

Marjorie had just started drifting off to sleep when she heard a rustling sound beside her in her small bed. With her eyes still closed, she felt a smile spread across her face. She knew what this rustling sound meant for the rest of her night.

Once she opened her eyes, she was greeted by the sight that she had been expecting to see. It was a sight that she had gotten used to, as she saw it almost every night now. Her three stuffed animals that always slept in her bed with her were alive and walking around. Levi the lion was just getting down from the bed while Peggy the pig was helping him get down, making sure his little paws hit the ground before she let go of his front paw. Billy the bear was still next to Marjorie, waiting for her to wake. Once he saw that her eyes were finally open, he smiled at her.

“Are you ready to explore now?” He asked as he extended his brown paw out to her. Marjorie didn’t say anything; she thought her smile and nod was enough to answer his question. She kept him clutched firmly to her side as she leapt from the bed to follow the other two animals.

Levi and Peggy were already at the front door, a few feet from the entrance of Marjorie’s room. She tiptoed to them, careful not to make a sound and wake her parents, asleep just a few feet away in their own room. She grabbed the door handle and turned it, opening the front door, freezing in fear when it made an obnoxious creaking sound. She turned her head to her parent’s room, convinced that she would see it open any second now. When it did not, Levi tugged on her free hand and out they went.

Free to now be as loud as they wanted to be, Marjorie let out a yelp of enjoyment, a huge smile on her face. She ran and heard nothing but the slaps her bare feet made on the ground and the sounds her stuffed animals were making.

But how could she call them stuffed animals when they were so real to her right now? How could she call them that when they had been coming alive at night for weeks now? They were moving and talking just like any real animal. In fact, she looked down at Billy and thought that if she put her ear to his chest, she would hear a heartbeat. So, no, she couldn’t explain it, but these animals were very real and alive. Just as alive as she was.

She set Billy on the ground so he was able to run on his own, anywhere he wanted to go. He followed Levi and Peggy into the forest that rested right next to Marjorie's house. This forest was nothing new to Marjorie and she wasn't even a little hesitant to enter it. All four of them came here almost every night, so it was almost becoming a second home to her at this point. She kept her eyes on the animals and tried to keep pace with them.

Once they were tired from running, the three animals stopped in front of a giant tree to catch their breath and Marjorie caught up and sat down next to them, her back resting against the rough bark of the tree.

"I just can't believe this is real," Marjorie said quietly, still trying to catch her breath. "Is this really happening?"

Peggy gave a sweet smile to Marjorie. "It is really happening. Anything can happen right now. You could grab a star and pull it down to you. Give it a try." She looked up at the sky and Marjorie followed her movement.

Marjorie closed her eyes, reached out her hand, and gripped onto something. She really could feel something in her hand! Without opening her eyes, she pulled that object down to her and held it in front of her face, afraid to open her eyes and find something wasn't there at all. She worked up her courage and opened her eyes and saw that she was holding a bright star in between two of her fingers. It looked exactly as it had up in the sky; it was small, white, and beautifully shiny. She looked back up at the sky and saw an empty space where she believed she had grabbed the star from.

"Wow..." Was all she could think to say, completely in awe of what she was holding in her hand. Finally, she let it go and watched it float back up to its home.

Peggy nudged her side, forcing her to come back to reality. "See? You could do anything you wanted to right now. Anything. So is it hard to believe that we're real?"

"No." Marjorie shook her head. It wasn't hard to believe anymore. It seemed like the most logical thing at that moment. "I wish you guys were real all the time."

Levi laughed and rubbed up against Marjorie, his mane tickling her nose. "We do too. But we're glad we can be real at all."

Marjorie suddenly came to a realization. She was able to roam around whenever she wanted. She was allowed to just *be* whenever she wanted. These poor animals of

hers didn't have that same opportunity she had. They were just able to go out and live and experience whenever night came. There must be so much that they all wanted to do, experiences that Marjorie probably took for granted.

It was then that she decided she would make tonight special for all of them.

"What do you guys want to do tonight?" Marjorie asked her friends. "Whatever you want."

They all looked at each other before looking back to Marjorie, smiles breaking out on all of their small, plush faces. They were all silent for a moment before Levi was the first to speak up.

"Just spending the night with you is enough for us."

Marjorie felt tears gather in her eyes as she smiled back at these animals. Then she quickly stood up and started running, calling back to her friends to catch her. She turned back to look ahead and heard the soft patter of the animal's feet following behind her, their excited yips filling the air behind her.

While she was running, she reached out and felt her fingers graze countless trees, the bark scratching at her fingertips, but the feeling wasn't exactly what Marjorie would describe as unpleasant. The feeling of the rough bark made her feel alive and more aware of this moment she was living in right now. If the trees felt so real, how could this not be happening right now? How could the sounds behind her be fake if they sounded so close to her? Sure, Marjorie couldn't explain it, but at this moment, she didn't really care to. Why should she have to analyze this? Being with these stuffed animals made her happy, whether they were out running with her, or just laying still in her bed.

And that was enough for her.