

Ballad of Vengeance and Violence

by Ivan Reyes

Tim didn't know how to ride a bike. Hold onto the handlebars, his father told him. Hold on tight. Now take your legs, there, yes. Push down with one leg, he thrust forward and felt the fear of death or god, we do not know for sure, don't worry, his father told him. I've got you, I won't let go, you won't fall. He pushed down again on the peddle and as his father held the handlebars the little boy on his little black bike sped to again, and his heart leaped. The sun was setting. Okay, that is enough for one day, the father said. He pulled the little boy home by the handlebars.

A month later, the little boy, Tim his name is was looking down a path strewn with leaves as the grey day hung over him. There were 5 stairs at the end of the path. He calculated the force he'd have to exert. He began pedaling. He sharpened his eyes. The stairs neared, his tiny legs pushed and pushed and finally he was at the stairs and he used his arms to pull up the handlebars and he jumped and the bicycle followed him and he soared and he landed. And the bike thudded against the ground and tire squealed upon concrete and made a black streak and he pedaled the bike victoriously in circles.

Down the block, across the street, a little boy watched him hop over the stairs, and he is filled with ephemeral and painful jealousy. He watches him spin circles in his bike, gilded by sunlight, clearly the superior specimen. He looks down at the toys he'd been playing with, they suddenly lose their luster. This is painful too.

He runs in his direction, and yells, "How did you do that?" at the boy riding the bike but is replied to with dead silence. The little boy wants to be left alone, with his victory. He also witnesses his own

superiority, as does the observing boy, and he simply wants to revel in it, for now. He wants it to soak into all of his being. He wants to drink it all up. He wants it to seep into his bones and he wants it to sustain him all his life.

At dinner time, the little boy with the toys told his mother he wanted a bicycle. "Those are expensive. Why do you want one?" his mother prodded. Because this boy down the street jumped down the stairs next to the park. The mother's blood pressure instantly skyrocketed. Her anger rose with it. The little boy went on, saying, "You should have seen it mom, he went -- " then he imitates the sound of a jet airplane, followed by the sound of a fifty car pileup. "And then he rolled away. It was the best, mom. The best. He's the best, I think."

After dinner Tony's -- the boy with the toys -- mother makes a phone call. Tony is just watching cartoons and playing with his toys. Tony peers around the corner and hears his mother. "Yes, it's dangerous. And it's a bad influence to the rest of our boys. Of course. Of course. You have a good evening."

Tim's -- the boy with the bike -- mother lays into him. She hits him with a belt. She reminds him that he is a bad boy, and that she doesn't know why he can't just be normal like the other boys. She expresses her feelings that she is cursed to have such a disobedient child. She rambles on for another thirty minutes. Tim's hatred for his mother is growing within him silently. She won't stop screeching. She begins to cry and goes into the kitchen. Tim walks defeatedly into the living room, his father asks Tim to sit on his lap. He strokes his hair and tells him he is a good boy. He says, "Your mom is just tired." His father's words are soothing and Tim grows sleepy. He sleeps on his father's lap. As he's slipping away into a dream he hears his father say, "I think what you did is cool." It was Tim's father that got him that bike, and assembled it for him, and he oiled it and tightened it as needed and Tim felt like he must be some kind of genius mechanic.

Two weeks later, on his way to a neighbor boy's house, Tim sees Tony on his way to the nearby convenience store. He runs up to him and places a small, balled up fist against Tony's temple and Tony immediately starts crying, then Tim pushes him to the grass, he mounts him, and rains down punches to his abdomen, his head, his mouth, his eye sockets, his face, his chin, his chest. Tony does not fight back. He is simply crying, but he possesses an innocent reverence for Tim. He is unable to resist his will, even if Tim's will were to destroy him. It is a harrowing, vengeful beating.

Then Tim stands up and looks upon Tony. He extends a hand. Tony cannot stop crying. Tim yells, "Stop crying!" Tony blinks and they stare at each other in silence. Then Tony clutches Tim's hand and he stands up.

Tim and Tony spend the rest of the day talking. At night, Tony arrives at his home, and his mother sees the state of him. She is half horrified, but Tony's calm disposition prevents her from going completely apeshit. "What happened, honey?" she asks.

"Nothing happened, ma."

She is examining his body.

"I tried to go down those stairs, on my bike," said Tony.

She stands up, confusion mounting and mixing with deep mortal concern. Then she sees that Tim is actually there too, behind a shrub a little way down the walkway that leads to their house. "You are a bad little boy!" she screams. Tim feels a familiar barb twist around his heart. She grabs Tim by the arm, "You stay here!" she yells to Tony, and she drags Tim the block and a half to his house and thrusts his little arm away from her once they arrive, "You leave my little boy alone, you hear me, he is a good little boy," and tears

twinkle in the moonlight, and she walks away, and Tim watches her leave as she bounds the corner and is gone. He stands there alone for a moment, because a nice breeze is blowing. Then he turns and opens his door. He goes into his room, there is a guitar, posters all over the wall, a sega video game console, a bed. He puts an Ace Ventura tape into his vcr. When it is over he goes to sleep.

The next day, Tim is sitting atop a hill on his skateboard that is three quarters of a mile to the bottom.

