

One summer day when I was a bright-eyed lad of nine years with a bubblegum smile and an unruly shock of dirty blond hair, my father squeezed my shoulder and clucked his tongue as he often did before making weighty announcements. Being aware of several outstanding incidents of a mischievous nature that I had yet to be held accountable for, I held my breath and hoped for the best.

“How would you like to accompany me to the county fair?” he asked in a wry and wary tone. His piercing blue eyes studied me for a reaction as if the fate of the world hinged upon my answer.

“Boy, would I ever!” I belted out with enough vigor to rustle his hair. A broad grin swept across his face and we were out the door in record time.

I was trembling with anticipation as we passed through the rusty metal gate that funneled people into the bowels of the fairgrounds. It was one of those hot sticky August afternoons when the air is thick enough to dog paddle through. The sun had just breached a dark knot of clouds that had, only minutes before, drenched the area in a steamy summer shower.

My father and I wended our way along a crowded thoroughfare of loose gravel cratered with murky puddles that I delighted in hopping over, pretending they were bottomless chasms where sea serpents and mermaids dwelled. The muddy path was riddled with discarded bottle caps, soggy foil food wrappers and waterlogged cigarette butts, each one a lethal land mine that I carefully circumvented.

I caught my father wrinkling his nose distastefully as we passed by the livestock barns. The air was ripe with the crude but not unpleasant odors of fresh manure and damp hay. As was the case with most adolescent boys I was more tolerant of the heady aroma, being well-versed in the ways of all things unclean.

At my father’s insistence we hastened our pace, moving with a purpose toward the crown jewel of every county fair, the carnival. We were only halfway there when my father sidestepped the crowd, sidled up to a shabbily dressed toad of a man and engaged him in conversation.

“How’s the family, Sid?” my father asked.

“Oh, just fine. How about this weather we’re having?” asked the toad of my father.

I quickly tuned out the remainder of their banal chat, mourning the time that was being wasted so callously. I shifted my weight uneasily from foot to foot, trying to give the subtle impression of impatience without crossing the line into the dangerous realm of disrespect.

It didn’t take long for my father to take notice of my cunning ploy. He rifled through a pocket, his fist emerging with a crisp fiver that he stuffed into my eager hand.

“You run along and have a good time,” he said and gave me a pretentious pat on the head.

“Thanks, Dad,” I said and started out at a dawdling pace toward my coveted destination. I was more than ready to appease my insatiable penchant for high adventure but, knowing that I could still be under surveillance, I minded my manners, blending in with the masses and biding my time. As I reached the suspected limit of my father’s visual acuity, my speed increased in direct proportion to the distance I was from him. It didn’t take long to hit a full sprint.

I threaded my way expertly through the stagnant throngs, nearly colliding with an old farmer in bib overalls who glared down at me with blatant contempt. I raced past the 4-H stand where a clan of subservient youngsters with forced smiles doled out overdone burgers and bags of stale chips. Past the sprawling pole shed that served as an exhibition hall where merchants pawned their overpriced wares. Past the dilapidated grandstand with its battered aluminum bleachers and crumbling cement walls, rife with faded graffiti enlightening passerby on who loved who and who had been there before. Past the beer tent where red-faced ne’er-do-wells guzzled cans of Old Style.

I slowed as I approached the carnival and made my way down the long line of food vendors. Sucking in deep thick breaths, I savored the tantalizingly sweet aroma of cotton candy and the occasional hot oily whiff of corn dogs and funnel cakes.

The corridor opened up and I was greeted with the glorious sights and sounds of the midway. The place crackled with energy. Carnival rides of every shape and size spun, twisted and rocked their hapless victims, provoking screams born of a contagious amalgam of exhilaration and terror. Intoxicating diesel fumes spewed from the huge generators that gave life to this menagerie of childhood delights.

Then there were the carnies with their gap-toothed grins and grease-stained sleeveless shirts. They were everywhere, manning each ride and precariously leaning out from every gaming booth, cajoling passersby to step right up and try their luck, always ready to relieve an impulsive fairgoer of a dollar or two.

Freed from the constraints of oppressive adult supervision, I found it difficult to decide where to begin my spree. I settled on a ragged canvas tent brimming with row after row of arcade machines eliciting all manner of squeaks, chirps and clacks. Their phosphorescent screens flickered and glowed, enticing children like moths to a flame. I recognized one of my favorites and dropped a quarter in the slot, amusing myself with the antics of a short, pudgy plumber trying to rescue his unlikely sweetheart from the clutches of a deranged gorilla.

