

Scavenger Hunt

By C. Jade Wyton

While staying in Thistlebond, Robin Stoneclaw finds a scavenger hunt that was set up by her late mother, and follows the clues to find all the treasures that have been hidden away for her.

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It had been two weeks since Robin had been left in Thistlebond and, judging by her father's latest message, it had been a good thing.

As nice as the Thousand Isles had sounded, the sand would have wreaked havoc on her lungs and the flood wouldn't have been very fun at all.

Robin was glad that she had stayed behind. It was the first time she had properly been without her father's constant monitoring (it was overbearing, even if she understood *why* he was Like That), and the Bluebells had been really nice to her; even letting her take on chores that her father was too scared to let her try!

Even if it was tiring work, Robin loved helping. It made her feel like she *belonged* here.

Well, not *here* here, buried in the hayloft of her Grandpa Bertram's barn; but in the town. Thistlebond.

'Ready or not!' Robin heard Jory's voice call out to her, and she giggled and snuggled down deeper under the hay. 'Here ah come!'

Another giggle, as the man started searching for her outside, and Robin pressed deeper down through the thick dried grass. She waited as Jory entered the barn, and giggled again as she saw he was, in fact, wearing the earmuffs like he promised. It was only fair, they agreed; as Robin's lungs were so loud it was impossible for her to hide without him covering his ears.

Jory scanned the barn, looking behind tools and in stalls, before chuckling to himself and heading back outside.

He didn't look up, and Robin knew he thought she wouldn't have climbed the ladder. But she was very good at climbing, actually! Even if people didn't think she would be with the heavy machine on her back.

Robin watched Jory vanish into the fields, and then slowly rose from the hay to stretch.

She rolled around in the soft-but-spiky hay, looking up to the cracks in the roof that shon down tiny shafts of light.

Then, she saw something sparkle, way up in the rafters, and her eyes widened. *What was that?*

Tail twitching in curiosity, Robin stood up; though her eyes didn't move from the distant golden shine.

Extending her claws, Robin gripped a nearby rafter and, with a burst of strength and speed shot up it like a dart; clambering clumsily over the old wood to a horizontal beam that she could rest on.

Still not looking from the sparkle of light, the child caught her breath and continued upwards. She lifted herself to the next beam, which was only a little

lower than the sparkle, and then slipped sideways towards the object— A locket!

Robin's ears stood erect as she carefully plucked the heart-shaped locket from the nail it was hanging from. And as she did she noticed the nail held a folded note.

She pulled it from its place, twitching an ear at the *rrrip* it made as it escaped the nail, and then cocked her head as she read the name of the recipient.

*"ROBIN OR JAMIE STONECLAW"*

Robin or Jamie?

Those were the two names her parents had picked out before she was born; one for if she was a girl, and one for if she had been a boy....

Was this note for *her*?

Not bothering to climb down to a safer height, Robin settled on the beam and unfolded the strange note.

*"My most beloved child, whichever name you are given,"* it read; and Robin frowned as she knew the handwriting wasn't her father's. *"It may seem strange to leave a note to the unborn, but I know that —if you're anything like me— you'll find it eventually. And even if you don't, I can always push you in the right direction."*

*"I've been wondering so much about you, lately. Who will you be? Will you be as happy with your life as I am to be having you? Will we be friends? I hope, at the very least, that you don't hate me. I want to be a good mother. Even if I'm scared I won't be."*

Robin shifted in place as she realised who the note was from.

*Her mother. Olivia.*

She read on:

*"This hayloft is a very special place. Me and your father used to come here a lot to hide from the other Dawn Runners. Farren (your grandfather) used to get SO mad about it, even though we never did anything but talk. I remember once, we fell asleep and I woke up with one of the stray cats Bertram feeds napping in my lap. A small brown thing that purred so loud I could hear it over your father's snoring. I'm sure you've heard how loud he snores, by now! He's like a piece of un-oiled machinery working away through the night.... At first it used to keep me awake, but now I don't think I could sleep without his rumbling if I tried."*

*"The locket I put with this note is the very first gift he ever gave me. He bought it at a general store in Cogturn for 20 gold. Which was not very smart, because a necklace like this is only worth 5 gold, tops. But it was very sweet. And so to thank him for being so kind, I broke into the store and stole 50 gold from their register and used it to buy him dinner. Serves those idiot store owners right for ripping off the man I love! But that's not the point."*

*"Like this was his first gift to me, I want it to be my first gift to you.... Even if you don't find it right away, and you get lots of other things before you read this note, please know it is the first thing I am ever putting aside for you to have. I hope you love it as much as I do (and if you don't, then give it back!)"*

Robin giggled as she paused reading the note to look at the locket. It was a simple but pretty thing; in the shape of a heart with little carvings all over it.

