

Merry-Go-Round

By Richard J. O. Green

The merry-go-round and the ferris-wheel spun in opposite directions, making him dizzy. A carnival tune piped from some hidden calliope, and the interwoven chants of concession barkers merged into a constant buzz of incoherency. The noise, the swirl of unorganized movement, and the gaudy splashes of raw color irritated him, and made him angry with himself for being irritated. The atmosphere was infected with a spirit of gayety, and it annoyed him that he was immune.

He watched a young couple, sharing a bag of pop-corn, buy tickets for the roller-coaster, and wondered if he looked out of place. His suit, he knew, was out of fashion, and he was a little ashamed of having brought the umbrella. No one carried umbrellas nowadays.

He glanced down at it and felt reassured. It's a badge of my generation, he thought; a generation that wasn't too optimistic!

The merry-go-round stopped, and he moved to the gate where the customers came out. His eyes searched the crowd, located a blue hair-ribbon, and watched it jostle through the crowd and out the turnstile toward him. His face lighted up as she approached, and by the time she had reached his side, her proximity was fully reflected in a smile.

He had been going to ask her if the ride was fun, but her exuberance made the question unnecessary.

"Can I go again, Grandfather—can I, please?" She tugged at his sleeve and recited "please" in pathetic monotone.

"Well," he said, "let's take a look at how much money, and how much time we have left, then, maybe you can go again. How's that?"

"I want to go again! See, I've got a quarter and a dime," she said, pinching the material of her handkerchief to define the shape of two coins.

He didn't want her to go again; he felt more secure—more a part of the surroundings, with her hand in his. "Wouldn't you like to ride the ponies," he suggested.

"Just once more, please, Grandfather."

"All right, just once more then."

He watched her purchase a ticket and dart through the entrance gate, and when she had disappeared into the crowd, leaned upon his umbrella and closed his eyes. He felt alone again, now that she was out of sight—he felt alone most of the time anymore. Since Fannie

had gone, time had been pretty much of a burdon—except when Milly spared him a few fleeting moments .

It was childish of him to depend upon her so. Strange, he thought, that we two, generations apart, should depend so upon each other. She, as my link to the future, my source of courage; I, as her door to the past—her key to possibility.

The whir of the merry-go-round motor broke his train of thought, and he occupied himself with the spectacle of the midway until the motor had stopped and she was beside him again.

“Ready to ride the pony now?”

“I wish I could ride the merry-go-round every day, don’t you, Grandfather?”

“It would be nice,” he agreed.

They had to wait their turn at the pony ring, and by the time she had ridden her ten cents worth, it was almost time to go home. She didn’t want to ride the pony again, so they went in search of a suitable product for her fifteen cents.

He was getting tired. The hot sun made him uncomfortable in his black serge suit. It would be good to get home, away from the noise and confusion, he reflected.

“Oh look, Grandfather!”

She was tugging him toward a vendors’ stand, where tiers of plaster and gilt dolls twinkled amid a confusion of pennants and balloons. Her eyes were focused on the ballons, clustered in vari-colored bunches at the top of the display.

“Can I have one, Grandfather—can I please get a balloon to take home?”

He felt a surge of relief. Now we can go home, he thought.

“See how much they cost,” he said, “and if its not too much . . .”

She had completed the transaction and was beside him almost before he had finished the sentence, waving a huge red balloon in his face. He marveled at her fascination for the balloon, and as they made their way toward the gate, tried to account for her joy.

A frown creased his brow, and he forgot about his tiredness. She could have gotten a balloon at the corner grocery for a penny. He looked at the toy again. To her, it isn’t a balloon—it’s a part of what she is leaving behind—a little piece of a few happy hours that she can take with her.

They came to the bus stop. If it makes parting easier, I suppose its worth it, he concluded.

As they boarded the bus, the balloon touched the sharp corner of a door, and was gone with the contact. She stood, silently, for a

moment, looking at the limp bits of rubber that dangled from the end of the stick; then a tear coursed down her cheek.

He propelled her to the rear of the bus and let her cry silently against her sleeve. When she looked up, only a few tear stains and a sob remained. "It-s g-one," she sobbed.

"I wouldn't say that now," he said. He felt uncomfortable. The rest of the passengers were staring at them. She was silent for a while; and then he felt her hand against his arm again.

He glared defiantly at the bus-full of faces that stared at them, then put his arm resolutely about her.

"Here," he said, "I'll show you a little trick." Stretching a bit of the rubber from the balloon between his fingers, he placed it against his lips, and inhaled deeply. The rubber disappeared suddenly into his mouth, and with a twist of the fingers, emerged in the shape of a miniature balloon.

"See," he said, only vaguely aware of the other passengers; "It's easy to make your own balloons."

Free Soul

By Anne McDonnell

It was a very warm, soft spring afternoon. In the newly green park Miss Harvey felt quite pleased with herself. She had been really daring at the store today. Her replies to the sallies of her companions had smacked of the woman of the world spirit that she so admired and of which she felt herself mistress. She tossed her thin shoulder in a poorly executed gesture of bold daring.

She repeated over to herself some of the more choice of her remarks. **Matter-of-factly.** "Well, personally I prefer straight whiskey to anything else, but brandy is all right." Half a bottle of beer sent Miss Harvey into tearful giggles.

Blase. "I think the younger generation should know the facts of life early and thoroughly. I don't like this false modesty." Miss Harvey could count the "affairs" of her whole forty-one years on the fingers of one meager, veined hand.

Challengingly. "Just simply tell the section manager you don't like the way he's running things around here. You'll never get any where if you don't fight for it." Miss Harvey had been selling ladies gloves and scarfs for the past thirteen years at the same obscure dingy little counter of Davis and Carter's Dept. Store.