that old ice-box, he tapped the top of it's condenser motor with his waddy and walked away. But with his sight failing and his hearing aids back in the shack he had not take notice that the door had not completely closed shut.

As Ed reached his shack in the background, Buffy began to quickly gather up the last of her new found decorations and gifts in hopes of making it home before daylight. She also took note of that old ice-box and thought, "That almost looks like one of those snowmen. He just needs a nice hat." With her dilly bag of goodies in hand, Buffy made her way over the junkyard fence and back up the hill to the Candy Cane Forest.

As Buffy reached the hollowed out tree of Miss Roo, old Mister Owl could be heard finishing his afternoon story. The tale of Annie the Australian Sheep dog puppy and friendship was one of his best stories.

"So when we forget that friends need special attention just like the little plants need to blossom into something beautiful... what happens?", asked Mister Owl to his captivated audience.

"No flowers", the little animals whispered out.

"And what makes life beautiful?", answered back Mister Owl.

"Friendship and flowers!", the little animals sang out and clapped.

Buffy reached into the sea of baby animals and placed Katie onto her back. She scurried across the forest floor and then up their tree, anxious to get home and share her new treasures with Katie.

"Mister Owl is so smart mum", Katie exclaimed, "But why does he always end a conversation with a question?" Buffy looked back and smiled, "Because he knows you are smart. And already know the answer or he wouldn't ask."

"But mum", responded Katie, "when I asked him what I should wish for he asked me something silly." Finally arriving at their tree top home, Buffy pulled Katie from her pouch and cradled her into the branches. Nestling into the tree leaves Katie continued, "He said", trying to sound like Mister Owl, "When is a wish as special as a kiss? I don't get it."

"You will, just think about it in your dreamytime." replied Buffy. "But now lets look at all the fun things I found today", she stated while retrieving the goodies from her dilly bag and hanging the decorations around the tree.

The following afternoon, Christmas Eve, Buffy's friend Danny arrived much earlier than usual. His plate of goodies for Buffy were piled high with special Christmas goodies. But after searching all over the junkyard for Buffy with no success he began to worry about her goodies spoiling. Since his relationship with Buffy was a secret, noone had been able to tell him that koala bears are nocturnal animals and only come out at night. He didn't understand Buster had trapped Buffy in the junkyard the two times he had seen her in the daylight.

Danny's mum was waiting for him at home so they could do some last minute shopping too. And she had no idea he was in the junkyard. He really began to panic, "What am I going to do?" Then he spotted that old ice-box and thought, "Now there is a good safe place to hide the goodies so they wouldn't spoil." But he had to make sure Buffy would find her goodies. So he began gathering up bunches of those old candy cane straws lying on the ground. He stuffed them into his back pocket. As backed over to the ice-box he made an arrow on the ground with the straws. Spotting a piece of car muffler nearby, he used it to prop open the ice-box door. Everything was going okay until he slipped and lost his footing while putting the plate in the ice-box. All of a sudden he fell into the ice-box and accidentally kicked the muffler away. This time the ice-box door slammed completely shut, trapping him inside.

That old ice-box was pretty dark, stuffy, cramped, and scary for a five year old. The beams of sunlight from those holes drilled in the top spotlighted the tears that quietly began to run down Danny's cheeks. He began to quietly yell out for help, but quickly tired for lack of fresh air. His throat began to tighten up in that stuffy old ice-box. He was trying really hard not to panic. "What would a big boy do?", he thought. And then he remembered the trick his older brothers had taught him about how to sit on the bottom of the pool for ever.

