

Operation Boogie Man

Xen

“Where is he now?”

We quiz each other on every crick creaking the house.

Ning

Downstairs--music room, in front of the stereo.

Xen

Called the game “Boogie Man Battleship”. Two points for a direct hit; one for the correct side of the room. I have 97 to her 136. We always stop when she’s up.

Then, I am dispatched to make sure our coordinates are on target. We count up points. If she wins, we watch Gem. If I win, GI Joe. The Holograms are catchy.

This week, there haven’t been many missions. He-Man and his swords are hostages in her room.

She’s “too busy to play”, she said.

But I still see her collecting supplies around the house, surgery tape, steak knives, an oyster shucker, and two checks from *Nanay’s* drawer-- without me.

AND I had to knock.

There was tape over the key hole. I turned the knob, and a bell chirped on the other side. Door wouldn’t pull open. She’d tied the knob to the radiator.

We only rigged the door when we were in there, together.

I went back to my room, watched the Princess Bride alone, sword fought my shadow, said our favorite part by myself. *My name is Inigo Montoya. You killed my father. Prepare to die.*

Ning

Can I sleep on your top bunk?

Xen

I wished I had closed my door.

I didn't have a radiator to rig it shut. But, I wished I had closed it.

Her question--*Rhetorical*.

She was holding her sleeping bag and mine, a field hockey stick and an ice skate.

I told her, "You can have the bottom bunk".

Ning

It's gotta be the top.

Xen:

She walked right past me and up the ladder. She scrambled up and down, filling the sleeping bag. I saw her stuff *Nanay's* crystal vase and my communion rosary in there.

I already knew, she was scared because of some Papa bull shit. I don't know why. I'm the only one he's ever spanked.

Usually, we team up. When he comes home from work, one glance at her snagged smile tows him into the music room. She widens into an open-mouthed grin and he sinks onto the couch, primed.

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Papa:

Play my song, my boy!

Xen:

I spread my arms like bat wings. My hands hover ready to strike. My fingers march over the keys, clashing chords together. My voice rises up to sing the *Tagalog* song I made just for him, "*Papa, Puta Ina Mo*".

Bang Joplin-style and they hear what they want. He joins in, stumbling tongue too fat for the foreign words. He chuckles, watching my sister laugh.

I throw my head back, wailing in Tagalog, "Papa is a *biiiiiiiiitch!*"

When I put down my final thunderous trill, my ears hurt from all the clapping. My fingers are stiff from banging.

My mother just smiles and never breathes a word.

My sister and I bow together.

I have decided to launch my own mission.

Maybe she thinks Papa's trying to spank her?

I will intervene. I will say, "My name is Xen. You scared my sister. Prepare to die."
Prepare to die...too strong? "Prepare to leave my room."

She is changing for bed; slipping pajamas over pajamas over pajamas.

Extra padding? He's never spanked her, just me. So I don't know what's up. I will make my voice, big and deep, echo like when I push down on all the piano pedals at once, and even bigger than when he yells through the tunnel of his cupped hands.

My name is Xen. You scared my sister. Prepare to leave my room.

*My name is Xen. You scared my sister. Prepare to get the **hell** out of my room.*

Yup. Sounds sword-fighter-y. The Spanish are always talking about hell.

Living room--bottom of the stairs; landing--next to the hibiscus plant; bathroom--in front of the sink, (didn't wash his hands). Hallway--outside my door.

I wish I had closed it.

She's not breathing. So, I am still too. I am sitting up. He doesn't notice that I'm awake.

He's on the ladder,

one rung then another,

one more and he is level with her.

It is time; before he tries to spank her.

In the dresser mirror he is teetering to get his balance.

It is time.

It is time.

I am going to spring from the bed, like the Joker packed too tight in a jack in the box.

He is banging around in her sleeping bag like she is a ragtime song on the piano.

I am going to pounce and say: My name is Xen. You are...what the fuck are you doing to my sister?

I listen to myself swallow and re-start.

My throat is yanking like a lawn mower string. Engine won't turn over like I forgot to flip the primer. He doesn't turn. I'm speaking. It's almost the sound our dog made, when we snapped the plastic cone around his head, before he curled up in the corner to bite his tail and die.

"My..."

My name...

I'm eight. I have my bare hands and the Duck Hunt gun. He-Man is lost somewhere in her room. I am still waiting for him to find me.

He is so big on that ladder, like the fox that's poaching eggs.

Papa:

Go to sleep!

Xen:

His shadow swells into a samurai wiping rust from his sword.

I'm eight.

I try to close my eyes.

I'm no warrior. *Conquistadors* aren't cowards.

I watch their tangled shadows and wonder why no one ever reaches out for me.