

Uncontrollable

by Ivan Reyes

It might have been a Sunday. Or maybe a Tuesday. Either way, I remember the way the blue wind turned the leaves. They shimmered. As if ripples of water. The wind was cool like hardwood, if there was such a house that only you were allowed to step foot in, and which when you did, the floor felt smooth and even under your bare feet. The sun beat like a furnace in the sky. The clouds were thin. My father had just come home from work. I had just got done with stickball. I was holding my bat across my shoulder, and my hat under my other arm, and my shoes were covered in dirt. And my jeans were covered in dirt up to the ankle. He walked right past me, his large rubber soles plodding across our hardwood floor like some large uncontrollable duck. He walked into the kitchen.

He had on his blue jumper. His toolbox rang and sang when he let it down on the kitchen counter. My mother turned around to kiss him. He seemed lucky to have her. It made me feel as if I'd get lucky, too, and eventually I would. Her red hair glinted in the sun, the light coming through the aperture of the beige, floral curtains. She was Irish. Her fiery habit fit his fat, Jewish calmness. Apart they were nothing; but together they made something, like a jigsaw. When they were done kissing, they both looked at me.

"He passed his swimming lesson," she said.

He looked at her. My body seemed to fill up with joy and restlessness and nervousness and I looked out to the tree that swayed in the wind in the sun outside the window.

"Did he," he said, looking at me. In that moment, all emotion fled from my body. I was suspended within an out of body experience. He walked nearer to me, and I felt stronger. He picked me up, and I held my bat tightly so as not to drop it. But my hat fell to the floor.

What I remember about that day, in the living room there was a complicated mess. There was paper strewn everywhere. I didn't like it. The mess made me feel uneven. Something like, when a song is playing, and you stop it early, right before the last note hits. I can see a tornado on the other side of the world. Only, nobody else sees it.

The paper was strewn, everywhere. And I remember bits of string strewn there, too, later on I learned a package had arrived that day. It was something I couldn't even imagine. It was plastic, and metal rods, oversized nails and metal chains, and in the corner of my eye I saw that dad had brought his sledgehammer into the room, the one that stays in the shed, otherwise.

The night was falling, so dad got out his generator. He set up his big lamps. Though we still had 2 hours of twilight left, before it vanished, but doing so outside our conscious minds, we got out the generator now. For my father hated stumbling around in the dark for a cord or switch or even a resting spot, for if it flipped over, he would grow angry and curse, and mom hated cussing.

But he let me do it. If it was in good taste. And if mom was not around. Speaking ill of women was forbidden. A man could curse his objects, because he is cursed to toil under them, but if he cursed his wife or any woman he reduced them to an object and so cursed his life. This would not do. A man would need to be honest to his wife, and any woman, for any woman could end up his wife if he was a good man, and on the other hand be a snake to his objects. It made sense to me. My father was a smart man.

So, when he let down that sledgehammer it drove the spike into the earth. He was making me a swing set. It was in the package. The one that came earlier. I liked it.

I swung on it for the entire summer. At least once every day. It was a welcome distraction. Sometimes I'd just read on it. I sat on the rubbery swing seat and read in the heat of the boiling sun. After that, during the winter, dad would put a tarp over it when it rained, although even in winter it never snowed here.

While my father was working on the swing set, mom had gone out for food, at the grocery store, and when she came back there was an atmosphere of news about her. Time stopped or slowed down around her. Her face was concerned. The cool night air hung thick with the sound of crickets chirping. My father walked over to her. They both walked in the house.

The shadow of that day still hangs over me. In college, once I met my wife, that is, the woman who would become my wife, I told her about it and her face went flush and then suddenly pale. A man came to our door. He was a dirty man. A hobo. He was asking for food or change or something to eat or a place to use the bathroom. My father and mother half regretfully turned him away. He pointed his toes in the opposite direction. When he got to the edge of the walkway he lifted his hat to us. My father waved, despite the feeling of lifelessness that now hung about the air. He winced, as if he realized he had been communicating with a figment of his imagination, and not a man at all. We were all left a little shook. But even so, we returned to normality fairly quickly.

My father turned on the tv. And mom went looking for something in the upstairs study.

After about half an hour my father turned off the tv to resume work on the swing set. I was his shadow.

My mother sat me down. The homeless man had been let in by our neighbors from slightly down the road, and I had been playing stickball with their kid earlier. He killed the kid first, then he made

his way to the wife, and the dad put up a fight; he was found with several stab wounds. The old man was never found.

But he was positively identified by 10 neighbors. Which either means that it took him 10 tries to accomplish what he wanted, or that he continued knocking on doors after he had slain that poor family and the boy I played stickball with. Alex. He was a good kid. Funny. His dad was serious, but retained a sense of certain and unquestionable fairness. I only caught glimpses of his mom. Moving from the eastern side of the living room to the western. Asking him a quick question. They were all gone. Had they been there, I asked myself. Again, time seemed to stop to make way for this emotion. When God made the sun, I wonder if he stopped to think he'd ever have to replace it. That's how I felt about the Stephensons. Would the planets explode. Later on I learned that what I felt was akin to phantom pain. The pain of the absence of something that was once there.

I flew my kite. Or I swang. When I got older I drank. I smoked pot. Anything to forget Alex's last words.

"Well, boys, I'm going home to watch The Simpsons."

Because I know he watched at least half of it. I met Claire at a party. And she had red hair. They say boys marry their moms, and girls marry their fathers. I'm not sure how much I believe anything. Because I swear it was her eyes that drew me in like two giant magnets. And her laugh. Two features very distinct from my mother.

Claire's big breasts dangled in front of me. You know what I mean? These were real ice breakers. She smiled. She laid her hair gently over my shoulder. I could smell her flowery-smelling shampoo. She was a big girl. With eyes that pierced like katanas. I was happy. She was my girl. I was her man, and more. I was Hercules. She was

Xena. She laid down. She felt like a warm cloud as if a warm ghost,
right next to me. The tv glowed. We we're both happy.

There was a knock on the door. I didn't answer it.

