

WHAT WAS LOST

DJ Janas ❧ SHORT FICTION

Hammy the pig from *Toy Story* was Kevin's favorite toy. We got him in a Kid's Meal from Burger King in 1995 when that film first came out and BK and Mickey D's actually gave out some quality toys. Hammy was soft and kind of a puppet — you could stick your hand in his belly and put things in him like little mittens or another small toy. He was supposed to be a piggy bank, after all.

Kevin loved him. Took Hammy everywhere we went.

Even to the park, one day, and that's where we lost him.

We didn't realize it until we'd gotten home, and checked everywhere, just in case. I'd gone back to the park, later, but I couldn't find him there. I'd kind of hoped to find that someone who'd played there after us had put him on top of a ride or a bench so that he could be found. I traced our walk into the park, looked around the rides I knew the boys had played on, kicked up the wood chips just in case Hammy had been dropped and buried by running feet. I even looked in the trash can.

Hammy was gone.

Either he was taken by another kid or parent, or tossed in the trash, or taken by some teenager as they passed through the park and thrown away later. Either way, Hammy was gone.

Kevin was inconsolable for a time. It wasn't so much that he missed playing with his toy, but he was afraid for Hammy.

He had imbued the toy with real feelings.

He thought about Hammy being alone and afraid.

He thought about Hammy being lost and not knowing how to find home.

He worried about Hammy being sad and crying that we hadn't found him.

He worried that some mean kid or a dog had hurt Hammy.

He worried that Hammy had been thrown away and would spend the rest of his life in the garbage with banana peels and juice boxes.

Alone and afraid.

Even Kevin's older brother tried to help and create a picture of some nice girl finding Hammy and bringing him home with her where he made new toy friends. Kevin and his brother predicted the plots of *Toy Story 2*, *3*, & *4* years in advance, thinking about what could have happened to Hammy.

I don't know if I felt even worse than Kevin because I let it happen. I didn't

check that we had his toy when we left the park that day. I didn't find Hammy when I went back. I didn't want my three-year-old to be feeling this torn up inside.

But I was an adult. I knew these things happen. Time would heal the wound. We lose things all the time. Toys, friends, lovers, jobs... He'd be fine in a couple days and move on to the next thing.

But it lingered.

I turned to eBay. I found a Hammy for sale still in its plastic Burger King bag and was the only bidder in the auction. We'd lost Hammy in November, so I thought that I'd save the new one for Christmas. On Christmas, Hammy (without the BK bag) was in Kevin's stocking. Santa had found Hammy!

Kevin knew it wasn't him. This new one didn't smell right. His body hadn't pilled from the washings we'd given him in the machine. He was soft, but in that new way, not like an old friend. Kevin smiled, but put new Hammy down and continued with the morning's gifts. He never picked up that Hammy, again.



Fifteen years later, Kevin was cleaning his room, making room for new stuff, throwing away old stuff. He carried a plastic tub out into our yard, to the green trash bucket, and deliberated.

"What's up?" I asked.

"Should I pour these into the bucket, or just leave them in this for the trash guy to dump?" Kevin asked. Whatever was in the tub, he was more concerned about taking up too much room in the trash bin or losing the tub to the trash collector.

I gave up fixing the lawn mower and came to see about his predicament.

Then I looked inside his tub.

It was his toy box.

Kevin was throwing away his old toys. He wasn't selling them on eBay, or holding a garage sale, or giving them away to a kid or to Goodwill or AmVets. He was throwing them away.

I noticed his teddy bear and Curious George were not among the victims, those that had held spots of honor on his bed for so many years. He still had a habit of giving feelings to his toys, at least the ones with faces. The ones with eyes pleading not to go into the bucket.

There was a time when you could get Kevin to finish his dinner by telling him that 'this broccoli will be sad if you don't eat it — he wants to give you vitamins to grow.' But that time had passed.

His brother came and liberated some of his favorites, toys that the two of

them had played with, and one — a Power Ranger vehicle — that he claimed was actually his.

“Why, Kev?” his brother asked.

“I don’t play with them anymore. I don’t even remember playing with these,” he told him.

I looked in and saw some that were breaking my own heart to see go. The dinosaurs, part of a Halloween costume, a Bumble Ball, his Pokedex, pieces from the toy airport, a sailboat, and a bunch more... Ones that if I were still a kid, I would want to play with.

But they weren’t mine to save or get rid of. They were Kevin’s.

Why did I feel so torn apart inside, watching him dump those hunks of plastic and rubber and polyester into the trash?

As he poured the contents of the tub into the trash can, I said, “You loved those. I can still see you playing with those. We have videos of you guys playing with those when you were little.”

“Dad,” Kevin said, “those are *your* memories.”

Yes. They were. 📖



The Glowing Sunset

Aiyana Lyles
🌿 PHOTOGRAPHY