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Destiny

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"That possum don't belong to you, boy." The young boy looked up wide-eyed from the road kill he was cradling in his arms. A plastic toy doctor kit was spread out next to him, and empty band aid wrappers fluttered across the porch in the breeze. "I said," the man repeated, cocking his rifle, "that possum don't belong to you."

"Yes it does," the boy said, completely unconcerned by the man's gun (this was, after all, hill folk territory, and guns were a common sight). "I found it. Finders keepers."

The man narrowed his eyes under his thick, bushy eyebrows. "Just 'cause you found it, don't make it yours, boy." Lumbering over to the boy, who paused in the middle of putting a band aid on the corpse in his lap, the man stooped down to stare him in the eyes. "Now, you be a good boy and hand over the possum."

"No! I can't give you Henry!" said the boy, clutching the possum and scooting as far backwards as he could from the man.

"What? Who in tarnation is Henry? Did you name the damn possum?"

The young boy nodded. "Yes. His name is Henry, and I'm going to fix him because one day I'm going to be a veterinarian." They both stopped to stare at Henry, who was missing several limbs and slowly oozing blood. Several band aids had been stuck on the patchy fur remaining in a half hearted attempt to heal the possum. "Once he gits better, Henry is going to be my pet cause Ma and Pa say I can't git a dog."

"Now boy, I'm gonna be straight with you," the man said, putting down his gun and sitting next to the boy on the porch steps. "You can't keep Henry fer a pet."

"Why not?" the boy asked.

The man looked at him as if he wasn't quite sure himself. Finally he said, "Because you see, I ran over Henry to be my dinner, and that's exactly what he's gonna be. You don't wanna stop Henry from fulfilling his destiny, do you?"

The young boy's eyes widened. "His what?"

"His destiny!" the man said. "You see, all his life, Henry has been growing, gittin, fatter and fatter so that one day he could be eaten by me. If you stop that from happening, well... you'd be

disappointin' Henry. And that'd be a mighty shame."

Staring at Henry, who made no move to confirm or deny the man's story, the young boy slowly spoke. "So if I give him to you then Henry will fulfill his destiny?"

"Thas' right," the man assented. Slowly, the boy lifted Henry out of his lap and stared at him.

The boy held the possum out to the man, but at the last minute pulled him back onto his knees. "No. I can't let you eat Henry."

The man spat on the ground (this also did not upset the boy as it was a common occurrence in hill folk territory. In fact the boy had been practicing spitting when he found Henry). "Is that really how you feel boy?" The boy nodded soulfully. "Well, I guess there ain't much else I can do then. Just... do you suppose I could hold him? Just fer a minute, to say my goodbyes and all?"

The boy nodded and held Henry out to the man. The second he did, the man had grabbed Henry and sprinted back to his truck, hollering "Woohoo! I'm gonna have possum stew tonight!"

As the truck sped off in a cloud of smoke, the young boy wiped a tear from his face and began to pack up his doctor kit.

"Are you out here – oh, good lord. Have you been playing doctor with road kill again? That's the last straw young man, I'm a talking to your pa about that dog. I won't have a son of mine playin' with dead things! Now go wash up for supper."

As the young boy scampered inside, he sent a mental thank you and goodbye to Henry the possum. However, Henry was oblivious to this as he was many miles away and in the process of being slow cooked on an old woodstove in a big iron pot along with carrots and the questionable remains of what might have been another possum but was possibly a squirrel. Not that it mattered much, because all road kill tastes of only one thing: destiny.