

ATTRACTIONS

A SHORT STORY

JOSHUA EDWARD SMITH



Attractions

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Joshua Edward Smith

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With Apologies to Plato

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They arrived at the line and checked the wait. The sign said 30 minutes. That seemed to be the magic number. Any higher than that, and the kids would insist they go to the next possible candidate. But 30 minutes was tolerable. He didn't care what they did at the park, but the idea of getting out of the heat and into an air conditioned building for the next half hour was appealing.

They kept asking him what his favorite ride was. What did he like best? Wasn't it enough that he wasn't complaining? He soldiered on, willing to be the accompanying adult for whatever inane thing his youngest wanted to ride. Willing to hang back and watch the stuff when everyone else wanted to ride a roller coaster or fall over a waterfall or spin to the point of nausea. Why did he have to like something? He didn't *like* any of it. It wasn't because he was old and not fun any more. He never liked rides. It was one of the many human activities that never appealed to him. He didn't under-

stand why other people liked those things, and they didn't understand why he didn't.

Of course, he knew that was true in both directions, of many things. He had a taste for extreme flavors—bitter, spicy, burned. He enjoyed doing long division in his head. He liked all sorts of things that other people didn't care for. But he never insisted other people should tell him their favorite scotch, if they didn't like scotch. Or their favorite prime number. He understood that other people wouldn't have a favorite in a class of things they didn't enjoy *en masse*. Yet, everyone asked him what his favorite ride was.

The line shuffled forward a little.

When his wife asked him at the bar the night before what his favorite was, he answered honestly. "You." She didn't like that answer. He could see her any time. What did he like at the park? He shrugged. She was wearing a "comfortable dress" that night. From what he could tell, the attributes of a comfortable dress were that it had very little substance, and what fabric there was would stretch around every curve. He was a big fan of comfortable dresses.

She didn't always have curves. When they met, she was a rail. And at first he wasn't sure if that was going to work for him long-term. But then a strange thing happened. He became very fond of rails. Not only her. He started noticing other women with no ass, and no tits, and no belly, and no hips. Women who he never would have noticed before. Those girls became very attractive. He understood why, but he still found it fascinating. He *imprinted* on the woman he was in

love with. And then other women who looked like that were suddenly attractive to him.

He had done that all his life—imprinting. He remembered once sitting next to a girlfriend who was breaking up with him. The girls always broke up with him, not the other way around. And as they had their talk in her back yard, and he graciously accepted that their fling was ending, he watched in awe as her beauty melted away. It was the strangest thing. It was like one of those optical illusions, where you see one thing, but if you can get your mind around to it (or if someone helps you), you can see the other. The candle stick or the people kissing. And once your mind makes that transition, you can't see the original picture any more. Not really. You can force it, but it doesn't stick. And that's what happened with the girlfriend. He knew her appearance wasn't changing, but his perception had. It wasn't only that she wasn't beautiful any more. She was downright ugly. Everything about her was repulsive. He knew it was a trick his mind was playing. But it was inescapable. *I dodged a bullet*, he thought.

A teenage girl stumbled into him. She was playing with her friends and lost her balance. He steadied her and guided her back to her line. She mumbled an apology.

He looked at his wife. She was dressed for the park now, so there was no sign of the curves he admired the other night. They had been together a long time. And her body had changed, as women's bodies tend to do. Childbirth, and nursing, and age had endowed his wife with curves. When they

were walking to the hotel bar, he hung back a little so he could admire her ass. In that dress it was absolutely perfect. Most women wore high heels to ensure their asses shook and bounced and drew the eye. But she was wearing flats, and it didn't matter. Her ass was doing all those things and he was entranced. He looked for the line of her thong and thought he could barely make it out. He wanted to grab her. To push her up against the wall right then in the hotel. But he knew better.

He had admired the show as long as she tolerated it, and then she dropped her hand to her side and shook it. Her subtle gesture that said, "I know you are watching my ass. And I don't really mind that much. But I think you've had your quota, so come up here and hold my hand and walk beside me awhile." And so he did. It wasn't so bad, because from there he could see her face, and her tits, and her little round belly.

He wondered why the belly had gotten such a bad rap. We love every other spherical curve on a woman—why not that one? He loved it. Particularly when she was pregnant so many years ago. The three towers—breast, breast, and belly. Her belly was much smaller now. Just a little bump. But the breast-breast-belly triangle was there, and it evoked the triangle where her legs came together. It evoked it and, in a sense, it pointed there. Like a big arrow pointing right down between her legs saying, "this way."