She clicked it open and peered inside, and was met with two photos of her

parents; one of them very young, with her father's mane only just starting to grow, and the other was when they were older; a picture from their wedding, with her mother in a beautiful dress.

She snapped the locket shut and, with clumsy-but-clever hands, managed to get the chain fastened safely around her neck before she continued reading:

*"I have more special gifts for you, too. Hidden all around town. I stole a treasure from every member of my family: you've found your father's one, and because he was the last member to join our family, I'm going to go backwards. So next, you should look for Veruca's treasure. I've hidden it well, I think. So I'll give you a hint:*

*"Where do you usually keep treasure, to stop it being stolen?"*

*"That's your only hint.... Now go and find it! I believe in you!"*

Robin's brow furrowed at the hint.

Where can you keep treasure to stop it getting stolen?

Treasure... chest?

A chest?

A locked box?

A... vault!

Robin pushed herself up and stood on the wooden beam with a proud purr.

*The bank!*

Her mother had left her something at the bank!

But, hm... the bank was all the way in town... and she didn't want Jory getting in her business— This was private, between her and her mother, after all!

Carefully, Robin climbed down the beams back to the hayloft and looked out the single small window to the fields. She caught sight of Jory as he entered the house (her mother's old dog following him with a wagging tail) and knew he would be searching for her inside for a good while.... And then she spied, in the fields, a very familiar animal.

Dehir! Her grandfather's old mount!

With a burst of excitement, Robin clambered down out of the hayloft and hurried into the field to greet the grumpy old hippogriff.

She knew she wasn't supposed to go near the animal on her own (something about it being very mean to people), but she was *sure* it would be fine. Dehir had been her grandpa's most trusted steed, after all, so she couldn't be all that bad.

'Dehir!' Robin greeted, holding out a hand as she slowly approached the hippogriff. 'Dehir, I need a *really* big favour from you. Can you help me?'

The hippogriff's feathers rose in displeasure as the child reached for its side and pet it, but it didn't lash out. Instead it made a high-pitch note, like a chicken who'd been bothered while brooding, and shook itself down.

'I need to get to town,' Robin told the animal. 'But it's a long way for me to walk, and I don't think I should do it on my own. Can I ride you? Please?'

Dehir lowered its head to examine Robin; blinking its big yellow eyes and turning its gaze from one side of the child to the other.

'It would be a really big help,' Robin explained, leaning forward to peck a kiss on the end of the creature's sharp beak.

Unbeknownst to the child, it was an action that her grandfather had done many, many times. A gentle sign of affection to his loyal mount before a long day

of riding.... And, though the animal had little patience for anyone but its beloved Farren, the memory of the orc's loving kiss was perhaps why the animal held off its instincts to buck the child when she climbed on its back.

Instead Dehir gave a displeased snort and clicked its beak as if to tell the child she wasn't the one in charge, and to remember that she could be easily bucked off, before starting for the fence.

It leapt over with ease and, at its own pace, made for town.

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The bank was looking better than it had, when the wolves had tried to rob it, but it still wasn't in the best condition. The wall that the wolves had dug through was still open; though, with how diligently the repair crew was working on it, it seemed like it would be sealed up by the night.

There was a security guard standing by the front door who greeted her warmly and motioned to one of the free tellers and Robin, honestly not sure what else to do, found herself making her way over. She held out the note to them and blurted, loudly:

'My mum said she left me something, here.'

The teller, an old woman that Robin knew as Mrs Briggs, was clearly even more confused than before as she took the note and skimmed it over.

'Huh,' Briggs breathed as she handed it back. 'I'm sorry, Robin, but your parents never opened any kind of account with us.... Are you sure she meant the bank?'

'Where else do you keep treasures?' Robin asked, her ears drooping. 'The bank seems like the safest place!'

'Well... we do pride ourselves in that...' Briggs said, sheepishly. 'But there's no account in the Stoneclaw name—'

'Stoneclaw?' interrupted one of the men working on the wall. 'Wait— Your name is Robin Stoneclaw?'

Robin nodded. 'Uh-huh!'

'Yeah, we found something with your name on it 'bout ten minutes ago while we was clearing the last of the rubble from the wall,' he explained. 'Looked like it had been in there a while. Handed it over to the manager. Said he'd get it to yer quick as he could. Think he put it in his office?'

Both Robin and Mrs Briggs lit up at this news.