Junk City seemed especially quiet that evening as Buffy arrived. Even the usually blaring sound of the mayor's television coming from his shack in the background couldn't be heard. Maybe he too had gone out to do some last minute Christmas shopping she thought. As she quickly began to wander through the sea of last minute gift possibilities she was surprised when she came upon the spot Danny normally left her dinner plate. No plate, but she did find a "To My Kowalla... MERY CHRISPTNESS" note written in crayon on the ground. Reaching down to pick up the note she then noticed the trail of straws leading to that old ice-box. "Ugh", she said while tilting her head sideways. "That's kinda funny. What's different about that snowman now?", she thought. Not really noticing the set of straws now poking out of the ice-box top. Nor aware that at the end of those pipeline of straws was Danny's with them securely tucked in his mouth. He was just sitting there quietly daydreaming about snorkeling safely on the bottom of his swimming pool at home. His eyes began to flutter as he slowly drifted off into his afternoon nap, unaware his little mate was just outside with her ear to the door.

As Buffy reached her home perched atop the tallest tree in the forest she was greeted by Katie and Mister Owl. He had kindly offered to watch Katie for Buffy's last minute shopping. Before she could even say hello, the loud voices of a group of town boys wandering through the forest were heard. "Yeah I know Danny is really smart... but he's lost and it is getting dark. And you know how stupid people get when it gets dark.", stated the oldest boy. "But it's early, and we haven't checked everywhere... like the junkyard.", said another boy. "It's later than you think for all of us. We've got to tell my parents now. Come on.", the oldest boy stated as they wandered away. "Oh no mum", Katie sighed. "That little boy may not be home in time for Christmas", she continued while beginning to cry.

All at once Buffy put the pieces of the missing boy puzzle together with the candy cane straws. Trying not to sound as frantic as she felt she said, "It will be okay sweetie. Mister Owl, would you please watch Katie a little while longer? I think it's an emergency." She then quickly shimmed down the tree calling out, "Thanks, goodbye." Mister Owl could see her running across the forest floor towards Junk City.

By the time Buffy reached the edge of the forest she could see a helicopter with a spotlight scanning across the town in the distance. People searching for Danny could faintly be heard nearby, "Danny. Oh Danny. Where are you?" She immediately hopped on her back and slid all the way down the hill gently stopping against the junkyard fence below. Buffy scaled the fence and began jumping across the piles of junk towards the ice-box.

Reaching the ice-box, Buffy pried open to old door with her strong claws and the superhuman strength of any mother in fear for a child's life. Sitting there as calm as could be was Danny peacefully asleep. Buffy then struggled up into the ice-box to gently awake him. As his eyes slowly opened the grin on his face expressed his delight at being rescued by his little junkyard friend. But suddenly his expression changed to horror as he saw the door swinging closed behind Buffy. Frozen with fear and unable to speak he watched the door knock Buffy into the ice-box and once again darkness consumed Danny, and now his mate.

Meanwhile in the junkyard shack, Ed sat quietly dozing off in front of the telly, oblivious to the chaos and drama taking place outside. With his glasses off and hearing aids out, the images of the lost boy being flashed across the screen were just a silent blur to him. But as the police helicopter began to hover low over the junkyard, Ed's chair began to vibrate and woke him. Grabbing his glasses to see what the heck was going on, Ed saw the news bulletin with Danny's picture on the telly. The bright spotlight from the helicopter then flashed through his window almost blinding him. He then knew something was seriously wrong in Junk City.

Grabbing his old red robe and matching beanie, Ed made his way to the front door while thinking, "Darn, I wish old Buster were here." And as he opened the front door, there on the porch was Buster and a female companion with a pup in her mouth. "You old son-of-a-gun. You really were lonely.", Ed exclaimed. He then gently escorted mom inside and put Buster's collar and leash back on before yelling, "Come on mate, we've got a little boy to find." Buster instinctively knew what to do and beelined it into the junkyard dragging Ed close behind.

As the police helicopter now hovered above the junkyard, it's spotlight zig-zagged across the piles of junk. Ed paused out of breath with Buster just across from the old ice-box. As the spotlight flashed across their path on the ground it followed Danny's arrow of straws up to the old ice-box. It was then that Ed, even with his failing sight, clearly noticed the two sets of red and white straws protruding from it's top. "Holy Jesus!", Ed exclaimed as he unleashed Buster who had picked up the boy's scent. Buster ran directly to the ice-box and began scratching frantically on the door almost pushing it over.

