

When the Wolves Follow You Home
by Sarah Chan

There's an enemy soldier at the base. There wasn't supposed to be one.

Robin squints in the dusty room, grains of sand itching themselves into every available space of exposed skin. He can't wait to wash. His rifle is pointed at the soldier, more of a boy, really, and he imagines himself pulling the trigger. He feels nothing. No revulsion, no fear, no anticipation.

Nothing.

He can see the boy's fear—it stagnates in his eyes and melts in great slabs down his back. Robin sees his lips moving, stammering words being forced out, pride forgotten when a bullet lies inches from your chest. He's begging for his life. Robin raises the rifle, readies himself for the recoil of the gun.

Orders were no prisoners.

Robin wakes with a ferocious slap of consciousness, sucking in wet gasps of air. The memory stabs him alive. He's still breathing, yes, but that boy...

The need to be grounded forces his shivering body out of his bed. It's freezing, but it snaps him back into the present. His feet are numb on the breathless tile; his hands grasp at the lamp beside him. Dim light floods the room. *You're safe*, Robin reminds himself. *You're in your apartment. You're in the city. TTC is thousands of miles away from you.*

He carefully avoids thought of Joey, but fails by the very act, and is filled again with a gnawing pain that he can't describe, a black hole inside that will never be sucked away, a brother still lost at war.

There's a bomb in his apartment. Several bombs maybe. Robin is steadily unwiring his television set when Will finds him.

"Dude, Robbie, what the hell?"

Robin looks up, a little guiltily. "I just thought...I thought..."

Will sighs and crouches next to him. "Man, we talked about this. It isn't going away just because time has passed. In fact, it may be getting worse."

Robin sits among the pieces of his dissembled TV and thinks that maybe Will has a point.

"Therapy is—"

"I know," Robin cuts in quietly. "I'll think about it."

He's clenching and unclenching his fists in front of the knife drawer in the kitchen when he hears a noise. A face springs into mind, swathes of white cloth bound loosely around the whole face, save the eyes. Stone-cold bullets of black stare into his mind. The Glock is in his hand before he takes another breath. Creeping around the side of the fridge, Robin springs into his living room and points the barrel at...

"Joey?" His voice is soft and disbelieving. He's suddenly six years old again and the world has just taken his parents from him and all he has left is his fantastic, five years older, taller, stronger brother.

Joey stares back at him with slight uncertainty, like he recognizes the name and the voice, but not the face. He opens his mouth, but no words come out.

Robin slips the Glock into the waistband of his pants. He lowers his hands and takes a tentative step towards his brother.

“Joseph? It’s me, Robbie? Robin?”

Joey’s eyes widen and he shakes. Robin catches him inches from crashing to the ground. His eyes are closed and he breathes heavily, but he is alive, and that’s all Robin can ask for.

He is afraid that Joey won’t adjust well to civilian life; exclusively advanced military spies of highest security aren’t known to just waltz back into normality. But honestly, he hardly sees him at all. Sometimes Joey will appear in their apartment like he can walk through walls. Robin knows it’s the advanced military training, but it still unnerves him sometimes to find his brother on the couch with the door still locked from the inside. When he does stay, he flits around the apartment like a purposeless ghost; he never eats, seldom sleeps. Sometimes Joey isn’t seen for days. He still hasn’t said a word since he dropped into Robin’s living room like a star (or a catastrophe) from above. But Robin understands. He knows how it feels to be set free after a lifetime of imprisonment, can imagine how deliriously thrilling it must feel to have your agency back after existence as a POW to one of the most ruthless forces in the world.

Still, it is disconcerting. If Robin didn’t know, he wouldn’t even suspect that two people lived in their apartment. Joey hardly leaves any evidence of his presence.

“—the dreaded word,” Will is saying.

Robin blinks. He's distracted; he hasn't seen Joey all day.

"What did you say?"

Will clears his throat. "Therapy, dude, pay attention."

Robin snorts contemptuously. "I don't need therapy. Do I look like I need therapy?"

"PTSD at least." Will numbers them off on his fingers. "Survivor's guilt. Anxiety, hyper-vigilance, depression, paranoia—just all part of the package, Robbie." He tactfully avoids a night of smashed wire circuits and cracked screens.

Robin groans and runs a hand through his hair. "God, I told you: I'm fine. I looked up the symptoms, and I don't have any of them."