'Oh, that's great news!' Briggs exclaimed. 'Come on, Robin, let's go see if it's in there for you!'

'Okay!' Robin chirped, following Mrs Briggs closely. She stopped at the office door, waiting patiently as Briggs knocked and entered... and a few minutes later when the woman came back out, Robin felt herself squeal with excitement to see the little wooden box she held.

It was long, but small. And it wasn't very surprising to find, when she carefully removed the lid and caught the folded note that almost fell on the floor, that it contained a pen.

A very beautiful pen, made from—

'Is that a wyvern bone pen?!' Mrs Briggs gasped, and glanced to the other

tellers. 'Oh, my— Isn't that the one Miss Sawyer was accusing Olivia of stealing?'

Robin saw all of the older tellers nod (though the younger ones just looked confused) and couldn't help but giggle. 'Dad says that Mum *loved* to steal!'

'She sure did,' someone quipped— Though they were quickly shushed by the others.

'What's the note say, dear?' Mrs Briggs asked.

'Oh! The note!' Robin quickly opened the folded paper and read, with Mrs Briggs looking over her shoulder:

"I'm really glad you chose to look for this treasure. You really DO take after me. I must be over the moon, right now. This is Veruca's favourite pen. It's very special to her, and also very special to me. She used it to sign everything... it was the pen she used to sign the wedding licence, when your father and I got married. And it was the pen she used when Farren asked if he could legally adopt me."

"Veruca is a strange woman. I can't believe I used to be scared of her. She seems scary on the surface but she's actually really sweet when you peel away the weird. She's always writing something down. She has a lot to do; she keeps everything in order for us. She keeps track of our earnings and our bills and even our birthdays! I wonder if she's going to throw you a birthday party like she does for us. I bet we're going to fight over who can throw the best party for you! Hopefully it's me haha."

"Veruca always has this pen and its box on her. She pulls it out whenever she gets the opportunity and I think it's really cool. I'm using it now to write these notes, which I think will make her mad. Which makes using it even more fun!"

"Using this pen makes me feel like I could be as powerful as she is. She's amazing at everything she cares to try, you know."

"The next treasure for you to find is Bertram's treasure. Here's your hint:"

"What is Bertram's dad?"

'An old man?' Robin asked aloud, feeling very confused.

The laugh that escaped Mrs Briggs was loud and genuine, and she had to smother it quickly. 'When your mother wrote this,' she managed through her hand. 'Bertram's father was sheriff.'

'Ooh,' Robin gave a knowing hum. 'So it would be in the sheriff's office, then?'

'Could be,' Mrs Briggs gave a nod. 'Why don't you get Jory to take you there now and see, hmm?'

'Yeah, okay,' Robin said, tucking the pen into her pocket as she made for the door. Nobody needed to know she'd left Jory at home; if they knew, they'd probably call him and make her wait until he came to pick her up.... So instead of mentioning that she was alone, she simply smiled and waved goodbye. 'Bye, everyone! Thank you for helping me!'

'Our pleasure, dear!'

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The sheriff's office was close enough that Robin didn't need to ride Dehir; though she politely asked the animal to follow her so she didn't lose it.

Dehir was reluctant, at first. But then Robin pulled a small jar of peanut

butter from her very large pockets (she had stolen it from the kitchen to snack on while hiding from Jory) and the hippogriff's attention was immediately piqued.

She led the animal through the streets, letting it lick the jar clean as she did. Then, with a warning to be nice to the deputies' horses, Robin left Dehir outside the sheriff's office and headed inside.

One of the deputies was napping in the corner, and there was a drunken man that Robin didn't know (but had seen around town a few times) in the cell.

The drunken man looked up at Robin as she began to poke around the sheriff's office; sneaking around the sleeping deputy as quietly as possible so she didn't wake him.

'Heh. Y'look just like yer mum, y'know! Yer looking fer something t'steal?' the drunk asked with a cheeky grin. 'Ain't nothing valuable here, kiddo.'

'I'm not stealing,' Robin shook her head before peering under the desk. 'I'm looking for something my mum left here for me.'

'But ain't she—'

'Yeah, she's dead,' Robin confirmed. 'But she left me some treasures, with secret notes that have hints on where to find more!'

'Ah, like a scavenger hunt?'

'Yeah! Like one of those,' Robin agreed. 'I've already found the first two treasures. Now I gotta find Uncle B— Uh... *Grandpa* Birdie's treasure.'

'I see.... Well, good luck, kiddo.'

'Thanks! Hm.... Hey! Can you check if there are any loose floorboards in with you?' Robin asked. 'Grandpa Birdie says that my mum had to get put in there a few times, when she was making problems. Just until she'd "cooled off," he said. Maybe she hid it in there.'