It was during my second game that I noticed him out of the corner of my eye. He was tall and lank and loitering just outside the tent flaps, leaning on one of the taut ropes that supported the makeshift shelter. He had an oddly tilted head that looked like it was screwed on crooked. But by far his most disconcerting aspect was his vacant eyes, devoid of even a trace of sentiment.

Even more disturbing was the fact that those cold dead orbs seated in his cockeyed head seemed to be watching me.

At first I paid him no heed, but as I flitted about from machine to machine, his intense scrutiny of me never wavered. I thought it might be an illusion, akin to how a particularly lifelike portrait's gaze appears to follow your every movement. Then I left the tent and all doubt vanished. He followed me as I proceeded toward the line of gaming booths.

Being preternaturally aware for a nine year old, this man's preoccupation with me struck me as odd and more than a little spooky. I couldn't comprehend what his intentions might be. Perhaps he derived pleasure from the simple act of stalking young children. Perhaps it was something more sinister, beyond even my grimmest imaginings.

I stopped under the narrow awning of the Lucky Duck booth where a flock of plastic ducks bobbed in the mechanized current of an elliptical stream. I chanced a look behind me. There he was, mulling in the shadow of a maple sapling. I slapped down two quarters, plucked a pair of ducks from the turbulent waters and pocketed a plastic chicken-shaped whistle half-filled with water and a set of jacks for my trouble. I moved on. So did he.

"You look like you got a good arm, son, " lisped a particularly toothless carnie juggling a grimy baseball between his calloused hands. He was staring directly at me. I raised a finger to my chest.

"Yes, you, son. All you have to do is knock over those milk bottles," he said, pointing to a pyramid of three bottles stacked on a bench. Distracted as I was, I never noticed the crooked-headed man approaching from behind. I felt a cold, clammy hand on my neck and shoulder.

"Want me to win you something, kid?" he asked, baring a set of yellowed teeth in a canted grin.

I looked up at him, still unsure of his intentions but tempted to take him up on his offer out of sheer juvenile greed.

"I got some change back in my car. Problem is, it kind of slid under the seat. Want to go and help me find it?"

At those words, I felt an icy chill sweep up from the base of my spine. I started backing away. He held up his hands relunctingly. "Now don't run away. Just trying to be friends is all."

"I'm not supposed to talk to strangers," I conceded. I glanced up at the carnie, hoping for some acknowledgement or a show of support but he was oblivious to my pleading stare, having already moved on to his next mark.

The crooked headed man knelt down on one bony knee and made another pathetic attempt to smile disarmingly. "Well, see, if we was friends we wouldn't be strangers no more, now would we?" His breath was musty and smelled sickly sweet, like overripe berries.

Just then, an errant throw by a teenager sent a baseball caroming off a support post, just missing the crooked headed man's skull. His face contorted into a dense writhing mass of rage.

"Watch where you're throwing, jackass!" he screamed, hot spittle flying from his mouth.

I sensed an opportunity and bolted. In my mad dash, I nearly collided with an elderly man smoking a pipe, just managing to snake between him and a heavysset woman, sending them both off-balance. From the crash I heard behind me, it was apparent that either one or both had toppled over. But I couldn't spare a glance back to see what bedlam I had caused.

The ground was loose dirt saturated from the recent downpour. The heavy pedestrian traffic had churned the mixture into an oozing sludge. I kicked up a spray of mud with every step. My feet slipped and skidded but my low center of gravity afforded me a degree of control that I hoped would grant me an advantage.

The lumbering crowd proved nearly impenetrable and I was forced to continually weave my way around legs and swinging purses. I made a series of sudden switchbacks and jackrabbit starts. It was then that I made a monumental error in judgment and slipped around the backside of the gaming booths where a narrow alley ran between the backboards of the booths and a six-foot chain link fence.

With my path totally devoid of people, I quickly picked up speed. My plan was to outdistance him but a quick glance over my shoulder told me instead that he was gaining ground at a startling rate. His long gait was proving more than a match for my youthful stamina.

I hit a slick patch of mud and hydroplaned across on one foot, ducking just in time to avoid a steel cable strung taut between a backboard and a fence post. I recovered my footing and chanced a look behind me to see the crooked headed man encounter the same mud slick. Spindly arms helicoptered as he lost contact with terra firma. His momentum carried him forward and directly into the guywire. It clotheslined him across the chest.