"That's what's worrying," Will mutters.

"Will, I don't mean for this to sound offending—"

"Which means it's going to be."

"—but don't you think that, as a counselor and all, which I completely understand and respect, that you sometimes...I don't know. Go looking for a problem that's not there."

"Robbie, man, listen to me. You served thirteen tours, during which you lost loved ones, got shot seventeen times, and saw horrors hell wouldn't forget. No normal man could walk away from that unscathed."

Robin stares determinedly at his hands. "Maybe. And maybe not."

Robin looks up from the pile of laundry he was folding. Joey is watching him silently in the doorway.

"You can come in," Robin offers.

The man hesitantly wanders in, like he still isn't sure why he's even here. Robin takes in his brother's ragged appearance with a slight pang in his heart. Joey wouldn't look out of place below a bridge, among homeless addicts.

"Well, you're looking just dandy. Have you even changed that shirt in a week?" Robin asks, his voice lightly teasing. The tenuously good mood is shattered when Joey shakes his head.

Robin sighs. "Here. Change into this."

Joey looks confused, as if he didn't understand why someone would care about clothes so much. He shrugs his shirt off and accepts the clean, blue one Robin hands him.

Nicole brings them lasagna. "When was the last time you had a home-cooked meal, General?" she demands, casting a scornful look at the takeout boxes haphazardly lining the kitchen counter.

Robin shrugs sheepishly and takes the dish. "Thanks. I've just been having some trouble...you know. With Joey and all."

A shadow passes over Nicole's face. "I'm so sorry, Robin. I...well, I haven't been thinking about him lately. Trying to figure out...PTSD and all." She brushes her hair out of her eyes and doesn't look Robin in the eye.

"Nicole," Robin says gently. "You don't have to be embarrassed about it. We all have issues; war's hell, you know? It wouldn't be right if you were just up and going fine."

Nicole's head snaps up, and a triumphant smile plays on her lips. "Yeah? Then how come you won't go to therapy for yourself, General?"

“Oh my...” Robin doesn’t know whether to be amused or annoyed. “Did Will put you up to this? And here I was thinking you cared enough to make me food.”

Nicole snorts and shoots him a smile, but her voice is serious when she says, “Come on, Robin. You gotta start taking care of yourself. I know with Joseph and all...well, I just want to make sure you don’t burn yourself out, alright?”

Robin smiles, a bit sadly. “Yeah. Thanks, Nicky. For the food and all.”

“Sure,” she says. “So. You’ll think about it?”

Robin is staring down, hands fiddling with a blue thread hanging off of his worn shirt. His voice is smooth when he replies, “Yeah. I’ll think about it.”

“You sure you don’t want to eat anything?” Robin asks. He pushes a plate of food coaxingly towards the gaunt man.

Joey doesn’t respond, and Robin sighs and spears a piece of chicken. He’s lost his appetite. Joey watches Robin push the food around his plate through the shaggy curtain of hair that falls across his eyes. His brother probably hasn’t had it cut since TTC.

“Hey, Joey,” Robin says, and not waiting for a response, continues immediately with, “Do you mind if I cut your hair? I’m not too shabby at it.” He realizes with a start that he’s gotten far too used to one-sided conversations. Joey stares mutely at him.

“Okay,” Robin mutters to himself. “That’s at least not a no.”

When he stands, Joey mirrors his movements and follows Robin to the bathroom. Robin switches the flickering light on, and it casts an almost eldritch atmosphere on the scene, reflecting off the bland tiles and Joey's emotionless eyes.

"Here, sit on this." Robin sets a stool in front of his brother and rummages in the cupboard for the scissors. Finding it hidden behind the full bottles of pills, Robin shows the double blades to his brother, silently requesting permission. Joey blinks and doesn't flinch away. Good enough.

Robin quickly sees that he's not as deft as he remembered. The last time he cut his own hair was before the war, before shaved regulations of bald heads and practicality. Snippets of hair float to the ground until a fine layer of it covers the ground.

He hacks a little here and smooths a little there. The final result isn't that bad, he thinks to himself.

"Sorry it's so crooked," Robin says a little guiltily. "I haven't had to cut long hair in a while."

Joey studies his reflection, combing his fingers through the ragged lengths of hair and almost, *almost* smiles.

