

Merry Go Round

By David Stone

The music tinkled merrily onwards.

Joseph gripped the gilded pole, feeling the heave and release of the fibreglass horse between his legs as it galloped endlessly round. He stared out in forlorn hope. The watching parents smiled and waved, calling out to their children in delight that the ride was such a good, long one. Joseph strained to catch a glimpse of his own parents where they stood chatting. His mother glanced up and waved with a big smile. Joseph waved urgently back, striving to communicate, but the merry go round swung him onwards.

Joseph clung to the gilded pole, peering around at the other children on the ride. They sat motionless on their horses or cockerels, their faces locked in expressions of misery as they galloped around and around. Some of the younger ones were beginning to grizzle, tucked in front of their elder brothers or sisters who looked close to tears themselves. Joseph felt the prickle of his own tears, despite being one of the oldest on the ride. He sniffed and scrubbed at his eyes. He was older, and so must be strong for the youngsters.

He looked at a couple of younger children. They cowered on the back of their golden cockerel, staring at the operator's booth in the central column. Joseph caught their eyes and they stared at him, their faces twisted with fear and misery. He tried to smile encouragement at them, but he felt his face tighten into a grimace. The youngsters began to wail and turned to gaze, helpless, out at their parents.

Joseph hunched against the gilded pole of his horse. He couldn't be brave any longer. Tears leaked down his cheeks as he looked out at the sea of onlookers. His parents still chatted with some people they'd met. Joseph reached his hand out to them and watched, betrayed, as his mother glanced up and waved, her attention never reaching him before the merry go round swung him away from them again. The strangers flashed past him. He saw people glance at their watches, their expressions bewildered. Joseph's parents came back into view and his mother waved to him. Joseph stared back in hurt anger that they stood there and did nothing.

Joseph hugged the gilded pole of the horse. He pressed his face to the cool, twisted surface of it, and stared at the central column. Through a

tiny window, the operator flashed into view. He sat slumped and motionless on his chair, staring out at the miserable, frightened children. They stared back at him, waiting for him to stop the ride. His jaw was slack and a waxy pallor crept over his face.

Joseph slumped against the gilded pole as the ride swung ever around.

The music tinkled merrily on.