

Fair of the Dead

By: J. J. Wilder

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It was mid afternoon and the crowd at the fair had grown thick. The third day of the event always held the most for attendance; Jack remembered that from the times he used to work the ticket booth. That was years ago though, now he was just revisiting his old stomping grounds. He loved taking in the air full of the small, rural area smells. There was the corndogs frying up, the sugary smell of cotton candy and of course the occasional breeze that would push the farm scent from the 4-H booths.

He walked around the small outlets with games and food trying not to miss anything. It had been years since he wandered through this fair.

“This is what we drove over an hour for?”

The voice carried up from behind him. He had almost forgotten her as the memories of the past flooded into the present. Jane was never one for small town things, being the quintessential big city girl. He looked over his shoulder to her just in time to see her sidestepping around a mound of manure. Her lips were curled up over her teeth and arms held out at her sides as if the pile were five feet tall.

“I told you we’ll only stick around a bit, then we can go back to the car. I haven’t been here in ages.” He said holding out a hand to her.

She reluctantly took the hand and got into stride next to him. Most of his friends couldn't understand what he saw in Jane, they just saw her as the annoying city girl. He knew her better than that. Past the outer shell of the blonde model-type girl, was a vast intelligence that had won her a position at the publishing house in the city.

“This is seriously where you grew up?”

“No, no, I didn't grow up here. I worked here, doing the set up, cleanup and ticket booth mostly. I grew up in a small town just a little south of here.”

“There's a SMALLER town?” Jane said with phony awe and amusement in her voice.

“Ha ha, Jane.”

“So what do you want to do?” she said squeezing his hand as a loud horn went off, “What was that?”

Jack looked around the fairgrounds, “I don't know. Sounded like it came from town. Maybe a fire or something.”

“Oh, okay. So, what do you want to do now that we are completely immersed here?”

His eyes floated across the whole scene, just taking in the vibe of the fair was enough for him, but he knew that there had to be something more for Jane to not complain about the trip. “How about a ride?”

She looked up into his eyes with a look of complete indifference and slight annoyance, “A ride? Like what?”

“How about the ferris wheel? That's romantic isn't it?” he said kissing her hand and leading her down past the food booths. She squeezed his hand a couple times, a sign

she wasn't entirely sure about this. He knew she didn't like older mechanical rides, and by the look of the rusting off paint, this wheel was definitely on its last leg.

The wheel was one of the largest he had seen at the fair, a couple hundred feet from the top to the bottom. He shoved their tickets into the young mans greasy hand as they passed the gate. The ferris wheel was something that belonged at the fair, it squeaked and groaned as each car shifted and was filled until finally the ride began. They passed the gate a couple times and Jack could tell even Jane was having a good time looking out over the fair and the town as best you could.

He felt at home. Suddenly his past came rushing back to him completely, he felt like he was a young man again. His friends from high school used to come to this place all the time, every year, at least every day of it. They would ride the rides, eat crappy food while their parents weren't looking or weren't there and then dare each other to ride the fastest and most vomit inducing ride.

The wailing of sirens and grinding of metal gears brought him back to reality and he saw Janes knuckles turn white as they reached the top of the wheel and stopped. He looked to the ground to see the greasy handed kid trying to start the wheel again.

“Why did we stop? Are we supposed to?”

“No, somethings wrong.” He said as he reached for her hand. Jane hated mechanical things when they broke down. He was still amazed she didn't try to talk him out of getting on this ride.

“Wrong? What do you mean, wrong?” she stammered and tried to keep her focus on him or the sky.

“The kids working on it...” he forgot his next words as he saw every other ride had stopped moving, even smaller things within booths weren’t working, “There’s a power outage, the whole fair’s out.”

A loud explosion from town drew both their breaths out. Jack’s head snapped up from the ground and started to scan the horizon. Suddenly he saw them. There were plumes of smoke rising in at least four different areas of town.

“Oh this is not good.”

“What is it? It can’t be terrorists can it?”

Jack tried not to laugh but a chuckle escaped anyway, “No...no I doubt that a town of less than six thousand would draw a terrorist.”

“It’s not funny.” She said letting go of his hand and rubbing her thighs, “It could happen.”

“Jane, listen we’ll be fine, there must be some type of electrical fire. Remember what we heard on the radio as we came into town, reports of electrical surges.”

“Yeah, yeah, I remember.”