Apparently, he needs to come up with better excuses. Will and Nicole show up on his doorstep one warm evening, Monopoly and The Game of Life in hand, but Robin knows what they're here to do. **It's what they're only ever here to do nowadays.**

"Okay, truce," Robin says as soon as Will opens his mouth. "No therapy coercion."

"Aw, man, come on—"

“No.”

Will lets out a frustrated sound. “It wouldn’t be so difficult if you just listened, Robbie.”

“It wouldn’t be so difficult if you’d let it be,” RObin muttered. He rubs his eyes wearily.

“Can’t you guys just be normal like before TTC?”

Nicole nudges Will meaningfully and he raises his hands in surrender. “Fine, man. Whatever you’re cool with.”

Robin smiles thinly, and Will pushes into the apartment, playfully shoving Robin out of the way. “Ready to have yourself bankrupted into the atmosphere, Robbie?”

“That doesn’t even make sense,” Robin complained, a small grin tugging at his mouth.

Nicole gives him a strange look when she passes him. “Nice haircut.”

Robin stares at her uncertainly at first, then fingers the uneven lengths of hair as if just remembering. “Thanks.”

There’s someone in his kitchen. He’s sure it’s a real threat this time; he hasn’t imagined an intruder in months. Since Joey came home to him, Robin hasn’t had the liberty to. But old habits die hard and the Glock is in his hand as he steps out of his bedroom. Past the bathroom, past the living room, until there. A shadow is bending over in the kitchen. Robin swiftly moves into the kitchen and, Glock behind him, snaps on the light.

Joey stands in the middle of the kitchen, the contents of one of the drawers emptied onto the floor. The knife drawer. He has a knife in his right hand, not aimed anywhere in particular, just sort of hovering over his left palm. Robin lays the gun on the counter and lifts his hands

palm upwards to show that he's not hiding anything. Joey's eyes are constricted in the sudden light and Robin is reminded of an animal trapped in the headlights.

"Joey," Robin says, very slowly and carefully. "What are you doing?"

Joey stares at him, part desperation, part panic. The knife is trembling.

"Joey, I'm going to walk towards you, okay?"

There's no answer. There's never an answer.

Robin takes a deep breath. "Okay, then. I'm coming now, yeah?"

Joey doesn't move and Robin closes the distance in three strides. He lays his hand on the knife, and Joey, eyes wide and frightened, lets the blade fall into his own palm. Robin yelps, moving to grab the knife before it cuts his brother any deeper. Joey drops the knife. The clatter on the kitchen floor seems to startle him out of his reverie, and then his brother is crying, and Robin just takes the convulsing body in his arms.

"God, Joey, don't ever do that to me again," Robin says hoarsely. "You can't leave me now...not after...just. Damn it, don't ever scare me like that again."

Joey shakes his head, and Robin doesn't know what he's trying to say, but he's at least *trying* to say something.

"Alright," Robin says shakily after the sobs subside. "Let's get that cut bandaged."

There's a man at the base. There was supposed to be an army.

Welcome, General, the man says with a terrifying smile—too mocking and self-assured for this to be an easy mission. A thin, white scarf is casually thrown over his head; his tightly buttoned collar ends a few inches too soon to sufficiently shield his neck. His face is exposed; his

throat is uncovered. These are not the habits of a lone, unarmed man facing his enemy's biggest assets.

Robin doesn't respond, but notes at least three possible escape routes. Three. Too few. Will, Nicole, Anderson, and Johnny are behind him, guns aimed at the man. Five to one. The numbers are in their favor. The odds? That's debatable.

General Robin, the man repeats, savoring the title. *You have been busy this year, sir. What, twenty three bases blown up? Hundred over casualties? Nine successive covert missions? You have one warning to lay down any weapons and come out with your hands behind your head*, Robin says. His voice is flat, almost bored. It does not betray the strengthening dread in his heart.

The man frowns. *That is not very polite*. He is silent, thinking. Then he nods to himself and snaps his fingers.

From above, from the cobwebby darkness of the bare rafters, a figure jumps soundlessly down. Robin's heart sinks—so TTC have started hiring mercenaries. The man is armed to the teeth and stands broad and tall. He is dressed all in blacks and buckles, hypnotic Stygian steel enforcing the assortment of assault rifles, pistols, knives, and grenades hooked and strapped onto him. His face is covered with a heavy square of black cloth; his eyes startlingly pale above the dark fatigues. Ordinarily, Robin thinks blearily, they may have been light blue, but now they seemed almost diluted until the light filtered through as a sickly green.

