

Beasts of the Talent Show

by Shawn Misener

The crowd of parents is stuffed into an empty sandbox and forced to watch the talent show. One by one our children are paraded out riding various species of wildlife: The twins on matching chimpanzees, the Thai kid on a skittish giraffe, a terrified looking boy dressed in rags clinging to the neck of a limping ostrich. I can hardly draw breath from the center of the pulsing throng of adults.

Finally my daughter emerges from behind the silver curtain, riding piggy-back on a gigantic proboscis monkey. She's preoccupied by his nose, and wrings it like a wet dishrag with both hands. If it hurts he's not showing it.

The animals dutifully form a chorus line in front of the suffocating parents. They begin a rhythmic series of bellows, grunts, chirps, howls, and other odd beast noises. Above this natural backbeat of wildlife the children launch into the first verse of Jethro Tull's "Rumble in the Jungle."

It's oddly beautiful.

The swarm of parents is becoming too much. I can feel the sweat of at least four different people dropping onto my neck and shoulders. The fat guy in front of me farts against my hip.

Eventually the song ends and the parents rush the stage, full of anger and screaming at the animals. Released from the prison of aging flesh and bodily functions I fall to my knees and catch my breath. I watch as they snatch their kids from their rides, toss them behind, and begin to wail on the creatures, who don't seem to have the energy to fight back.

My daughter jogs over to me, pulling the reluctant monkey by the nose behind her. "Aren't you going to kill it?" she asks.

The parents have begun piling the dead animals up. One of them produces a jug of gasoline and lights the pyre. "Dinner, motherfuckers!" he screams, full of savage energy.

I examine the monkey, who stares back at me with dumb, resigned eyes. The adults have set up a makeshift picnic table and

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are setting out paper plates and pitchers of Kool-Aid. A particularly heavy father, the grillmaster, brandishes an impossibly large fork and manipulates the pile of burning animals, digging out pounds of random meats and stacking them on the plates of salivating adults and kids.

"Not for us," I say to my daughter. We walk away, the three of us holding hands. Child, proboscis monkey, parent.

"Is this the peaceful option, Daddy?"

"It's either this or that vulgar display."

"Oh."

The monkey stops walking and turns to face us. He appears worn and when he speaks the words are barely audible: "My gratitude to you is immeasurable, kind sir. Where the rest of your fellow humans chose the immediate pleasures of murder and gluttony, you chose love. And when you elevate love over all else, you prove your enlightenment. Here, take this as a token of my infinite indebtedness."

He reaches around his backside, grunts, and offers me a fresh pile of monkey shit.

"Ewwww!" My daughter moans.

I'm not sure what to do, so I shrug and continue walking. My daughter scurries up to my side, leaving the monkey standing with poop in his outstretched hand.

"Just fling it somewhere," I say.

The dull sound of shit splatting against grass. We don't look back to see if the monkey is following.