He reached out and started to put his arm around her shoulders when he noticed someone limping in toward the front gate of the fair. She was wearing a white apron, and looked like she had either gotten sprayed with ketchup or... “My god...” he muttered.

“What? What is it?”

Jack couldn’t speak, he just stared at the blonde haired girl as she limped to the gate. She was walking slowly, her left ankle was turned in and it almost seemed broken, but she was walking on it.

“There’s been an accident. I see a girl by the gate over your shoulder.”

Jane glanced over quickly then turned back to the horizon, “I hope she’s okay. Do they have ladders here to get us down?”

Jack shook his head, unable to answer. He couldn’t stop staring at the girl as she got closer to the booth. Finally someone else noticed her on the ground and went running towards her. Jack thought he knew the man, he was a retired high school teacher and on the ambulance squad. *She’s in good hands now. Look away.* He tried telling himself.

Then the blonde haired girl opened her mouth and leapt out to the retired teacher. Jack was frozen as the girl pushed the man down and bit him on the neck. She tore into him with her teeth like a mountain lion taking down a deer.

“Jane...Jane...” was all he could stutter out of his mouth.

“What? What is it?”

He pointed towards the girl and finally broke his stare to look down at the kid trying to fix the ferris wheel. No one around them had seen the girl take down the man who was at least a hundred pounds heavier than her.

“What the hell is she doing?” Jane’s voice flowed into his ears.

The girl was still tearing and eating the man’s neck when he finally turned back towards the scene. He wanted to throw up, but there was no control. Not even his muscles would react to bring up his food.

“This has got to be a skit or an act...doesn’t it?” Jane said as she looked back to him.

He shrugged, it was the most he could do. The girl was his main focus until he heard another siren going off in the distance. His vision finally cleared up and he saw

behind the girl. There were five more people slowly dragging themselves towards the fair. They weren't walking; he couldn't describe it as that. They were standing upright and dragging their feet like a kid who isn't getting their way.

“Good Lord...” It was then that he came to realize what this was.

“This is getting a bit much for a skit.” Jane said as she wrung her hands on the safety bar.

“This is no skit, they're ... zombies.” The word felt fake as he said it even as he saw another nearly fall down onto the retired teacher and begin gnawing on his legs.

“No, no, you're wrong. This is all a play.” Tears started to run down Jane's face.

With his muscles finally listening to him again, Jack put his arms around Jane and pulled her face to his chest and held her tightly. He shut his eyes and prayed. When he opened them, the slow sauntering people were still walking towards the front booth.

“I'm sorry, Jane, I shouldn't have brought you here.” He said as the tears started to overtake him as well. He didn't know if she could hear him over her sobs or with her face pressed against his chest, but he said it anyway.

A scream filled the air followed by another, and another. Then people started running around, the kid at the ferris wheel gave up trying to fix it and looked to see what the screaming was about. When he saw the small crowd of undead walking through the fair entrance he looked up quickly to the people in the cars on the wheel. He caught Jack's eye for a moment, and in them Jack could almost see a prayer and an apology before the kid turned and ran as fast as he could.

Everyone on the ground had soon forgotten all about the people stuck in the ferris wheel or any other ride. The next screams Jack heard he could follow to the spinner ride

that strapped you in and as it spun around, lifted into the air. Those metal lock pins were electronically sealed. The ride was a buffet line just waiting for the growing horde of zombies.

Jane had stopped sobbing a while before this, but kept her face planted in his chest. He rubbed her back as he surveyed the grounds. There were a few pockets of humans left, running around the slow moving dead, trying to get out any way they could.

He looked down the side of the ferris wheel. It was mostly barren on this side of the fair, for now. A few stuffed animals and half empty buckets of popcorn scattered the ground. The food booths were completely vacant.

The food booths. Jack nearly sprained his neck looking over Janes body to her side of the car. The booths below had tarps stretched tightly over them. The one just below the ferris wheel was empty and no body was around. He didn't think no one or no human, just no body. If he remembered right, even those who had been bitten would turn into the undead. *Thank you horror films.*

He tapped Jane on the shoulder and pulled her away from his body, "I have an idea but you need to trust me."

She stared into his eyes, she looked tired and her makeup had run from rubbing on his shirt and crying.

"Just listen, there's a booth over your side. If we can get out of the car and onto the rail, we should be able to make it."

