

A Hoof Days Work

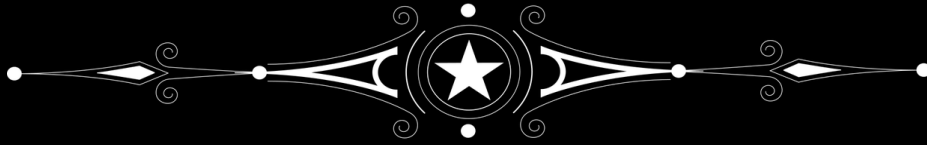
For Bahamut-255 and PaulRevere

By

Desmond Fallout

The following contains: Nearly complete feral horse TF. Grumpy workers.

Read at your own discretion.



Like many labor-intensive jobs that run in the background of daily life, truckers did not get the praise and admiration often rightly earned. It takes a certain kind of grit to drive some fifteen tons of supplies across countries so people can get their needs met. Not to mention lots of special training was needed just to work the rolling beasts on the roads. The shifts were long, lonely, and plenty dangerous.

That's why it's a pain in the tail that most healthcare didn't give special benefits for drivers with a tendency to transform into a horse. Apparently, that's too unique a case to qualify as a medical condition.

"That should do it," The engineer declared while making a final pass over his handiwork. After months of custom refitting, the semi's dash panel now had its hand controls configured for a large animal driver. Once satisfied everything seemed to function properly, he hopped out of the cabin to give the owner an amused grin. "Never pulled a job this ambitious before, but steering the old girl should be fine with or without hands."

"Phanks," Karen said in her usual flat attitude. Getting even that to sound generally like an English word brought a slight sense of accomplishment. Unfortunately, the man she'd hired to remodel her rig didn't even try to hold back his amused chuckling. The fluttering of her thick lips and huge teeth was annoying enough without everyone treating a horse's muzzle like it was a clown show.

The overpaid jerk eventually calmed down enough to pass along the final paperwork. Not that he kept much composure when Karen tried grabbing an offered pen with the little nub that used to be her thumb. After the third attempt made her want to bap him with a hoof, she settled for scribbling out a signature with her teeth. The man certainly didn't laugh while taking back a pen covered in spit.

"Wow. That's more legible than I expected," he said, looking over the scribblings with a chuckle. Figures they'd want the last word in before giving a tip of their hat and departing.

Karen's look would have melted ice, but she only snorted through her enlarged nostrils before turning away. Attempts to at least walk around the trailer-less truck for a final glance over with some dignity proved lacking. Painfully angular shaped hips with enormous buttocks forced her steps to jut forward in awkwardly stiff motions. About all she had left to wear, besides the silver horse head pendant hanging off her lengthy thick neck, was her emergency poncho. Very little else could cover her brown furred body this late into the transformation. Unfortunately, the involuntary flicks of her bristly equine

tail caused the back to flutter, threatening what little delusion of human modesty she had left.

This was a familiar song and dance at this point. The silver pendant's curse had imposed its desire to make Karen a thoroughbred horse years ago. In that time, she'd self-taught an impressive number of tricks or techniques for managing heavy vehicle operations with hands, hooves, and everything in between the gradual shifting process. Becoming a thousand-pound animal wasn't going to stop her making deliveries, because simply being a horse sure wasn't going to pay the bills. It was now just another obstacle in an already lackluster career.

Hopefully all that struggling to save up would be worth it. While she'd yet to find a cure, there was the Azuchroma flower that temporarily subdued the magic effects. The problem was that it was a spring weed. That usually meant a lot of bothersome winter trips on the far horse side of Karen's shape spectrum, just like as she was now. Exactly the reason she'd just spent a large chunk of her life savings having the steering augmented.

Granted there was some Azuchroma sitting inside the cabin fridge just waiting to be munched on. This particular case of horse happened to be a rare intentional time on Karen's part. There was still a simple matter of proving she could drive the thing safely after all this work. Stupid bureaucratic red tape liked to make everything difficult. As if making dozens of trips on a normal rig couldn't be proof enough.

She finished her lap around the rig satisfied it looked as gorgeous as the day she bought it. Just her luck there wasn't a sign of the state inspectors yet. No one else's time matters but their own. Karen snorted and began clopping her way towards the pit stop's store intent on at least eating something while she waited.

Of course, the door was pulled open. She really hated having to lower onto all fours just to yank it open with her sloped lengthy muzzle. Karen reared back up and yelped as she staggered inside, having to brace against a shelf of gift cards to keep from toppling over. When she regained some balance, it was with a hunched posture that left her barely human hips aching. Looked like walking upright wasn't going to be a privilege much longer. Her thumbs and pinkies were barely visible pimples on the massive hooves decorating her forelegs.