'Hah. That's why ah'm in here, too,' the drunk man chuckled, and began gently tapping at the floor. 'Just till ah've cooled off an' won't start no more fights. Ain't even charging me fer being disorderly, though they could.... Jory is a good sheriff, ain't he?'

'He is!' Robin agreed. 'I love Jory a lot. He's the best.'

'That why yer sneaking around without him knowing?' a sly grin turned the man's face. But it quickly changed to a look of happy surprise as one of the panels he tapped sounded suspiciously hollow. 'Ah! We might have something here!' he said, pulling up the loose board and reaching into the floor. 'What're these, then?'

It was two brass spurs, dotted with the dark brown of their age, and a tattered-looking note.

'That'll be it!' Robin beamed, reaching her hand in to take them from the man. 'Thank you so much, sir! I really 'preciate it!'

'My pleasure,' the drunk said as he replaced the board. 'Y'all be staying safe now.'

'I will!' Robin promised as she hurried outside.

It was immediately clear to her that Dehir had *not* been nice to the horses, as they looked at the hippogriff with upset and moody snorts, so Robin produced more snacks to keep the animal busy as she unfolded the note and read:

*"My wonderful baby, I'm so happy you've come this far! The spurs with this note are from Bertram's boots. They make a very annoying sound that I have come to really love."*

*“Bertram has always been hard for me to get along with, because Farren adores him so much and I’ve always been so scared of losing Farren and going back to my old way of life. But there are some moments where I can’t deny the silly cowboy has my best interests at heart. And, lately, when I think back, I’ve been realising it was silly to be so scared. Bertram clearly loves me and would never do anything to hurt me.*

*“I remember when I was younger, especially during the first few years after Bertram had joined the Dawn Runners, he would always be the one to check on me after a mission. I would hear him and the others get back from a job, and these stupid spurs would click and clack outside my door, giving me plenty of warning to jump into bed and pretend to be asleep before he would poke his head in to check on me.*

*“At first I thought he was an idiot who didn’t know how to be quiet. But now I’m not half-convinced it wasn’t deliberate; that he did it because he didn’t want me to get in trouble for something as silly as staying up late. And I wonder if he’ll do it for you, too, when you’re old enough to be rebellious.”*

Robin paused her reading, then, to consider her mother’s words and her grandfather’s actions.

She recalled thinking, once when she had stayed over a few years prior, that it was strange how Bertram always seemed to walk a little bit louder when he would come home at night. She thought that it was just that he was tired and heavy footed— But now, she realised, he had only ever done it when he came home *after* her bedtime. And she’d always heard him and been able to climb into bed before her father found her awake.

Smiling to herself, she read on.

*“I really hope that, by the time you read this, Bertram has grown some balls and asked Farren out. There aren’t many people I can trust. And even less I can trust to love me. But I think Bertram is one of them. He loves in such a real and genuine way, and I know he will show you that love, too. I know when you read this note, you’ll know what the best kind of love feels like; so please don’t ever settle for any kind of love less than the kind Bertram shows you.*

*“Volante’s treasure is next. You can find it in the cellar of a place with many beds.”*

‘That’s an easy one!’ Robin said out loud. She wasn’t sure if she was talking to herself or the hippogriff that nibbled at her pocket, but she continued anyway. ‘The tavern is the only place in town with a cellar and a lot of beds!’

Folding the note and placing it in the pocket opposite from Dehir, Robin prepared herself for the walk across the street. She attached Bertram’s spurs to her own boots and then rose to her feet, petting Dehir’s beak before it gave a discontented trill and wandered away to drink from a nearby trough.

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Robin had almost completely forgotten why she had come into the tavern, as the moment she entered she was greeted with such an infectious excited energy from the owner, Terrance, that she had become distracted and spent the last ten minutes eating and drinking everything he brought her and chatting happily

about the town's newest gossip.

'You have an appetite like your dad, you know!' Terrance told her as he refilled her juice. 'Luckily for you, it's free-food-for-cute-kids day.'

Robin giggled out a thank you as he ruffled her hair and sat with her again. Then she sipped at the juice, licked her lips, and kicked out her feet in a playful motion.

The spurs on her boots clicked loudly and she gave a little gasp as she remembered why she was here.

'Oh? You alright?' Terrance asked.

'Yeah,' she confirmed. 'I just— I just remembered that I need to go in the cellar.'

'The cellar?' Terrance chuckled. 'I can't let you in there, love.'

'Why not?'

