

## **keep the world at bay for me**

by iztopher

Robin has some hang-ups about kissing the princess of Halaina to break her curse. Some of them are easy to get over. One of them is a little harder. Myst helps him out.

Title from Easy Silence by the Chicks.

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The princess of Halaina laid across her bed, eyes and mouth closed tight in a deep slumber. Robin strained to see signs of life in the still figure, intently searching for the rise and fall of her breathing.

He found it, and suddenly found his own a little steadier. His heart still hammered in his chest, though, and something else still welled up in the center of his throat, tight and unpleasant. Robin tried to squeeze his hands tightly, a gesture he often resorted to when he found he had anxious energy and nowhere to put it, but the thick fabric of his gloves ruined any pressure.

Boyle was the first to speak. He nudged him forward, not really gently. "Well? Go on ahead."

Robin swallowed the lump in his throat and edged towards the bed. "Right, right. Of course. It's just..." he trailed off. He *really* didn't want to disappoint Boyle. Or Ingrid or Myst, for that matter. But his nerves meant that he also really did not feel capable of saving anyone's life. "I don't think I can do it right now."

"Nonsense." Ingrid's voice, sharp and crisp, rang in his ear from her position midway across the room. She had her hands on her hips, her eyes half-lidded to look down on him. The brim of her hat cast an ominous shadow over her face. "This is the entire reason we took you with us. We even made you a paladin!"

"I know! It's just... she's asleep."

Ingrid sighed, but Robin was surprised to hear something other than

frustration in it. “Exactly. And if you don’t kiss her, she’ll never wake up. I’m certain she’d prefer the peck.”

“And I will. I just need to take a second.”

“Maybe you should go outside?” Myst offered. “Clear your head.”

“Not having us breathing down your neck,” Boyle murmured.

Robin thought it over. Not having three sets of eyes on him sounded nice. “I really like that idea, actually.”

“Fine. Just make it quick.” Ingrid gestured at the door. “We’ll be waiting for when you’ve collected yourself.”

Robin nodded and darted out.

He was gone for about thirty seconds before Boyle rested a hand on his temple. “Just a thought,” he said, “but I don’t trust that kid not to run. Myst, do you think you’d go look after him?”

Myst raised an eyebrow. “Why don’t you do it?”

“Because I intimidate him! I’m fantastic and terrifying and he doesn’t know how to act in my presence. *You*, on the other hand, literally have a spell called soothe.”

“Very well, Corrupted Will.” Myst rolled her eyes and slipped past Boyle and out the door.

Robin wasn’t very far. He was actually still inside, leaning out over the balcony that opened into the throne room down below. He turned his head at the sound of Myst’s approach.

“Sorry,” he started, “I didn’t realize that my break was that quick—”

Myst shook her head and took a spot next to him. “It wasn’t. Boyle asked me to talk to you. Thought some misty magic might calm your nerves.” She wagged her fingers at him and grinned.

“No, that’s fine.” He laughed a little, but it was stiff. “Thanks, though.”

She nodded, settling her elbows on the golden rail in front of her. “Is this really upsetting you that much?”

Robin shook his head. “Not really? It’s more like there’s a lot of little things.”

“Do you wanna talk about them?”

He was quiet for a moment, thinking it over, before nodding. “It could help.”

“Shoot.”

“I mean, I know I have to kiss her to save her, and that’s fine. But I still feel weird about it, y’know? I’d be able to get over that pretty easily if it wasn’t for the other stuff, though. Get it done with and have her be all happy and whatnot.”

“But there’s other problems.”

“Yeah.” Robin sighed. “I don’t want to mess up. What if it doesn’t work? Then what? She stays frozen forever and it’s all my fault because I’m not really a paladin or something?”

“Then we find someone else!” Myst’s chipper voice wrenched him out of his nervous spiral before he could devolve further.

“But then I’ve failed you guys.”

