

Monsters

by Grant Bailie

1.

I have always been frightened of Ferris Wheels, ever since I was a kid and saw a movie where one was destroyed by a giant lizard or possibly a giant rabbit, squishing it and a hundred screaming teenagers beneath its claw or possibly its paw. Then bent and broken and knocked loose from its base, the Ferris Wheel rolled into a convenient ocean. More teenage screaming. Splash. The Army had to be called in. Plastic tanks rolled over green hills, shooting puffs of smoke. Enormous satellite dishes spun like gossiping heads, relaying the strange news across the globe in all directions.

I had nightmares for years. Giant wheels rolling down streets, crushing cars and houses.

2.

Denise Smith smelled of raspberries. Tasted of raspberries. I think it was her lip-gloss. I took her to the county fair. I was in love with her, though I knew she did not feel that way about me and pined instead for some guy from another high school. A senior. But she let me hold her hand and sometimes kiss her.

“Let's go on the Ferris Wheel,” she said.

“I don't like the look of it,” I told her. “It looks like it wobbles.”

“You're nuts.”

“What about the dodge-ems?”

She made a face. “Ferris Wheels are *romantic*,” she said. She said “romantic” like for that one word she was ten years older than me. More mature. She understood things that I could not and never would.

“So are the dodge-ems,” I said, but really, that's a hard argument to make.

If I smell raspberries today my heart begins to flutter. I feel sad and am overcome with the notion that I have made some recent

mistake that I cannot undo, that I have forgotten something vital and loved on the roof of the car.

If I am driving down a country road and pass a produce stand selling fresh raspberries by the bushel, I have to pull to the side of the road and weep.

3.

We sit in bed. Her stomach is bulging. It rolls with a yet unnamed life. We were discussing decorations for the nursery but have gotten sidetracked.

"And you're not afraid of rabbits or lizards?" she asks.

"Not even giant ones," I tell her.

"Just Ferris Wheels?"

"Well, anything large and circular, really. Windmills, I guess, but there aren't many of those around. Anything like a Ferris Wheel, I guess."

"Hmm," she says. If she were my doctor instead of my wife she would be making some small shorthand mark in a notebook right now, rubbing her chin thoughtfully as if it had a beard, nodding for me to go on.

"Why do you think that is, Mr. Baillie," she asks, fixing me with the earnest gaze she learned in her second year at medical school. "Does it strike you as..." She looks for a nonjudgmental word. She doesn't look very hard "...*Goofy* that it would be the Ferris Wheel and not the giant lizard or rabbit that frightens you now?"

"Why not the Ferris Wheel?" I ask. "It rolled into the sea. Teenager were screaming. The rabbit just moved on to the next town."

"And how does that make you feel?"

I look at her. "What? About the rabbit. How does it make me feel about the rabbit moving on? "

She makes a face. I have seen that face a hundred times before but have yet to figure out exactly what it means. "Yes," she says, and

maybe she is being sarcastic. "About the rabbit. How does it make you feel about the rabbit?"

"Afraid for the next town," I say.

I decide not to tell her about raspberries.

