

Robin and Birdie

By C. Jade Wyton

After the excitement of a day's travel, little Robin can't get to sleep. So, upon realising her Uncle Birdie is still awake, she makes him take her outside.

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It was a cold, wet night. Robin wasn't sure exactly what her father and her uncle and aunts and their friends had done when they'd made River take her ahead to town "for safety," but she'd had a lot of fun helping the anxious tiefling report the dead body!

The authorities had a lot of questions. And when River had been too scared to answer them, Robin had decided she needed to answer for him; giving the police directions and explaining what she'd overheard all the adults discussing about a "Soul Drain" spell.

She hadn't understood why River had been so scared. But then her aunt Veruca had gently explained to her, after returning, that River was scared of the police because of his time in jail. Robin then hadn't been sure about what was meant by *that* until her uncle Bertram had explained that not all jails treated their criminals as nice as Thistlebond's did.

Robin had thought that was stupid; her grandpas, who all worked capturing criminals, had always taught her that people who broke the law were still people (a part of what could be so scary about them!) and that they should always be treated like people.

So Robin had made a point to be *extra* polite to River at dinner, to help remind him that he was a person and he deserved to be treated like one! And even though he had been confused when she'd pat him on the hand and reminded him with her words that he was a person, she thought he went to bed seeming a little happier than he had getting up that morning.

He seemed to be sleeping peacefully at least, Robin thought as she sat up and craned her neck to look at him across the room.

Yeah, very peacefully!

'*You alright there, lil' nipper?*' whispered a nearby voice.

Sitting up seemed to have caught her uncle Bertram's attention, so Robin turned to him, next, and smiled wide. '*I'm good, Uncle Birdie! Just thinking.*'

'*What about, darlin'?*' Bertram asked, using that loving tone he always addressed her with.

'*Lots of stuff,*' she replied. Then, she swung her legs around and clambered out of bed; grabbing her machine from the bedside table and hurrying over to Bertram so she could climb under his blankets with him and purr into his side. '*Everyone else is asleep already, why are you still up?*'

'*Could ask the same of you, love,*' Bertram replied with a chuckle as he ruffled Robin's ears and straightened her breathing tube. '*You feelin' alright?*'

Robin nodded. '*Yeah. Are you?*'

'*Yeah, darlin', Ah'm fine,*' Bertram told her, following her tube all the way to

the machine on the floor and making sure everything was plugged in properly.

Robin couldn't help but giggle as Bertram leant over her and hung precariously out of bed for several seconds as he adjusted something.

*'Ah think yer lungs are needing a clean,'* he finally said. *'Th' outer vent is getting some dust build-up.'*

*'Yeah, I know,'* Robin reassured, wrapping her arms around Bertram as he sat back up so that she was pulled into his lap. *'Dad said tomorrow's when we change the filters. He's gonna let me do it on my own this time. Well. He's gonna watch just in case, but he says he's not gonna help unless he has to!'*

*'Ah'm glad t'hear yer on top of it,'* Bertram grinned down at her. Then he ruffled her again and she had to cover her mouth to stop herself squealing in joy. *'Yer growing up real big, ain't ya?'*

*'Yeah!'* Robin agreed, pressing tight into Bertram's chest and purring as loud as she could (which, honestly, wasn't all that loud). *'Soon I'll be as big as you!'*

*'Maybe even bigger,'* Bertram told her. *'Considering yer daddy's so tall!'*

Robin giggled in response, rubbing her catlike head into her uncle again and asking in as sweet a tone as she could, *'Will you take me outside, Uncle Birdie?'*

*'Sure, just let me wake yer daddy and tell 'im—'*

*'No!'* Robin interrupted, so firmly she forgot to whisper. *'If you wake him he'll wanna come out with us. And— And I love Dad, but sometimes it's nice when he's not always with me.'*

*'Ah.'*

*'He's smothering!'*

*'Naw, 'e just loved yer,'* Bertram said, his tone still hushed.