'Because that's where we keep all our alcohol, and you're too young to drink,' he explained. 'There's nothing else down there but spiders and dust.'

'I don't wanna drink anything I'm not meant to!' Robin promised, holding up her juice. 'I have this! I like this! But I gotta go look for a treasure my mum left down there for me!'

'A treasure?' Terrance echoed. 'From your... oh. I see. Liv's little pranks are *still* playing out!'

Robin's smile matched the orc's own as he laughed and slapped the table in joy.

'She left me a scavenger hunt,' she explained. 'And I've found the first three already!'

'Aw, that's sweet. I love that girl! She was such a charmer,' Terrance said, rising to his feet and offering Robin his hand. 'Alright. I'll give you a hand looking. See if I can't clean up a little while we're down there.'

'Thank you!' Robin beamed, accepting Terrance's hand as it was offered to her.

She let him lead her down the old stairway into the old, cold cellar, and then let go of his hand so she could look around.

'Where do you think Mum could have hidden it?' she asked as Terrance cleared some empty boxes from her path. 'Is there any good hiding places in here?'

'Well, some of the older shelves have gaps under the bottom,' Terrance commented, motioning to the far end of the cellar. 'And I admit, I've been *very* slack in cleaning up under them. I could clean up and see what I find?'

'Mm-hm! That sounds good!' Robin chirped. 'Can I help, any?'

'Course you can, love!' Terrance told her as he handed her an old broom and took another for himself. 'So what we want to do is get the head of the broom under the shelf like this... and then we swipe sideways, curve... and pull out!'

Several dust bunnies and a rat skull rolled out with the broom.

'Ew, cool!' Robin commented as she picked up the skull and put it in the jar that Dehir had licked clean earlier.

'Robin—'

'Auntie Veruca is gonna *love* this! I gotta send it to her! Dad sent me cake today, through the druid circle, so I don't think they'd stop me sending this!'

‘Veruca likes skulls?’ Terrance asked.

‘She likes creepy things in jars,’ Robin corrected. ‘It doesn’t have to be skulls. It can be anything weird!’

‘I’ll... keep that in mind,’ Terrance said, unsurely, before shaking his head with a smile and continuing his cleaning.

Robin helped the man as he organised his shelves and swept out the dust. It took a long time, and Robin had almost forgotten why she was here again, when—

‘Ahah! I think I found something!’ Terrance exclaimed, turning to Robin with a pair of old, worn-out looking goggles in a hand. ‘These look like Volante’s old goggles. And they have a note with them. This what you were looking for?’

‘Yeah! That’s it!’ Robin happily took the items from Terrance and examined them.

The goggles were old protective goggles, like the kind Volante would use when she worked on her machinery. They were scuffed, with grease stains and little dents covering them.

And the note read:

“My wonderful baby, I hope you’re having fun finding my treasures. These are Volante’s work goggles. They’re not expensive like Veruca’s pen but they’re such an integral part of Volante and her work that I can’t even IMAGINE how much she’s going to yell at me when she realises they’re missing. But let her yell. That’s what big sisters do.

“Volante wears these goggles all the time. Sometimes, I’ll wake up when she’s tinkering on things, and all I’ll see in the dull lamplight will be her goggles and her horns. At this point, looking at her goggles almost feels like looking at a photo of her face.

“Volante is my rock. I can always rely on her to make sense when I need to talk to someone. She always stands up for me, and she’s a lot of fun, too. Though sometimes we encourage each other to go too far.

“I remember the first time we came to Thistlebond. We were both miserable about it, and kept chewing Farren out for wanting to meet Bertram. We made fun of him together before we’d even met him. And I remember sitting in the tavern with her that day. Despite how terrible the weather and our moods were, it’s something I remember fondly.

“Even though we all felt awful, Volante was still looking out for me. I remember she snuck me a drink (well, it wasn’t really sneaking; but it certainly wasn’t allowed!) and despite the fact I was in a foul mood and had fallen over in the mud, she somehow made me feel better. She managed to talk me out of sneaking out, too, which was smart because I think I could have really gotten hurt with the weather the way it was.

“She convinced me to sit down and eat dinner and talk with her. And in that memory, as we joked and enjoyed good food, I see her goggles around her horns.

“She’s one of the smartest people I’ve ever met, and I’m really excited to see all the things me and her are going to teach you about together! Between her and Sheshalan, I think you’re going to know everything you’ll ever need to know.

“And speaking of Sheshalan, that’s where the next treasure is hidden. Your

hint is (this treasure is more of a challenge to get to, than a head-scratcher to figure out):

“Behind a shelf in the main office of Sheshalan’s favourite building.

