

The Real Story of the Easter Bunny

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Once upon ages and ages ago there lived a kangaroo. Her name was Kangaroo Jill and she lived in Australia. One day, not long before Easter, she was standing beside a bush, nibbling leaves and minding her own business, when a boomerang whizzed over her head.

“Whoop-whoop-whoop!” sang the boomerang as it clipped her ears and went whirling away into the distance.

“Hooly dooley!” exclaimed Jill, ducking her head. “What was that?”

A moment later the boomerang came whirling back—whoop-whoop-whoop—and flew over her head again.

This was too much for Jill and off she bounced, bounce-bounce-bouncing across the outback as fast as she could go. When she came to the sea Jill didn’t stop. She hopped to China, over to Africa, up to Russia and landed in England. There she stopped. She stopped and looked around. Nothing was the same. Where were the lovely eucalyptus trees? Where were the laughing kookaburras? Where were the billabongs and the lizards and the flies? But most of all, where were the kangaroos? Nary was a one in sight.

She wandered about until she met a fox. She stopped and stared—she had never seen a fox before. Mr Fox stopped and stared too. He had never seen a kangaroo before. They stared and they stared and were amazed.

“What fine, intelligent eyes you have,” said Kangaroo Jill.

“And what a fine bounce you have,” said Mr Fox, “but I bet you can’t jump over my tail,” and he held it out straight.

“Of course I can,” said Jill, hopping over the fox’s tail.

“But you couldn’t hop over my head,” said Mr Fox. “I bet you couldn’t do that.”

“Of course I can,” said Jill, and easily hopped over the fox’s head.

“But if I stand on my hind legs and stretch my nose into the air,” said Mr Fox. “You couldn’t possibly jump over that, could you?”

Jill just laughed and sailed high over Mr Fox even though he stretched himself as tall as tall could be.

“Oh, that is fine and marvelous leap,” said Mr Fox. “If only I could jump so high I wouldn’t be starving to death.”

“You look healthy to me,” said Jill. “You have a lovely red and glossy coat.”

“Oh, no,” said Mr Fox, “I am starving, and my poor kits are starving too. It’s a terrible thing to see your children so hungry. But if we could have a chicken, just a small, itty-bitsy chicken, that would be wonderful. Please help us poor, starving fox folk get a chicken,” and he sank to the ground and lay panting on his side as if he was dying.

Kangaroo Jill was shocked. She had never talked to a fox before. She didn’t realize how kind and sweet and tragic they were. She felt so bad.

“I will help you,” said Jill, “Where can we find these chicken things?”

Mr Fox looked surprised.

“You do know what chickens are?” he asked.

Jill shook her head. Back in those days, there were no chickens in Australia.

“I will show you,” said Mr Fox kindly. “We just have to make sure that Farmer Digg is not around. He loves foxes, but he is getting old. Too much excitement is not good for his heart. It’s best if we go at night and you can hop over his chicken fence and fetch me a fat chicken.”

So that night, Jill and Mr Fox went to Farmer Diggs’ chicken house. It was surrounded by a strong, high fence—but not too high for Jill. They waited until the lights in Farmer Diggs’ house went out.

“There’s the chicken house,” said Mr Fox. “You’ll easily hop over such a small fence. And remember, the chickens will be sleeping, but if they wake up and make a fuss that’s because they don’t like Farmer Digg. They will be shouting, ‘Please, please take me to Mr Fox! Quick! Quick! See, I am flapping my wings, trying to get away from that horrible Farmer Digg!’ That’s what they’ll be saying if they make a fuss.”

Jill jumped over the fence and opened the chicken house door. As soon as she hopped inside the chickens clucked and squawked and flapped about. What a to-do there was! This was not going to be easy. Jill bounced about trying to catch a chicken, but they were flying hither and thither and making such a fuss.

“I’m here to take you to Mr Fox,” cried Jill, but the chickens only got wilder and more frantic.

“Quick, run, Kangaroo Jill,” Mr Fox called from outside. “Farmer Digg is coming!”

Jill left the chicken house, hopped over the fence, and bounced away with Mr Fox at her side. Suddenly there was a loud bang and something whizzed over their heads.

“What was that?” asked Jill, jumping high into the air with fright.

