

The carnival was in town.

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Every summer it came to the North End of Gaw for One Week Only. Prizes Galore! Fun for All! Bring the Family!

Tony and Lommy brought themselves to the entrance of the carnival. Business was good. People were standing in line to buy tickets, and there were two carnival men collecting the tickets, one on each side of the entrance passageway. It cost ten cents to get in.

Tony and Lommy walked away from the entrance. They had their own way of getting in. At least it had worked for them last year.

They went around the corner. They strolled leisurely along the line of tents. The high backs of the tents were an effective barrier. They could hear the sandpaper voices of the barkers and the excited cries of the people on the other side, but they could not see anything.

Each tent had been set up so that its sides touched the sides of the tents next to it. It was impossible to slip in between tents. But—further on, towards the back—the tent setter-uppers had miscalculated and there would be two tents with a foot of space between them. At least that had been the case last year.

But meantime in the event that some unseen carnival eyes were watching, the two boys did not make a big production out of examining the amount of space, if any, between the tents. In fact, they walked along several feet away from the tents and looked off into the field. The carnival was in the open field next to the Hook Mill on Loring Street.

They turned the corner, at the back, and then veered abruptly into the field. This sudden move away from the tents might have seemed rather odd for here in the back there was that looked-for crack of space, where two boys could tuck in their gut and glide silently through a

tight sandwich of canvas into the carnival. But the only trouble was that standing close by this opening was a husky gypsy with a club in his hand. He grinned at them like he could read their minds.

They swung around the back of the carnival and went down the other side, still keeping to the sanctuary of the field. On this side a carnival hand was walking up and down by the tents, patrolling. Like the gypsy he was armed with a club. They came closer, to look him over. It was a typical carnival face. A long thin jaw, speckled skin, and dead-looking straw hair. He did not look friendly. He stared at them with cold eyes.

“Hi,” Tony called, waving and smiling.

He answered by spitting in their direction.

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“Oh, you carnival bastard!” Lommy said angrily under his breath. “Let’s throw a couple of rocks at him and go home.”

“No, no,” Tony said.

“We’re never gonna get in anyway,” Lommy said pessimistically.

“Just wait a minute,” Tony said. “Maybe I can think of something.”

“The only place I saw where we could get in is by the gypsy, and he’s got a club,” Lommy said

Tony nodded, and scratched his chin.

“I wish we could get twenty cents someplace,” Lommy said. “All I’ve got on me is four cents.”

“Well, that makes us sixteen cents short,” Tony said.

They turned around and walked slowly toward the back.

Tony wasn’t quite ready to give up. He had no idea of what he could do, and the situation seemed hopeless, but he believed in miracles. He kept thinking, thinking.

The lights of the carnival were getting brighter in the night. The noise was picking up. The excitement was picking up—he could feel it in the air. It was Friday night and the place would be jammed inside. And here he was in a quiet field with the grasshoppers, cut off from all the excitement and fun. Goddamn it! He felt the desire to be in that crowd rising in him hot and impatient.

Wasn’t that the way it went though, when you least expected something—bang! Seeing that gypsy there had really shaken him. It was the last thing he had expected to see. The carnival had never had guards before. Why did they have to start now? Some smart guy was always changing things.

“We might as well go home,” Lommy said despondently. “We’re never gonna get in tonight.”

“Take it easy, Lommy. We might find some money.”

“Hah! Look—I’m laughing.”

Tony had a feeling about that carnival hand and he had been right. He liked the gypsy better than the carnival hand. The carnival hand had an American face. He looked like he came from some really American state, like, say, Kentucky, or West Virginia. But the gypsy had sort of a Portuguese face. He was dark and had flashing white teeth. Yes, he liked the gypsy better. He felt more at home with him. But didn’t they say you couldn’t trust a gypsy?

They turned the corner at the back, walking along easy, but keeping a safe distance into the field. The gypsy smiled broadly, as if he had been expecting them. He had not budged from his station by the opening. This was disappointing. Tony had thought they might make a run for it, if the gypsy walked up and down like the other guy. But he obviously was staying put.

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Tony put his hand up and gave the gypsy a friendly wave. The gypsy nodded back—still smiling broadly, which was a good sign. Or was it?

Well, nothing ventured is nothing gained.