*'Yeah I know,'* Robin acknowledged. *'But like... sometimes I wanna go out on my own! And do things on my own! Like.... I dunno. I want to climb trees and throw rocks. Maybe throw a rock at something...'* she flicked her tail, feeling it brush over the bedsheets. *'I want to make problems, Uncle Birdie! Just to see if people'll get mad at me or not.'*

A small breath escaped Bertram, just a puff of air that Robin wasn't sure if it was a sigh or a laugh, and he threw aside his blanket. *'Alright then. Ah'll take yer out.'*

*'Really?'* Robin asked, her voice squeaking as she rose to her feet.

*'Mhm,'* Bertram nodded as he stood and slipped on his boots. *'Just cos Ah'm seeing a bit too much Liv in ya right now,'* he said, a cheeky grin finding his lips. *'And when yer saying yer wanting to cause people problems, Ah can't not be half-convinced yer gonna sneak out like she would'a!'*

Robin snickered, at that, and hefted her breathing machine onto her back. *'Maybe! I've done it before.'*

*'Have ya, now?'* Bertram raised his brow. *'And yer admittin' that t' me, cos....'*

*'Cos now you've got competition for being my favourite uncle,'* she joked, motioning to River. *'And you know if you dob me in you'll lose points!'*

*'Oh? An' Ah wasn't in any competition with any of yer biological uncles?'*

Bertram asked, his grin returning.

Robin shook her head. *'No, they're all narks.'*

*'Yer really are just like yer mother...'* it was clear, now, that the little breath was both a sigh *and* a laugh. *'Well, then. Y'all be wantin' t' keep yer voice down so*

yer daddy doesn't hear ya.'

Robin covered her mouth, nodding, and hurried to the door. She waited for Bertram to catch up to her before opening it and slipping out into the inn's hall.

'But this is just fer a few minutes, then it's right back t' bed, y'understand?' Bertram told her as he shut the door behind him. 'An' we ain't gonna make no problems for any of the nice folk in this here town; we're just gonna get some fresh air an' do some stargazin'!

'Yes, Uncle Birdie!'

'C'mon, let's—'

'Isn't it past her bedtime?'

Both Robin and Bertram whirled around at the voice and found themselves facing Sheshalan. She was still in her nightdress, which was a very pale minty green, and had a pack of cigarettes in one hand and her lighter in the other.

She gave a short sniff as she looked up at the pair and impatiently tapped a hoof. 'You're not teaching her bad habits are you, Bertram?'

'No, he's not!' Robin defended. 'I already knew the bad habits, he's just making sure I'm safe while I do them.'

It earnt a laugh.

'Yer certainly one t' complain 'bout bad habits,' Bertram said with a humoured note as he motioned to the pack of cigarettes. 'Yer a cleric. Shouldn't y'all know better?'

'Ex-cleric,' Sheshalan huffed, pulling a smoke out of the box and popping the end into her mouth; though, she didn't light it as she made for the stairs. 'I haven't done cleric work in *years*.'

'Still.'

'Eh.'

The two adults simply shrugged at each other as they led Robin outside.

It was cold.

The chill of the air bit into Robin's skin past her fur and she almost regretted asking to come out— Though she didn't say anything as she followed Sheshalan to a nearby bench.

'So,' Sheshalan gave another sniff before finally lighting her cigarette; a plume of smoke escaping her lips as she spoke. 'You and Daimon kept in contact after we all broke up?'

'Uh-huh.'

'Haaah!' a bleat-like laugh escaped Sheshalan. 'That's both something I didn't expect, but also I'm somehow not surprised about at all! The kid always looked up to you.'

'Ah think he looked up t' all of us,' Bertram chuckled.

'Maybe. But he *really* wanted to be like *you*,' Sheshalan said, taking a very long drag of her cigarette and turning to blow the smoke away from her companions. 'More than anyone else.'

'Y'think so?'

'I reckon, yeah,' Sheshalan let this breath out her nose as a sigh that sent smoke out both her nostrils. Then, she pet Robin on the head; playing with the girl's short tufts of hair for a moment with a melancholy look in her eyes. 'Hm.... Do you have anyone you look up to, Robin?'