The idea snapped her back to reality, "You want us to... jump?" She said looking over her side, "Are you nuts?"

He smiled slightly and kissed her forehead, “Only a crazy man would think of something like this at this point in time.”

She shook her head, “Of all the men to date. I had to pick you.”

“Good to have you back, Jane.” He said patting her arm.

“Okay, whats the plan?”

“Scoot over me and let me look.” He said as they changed places.

The drop wasn't as bad as he thought. If they could get out of the car and down onto the rail, they had a chance to lessen the drop onto the tarp.

“I'll get out first, remember be quiet.” He slowly moved his legs out of the car and eased himself onto the rail. His shoes kept his footing as best they could as he motioned her closer.

“Jack... I don't know about this.” She said as she looked down to the tarp.

He put his finger over his lips and motioned her over the railing. She crawled out slowly and he grabbed her legs to hold her balance until she was positioned on the rail. He looked over to the ground and to the booth.

“You go first.” She whispered.

“That was the idea.” He said with a wink.

He turned himself around on the rail and bent his knees as much as could be afforded and pushed off. The wind felt nice against his sweaty forehead as he fell towards the tarp. He strained to turn himself slightly as he got nearer the top and then hit.

It was nearly perfect. The tarp held and cushioned his fall, except for his right ankle. The foot twisted slightly as he landed and he felt the snap. *Fuck, broken ankle.* It

was all he had to keep himself from crying out. Instead he bit his tongue and made a fist so tightly he thought his fingernails were going to cut through his palm.

After a couple moments of silence, he shifted his weight around and looked up to Jane. She slowly motioned a thumb up, which he returned and slowly moved himself towards one corner of the tarp, trying not to look injured. Jane turned around shifted herself on the rail, bent her knees and then leapt as he had done.

She turned in mid air like a diver trying to hit their mark and landed perfectly in the center of the tarp. She moaned quietly and picked herself up. With a smile, she threw her hands up in the air in victory.

Jack winced in pain and played it off as a smile. He felt for the truck keys in his jacket and blew a breath of relief when they poked his hand. Again he motioned with his finger over his lips as they moved to the side of the booth. Still no dead.

Jane went first this time, Jack figured just trying to be on the firm ground. He motioned for her to keep a look out as he eased himself down as lightly as possible. The shooting pain in his ankle shot up his spine as he put his weight down. Jane came up behind him and he could tell from her face they didn't have long.

As quietly as possible they started back towards the entrance. Jack suddenly realized how stupid this fair was. It was built in a giant circle, with only one way in or out. Sure, it kept it easier to make sure teenagers didn't sneak in for a free ride, but at a time like this Jack couldn't help but just shake his head.

They passed the retired teacher who was now missing a leg and half his neck. Jack looked away and said a quick prayer for the man. Once they got into the parking lot,

they found a new set of problems. There were at least a dozen undead wandered around the cars, weaving their way towards the fair.

How do they know to come here? Jack thought. They quickly moved behind a minivan nearby and he tried to look out over the hood when he felt a hand tighten on his arm nearly cutting off circulation. He looked to Jane to see her lips pierced shut so tight there were white lines showing up. She looked around them and back to him, her eyes wide and unblinking, he could tell what she was asking, *What do we do?*

He grasped the truck keys in his hand and slowly put them into hers. She tried to shake her head and shove them back, nearly making the keys jingle. Jack quickly wrapped his hand around his and hers. The noise didn't come. He looked sternly at her and jerked his head to the truck. There were only a couple undead wandering near it.

Tears came back to her eyes again as he kissed her one last time before moving around the minivan, "Hey! Hey! Over here you undead fucks!" He waved his arms and banged on the car next to the minivan.

Moans and growls picked up and the zombies soon started to shuffle faster towards him. He kept moving along the cars, pounding on roofs and shouting. As he did, he caught a glance of a white coat leaping over a small car and then disappearing into their truck. He smiled and waved harder. The pain of his ankle disappeared as he started moving faster towards the edge of the parking lot.

The truck roared to life and sped around the other side of the lot and onto the road. Jack felt his heart fall and leap at the same time. Jane was gone, she was safe, but for how long. He turned to run as best he could to the nearest house.

As he cleared the lot, the moaning of the undead seemed to die down. He took a moment to look behind him, he didn't see anything. A breath of relief escaped him as he turned around and stood face to face with a large man with a bloody bite mark in his neck.

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