“You’ll have to be really sneaky to get in and find that one! Good luck. And don’t let Sheshalan catch you, or I’M the one she’ll yell at!”

Robin’s ears twitched as she read the hint of this one.

Sheshalan’s favourite building... was Madam Sapphire’s place, wasn’t it?

That was the *one* place she wasn’t allowed to go in town. And she had no idea why— The people who worked there were always so pretty and so nice to her, but then never answered her questions about what they *did*. All she knew was that Madam Sapphire’s place was the fanciest and most beautiful house in all of Thistlebond, and she had always desperately wanted to see inside.

‘You alright, Robin?’ Terrance asked, putting a hand on the girl’s shoulder.

‘Mhm, just thinking,’ she said. Then, she pulled Volante’s goggles over her head; letting them hang loosely around her neck. ‘Is it okay if I go? I think I know where the next treasure is!’

‘That’s fine with me,’ Terrance told her. ‘Thanks for your help cleaning up down here. You have fun with the rest of your hunt.’

‘I will!’ Robin called as she hurried back up the stairs.

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Robin was so puffed from climbing the stairs that she’d needed to sit down for another five minutes; which was fine with Terrance, who served her another cup of juice and gave her a small handful of honey-drops.

By the time she’d made her way into the street Dehir had curled up to take a nap on the side of the road.

Robin pet the hippogriff, who gave a displeased grumble, and then looked around for Madam Sapphire’s place.

She hadn’t even walked all the way over before Madam Sapphire herself called her name from the garden and shook her head at the child.

‘I can see you looking!’ she called across the street. ‘Don’t you try and sneak in now, young lady!’

Robin paused, rocking on her heels for a moment as she blushed, before flicking her tail and hurrying over to meet the beautiful dwarven woman at the fence.

‘You know very well that kids aren’t allowed in, Robin,’ Madam Sapphire said. Her tone was both firm and gentle; understanding but resolute. And as she leant on the gate and looked up at the girl, Robin knew she wasn’t going to change her mind.

So, instead of arguing or trying to sneak in, Robin simply took out the note from her mother and handed it to the woman without a word.

Madam Sapphire read it thoughtfully. Then let out a laugh.

‘Oh, so *that’s* what she was doing in my office— I thought she was stealing!’ Madam Sapphire beamed as she passed back the note. ‘You wait right here, and I’ll go look for this “treasure” of hers.’

‘Thank you,’ Robin offered a sheepish smile as the dwarf headed inside.

It didn't take long for the woman to return; a piece of paper and string of worn-out granite prayer beads in each hand.

'Here,' she said as she handed them over. 'And nobody has to get in trouble! Good on you for telling me instead of trying to sneak in. You take after your daddy.'

'Thank you, Ma'am Sapphire!' Robin chirped, accepting the beads and note and then giving the dwarf a hug through the fence. 'I really 'preciate it!'

'It's alright. You get along, now!'

Robin nodded and, wrapping the prayer beads around her wrist so she didn't lose them, hurried back to Dehir to sit down and read the newest note.

*"Congratulations on getting this one. I hope I didn't get you in too much trouble. As you saw, Madam Sapphire's place is nice; but way more boring than you'd expect from a place so hyped up and forbidden! Honestly I was so disappointed the first time I ever went in. I thought it was going to be WAY cooler."*

Robin couldn't help but smile; her mother clearly hadn't expected her to just ask Madam Sapphire to get it for her, and it was funny to read a note that had made such a wrong assumption.

*"These prayer beads might look like some of the more boring ones, but they're very important to me. The very first time Sheshalan ever made me sit down and meditate, these were the beads she had me hold. I think she regretted it, as they're heavy beads and I kept using them to hit her whenever she closed her eyes, but she still kept trying to get me to do it. She's stubborn like that."*

*"Her stubborn nature is why we always end up butting heads. Even though we both KNOW the best thing to do when we get heated would be to back away, neither of us ever wants to. It's kind of funny in hindsight. Especially when it's over something stupid and subjective."*

*"I used to think it meant she hated me, but now that I'm older I'm realising that she's just been trying to protect me in her own way. She's a good woman, even when she's telling you the things you don't want to hear, and I know she'll be making sure I've been raising you right. (Blame her for any vegetables you're forced to eat! She's obsessed with 'balanced diets' and 'nutrition'!)"*

Robin laughed, at that. And Dehir raised its head to look at her with an annoyed glare.

