

## Uprisal

Some nights she swore she could still hear the squeak, the easing down and release of the giant springs in the frame of the trampoline outside her bedroom window, the tough summer feet hitting with a twop, twop on the heavy woven vinyl surface, always the pleasurable thud releasing the suspense of whether the boy jumped straight, came down right, not on his neck or shoulder, not diving like a small visitor once had, thinking mistakenly for one split second it was a swimming pool, his legs flipping over his head like a contortionist, squeezing him breathless, coming up, gasping, then screaming out for his mother and climbing down penitently into her safe arms.

Hand-holding little ones there had been, facing, giggling, bouncing gently, testing, so afraid of this world that put them off balance, so delighted by it.

Bigger, they might go in threes and fours, attacking, laughing, shoving, their hair splayed out in the downrush, jumping into each other's territory, causing another to fall backwards, off balance and whooping and vowing vengeance. Later they would lie in a row in their sleeping bags like mummies in the early morning moonlight, stilled with exhaustion.

Or a sole boy might take an oath to sleep alone on the tramp a whole night, one who had been hurt by life that day and wanted to be set right by the test of darkness and the course of the Big Dipper. She would listen for him all night through her open window and find him in the morning light huddled beneath the dew-laden quilt, the small brown dachsie who had seen him through the loneliness now plowing the covers, absorbing his warmth and willing him to waken.

Later there had been times when the giant canvas, strung with dozens of springs, any one of which could knock a person cockeyed if it got loose, rolled two young lovers together, doing the job the brochure had said it would—throwing bodies back to the center. Oh, the squeals, the mock protests, the movements that went on under the blankets in the name of play.

And now the trampoline was leaving, because there had been no boys for some years to squeak it, or shout and push upon it, to bring friends or small dogs to its tricky flatness, to roll around on it tickling each other helpless, or to woo the latest girl. The only being still around was the small brown dog, and he, only because he was buried in a pillowcase beneath one corner, a tile with childish scrawl saying his name, not room to say this site was chosen for burial because the little dog loved the trampoline so much—or rather the small boys who had jumped with him in their arms, hugging him even as they terrified him. He had taken their love where he could.

One morning, having her coffee on the deck, it came to her the trampoline was no more than a dinosaur, outdated and useless taking up a corner of the yard where she could plant a garden. She went into the house and called the orphanage.

She would show the boys. They never came home now—well, hardly ever—but if and when they did in the future, they would look out and see their trampoline gone, a memory, something they shouldn't expect her to keep taut and ready for boys who had taken their laughter, their sweaty, plastered-down hair, their knees ashy with bouncing, away into the world. One was halfway across the country, taken up with getting ahead. Another had married and was preoccupied with his bride. The youngest had become a scholar, barely with time to call except when he needed money.

The orphanage pickup, pulling a flatbed trailer, came in the afternoon after school to collect it. She had the young man who rang the bell drive into the alley as she passed through the house and into the yard to open the back gate.

It hadn't occurred to her how many boys might be brought on such an outing. She tried to count. Maybe there were seven—no, nine. They leapt out of the cab and down from the flatbed trailer and swarmed past her as she struggled to get the gate over a patch of stickers.

When she turned around, they were all over the trampoline and she had to rush and tell them they must take off their shoes before jumping. Without bothering to acknowledge her, they pulled their shoes off and chucked them across the yard. They had taken possession of something that wasn't yet theirs.

The young man who drove the truck seemed hardly older than the biggest boys in the group, except he had a sadness in his face and a becoming modesty. He told her he was a former resident who had returned after college to become a house dad. "To all these?" she asked. "No, just some," he said, filling out her donation receipt. She could fill out

the value herself. She hardly knew what she would put—what the thing had cost, or some inadequate estimate of the fifteen years it had served.

Now the young man called the boys to get down and they instantly and surprisingly obeyed. They surrounded the frame and grabbed hold of it while the biggest one shouted, “All together now—Yo!” but nothing happened because the welded footing was enmeshed in the ground cover of honeysuckle.

Immediately some boys stooped and without permission began to snatch at the vines, ripping them backwards across the bars, flinging the leaves and flowers outward over the yard. A fat boy with a country face, maybe thirteen, turned and perhaps seeing her for the first time, said, “Lady, you got a box of matches I can borrow?”

“Whatever for?” she said.

“I can burn this stuff real easy,” he said, “I mean real easy.”

“Oh no you can’t,” she said. “You’d melt the bed of the trampoline and maybe even catch my house on fire.”

He wrinkled his nose. “No I wouldn’t,” he said loudly. “I know how to be careful with fire.”

“Troy,” called the house father, “hush that up right now. Remember our deal? You could come if you would be nice and not argue.”

“I could too burn it,” Troy went on. “I’m the only one who’s got it figured out.”

“Go sit in the cab,” the house father said.

Troy’s eyes filled with tears. He wadded up the honeysuckle he was holding and pitched it as far as he could. Then he went to find his shoes. He was wailing loudly by the time he reached the pickup.

The other boys pulled steadily at the vines until the frame was freed. They made another try at lifting it, straining upward, and this time it gave and they walked it to the fence, where, with many manly directives to each other, they succeeded in turning it on its side and hauling it through the gate. Out in the alley there was another general scramble as they righted it and lifted it on the flatbed.

Then at the admonition of the house dad, the boys lined up and for the first time acknowledged her, with a “Thank you, ma’am,” and a grimy handshake.

“That’s all right,” she said. “Sure.” “Glad for you to have it.” “Have fun, boys.”

Now they fell away like astronauts floating over the edge of the horizon. The smaller ones scrambled into the double cab while several of the older ones got in the back to steady the trampoline on its ride.

They bounced off down the alley, the trailer hopping over the ruts, and trampoline shifting and creaking at every motion. Dogs in the side yards barked their alarms and hurled themselves against their fences full force at the strange sight.

She found herself leaning against the gate, not intending to, but gazing after them until they came to the end of the block and slowly, like a parade, angled left on to the street and were gone. She turned back now, yanking at the gate, cursing the clump of stickers that had grown so thick beneath it.

The honeysuckle vines, broken and trampled, lay all about the yard. She saw for the first time that the dog’s tombstone had been pried up and propped against the fence. A great yawning white space filled the yard, like when a tree is cut down, and she thought for a moment that this must be the only place left on earth not filled with boys.