Myst rolled her eyes. “You’ve helped us plenty already. You saved all of our lives, for instance, by protecting us in that cave.” She looked at him, searching his face. He still looked upset, but he was beginning to crack a smile at the compliment. “Look,” she continued, “I can’t promise anything for Boyle or Ingrid. But I wouldn’t be disappointed in you or anything, and I don’t think they would be, either.” She turned her body around so she was facing him at an angle and rested her hand on his pauldron. “The sooner you try, the sooner we can search for someone else, if need be. You’ll do fine. C’mon.”

She went to nudge him towards her, but he leaned back and made a choked, nervous sound in the back of his throat. “Wait. There’s something else.”

“What?”

He turned back around to look at the expanse in front of him. “I don’t know if you’d understand, what with your... mist, wraith, fox, thing going on.”

“I’d like to try. I want to understand humans.”

Robin nodded. He turned back to her and forced himself to stand up straight, swallowing the anxious, self-conscious lump in his throat. “I’ve never kissed anyone before.”

Myst laughed. It wasn’t mean-spirited, and Robin could tell, but the

sharpness stung a little anyways. “I don’t think she’s going to *care*, Robin! She’s not *awake*!” She caught his fallen face, and her own expression faltered. “It’s not about that?”

He shook his head. “I... I wanted it to be with someone I really liked, you know? And... I want to do the right thing and help this girl, but I don’t know her.”

“I think I understand. Mother has been telling me for ages that I ought to find a mate, but I haven’t yet.”

Robin tilted his head to the side, thinking it over. “Yeah,” he said, “that sounds pretty close. I don’t really know what... wraith mates do, or if it’s like human dating, or something, but... I think you get it. But I don’t mind. I’m okay with doing it. It’s just...” he trailed off.

She nodded, but her expression seemed unfocused.

“Myst?”

“What you’re upset about,” she said, with a pause that suggested she was still working it through, “is kissing someone you don’t really know, because you wanted your first kiss to be with someone special to you.”

Robin nodded. “Yeah.”

“So if you kissed someone special to you first, you might feel better?”

“...I mean, I guess. But how is *that* going to happen?”

Myst rolled back on her heels. “What about if you kissed me?”

Robin nearly leaned back. His eyes were wide and his cheeks were reddening. “You’d – you’d be okay with that?”

“I wouldn’t offer if I wasn’t, silly.” Myst was smiling then, a glow to her expression. “We’ve only known each other for a bit, but you’re my friend. You’re important to me. Maybe, if you...”

“Yeah,” Robin said, face flushed red, “yeah, I’d really like that.” He coughed. “Um, thank you, Myst.”

“My pleasure.” She stepped forward, gently taking one of his wrists in each of her hands. “Is now okay?”

“It is.” Robin tried not to stammer, because it was, but it also felt so soon. He *really* liked Myst – she was interesting, and fun-loving, and sweet, and

she both appreciated his protection and looked out for him in equal part. But he'd never even thought about kissing her before she suggested it.

But he really liked the idea. It felt... right. It was what he wanted, now that it had been presented to him. So he squeezed his eyes shut and leaned his face forward, feeling Myst's nose bump his. She giggled a little, brushed her cheek deliberately against his. It reminded him of a cat rubbing against his palm - probably a mist wraith thing. Her skin was almost wet, like she'd been standing out in the rain.

She curved her head back down to find his lips, and kissed him. It was soft and certain, just like her. Her white, messy hair brushed against his cheeks and neck, tickling like a gust of wind.

As soon as she began to pull away, Robin broke out of her hands' gentle grip to wrap her in a close hug.

"Was that like what you wanted?" she asked. He could hear the smile in her voice.

He laughed. "Yeah. It was special. Thank you, Myst."

Myst gently removed herself from his embrace. She smiled, lopsided and fond, at him, before placing her hands on her hips. "You think you're ready to save the day now?"

He slipped an arm in the curve made by one of hers. "I think I am."