

## Concrete Carnival

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*Step right up to the show that never ends...come inside, come inside...*

'Tis quite a ride, this life inside. One of the scariest shows on earth. A carnival of the bizarre in a fairground of bars and steel, bricks and concrete. Save for the sporadically flickering fluorescents, there are no flashing lights, but we have our bearded women, games of chance, and hustlers lurking around every corner. The rides are painted in institutional grays, browns, tans, and greens; their scariness warranted, their destination nowhere good. The bells don't indicate a winner, but alert us—losers to a man—when we're to be counted, leave our cells, when to return; sometimes they signal a dangerous breakdown in the established order.

Our admission fee is paid in years. In lieu of ticket stubs, rap sheets condense all the victims robbed or raped, hurt or killed into a burst of penal code. We pays our money, we takes our chances.

I'm your carnival barker, a hooker with a heart of fool's gold. You, reader, are a townie, a citizen strapping in for this ride of mine. Mind you, my peers don't fully accept me. They sense that I came from the right side of the tracks. But the world makes little distinction among us. So you see, I don't belong, yet I do belong here.

I'll lead you around, try to keep you safe, introduce you to the oddities. I speak the language, know how to move. But I try to believe that it's all a ride that ends in eighteen more years if I'm a lucky boy and I retain a tenuous grip on my sanity, which is the best I can do. So don't look for a through line. Like the rest of us, you'll have to take it day-by-day, scene-by-scene. Since I'll be your guide, you can call me Odi.

Enough talk, let's begin. Keep your arms inside the ride at all times. Don't make any sudden moves and I'll return you in one piece, scout's honor.

### **Games of Chance**

I went to chow on Sloppy-Joe night. The sloppiest joe in the state, slopped over undercooked fries, served in a cavernous mess hall half filled with two hundred diners.

After eating, my group was lined up at the exit. The large exit door swung open as we held our spoons at the ready to toss into the bucket upon leaving. We were just about to be given the *Go!* command when a fight broke out in one of the sections still eating. The door slammed shut, and with it our chances of getting out without a headache.

We're ordered up against the wall; our escort officer unsheathes his nightstick and runs toward the melee. Fights in the mess hall have the potential to turn into riots in the mess hall, so the ten ridiculously outnumbered cops treat it with called-for seriousness. Our escort officer, a huge country boy reliving his high school-football-glory days, subdued, nay, sent flying the fighters with a running tackle. And then things took a horrible turn.

A newly-minted sergeant panicked and gave a signal to the officer in the gas booth. Forty feet overhead three slots opened to disgorge three spinning canisters of teargas that dropped to the floor and bounced.

The mess hall tables were enveloped in a sinister cloud. Time compressed. Memory spooled: Fire Academy when I was a seventeen-year-old volunteer firefighter: an ex-Navy SEAL lecturing us on things gaseous after our stay in the smoke room: Your first reaction to tear gas is to rub your eyes—avoid doing so at all costs.

The gas stung every pore of my recently-shaved face; my eyes and mucous membranes felt like they were being seared raw; tears and snot streamed uncontrollably. But I didn't touch my face. I was more worried about the screaming throng of flailing inmates running in my direction, for we were standing in front of the exit. This way to the giant egress, folks.

A sympathetic door suddenly swung open, my two friends and I linked arms, and we ran out into the corridor. To our left were bars, to the right a wall of cops three deep, all holding nightsticks that I randomly swing out for our heads. Straight ahead an open door led to an evacuation yard. We made for this door while I cringed against a headshot, then poured down the couple of stone steps into the welcome fresh air.

I turned and saw an old man who had tripped down the steps and lay helplessly on the ground as others stepped on or over him. I ran and grabbed the oldster. Got him away from the steps and kept dragging him using a cross-body carry that I'd never attempted out of water, then a flood of inmates, the mob proper, burst through the door. Out of the crowd's reach, I brought the old man to his feet and shouted, "You okay?!"

"*Si, si. Gracias, mi hijo.*"

"*De nada, viejo.*"

He held tightly to my arm and looked up at me with rheumy eyes. "*Gracias,*" and some more in Spanish too fast for me to understand.

Then I noticed his shaking hand going for his face.

I grabbed it and leaned my face close to his. "No, uh, *no toca sus ojos.*"

Nodding and attempting to smile, he said in heavily accented English, "Yehs, ohkay, ohhhkay." Holding his arm, I escorted him to an *amarillo* crew of Latin Kings and left him in their charge.

