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opening extract from

Infinity

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published by

Puffin Books

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Infinity

Lately, I don't dream about Anthony. I dream about the roundabout.

Now, Mr Haskell, my psychology teacher, would say this had implications. That somehow my fear of the roundabout is linked to my issues with Anthony, which are both many and complicated. Mr Haskell has a certain way he says things like this, leaning over with both elbows balanced on his lectern. It's very unsettling, as if he can see deep into your soul. But the truth is I was scared of the roundabout before I even met Anthony.

Most towns have those most modern of inventions, traffic lights, to deal with traffic. Not here. Instead, some genius decided however many years ago to put in instead this big circle with all the main roads feeding into it, then sat back to watch people crash to their deaths as they attempted to negotiate it.

But I digress.

My first experience with the roundabout was when I was about seven. We'd just moved to town so that my father could finally finish his dissertation.
My mother and I were on our way to the grocery store when we suddenly came up on this big sign that said yield with an arrow pointing to the right. Cars were going round a big circle, off which poked several different exits to different roads. The trick, apparently, was to kind of merge in, follow round until your exit, then merge out. Simple as that.

'Oh, my God,' my mother said, poking her glasses up the bridge of her nose, which she always does when she's really nervous. 'What is this?'

The answer came in the form of a loud, impatient beep from behind us. My mother looked anxiously to her left, then tentatively tapped at the accelerator, sending us inching out into oncoming traffic. Another beep.

'Mom,' I said.

'I'm merging!' she shrieked, as if this was on the level of splitting atoms and I was distracting her on purpose. And we were merging, pretty well, slowly easing into traffic. In fact, we were almost relaxed when we had to try and get back out, no easy trick, as there were many cars merging in. We got stuck on the inside track for two more turns, watching our exit go by, before my mother panicked and just sort of jerked the wheel, sending us in its general direction. And that was when the station wagon hit us.

The scene ensued the way you would expect: dents all around, tears (my mother), angry muttering (the guy who owned the station wagon), plus everyone else driving past rubbernecking and jawing to each other while I sank down as far as I could in the passenger seat, wishing there was a way to meld permanently with the pleather beneath me. The entire episode ended with a ticket, our insurance rates rising and my mother swearing to never do the roundabout ever again, which seemed somewhat overly dramatic, until we realized that she meant it.