

The Circle That Fits

Kevin Lichty

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In Kevin Lichty's whimsical novella *The Circle That Fits*, a boy raised in a carnival seeks a steady life.

Daniel grows up beneath the flashing lights of the midway, where people's screams of joy belie dark realities that slink out at closing time. His veteran father is volatile, but also makes the best funnel cakes around. His mother, a consummate dreamer, loves spinning him among the fireflies, but cannot take the darkness long: she leaves when he is seven. Llewellyn, in charge of the pony rides, warns Daniel then: you don't want to be bound by these aisles. There's a world bigger than the circle your father has drawn around you.

When Daniel is seventeen, he decides that he agrees. Armed with yellowed letters from his mother, but without a birth certificate to help him find work, he leaves the carnival. He works itinerant jobs, earns a GED, encounters disappointments, and realizes that he has a knack for French cooking. But just as grand opportunities blossom before him, he receives word that his father is in the hospital. He's forced to choose between a bright future and the past that he shook off.

Daniel is a sensitive narrator who observes much but avoids judging others, even when they let him down. He thrills in the carnival spaces of his youth, befriending Rolfe, who tamed a lion with his vulnerability, and Llewellyn, who's so knit into the carnival that he's taxidermied for it when he dies. He clings to a few bright recollections, though their edges fray over time: "my memories are made of static," he notes with regret. His boundless empathy both imperils him and proves to be his greatest asset.

Relayed in affecting vignettes, *The Circle That Fits* reveals the magic and dangers of carnival life.

MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER (November / December 2022)

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