"Afternoon, Karen!" the older cashier greeted them when they'd successfully shuffled to the counter. Lynda was always a welcome sight as one of the few people in this business that never felt the need to bust Karen's chops when she wasn't even human enough to retort. "I got some fresh garden salads in today, plus the Mareweed you ordered. How many do you need?"

Karen tapped a hoof twice on the counter. Within minutes she had two bowls of salad and a bottle of water bagged up. Lynda followed this by placing a bundle of jagged leafed herbs on their side of the counter, which the more horse than woman quickly ate up. The loud flapping of her lips was nothing compared to the satisfaction of having a cold minty tingle travel down her widened throat muscles.

“Thanks for that, Lynda,” Karen said in a perfectly clear and cheerful voice. No one was really clear on the specific properties. Mareweed was a year-round plant that allowed Karen a brief period to talk normally no matter what animal she might get magicked into. She angled her snout to pull a credit card out of her poncho’s breast pocket, dropping it on the counter. “How’s the grandkids?”

“Being as wild as ever,” Lynda chuckled while ringing up the order. She did Karen the courtesy of slipping the card back into the pocket when it was done. “I know you’re not interested but my son doubled his offer if you want to work for their next birthday party in four months.”

Karen rolled her eyes the best she could with a giant muzzle between them. “Being a truck driving talking horse is plenty awful for me. I’m not sure how well things would go throwing kids into the mix.”

“Suit yourself. I promised him I’d pass the message.”

“Of course. See you next round, Lynda.”

With hands virtually nonexistent, Karen carried her imminent lunch out with her teeth. The second she got outside she couldn’t help losing what little cheer her purchase had brought. Two new cars had shown up in the lot during those couple of minutes. A pair of suited men were waiting beside her rig when she approached, looking agitated like it was only their time being wasted.

“Miss Karen, I take it?” One of the men asked in a tone that perfectly resonated such sentiments.

Much as Karen wanted to retort with something mildly snarky, being the only trucker anyone knew of that became a horse, she fought the urge back. Having a mouth full of paper beg also helped hold the silence. Instead, she held up a hoof that hopefully resembled the ‘wait a second’ gesture before walking past them into her rig’s cabin. The precious greens were dropped onto her reinforced bed, but turning to climb back out tripped her sense of gravity enough to topple into a rough landing on all fours atop the pavement.

“You alright there!?” the other man rushed over, although looking unsure how he could assist someone of another species and twice his size. “You need help standing up?”

Karen didn’t answer, only pushing off onto her hind legs again. She didn’t get far before gravity pulled her back down with a loud clapping of front hooves. Nostrils flared as her grumpy levels reached their peak. “Don’t bother. I am standing now. Yes. I’m Karen. Thanks for coming over.”

“Glad you could finally decide to show up,” the first man huffed, making Karen’s chestnut mane bristle. Her angry glare didn’t affect them in the slightest as they pulled out a phone for a series of rapid taps. “We already confirmed with the contracted engineer that all modifications are done. This’ll be a simple test run so the insurance

office is assured you are perfectly capable of managing this setup within all safety regulations.”

“Just like the last three times we went over this.” Karen waved one hoof with a bored sputtering noise. “I already told them over the phone that if I can handle driving stick like this, I can handle anything.”

“Assuming this bizarre reworking actually runs.” The man’s eyes narrowed, making Karen slightly nervous for the first time. “Bob will ride passenger to observe the interior while I’ll record for the office out here. A simple pass around the lot should suffice, miss.”

“You’re too kind.” Karen regretted the attitude, though she’d spent months going over all the paperwork in advance. Anything beyond a test run would have been cruel overkill by this point.

She padded back into the cabin grateful for the expanded steps in a forced quadruped state now. The other man, Bob, wasn’t far behind, settling into the human sized passenger seat. The driver side still had one, but it’d been converted into a fold away section so most of the space left Karen plenty of room to sit on her haunches. It took a few moments of looking at the new controls before memory began working. She pressed her nose against a bright red button that got the motor jumping to life. A pass of her chin over three more buttons got things into automatic gear. Lights flicked on across both sides of the dashboard as the radio came to life blaring country music.

“So... You’re a horse. Huh?”

Karen could only stare at Bob in silence for a moment. The fact horses had a wide range of vision meant she didn’t have to turn her head to do so, which probably unnerved the poor guy. “Did the pointy ears give it away?”

That got an amused chuckle from her inspector. Casual conversation hadn’t been expected for this, but it did help with Karen’s already grumpy mood.

“What’s it like?”

Karen put one hoof on the steering wheel making a big show of thinking the question over. When it felt like the poor guy had waited long enough, she used her other hoof to push down on a panel that started moving her truck forward.

“I miss wearing pants.”

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Afterward

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