He went down hard on his back, legs flailing in the air. I slowed, thinking he must be out of commission after such a violent tumble but he proved more wiry and resilient than I had anticipated. He leaped to his feet, shook off the momentary daze and continued his dogged pursuit.

At the very least, I had lengthened my lead. I poured on the speed. Just ahead, the alley ended abruptly, blocked by the rear of a parked semi-trailer. Its doors, adorned in brilliant red and orange flames, were latched and secured by some ancient brutish padlock. I could see there

was a narrow space between the trailer and a small wooden storage shed. Venturing that I could fit, I committed myself to it. It was a tight squeeze but I forced myself through and stumbled forward.

Before I could even get my bearings, an arm shot out from the cranny, lunging for me. After several failed attempts, the arm withdrew and I saw the silhouette of a head press itself up against the opening. An eye darted this way and that, finally settling on me. It narrowed to a burning slit. Then the eye and the silhouette shrank back into the shadows and were gone.

Feeling safe for the moment, I looked up and realized that the hellishly painted trailer was, in fact, a funhouse. The entire side of the trailer that I faced was shrouded with a towering wooden facade bearing images of colossal demons peering out from behind rigid plywood cutouts of flames. One of the creatures had its burly arms raised high over its head and appeared to be cackling. Its thick horns spiraled up toward heaven mockingly. Another demon was clutching a scantily clad woman in its fist while licking its blood red lips. They all had a very disquieting realism about them and I surmised they were the masterpiece of some talented but seriously deranged artist.

A marquee, rimmed by red flashing bulbs, leaned against the side of the trailer. I squinted against the unholy glare, trying to make out the gothic gnarled lettering. It read: Perdition's Gate. Oddly, there was no line of people waiting to enter. Then I noticed that the front of the funhouse seemed to be angled away from the crowd uninvitingly as if attempting to exclude them from its macabre allure.

Before I could decide on my next move, the crooked headed man slipped around the far corner of the funhouse. He was still breathing hard but no longer running. He was hunched down low and the careful way he planted each foot as he advanced toward me gave me the terrifying impression of a cold-blooded predator stalking its prey.

Knowing that he would have me before I could slip back into the distant crowd, I exhausted my last option and vaulted the steps two at a time up to the diamond-plated steel platform that led to the entrance to the funhouse. No sooner had I mounted the platform than I found myself standing at the feet of one of the oddest fellows I have ever encountered.

He was clad all in black, from his sleek, pointed boots to his satiny trousers to his Victorian style vest. A heavy black robe hung nearly to the ground and completed the drab ensemble. I marveled that anyone could wear such heavy dark garb on such a sweltering day.

He was strikingly tall and I had to crane my neck to catch a glimpse of his face; a glimpse that made me cower. He had a deathly pale complexion and sharp, angular features. A wispy goatee encircled his thin lips and a mane of thick hair, dark as pitch, was tied back into a ponytail. Crafty penetrating eyes peered down at me and I found myself taking a step back, recoiling from his imposing presence.

“Welcome to Perdition’s Gate, lad,” he said in a deep, resonating voice. “Enter if you dare. But be warned. Inside these walls untold evil lurks. Some unfortunate souls never make it back.” A devilish smile crossed his lips.

“Ticket, please.” He held out a pallid hand, slender fingers writhing in anticipation. When I made no move, he quickly withdrew his arm.

“No ticket?” he asked, a bemused look on his face.

Speech eluded me so I just shook my head. My eyes darted toward my stalker. The attendant caught my furtive glance and turned his head to appraise the situation. The crooked headed man stood casually at the foot of the stairs, tapping a finger on the railing and feigning an innocent smile.

A knowing look crossed the attendant’s face. He nodded. “Hmmm. I suppose I could make an exception of you. For you, I mean.” He chuckled and I could have sworn I saw a wisp of smoke seep from his nostrils.

“The name’s Dagra Reeth. You can call me Dag,” he said, grinning malevolently. He slid his thumb and forefinger down the razor thin edges of his goatee as if to flatten it. When he stepped forward to lift the rope cordon I noticed his boots left behind what appeared to be a trail of soot.

“Thank you, sir,” I managed to say.

“The pleasure’s all mine,” he rasped and flicked me another Cheshire Cat smile.

