

Oh, Before You Were Born

by Mark Whitaker

For Hannah and Lauren, with love.

A man and a boy walk across the desert. I say boy, although he's 20 at least. But everyone calls him a boy. A man and two tiny girls look on.

'Where's Deetoo-Dootoo now?'

'You'll see him in a minute.'

'But where is he?'

'He's in the desert too. Those men are going to buy him.'

'And the shiny one?'

'Yes, they'll buy the shiny one too. Just watch.'

The man and the boy walk towards us and the camera pans.

'There's Deetoo-Dootoo!'

'And the shiny one!'

'Yes, now just watch.'

'Who's that robot, Daddy?'

'I don't know. I don't think he's got a name.'

'Is he called Deetoo-Dootoo?'

'No, that's R2-D2 there. There's only one R2-D2.'

They fall silent for a moment and watch as the man and the boy browse what's on offer.

'Why will they buy them, Daddy?'

'What?'

'Why will those men buy Deetoo-Dootoo and the shiny one?'

'Because they want them.'

'Why?'

'Oh... because they want the robots to do jobs for them in their house.'

'Doesn't their Mummy do jobs?'

'I don't know. Listen, just...'

'Daddy!' A new tone now, full of urgency. 'They bought the wrong one!'

'They didn't bought Deetoo-Dootoo!'

'Just watch...'

'But they're going, Daddy!'

'With the shiny one and the wrong one!'

'They'll come back for him, just watch...'

There's a bang and a plume of smoke rises from the top of the little red robot.

'Uncle Owen,' calls the boy. 'Look! This R2 unit has a bad motivator!'

'They still hasn't bought Deetoo-Dootoo, Daddy.'

'Just *watch*...'

The man talks to the traders and the little blue robot trundles over.

'There you go, what did I tell you?'

'They got Deetoo-Dootoo now! And the shiny one!'

'Daddy, how did you knowed that?'

'Because I've seen it before.'

'Yesterday?'

'No, a long time ago.'

'Next week?' Time is still a matter to be experimented with.

'No, next week hasn't happened yet, sweetheart.'

'*Last week?*' her sister ventures proudly.

'No, when I was a little boy.'

'When you was four?'

'Nearly. When I was five.'

'But we're four, aren't we Daddy?'

'Yes, you're four.'

'Do girls see it when they're four and boys see it when they're five?'

'Yes, sort of. Look, they're going home now.'

'Did you bought it on CD?'

'Did you *buy* it on *D-V-D*.'

'Did you bought it on *D-D-D*?'

'No, I saw it at the pictures.'

'Why?'

'Because DVDs hadn't been invented then and it was on at the pictures.'

'Did Mummy take you?'

'No, sweetheart, Mummy was just a little girl then and I didn't know her. Grandma and Grandpa took me.'

'Why?'

'Because they're my Mummy and Daddy. They took me and Simon.'

'Did they take Tash?'

'No, Simon didn't know Tash then.'

'Did they take Beti?'

'No, girls, Beti wasn't born then. Listen, just watch the film.'

A moment's quiet. The man and the boy are sitting round a table with a woman. They eat and talk.

'Is that them's Mummy?'

'Well, it's that man's auntie.'

'Oh. Where's his Mummy?'

'It's a long story. Just watch.'

A pause.

'She isn't doing any jobs.'

'No, Deetoo-Dootoo does the jobs now, doesn't he Daddy?'

'Yes.'

'But where's Deetoo-Dootoo now?'

'You'll see him in a minute.'

'But where is he?'

'I don't know! Look, should we skip forward a bit and find R2-D2?'

'Yes!' in unison.

'OK.' The picture jumps, then jumps again. 'Look, there he is.'

'Why's he in the desert again, Daddy?'

'Because he ran away.'

'Didn't he want to do the jobs?'

'No, he ran away to find that old man.'

'What's that old man's name?'

'Obi-Wan Kenobi.'

'Obi... Obi.'

'How do you know his name, Daddy?'

'I just do.'

'Because you seen this film before?'

'Yes.'

'When?'

I sigh. Then I adopt the special voice. 'Oh, before you were born.' Normal voice again. 'Now just watch.'

The old man looks wistfully into the distance and says, 'I haven't gone by the name of Obi-Wan since... oh, before you were born.'

They look at me open-mouthed, in awe of my mind powers.

I've got a good feeling about this.