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The Carousel of the Blind

Written by Matias Travieso-Diaz | 👁 Hits: 12



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I could no longer cast from my soul the conviction, each time stronger and better supported, that the blind controlled the world: through the nightmares and the hallucinations, the plagues and the witches, the soothsayers and the birds, the snakes and, in general, all the monsters from the darkness and the caves
Ernesto Sábato, Report on the Blind

The news spread like wildfire throughout the domain. A new carousel had been installed in the fairgrounds! It was said to be the greatest and best entertainment contraption ever, one that would bring happiness to the hearts of all citizens. All you needed to do was buy a ticket and take a ride on it, and your life would forever change for the better!

Vidal was standing in front of the pavilion that held the new merry-go-round, which was already full of prospective riders. It took him some time to realize that all the carousel occupants were adults, and that they behaved as if they were blind or unmindful of the upcoming event. He could tell by their uncoordinated motions that some prospective riders were clinically sightless; others were people he knew and who usually seemed, as now, out of touch with reality. Also present were well-known members of the press and government; these seemed to be indifferent, only attending due to the needs of their occupations or seeking to benefit from being part of the experience.

Vidal frowned at the silliness of the situation, for there were no children – the expected targets of the ride – among the patrons ready to whirl around in the cool November evening. Perhaps this was because it was nearly closing time and the families that had visited the county fair had long gone away or were milling around waiting for transportation home.

He did not like to take rides on devices that went nowhere: Ferris wheels, roller coasters, carousels. He would rather descend on a water slide ride, knowing that despite the steep drops and twists he would end up elsewhere, floating in an inviting pool of cool water. He also felt a bit superior to the fools that would go around in circles with no aim in mind, other than wasting a few minutes of their lives and arriving at the same place from which they had started. But he remained in front of the carousel, waiting to see what would transpire.

When the fairgrounds merry-go-round finally started its gyrations, the pipe organ connected to the rotating platform began playing a pleasant tune, the "Over the Waves" waltz by Juventino Rosas. The patrons astride the brightly colored wooden horses gave out a collective sigh of pleasure as they noticed the start of motion and their ears were caressed by the music. The sightless ones could not see the platform slide forward, but were nonetheless as excited as the others by the perceived progress of the ride.

As the speed of the carousel increased, the accompanying music shifted from a sedate waltz to Fučík's "Entry of the Gladiators" march, whose jaunty rhythms signified that the pace of the circling was quickening. At that point, the riders who were devoid of sight began showing evidence of discomfort – they were grasping the metal poles on which their wooden horses were mounted, squirming, and signifying a desire to get off. This was, of course, impossible, as any attempt on their part to dismount could have had serious adverse consequences. Vidal felt a brief pang of sympathy for those poor unfortunates, who by ignorance or mistake had undertaken a ride that was turning out not to be enjoyable.

A few moments passed, during which both the circling speed of the ride and the pace of the music accelerated. The jaunty rhythms of the Beer Barrel Polka now filled the air, and an increasing number of riders started clinging to the bars that held their horses and moving back and forth on their seats, evidencing disquiet and increasing anxiety. In addition to the physically handicapped, other patrons were feeling alarmed. These were people who had chosen the carousel ride indifferently, for lack of something else to do, or in the vague expectation that they would get thrills or other benefits from the experience. Because they were able to fully appreciate the unpleasant turn that the ride was taking, their alarm led to physical activity: a couple attempted to dismount their wooden horses, lost their footing, and were carried around the carousel, tumbling and striking other riders and vacant horses, and hurting themselves, as they vainly attempted to get off the merry-go-round.

Vidal was inadvertently humming the "Roll Out the Barrel" melody as he listened to the polka. He felt much less sympathy for the indolent ones, who had signed up for the ride in full knowledge of the thrills and potential perils it might entail but perhaps did not think they would be affected by them. "Hang in there" he silently counseled to them but, as he witnessed the predicament of the riders, he felt he should do something.

He looked around, seeking to locate a control booth where he could alert whoever controlled the mechanism of the carousel of the need to bring it to a stop. He located the booth a few steps away and approached it. Its door was closed, but from within came the sound of glasses clinking, loud conversations and laughter, and even louder rock music from the nineteen seventies. Vidal banged on the door of the shack repeatedly and got no response, so he returned to his place before the merry-go-round and stayed there, staring in amazement as events continued to unfold.

The device had increased its twirling speed further, so that the appearance of the carousel occupants to those outside became phantasmagorical. The tempo of the music had also become so fast as to be unrecognizable; it sounded perhaps like the last few bars of Ravel's *La Valse*, a series of highly dissonant sounds, with harmonies that were jagged and unsettling and had a frantic, agitated quality.

The few self-absorbed patrons who up to that point had not reacted to the anomalous nature of their carousel experience now joined the chorus of riders, screaming for help loudly and trying to draw the attention of passersby to their predicament. It was they who were now most vociferous in demanding that the ride be brought to an end.

As the carousel motion became faster, riders were forcibly thrown from their mounts or were unable to hold on to the bars and fell. Horses flew off their poles, and finally the entire platform cracked. The mechanical structure then failed and the carousel stopped abruptly, causing riders to be thrown in all directions, sustaining grave injuries.

The collapse of the carousel during its maiden voyage sent portions of the structure flying off to become projectiles. Vidal, who had remained a motionless witness to the debacle, was hit by a piece of one of the erstwhile horses that flew out of the ruins of the carousel. He spent weeks in the hospital recovering from his injury, and learned that his motor coordination would forever be affected by the accident.

When an inquest was made, the ride operator disclaimed responsibility for the catastrophe and blamed the manufacturer or "an act of God" for the carousel breakdown. His own fate became immaterial: the occupants of the carousel were injured or killed, and many bystanders were impacted as well. For when such a catastrophic event is unleashed, both the innocent and the guilty suffer in grievous and lasting ways.

END

Bio:

Born in Cuba, Matias Travieso-Diaz migrated to the United States as a young man. He became an engineer and lawyer and practiced for nearly fifty years. After retirement, he took up creative writing. Over two hundred of his short stories have been published or accepted for publication in one hundred and thirty anthologies, magazines, blogs, audio books and podcasts. A novel, an autobiography entitled “Cuban Transplant,” and four anthologies of his stories have also been published.



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