*"She's never believed in sugar coating anything, and is always as honest as she can be with me; even when I was a kid."*

*"You can trust her with anything you need. And to explain things you don't understand. Even things that you might be too embarrassed to talk to me about, you can always go to her and she will NEVER judge you. Even if she's blunt about it."*

*"Don't be scared to talk to her just because me and her fight a lot; she's actually really nice."*

*"You're almost done! I hope you're having fun. The next one is Farren's treasure. And I hope it's something you'll enjoy using.... The hint is:*

*"The opposite of a previous hint, this treasure is north from your new eyes."*

*"Good luck!"*

Robin stared at the note for a long, long time with her brow furrowed and her

snout crinkled. Then she looked to the hippogriff beside her and squeaked in an almost offended tone:

‘What the heck does *that* mean?!’

~~~~~

It took Robin *two* whole hours and asking *four* different adults she knew for help to figure out what the hint meant. By the time they even had half an answer, they had amassed a small crowd of townsfolk who were discussing (some of them rather heatedly) what the message could possibly mean.

It had only been when Jory had tracked her down (he was quite flustered and upset, and had apparently been looking for her all day) and read over all of the notes Robin had found, that the answer had been discovered.

Jory had heaved a long, tired sigh, pointed to Volante’s goggles, and commented, ‘She means the top floor of the tavern. She meant “up” from the goggles. She always used “north” to mean “up” no matter how many times people corrected her.’

So they had returned to the tavern and, with some more help from Terrance and several curious guests who wanted to know why such a crowd was suddenly disrupting their quiet meals, gone over every room in the building one by one.

Sadly, nothing had been found.

There were no loose boards. No uncleaned shelves. Nothing taped to the undersides of the beds.... Nothing.

Robin felt her ears droop in disappointment as the search party finished their second sweep of the top floor, and she sat down to catch her breath.

‘This is *exhausting!*’ she stated. ‘Are you *sure* this is the top floor?’

‘I’m positive,’ Terrance gave a sympathetic laugh and pet Robin on the shoulder. ‘Though, you’ve almost got me doubting it.’

‘It has t’be *somewhere!*’ Jory said, encouragingly. ‘Dun worry, we’ll find it.’

‘Mm,’ Terrance gave a nod of agreement. ‘I’m sure it’s here. I just need to think.... Hold on. You said this was *Farren’s* treasure, right?’

Robin’s ear twitched at Terrance’s question. ‘Yeah?’

‘Farren always requested a specific room, if it was free,’ he commented, tapping his hands together. ‘The north-most room. He said he liked the view—’

Cutting off mid-thought, Terrance hurried down the hall; everyone in the search party trailing behind him.

By the time Robin had followed him, he was in one of the rooms; leaning out the window.

Seemingly examining something, he gave a victorious laugh and audibly shifting something.

‘A loose panel!’ he cried as he pulled himself back inside.

He held up a small wooden box and everyone held their breath as he gently passed it to Robin to look at.

She rolled it in her hands and then, swallowing, popped it open.

On top rested a folded piece of paper with “ROBIN / JAMIE” written on the top, and Robin broke into a smile.

‘It’s it!’

A cheer went up.

‘What’s it say?’ Jory asked.

‘Oh, uh...’ Robin cleared her throat as she unfolded the note and read aloud:

“Good job finding this one! I tried to think of a really good spot. I wanted to make sure nobody else found it before you got the chance. This seal is very, very important. It bears our family’s crest.

“Farren used to use this seal all the time. Whenever he wrote letters or mailed off important documents, he’d use it to stamp the wax with the symbol of our family.

“This is one thing I didn’t steal just to make this game for you. I stole this seal from Farren a long, long time ago, back before any of the other Dawn Runners joined us.

“I wanted to feel important. Like I wasn’t lost and like I had some sort of hope or future. I wanted to pretend that I could be a part of a family. So I took this seal, and I pretended it was mine. Because if it was mine, it meant I came from somewhere. Somewhere that cared about me.

“It was clear Farren knew I took it. And I was so, so scared that he was going to yell at me or punish me, just like the horrible people I grew up with would have. But he didn’t get angry. He didn’t yell. Instead, when he saw my failed attempts at pouring and stamping wax he simply laughed to himself and said: I think I misplaced my seal. If you see it, let me know.

“I never admitted to taking it. And he seemed to know I wasn’t going to give it back. Because he ordered another one made, and joked about being forgetful.

“Something changed inside me that day. It was then, as I held his seal in my hands and ran my fingers over its embossed symbol, that I realised something important.... Farren had not only saved my life the day he caught me on the catwalk, but he had been saving my life every day since. Just by letting me stay in his.

“Letting me keep his seal was a way of welcoming me into his life. A way of telling me I was wanted. That I was important enough to have a place in someone’s family.

“And I hope now, as I pass this seal on to you, that you feel as important as I did in that moment. I know that there will be times we may fight or argue. And I imagine that by the time you find this, I’ll have probably yelled at you more than I would like, because I know I take after Sheshalan. But I hope you know that you are wanted. And that you will always be wanted.

“Your final treasure to find is from me. It’s something very personal. And I hope it inspires you.

“It’s hidden in the house of the first person I robbed in Thistlebond.”