Recognize our favorite new combatant? the man asks. He grins, his mouth a red stitch of hyena laughter.

Robin ignores him and blinks the sweat out of his eyes. His mind is working furiously; they had been prepared to fight at least a dozen men. Not one mercenary. To their credit, no one flinches when the mercenary raises the machine gun.

Sta, the man barks, his voice suddenly hard and cruel. He rattles off a harsh string of words in a language that Robin doesn't recognize.

The mercenary's eyes narrow and he obediently hands the machine gun to the man. He crouches slightly, then moves.

Robin thinks "move," but it's more of a whipping hurricane of action. Guns explode behind him, spluttering bullets in their wake. The man has lifted the machine gun, but makes no move to use it. He is too far away for any random scattering of bullets to hit him. Somehow, Johnny's down: knife in the shoulder, head kicked in. Anderson makes a hit, a graze at the mercenary's side. The mercenary doesn't even pause. The sharp *click* of bone echoes in Robin's mind as powerful hands snap Anderson's neck like a trussed chicken. Robin is frozen. He can only watch as Nicole, too smart to try any offense against the soldier and brave enough to risk it, throws down her gun and draws her own wickedly sharp knife. She manages a shallow cut on the mercenary's forehead before he flings her aside. Her body hits the wall with a sickening *thud*. Will is next; the mercenary strides forward, blood flowing thickly into his eyes, matting his hair with gore. Will's eyes are wide, but firm and he gets in a couple of good shots, the bullets ricocheting off the body armor, before the mercenary reaches out for him. He doesn't break Will's neck this time, just holds him up by the collar of his shirt. Will's head drops onto his chest, unconscious.

Robin is left alone.

You see, General, the man says, raising his shoulders almost in an apology. *It wasn't much of a fight to begin with.* Robin doesn't speak, but he can suddenly move again and a plan begins to form in his head. His eyes are trained on Will, the barrel of the mercenary's gun laying on Will's shoulder like the touch of a close friend.

You monster, he finally says quietly, speaking to the mercenary. *How much did they pay you to dirty your hands with innocent blood?*

The mercenary looks straight back at him and says, *How much do they pay you?*

Robin grits his teeth and leaps. Attacking the mercenary would be suicide; the other man is much more viable. He has the advantage of surprise; they hadn't expected him to attack one to two. He manages to knock the machine gun out of the man's hands, wrestles him into a choke-grip. The man is limp; Robin realizes with a jolt that he must have gripped too hard. The other man makes no noise, but his pale eyes are open with shock.

Very good, the mercenary says. His voice is strikingly familiar all of a sudden. He jerks Will upright. *It appears we are at a deadlock.*

Let him go, Robin demands. *If I kill him, you won't get paid. If you let him go, I promise...I promise I won't kill you.*

The mercenary throws his head back and laughs. The sound is deathly desperate, ringing hollow. *You think you can kill me, little boy?* His eyes are incredulous. *You think...you think I'm being paid?*

He raises his hand, the one not holding onto Will. The mercenary allows the bandanna veiling his face to fall to the ground.

Pale eyes meet Robin's. The cracked lips twitch up in a gruesome mimic of a smile.

Robin stares. There's no way...

Joey?

He is startled awake by the insistent squawk of his alarm and finds himself drowning in wet sheets.

"This is normal, you know?" Will says as he helps Robin strip the piss-stained sheets off the bed. "I mean, grief takes many forms. Not to mention PTSD and all the other trauma. And especially since it was your brother."

Robin feels a lump rising in his throat and with an annoyed gulp, smothers it.

"God, I wish he'd never enlisted. I feel like I've lost him forever, you know? He's just... *gone.*"

"It really sucks, man," Will says gruffly. "But you know you haven't lost him. He's still here, just, not quite in the way you want. And that's okay. You'll power through, Robbie. It's the only damn thing you can do, yeah?"

Robin raises his head and scrubs his face with his hand. "Yeah. Thanks, Will."

"Dude, what happened to your hand?" Will asks, his eyes flickering over the tight bandage wrapped around Robin's hand. Robin lets the hand fall out of sight. Is that suspicion in Will's voice? Does he think Joey did it?

"It's nothing," Robin says, forcing a lightness he didn't feel. "Just some broken glass."