The sun was beginning to set; underfoot the ground was muddy in spots, with islands of old snow. There were guards with assault rifles on the rooftops, one of whom aimed playfully down on us. A stiff wind blew. A flashback to a war I'd never been in.

My friends and I huddled close for warmth and, at my urging, found an available spot against the wall. The trigger-happy camp guards were three stories straight overhead. Our position was moderately safe. The hours passed in relative silence, the cold and tear gas residue putting a serious damper on an otherwise rowdy bunch.

It grew dark. No one knew how long we'd remain outside. We watched the corridor windows. An hour passed. Then two. My face stung, my extremities were numb. I kept my hands under my pits. The three of us each took turns being the warmer middleman.

It was nearing nine p.m. Judging by the flurry of activity in the lighted hallways, our stay was drawing to a close. Guys dropped shanks and used their dirty sneakers to surreptitiously bury them in the mud. I was surprised to see how many guys were packing.

Some four hours after the shit hit the fan, the door opened and a bullhorn announced that we'd be called in by company. Naturally, my company was one of the last to be called. Never have the hallways been more inviting; the heat was a pleasant welcome, even if the fluorescents were harsh on inflamed retinas. Dull-eyed and stiff, we walked through a gauntlet of angry cops. We filed past a nurse who was accompanied by a sergeant, and were asked if we needed medical attention. The sergeant's glare might as well have been a recorded message: You really don't want to request medical attention.

Down another hallway, we stripped for cops who checked us for weapons and marks of having been in a fight. I shook as I got dressed, not entirely from the cold. In my cell ten

minutes later, I removed tear-gas infused clothes and threw them all in a plastic bag. Then I filled my sink with cold water and washed the pain away as best I could.

Managerial statistics was the bane of my existence junior year. Paying no heed to the law of averages, I never go to dinner on Sloppy Joe night.

It was my first week in prison. Granted, I'd done a year in county waiting for the media to die out and move onto their next murderer of the month so as to cop out in peace. Then there was reception, where I was officially brought into the State Prison System: stripped, deloused, shaved, assigned a number, IQ tested, physician prodded, warehoused until a suitable home could be found for me. I was in reception for six months before being transported to the place that would be my home for a couple of decades. Eighteen months earlier I was, as they say, a free man, and as we say, one could still smell the street on me.

This was my first week, I was double bunked in a cell designed for one. At eight a.m. I came out for breakfast and waited on the company with the rest of the guys. Turning around to address someone, I saw a tall black kid with wild eyes, his hair twisted into tiny braid-like offshoots, slowly walk up behind a guy called Moonie, nonchalantly withdraw a jagged tuna can top, and rip Moonie from the corner of his mouth backwards, stopping at the ear lobe.

This isn't really happening.

Moonie's earlobe dangled precariously from a piece of twisted skin. His black flesh parted ungracefully, the white cheek meat splayed open to the world, the blood flowing. (So much blood from cuts to the face.) All the idle chatter ceased as Moonie mechanically walked a few steps and grabbed the handle of a metal mop wringer sitting nearby. The two now square off, the kid with his bloody can top, Moonie with his cudgel. This isn't the movies, there's no

hooting and cheering. We watch quietly, pretending (at least me) not to see anything. A cop sits on a desk on the other side of a gate, twenty feet away. It's the morning and he's probably hung over, but I can't believe he lets this behavior go on.

The boys bob and weave, no strangers to this bellicose dance. The blood pours into Moonie's mouth; the reptilian brain takes over, swings the wringer straight for the opponent's face. Whoosh, It misses. The kid has parried well, and with a hungry grin he now looks to move back in, to tag the other side of Moonie's face. The kid advances but Moonie draws on reptilian strength and delivers a sick-sounding blow to the kid's head. The kid's knees give a comical shake, he falls backwards, his head hits against a metal tray slot welded to the front of a cell. Whack-a-mole.

He's probably concussed before he hits the floor. The kid drops in a pile against the cell bars and floor, folded over.

The smell a second later, bludgeoning, indicates that this bloody unconscious pile of human has just auto-evacuated.

The cop's attention is finally piqued. He bangs his nightstick on the ground in an alert for backup, then yells, "Drop the fucking mop wringer!" and to us onlookers, "Up against the wall! Now!"

