



This Time, He Pulls The Trigger

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The joke goes like this: a not-Robin with a new name and a new face grabs a gun and knocks on Joker's door.

But this time, he doesn't call on Batman to prove himself to him. This time, there's no one around to stop him. This time...

...he pulls the trigger.

Chapter 1: One Of Those (Rare) Nights

It's one of those rare nights where all of Joker's henchmen, even Harley, have somewhere else to be. It's one of those rare nights where there are no plots and no heists, and it's just him sitting alone in his hideout, quietly drawing up plans for his next dance with Batsy while eating cereal straight from the box.

It's one of those rare nights where his smile is soft and his guard is down.

"Hey, Jokes," a distorted voice whispers right into Joker's ear, making him jump higher than should strictly be possible. He lands nimbly on the other side of his work table, twisting in the same movement to face the intruder he failed to notice enter.

Joker takes a beat to look him over, his usual stretched-out smile overtaking his face as he switches into *showtime!* mode. The pink-haired, kid-sized intruder looks like he's wearing hooded pajamas, fake claws, and curled shoes like a jester's.

The Joker makes a mental correction: this was the *rather unusual* and definitely Gothamite intruder he failed to notice enter.

"Like my new costume?" the maybe-kid asks, rocking back and forth on his heels as he speaks. The glowing pupils of his void-like eyes curve in some parody of amusement, the only form of expression his nearly featureless mask can make.

"I love it!" Joker tells him genuinely. It's always nice to see someone new and colorful on the scene. His face scrunches up briefly in confusion, though his smile remains, as he adds, "But, uh, do I know ya?"

"Oh, where are my manners? 'I am not what I am'." The other taps something along his wrist. When he next speaks, the distortion is gone. "Recognize me now, Jokes?"

"Trip?" Joker gapes. The third Robin, affectionately dubbed 'Trip' by Riddler, is his favorite — the kid has a great laugh, or at least he did during the few times the uptight sidekick actually let himself laugh in front of Joker. He also hasn't been out patrolling in over three months, ever since Batsy's little Demons showed up. "Wha' happened ta ya? Why da new digs?"

The boy cackles, throwing his head back, and Joker abruptly realizes that none of those other times he heard him laugh were actually the kid letting loose; they were nothing compared to how unhinged he sounds right now.

"S-sorry," Robin III gasps out, holding his stomach. He pulls his bostaff out of his backpack, extending and twirling it idly. It's a nervous tic Joker's seen from the kid before, spinning his weapon in thought as he speaks, and Joker doesn't think much of it. "I've just been getting that question a lot lately. I don't know what people expected, really; B has a real son now, a proper heir, so how could I possibly stay Robin?"

"Batsy wouldn't jus' fire ya," Joker says slowly, subtly looking around in case more of the flock is present. There's something about Robin's body language — something about this whole situation, actually — that's starting to set him on edge. Breaking into his hideout to chitchat is not typical Robin behavior...

...well, except for Robin I for a while near the beginning, but he was an irrepressible gremlin when he first started, so he doesn't really count.

"Of course not." Robin giggles, twirling his staff faster and faster. "But he doesn't really get to, now does he? I hired myself, so I fired myself!"

Joker doesn't know what he's talking about, but the following laughter is contagious to the clown. He bends over, eyes closed from the force of his fit, mouth opening impossibly wide to let out the sounds of mirth. It's so rare that anyone besides Harley laughs with him like this!

(In hindsight, Joker will admit that taking his eyes off a highly-trained Bat that was behaving oddly had been a truly terrible idea. But in his defense, Joker was sleep-deprived and off his game — he was having a quiet, peaceful night five minutes before, for Pete's sake!)

"Which, of course, means I don't have to play by B's rules anymore," Robin adds conversationally, once his laughter's petered down.

Joker looks up at that, at something *not right* under the kid's tone, only to find a *gun* in his face and the kid's bostaff nowhere in sight. He freezes, smile dropping in shock. Robins don't use guns. "W-woah, Trip, wha' are ya-?"

"No brooding rich guy's childhood trauma to hold back my options." Robin clicks the distorter back on, masked eyes flashing, ignoring Joker's words even as his weapon tracks his every twitch. "I can't tell you how much of a relief that is. Don't get me wrong; I love B, really, but I have *always* followed other people's rules. 'Be quiet, sit still, stop being a smartass, go to bed, put down the coffee, cut out that creepy laughing!'"

He sighs, hopping onto the worktable and moving into a crosslegged sit in one graceful motion, all without taking his gun off Joker. "'One man in his time plays many parts'. My whole life, everyone's told me to be someone different, to be someone better... except for you."

"Oh?" Joker prompts, hands lifting into the air at a gesture from the other. If it had been anyone else, he'd already have them knocked out and would be dismantling their tools for fun by now. Unfortunately, this is one of Batsy's brood, about to break his big rule — he has to talk the kid down and call his Darling, before everything goes to Hell.