He was exceedingly horny. That was the worst part about family vacations—there was simply no opportunity for

sex. Particularly since she had decided they were going to be the ordinary kind of parents who pretended they didn't have sex. And it would be really hard to maintain that illusion if he told the kids, "go to the arcade for an hour, so I can fuck your mother senseless." No, that would have been unacceptable. So on top of the misery of the heat, and the rides, and the constant drone of "what was your favorite," he had the misery of temporary celibacy. Which, he supposed, might be bearable, except for her propensity to wear *comfortable dresses*.

He had gazed at her up and down that night. When they reached the bar, there was a gush of cold air, and he looked to see if her nipples had come to attention. Just the curve of her breast, a perfect hemisphere, not encumbered by any undergarments, was really a work of art. But with the addition of a tiny bump, it became all the more a symbol of her sexuality. He couldn't take his eyes off them. But he knew if he stared too long, she would become self-conscious and cover up somehow. She knew him well. She knew he was staring at her chest no matter how subtle he tried to be, and he knew that. But she also would tolerate it for a while, and he knew that, too.

The line lurched forward and they entered another room. In this station, they would design a car. They divided into two teams. He and his son on one team, his wife and the two girls on the other. Each group went to a kiosk and used the touch screen computer to make myriad decisions about the car design. The conceit of the ride was that after you designed your car, you would ride in it, and the computers

would tell you how well it performed. His son loved this ride. It was the highlight of the trip for the boy, so the father stepped back and watched as the design process went forth.

He knew too much. He was an engineer and a scientist. He knew how everything at these parks worked, and that killed the magic for him. He supposed it was like being a magician at another magician's show. You might appreciate technique. You could admire skill. But you would never be surprised or amazed. And so he watched as his son tried to optimize the car to get a perfect score and beat the girls' team. He did the math in his head, and concluded that the boy was making a lot of errors. But he did not intervene. He watched.

The timer expired and they moved to a new line, waiting to ride in the cars.

His wife was ahead of him now, and he looked at her bare calf. It was perfect. That was one part of her that never changed. She had perfect legs. They were perfect when he met her and they were perfect now. And unlike everything else, that definition of perfect in his mind had remained unchanged. He followed them up until they disappeared into her shorts. The rest of her clothes were loose and gave no hint of the wonders beneath.

This line moved quickly, and before long they were waiting to ride. There were five in his family, and each car sat six. The girls took the front, and he and his son took the back. That left an open seat, which was filled by a single rider. They needed so many single riders for this particular attraction that they had a separate line only for them. The new

family member stepped up, and his heart went into his throat. She was stunning.

He guessed early twenties, although at his age, he had lost all ability to know how old any woman between puberty and motherhood actually was. Her breasts were full and prominently on display. The neck of her tight shirt scooped deep, leaving absolutely nothing to the imagination. Her tits were supported by sufficient modern engineering to create the illusion there was a small gravity-free zone around her immediate area. The tight shirt showed she had no belly, and her tiny shorts demonstrated no hips or ass to speak of. No, this girl was nothing but tits, and long, flowing sandy hair, and long, flowing tan legs.

“Have you been on this before?” he asked.

“Yes, a couple times. It’s so much fun. My friend and I just keep doing the single-rider thing over and over,” she said, gesturing at another girl who was nearly as attractive as she, with short black hair and a nose ring. “Have you?”

“Yes, a few years ago. It’s a lot of fun,” he lied.

The car pulled up and they sat down. He glanced at her chest. He attempted subtlety, but he suspected that, like his wife, this woman knew exactly what he was doing. Or maybe not—she was young. He wanted to stare, but he knew that was against the rules of polite society. The double standard struck him as odd. On the one hand, women he knew thought it was endearing and sweet that he still ogled his wife. But ogling a beautiful young woman sitting next to him on this ride was probably creepy, or at least politically incorrect.

Objectification. It was wrong to treat women as objects. Unless that woman was older. Then it was flattering. Or something. Maybe it was because she was his wife that objectification was okay? That theory didn't hold water, since it would therefore imply that wife means chattel. And that's emphatically not okay.

The whole thing gave him a headache. Why couldn't he take the da Vinci way out, and consider every human body a work of art worthy of admiration? If he believed in God, perhaps he could justify it that way. Look at this beautiful creation that God made. Hail the gorgeous virgin!