Following the others' lead, I place my palms on the brick wall and stare. Behind us, the mop wringer drops noisily to the terrazzo floor. I'm shaking, but probably not as violently as I imagine. Moonie's told to lie on the floor and he complies.

The cops tramp noisily up the stairs: jangling keys, clanking nightsticks, bad haircuts. The company's gate slides open with a whirl, cops snap on rubber gloves, handcuff Moonie and take him away. We remain, as directed, on the wall. The kid's dragged away by his feet.

The company officer mills about with his coworkers, makes small talk, jokes to the sergeant, "I knew they were fighting 'cause I've never seen Johnson Moonie use a wringer. You know how hard it is to get him to clean the stairway."

This is met with laughter. Dark humor is oddly reassuring at times such as this.

I suppress a chuckle and remember what my grand pappy told me when I was just a pup: Never bring a can top to a mop-wringer fight. Believe you me, there is no humor like gallows humor.

We're locked back into our cells as the blood trails are covered with bleach and mopped away. I wanted off this ride.

I looked for the ride jock to tell him that I wanted off, that I was going to be sick. He was probably goldbricking behind the funhouse, eating a pink cloud of cotton candy. The thought occurred: This kid just had the shit kicked out of him. To this day, when told that someone got the shit kicked out of him or was the one doing the shit kicking, I always inquire: Seriously? Literally? Real-life shit in the pants?

In the days that followed the incident I learned that Moonie had shorted the other guy out of five dollars on a bag of weed. Five dollars. And to make matters more interesting, the kid had offered to sell me a bag of weed at reduced price the night before the fight. I turned the offer down because, being new, I wasn't comfortable enough to begin breaking the rules; and the half-priced offer sounded too good to be true, like some type of set up.

In retrospect, I see that he knew exactly what he'd be doing the next morning and wanted to sell off his wares before he was carted off to the Box. The kid had done what he believed necessary. Me, I'd have eaten the five bucks and never again done business with Moonie. These

were the stakes now, the new ground truth. I could be cut over five dollars. This logic was completely foreign to me, remains so, but I act as if...

I still want off the ride.

### **The Tunnels of Love**

Cheri had legally become Cheri at some point in his life. He's a young Puerto Rican pre-op trans woman who's quite "passable" as a female—which is, I'm told, the standard to which trans women aspire—and all the more passable to the incarcerated and sex-starved.

We were in the same block a few years back. An unredeemable flirt, I'd make nice enough that Cheri would steadily gift me joints, but not so much so that he'd think me a potential John. We were roughly the same age, frequented some of the same mega-clubs back home, and reminisced about the different name-brand hits of ecstasy from the nineties. We'd discuss different club DJs until he inevitably began voguing in the middle of the yard, and I'd say, "You're embarrassing me."

Cheri made cuckolds of more than a few men. The amused cops would bring him makeup and lip gloss and panties, the cons would give him all manner of drugs. The latter in return for some sexual service, a rough trade the likes of which I didn't need, but was curious to know about.

He was protected, because the things Cheri got away with in here would land someone like me in the Box. One autumn night in the yard Cheri stumbled up to me and latched onto my arm. "Whoa," says I. "Had a few too many, did ya?"

"Ohhhhhdeeeee, it's my birthday."



Cheri was playing a role I remember well from my youth: Sloppy Drunk Girl. A potent odor of alcohol wafted off him. Not the shitty grapefruit hooch we brew in garbage cans, but honest to goodness hard liquor. From *the world*.

"Happy birthday, Cheri."

I looked, and hoped, for a water bottle filled with some clear liquid other than water. Looked to no avail.

"Odi, you...are...sooooo...cute."

This accompanied with the look: I'm going to throw up soon.

"Thanks, Cher."

We were walking again, me playing my role: He Who's Trying to Avoid a Scene.

Between hiccups, Cheri said, "Lemme blow you."

"Well, it sounds like fun, but why don't we try to get you a nice sit."

We walked past my crew's table. Although empty that night, I couldn't deposit Cheri there; protocol and table politics forbade bringing a chump to sit alone with me. Cheri made a sickening burp, one that portended a watery finish, a vurp. I spotted the table at which Cheri and the other 'mos were known to dole out handjobs, and hoped that we'd make it there before Cheri popped all over the side of my body he was using as a crutch.

