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Bushnill County Fair

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i always thought circus & carnival freaks weren't allowed to talk. they just grunted. like the elephant man, perceived as animal, then proven to be human. i'd never seen a real living freak in all my years traveling to hundreds of carnivals with my own freak show.

the show i had that popped neatly out of a tractor trailer just wasn't enough anymore. less people willing to pay two dollars to see any of it:

two-headed rabbits

the voodoo wonders case with a replicated altar & dusty half-melted candles

siamese rats

shrunk african heads.

the outsides of the truck boasted midgets. we had small mannequins dressed in children's circus costumes. we should have advertised:

DEAD ANIMALS- STUFFED AND SEWN TOGETHER

they were enough to get dad through the 70's and 80's, but i was beginning to feel i'd been gyped by '98. he sold me the whole deal: truck and everything inside for a steal at \$7,000. after four years traveling with the mess i'd barely earned it back.

but then i found the midget. a real one. with nothing to do. he was exactly what i needed to steer the herds of white trash back into my world of dingy glass cases. i was not yet in a position to make anyone believe i was the **WORLD'S FATTEST MAN** at only 220 pounds.

the midget:

sal was 38 inches tall and probably about 38 years old. soon as i saw him i actually left my post and followed him down the midway. tapped him on the shoulder "hey, you wanna be in a freak show?"

he looked like he wanted to punch me, but when i offered him a beer he calmed down. shrugged his shoulders and came along with me.

i bought two beers in flimsy plastic cups. the beers sloshed over the sides as we walked back to the freak show entrance where i normally bragged about amazing mysteries through a loudspeaker.
(now that part of the job was fun)

sal's first words to me were harsh. "You sound like a cross-eyed south carolinian through that thing." he mocked my previous performance: "cum see the amay-zin two layged howrse"

"shit," i stuttered and looked down after my brilliant response. i'd been made fun of by a dumb looking midget. damn it.

a sip of beer and i re-focused. "look. i need a real freak for my show. you know. you could stand in the front and make people believe there's more real shit in there."

he snarled. "everyone knows there ain't nothin' to a freak show in a semi-truck. people ain't stupid. they seen one they seen 'um all. and they tell their kids too. they tell 'um there ain't nothin' real in there. just a bunch of foggy old glass cases with dead shit. most of 'um got more impressive animal heads hangin' above their fireplaces. i even seen some wild lookin' coyotes sittin' up on the inertainment stand in the nastiest hillbilly trailer ever. you ain't got nothin'."

true. but i was on a mission and i stuck to it. "so what're you doin' anyway. i bet you're a little bored here in BUSHNILL COUNTY." i put my hands up and wiggled my fingers to accentuate the magical thrill of the place. "whatdya do for fun?"

he glared at me. mean looking blue eyes like he was trying to project me into outer space.

"drivin range."

"drivin' range?" i felt my right eyebrow lifting. i hate my face's habits. but with that being his idea of a thrill, i could keep my cool. "man, you have not seen FUN. we have some TIMES travellin' with the fair. and see some crrrazy shit. like the last fair in wonchyauckmee county, i saw this lady about 5 feet tall with four inch heals and shorts so short the creases between her buttocks and legs were showin'. and get this... tattoo on her inside right thigh... of a baby jesus appearin' to be comin' right out of her. you know how i knew it was jesus and not just some kid?"

"no." he kept glaring at me.

"well..." i began my punch and i knew my grin was sideways, always is when i think i'm being clever. "up and down the whole other leg was a great blue mother mary reachin' out into bleedin' black ink stars over creamy white flesh skies for her sweet son."

sal's scowl wrinkled up like a peach sitting under a tree way too long. boy, he was an ugly midget. raised his voice at me too. i never thought midget voices could get so loud, especially so deep.

"now who gets a tattoo like that and dresses up like some kinda whore. what kind of crap're you tryin' to get me believin'? you think seein' a menage on twa," he stumbled over the phrase, "with Jesus, Mary, and a dumb slut is my idea of a good time?"

i'd pissed him off good now. "look. i'm no christian and no golfer either." obviously fun and jokes were not sal's idea of the happy life so i got serious. "what it all boils down to is... i am offering to pay you to come along and see the country. all you've got to do is stand there while i yell through my loudspeaker. that's it. rest of the time is yours. no questions asked."

(secret: there was no other time- just riding in the truck and sleep)

"so how much do you pay me?"

i said pay? i fumbled for a quick answer. "\$200 a week."

"that's minimum wage!" his voice getting loud and deep again. "how'm i supposed to live off that?"

"no rent. i've got some hay and blankets in the truck. and we eat real cheap if not free while the fair's on."

he shrugged his shoulders. did he always shrug at an offer he was taking up? anyway he climbed onto the wooden ledge across the entrance from my podium. started the mystery right away. sending a pack of staring 12 year olds to outer space with his super-charged eyes. but the kids just kept looking. nudging each other. smoking the marijuana. lowering their voices, "hey, look at that guy." i knew sal meant success. and just like anyone playing the freak, sal did not speak.

that night sal did sleep on the hay and blankets

never even went home to pack any bags

must not have had anyone worth saying goodbye to either

i never did meet anyone so detached
sal was like a small rock
he had the attitude those tough carnies only pretended to have
some of them even had girls' names tattooed in their backs or arms
same shit airbrushed on their trucks
i guess i was just somewhere in between
never got too broken up over any girls

sal was still sleeping. i was packed and ready to go. so i locked up the trailer and left him in there. drove about four hours to some Flying J travel plaza in north florida.

opened up the back:

sal standing right at the door
hands on his hips
door was streaked with urine
and a puddle in front of him dripped down on the hot concrete

he began preaching before his puddle. "i ain't one of your ass-headed mannequins. from now on i ride up front. and you better tell me when you're leaving whether i'm sleeping or not. leavin' me back here ain't humane."

he jumped out of the trailer and landed on his hands. i saw later they were scraped up. i didn't blame him though. i wouldn't have had some giant picking me up and moving me either.

i finished my business, got a coke, filled the tank. waited in the truck for sal. i left the passenger door open for him. i knew he'd never be able to reach the handle.

i dozed off for a while and was startled by a pack of fritos hitting my right thigh. and then a 20 oz. mountain dew landed next to me. a slim jim. a tall can of *natural ice* beer.

