Once upon a time there was a little red horse. Not a real horse you know, but a wooden horse — a Merry-Go-Round horse.

He was a nice little horse with a well-developed personality and but one defect—he was red instead of gray. The One who made him had made a mistake, you know. Instead of making him gray with red spots he made him red with gray spots. Upon discovering this terrible mistake he ran to another of the Ones who make horses and confessed with averted eyes, "I have made a serious mistake. Come look. I have mixed the background and the spots, that is, the red is where the gray ought to be and the gray where the red ought, — and I'm all confused," whereupon he wrung his grubby hands and shook his stubby beard and did in truth look all confused.

"This is terrible!" cried the other One as he gazed, eyes bulging, at the Monstrosity. "A red horse will never be able to adjust himself to society. Why, grey horses with red spots are all the fashion this year."

"I know, I know," moaned the first. Then he whispered, "Let's just not say anything about it. We'll just pass him along with the rest and perhaps no one will notice the difference."

"A Monstrosity," said the other One shaking his head sadly. Then he repeated himself, for he was fond of the word, "A Monstrosity, truly a Monstrosity." And they walked away, casting disparaging remarks in their wake.

"A name at last!" nodded the little red horse to himself. "A name all of my own. Monstrosity. Monstrosity. Well, it has a funny sound, but rather distinguished, I fancy." And he smiled, for not having a name had been bothering him for some time.

And so, being removed to a dark corner, he stood patiently and happily, letting his last coat of paint dry and filling his wooden head with dreams of the day when he would lead a lovely life prancing on a Merry-Go-Round.

"I shall be the most gorgeous horse in the world," he concluded, and shivered with delight at the thought of his debut. "I shall live on the biggest Merry-Go-Round in the world. No, not a little one, but the very biggest one in the world." And he admired his shiny gray spots and tossed his wooden head and struck a Dashing Pose.

Then one day an Exciting Event occurred. Monstrosity, along with several others, was taken away — away to the carnival, and put on a big Merry-Go-Round.

"Well, it doesn't look like the biggest in the world," he was vaguely disappointed. "But I guess it will have to do." It was then that he discovered that he had been placed in the lead of all the other horses. When he noted this fact out loud, the other horses disagreed with him, and told him the Consensus felt he was wrong. But Monstrosity didn't mind and was very tolerant, as is well-befitting a Balanced Personality. "After all, who is Consensus, anyway?" he asked reasonably. And since the platform was circular no one could prove he was wrong. That's the way in these matters, you know.

Monstrosity was very popular with the Customers, for he took care to arch his back in an artistic manner and not to throw his passengers off. He did get tired — "I do feel fatigued," he would remark — and
sometimes could hardly wait till midnight
when the Merry-Go-Round closed and he
could stretch his aching wooden legs stiffly.
Then, standing relaxed beneath the dark
canvas cover, he spent his time meditating
on Things and Life in General.

“But I am really very happy,” he would
always conclude, reassuring himself, you
know, and bolstering his Positive Self-Feel-
ings.

Then one day he made a discovery.
He noticed that he was different. “While
the other horses are gray with red spots
I am red with gray spots. They don’t seem
to notice it, but I tell you I am different.
I am different from the others.” And he
reflected gravely upon his personal State
and wondered what would become of him.

Then the summer turned to autumn,
and the world to a fairy-tale forest. The
skies were a vague smoky blue, and the
nights were crisp and cool. The leaves on
the trees turned kaleidoscope colors and
dazzled the eyes of the little red horse as
they danced and tumbled before him. The
trees nearest the Merry-Go-Round were
tinted with brilliant orange and red,
splotted with patches of green and brown.
They rustled dryly when the wind blew.

But just beyond the carnival grounds
there was a little maple tree that was pure
gold. It was perfect in shape and grew
on a little rise in the ground that set it
apart from the rest of the world. Its delicate
curly leaves glittered in the sunlight with
unbelievable brightness, and the dark
slender trunk reached tenderly up into the
heart of the golden leaves.

Monstrosity felt an indefinable yearning
to be near this tree, to nuzzle his wooden
nose into its golden foliage and rub his
back against its rough trunk. “My Tree,”
he called it. And the gay lift of his head
lost some of its gaiety as he realized he
could not have his Tree. Through the
smoky days and cool nights he thought
about it until he began to develop a split
personality.