Without looking too obvious, I deposited Cheri into the bench seating, propping his back against the wall. "Thaaata girl," I might have said, relieved that the hardest was over. Standing with my back to the wall, I instinctively reached for Cheri's wrist and took a pulse: Concerned Friend Who Happened to Be a Former EMT.

While I maintained a coolish gaze towards the horizon, Cheri stuck his head under the table and sprayed steaming vomit. When he was done I helped him back up, gave him a Starburst, made sure he was okay, promised to return, then left to spin the yard's perimeter.

I realized that I forgot to hit him up for a joint, but let it stand; Cheri might be able to get away with such drunken theatrics, but I worried I'd be scooped up from the yard, brought in for pat frisking and didn't want to smell like a roach clip.

Ten minutes later, when I returned to where I'd deposited Cheri, he was gone but easily enough spotted on the lap of some guy a few tables down, and no longer my problem.

Several nights later I sat at the table with my best friend, Ant, a tough, streetwise, blonde-haired, blue-eyed Italian kid a couple of years older than me. Cheri swished by and I told him he could sit. So long as certain protocols were followed, Cheri was welcome, however briefly. In the land of the thuggishly insecure, appearances are everything, and people-watching is elevated to high art. The yard birds gossip like high school girls; the message gets distorted and travels like a brushfire. If I was sitting alone, I wouldn't have invited Cheri over, but having Ant with me provided heterosexual cover. Cheri was conscious of keeping his hands above the table, something that was done for our sake. Most importantly, he was getting us baked, and that could be used in response to any of our crew who wanted to know why we allowed a chump to sit at the table. This protocol isn't discussed, it's just understood at a perception-equals-reality level.

After smoking, Cheri, seated at my side, leaned into my ear and in a breathy, sexy, black-and-white-movie-starlet way, said something about how much I'd like a blowjob from him or how quickly he'd make me come. Then he was standing. I looked across the table to Ant, who, like me, is a Seinfeld watcher, and said, a la George Costanza, "Jerry! It moved, Jerry!" We laughed tears through bloodshot eyes. Dare I admit that I wasn't lying?

My cousin J came to visit. Great conversation as always. Mountain Dew and an inhaled cheeseburger ensuring I'd fly all over the map. Word soup. Spraying monologue, losing the plot, discussing his forays into plotte (kooch). While he got me food from the vending machines, I scanned the room from the back corner. A sixty-something with the slight headshake of early Parkinson's played cards with his incarcerated son (grandson?); this made me sad. I perceived the old guy as ex-military, a civilian having to be subjected to this life inside. Like me. And the rest of my family.

The old guy left and, in so doing, gave J and me an unobstructed view of the next table: Hispanic with dreads, with his heavysset, middle-aged woman. J was describing some concert. Her abdomen was shaking like she was laughing. But she wasn't laughing.

The dread was dry humping her. With his knee. Her face was red and splotchy, her hair thin unlike her frame. She had the Linda Lovelace type of Fuck-Face: tightened mouth, scrunched-up brow. Lamaze class breathing.

We'll call her Helen because that's nice and she looked like a Helen. Helen probably works as a lunch lady or a librarian or a DMV clerk, and says things like, "You can't do that." No, "We, can't do that" and, "It's against company policy." She probably takes particular delight in saying, "I'm sorry, sir." When she sits in the lunchroom at work and describes to her coworkers her man doing time—the gentleman fucking her with his knee—Helen uses words like "caring" and "romantic" and "kind." She probably mules drugs for this mug.

I show J, who cautiously looks; still facing me, his eyes scan rightward, the pupil replaced by white. We continue talking, but he's visibly shaken. Oh, the fucking humanity.

Reality so real it becomes unreal. A weird dream. A dog dream. Fellini films. An acid trip at the country fair.

Minutes pass and conversation continues. I periodically check back, unable to help myself. Why couldn't she be hot? Like the girl at the soda machine with the improbably perky tits who must be pregnant.

The dread slowly licks fingers that surely ventured south of her border. I tell J, and we both pretend to swallow back impulsive vomit. Ten minutes. Twenty. "J, she's-about-to-come." We watch her face get redder, her breathing become more frantic. And then it's over.

I tell J that if he gets drunk that evening, he's got to recount that scene for his friends. Before leaving, I helped him paint it in his memory: red-faced, porcine lunch lady getting a knee job, her belly jiggling.

