

BALE. I've seen you here before, haven't I?

MAX. Maybe.

BALE. I'm good with faces. Helps when you're a "carnie."
Ah, that's short for carnival workers, carnival folk. It's a phrase people use a lot to imply something undesirable, but it's a unique lifestyle and I'm happy to own it. So then I have seen you here before?

MAX. Yes.

BALE. Sure, maybe with a girlfriend, right?

MAX. I don't...yes.

BALE. I knew it. Standing and looking. You know it's a lot more fun to actually get on and ride her than it is to just stare from a distance. That's true of most things though, am I right?

(BALE laughs at his own implication. MAX continues to stare.)

To each his own, I suppose. Hoo! She's got you all scared and frozen up, huh? I've never seen anything quite like it.

(MAX suddenly screams and screams at the rollercoaster. BALE is shocked. MAX stops and shoves his hands back in his pockets.)

Okay.

MAX. I hate that thing.

BALE. No point yelling at her like that, she can't hear you.

MAX. It's awful.

BALE. It's just a rollercoaster.

MAX. It's a big, rickety, wooden bullet of death.

BALE. That's quite an imagination you have there. As far as I know, no one's ever died on her and I know pretty far.

MAX. Dumb luck. I'm trying to work up my nerve.

BALE. To ride her?

MAX. To burn it down.

BALE. Now hold on there, champ. That doesn't sound like the best reason to be building up steam. Look, sometimes you just have to get on the rollercoaster.

MAX. I don't want to ride it.

BALE. Better than trying to burn her down.

MAX. I don't want to ride it. I want to burn it down. With my own hands.

BALE. With your own hands? I don't even know what that means. Listen, sometimes you just have to get on the rollercoaster.

MAX. You already said that.

BALE. Only advice I've got. That and don't waste your time on a woman who likes to dance. That's just a bunch of trouble in the making, if you ask me. My wife? Two left feet and happy as you like.

MAX. Is she a devastating, heartbreaking liar?

BALE. Whoa now.

MAX. Because if she's not then you don't have much to say to me.

BALE. Now, if you don't mind my saying so, you seem a little too depressed or, well, "out of sorts" to properly enjoy these attractions.

MAX. Enjoy? I think this rollercoaster, this one right here, is the reason my girlfriend left me. I wouldn't ride it with her. I was too afraid, made them stop the ride on the first hill. Fucking humiliating. And I think it was the tipping point, or the, the whatever that small thing is that unravels everything else.

BALE. Listen, what's your name?

MAX. Max.

BALE. Max, I can tell you're sad. Hell, people looking down from the top of the Ferris wheel could tell you're sad, but you need to cheer up. Because you're making me sad. And nervous. Now, I'm Bale. Bale Ring.

MAX. Bale Ring?

BALE. Named after the central ring used to raise big circus tents. My parents were carnies, too. And you know what they taught me?

MAX. How to make cotton candy?

BALE. Sometimes you just have to get on the rollercoaster.

MAX. There's a shocker.

BALE. Already said it's the only advice I have.

(He laughs at his own wit again. MAX smiles big and takes a plastic bottle of something and a lighter out of his pockets.)

What do you have there?

MAX. Gasoline and a lighter.

BALE. Well, I don't think I like that at all.

(MAX starts laughing. He becomes almost chipper.)

MAX. Hey now, we're just chatting. Right?

BALE. I'm sorry I didn't realize earlier that you were serious. Here I thought you were just having one of those, what's the, an existential crisis.

MAX. How do you even know [that term...?]

BALE. [Because I read] books and Kierkegaard is one of my favorite thinkers. You shouldn't look down your nose at folks just because they choose to amuse people for a living.

MAX. I wasn't [doing that.]

BALE. [There's a lot] to be said for giving people a laugh or a thrill. And while we're on the topic, you shouldn't assume your pain entitles you to take something away that many other people enjoy.

MAX. I sort of think you're biased.

BALE. And I sort of think you're on the verge of a psychotic break.

MAX. You don't even know me.

BALE. Healthy, well-adjusted people don't commit arson. At a carnival.

MAX. You're wrong; it really helps. It's fully one hundred percent healthy. Listen, I burned down the shitty little diner where she broke up with me over Eggs Benedict while the waitress watched. Helped. I burned down the used car dealership where she said I didn't stand up for myself when I bought our Saab. Helped.

BALE. A Saab? What happens when it needs service? Such a hassle. There aren't a lot of dealerships where [you can...]

MAX. [Then I tried to] burn the store where we got our cell phone plan that she said we were spending "way too much" on, but the fire alarm went off and I had to run.

BALE. You might actually be well past that psychotic break I mentioned.

(MAX laughs even more.)

MAX. It's really cathartic.

BALE. So is just getting on the rollercoaster.

(MAX suddenly screams at the rollercoaster again.)

Okay. We don't know each other, but eventually this is gonna catch up with you. And even if it doesn't, legally speaking, how is any of this making the fact that she's gone any better?

MAX. I don't like who that guy is. I don't like that guy, Bale. I can't be that guy. And every one of these places that burns down is one more piece of that guy she didn't love that's gone forever. And once he's all gone, completely gone, I'll be a different man.

(Pause.)

BALE. Is there...is there more?

MAX. That's it. We're nothing but our experiences, right? Erase those and start fresh. You'd be amazed, really. Amazed. It feels amazing.

BALE. Now I haven't gone to get the police, I haven't called for help, I've been really understanding, can you give me that much?

MAX. Okay.

BALE. Right, so I'm genuinely without an agenda when I say to you that is a really naïve thing you've convinced yourself to believe.

MAX. Fuck you, you don't know how much it hurts.