I slipped past the gate and stepped into a revolving tunnel that I navigated with ease. I turned toward the entrance to the trailer. The doorway was circumscribed with a vivid mural and I realized that I was about to step into the cavernous maw of Satan himself.

I hesitated and glanced back through the tunnel toward the entrance gate. The crooked headed man had climbed the stairs. Although he was a tall man, the attendant was much taller, towering over him like a panther over its prey. I tried to tune out the dismal strains from a badly mistuned calliope in an attempt to hear any words that were spoken between them.

Dagra Reeth extended a waiting palm.

“I got no ticket but I got cash. Will that do?” the crooked headed man asked anxiously.

Dagra Reeth smiled, baring a set of realistic fangs that I, strangely, hadn’t noticed before. “But of course you have a ticket. You just don’t know it yet.”

Dagra Reeth's arm shot out past the man's ear and, with a flick of his wrist and a magician's flair for the dramatic, he pulled his hand back. A black ticket was grasped firmly between his finger and thumb. "Ah. There it is. You may enter, my good man."

I was appalled when the dark attendant waved him in with a theatrical sweep of his arm and a courteous bow. Knowing I had only moments before the crooked headed man spanned the tunnel and overtook me, I parted a heavy red curtain that looked and felt like a giant hanging tongue and stepped into the gaping mouth of the devil.

The first thing I noticed was how instantly and eerily quiet it was. Not a trace of the maniacal calliope music penetrated past the curtain. Nor was there the least vestige of light seeping through. I reached back, hoping to part the curtain and shed some light on my surroundings but my hand met what felt like bare rock. Surmising that I must have stepped in at an odd angle, I turned and placed both hands on the jagged wall, feeling for an opening that I couldn't find.

Shaken by my sudden disorientation, I decided the best course of action was to press onward. I turned and took two tentative steps. A gust of hot, dry wind blew past me and suddenly there were sounds to break the silence. Dreadful sounds. Raucous demented laughter. Unrelenting cries of agony and despair. Whatever soundtrack was playing, I had never heard the like and never care to again.

As I crept onward, the ground seemed to shift beneath my feet. My eyes were beginning to adjust to the darkness and I could see shards of bone and fragments of human skulls littering the floor. Smoke wafted up from beneath them and assaulted my nostrils with acrid sulfurous fumes. It was evident that no expense had been spared and no detail overlooked in devising such a fiendishly clever carnival attraction.

Just ahead, the rock walls opened up into a larger space. I knew it must be an optical illusion, but the depth of the darkness seemed to extend far beyond where the walls of the trailer should have been.

There appeared to be a flickering orangish light that provided a faint degree of illumination, though I couldn't pinpoint the source. A tepid oppressive mist hung in the air, swirling before my face with each breath that I took. It was then that I had the distinct awareness that I wasn't alone.

Glancing to my right, I saw nothing but fog and blackness. Glancing to my left, through the whorls of mist, I could make out an impish little creature with a tight pudgy face, stubby horns atop its head, and a grotesquely distended belly walking beside me. Its red skin glistened with a wet sheen and I could hear the patter of bare feet with each step that it took. Turning its head in my direction, it regarded me curiously with beady black eyes.

Instinctively I looked away and when I mustered the courage to look back again, the creature

was gone. In a bit of good fortune, I slowed to take a closer look around. It was then that I collided with the first panel of mirrored glass; a rude reminder that I was still in some demented likeness of a funhouse.

Placing my hands on the sheet of glass, I sidestepped until I found a narrow opening. I stepped through. Instantly I was surrounded by myriad reflections of myself, in some directions stretching out to infinity. Keeping my hands up before me as feelers I started working my way through the maze of seemingly endless mirrors.

More than once, I glimpsed pairs of glowing red eyes hovering before me, somewhere behind the glass panels. They unnerved me but I knew I had to keep my wits about me so I concentrated on the task at hand. I felt my way along, like a blind man navigating an unfamiliar house.

I encountered countless twisting passages and seemingly never-ending corridors. Deadends forced me to backtrack, only to find my prior path blocked as if the mirrors had covertly shifted only moments before. Then, at the end of the hallway I was traversing, a tall shadow appeared. I squinted, trying to make out details. It took a step forward into a pale shaft of reflected light. A shudder swept through me as I realized it was the crooked headed man making his own way through the warped maze.

He swiveled his lopsided head, scanning his surroundings. I froze, hoping he might overlook my small form in the dim light. As his face turned toward me, his body dropped low into a predatory crouch. I knew that he'd seen me.

