

## A Season of Happiness Presents



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### Story Ten – THE NEW TRAFFIC LIGHTS

By Dave Hawkins

It was a big day for Pronto. He was down at the crossroads in town making sure that the new traffic lights were put up in the right place. “This should help stop some of those accidents we’ve been having lately,” he commented.

Wombat was watching and was apparently not convinced. “You surely don’t believe people are going to take any notice of them, Pronto,” he said in his usual grumpy tone.

“Of course they will,” insisted Pronto, “It’s the law.” Straightening his nice blue hat to remind everyone that he was not only just good old Pronto, but was also The Valley policeman, he said: “Anyway, I shall be here to make sure everyone does the right thing.”

Kookaburra was sitting on top of one of the new traffic lights and started laughing: “Hoo-hoo ha-ha-ha-haa. In your dreams, Pronto,” he cackled, then laughed again. “I’ll be back later to watch the fun.” And with that, Kookaburra flew off.

“What did he mean ‘fun’?” said Pronto frowning. “This is not supposed to be fun. It’s about public safety. I seem to be the only one who cares.”

“Well, as the local policeman that’s your job,” Wombat reminded him, “And you’ve got the hat to prove it.” He paused to look again at the new traffic lights before adding: “But I have a sneaking suspicion that it won’t be enough.”

Once the traffic lights were all fixed up, Pronto stood watching to make sure they were working properly. They certainly seemed to be, changing from green to yellow to red; then after a long pause back to green again. “Yes,” said Pronto proudly, “That should do it.”

“You’ll find out in a moment,” said Wombat. “Here come your first customers.”

Two kangaroos were bounding towards the crossroads, and at the same time Possum was approaching along a different road on his bike. According to the traffic lights, the kangaroos were coming up to a green light and were safe to carry on; whereas Possum should have seen the red light facing him and stopped; but he didn’t and almost ran into one of the kangaroos.

Most disappointed, Pronto ran over. "What's the matter with you, Possum? Didn't you see the lights?"

Possum looked up. "Oh, yes. Very nice, Pronto. Are we having a party?"

"No we are NOT!" snapped Pronto, getting quite annoyed. "They aren't party lights – they're *traffic* lights. You're supposed to take notice of them."

"Oh, I will," said Possum, "Now I know what to look for." And off he rode.

A little later, Possum returned. This time he nearly ran over Goanna, which made Pronto very upset indeed. "You've done it again, Possum. I've a good mind to arrest you. Do you realise you ran straight through a red light?"

"Yes," admitted Possum quite casually. "I do love red, don't you?"

Pronto groaned in frustration. "It's not there for you to love," he grated severely, "You're supposed to stop when you see it. Red means stop."

"Sorry, Pronto," said Possum, "I didn't know."

In the meantime, the Drumlins had been collecting the tools that had been used to put up the traffic lights and loading them into Wombat's wheelbarrow. Along he came, pushing the wheelbarrow straight into the middle of the crossroads and stood waiting. "Come on, get out of the way, you lot," he demanded. "You shouldn't be standing in the middle of the road."

"And you should have stopped at the red light," said Possum, now that he knew what it meant.

Purple had suddenly noticed a cloud of dust approaching and began leaping up and down. "Look out, everyone!" she blurted excitedly, "Old Man Emu's coming with his chicks and I don't think he's seen us."

"Er, no he, er, hasn't," said Blue unnecessarily when, a moment later and with a terrible crash, Old Man Emu and his chicks ran straight into the crowd already gathered in the crossroads.

Pronto moaned, took off his policeman's hat and scratched his head. "This isn't going to be as easy as I thought," he said. Turning to the Drumlins, he asked: "Do you have any ideas how we can make the new traffic lights work?"

"They already do, Pronto," said Purple, leaping from one light to another, pointing at the changing colours.

Yellow tutted. "You silly Drumlin. Pronto meant that the people don't understand what they are supposed to do when they see the different colours."

"What we need is a demonstration," said Green.

"Exactly right," bellowed Red. He blinked a few times, then asked: "Um, pardon my ignorance, but what is a demonstration?"

"I think it's like a practice," whispered Orange, "To show people what to do when they see the different colours of the lights."

“Of course it is,” said Red a little quieter than usual. Standing up straight, he raised his voice. “Right, Drumlins. We are going to do a demonstration.” He paused again, frowned and looked at Green. “You’re the thinker, Green. Tell us what we have to do.”

Green thought out the problem really well. Once they knew the idea, Pronto and Wombat sent word to the town people to gather at the crossroads. Even Kookaburrah and Magpie helped by flying to those who lived out of town. Soon, people were lining the streets surrounding the crossroads, looking on as Red stood in the middle and announced: “First, I am going to let Green start the demonstration.”

Green stepped forward. “Now, you all know my name: I am Green.” He patted his chest. “And, as you can see, that is also my colour. When you see a traffic light that is the same colour as me, it means you can carry on through the crossroads.”

Green took a step backwards and Yellow came forward. “And my name,” she said, “Is Yellow, and that is the same colour as my beautiful, dazzling yellow dress. When you see a traffic light this colour,” and she stroked a hand down the front of her dress, “You should be very careful and wait.”

“But!” ordered Red loudly, “The instant you see my colour Red on the traffic light; what should you do?”

Purple was frowning and didn’t even start bouncing. “Shape up?” she asked, clearly quite confused.

“No, Purple,” said Pronto. “When you see a light the same colour as Red, you must stop. Now, I think we’d better go over it again to make sure everyone understands.” Which is exactly what they did.

Eventually, Pronto was able to look on proudly as those who came up to the crossroads stopped when facing a red light and didn’t start off again until the traffic light changed to green. “Do you know, Pronto,” said Wombat, “I do believe you’ve done something right for a change.”

Just at that moment, Bandicoot came wandering into town with his nose on the ground and bumped straight into one of the traffic-light poles. Noticing Pronto standing nearby, he complained: “That was a silly place to put a pole, Pronto. If you’re going to leave it there, I suggest you put a light on it before someone has a serious accident.” Then Bandicoot hopped off, grumbling to himself.

Pronto sighed and mumbled to Wombat: “Sometimes, I don’t know why I bother.”