

Tethered
by
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Young Writer's Contest
Short story entry (4th and 5th grade)

Tethered

Hi, my name is Walter. I am a red balloon. I began life empty and small. I was pumped with breath and rose, full and round. Feeling light and free, I floated high and proud only to realize I was tethered to the ground by a long, white string.

I remember seeing the deep blue sky above and a colorful scene below. Red and gold tents were scattered all over a grassy hill. Flashing lights lit up a large red arrow beckoning small children to drop, flip, fly, spin, and swing on various monstrous machines. Snatches of muffled conversations, shrieks, and laughter climbed my string. The smells of buttery popcorn, sizzling burgers, and flakey funnel cakes drifted on the breeze. There were people leading animals around. Some carried blue ribbons and pompous looks. Others held nothing but a disappointed air.

I saw a big boy win a teddy bear for a little girl. She squealed with delight and hugged the teddy bear close to her heart. Then I saw a scene that made me feel as empty as my beginning. A small boy was crying while a larger boy snatched a contraption made of wire and glass from

his face. The larger boy laughed. It wasn't the kind of laugh I had heard before. It wasn't full of mirth but of malice. The cruel boy dropped the contraption and crushed it with the heel of his boot.

I was tied to the base of a shop in which a woman with great globs of paint on her face handed a metal ring to each eager contestant. The child tried to toss the ring around a bottle's neck. As each child missed, a man with a painted-on smile tried to cheer him up.

I saw only one succeed. She was a tiny girl with golden fly-away locks and a glint in her green eyes. She wore a dirty tee shirt and grass-stained jeans. She was leading a small furry pony. When the booth operator asked her what prize she wanted, she scanned the array of options. Her pony began to play with my string, bobbing me up and down, up and down.

"I'll have the balloon, please", she said.

"But Miss, it's not a prize. It's for show," the lady said.

"Your face is for show," the tiny girl muttered.

"What was that?" came the high shrill voice of

the lady.

“Nothing. I’ll pay you a dime,” the tiny girl said.

The lady with paint on her face thought a minute.

“Fine,” she said finally.

The girl handed her the dime, and the lady untied me. The girl promptly turned around and tied me to the halter of her pony. Together we trotted off through the rainbow of human life.

I soon learned that the name of the pony was Francheska De Fleur. The girl’s name was Avery. I learned this from listening to the other kids we passed. They whispered and giggled about her. Avery just kept walking with her head high and her nose in the air with her pony in step behind her.

We passed a bombardment of tents. One time, as a man entered one of the tents, the flap blew back a little in the wind. I saw a beautiful lady walking on a piece of string much like mine but thicker. Then the curtain closed, and I was left trying to figure out if what I had seen was real.

Avery didn’t stop until we were past the tents. I bobbed above

an open grassy meadow dotted with silver lakes. It was so simple and pure, so unlike the mess of the circus behind us. Trees stretched up their branches to the sky as if in worship. Avery led her pony under one of the trees, a large and beautiful oak, and sat down.

As you know, a balloon's life is very short. After experiencing this tangle of life, the good and the bad, I felt at peace in this place with this girl. I would be content to drift away looking at the simplicity of Avery with her long golden hair blowing in the breeze under the strong silent oak.

My girl suddenly stood up and began to work on my string.

"Here is your chance at being free, balloon," she said softly. "Even if I can't be."

Then Avery let go of my string, and I began to drift up and up into the endless blue of the sky.

2018 KET Young Writers Contest Winning Entry



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