The Girl Who Could Make Stuffed Animals Come Alive

Written by Stuart Baum

Illustrations by Gryffon Baum
Natasha was three when it first happened. This was two days after her birthday.

Aunt Jeannie gave her a small green plush turtle, a stuffed animal, about as big as one of Natasha’s tiny hands. She played with it until bedtime and she took it to bed as well. Her Mom asked, as she was turning out the light, “What are you going to name the turtle?”

Natasha thought about it long and hard, petting the soft turtle all while she thought about it. Just before she dropped off to sleep, she decided on the name: Greenie.

In the morning Greenie was gone.

Well, not gone, just come to life.

There was a small green turtle, perfectly alive, crawling slowly across the rug on the floor. Three-year-old Natasha knew it was the same one. Her parents tried to figure out where the live turtle came from. And even thought Natasha told them, as best she could, the parents’ did not put one and one together.

Why not?

Because it is impossible that a stuffed turtle would become a real turtle.

Well… not *impossible*, clearly, because that is exactly what happened. And it happens in *stories*. But it had never happened before in *real life*.

— applauding —
Three years later, when Natasha was six, it happened again. This was on the evening of Natasha’s birthday.

Her friend Kaia gave her a book about squirrels and squirrel plush toy. Her father exclaimed, “That looks just like a real squirrel!” when she opened the present. It was pretty lifelike, but it was much browner than the grey squirrels in Natasha’s back yard and the ones that scurried up trees during their walk to the park.

She took the squirrel book and the squirrel toy animal to bed with her. And, again, as her Mom turned off the light, she said, “I’m glad you had a happy birthday and a nice day. What are you going to name your new squirrel?”

Natasha was afraid to name the toy, since the last time she named a stuffed animal, it turned into a real animal and her Mom and Dad took it away. Plus, this was a squirrel and she knew that having a live squirrel in the house would not be a good idea. Six year-olds understand these things.

But as she drifted to sleep with the soft and cuddly squirrel in her arms, she couldn’t help herself.

“Nutty?” Would that be a good name for a squirrel? Or “Nibbles” since it had little teeth. Or, just as her eyes were closing … “Brownie?” And then she fell asleep.

In the morning, Brownie was gone. It had scurried out of the open window in her room. She kind of, sleepily, remembered watching the small critter climb off the bed, cross the night table – stopping for a few seconds to nibble on the squirrel book – onto the window sill and out the window. She picked up the squirrel book and saw that the bottom of the cover was chewed off.

Over breakfast, her Mom asked, “What did you name your squirrel, honey?”
Natasha replied, “Brownie. But then it came to life and ran out the window.”

Again, like what happened to Greenie the turtle, the parents didn’t believe this was possible. Her Dad said simply, not really paying attention, “That’s a good name for a squirrel.”

They never mentioned it again.

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During the next five years Natasha tried her best to avoid stuffed animals, even at her friends’ houses.

She was mostly successful except once at a toy store in Michigan, when she was eleven, she saw a tiny stuffed beetle, bright gold with purple legs, no bigger than her thumb.

She wanted to see if she still had her power and, also, if naming them colors was the trick, since the last two times – the only two times – this happened that she knew about, she had named the stuffed animals Greenie and Brownie.

Since Greenie the turtle was so long ago and she was so young, she no longer fully believed it really happened.

But she still had the squirrel book, with the bottom corner nibbled off. This did not prove that she had made a squirrel stuffed animal come alive, since anything – even Natasha herself – could have nibbled off the corner of the book. However, Natasha knew it was true. She had made that stuffed squirrel come to life by naming it.

Anyway, at the small toy store, she picked up the tiny beetle plush and said, softly, “I call you ‘Beetley.’”
And she waited.

Nothing happened.

Then she said, “I call you ‘Peter the Beetle.’”

Still nothing.

Finally, she said, “Goldie?” and then exactly what you expect to happen did happen.

The bright gold backed and purple legged beetle came alive.

Then it bit her hand!

“Ouch!” she cried and dropped the beetle on the ground. It zipped off, faster than she expected, under the cabinet.

“Are you OK?” asked her friend. She nodded yes, but then, at that very moment the tiny beetle started creeping out from under the cabinet and Natasha had an idea.

“Goldie is the wrong name for you,” she said. The beetle, as if it could understand, looked up from the floor at her. She added, “I think you are definitely ‘Bitey’ the beetle.”

No sooner than she said it, the beetle returned to its original stuffed animal shape.
She picked it up off the floor and noticed it was dusty and a little dirty. She knew she couldn’t return a dirty stuffed animal back to the shelf, and, besides, she had taken a liking to Bitey the beetle, so she walked over to the cashier and bought it. As soon as she left the store, she slid the small stuffed animal named Bitey the beetle into her pocket.

Bitey the beetle was small enough for Natasha to carry with her everywhere she went. Which she did.

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Now, Natasha is twelve and a half.

She’s walking down the hall at her school, when she notices that two bullies have stolen a smaller child’s stuffed animal and were playing ‘keep away’ over the smaller child’s head.

The small child was running back and forth between the two larger kids, crying as he ran, but no sooner than the small boy got close to the bigger child with the plush toy, the bigger child would throw it over the smaller kid’s head to other bully.

It was a bright red stuffed dinosaur, close to a Tyrannosaurus Rex, but more friendly looking. Like a nice wingless dragon.

“You might want to stop that,” she said calmly to the two boys.

You do understand why Natasha was unafraid, right?

The two bullies did not.
One of them looked at her and responded in a mean voice, “What are you going to do about it, little girl?” He tossed the stuffed animal towards the other bully.

She smiled, and, barely loud enough for anyone to hear, said to the dinosaur, “I call you ‘Reddie.’”

Suddenly the dinosaur came alive – in midair – and the bully about to catch the dinosaur noticed a real, live dinosaur – teeth and claws ready to attack – flying towards his head. He yelled, “It’s alive! It’s alive!” He quickly turned around and ran down the hall, terrified.

Natasha whispered, “I call you ‘Nate.’”

Immediately, the dinosaur returned back to its stuffed animal form, landed on the floor, soft and red and blue and adorable, right where the bully used to be.

Natasha picked it up and handed it, gently, to the small, crying child.

The first bully stood there, confused, unsure why his bully friend ran away screaming.

Eventually he wandered away when he realized no one was paying attention to him.
“Thank you,” said the small boy, also unsure what had happened, since he did not see the stuffed animal come alive. All he, and everyone saw, was a bully – for some reason – yelling “It’s alive!” and running away in fear.

Natasha responded with a smile. “You can thank your dinosaur,” she said. “He did all the work.”

Later that day, Natasha took Bitey, the bright gold backed and purple legged beetle, out of her pocket and starting petting it.

In its stuffed animal form, it was very soft.

She asked, “If I turn you into a real beetle, will you bite me, again?”

Bitey said nothing, of course, since it was just a plush toy.

Natasha smiled.

“Better not risk it,” she said softly to the plush beetle. “We’ve had enough stuffed animal excitement for one day.”

The End.