“I do not really belong here on this
Merry-Go-Round,” he reasoned. “I am
different. If I stay here I’m liable to be-
come a pathological case. I am really an-
other being, quite different. I should be
prancing beneath my Tree instead of slav-
ing here. I must get away from it all.”
And he fretted about the wheezing music,
and the thought of his freedom chafed his
mind like the leather bit at his wooden
mouth. One night he made a Decision. “I
will go!” he said.

After the cover had been put down, he
lifted his hoofs delicately, one by one,
from their footholds in the platform.
Stealthily he crept from beneath the cover,
and leaped from the Merry-Go-Round.
“Free!” he exalted, and his wooden hoofs
crashed on the boardwalk. He turned and
got his bearings. In the silver of the moon-
light his Tree was more beautiful than he
had ever imagined. Stiffly he galloped to-
ward it, happier than he had ever been in
his life.

The next thing he knew, he struck the
ground with a hollow clunk. A fence. There
was a barbed-wire fence in the way. De-
sperately he tried to leap over it. He failed,
tried again and again. He only splintered
his ankle. Then he crowded close to the
fence and stretched and stretched, trying
to touch the magic leaves. An inch away,
a half inch. He stretched still more. Then
the wind stirred the lowest gold leaf, and
it brushed his wooden nose before it rose
with the eddying air currents. He stood
poised motionless for a while. Then gra-
dually the little red horse lost his feeling
of disappointment. At least he had tried,
at least for a moment he had been free,
had been blessed. And as the silver streaks
of dawn appeared, he limped his way back
along the boardwalk to his old familiar
place in the Merry-Go-Round platform.
As he settled three hoofs back into their notches, he noticed that his seams had burst here and there and he had lost some of his woodenhorse beauty marks. Then suddenly he saw he was no longer red! He had stretched and stretched until the gray spots had become bigger and bigger and the red spots littler and littler until — he was a gray horse with red spots. When he thought about this he was even more dejected. "Not only am I old and broken, but now I'm no longer Different," he whinnied sadly. "I'm only one of the Common Herd."

But when the full rays of the dawn fell upon the carnival grounds, the dingy mirrors of the Merry-Go-Round showed the tip of his nose to be gold — pure gold.

GRANDPA’S STORY

MARY MARGRETTE SCHORTEMEIER
Third Prize, Short Story Division, Butler Literary Contest, 1943

Grandpa was coming in. Leaning on his cane, she thought. She'd look around and see. Yes, leaning on his cane. And ready for his lunch. Noon meal was always dinner to him, though, even if it was only a cheese sandwich and a glass of milk.

"Well, how's dinner coming along? Is there anything I can do to help?"

He was hungry. Men were always hungry. Even if they were old. Help? What could he do to help? Just what? Get on out of the kitchen. But she couldn't say that. Not to Grandpa.

"Are you slicing cheese? The butcher knife'd be better. I'd be glad to do it for you. More than glad. Yes, sir, just mighty glad."

She certainly wasn't slicing up the moon. It was green cheese. And this was very evidently rich and golden. Right there before him and he wondered if it was cheese. His questions were just habit. They meant nothing. And she was very well able to slice the cheese. She was no baby. She was old enough to be married and keeping house for a husband instead of for him. But he forgot that.

"Yes sir, it's a good thing I came in when I did. You needed some help. I always was a hand to help out the women folks. Yes sir, I'm mighty glad to slice this cheese. Just more than glad."

How could he go on that way? She hated to hurt his feelings. She wouldn't tell him how much of a nuisance he was. If he just didn't talk so much he wouldn't bother her so. Just as well stop the sun from shining, though. Grin and bear it. Well — anyway, bear it.

"Slicing cheese for you like this makes me think of a long time ago—"

Everything made him think of a long time ago. That was part of growing old, maybe. She hoped she'd never bore her grandchildren with reminiscences from times that would seem long ago to them. If ever she had any grandchildren — and any memories . . .

"Reminds me of a long time ago when me and my sister — the oldest sister, the one you never saw — we two were left out on the ranch together while the family went somewhere. Can't remember where, anymore. May have been a family funeral. That was about the only time they would so many of them go at once. Might have