Waiting to go back, the knee-fucker asked if I wanted a Jolly Rancher. I said Sure, held up my hand, and Jedi-willed a good catch. He threw from twenty-feet away. I made it look easy, unwrapped the grape candy and lolled it on my tongue. Smacked it around, then thought of him licking his fingers. Spit out the candy into its wrapper and tossed it in the garbage. Getting strip searched on the way out, I drew the short cop who I'd seen before but never heard speak. He looked and sounded like the wise scientist ubiquitous in japanime. He called my sneakers "neakeys."

I got naked, lifted up my junk for his gander, turned around, raised my feet, and wiggled my piggies. I waited for him to say "Bend and spread"; instead, he said, "Waiting for a drum roll?" His delivery was comical, not malicious. I bent and spread. He said, "Therrrrre's a happy face. Get dressed," and walked out as I giggled to myself.

### **Lose Yourself in the Funhouse**

We don't really discuss our crimes; it's gauche. The "So whatcha in for?" line standard in most Hollywood depictions of prison just isn't kosher. Many men have appeals currently in the courts and snitches abound. And asking such a question, if answered, would lead to "And you?" and who wants to invite a public airing of their worst.

Still, I'd found out that Aaron had a dirty case, a rape charge, and while that was supposed to mean the end of my talking to him, my feelings didn't change. I'd found it out in an amongst-friends deal, from a guy who also had a dirty case.

This was our second meeting since my finding out. Yom Kippur in the mess hall. Nation of Islam fifty feet away, the other side of the mess, fifty of them, fifty of us. NOI celebrating Ramadan, peppering their sermons with angry rhetoric. Aaron and I laughed at the dark irony of it all. Aaron, the observant Jew, Puerto Rican father, Jewish mother. Quite a *simpatico* character: thin build, dark features without the swarthinness; calm, quiet, smart.

Since he's two months away from the end of his sentence, he worried aloud about civil confinement, a policy whereby, if deemed a threat to the public, an ex-offender can be held indefinitely. This is a new policy set at the very top, and local management is scurrying to handle the logistics. Guys are being held until the policy makers can designate a civil confinement facility for them to be housed in.

I reassure Aaron that civil confinement is only for the worst of the worst. He describes his crime. An entrapment along the lines of a "To Catch a Predator" series. He doesn't defend it. He was up to no good and got caught. Disowned by his mom. A *shondeh*, a disgrace, just like me.

I asked if he's okay, if anyone's fucking with him. "Thank God," he said, "I'm okay."

"How about the cops?" I said. This was the point in my life when I began asking questions even if I feared the answer.

"When I first got here, in the reception room, a guard slapped me really hard in the face." I cringed, said, "Ooof." Then, for no apparent reason, I imagined that the person with whom I was speaking was my brother, not Aaron.

The person sitting next to me, Aaron, my brother, described his stay in one of the rougher blocks. I began to cry, just a gentle trickle of tears. I looked to the NOI guys. Tears made everything blurry. He recounted his first night. His gate cracked, two massive cops walked in, called him a "rape-oh," smacked him around, stuck his head in the toilet.

I think of my brother again, maybe to torture myself, upping the emotional ante. I focus on my breathing so as to check the tears. I hear myself saying: "Look at me. Look at me. Whatever you need, whatever you fucking need, you let me know."

Across the table from me at chow sat a bearded Hispanic bug, the kind of guy whose psychiatric chart probably reads like a cut 'n' paste of the DSM. His eyes remained almost closed as he shoveled food into his gob, his neck cocked at an odd angle, alternately staring off toward the ceiling or the floor, smiling at times, mumbling continuously. Occasional facial tics and rubbery smiles. I glimpsed the nametag on his state shirt: *Trescabeza*.

A Korean friend once told me that in his country, weird dreams are referred to as "dog dreams." These dreams cross-pollinate with my waking life, making it weirder 'round the clock. In a recent dog dream I was actively concentrating on conjugating Spanish verbs, leaving out the *vosotros* because there's no place for it in the dream world.

*Trescabeza*. Three heads. Was this some bizarre joke played by a booking officer with a sense of humor? Was I dog dreaming? Or was this a perfectly apt name for a schizophrenic? And anyway, all of us here need a couple of spare heads in order to survive.