Reaching the ice-box Ed pulled Buster back and also began frantically clawing at the jammed door. His wrapped up swollen and painful hands couldn't budge the door. "Darn these worthless old hands.", Ed yelled out in frustration, "Give me strength O'Lord. Please help me save this boy." It was at that moment the helicopter pilot saw Ed and focused his bright spotlight light right down on him. As if a beam of energy had been sent down directly from heaven, Ed became energized in its glowing light. He ripped the wraps from his hands and flexed them in the light. Miraculously they were pain free and no longer swollen. Empowered with the strength of ten men now, he effortlessly yanked open the ice-box door.

Sitting quietly, but wide eyed, in the back of that old ice-box were Danny and Buffy. Both with straw snorkels in their mouth. Danny's mouth dropped wide open as he stared at the heavenly vision of his rescuer. "Holy cow! Santa Claus has saved us.", exclaimed Danny. "No. It's just old Ed" responded Ed as he reached in to retrieve Danny. Eager to return to the safety of the Candy Cane Forest and the warm caress of baby Katie, Buffy immediately leaped out of the ice-box past Ed and ran like the wind for home.

By the time Buffy arrived home Katie was fast asleep and Mister Owl was still dutifully watching over her. She gratefully thanked him and apologized for her delayed return without explaining why. As he flew away Buffy peacefully smiled and starred at Katie. She leaned down and kissed her baby goodnight, so very happy to be safely home again. Katie's eyes fluttered open and she motioned for Buffy to lean down. Katie whispered into her ear, "Mum, I think I know when a wish is as special as a kiss. It's when you give it to someone else." Buffy nodded in approval. "And I know I shouldn't mum, but I want to tell you what my

Special Wish is." Katie continued. "Sure, I think it will be okay" responded Buffy. "I wish that little boy could be home with his family for Christmas" said Katie. Smiling with great pride over Katie's unselfish choice she replied, "I think you just might get that wish Katie", while pulling Danny's note from her pouch.

It was a starry Christmas night like no other had ever been before in Junk City and the Candy Cane Forest. Danny was home with his family. Buster and his family were home with Ed. And Buffy was safely at home with Katie safely asleep in her pouch. Sometimes wishes really do come true.

THE END

GLOSSARY

ban·di·coot

(bán'dí-kt') —n. 1. Any of several ratlike marsupials of the family Peramelidae, of Australia and adjacent islands, having a long tapering snout and long hind legs. 2. Any of several large rats of the genera Bandicota and Nesokia, of southeastern Asia. [Telegu pandi-kokku : pandi, pig + kokku, rat.]

dilly bag

—n. A bag or basket woven of rushes or bark, used in Australia. [< dilli, native word in Australia.]

jum·buck

(júm'búk') —n. AUSTRALIAN. A sheep. [A native word in Australia.]

mar·su·pi·al

(mār-s'pě-l) —n. A mammal of the order Marsupialia, including kangaroos, opossums, bandicoots, and wombats, found principally in Australia and South and Central America. [NLat. marsupialis < marsupium, marsupium. —see marsupium.] mar·su'pi·al adj.

wad·dy

(wód'ë)wad·dy1 AUSTRALIAN. —n. pl.-dies A heavy straight stick or club thrown as a weapon by Australian aborigines.

—tr. v.-died., -dy·ing., -dies. To strike with a waddy. [Native word in Australia.]

wal·la·by

(wól'-bë) —n. pl.-bies Any of various marsupials of the genus Wallabia and related genera, of Australia and adjacent islands, related to and resembling the kangaroos but generally smaller. [Native word in Australia.]

wom·bat

(wóm'bát') —n. Either of two Australian marsupials, Phascolomis ursinus or Lasiorhinus latifrons, somewhat resembling a small bear. [Native word in Australia.]