Alas, he knew it was not to be. There was a camera somewhere on this ride, and if he were staring at her tits when it went off, he would *never* hear the end of it. So he faced forward, and only took slight sideways glances as the ride lurched, and jostled, then shot forward. And the glorious tits next to him flew, and shook, and then almost escaped the confines of the tight, plunging neckline.

He was so fucking horny.

Then he spotted the camera and glared at it as it flashed, the ride speeding up to a ridiculous pace as it made the first major corner. Then another corner. And another straightaway. Next, the ride would be over, and he knew he hadn't been caught staring by that fucking camera. So he stole another glance at her. She had her chin up. The wind was whipping her hair. She was smiling and free. Unmitigated joy. And truly remarkable jiggling.

The car took another corner, and it went back into the darkness. He expected it to stop, but it didn't. It turned, and he realized that he had seen this part of the ride before. It was the part where the "simulator" drove through a darkened area, and suddenly turned. It was supposed to surprise you, but it didn't work, and it certainly didn't work the second time around. He was trying to figure out how he could be repeating things without having passed through the entry area again.

This was definitely different than it had been a few years ago. Perhaps there was some bypass, making two loops. *But why would they do that?* he wondered. Before long they were outside again, doing the fast part. He knew where the camera was. He smiled this time. Then he turned his attention to the jiggling tits next to him. They really were magnificent. He turned to look at her as the car sped down the straightaway, into the final turn. She looked so happy.

He looked toward his wife, but could only see her hair whipping around the head guard, along with his two daughters' hair. He looked at his son who was smiling. The car made the final turn, and then it was dark again. Something was definitely wrong. This ride should have been over. He tried to unbuckle the seat belt, but it wouldn't budge. That made sense, of course. You can't let riders unbuckle before the ride is over.

He thought perhaps this was a dream. Maybe he fell asleep at some point. He had always had the blessing, or the curse, to be acutely aware of when he was dreaming. His logi-

cal mind would always pick up on things that didn't make sense, like sudden changes of scene, or theatrical camera angles. And then he would think, *oh! this is a dream!* at which point he would try to control it, and invariably wake up. Apparently, his subconscious would not tolerate being controlled.

As they entered the straightaway and he passed the camera for the third time, he was pretty sure he was dreaming. So he decided to go ahead and make a pass at the beautiful girl next to him. After all, you can do whatever you want in a dream. He started slowly, by putting his hand on her leg. He watched his hand slowly move over and settle down onto her flesh, but he did not feel her leg there. His hand passed right through down to the seat. And that section of her leg disappeared.

It reminded him of when he used to smoke cigarettes. If you let the thing sit there smoldering, eventually you have a long cigarette-shaped ash. And it would stay intact until there was any motion. Then it would fall away. That's what her skin did. It fell away. He turned to look at her. She was still smiling and the wind was whipping her hair. But from that dent he had made in her leg, her body was flying off in little pieces. Like ashes from the cigarette. Little by little, she was disappearing. The wind from the ride taking her away, until there was nothing left.

He looked at the rest of his family. They were still there. Being jostled and pulled, this way and that. He thought about touching his son's leg, but he didn't want to risk it. His

wife's hair was still flying around, so he reached up to touch that. It held fast. He was able to feel it. He pinched it in his hand. That was real, he supposed.

As the ride slowed, and re-entered the dark part, he held the hair between his fingers. He rolled it. He loved his wife's hair. It was perfect. Just like her. The ride exited the darkness, and he found himself on another lap. He was tiring of this dream. He touched his son's leg, and the boy turned to smile at him. Nothing disappeared. *This is a most peculiar dream*, he thought. *Usually, I don't get this much control before I wake up.* He tried the seat belt again. It was stubborn. He looked around the car and concluded he was pretty much trapped. He was going to be stuck here as long as the dream lasted.

It didn't end.

He made loop after loop after loop. He felt the presence of his family around him. He saw them. He could touch them. But there seemed to be no exit.

It made sense. He never believed in God, or the after-life, or any of those silly notions people made up to pretend they would exist beyond the end of their natural lives. He assumed it would be, as Socrates conjectured, either eternal darkness or an infinite dream. And it appeared the infinite dream was the winning answer. And of course, this infinite dream might as well be the last thing his brain experienced. He would be on this track forever. Looping around and around, with only his family around him.

