Birth of Butterflies

In the Dreamtime, when the world was newly created, there was no death. The animals still spoke one common language and lived as one tribe. The oldest animals could remember the time of creation itself, for they were the first living beings. The ancestral spirits who had made the world forms had given them their forms. The old animals taught the younger ones all that they needed to know: how to forage for food, how to find their way around in the bush, and how to live in harmony. At night, with everyone sitting around the blaze of a campfire, the old ones would tell strange and wonderful stories about the dawn of time.

The oldest animal, Uncle Lizard, liked to sleep on top of rocks and keep warm in the sun. One night, the others noticed that he was still lying on his favorite rock when the sun had gone down and the stars shone above the gum trees.

“Pardon me, Uncle,” said a young wombat, “but wouldn’t you rather come and lie down by the fire, where it’s warm?”

Uncle Lizard didn’t answer. His eyes were open, but they didn’t blink. He seemed to be staring at another world. The animals tried to rouse the lizard; but not even Aunty Kookaburra, with her loud, wild laugh, could make him stir. It became clear to the animals that Uncle Lizard couldn’t see, hear, smell, or move.

They decided to watch Uncle Lizard for signs of change. For days, which stretched into weeks, they took turns observing him. Gradually, his body turned to dust and blew away in the wind, leaving only his skeleton sitting on the rock.

“He’s gone,” stated a red kangaroo, late in the night, shaking his head. “Like the fire when it burns out,” he added in a murmur.

To all the animals, the ground and the air felt suddenly colder. The night seemed very large and dark and empty.

Aunty Kookaburra cocked her head to the side, a pose she habitually adopted when she was thinking.

“Hang on a minute,” she said. “When the ancestors created the world, they were always changing things around, making animals out of rocks and sticks and goodness knows what else.”
The sun was beginning to take the sharp chill out of the early morning air when I arrived at the popular Lake Tahoe resort where I had worked as assistant manager for the last two years—a position that required 9- to 11-hour work days for six (and sometimes seven) days a week. Of course, such a hectic schedule included being on call when I wasn’t physically on the property. My mind, body and soul were so attuned to my job that the thought of having any type of responsibility outside of work was not an option I even entertained.

I quickly fell into my daily routine. I checked in with the night auditor to find out about the previous night’s events, completed my morning property check and entered full swing into the busy workday. Naturally, I did not expect what was about to happen, but isn’t that usually the way it is with life’s surprises? When one least expects it, the unexpected arrives—in my case, an abandoned cat that was determined to become my buddy.

Around 9 o’clock, the housekeeper spotted me in the lobby and asked me to accompany her to one of the recently vacated rooms. Something unusual had happened, and she wasn’t sure how best to handle it. The door to the room in question was wide open, and there, sitting regally in the doorway, was a gorgeous, albeit under-nourished, ebony cat. Apparently, our guests had checked out and left the sad, lonely little cat behind like yesterday’s newspaper. At least I thought he looked sad and lonely (which should have given me a clue about the changes ahead for me); to my mind, he should have felt that way after being abandoned. Yet, he seemed perfectly content as he wound his body around my ankles, purring loudly enough for all to hear. He actually seemed happy to see me (which should have been my second clue.)