

Triana Rosas | The Merry-Go-Round Just Won't Break Down

The only living girl in Buena Park

“Who picked out the *carousel*?” I hear someone in our crowd say, just enough snark in her voice. I stifle a “HAW” and skip ahead to the front of the group.

The sky thinks it should be night-time, but the ground is awash with the glow of somewhere beyond daylight. Every time the looming darkness suggests an end to anything in this world, it gives us courage to see our surroundings answer back, “NO.” Who wants to think about endings when you’re running through Pleasure Island? We don’t want to bow down to anything but now.

“We’ll just see about *that*,” the night sky grumbles to itself.

Up ahead is the castle, and straight through the center of its archway to Fantasyland we can see the carousel at spin. From where I stand, it looks like the castle’s whirling, shining heart: a beating glow just beyond that drawbridge. It’s the epicenter of this world’s life-force, the core of all things magical, and the invitation to ride through its heart is open to anyone. Who could turn down the experience of getting to ride through something else’s heart?

“Oh, you bet I could,” the swarthy sky seems to say.

“We’ll just see about that,” I think back.

The gate rolls open (who ever remembers waiting in line?) and we all rush

through to claim our horses. On the carousel, there's a hierarchy of scale: The biggest horses are the grandest in design and go on the outside rim for show, while the smaller ones take up the middle two rows; the smallest and least glamorous get squeezed to the innermost ring. The two biggest horses are Jingles, the lead horse, and King, who's very nearly her equal—though no horse except perhaps Daisy surpasses Jingles in glamour and beauty.

When I'm making my way past the nosebleed horses, my heart sinks as I see Jingles get taken by a toddler boy who's ahead of us. He probably doesn't know the prestige associated. Fights have occurred. When Jingles was painted gold for the anniversary, mothers even threw punches. But even *I'm* not crazy enough to throw down a screaming fight with a toddler over a big toy horse that doesn't belong to me. Lovely Miss Daisy is too far away from the rest of the group to venture riding, and only the wastes of humanity ride the benches, so I settle for King. *It's okay*, I think as I watch everyone else climb onto their horses indiscriminately. King's not such a bad ride. If all the horses on the carousel got into a big knock-down drag-out brawl, King would emerge triumphant. His mane is cut short in spiky aggressive blocks, and his sheer size makes everyone else look pitifully weak. Even the expression carved into his face is surprised indignation. (“*You dare challenge me?*”) I'm the only one in the whole park who cares about this ridiculous kind of shit, and I'm enjoying myself immensely.

“You're a fool,” the stormy sky says to itself as the starting whistle rings out.

“You wish you could be where I am,” I think back, as the horses come to life.

King lunges forward and we're off. The world is turning backward, turning into someplace else, turning full of spinning shapes and fantastical beasts. I'm a part of this

transformation, I'm riding its pulse and leaning into its heartbeat, whirling through the hub around which this universe turns, and don't you know its core is a bright one?

I'm watching my friends laughing at each other as that flying carpet song plays over and around us, and I'm wishing that this merry-go-round would just break down and carry me with it as long as I like. I always find myself hoping that this will be the day the horse figures out how to jump off the platform, that there'll be a sudden crashing sound as the pole breaks free, and we'll both go bouncing away like Mary Poppins and her lavender horse into the horizon.

"Not tonight," the somber sky remarks.

"Some day," I think back.

Our heavy friend with the camera is sidling between the leaping horses, getting good shots of all of us. He's not supposed to do this while we're moving, as he finds out when he stumbles back against a brass pole. I'm laughing at his antics and shouting to him, "Matt! Matt! Come take my picture!" I want this flash to outlast the night.

He makes his way over and snaps away. Looks at the digital camera screen. Nope, no good. Takes more. Checks again. Nope, still no. Takes a last one just as we're slowly grinding to a halt. I don't know it yet, but I'm beautiful in every shot he took. Just what I wanted the sky to see.

As I hop down from King's back, I feel sorry that it always has to end so soon.

"Well? Wasn't I right?" the swarthy sky asks as we depart.

"You miss out on a lot," I think back.