

# Dirty Deeds

*by* Mark Matthews

Mustard stings the corner of his lips. He swipes it away with a finger, and looks closer at the hot dog. The piece of meat is ripped open like a sliced finger stuck in a doughy bandage. How long was this hot dog sitting out before he bought it? Probably sat on the shelves all last month and didn't sell in the last town. It traveled with the carnival while a powerful army of bacteria infiltrated the casing. And here he was eating it now.

He thinks he should have chosen the elephant ear instead. The fatty fumes are so thick, and even the most ancient of grime would be killed in the deep fryer and then coated with sugar until it went down satisfying and sweet.

His feet kick the dirt and dust swirls in the air. Shrill bells and whistles shriek from rides held together by bolts tightened with hungover hands. Same rides as the year before, and the year before that, and here he is, 30 years old and still coming back trying to reclaim what belongs to him.

He was just 13 years old when he was here for the first time. His parents thought he was going to the bowling alley and would be back in a few hours, but instead, his feet pounded on his motocross bike carrying him on a ten mile bike ride. The carnival awaited.

He dumped his bike on the dark outskirts by a lone tree, and walked the last bit of distance. The darkness of the night framed the shining oasis of the carnival in front of him.

Music thumped in a tornado of noise as he approached. Teenagers older than him stomped about. One boy had his arm slung around his girl, who smirked behind lipstick and a hue of perfume. Another boy had his thumb stuck in the back of his girl's jeans, a public display announcing they had gone further and deeper in private. Years from now, maybe he could be one of those boys, but tonight, he was an outsider.

He roamed the aisles as the kaleidoscope of games called for his attention. He passed them all, hand in his front pockets fingering

his folded 5 dollar bill. Carnie game workers knew he had money to spend. They could smell the fresh meat and called out to him.

“A winner everytime.”

“I got a deal for you”

“You want to play this, I know you do.”

“Come on over here son, come on now...”

Rows of huge stuffed animals ... red, yellow, pink bears. Elephants of blue and orange with floppy ears. All of this could be won and presented to your girl if you were lucky enough to win at a Carnival game.

He couldn't recognize a single friendly face. Who were these people? Nobody from his school, nobody from his street.

His mouth was dry, and carnie dust was landing on his tongue and making it worse. A pop. He needed a pop. One lap of this place, he decided, then a MT dew before the bike ride home.

“You there! Yes, you with the taste on your tongue for something sweet, come on over here.”

His head swiveled, his feet pivoted, and he was drawn to the front of a dart throwing game. The prizes were mirrors with the names of music groups written across, and they shined down like treasure.

Metallica, Justin Beiber, Led Zeppelin, One Direction. Above them was more prizes; a row of t- shirts, all of them black, with ink that didn't seem to be centered.

These were knock-offs, homemade bootlegs.

“1 dart for 2 dollars. 3 for 5. You're a 3 for 5 boy. Come on now. Everyone's a winner. Pop one balloon.”

A man with a microphone paced back in forth. Red and Yellow balloons dangled waiting to be punctured. A woman worked as his assistant and followed his direction. There was some unison in them, like they were connected by invisible strings, one the puppeteer and the other the puppet, working in clockwork, collecting money, passing out darts, grabbing them from the floor, sucking in new customers.

The occasional pop of a balloon made him blink. He was scanning

the mirrors and shirts, when he felt the warm touch on his forearm. It was flesh older than his, but still soft and warm enough to make heat immediately pump through his body. Right in front of him was the dark, luscious queen of this carnival game.

She had white, fleshy cheeks with deep pores, and each one of them threatened to suck him in. Her face was stuck in a smile, her eyes were tiny dots of swirling possibilities. Stringy black hair was pulled back in a ponytail and her thin lips were dark as if black lipstick had been put on and could never come off .

She smiled too deep into him, looking through him, and saw that he was excited by her but that he didn't want to be. He needed to pull away but she was an exotic pleasure to look at.

He finally looked down from her eyes to her black t-shirt she wore which was one of the prizes they were offering. "AC/DC" it said in front, and had a picture of the whole group, including Angus Young wearing his school-boy uniform and horns coming out of his head. "BACK IN BLACK" was written sloppily underneath. The shirt pressed tight against her braless breasts.

The touch of her hand still warmed his arm. Every last swirl of her fingerprints made him excited. To be touched by her. She was in control. He didn't like it.

"You see anything you like Hun? Anything you like sweetie? All you need to do is nail just one, just pop it, and you win. Just keep trying. It's why you are here tonight. To win something you like."

His hand became part of the puppet show, and he pulled the five dollar bill from his pocket. The woman bent down to gather darts that had fallen to the ground and he watched as her cleavage spilled forth. He should have looked away but couldn't. His eyes traveled down her AC/DC shirt to the roundness of her breasts and ...

"What you looking at Boy?" Said the man, stepping up to him. His teeth were dark and jagged, like a dog's toenails. Black shave stubble was on his face, and his eyes glowed yellow.

"Her shirt. Her shirt is wrong."

"You say her shirt is wrong? What do you mean its' wrong?"