My heart skipped a beat. I took a tentative step backward. My heel thumped into a glass panel that wasn't there just a moment ago. Panicstricken, my arms flew out to both sides, hands seeking an escape route. They met only cold unyielding slabs of glass.

I stood motionless and watched as the crooked headed man began his determined charge, quickly building his speed into a headlong sprint. The sudden realization hit me that I was alone, in the darkness, facing off against a deranged lunatic. I wouldn't give up without a fight but what chance did I have? His hands were already reaching toward me as he ran, fingers bent like claws.

I rallied my courage and balled my fists, ready to go down in a flurry of desperate blows. He closed the distance rapidly. I could hear a low growl building in intensity as he approached. The last few moments seemed an eternity. My back was pressed tightly against the panel behind me.

In the last instant before impact I could see his wild bloodshot eyes along with the seething rage and hate that blazed behind them. Then I heard a sickening thud and a sharp crack as his nose plowed into a glass panel just inches from me that wasn't there before. A great gush of blood

issued from his flared nostrils, painting the glass in an explosion of crimson. His momentum folded him up like an accordion and he collapsed in a heap on the ground at my feet.

Suddenly, I felt the absence of pressure on my back as the glass that had blocked my retreat vanished. I toppled over backward. Glancing around, I noticed that, not just one, but all of the glass panels had vanished, leaving me in a vast open space with the crooked headed man just a few feet away.

I tried to stand but before I could regain my footing, the floor began to tremble. I watched in disbelief as a series of cracks opened up in front of me. Steam billowed out from the fissures. As the seams grew, large chunks of flooring crumbled and broke away, sinking into a sea of boiling red liquid that seeped up from each crevice. I knew from the overpowering rusty stench that it must be blood or a remarkably close facsimile.

The crooked headed man reclaimed just enough of his shattered wits to realize his precarious situation. He managed to stand and stood there swaying unsteadily as the ground collapsed behind him. He stumbled forward just enough to avoid sinking into the depths. By the time the tremor had passed, he was left standing on the shore of that roiling red sea.

He stood there, staring at me. Blood still flowed freely from his nose, pooling on his knobby chin before dribbling down the front of his shirt. His mouth was curled into a snarl and I could tell he had lost several of his teeth as well. As I sat there looking up at him, it was apparent that he was gathering his last vestige of strength for a final lunge at me.

I knew that I should be scrambling to my feet but I was spent, in the midst of a waking nightmare without refuge or recourse. It was then that an odd gurgling sound caught my attention. It seemed to be coming from the lake of blood. I watched, mesmerized, as a line of ripples followed a sinuous course toward the shore. The ripples became turbulent bubbles and a bulbous mass of what appeared to be gangrenous green flesh surfaced. From its oozing folds, a slit peeled open and an eye emerged. Pus leaked from the socket as the eye swiveled and stopped, its cloudy pink pupil pointed directly at the crooked headed man's back.

I think he sensed the danger. I think he also sensed the futility in trying to elude his fate. He stood there, waiting in a state of resigned catatonia. He didn't have to wait long. A pair of sinewy green tentacles burst from the depths and streaked right for him. They tore through the seat of his pants and continued their course for several more punishing inches. His body went rigid, eyes bulging, and a quick gasp escaped his lips.

Heavy footfalls echoed behind me but I was too horrified by the spectacle playing out before me to even acknowledge them. Then a pair of pointed black boots came to rest beside me. I glanced up into the smiling face of Dagra Reeth. His attention rested not with me but with the crooked headed man. From the smug look on his face, it was evident that he was deriving a great deal of pleasure from the man's torment.

“I see you've met Zephiel,” Dagra Reeth said. He took another step, studying the writhing tentacles protruding from the crooked headed man's britches. “I think he likes you. Usually he only uses one tentacle.”

I heard a high-pitched keening laugh. Looking past Dagra Reeth's towering form, I saw the tiny red-skinned gremlin sitting on its rump, its stubby legs splayed out in front of it. Its belly jiggled convulsively with each raucous snicker.

Dagra Reeth's grin widened, exposing his glistening fangs. “I daresay from the pained expression on your face it appears you like it no better than some of your past unfortunate acquaintances. Enlightening, isn't it? At any rate, you better get used to it.” He pointed a bony finger at the man. “There is a very special circle of hell reserved just for the likes of you.”

