The Merry-Go-Round

Nichole Klungle
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It was a nightmare. Not a puny little scary dream, but a nightmare. And the dreamer did not know it. There was a small child, a little girl of three, riding a local park "push" merry-go-round. This merry-go-round did not have horses for the children to pat and admire. It was just a piece of textured metal with handles to hold on to and to push with. The child was laughing as she fought the inertia that threatened to throw her off the merry-go-round. She was happy, and the dreamer smiled. Then slowly, the dreamer realized that the child could not have pushed the merry-go-round herself, and the dreamer had not pushed her. Who had put the little girl on the spinning carousel? And then the dreamer and the child were no longer alone. The dreamer tried to stop looking at the girl to see the other person, but she could not. Her vision was a fish-eye lens, blurred at the edges. At the center of the dream, the little girl was still laughing, throwing he head back and chortling in a strangely adult manner. She was unaware of the danger that now enveloped the dreamer and made her sweat. The dreamer panicked and ran to save the child from the unseen enemy, but she remained rooted to her place. She was helpless; she would see the child destroyed.

Then, there it was. A black dog bounded into the dreamer's area of vision and chased the revolving merry-go-round. It was not a big dog, and it did not look like an attack dog. It was just a stray mutt, and it wagged its tail and panted amiably as it followed the girl around and around. The child laughed happily at the dog and took one of her tiny hands off the rail to reach towards it, pet it. The dreamer suddenly left her observing position and saw the dog from the little girl's eyes. But the dreamer and the child remained separate. The little girl did not know the things the dreamer knew. And now the dreamer, too, felt the pull of the merry-go-round as the child extended her hand to the dog. The girl stretched her arm slowly, to avoid losing her balance. But just as she came close enough to the dog to pet it, she saw the dog snarl and begin to snap at her fingers. And she lost her balance. The child and the dreamer both gave a little cry, but the child, but the child pulled back in time to avoid falling or being bitten. The dreamer jerked underneath the sweaty sheets, her movements coordinating with the dream. The child whimpered. She wanted to go home. The merry-go-round was beginning to move much too quickly, and there was a bad dog trying to bite her. But she was trapped. She held on to the handles, pulling away from the double danger of falling and being bitten. And the more knowledgeable dreamer thought about rabies shots. The child huddled around one of the handles. She was afraid. The merry-go-round went faster and faster until the child could no longer see individual shapes. The trees and the ground and the fence and the monkey bars that you don't climb because you might fall-off all ran into one another and made the little girl feel sick. But she could still see the
dog. It couldn’t keep up with the merry-go-round anymore, but it was still following the child. She would see it chasing her for a few seconds, then lose sight of it until the merry-go-round passed it again. It was slavering, and the girl could see its ribs now. The dog was hungry.

Suddenly, a young man appeared, jogging directly behind the dog. He was a big boy, like the kind that the girl had seen pulling little girls’ hair on the playground at the "big kids" school." The dog and the boy paid no attention to each other as they ran. And then the boy called to her. "Are you afraid, little girl? Are you scared of the big bad doggie-woggie? Aw, poor baby. What a sissy! Aw, poor baby... What a sissy...Aw, poor baby...." And he became a part of the scenery. As the merry-go-round turned, the girl passed again and again the jogging boy and the snarling dog. She tried to close her eyes, but deep inside, the dreamer knew that if the little girl closed her eyes she would be snapped up by the dog, or even worse, open her eyes to find the contemptuous face of the boy right up next to hers. So she kept her eyes open.

And then a phenomenal thing happened. The girl began to grow up, right there on the merry-go-round, and she was eight years old by the time the dog and the boy were joined by an older man with a thin, wicked smile, who called, "You wimpy women are all alike...You wimpy women are all alike...." The dreamer realized now why the child was being attacked. She was female. And she was trapped. No one was helping her, and she was stuck on the merry-go-round. The girl grew older again, and this time she was thirteen. Another man joined the revolving entourage. He was tall, much taller than the girl, but he was only a few years older. He yelled to her "Hey, since you know so much about women’s rights and all, if your girlfriend leaves you for another girl should you open the door for both of them? Should you open the door for both of them...Should you..." The girl in the dream did not understand what the man meant, but the dreamer did, and the dreamer became angry. The girl began to cry, only increasing the volume of the calls around her.

She grew to the age of sixteen, and she looked just like the dreamer. She was the dreamer. Another man and another call. The girl had seen this man on a religious program on T.V. "Of course, no mother should work. They have to take care of their children. What if they’re single and can’t support their children? It was their duty to think of that before they became with the child...It was their duty to think of that before...It was their duty..." Finally, the girl was old enough to understand. She knew the men. She knew all of them, and what their calls meant. And now she was angry too. She cried because she could not avoid the men or the dog. And she knew that they would never stop calling after. Never. The dreamer screamed, and woke up, and sobbed into her pillow so that she wouldn’t wake the little sister in the bed next to her.

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