Tony took a couple of steps toward the gypsy. He spoke over his shoulder to Lommy. “Come on,” he said in a low voice.

Lommy was alarmed. “What are you gonna do?”

“You’ll see. Follow me.”

Tony approached the gypsy in an apparent casual, friendly, light-hearted, trusting way, but he stopped a little over a club’s length away and stood on his toes, alert, wary, and ready to run. Lommy stood further back yet, behind him, and to the side.

Tony nodded at the gypsy.

The gypsy nodded back, his second nod of the night, and he was still smiling broadly.

“Nice night.”

The gypsy nodded, the smile the same.

“You with the carnival?”

The gypsy nodded, the smile even broader now.

“It’s a good job, huh?”

The gypsy nodded twice, all his teeth showing.

Why doesn't he say something? Oh, Lord, maybe he doesn't know any English, Tony suddenly thought. He had talked once to an old grandfather who nodded and smiled all through the conversation and then afterwards Ma told him, "Next time talk to him in Portuguese. He doesn't understand a word of English." And this gypsy was acting the same way that grandfather had.

"Boy, I sure would like to work in a carnival!" Tony lied. "It must be very interesting—you get to see all the different cities."

The gypsy stopped smiling and spoke for the first time. "I stay on the lot. I never see the cities," he said, shrugging his shoulders.

200 "I still say it must be a nice life though. You're independent, you know. You don't have any boss over you."

What was Tony doing? Tony was a born salesman, a sure candidate for a gold pin and letter of commendation from Regional Sales. He was buttering up the gypsy, softening him up for the kill. He had never read *The Selling Manual* but he knew its valuable money-making secrets by instinct. Did not the *Manual* make the following points in the summary at the end of Chapter Four? *Concentrate on the target. Establish a warm, human, personal relationship. Make suitable comment on wife and children, etc.* Tony would have gone up to the target with a squaloid grin and pumped his hand vigorously up and down and said, "How are the kiddies, gypsy?" But he was not properly equipped. He had left his cigar and double-breasted suit at home. Under the circumstances, he was doing the best he could.

"Where do you go after you leave here?"

"Chicopee."

Tony cleared his throat. "Say . . . uh . . . any chances of you letting me and my friend here go inside?"

"Ho, ho!" the gypsy laughed, as if that was a good joke. "You boys try to go in without paying—I know, I know!"

"How about it? Will you?"

"Ho, ho! I lose my job if I let you in."

"We won't tell on you, honest."

The gypsy shook his head, but kept smiling.

Then inspiration came.

"I'll pay you for it."

The gypsy's smile vanished. This was business. His eyes narrowed cunningly. "How much?"

“All I’ve got on me.”

The gypsy smiled in compliment to his tactics. “How much is that?”

“Four cents.”

Tony held his breath. The gypsy looked at him. Then he looked to the left and then to the right. “Let’s see it,” he said.

Tony looked at Lommy for the first time. “Okay?”

“Sure!” Lommy said. He quickly passed Tony the four cents.

Tony was apprehensive. He didn’t trust the gypsy. The gypsy could easily take the money and tell them to beat it. But he had to take that chance. He came close and handed the gypsy the money.

“If anybody stops you, don’t tell them I let you in,” the gypsy said.

“No, don’t worry, we won’t.”

The gypsy looked around again and then he said. “Go fast, boys.”

They went fast—before anybody could change their mind or something else happen.

They popped out of the slot sideways and ran off into the noise and activity. In a moment they were safely hidden in the warm belly of a big crowd. One last look over their shoulders to see if they were being pursued, and they relaxed.

“I gotta hand it to you, Tony,” Lommy said affectionately. “You’re smart. I never would have thought of that.”

“Well, I didn’t know if he would go for it,” Tony said modestly, but pleased. “I just took a chance, that’s all. And thanks for the four cents.”

“Oh, forget it. Your share was just two cents anyway.”

Gee, but it sure felt good to be inside. And they knew exactly where to go, too.

They leaned against an empty wooden stage and waited. Overhead a big painted canvas told the tale: *15 Beautiful Girls 15*. This was the hula-hula show.

“I wonder if the girls will be good-looking this year,” Lommy said. “Remember that redhead last year?”

“Yuh, I remember her!” Tony said enthusiastically. His groin twitched in honor of her memory.