

Cory's Carousel

by Johnny Dantonio

When I was young, seventeen or so, Cory and I would smoke cigarettes on an abandoned carousel he had found deeply embedded in the woods behind our neighborhood. Our mothers had lived next door to each other, simultaneously pregnant, and we were born within months of one another. He was older. I figured it a burden; carrying me forth since birth.

It was bizarre, but it was ours. The pine covered place somehow fit between the bones of dogwoods and, fuck, I don't know, oaks? — this merry-go-round with a density of weeds biting at its feet.

We never said much there, inhaling while sitting on the oscillating ghost horses, their wooden bodies carved with deep eye-sockets and satanic smiles. The grooves were deceiving; splinters biting at any chance, the gray-painted wood peeling with every touch. The teeth or tails were missing on most. I can still hear Cory smacking a hard pack of reds against his wrist horizontally like the uneducated knives of my childhood. There was an ownership about the makeshift carnival. There was a therapy there.

Cory was depressed, or so I supposed by the way he would revert to silent exhaustion at the stables. His moods fluctuated, and on days when his energy pulsed at lower frequencies he wouldn't tell me to come to our park, and I'd closely listen to his non-direction. He was more popular than I was, but he was afflicted and human and we never talked about it. He hid his depressions and derangements in appeasing personalities; an undeniable wit, over-excited hellos. He opened to anyone that called, oblivious of himself — a god damn elevator.

On a particular Wednesday of our junior year, right about the time when everyone gets hornier because of the winter thaw and tight

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baseball pants, Cory wasn't in school. I approached Frost's forest after school to find my friend, and I found him; his body slowly rocking above the stallion assassins, hanging from a steel beam that supported the metal tent roof.

I straddled a gray colt closest to his feet and sucked a cigarette, my lighter flirting back and forth with the end of it. Smoke shooting from my nostrils like a pierced bull, I played with his shoelaces as we danced there, smiling at the now-affirmed sincerity of the friendship I always questioned, one I might have hindered with my odd habits and unadorned looks.

I hugged his shoes hard, my cheekbone tight against a cold calf, his leg hair ticking my closed eyelids. I clenched my backpack straps and pulled them down, the weight tightening against my back, and walked away with a cigarette bobbing between my lips. The ash floated like gossamers. I promised never to come back to the place.