And the memory of his wife at the bar, before she tired of his stare and crossed her arms over her erect nipples. That comfortable dress. At least he would have that memory.

If you enjoyed this story, please stop by [amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com), [goodreads.com](https://www.goodreads.com), and [librarything.com](https://www.librarything.com) and leave a review.

Joshua Edward Smith has written two novels: *Entropy* and *Duality*. If you liked this story, you will probably enjoy those as well. You can find *Entropy* at mybook.to/entropy.

The first chapter of *Entropy* has been included here.

ONE

Lisa was comfortable. Both in the larger sense of her life, her marriage, and her children out of the nest, and in the smaller sense of right now—comfortably sitting on the couch. There was an hour to kill before her show came on, and she spent it tonight the way she always did: Facebook, Twitter, Words with Friends. She was just killing time on her phone tonight, not connecting with people exactly, but interacting with them.

Facebook, for her, was all an act. She suspected that was true for everyone. Just a polished, fantasy world in which every meal tastes as good as it looks. Every child is beautiful and smart, and every vacation is amazing. She did time on Facebook, but only out of obligation. Words with Friends was okay, too. It was a way to keep the brain exercised, she figured. Lisa didn't try very hard. She didn't need to, because her friends weren't all that smart.

Twitter was what kept her attention. She followed funny people, and beautiful people, and inspirational people,

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and annoying people. She followed poets and porn stars. She would watch her timeline scroll by and congratulate herself on the eclectic society she had constructed in her phone. And she would flirt.

Flirting was easy for her—she came by it naturally. Some men would send her private messages, while others would comment to her directly, in public. Either way, she would chat with them and feel them out. Eventually most men would get sexual. They would ask her for pictures, and sometimes she obliged. But mostly she demurred. It depended on her mood, and the man. But it felt wonderful to be so desired.

She was a woman who spent her whole life being the object of attention. Catching men staring at her subtly. Enduring men catcalling her, not subtly at all. She hated it. She despised the attention and just wanted to be left alone. Until one day—suddenly, it seemed—she was left alone. The catcalls stopped. The staring stopped. It all just...stopped.

Lisa didn't know why. She was still pretty, still sexy, and still in good physical shape. Maybe it was because the catcallers were mostly young men, and there was a taboo about calling out a "mother" type. When the harassment stopped, Lisa found that she missed it. She had never realized it when it was happening, but she needed that attention. It was important to her. Her husband looked right past her, pretty much all the time, just like those young men on the street. But on Twitter, it was different. On Twitter, men would seek her out and try to get her attention. They would

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catcall to her. And this time she liked it. She liked it a lot.

And so she would flirt, and that would make her feel good about herself. And she didn't feel the least bit guilty about it, because she knew her husband didn't care. When he was home, which was only about half the time, he had his nose buried in his phone. Presumably flirting with some young thing of his own.

So there they were. Together on the couch, yet miles apart. Each was invested in their own little online worlds. Practically touching, yet having no connection to each other whatsoever. They were waiting for the hour to be over so they could watch the show they both liked.

And then it happened. A private message from a man she recognized. Someone she had been noticing lately. And it seems he had noticed her as well. "You are so adorable. Your husband is a lucky man," the message read.

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Lisa did not have a difficult life. She maintained a home and took care of her self. She read, and she watched tennis on TV, and she looked after her family. In the wealthy suburb where she lived, her life was fairly typical. There were some high-powered executive women, and some women who worked because the fates had been unkind to their husbands' careers. But most of Lisa's friends were in essentially the same situation as her.

And she felt the scorn of society because of it. She knew that the "bored housewife" was a stigma worthy of

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mockery on reality TV. And she thought that was complete bullshit. Why was it that when a man works hard and catches a few breaks and finds that he can retire before fifty, he is a hero; yet, when his wife works hard and raises a family and successfully launches her children into the world, she is a jobless failure? It was ridiculous and it made her mad.

Lisa had gotten pregnant and dropped out of college when she was “ABD”—all but dissertation. So she essentially had a master’s degree. She toyed with the idea of going back to finish her PhD, but practically speaking the difference between a masters in art history and a doctorate in art history is exactly nothing. Either way, she was qualified to stand behind the perfume counter at Macy’s, which is exactly what her friends who worked found they could do when their kids left the nest.

No thanks. Lisa had done her time, doing laundry, and cooking, and cleaning. She baked cookies to raise money for the marching band. She drove her children all over creation. And she helped to raise the children of all the women who would now judge her. She would be the one who could pick them up and feed them when their mom got stuck at the office. No, Lisa knew that she had spent more than twenty years doing a hard job, and she was done.