~~~~~

Robin stood in her great-grandmother’s house, holding Jory’s hand as he explained to his grandparents what Robin had spent the day doing.

And she thought she saw, as she showed off the things her mother had hidden away for her, tears forming in Dorothy’s eyes.

‘She was such a wonderful girl,’ said Dorothy. ‘Ah really do miss her,

sometimes.'

'Could never admit t'being as sentimental as she were,' Melvin added. 'She was always trying t'act tough. But she was a lovely thing.'

'Heh, yeah,' Jory chuckled. 'She had her ways.... Y'all dun mind if we have a little look-around?'

'Of course not!' Dorothy reassured. 'Ah'm just sorry we can't help none.'

Melvin gave a grin. 'Ah'm sure we could help a little—'

'No! You need to rest!' Robin interrupted. 'Uncle Bi— Grandpa Birdie said you're not allowed to do any hard work! And looking for things is *very* hard work! So you're not allowed to do it!'

All three of the adults laughed; then Jory ushered Robin into another room.

'Come on,' he urged. 'It could be *anywhere*!'

'Is there somewhere special my mum liked, here?' Robin asked. 'Maybe we can start there?'

Jory thought for a long, long moment. Then he smiled. 'Well. When Liv was pregnant, ah know she spent a lot of time sitting out th' back with Gram. We can try there!'

Robin was more than happy to try there; the backyard was beautiful and the bugs that flitted around were fun to bat at.

She thought, when Jory tickled her side as he passed her, that they might have spent a little more time playing than they did actually searching. But that was fine with her.

The sun was setting by the time they found what they were looking for; hidden near the roof, to the upper left of the back door. It was another wooden box, larger than any of the others, which Robin carried with excitement back to the Bluebells to show off.

They encouraged her to open it, and inside she found a ragged old book and another note, which read:

*"My lovely Jamie or Robin (I really hope we call you Robin), I hope you had fun finding all these treasures. I wonder if you've asked me for help, or if you've done it all in your own way. And I wonder how the others must feel, as you've been uncovering it all. I'm sure they're all furious with me. Don't worry if they yell; it's all in good fun. They don't really mean any of it.*

*"I know that by the time you find this, you will already know, but I'm writing this to you as you are now; unborn inside me. The Dawn Runners are the best thing that has ever happened to me. I am so glad I get to spend the rest of my life with them. I wonder what the future holds for our family? I can't wait to experience it all with you!*

*"This book is my very first spellbook. I've had it for as long as I can remember. I think it was a gift, but I can't really be sure.*

*"I can't wait to read through these spells with you. To show you all of my old mistakes so you can learn from them and become something better than I am.*

*"I want you to pick a spell, any spell, from this book. And I will teach it to you. Choose wisely!"*

As Robin finished reading, she heard a short sniff, and looked up in time to catch Dorothy wiping a tear from her cheek.

'There's been a little piece of her here the whole time, huh?' she commented,

motioning to the spellbook. 'She kept that here with us?'

Robin nodded, not sure what to say. But, not wanting to say nothing, she took a deep breath and pulled the spellbook out of the box to carefully examine. 'Dad says that Mum left little pieces of herself everywhere she went; that everyone who met her has a bit of her inside who they are. He says it's how it is with everyone. Everyone leaves a mark, even when they're forgotten. But especially when they're not.'

Melvin gave a nod, and pet his wife's back gently. 'Yer mother took it a little more literally with this one, hm?'

Robin felt a giggle, small but genuine and accompanied by a purr, escape her chest as she opened the book and read through the spells. 'Yeah,' she agreed.

'Did y'have fun?'

'I did!' Robin confirmed, tracing her fingers along her mother's old notes.

'It's a real shame she ain't here t'teach y'all her old spells, huh?'

'That's okay!' Robin chirped, closing the book again and holding it close.

'Maybe, when Unc— Grandpa Birdie gets back, maybe he can teach me! And if he can't, I can ask Veruca or Volante! They're both very smart. And Volante is a good teacher. She taught me how to make a radio! So I got lots of people who can help! All of Mum's family.... All of *my* family!'

—END—

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