(beer & mountain dew?)

finally i saw his fingers come up to grip the edge of the gray plastic seat. then his head. then his leg. "thanks man," he said sarcastically and almost fell out reaching to close the door.

i didn't question the purchases, just waited to see what was opened first. luckily sal did open the beer first, but hell... i've had warm mountain dew and it bites like poison worse than a warm *natural ice* probably would.

we pulled out of Flying J with bad pop playing and sal wouldn't stand it for a second. "what is this shit?" he reprimanded me and changed it to a country station. great.

an hour later the natural ice and mountain dew containers were empty on the floor, and sal was nagging me to pull over. i rolled my eyes. "piss in the bottle for god's sake."

he stood up right next to me in the seat and put his hand on my shoulder like he was being nice. but then i saw the scowl and his dumb fire rained upon me once more. "FORSAKE MY GOD AGAIN and i'll piss right in your lap. now pull over."

i pulled over. he opened the door about a foot and pissed through the crack. i felt like pushing him out.

we made it to alachua county and began setting up for another fair. i had everything ready by sun down. didn't see sal all night. drank my six pack in peace.

next morning i woke up to sal walking on my chest and stomach. i yelped and reached for him. i wanted to grab him and throw him... all the time. i realized that was why i never did pick him up to help him the day before. i'd be to tempted to just hurl him up and watch him crash. crack his ugly head to pieces.

sal ran across the trailer quick as a cat, grabbed some clothes, and came back over to me. "put these on," he demanded and held them up.

"what the hell for? they're huge!" sal couldn't even hold them up enough to display them. the plaid shirt dragged to the floor when he held it over his head to display it.

"you're gonna be the world's fattest man," he exclaimed with a sinister grin. first time i'd seen him smile. the bastard.

"how the hell am i gonna be the world's fattest man? i ain't the world's most anything. i'm as average as you get."

he laughed. "cause i'm gonna stuff you with hay. you're the freak now, buddy."

"no, i'm not the freak. and i never said you were either." i tried to make him think i was an ethical, humane person. yeah right. he knew what i thought.

"well, you put me in your FREAK show. so what the fuck am i?" he sneered.

i stuttered "um" and looked at the floor. "a human being"

"yeah. a human freak. same thing. you'll be the world's fattest MAN. a FREAK of nature. and you oughta see how much money we get when we have you... pathetic son of a bitch... asking for donations for an electric wheelchair. i'm gonna stuff you up and make you MY bitch now."

his ugly face was glowing like a mean jack-o-lantern. and i was about to give it the same treatment i gave to many a jack-o-lantern when i was a kid. SM-ash! but when i reached out for him the bastard grabbed my hand and bit my pinkie hard. i yelled, but said no understandable words.

"do you wanna make some money or not?" sal said after releasing my finger.

"yeah, but i don't want to become a freak in order to do it."

"you think you look good up there in the front with that loudspeaker? you think a liar is a more noble profession than a freak?"

"i'm not a liar. i'm an exaggerator. and besides, who'll be the exaggerator if i'm stuck back here stuffed with hay?"

"i will."

"i thought you said the man with the loudspeaker looks like a fool. what're you... gonna tell the truth out there: hey everyone, come see the dumb man who stuffed his clothes with hay!"

"i don't give a shit about looking like a fool, freak, or anything so long as i have all the beer and burgers i want. ain't found nothin' else worth worryin' about in my lifetime."

now to that piece of philosophy, i had to hand it to sal. he was right. "alright alright. stuff me for god's sake."

i put the clothes on over my own and sprawled in a pile of hay across from the side door of the trailer. so people looking in would have to look over the voodoo case and about seven feet of truck. hopefully they wouldn't notice how lumpy i was or that my face was still way too skinny.

sal began stuffing and it sure itched like i'd expected. "we're going to get some of that poly-fil pillow stuffing TOnight. this is hell," i complained.

"whatever." sal was apathetic to my discomfort and continued stuffing me.

i'd been sitting there bored for about two hours listening to sal blab about the WORLD'S FATTEST MAN when two redheaded twins ran in giggling.

"hey cutie," the one said and motioned with her finger for me to come closer. i couldn't do anything. i couldn't move without the hay going everywhere and destroying my disguise. a piece of hay stabbed at my instant hard-on. i grunted.

"why dontcha come a little closer. we've got sompthin to show You, world's fattest MAY-N," the other twin added.

i grunted again. what could i say? i was helpless.

the first twin took charge. "well, we're gonna let you see anyway. seems the world's fattest man ought to have a peek at the world's finest titties." and with that they both lifted their shirts and moved their diaphragms in ways i never imagined possible.

then the shirts went back down. the first twin rested her arms on top of the glass case and spoke in low tones. "now if you ever wanna see again, you come visit us at cafe risque. exit 72. got that? we've got sompthin special in mind for the WORLD'S FATTEST MAY-N." they both turned quickly and walked directly to the exit.

i grunted after them. god i felt pathetic. and great all at the same time. i had found my place in the world. and i resolved to eat everything i could until i filled it.