

## THE ROUNDABOUT

'Twas a long time ago but I remember well, the roar and the lights and the loud clanging bells. The dancing horses whirled around and around, as on that merry go round we rode along. Of all the rides in that joyous fair, the bright spinning roundabout was the best of all.

People queued for miles and miles just for their turn on the carousel, it was a long wait but worth the while and once you were on you stayed a long time. The gathering crowds would cheer as we passed, I would give a quick wave and then onto the next. But after a while we began to feel sick, the lights and the music all a blur as our world spun round and round. Those who had been on for a while cast anxiously round, searching desperately for the carousel man. Alas, we stared in vain and soon it was clear, once you were on, there you stayed, and the only way off was a leap into space.....

Some would make that dangerous play, and with a flying leap they would crash to the ground. The crowds would all jeer and shake their heads, for who would ever want to leave the merry go round? And when one of us left the carousel, another tried so hard to climb aboard. Some would make it while others stumbled and fell, cursing as they tripped over those who had fallen. For even though the attendant was gone, everyone wanted their turn on the merry go round.

The fear rose in my throat as I gazed all around, for so few of the friends I had known were still going round. Some had jumped clear and disappeared, whilst others fell off, wounded and beat. I knew then with a sinking heart, that if I did not leave now, I never would. I'd be doomed to whirl on endlessly into the night, to the cheers of the crowd and the music that played

I rose to my feet and with a prayer for good luck, I sailed into space. There was nothing at first just a gasp from the crowd, for I was well known. Many had waved at me over the years and no one thought I would ever leave. They cheered me on and threw flowers and gifts, for I was their idol, their hopes and their dreams.

I hit the ground with an awful thud, stars flashed in my head and the bile rose in my throat. My stomach felt queasy and it seemed as though my legs had lost the will to stand, my head all a whirl. So I lay there all by myself, so battered and bruised and terribly alone, trying to work out where I'd gotten on.

There was a stunned silence from the watching crowd and one woman cried in shock.

"My God look what they've done!"

Others called louder. "Quick get back on, before there's no room!"

I was unable to move however, my strength all gone, winded and wounded I lay there whilst the show went on, my race was all run. The cries turned to jeers when they saw I was done, for I had let them all down when I stepped into space, and no one bent down to see I was okay. Another tried to take my place tripping over me and missing the ride, cursing as he was hurled aside, where he too lay stunned beside the carousel. Others walked on by with their noses in the air, as if they couldn't give a care.

I had given up hope trying to find my legs, my head still spun and I was violently sick. It was then that a wizened old man bent down by my side, his voice so clear, strong, and serene.

"Give me your arm and I'll help you up."

I had no resistance to his firm gentle touch and at first I was afraid I would buckle his back, so frail and old was he. The old man however, was strong as an ox and he led me away to a nearby bench, and there he spoke.

"Sit here a while and you'll be all right in time."

So I did as he said and we sat there watching the spinning carousel, the spectators who leapt on while others fell off, as sheer exhaustion took its toll. It was after a while that I could see it all. The illusion of power and the crushing defeat, it was strange and sad to see how far we had come, to be spat on and scorned when we fell by the way. The wise ones did not stay long at all, and when they jumped off it was so much easier to find their feet. The rest just lay there stunned for the heckling crowds, who hooted and roared and made quite a fuss.

It was after some time that I found my feet, I could see which way was North, and which way was East. The old man sensed it in his comforting silence at my side, and with a squeeze of my shoulder he was gone. So I got to my feet and walked on out, I knew where to go and that's where I

went.

It was out amongst the rusting pines my childhood began, the sweet perfume filling the air. 'Twas within a still black pond I found what had eluded me all these years, my own startled face stared back at me from beneath the pool. So different now without the lights, no show to perform for the jealous crowds, no makeup plastered all over my face. So strange to see me all alone, what did I say-and who cut my hair?

After some time though the image was good, so I smiled and bid good day to the beckoning woods. I had found the friend I'd for so long yearned but there was always one more ride on the merry go round, one more casualty to the wheel of fame.

I return to the fairground every now and then and watch the crowds around the merry go round. I see who falls off and make a note, if they don't get up soon I help them up. Just as that old man did all those years ago, I sit awhile till they find their feet, and then I leave them there and go home alone. Some want to follow but I don't mind, company's good in this world of strife. Everyone seems to need to belong. I keep ever in mind my ride on the carousel, it was oh so much fun as you fixed your grin, but stay on too long and you lose your smile.

Every now and then I too go for a ride but I don't stay long, the illusion's a lie. With a shake of my head I dust the cobwebs from my brain-and look to the ground for someone lying all alone by the carousel.

Written by Alastair Rosie 1997 ©