The thing is, I see faces and animals in the painted cement. In this regard, *Trescabeza* and I are quite *igual*. But I know they're random chips of paint, an opportune juice stain, not some supernatural force. Pattern-recognizing animals, we humans are. I see a bus, a ship, a hippo. Hamlet suggests to Polonius what any child can see in passing clouds.

Over time we learn to turn that feature off, lest we become too engrossed, to the detriment of our daily functioning. The key is to understand that the ability lies dormant in us. One simply should not speak to the patterns, unless one wants to be referred to the washed-up social worker who passes for a mental health professional. I make the patterns work for me. I amuse myself when bored by finding figures, faces in the floor. Take it a step beyond gazing and note the patterns, the timetables, say, of the cellblock rounds man. (If you're into sucking down joints in your cell and don't feel like being interrupted by a crew-cut cop making a round, this type of pattern recognition is for you.)

Tease out the patterns to the big picture flow of life inside, and you can learn how to avoid much of the bullshit. You can pay your drug bills in full and not in flesh, and steer clear of other extracurriculars.

Then there's everyone's default fantasy, a place to lose at least one head for days: Escape.

Every prison movie deals with it in some fashion, because the nicest thing about prison is leaving. It makes for a nail-biting plot arc as our protagonist hatches his plan, keeps it mum from guards and snitches, digs and tunnels, evades the bloodhounds, and spends the rest of his days lambing it on a white sand beach, frosty beer in one hand, foxy blonde in the other. This is

why drugs are so popular in prison, for drugs are ultimately about escaping your life, and no one wants to escape their life more than one doing time.

I've mellowed a great deal, but am still known to wet my beak from time to time. If the authorities were cool with it, I'd smoke a fat joint every night and melt away into scrumptious slumber. But, alas, they're not, and I stand to lose what few perks prison has to offer.

The tunneling and climbing have been tried before me. The System always learns from its lapses and immediately plugs the hole. You'd be foolish to assume I've given serious thought to escaping. I have a room with a view to a guard tower, and a guard with a high-powered rifle. I have a room with a view to someone who's been trained to kill me if I venture anywhere too close to the wall.

A good book provides a few hours of daily escape as I roll toilet paper into my ears and paint the scenes of, say, Dickensian London while the barely-muffled idiots to my left and right shout along with Jerry Springer or BET.

Seeing as how I have no appeal before the court, I'm trapped in this funhouse for the time being. Maybe the best I can do is record the experience, step outside of it; break my bid into a series of daily journal entries and occasional essays, a load I'm more able to bear on a day-by-day basis. Yes, that shall allow for brief respites as I crawl into my shell and chronicle this chaotic freak show.

I'll die behind the wall, or I won't. I'll taste the sweet air of the unincarcerated, or I won't. And this, too, shall pass; act as if. Make the adage a Jacob's ladder that leads over the wall of Painfuck, and into the heady mental state called Acceptancefreedom. The Gordian knot of Hard Time shall gradually untie itself, until one day it becomes the piece of rope I'll use to hold up the pants I'm given upon release.



P.T. Barnum once remarked that the entire world's a circus, people the clowns. I'll put on a funny hat and dance to that tune. Prison is a shitty, diet-cola version of the world, so we're the carnies to the world's clowns. And what's a carnival but a poor man's circus? We're misfit toys, wayward boys, sad jesters, maniacal clowns. In my darker moments, I dream of donning my clown outfit, painting tears on my face, and taking a rusty razor to my throat. No need for a melodramatic suicide note, I'd probably fuck that up, too. Let the tears speak for themselves.

As promised, I've gotten you through a picaresque tour of this shithole, hopefully not too much worse for wear. You can find your way out from here if you choose. I can't leave with you. Yes, I can see your car, your regularly-scheduled life, just past that last paragraph. Please remember me to the beach, to the bar that sits poolside. This way to the GIANT EGRESS, ladies and gentlemen...

But if you choose to hang around, I'll wash off my makeup, lose the barker's top hat and strap on my utility belt. Since we can't carry hammers, you can hang onto that loop while I point out the loose nuts on the creaking rides, give you the inside dope on the strong man and the trapeze artist, and I promise, by the time it's time for you to leave, you'll know more about the life your taxable tickets keep running than a marathon viewing of *Lockup*.

First things first, for your safety, let's begin with how to feed the freaks without losing major digits.