The little gremlin's teeth chattered in anticipation.

“Zephiel!” Dagra Reeth called out. The creature's single cloudy eye widened. “Home!”

The eye rolled up and the fleshy slit sealed over it. As the creature submerged it retracted its tentacles but kept a firm grip on its precious prey. The crooked headed man let out one final tortured scream, tumbled backward, and disappeared beneath the red waves.

Dagra Reeth sighed heavily, then turned toward me. He was still smiling but his expression had softened. And when he spoke, his voice had lost its menacing edge.

“Don't spare a thought for him or where his fate lies. Make no mistake, he earned his ticket to this infernal place. And 'twas a one-way ticket at that.”

Bowing low, he extended a hand to me. I reached up and took it. His grip was firm, his pale skin as cold as ice. Effortlessly, he pulled me to my feet.

He placed a hand at my back, prompting me to walk with him. “Please allow me to guide you past the endless perils of Perdition's Gate back to the land of the living.”

As he ushered me away from that dreadful shore, into a darkening gloom, I gathered a bit of courage. “Are you a demon?” I asked.

Dagra Reeth let out a soft guttural chuckle. “I prefer to think of myself as a reckoner. A settler of accounts.”

I pondered his answer for a moment. “You look like a demon but you don't act like one.”

Dagra Reeth regarded me sternly. He raised a black dagger-like fingernail to his mouth.

“Ssshhh,” he hissed, feigning a concerned look around him. “Not so loud.”

A familiar gust of hot, dry wind blew past me. We paused before a barren rock wall. He reached out a hand, pressing his fingers into the craggy surface. The rock yielded to his touch, fingers penetrating with a grinding screech. The stone seemed to ripple, transforming into a heavy red curtain that he parted with ease. Daylight streamed in and I blinked against the sudden glare. Dagra Reeth reached up with his free hand and pulled his hood tighter around his head. Then we stepped out into the light.

I sucked in a great breath of fresh air. Dagra Reeth raised a finger toward the midway. I shielded my eyes with my hand and peered out in the direction he indicated. I saw my father standing on a park bench, his head snapping this way and that, searching the crowd intently.

I started down the stairs. Then I paused and turned around. “Thank you,” I said.

Dagra Reeth grinned. “Mind your parents. Eat your broccoli. Do your homework. And behave yourself. Or, someday, you just might be seeing me again.” A fiery spark seemed to flicker in his eyes for a moment and then was gone. “Take care, lad.”

I tore off at a dead run. My father saw me coming and I could see the tension drain from his face. He smiled and hopped down from the bench. I hit him at full speed, wrapping my arms around him. “Where ya been, Sport?” he asked.

I let the question hang in the air and drift away unanswered. As we walked away hand-in-hand I wanted to look back over my shoulder, perhaps to wave a final farewell. But I knew he was gone. To this day, I still have not managed to reconcile to myself what took place that fateful day of my youth. Those bizarre events are tucked away in the deepest recesses of my mind. And I’ve never again seen the likes of Dagra Reeth, the demon with a conscience.

A trip to the county fair on a balmy summer day is all that any nine-year-old could ask for. But when a malevolent predator begins stalking one boy, excitement quickly turns to terror and sets the stage for an encounter with forces best left in the darkest recesses of the imagination.

This is the first in a series of short stories following the exploits of Dagra Reeth, a fiendish but oddly likable demon with a soft spot for humanity who excels at walking a fine line between good and evil.

*This short story delves into the realm of fantasy and introduces Dagra Reeth, a demon with a soft spot for humanity. I have written a second tale that revolves around this fiendish but oddly likable character called 'Blood Bargain' that is currently available for download on Amazon for just ninety nine cents. I can foresee writing many stories about him and how he always manages to walk a fine line between good and evil.*

*In 'The Reckoning', we get to experience an idyllic summer day at the county fair through the eyes of a giddy nine-year-old boy. However, things quickly devolve into a nightmarish hell. But just as all seems lost, our young friend receives help from an entirely unexpected fellow.*

Rope bridge over pit of blood

This is the first of two short stories that I've written that feature Dagra Reeth, a fiendish but oddly likable demon with a soft spot for humanity who excels at walking a fine line between good and evil.

I do realize it is heavy on description and short on dialog. The vocabulary used is intentionally much larger and richer than a typical nine-year-old would use since the story is being told from the perspective of a much older version of that character.