Something to Crow About

Lexi breaks off a petal of her blooming onion, coats it heavily in ranch, and shoves it in her mouth, groaning at the taste. Forget roses or daisies, if a boy wants to romance her, she’ll take a bouquet of these. A trail of grease tracks down from her fingers to her forearm. Without hesitation, she brings her arm to her mouth to lick it up.

“Lexi,” Callie, her cousin, admonishes. “Stop that. We’re in public.”

“Hush you,” Lexi retorts as she plucks off another strip of onion. “Let me enjoy this. The fair only comes around once a year, you know.”

“You can eat onion rings whenever you want,” Callie says, stepping forward in line as another group climbs into a Ferris Wheel car ahead.

“Onion rings are different. This is a blooming onion.”

Callie rolls her eyes, “Same thing.”

“No, they aren’t,” Lexi objects. “Blooming onions are infinitely superior. Here, try some.”

Callie pushes away her cousin’s outstretched hand with a wrinkled nose. “No thanks. I’m already nauseous. Why did I let you talk me into this again?”

“Don’t talk like that. You can’t back out now,” Lexi says. “It won’t even be that bad. We’re not babies anymore.”

When Canfield Fair came to Youngstown when they were seven, the cousins convinced their parents to let them ride the Ferris Wheel, convinced it would be the coolest thing ever. With Lexi’s dad, Mark, in the middle, they practically vibrated out of their seats in excitement. Until it started to move.

Once their car crested the top and froze, they started screaming bloody murder. They wailed, they cried, they buried their faces in their adult’s chest and shook. Then, when they started to move again, they begged to be let off as they approached the bottom. However, the bearded man holding the controls was a sadist, and put them back in time out sixty feet in the air. The children swore never to ride it again.

They’re teenagers now, though, and that makes things different.

“You’re right,” Callie admits, forcibly relaxing her shoulders. “It’ll be fine. Fun, even. Maybe, after this, I’ll be able to convince Miguel to go up again with me. I saw him around earlier. It would be so romantic.”

“That’s the spirit,” Lexi says, pumping a greasy fist in the air.

By the time they reach the front of the line, Lexi’s onion is gone, the Styrofoam plate and empty ranch bowl crumpled in her jacket pocket, and both are excited for their turn. When the conductor cries, “Next!” they eagerly rush into the vacant car.

Still, since it’s unenclosed, they pull the bar down tight enough to dig into their hipbones. Not because they’re scared, though. It’s just common sense.

“Hold up,” the conductor says, coming forward and pulling the pin to put the bar back up. In the conductor’s wake, a little kid in a striped polo releases an old lady’s hand and bounces up the metal stairs towards us. “There’s enough room here for one more, and this little guy’s been waiting for a while. Do you girls mind if he rides with you?”

“Uhm,” Callie says.

As she thinks of a polite way to refuse, however, the boy – who looks to be four or five – climbs right up into the space between the cousins and beams at them.

“Great,” the conductor says, locking the bar back. “Enjoy the ride.”

The cousins look at each other, but shrug. It’ll be fine. They’ll be fine. They’re teenagers now. Maybe they’ll have to comfort the kid at the top. Neither of them want kid-snot on their jackets, but, hey, it’s the circle of life and they’re at the top now.

The ride starts moving again, and cousins watch as they rise up above the crowds, up to where the air is no longer heavy with the smoke of concession stands and cigarettes, and the constant drone of the live music and loud people decreases to a more tolerable level. Around and around they go. They can see the whole fair, they can see the parking lot, they can see the Dairy Queen at the end of the street. And, the kid doesn’t even cry.

“I told you, Cal,” Lexi squeals. “This is great.”

“Yeah,” Callie says. “It’s so beautiful up here.”

Their car comes to a stop near the top, and Callie pulls her phone out of the back pocket of her jeans. “Come on,” she tells her cousin, holding her phone up to get both of them in the frame without having to lean over the kid. “We need a selfie for Instagram.”

The camera shutters through half a dozen pictures. The winds whips their hair in their face, though, so the perfect one eludes them. She’s just about to take another when the whole car rocks.

“Aaaaaah!” The cousins shriek. Callie drops her phone onto the bench, but the car rocks again, and she is frozen with indecision over whether she should be more scared for her phone or her life. Lexi, hunched down and clinging to the bar with both arms, chooses life.

“Woohoo,” the kid screams, but not in fear. It’s only then they realize that he’s rocking back and forth like a maniac.

Callie’s too terrified for words, so Lexi grits out, “Kid, kid stop!”

The kid doesn’t stop. He throws more force into his movements. “Come on. Let’s do a flip.”

“No,” Callie shouts, trying to grab the slippery child and still him. “Stop. Please stop.”

The ride starts to move again, adding an additional dimension of movement to heighten their terror and vertigo. They scream as the ride starts to drop again, though only the child’s screams are of delight.

“We’re gonna die,” Lexi moans. “We’re gonna die.”

They cling to the bar and keep screaming, so focused on their impending doom that they don’t notice the ride slowing to a stop until the conductor’s leaning over them with a smirk saying, “So, I guess this fair really is something to crow about. Seems like you girls had fun.”

The cousins glare at the man and peel our fingers away from the bar so he can lift it. While the kid skips back to his grandmother, they stumble off the platform.

Lexi staggers over to a trashcan, leaning over it and breathing heavily while her body decides whether or not it needs to hurl. “I think I might hurl. Why’d I let you talk me into going on that death trap?”

Collapsed in the grass nearby, Callie says, “It was your idea.”

“Well, you should have stopped me,” Lexi croaks.

“Agreed,” Callie says. “Lex, let’s never do that again.”

“Agreed. I say we stick to the games,” Lexi suggests. Stomach settling down, she pushes away from the trash can, “Wanna go shoot some balloons and win a cheap, bead necklace?”

“Yeah, that sounds good.”