

The Case of the Missing Kangaroo

"Oh no," shouted my little sister Janiah. I could hear her crying and screaming inside the house, even though I was all the way in the back yard. I had been sitting in my tree house all morning, reading my new book. But Janiah's outburst let me know that my peaceful reading time was over. I put down my book, climbed down the ladder, and raced into the house, wondering what was wrong.



I found Janiah standing in the kitchen, tears streaming down her face. My mom hurried over to her with some tissues. Mom rubbed Janiah's back, trying to soothe her.

"Dontae," Mom said, trying to talk over Janiah's loud sobs. "Janiah can't find Hoppy. Please tell me you've seen him."

Hoppy is Janiah's kangaroo. Well, he's not a real kangaroo; he's actually a stuffed animal that Janiah got when she was a baby. Hoppy is Janiah's constant companion. When Janiah eats breakfast, Hoppy sits next to her at the table. When Janiah goes to bed, Hoppy rests on the pillow right beside her. Hoppy is not allowed to go to school, but he does sit in the car with Janiah when Mom drives her there. Janiah adores Hoppy, so it's easy to understand why she's shattered right now.



"Just stay calm and take some deep breaths," I reassured her. "I know you're alarmed, but crying isn't going to help us find Hoppy."

Janiah stopped crying and stared up at me with her big brown eyes. "Dontae, you always know what to do. You've got to help me find him," she pleaded.

"He's probably hiding underneath your blankets," Mom said to Janiah, as she took her hand. "Let's go look right now."

While they went into Janiah's bedroom, I sat down at the kitchen table to organize my thoughts and provide some assistance. Since writing always helps me think clearly, I figured it might help me solve this mystery. I listed some ideas in my notebook.



Janiah walked into the kitchen, weeping again, as Mom trailed behind, shaking her head. Just as I suspected, Hoppy was not in her room.

"Hoppy couldn't have gone far, Janiah, so let's try to figure this out," I said.

Janiah used the back of her hand to wipe away her tears and sat down next to me. Mom placed a tray of Janiah's favorite cookies between us. I knew Mom was concerned—she never lets us have cookies before we eat lunch!

I handed Janiah a cookie and started my investigation. "Tell me when you last saw Hoppy."

"When I woke up this morning, I got dressed and put my pajamas in the hamper," said Janiah, nibbling on the cookie. I wrote some notes as she spoke.

"Where was Hoppy when you did that?" I asked.

"I was holding him," replied Janiah.

"Maybe you put Hoppy in the hamper by mistake," I suggested. "Let's go check."

We went back into Janiah's bedroom and looked in her hamper, but it only contained clothing. We went back to the kitchen to talk some more.



"Describe what you did next," I continued, working to familiarize myself with Janiah's activities.

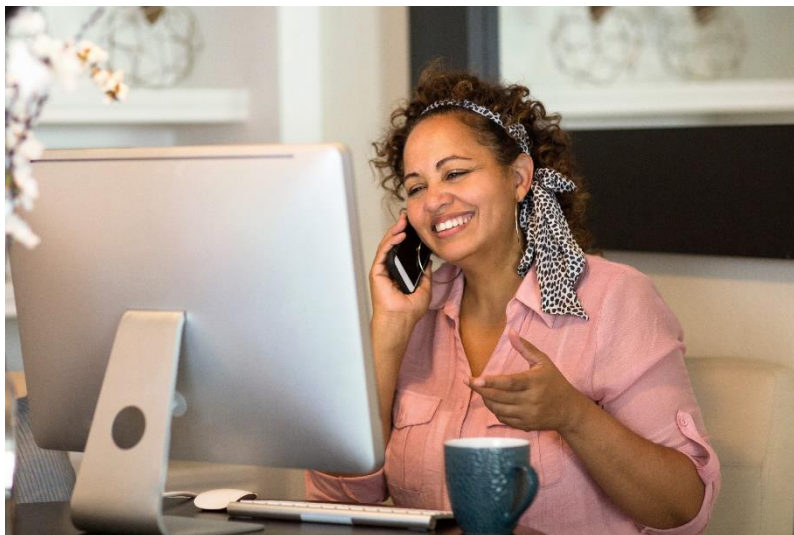
"I ate breakfast, and then I washed my face and brushed my teeth. Hoppy sat near me when I did those things, just like every morning," said Janiah.

I wrote those details in my notebook and asked, "Did you do anything out of the ordinary?"

Janiah was puzzled by my question. "I don't know what you mean," she replied. She's only in kindergarten, so sometimes I have to do a better job of explaining things to her.

"Did anything different happen this morning? Maybe you did something that you don't usually do," I said.

Mom interrupted, "Uncle Rick called this morning. I spoke to him first, and then Janiah wanted to talk to him."



Janiah nodded her head. "Yes," she answered, "We were talking about what I want to do for my fifth birthday."

Now I had some good information! I turned to my mother and asked, "Mom, what were you doing when Janiah was talking to Uncle Rick?"

Mom looked at the ceiling as she thought for a moment. "I sat down to do some work," she began, "and then, I let Otis outside."



Otis, our dog, is only one year old, and he still acts like a puppy. He likes tennis balls, chew toys, and bones. Otis also likes to play with our toys, so we have to keep them in our bedrooms, with our doors closed. It's almost like having a toddler in the house because everything needs to be kept out of his reach.

That's when I realized something. "Otis! That's it," I concluded. I put my notebook and pen on the table because I had all the evidence I needed.

I ran to the back door and raced down the stairs to our fenced-in yard. "Otis, come here, boy," I called.

Otis zoomed toward me at full speed, wagging his furry tail. As he got closer, I noticed that Otis was carrying something in his mouth. Sure enough, it was Hoppy.

"Mystery solved," I exclaimed.

Janiah was overjoyed as she bolted out of the house. When she reached Otis, he dropped Hoppy right into her outstretched hands.

"I missed you so much, Hoppy!" shouted Janiah, giving her long-lost friend a huge squeeze. Then, she hugged me, too. It was a relief to see Janiah happy again.



"Well done, Dontae," said Mom, looking very relieved. "I'm so sorry I didn't realize that Otis had Hoppy when I let him out. The phone call must have distracted me," she added.

We may never know how Otis was able to take Hoppy, but that doesn't matter now. With some good thinking, I was finally able to solve the mystery of the missing kangaroo. Hoppy and Janiah are together again, and I'm beginning to think that I have a future as a detective!

