

Mad Max

by Jack Swenson

I remember when I was a kid. My drunken uncle told me you can learn a lot from riding the merry-go-round. You get on, you go in a circle, you get off. What's important is the last part. Don't forget to get off when the music stops, he said.

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When his wife left him, a friend told him that resentments were like canceled checks. You weren't going to get your money back. Your money was in the other person's saving account. That evening he called his ex and asked her how she was. "Fine," she said. He asked her how Prince Charming was, and she said, "Don't start."

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Max wanted to watch while I fucked his new girlfriend. "No way," I said. Max was unhappy with me because I had spoiled his fun. I called him later that week, but he wouldn't talk to me, so I talked to his girlfriend's mother instead. She was visiting from South Dakota.

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She stood on the bank of the river, took off all her clothes, and waded into the water. "Come on!" she yelled and swam downstream. I shucked off my shorts and T-shirt and followed her. The water was freezing. We got out of the water at a bend in the river where there was a sandy bank. We sat in the sand and looked at each other like two kids playing doctor. She had fair hair, freckles, and a red nose that was shedding its skin. Her eyes winked almost shut when she smiled.

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Kaia called me one day last week and told me that Uncle Ray had fallen and broken his hip. They put him in a skilled nursing facility, she said. The place where they put him is swell, I'm sure. I bet the staff is a cheery bunch. A glassy-eyed director with a fixed smile. Chubby, red-faced nurses rolling up and down the corridors like bowling balls.