"Oh, that's nothing," said Mr Fox, running twice as fast and keeping his head down. "It's Farmer Digg slamming the chicken house door to keep them prisoner."

The next day, when Mr Fox came out of his den, he could hardly walk he was so weak. "Oh, Kangaroo Jill," he sobbed, "my kits are almost dead and Mrs Fox is too tired to get out of bed. There is only one thing we can do."

"What's that?" asked Jill.

"If we can't catch a chicken, we have to get their eggs," said Mr Fox. "They lay lots of eggs and don't mind giving them away. I see you have a basket on your tummy. You can hop over the fence, collect the chicken eggs, and put them into your basket."

"That's a good idea," said Jill. "That's what we'll do. Let's go now."

"But it's Sunday morning," said Mr Fox. "Farmer Digg will be coming back from church with his whole family."

"Oh, fiddles on Farmer Digg," said Jill. "You said he was old. He will never catch me," and off she hopped before Mr Fox could say another word.

Mr Fox tried to keep up, but found that Jill was much faster than him. He arrived just in time to see her leaping over the fence. Most of the chickens were outside their house and they fussed and flew about when she landed in their yard. Jill ignored them and went into the chicken house. Three hens were inside, sitting on their eggs, but when they saw her they squawked blue murder and fled the coop. Jill gathered their eggs and popped them into her pouch.

She had just finished when there was a loud shout and a bang—it was Farmer Digg slamming doors again. Jill went outside. She saw Mr Fox running away and Farmer Digg standing with a long, smoking stick in his hand. With him were Farmer Digg's many children, all dressed up in their best clothes. It was Easter Sunday and they had flowery garlands on their heads to celebrate spring.

"What's that?" cried the children, pointing at Jill.

"It's a huge bunny rabbit," said number one.

"No, it's not," said number two.

"It's a humongous hare," said number three.

"What a funny tail it has," said number four.

"Hare or rabbit, it's in with my chickens," said Farmer Digg, and he pointed the long stick at Jill.

Jill leaped into the air just as the stick went BANG! What a fright she got! Away she bounced with the children running after her.

"Catch it! Catch it!" cried the children. "Catch the funny bunny!"

Jill was faster than the children, but her pouch was so full of eggs she was afraid they would break.

"I'd better get rid of these eggs," said Jill to herself. "I will hide them away so Mr Fox can find them later."

She stopped and hid an egg underneath a daffodil, then bounded off and hid another behind a fence post. She put some into hollow logs, a few in the branches of trees, and several in the lilac bushes—she hid them in nooks and crannies everywhere. All this time the children were just behind, shouting and screaming and trying to catch up. The oldest ones kept chasing after her, but the younger ones began to find the hidden eggs. Soon, that's all they were searching for. This was the world's first Easter egg hunt—though nobody knew it at the time.

Jill was down to the last few eggs when she heard voices cheeping and peeping. 'Cheep-cheep! Peep-peep!' they piped. She stopped and looked in her pouch. Inside were three golden chicks freshly hatched from their eggs.

"I can't take these babies with me," thought Kangaroo Jill. "I will wait for those children to catch up."

The children stopped when they got close to her. Their eyes were full of wonder and amazing.

"What is that animal?" they whispered, staring and staring. "She must be magic!"

That's when Jill took the three chicks out of her pouch and put them on the ground. Then away she bounded across the meadows and fields and over the fences and hedgerows. When she got to the sea she jumped to Iceland and Greenland and Canada and Brazil and then, with a huge leap, she landed up to her tummy in snow in Antarctica. It was so bitterly cold that her tummy fur turned white with frostbite. That's why kangaroos are lighter underneath than on top.

"Burrrr," said Jill, chilled to the bone. "I am not staying here," and with two more bounds, one to New Zealand and one to Australia, she was home again.

Kangaroo Jill was happy to be back. She laughed with the kookaburras, played with the possums, and danced with the dingoes. Far away in England, Easter egg hunts took off like wild fire—the children thought they were so much fun! A great tale spread throughout the land, about a massive bunny rabbit or humongous hare that whizzed across the fields in leaps and bounds and left eggs behind, carefully hidden, for children to find—and even, if you are lucky, some newborn spring chicks too.