(He still remembers what happened after the last time something really bad happened to a Robin, still occasionally has nightmares of what the Bat became in response. Most people in Gotham do)

"When I laugh a little too long, when I pull a prank a little too vicious..." Trip snorts. "Even B doesn't like that side of me. You, though, you love it. You *applaud* me for it. Like that time I reprogrammed Red Hood's helmet to play Christmas carols and you were the only one that laughed, the only one that *got the joke*."

"Well it was funny!" Joker tells him, giggling. It really had been hilarious, he still doesn't understand what Batsy got so upset for... Well, he supposes the name-stealing second Robin was still a dangerous crime lord targeting Robin III back then, so maybe that had something to do with it. Still, the look on Robin II's face! Absolutely priceless.

"But, kid," Joker adds, trying to sound serious enough to get his point across. He's not good at serious, but he's known Mr. 'I am the night' long enough to give it a shot. "There ain't nuthin' funny 'bout guns!"

Not *real* ones, anyways. Not by themselves. His 'BANG' flag guns do not count, even if they can actually shoot real bullets. He needs the kid to *believe* that they don't count, at least, or to forget about them maybe. Really, he just needs the kid to drop the damn gun.

"Oh, I think they can be really funny. 'No, no, *they do but jest, poison in jest; no offence i' the world.*'" Robin chuckles darkly, his hand stilling with the gun pointed right at Joker's head. "I won't lie, I was already getting here on my own, but... Well, like I said, you're the only one that gets my jokes. And I think you're especially going to love *this* one, but stop me if you've heard it before. There's a kid named Robin, see, and being Robin's the thing he cares about most in the whole wide world. Then he disappears for a while and gets replaced, only to come back with a new costume and a new name, spouting off nonsense while he waves his silly little gun around."

"And the real funny bit," the kid pauses to try to hold in his laughter, "is that the kid decides to go after *The Joker!*"

Joker considers knocking the kid out anyways, despite his reservations with attacking one of Batsy's flock. The kid's clearly suffered some sort of mental break, or maybe he's been poisoned or something, and the sooner he's back home and getting help the better.

But the Joker just had to choose *this night* of all nights to not obsessively make sure some amount of poisons or sedatives were readily available near his person, and therefore he can't knock the birdie out without hurting him at least a little.

Which presents a bit of a problem: if he returns the kid anonymously, Batsy will tear up Gotham looking for the person that attacked his son; if he returns him in person, Batsy will go full Papa Wolf before the Joker can explain what happened; if he doesn't return him, if he tries to get him help on his own, then Batsy might literally kill every criminal he runs into until he's found.

"I have heard dat one, actually, an' I didn't like da punchline much," Joker tells him, resolving to keep trying to talk him down before resorting to hurting the kid. He tuts playfully, shaking his head. "Fer shame, Trip, ya know better dan ta repeat jokes like dis! Ya gotta keep things fresh if ya wanna stay relevant — everyone knows *dat*."

"But I haven't even told my joke yet," Robin complains, his voice making it clear that he's pouting behind his mask. Joker can just imagine the puppy eyes. "That was just the setup, the real joke's like this — there's another kid that comes along, one who's a little different than everyone else, looking for a place for himself. He names himself Robin, and the real Robin doesn't like this very much, but he gets over it eventually because the other kid only became Robin because someone *needed* him to."

His voice gets sad, even through the distortion. "One day, a new kid comes along, one that's *a bit different than everyone else*. He doesn't know how to find a place for himself, so Robin gives him his; he needs it more. But now not-Robin's got a problem, since he has no name."

Robi- not-Robin chuckles. "But he gets a name eventually. Goodfellow. Get it? For '*I am that merry wanderer of the night*'."

Joker snorts. If it wasn't for the gun, he'd double over laughing again.

Goodfellow laughs softly, his first one to not sound at least slightly insane in the entire conversation. "I knew you'd get it, you *always* get it. I'm not good at jokes, am I?" he says, sighing. "I go on too long, no sense of timing... Maybe I should stick with pranks, huh?"

Joker makes a vague agreeing noise, tilting his head in a 'sorry but yeah' gesture, and chuckles again. The kid really isn't the best comedian, he's got to admit. But at least he sounds calmer now. That's a good sign, right?

"*'I was not born under a rhyming planet'*," Goodfellow laments. "I thought I might as well try at a proper joke, though, as a 'thank you' of sorts," he explains. "Shall we get to the punchline? I promise it'll be a blast."

Joker doesn't say anything, growing wary once again. Something's... off. But he isn't too worried, really — this is still a Robin (Not-Robin) after all, and worst case, Joker is still more than a match for one little bird that's all on his own (*where is Batsy?*).

Goodfellow takes his silence as an answer, apparently, as he continues brightly, "Where was I? Oh yes, Goodfellow loves his family, of course — but now he thinks that maybe he can stop pulling himself apart just to keep them from crumbling, maybe he can do things for his own sake without giving up on them. So he takes his new name, and he puts on a new face, and he makes a new weapon that fits him so much better than a ridiculous little boomerang does. And Goodfellow, see, he goes and he knocks on the door of a man known for jokes."