Robin put a hand to her chin, thinking on it for a long moment. 'Hmm.... I really like Aunt Volante.'

'Yeah?' a humoured look crossed Sheshalan's face, though Robin wasn't sure why.

'Yeah. She's strong, but not like Dad's strong,' she said. 'She's strong like Uncle Birdie's strong.'

'Yeah? And how's that?'

'Strong with her head!' Robin beamed. 'I want to be strong like that, too.'

'Ah. You want to be *smart*,' Sheshalan grinned.

'And kind!' Robin added. 'Actually. It's hard to pick just *one* person to look up to. Aunt Veruca is really smart, too. But in a different way.... I dunno. It's hard to know who to look up to cos I don't know anyone too well, yet.'

Bertram gave a chuckle, petting the girl's shoulder. 'Y'all'll get there.'

Sheshalan gave another chuckle and took another puff. 'Nobody you look up to at home?'

Robin shook her head. 'Everyone back home is all *boys*!' she huffed. 'And even though they're all really nice, I really want to look up to a *girl*!'

'What about your grandmother?' Sheshalan asked. 'I've heard Daimon mention her before.'

'*Him*,' Bertram corrected.

'What?'

'Grandma Rueben's a boy,' Robin explained. 'He has been since Dad was a baby. That's why Dad's the youngest.'

'Ah,' Sheshalan gave a (slightly unsure) nod and flicked the butt of her smoke to the ground to stomp on it. 'Wouldn't that make him a grandpa?'

'It's complicated,' said Robin, watching as Sheshalan twisted her hoof against the pavement with a rough grinding sound.

'I'll say!' Sheshalan agreed as she sat back down. 'How many grandpas do you have, again?'

'Uh... there's...' Robin lifted her hands to count on her fingers. 'Grandpa Safa.... Cohen.... Wayne....'

Bertram chuckled. 'That's three—'

'And Farren.'

Both adults went quiet at the mention of Robin's "grandfather" Farren. But Robin barely noticed as she continued counting:

'And that's just the grandpas. Everyone else is a boy, as well!' she said.

'There's all of Dad's brothers. Uncle Terry, and Cayden, and Saba, and Oskar, and Kye! And all my cousins are boys, too! Bazel, and Edgar, and Maurice and— And their mum's a boy, too! Just like my grandma! Even *Meth* is a boy! I'm the *only* girl in the *whole family*!'

'That, uh...' Sheshalan cleared her throat. 'It sounds like a real boy's club.'

'It *is*!' Robin exclaimed. 'That's why I'm so excited to be here! Cos now I get to have aunts! And I like having aunts! But— Oh! I still love you, though, Uncle Birdie! Promise!'

Sheshalan and Bertram both chuckled as Robin pet her uncle on the hand.

'Don't worry, darlin', Ah know y'all still love me,' he reassured. 'Ah couldn't ever doubt it.'

‘Good!’ Robin beamed. Then, she was distracted as Sheshalan lit other cigarette. ‘Those smell gross,’ she blurted. ‘Do they taste as gross as they smell?’

‘They taste *worse*,’ Sheshalan told her.

‘Eugh. So why are you having another?’

‘They help me relax,’ she said, smoke escaping her mouth with her words. ‘And I could really use a bit of relaxation, right now....’

‘Oh...’ Robin’s ears twitched, and she played with her nails for a moment before scooting closer to her aunt. ‘When I can’t relax, Dad tells me stories. Would you like me to tell you a story?’

Another bleat-like chuckle. ‘Haaah! Sure. Tell me a story, honey.’

‘Okay!’ Robin exclaimed, leaping to her feet and motioning to her seat. ‘Uncle Birdie, sit down and listen, too!’

‘Alright, Ah’m listening,’ Bertram echoed Sheshalan’s laugh and sat beside her. ‘What’s th’ story, tonight?’

‘It’s.... It’s, uh...’ Robin tapped her hands together in thought. ‘Oh! It’s a story about a doctor.’

‘Ooh, a doctor, now?’ Sheshalan queried. ‘What kind of doctor?’

‘An *evil* doctor!’

‘Oh, my.’

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