

Remembering Merry-Go-Round Horses

I am thinking about, dreaming about, merry-go-rounds. I am writing a map of the country of merry-go-rounds, the climate for merry-go-rounds. For there is a geography for these painted wooden horses circling to music. It is always a flat summer land, with pale dust rising. There are tents here; there are stands with cotton candy; there are balloons on sticks. In this country there is cold strawberry soda and hot popcorn. At night there will be fireworks, if night can ever end such a day. There might be a ferris wheel; there might be side-shows, kewpie dolls in rows to be won. But it is always hot and dry and there is always a haze of dust. That is the country and the weather of the merry-go-round horses.

You strike the dried grass with a toy whip, wound round at the handle with strips of pink celluloid and you scuff through the dusty grass near the tent ropes with your Mary Jane—was that really the name—slippers, fine dust settling on the patent leather and the black ribbon bows.

The horses, for they are the finest creations in this land, move up and down, stare ahead with colored glass eyes at the marble sun, moving up, moving down. And now there is music beginning in my mind, the harsh, sad, sweet music of the brass pipes—do I truly remember these—to which the horses dance their fixed dance, circling and circling.

The man in grease-stained overalls stops the merry-go-round—that he should have the power to bring the music and dance to an end—and you give the money which your father has given you—to whom? Where did you buy the ticket which you hold in your hand as you step up on the wooden platform, finding your horse—I think it is the painted gray horse with the carved flowing mane, ruby eyes, flashing hooves. Or is it the white horse with the blue reins, or the shining horse black as the patent leather slippers?

You put your foot in the stirrup, the real stirrup, and swing yourself up, holding the cool polished rod—as the music begins again, like a calliope, the music to which the horses rise and fall. And the boy taking the tickets walks around among the riders, while the merry-go-round whirls in its own wonderful life, realer and truer even than the life of the boy who lives on the merry-go-round, walking in endless circles to its brass melodies.

Do you see your father as you go round giddily, dizzy with joy? Do you wave, can you take one hand from the rod to wave to your father? He has brought you there. Do you remember him, as you ride rapidly, with the watching faces, the balloons, the tents flashing by?

But the music is ending. How do you know?

(And what do I really remember?) Does it play more slowly, as the merry-go-round circles slower and still slower and the horses do not rise so high or fall so far? But it is ending, however it ends, and if you do not get down quickly from the incredible horse, the boy who takes tickets and who is helping little children will help you, too. Now you walk among the chariots and animals, among all the horses you did not ride. Are there pipes for the merry-go-round organ in the center and are they brass, with the sound of the music as splendid and brassy as the pipes themselves?

And if memory cannot answer, where are the answers for the questions, the doubts, drifting through remembering, in the silence of the merry-go-round horses?

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