A Day at the County Fair

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(an excerpt)

Callie and Michael were in awe as they gazed ahead at all of the fluorescent-colored flashing lights from the rides at the county fair. They couldn't wait to get through this seemingly endless line of people waiting to buy tickets. Callie continuously shifted from the left to the right in a subconscious dance, while Michael craned his neck around the line and attempted to count how many people were ahead of them.

Callie closed her eyes and breathed in deeply. The collage of smells was magnificently sweet. She imagined tasting the elephant ears sprinkled with powdered sugar, the crisp red apples bathed in warm caramel, and the thick slices of pepperoni pizza oozing with hot steamy cheese.

After what seemed like days, they reached their first destination: the front of the line. Michael paid, gave half the tickets to Callie and stuffed his own into the front pocket of his jeans. They both agreed while in line that they wanted to try out some of the rides before they ate. Nothing was worse than hopping on a fast or spinning ride on a full stomach. Michael gently took Callie's hand and excitedly said, "Let's go through the fun house first!"

That sounded just fine to Callie. She loved all of the different-shaped mirrors that changed the way she looked, except for the one that made her look short and wide, like she had swallowed one of Saturn's rings. Her favorite was the mirror that elongated her pear-shaped figure and made her feel tall and graceful.

The line of children to enter the fun house was surprisingly short, and it moved a lot quicker than the one they had just come from. They were still patiently waiting when Callie heard a terrifying scream emerge from the darkness of the large structure, causing her to jump and unsettle her nerves.

"Look," Michael told Callie, as he gave her hand a quick squeeze. The sound of desperation had come from a very frightened little girl, who was now running as fast as her small short legs would carry her. Her blonde curls were bouncing up and down as she ran and jumped into her mother's outstretched arms.

Callie and Michael exchanged a nervous half-smile and stepped forward to give the attendant their four tickets each. The tall lanky boy accepted their tickets, and with an expressionless non-enthusiastic voice said, "Watch your step. No pushing, no running. Enjoy." Michael's eyes were still fixated on the little blonde girl whose sobs were subsiding and turning into sniffles. He quickly looked away and glanced at Callie. He was a little scared, but didn't want to embarrass himself by exposing any smidgen of fear to Callie.

Callie's knees wobbled as they advanced into the darkness. The kids in front of them obviously had not listened to the rules

because they took off, running and giggling, leaving Callie and Michael to fend for themselves. They haphazardly stepped out of a slowly spinning tunnel into a narrow hallway with extremely high walls. Callie told Michael he could go first. They placed their palms on each of the walls and felt their way down the blackened walk. Callie was wondering why she had agreed to do this when she noticed a dim yellow light in the near distance.

Michael whispered, "Do you see that light?"

"Yes," she replied, relieved that he had broken the eerie silence. "I wonder what's up there." They slowed their pace, fearing what might possibly be awaiting them. As they trudged nearer, Callie heard a deep crackling voice emerge from the shadows.

"Come closer, my children. See what lies ahead, if you dare." The creepy warning was followed by a quiet wicked laugh, as if they were about to meet their doom. Michael, being the brave soul he thought he was, charged forward, determined to show that evil voice he was not intimidated.

Callie, on the other hand, was trembling. Her palms were wet with perspiration; her heart raced with anticipation. What was that mocking voice trying to warn them of? she thought.

BOOM! Callie lost her balance as she lunged forward, frantically groping the air in an attempt to grab anything that would steady her. A section of the floor had immediately gave way and dropped her and Michael to a lower level. Luckily, an ocean of multicolored plastic balls broke their fall. Their nervous silence turned into laughter and relief. The ball pit was deep and they had a hard time regaining their balance, but eventually Michael was able to pull himself up. He took both of Callie's hands and pulled her to her feet. Immediately outside the pit was a well-lit winding staircase leading them back up to the main level. They were still chuckling as they climbed up while twisting around and around, but the laughing dwindled away as they stepped back into darkness. Was this ever going to end? Callie wondered. They were in the same dark hallway, but they only had a few steps until they were standing in front of a large wooden door with a reflective golden knob. The sliver of yellow light they had seen before was spilling out from under the door. Michael turned and faced Callie.

"Do you want to go in or turn around and go back?" he asked her. They had passed an exit before their crash landing into the balls, but there was no way she was turning around. She would much rather enter a room with light than find out what other surprises lurked around hidden corners in the hall or floor.

"Open the door," she replied without a second thought.

Callie took a deep breath as Michael slowly turned the knob and pushed the large heavy door. It made a loud creaking sound. Callie thought back to the nights when she would sneak out of bed and tiptoe past her parents' bedroom. Her mission had been to smuggle a chocolate chip cookie or two back to her room. More times than not, that one sticky floorboard would bow under her small bare feet, and her father would catch sight of her. She knew at this point there was no hope of having that sugar fix, and she would fly back into her room, jump into bed and bury herself under her pink fluffy comforter. That darned squeaky board was such a tattletale.