She spent a lot of time now on social media, particularly Twitter. She had developed some real relationships there, much to the consternation of her husband. Roger belittled her Twitter friends as “imaginary.” These were people that she had grown to love, but he absolutely rejected the possibil-

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ity of that. “How could you love someone you’ve never met?” he chided her. She didn’t love anyone online romantically—hell, she didn’t love her own husband romantically—but she felt a strong affinity to many of her Twitter friends and she followed their life struggles daily.

She was not a huge sharer on Twitter, especially in public. She put up a selfie now and then, and she would chat with people about the things they posted. But she did not share too much of her own life on her public timeline. Sharing that way was a little too scary for her, but she enjoyed immensely when her friends would do that. If Lisa wanted to talk something through with a friend she would go into private “direct messages” and talk that way. Eventually, these conversations might move to a different app that was better for real-time conversations.

Through these various apps and chats and timelines, Lisa felt that she was part of a community. There was a group of people out there, none of whom she had ever met, who she cared about. And these people cared about her. And no matter what her husband thought, she considered this part of her life just as “real” as the physical world. Mostly she simply avoided the subject with Roger, because he was always so mean about it.

Lisa was loyal to her husband. Roger was a jerk. But he also could be sweet, and Lisa felt a strong obligation to him because he had been the one working long hours and traveling and earning all the money that now let her live a life

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of leisure. He wasn't a perfect husband, but he was her husband.

✕

Roger was an attractive man. He was tall, lean, and good in bed. Lisa and Roger had been together for an eternity, it seemed. It was comfortable. And boring. They had sex nearly every night when he was home. After their shows were over that night, and Lisa had taken off her makeup and got naked as she does every night, he came over to visit her side of the bed. He didn't kiss her. He used his hands. He never kissed her any more.

But his hands were practiced. They knew exactly where to caress and squeeze and tickle to make Lisa wet. And he eventually slid his hand down between her legs, and started to get her off. She pushed him onto his back and climbed on top. She rode him, with her eyes closed. There was no connection. His cock was just a dildo she didn't have to hold on to. She knew her body well, and quickly brought herself to orgasm.

She opened her eyes when she came, because Roger was strict about that. She looked at him but did not see him, and she came on his hard cock. And then she slid down and wrapped her mouth around it. She licked her juices from him, and worked his cock with her hand and her mouth until he came.

Then she went to the bathroom, cleaned up, and came back to bed. He was already facing away from her, and

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she lay there looking at the ceiling.

Is this all there is? she asked herself. *I came. He came.* Every night, not the same exactly, but the same essentially. Maybe he'd take her from behind. Maybe he would cum inside her. But whatever the form it took, it was always the same. Her turn, then his turn. Maybe together if they were lucky. No kissing. No connection. No emotion. No love. Just fucking.

And her mind went back to that text chat—the one that started before her show.

This man was different than the others. He was different in so many ways. He was extremely intelligent—maybe the most intelligent man she'd ever met. His use of language was astounding to her. He always used just the right word. And that vocabulary! He painted with words, and she felt proud, because words were her thing, too! She understood everything he said, every subtle nuance. She kept up. All that education and all that reading had never led to much of any career, but it certainly felt worthwhile when she talked with this man.

She flirted with him, but he didn't flirt back. Not really. She dropped a hint, mentioning *négligée*. He didn't take the bait. They always took the bait. She would mention *négligée* and the man would ask to see her in it. But not this man. He just moved the conversation right along.

She escalated. He made a sexual joke, and she took the opportunity to say she liked "sucking cock." There are a lot of ways to describe that act, but she knew from experience

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this was the one that grabbed a man's attention. It was true, of course. She really did like giving blow jobs. And all men love receiving them. So she would say she liked "sucking cock" and the man would say he wanted her to suck his. But not this man. He just said it seemed that all women on Twitter liked that. And he moved the conversation right along.

She lay there in bed, staring at the ceiling, and worked on the puzzle. *He started it! He said I was adorable! Why doesn't he want to see me naked? Maybe he didn't mean adorable that way. Maybe he meant what I write. What did I tweet tonight? Anything? Did I tweet something adorable? What the hell is wrong with him? Why didn't he ask me for naked pictures? Why didn't he try to sext me? I wonder if I'll ever hear from him again.*

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