Will doesn't look convinced, but he's doesn't push it. "Well, anytime you wanna come round and visit an old friend, feel free, man. I know you're still...dealing...with Joey, but..." he shrugs. "Offer still stands."

"Thanks, Will," he says quietly. "And about last time..."

Will doesn't miss the unspoken apology. He claps Robin on the shoulder. "Don't sweat it, man. Just take care of yourself, y'know? Don't knock it; therapy's not like it is in the movies."

Robin moves away at Will's last words. "I know."

That's his cue. "Well, I'll see you round, Robbie."

"Bye, Will."

Will and Nicole are standing on his doorstep the next evening. They're dressed quite formally: Will in a black suit, Nicole in a simple black dress. Nicole holds a bouquet of lilies.

"Hi guys," Robin greets, rubbing sleep-swollen eyes. "What's up?"

Nicole raises an eyebrow. "Robin. Today's the day, General. First year anniversary."

"Anniversary of what?"

"I—never mind that," Will says. He scratches his head, looking around into the cool evening, and then offhandedly remarks, "This is just the kind of weather Joey liked."

Robin frowns. "Likes."

"What?"

"Likes," Robin repeats. "He likes this kind of weather. Anyway, you guys should stick around. I think he may be coming home today, though who knows." Robin shrugs. "He hasn't been around for days."

“What do you mean?” Will says carefully, in a casually bland tone.

Robin notices the pseudo-therapist creeping out of his friend. He suddenly feels like punching Will. It’s a point of his restraint that Robin doesn’t close the door in their faces.

“Joey,” he says shortly. “I know you’re too comfortable around him, but you could at least acknowledge his existence.”

Nicole frowns. “We’re not denying Joseph’s existence, Robin. We’re just...concerned as to why you’re saying he’s here.”

Robin’s head is hurting. “Because...because he is here. With me. He’d never leave me.”

“We know that, Robbie,” Will says. “He’ll always be with you, but you just need to, like, to let go, you know? Keep him close, but not present.”

“Yeah, I know that,” Robin says, his head spinning. “I’m just worried because I don’t where he went. He hasn’t been home all day.”

Nicole and Will are staring at him with twin expressions of confusion and horror.

“Why would Joseph...be here?” Nicole asks. “Joseph is—”

“Joey is a living, breathing human being,” Robin interrupts, his heart beating twice as fast as normal because of reasons he doesn’t want to think about. “And I know you both can’t forget what happened in the war, but you could at least give him the basic dignity of address.”

“Oh, God,” Nicole murmurs. “Will—”

The man just shakes his head wordlessly.

“What?” Robin asks, suspicion lingering in his voice, but underneath, a dark feeling of dread threatens to overwhelm him.

“Robin, man,” Will says, his voice thick with emotion that Robin, in his panicked and paranoid state, can’t read. “I...Joey...”

“Joey what?” Robin says, a little desperately. “Where is he? What did you do to him?”

“Robin.” Nicole’s voice is cold and helps cut through his confusion a little. “Don’t you remember?”

He hesitates. “R-remember what?”

Will and Nicole exchanges a look that infuriates him. He clenches his fists; the rush of blood in his head is all he could focus on.

“What aren’t you telling me?”

“Robin,” Nicole says, her usually calm voice strangely unassured. “Joseph died this day a year ago.”

He stares at her. “What are you saying?”

“Joey is dead,” Will says, more firmly. “He died during Operation Black Star. You...you killed him.”

Robin lets out a high, hysterical laugh. “*What* are you taking about? Joey isn’t dead! He lives here, with me. He has since after he was discharged. After Operation Black Star...” Robin trails off, unsettled.

“God, I’m so not equipped to handle this,” Will says, passing a hand over his face.

“Joseph is dead,” Nicole presses. “Operation Black Star, General. You gave the orders. Shoot on sight. He had been captured—months before. Assumed...well, most of us assumed that he was dead. We weren’t even thinking of him during the mission. TTC had injected him with the LTK-26 serum. Brainwashing. They thought you wouldn’t shoot him, sent him out to kill us.”

“I wouldn’t,” Robin whispers, hands clutching at his hair wildly. “You’re crazy. I’d never...”

“It wasn’t your fault,” Will says, one eye on the desk that he knows hides a Glock in its drawer. “Joey was about to shoot me. You saved my life. The White Cross medal...it was for that.”