“Yeah, her shirt is wrong. That picture. It's a different AC/DC album cover. It's from Highway to Hell but it says Back in Black on it. It's mismatched. It's wrong.”

“Hmmm, so you say my good man, so you say. You are a smart lil'fuck. A smart one. Hmmm, yes. Yes. You could work. A little young, but, you could work. Smart to know all of that.”

The man pointed a finger into the air like it was a light bulb over his head.

“I'll tell you what my good man. We got new ones. New shirts. Back at the trailer. You bring one box from the trailer. Just one box of shirts from the trailer to here, and we give you one. And a mirror. One of both, you can't beat that now step right out and get going.”

He saw himself on Monday at school wearing the shirt and getting attention from everywhere. Which one would it be?

The woman bounced onto the counter and took him by the hand.

She pulled him along like she was walking a puppy. She was even older than he thought, old enough to be his mom. They walked by the Zipper, the Funhouse, ticket booths and the tilt-a-whirls. Carnie workers gave her nods of their heads with reverence like she was the queen, like a mother to all.

The whirl of light faded to the darkness of the trailers on the outskirts. She pulled him down rows of RVs and trucks attached to rustic campers of all sizes. Her fingers held his hand delicate as a doll but commanding as a cop. They finally came upon what seemed the hugest of trailers. More like a mobile home.

“Follow me in Hun.”

The room was full of thick black air, and he could feel the presence of something more inside. Like pets, animals; dogs asleep who were breathing. The slow movement of their chests, in and out, made slight ripples in the air, but none barked. The scent of ammonia stung his nose, like urine or something to clean up urine was on the floor, he couldn't tell which.

His heart thumped. This wasn't right. His feet started to turn back to the light of the door they came through, but she was on him then. Her lips kissed against his, her tongue was the taste of summer

heat. The black lipstick and her breath held the history of all her days and it filled his taste buds with something foreign and exotic.

She peeled her clothes off with speed. He felt the bare skin of her back. The roundness of her breasts pressed against him. Her hands worked like a mechanic and pulled down his shorts to his ankles. His brain flashed with the thought:

He was about to fuck for the first time.

*Yes fuck.*

No, not have sex and certainly not make love, but *fuck*.

There should have been music instead of the noise of dogs breathing all around him. He wished he could look into the eyes of a girl who was nervous like him, someone who he could think about the next day at school and smile with their unspoken secret. He wished her lips could taste like strawberry and not burnt blackness.

But nope, it was too late, because his body was raging hard and she was on top of him. She grinded with all her weight, her bare flesh made him boil and ready to explode. As soon as he entered her, better yet, soon as she engulfed him into her groin and was stuck on him like a suction cup, he did explode. Grunts came forth. He whined for God. He said he loved her. He knew he sounded like a child.

This made her laugh. The grinding stopped and she was laughing hysterically. The laughter filled the small room and crunched his insides. He needed to leave. He tried to cover up his naked self while she lay on her back, laughing not like a witch but more like a tattle-tale sister.

It was only a few steps to the door. The air would be clear out there, the ammonia would be gone, he was almost free. He opened the door ready to dash out and never to see her again, but hesitated. Maybe one glance back first to see if this woman even cared that he was going..

Dark shapes were in the room. He flicked the switch.

Light spilled forth like a flash bulb and made a permanent imprint in his memory. There were no animals in this room, there were little children, probably a dozen of them.

Cribs and cots lined the walls. Babies too big for them were sleeping in diapers held together with silver duct tape. All of them seemed brown and caked with carnie dirt. One woke, looked at him disinterested, annoyed, and then crawled to the crib side. It slurped on a bottle filled with yellowish white liquid that was rigged into the sides of the crib like he was a hamster. Liquid dripped down the child's chin. He feels like he can taste the liquid too, like it's a mixture of milk and elephant ears.

More movement in the cribs, restlessness from the children being woken before their time, faster breaths and faster heart beats. More eyes open up, some eyes catch his, some start to cry. They seem like plastic dolls, left out in the rain, with stains that will never come clean.

On the bed, the woman lays naked. Tattoos sag with her skin, and a series of scars that look like hash marks on her navel.

"Go on Hon. Get out of here, Let them Sleep. Go now My Love. Go Find your God!"

He fears she may laugh again, He wanted back on his bike. He wanted to go home.

Two steps out of the trailer and the air was fresh and the ammonia stink gone, but somebody is there waiting, seemingly standing guard, right outside the door.

It's him. The man with the dog toenails for teeth. Did he know what happened? What would he do?

The man's mouth opened and his teeth somehow sparkled in the dark.

"Thanks for the seed my good man. Thanks for playing. We can't just breed carnie on carnie. Really dumb down our tribe that way. We just need a few good men. Smart fuckers like you. Your's gonna be a wicked smart Carnie."

Wicked smart carnie becomes the name for his imagined baby, sleeping in a dirty crib some 9 months later.

The bike ride home was 17 years ago, and today he walks over the same piece of land; buying hot dogs, eating elephant ears, playing games, riding rides, and looking into the eyes of the carnie workers.

He hopes to see the trace of his own flesh in some lost, 17 year old.  
He wants to reclaim what's his, and bring the prize home with him.

