

## **Bob, the One-Legged Robin**

by Natalie McNabb

Seeing our one-legged robin friend, I perched my daughter on the deck railing to watch his morning hunt below. He hopped and froze, head cocked. Four more hops toward us landed him amidst the daffodils, their buttery heads swaying in the breeze. The robin pecked the ground, lifted a worm-trophy proudly into the air for us to see.

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

*Mama?*

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

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

*Of course,* I said and kissed the top of her head. Her bronzy curls still smelled of the grape shampoo I helped her rinse out last night.

Angie looked up and scratched the patch of freckles on her cheek. *Did we scare him?*

*Probably.*

*I wouldn't hurt him.*

*He doesn't know that.*

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

*Did I leave my wallet somewhere?* my husband asked.

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

*Yeah.*

I recognized its brown leather across the room. *You left it on the bookshelf. Do you need it?*

*Not really, I guess. How's Angie?*

*Quiet.*

*What's she doing?*

*Picking at breakfast. Jelly's everywhere but the pancake.*

*Let me talk to her.* I knew he was smiling by the tone of his voice.

I held the receiver out toward Angie's sticky fingers. *Daddy wants to say 'Hi.'*

She put the phone to her ear.

I crammed the dishwasher with another plastic cup.

*Uh-huh,* Angie said and grinned. She beckoned me with the jelly-printed receiver. *Daddy wants you, Mama.*

I wiped the phone down with the dishrag and put it to my ear. *What'd you say?*

*Asked if she was enjoying her jelly.*

*She's still smiling.* Angie moved from pancake picking to fork plunking, plucking a tong with her fingernail and holding it to her ear. I got off the phone, tidied the kitchen and handed Angie the dishrag. She wiped her hands, and I dropped the rag into the washing machine.

*I don't want to go,* Angie said. Her smile was gone, and a tear slid down her round cheek, fell from her chin and disappeared into the fabric of her sundress. She clenched her hand into a fist, pressed it against her knee.

Here came the fit, just delayed this time, and I never knew how to comfort her. How could I ask her to coerce her body into doing things so difficult each Monday, Wednesday and Friday? How could I tell her that if she didn't try she'd never walk and, even if she did force her body to do things it didn't want to, she probably wouldn't walk and run and jump like all the other kids anyway? I hugged her.

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

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

*I know,* Angie said. She stopped sniffing. *Bob gets his own worms now. He did it.*

I pulled back. *You're so brave!* and dried Angie's cheeks with my thumbs. I swallowed hard and reached for my keys. Angie gripped her chair as we wheeled out the door and loaded into the minivan. We drove in silence to Doctor Janet's office.

Doctor Janet ran Angie through her stretches, fit her into her prosthetic leg and then helped her from a sitting to a standing position. Though Angie usually only stood for a moment before complaining that she was tired, her forehead had grown pink and damp before Doctor Janet finally said, *I think that's good for today, Angie.*

Angie looked ready to cry.

*Nice job!* I said.

Doctor Janet said, *Angie, you're going to be going up and down those stairs over there before you know it! I think you're ready to start practicing at home too. What do you think?*

Angie nodded.

We hadn't ever left a session without tears and, though exhausted, Angie was smiling as I wheeled her toward the front desk. Then I realized I'd forgotten my purse. *You'll have to bill me,* I told the receptionist, Joelle. *Sorry. John's rubbing off on me. He forgot his wallet this morning.* He'd laugh if I told him, but I wouldn't. Not right away at least.

Doctor Janet said the usual goodbyes to Angie, but added, *Great work today,* and winked.

Angie grinned at Doctor Janet and told her, *Bob can catch worms now!*

Doctor Janet asked, *Who's Bob?*

*He's got just one leg like me.*

I said, *Angie and her dad found an injured robin near the driveway, and they talked me into keeping it in a box on the hearth.*

*We found worms for him until dad said he could do it himself, said Angie, and then we pushed him out of his box on the lawn.* She scrunched up her face and wiggled her pinkie finger. *He got a big fat worm today.*

Doctor Janet smiled. *Good for Bob!* Then she walked off to her next patient whistling.

Joelle said, *See you day after tomorrow, Angie.*

Angie waved.

As I loaded her into the car Angie said, *I want to whistle like Doctor Janet,* and all the way home she blew air through her puckered lips. When we pulled into the driveway, Bob looked up from hunting. It was then that Angie actually whistled.

*You can do it!* I shouted and clapped until Angie's whistle had turned into a smile.