

Bob, The One-Legged Robin
by Natalie McNabb

Upon seeing our one-legged robin friend, I perched my daughter on the deck railing to watch his morning hunt. He hopped and froze, head cocked. Four more hops toward the dogwood landed him amidst the red tulips. He flicked an eye across the grass. The breeze tickled daffodils nearby, wafting their buttery breath to my nose. Our bird-friend pounded the ground with precision and lifted a worm-trophy proudly into the air for us to see.

My daughter squealed in disgust and triumph, frightening the robin into flight. We laughed, and I moved her to her chair.

Mama?

Yes? I took off the brake and turned her wheelchair toward the slider.

She smoothed her sundress over her thin right leg and the stub of the other and asked, *Will Bob come back?*

Of course he will.

Did we scare him?

Probably.

I wouldn't hurt him.

He doesn't know that, I told her.

Breakfast was abnormally quiet. No whining for cartoons or random questions. Not even a tantrum, which was what usually led up to every Monday, Wednesday and Friday minivan trip to see her physical therapist. The telephone rang, and I answered.

It was my husband. *Did I leave my wallet somewhere?* he asked.

It wasn't on the counter or the kitchen table. *I don't think so,* I said and then asked, *Did you check your coat?*

Yeah.

I finally recognized its brown leather on the bookshelf. *You left it by the new book you took off the shelf last night. Do you need it?*

Not really, I guess. I have a twenty in my desk. I'll use that for lunch. How's Angie?

Awfully quiet.

What's she doing?

Picking at breakfast. Her jelly's everywhere but the pancake.

Let me talk to her. I knew he was smiling by his slightly upward curving tone.

I crammed the dishwasher with a final plastic cup and held the receiver out toward Angie's sticky fingers. *Daddy wants to say 'hi,'* I said.

She took the phone and put it to her ear. *Uh-huh,* Angie said and grinned. *Daddy wants you, Mama.* She beckoned me with the jelly-printed receiver.

I wiped it down with the dishrag and put it to my ear. *What'd you say? She's still smiling. I just asked if she was enjoying her jelly.*

I shrugged as Angie moved from pancake picking to fork plunking, plucking a tong with her fingernail and holding it to her ear. I hung up, tidied the kitchen and handed Angie the dishrag. She wiped off her hands, and I dropped the rag into the washing machine.

I don't want to go, Angie said. A tear slid down her round cheek.

Here came the fit. It had only been delayed this time. I never knew how to comfort her though. How could I ask her to coerce her body into doing things it couldn't each Monday, Wednesday and Friday? How could I tell her that if she didn't at least try she'd probably never

walk at all and, even if she did force her body to do the things it couldn't, she may not walk anyway? How could I tell even myself? I hugged my little girl.

Angie whispered into my neck, *Doctor Janet scares me. She's got big teeth. Like a horse. And, my leg hurts bad when I see her.*

I battled the knot in my throat. I wanted to shout, *Let's go to the pirate park!* with tears streaming down my face and drive her to the big plastic ship that had bridges and slides coming out and down its top and sides. But, I couldn't heave Angie up slides forever, and I couldn't be there to catch her at the bottom every time. I whispered, *Doctor Janet's helping. I promise.*

I know, Angie said no longer sniffing.

I pulled back from her and dried her cheeks with my thumbs. *Why so brave today?*

Bob got better. So can I.

I swallowed hard and reached for my keys. Angie gripped her chair as we wheeled out the door and I loaded her into the van. We drove in silence to Doctor Janet's office.

After forty minutes and a few sobs Angie was finished, and I only realized that I'd forgotten my purse when I got to the front desk. *You'll have to bill me,* I told Joelle, the receptionist. *I'm sorry.* John was rubbing off on me. He'd laugh if I told him, but I wouldn't. Not right away at least.

Doctor Janet said her goodbyes to Angie and told her, *Great work today.* Doctor Janet winked and asked, *Any special reason?*

Angie said, *Bob helped me know I could.*

Doctor Janet asked, *Who's Bob?*

He has just one leg. Like me, she answered.

I explained, *Angie found an injured robin near the driveway last summer. She and her dad talked me into keeping it.*

We made him live, said Angie, *and pushed him out of his box on the lawn.* She scrunched up her face as she wiggled her finger and said, *He got a big fat worm today.*

Doctor Janet said, *Good for Bob!* She smiled and walked off, just as she always did, whistling.

Joelle said, *See you day after tomorrow.*

On the way out the door Angie told me, *I want to whistle like Doctor Janet,* and all of the way home, she blew air through her puckered lips. As we pulled into the driveway, we saw Bob look up from hunting. Then, Angie actually whistled.

You can do it! I shouted, and we clapped.

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