"In other words," Goodfellow finishes, "a Robin with a new name and a new face gets replaced, so he grabs a gun and he visits the Joker. But this time, he doesn't call Batman to come stop him. This time—"

His voice drops and Joker ducks, but Goodfellow just changes his aim, shooting for his heart rather than his head.

"—he pulls the trigger."

Epilogue: The Batstalkers Club

Goodfellow recruits them into a 'Batstalkers Club', since all three of them are known for obsessing over and flat-out stalking Batman. Bat-Mite drops in occasionally, excited to compare notes with people just as obsessed with the Bat as he is (he actually might not be the most obsessed person there, and he isn't exactly sure how to feel about that).

Goodfellow is loving having friends that share his interests (even if they are hanging out with him against their wills).

Joker thinks literally everything about this is hilarious (and is making sure the kid's not having a mental break after all).

Edward very much wishes they'd stop kidnapping him for this nonsense! (But he eventually accepts that he's part of this now and isn't getting out of it).

When he eventually finds out about the club, Bruce just buries his head in his hands and questions his life choices...

Happy April Fool's, everybody! ;) And happy birthday to me! XD

*If we shadows have offended,
Think but this, and all is mended,
That you have but slumber'd here
While these visions did appear*

Joker comes to groggily. It takes him a moment to realize that he's tied tightly to a chair in a dark room he doesn't recognize. This would normally be cause for concern, but all Joker can think about in this moment is that he's not dead *why isn't he dead*, he's not even in any pain, what-

"He's awaaaaake!" a familiar voice calls out. Joker spots Eddie nearby, tied to a chair just like he is and looking very put out indeed. "Let's get a move on already. This has taken up enough of my very valuable time as it is."

"Honestly, you're acting like you have no respect for *dramatics*, and we both know that's not true," a distorted voice responds from the darkness. A still-basically-pajamas clad figure steps into the circle of dim light that surrounds the two chairs, though this time his mask and wig are gone, replaced with a yellow domino. He turns to Joker, smirking. "The punchline is that it's a stun gun!" Ol' Trip declares cheerfully, waving said gun in the air with a beaming grin.

Joker stares blankly at him for a full minute while his mind reboots. "A stun gun?" he repeats softly.

"Yep, I made it myself," Goodfellow tells him proudly. "*The fool doth think he is wise, but the wise man knows himself to be a fool!*" And what a fool I am, ha! Told you I was good at pranks." He giggles. "Did you like my little joke?"

And Joker, he just... just...

A Robin with a new face and a new name cuts loose, knocking on Joker's door. Well, he doesn't really knock and probably didn't use the door, but that's beside the point because he shoots the clown in the heart—

—with a Stun Gun.

...he just starts laughing. He knocks his chair over from the force of it, wheezing and out of breath by the time the kid rushes over to pull him back up.

"Good laughter or bad laughter?" he whispers. And, awww, not many ever think to ask him that.

"Very good, liddle Birdie," Joker cackles. "How can it not be aftah such a great joke?!"

"Glad that someone liked it," Goodfellow mutters, glaring sideways at Eddie with a childish pout.

"Yes yes, very funny." Eddie-boy rolls his eyes. "Can someone please untie me now?!"

"Ah, ah, ah," Goodfellow tuts, shaking a finger at him. "Not quite yet, my good sir." He pulls the Joker's chair back up and taps some button on his wrist that turns on more lights in the room. He spins on his heel and flits over to a desk set up across from the chairs. "Now, gentlemen, I know you're wondering why I brought you here."

"I certainly am," Edward grumbles, pulling at his restraints with the air of someone that knows their actions will be fruitless but feels the need to try anyways. As if he's been trying at this for a while. As if he really can't escape and isn't just playing along.

Now, sneaking up on and shooting Joker while his guard's down and he's not actually trying to fight back is one thing. But Joker has seen Eddie get out of a lot of constraints, Bat-level ones even, and yet Trip has apparently succeeded in kidnapping and effectively restraining *The Riddler* himself. So maybe Joker should be feeling just a little bit uneasy about this whole thing.

But a Robin just kidnapped two Rogues while laughing like a lunatic and dressed up like a pseudo-Shakespearan goblin/nightmare/thingy going to a pajama party, and if that isn't just some of the funniest shit Joker's experienced in a while!

"I know we all love a certain Bat. 'Under love's heavy burden do we sink'," Goodfellow continues, pulling down a screen filled with strings and thumbtacks and so many photos of Batsy. It looks like a stalker board that can rival Ed's and can almost rival Joker's own.

The little Birdy turns to them, steepling his fingers together like Lexie does when he's being overdramatic about Supes. His grin is about as sharp and obsessive as Lexie's, too, when he asks, "But I was wondering how you gentlemen feel about *photography*?"

Oh yeah, The Joker thinks, this is definitely worth a little bit of kidnapping.

— end of "This Time, He Pulls The Trigger" —