

The Windmill Of His Memory

by Erika Byrne-Ludwig

Mars was counting the hours of daylight left to complete his windmill. It was a simple matter of mounting the spire on the open wire cylinder and attaching the sails onto it. He was a landscape gardener.

It had happened on a Sunday evening. She was standing there, her face turned to the sea, her wet dress moulding her hips, her lips gorged with sea-water.

The nail he held between his teeth fell on the grass. He picked it up and leaned the ladder against the wire wall.

It had been one of those evenings when bodies enjoy squirming. She was like that, that night — blazing, lazy, a bit high, just a bit, just enough. Mars remembered the details. He slipped another nail between his teeth. An acid taste settled in the corner of his mouth.

The spire was on the wire cylinder. He lifted up one of the sails and climbed up the ladder again. Her dishevelled hair entangled in his, her lips with his. He liked their sheen, their ocean taste. The pain shot again. He rubbed it. In the car they had been in on that fatal evening, something had poked him in the eye.

The gate was closed but a hand could open it. She was coming in, swaying in her summer dress, white with colourful bird prints, her knees — a language of their own. She looked up the ladder, he looked down at her, long enough to let her silhouette leave its reflection on him. Before resuming his hammering and adding the last touches, the wind had started to blow.

The windmill was now complete. He walked around it, decided it had style. A passer-by's glance and nod confirmed his impressions. Tomorrow he would let the birds fly. He walked inside the house and poured himself a drink. From the bare window he could see the windmill. The sails were turning. He fetched some paper and a pen.

The letter started in the middle of nowhere, on a sharp bend, with sirens and ambulances, screams and pain. He talked about his windmill, its dynamism, its energy, its presence. His breezy ally. At the end he thought he might mention his eye, his confusion, his doubts. Then again he might not. He folded the letter and stamped it.

The sails had been turning for days and nights. The water nearby in the pond was moving away in widening rings, the canaries throwing songs and trills through the wire. Swiftly, almost roughly, Maya sat her child on the lawn.

She had actually come, even managed it with ease, though with a limp. The accident had also left its mark on her. Now, she was prattling with little Micko about the birds in the windmill and the goldfish in the pond, adding colours and tone to the entire garden. In a moment of thorough contentment, Mars wondered why the accident had ever blown them apart.

"You know, I never talk much about it," Maya stopped him. She caught up with Micko and sat him down beside her with a plush duckling. "Have you been back since?"

Mars was looking at Micko's chubby stockiness planted there opposite him. When he turned his head, he noticed the toddler's whirl with in its centre an eye. He followed its concentric path. A light tickle began to touch him inside his face. "Not again," he whinged.

"What is it?" Maya asked, touching his arm.

He took off his glasses and pressed his hand on his dying eye. He could feel dust and bits of straw embedded in the cornea: "It's that pain ..." he complained.

"A wet compress might ..." she suggested.

"No, no. It won't last," he replied. "It usually doesn't."

Micko had wriggled to the pond. Maya fed him under a tree. Ripples and rings clashed with each other over the water in the shade. She thought of injuries that never quite heal, of broken glass, of large body scars.

When the darkness veered off, the pain left its retreat. Mars had never shared the more clandestine parts of himself. Blushing a little, he put his glasses back on. She was watching him. Her lips were parted like a glazed oval ring. Between her eyes shallow frowns showed a wavy drawing of lines.

The wind was blowing through the narrow passages between the spikes of her dark hair. A sea-urchin ... He was curious to know whether each spike would flex under his hand if he only touched it lightly. His healthy eye moved to her inflated lips, followed the downward route of her pendant and rested on the dangler — a bird-cage made of silver threads, gracefully intertwined, with a golden canary in it. It amused him.

There were vibrations in the air, veiled touches, suspended words, amidst wing frictions. He talked about his eye and she about her knee. Micko, with babble and gesture, showed his small discovery. His sparse reddish hair intrigued Mars. A scene sprung up from his childhood. "Mars," he whispered, recalling the red crew cut of his school years, his coming to terms with its colour, his nickname "Mars".

Maya was staring quietly. When he took off his glasses she saw his live eye turn a bright satin and his blind eye ooze under its shroud.