“You’re both crazy,” Robin declares, abruptly standing, a deranged light in his eyes. “He’s here, I’m telling you. He’d never try to...to hurt me. Or you.”

“There was nothing you could do. It wasn’t your fault, Robin,” Nicole repeats.

“Get out! Get the hell out of here!” Robin screams, his fury and fear exploding into sudden rage. “I don’t know what shit you’re trying to pull, but it’s not going to work. I see how it is. Always trying to get me into therapy, huh, Will? Why, so you could mess with my head even more? All I want is a quiet life and you can’t even give me that goddamn much?”

“Robbie, man—”

Robin’s hand grips the side of the door so tightly his knuckles turn white and he can feel blood bursting from the scabbing skin nestled in his palm.

“Go away.” His voice is childishly petulant even to his own ears.

“Robin,” Nicole snaps. “This is ridiculous—”

“Leave!” he shouts, and slams the door so hard, he is surprised it doesn’t fall out of its frame, thrown off its hinges.

His head is pounding, his heart racing in its cavity. Robin sags against the rough paint of the door and buries his face in his hands. There’s something wet against them; he doesn’t know if it’s blood or tears.

He doesn't care.

Robin doesn't sleep much that night. There's something niggling in the back of his mind that he can't fix upon. Something like a blue shirt, like an impromptu haircut. Like the deep cut in his palm. He turns over in his bed and slides into fitful dreams.

He's flying over a graveyard, and the dead, the dead he's killed, are shaking their fists at him and grinning horrible skull smiles. They promise that his time will come, and that they'll make it as painful as possible.

He's hidden in the dry wall of a house and a mother is beating her chest over the body of a thin boy. She seems to sense his presence and stares straight at him. Her eyes are tinged with red; the grief pools at her mouth. "*Why my son?*" she asks in a cracked voice. Robin opens his mouth to answer and feels himself being sucked into another scene.

He stalks the once bright markets of the village. Children skulk in the shadows, looking like starved dogs, half-bent in their hunger. They draw closer, claw at his face and his hair and breathe hotly in his ear. They devour him, flesh and soul, and Robin wakes with a choked scream.

He stumbles out of his bed and rushes to the bathroom where he promptly vomits whatever little food he had coaxed into his body. The tap spews cold water over his trembling hands. He breathes heavily and looks up at his reflection in the mirror.

Joey's face stares back at him.

He cries out again and wakes. The sheets are stained with sweat and urine.

The morning brims over with pale yellow sunlight falling over his face. Robin squints in the light, that familiar burn still stirring in his gut, that dread that always accompanies thought of his brother.

Isn't his brother...?

“Joey?” He breathes the name into the room, not knowing what response he's expecting. What he's wanting.

There's no answer. There's never an answer.

He staggers into his kitchen, absently puts a kettle on to boil. A stale flower is crushed on the floor. He picks it up, turning the pulpy petals over in his hand. The white is startling next to the blood-soaked bandage. He's still woozy with the warmth of his bed. His eyes catches movement in his peripheral vision, and Robin's heart explodes into furious beating as he grabs for the gun that's not there. The forgotten flower flutters to the ground. The figure looks at him, face void of any emotion.

“Joey!” Robin exclaims. He grabs his brother tight and pulls him into a crushing hug. “Thank God you're alright. Will and Nicole said you were dead.” He laughs, an unnaturally pitched laugh. “But you're not! You're here and we're going to be safe here, you know? We're going to be safe from the snipers and TTC and no one will ever hurt you again, you hear?”

Joey stares at him blankly. He carefully untangles himself from Robin and makes his way up the stairs. Robin smiles to himself.

“There, you see?” he chats to the shrill kettle of boiling water. “Joey is alive! I’ll have to tell Will and Nicole they were wrong. Joey wouldn’t leave me. And me! Killing Joey! What a crazy idea.”

Water bursts from the spout, sending the scalding liquid all over the man. Robin doesn’t even flinch. “Then again,” he muses quietly. “Will and Nicole think Joey’s bad. They must because they said that his death wasn’t my fault. If I killed him, it was my fault!”

He considers the sofa, and deems it worthy of conversation. “We’re moving,” he tells the red and white stripes. “Joey needs to be safe, somewhere where no one can hurt him. No one must, you understand?” Robin shakes his fist at the ceiling lamp.

“Now, I must make sure to bring the photo album with Mom and Dad. Oh, and that brown mug. It always was Joey’s favorite...”