

Ken Rivard / THREE PROSE PIECES MORE COMMON

Here is a desert scene from nearly forty years ago and an atomic explosion has just occurred. Mannequins are used to measure the effects of an atomic bomb on the human body.

A car and truck parked in the background have all doors opened to make this research as realistic as possible. A farmer mannequin leans against the truck. Looks like he just completed the rolling of a cigarette when the bomb went off. The farmer appears to be reflecting on his existence as his cigarette waits to be lit. Although it is still early in the experiment, the farmer mannequin's skin seems healthy. Only the brim of his straw hat is singed by the heat. The rest of his clothes might be made of some miracle cloth.

In front of the farmer is a city couple. The woman mannequin, in a yellow chiffon dress, stands at a forty-five degree angle to the ground. Her exposed legs are decomposing. Her arms have disappeared. But she looks somewhat philosophical about her arms; maybe she realizes that more efficient artificial limbs will be available in a few short years. Next to her is the city husband mannequin. He stands almost at attention. He is blond-haired, wears a dark brown rumpled suit, white shirt and a bright red tie. The fringes of his clothes are not miracle-made. There are also many loose threads springing out of his shoulders. He'll survive though because he's got that strong silent stare on a perfectly chiselled face, a face that has sold many a suit of clothes from a department store window, a face more common than today's.

THE TANIA CAROUSEL

(for Tania Laniel*)

On the carousel today there are only two riders. One is a woman trapeze artist taking a break from rehearsing her new act. The other is her midway barker boyfriend. Both want us to feel the newness of their passion in the same way the sky teases the horizon with pre-dawn light.

The woman is dressed in white tights and her hair is tied in a thick knot above her left ear. On her head is a two-tone red beret, and her tiny ears are wooden spools recently planted into the sides of a perfectly oval head. Other circus performers call her a veteran of love because of her glowing skin. The veins on her hands are invisible, as if she did not want to reveal the strength in each of her fingers. And she is a woman of little waste because there is absolutely no flabbiness in her arms and legs. The horse she rides wears a first prize medal of sorts around its neck. But the animal's eye is bashful, perhaps because it cannot handle success as well as the woman.

Because the boyfriend wears a red jacket, red pants, pink T-shirt and a straw hat, he could be mistaken for an overflowing cotton candy machine. There are unusually thick pads in his shoulders that appear to force him to lean with his right hand on the back of his girlfriend's saddle. The barker wants everyone to believe he is completely concentrating on his girlfriend and is not the least concerned with customers throwing darts at balloons. Even his horse's mouth is wide open as if it too were enthralled with the trapeze artist. But the horse does not wear a single medal. And the barker's looks, which are those of a pretty boy mannequin, are covered in flashy clothes which try to hide a personality that went from boy to bland in record time. On this warm afternoon, the trapeze artist silently tells herself that her boyfriend will change. Soon.

Although it seems their electricity comes from an aging generator, the two lovers show promise. Maybe they both belong in a place where they can get on and off a carousel whenever they wish, a place where voltage is unnecessary, a place so far away from the homes we can never run away from.

* Tania Laniel is a Calgary artist.

PULSING THROUGH THEIR OPTIMISM

The rain falls as if it were cheese being grated by clouds. Under the rain two brothers stop raking leaves and offer their faces to the sky. Mouths are wide open and eyes are squeezed shut. Since the rain is so clear and abundant, the boys are confident that it will quench their thirsts. And anyone who can keep a mouth open that long has got to be optimistic.

The bigger brother wears a white T-shirt with a faded crest that could be a birthmark. He holds on to the handle of his wooden rake as if it were anchoring him to the ground. His teeth are in the way of some of the raindrops and his tongue playfully tries to keep count.

The smaller brother has ferocious concentration. His closed eyes trap more rain than his mouth, and he'll need to stand longer in the rain to get rid of his thirst. But the boy doesn't care; he's had lots of practice either crying without the rain or faking tears for the fun of it all.

There are absolutely no logical reasons for this behaviour in the rain. There is only hypnotic pulsing in each boy's chest, a pulsing that is timed with each real and imagined burst of cloud.