

CARNIVAL FARM

LISA JACOB



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Published by Paper Angel Press
paperangelpress.com

SAMPLE CHAPTER

1

SEAGN CONWAY GAZED INTO THE SAD BROWN EYES of the cow leaning heavily against the iron gate in front of her. She scratched the cow under its chin. The cow tried to lick her hand.

Seagn sighed, looked out at the twenty assorted farm animals in the pen. Crowded under a single ten-foot long tent, with one rusted barrel of water between shared between them all, it was no wonder everyone went straight into the carnival and didn't even bother to stop to see the farm animals. They looked worn, sick, or old.

Seeing them like this broke her heart.

Seagn caught the eye of the nearest person wearing a "Rockwell Carnival" t-shirt. "You know who owns these animals?"

"Fatsy?" The man gave her a grin, revealing three missing teeth and the remainder were all black. "He's with Webby."

"Where?"

The man pointed with a wavering cigarette. "The RV over there."

At the edge of the carnival, parked between a couple of trailers, sat an RV. Three people sat at a table under the shade of its awning.

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In a fury, she pushed through and dodged groups of people to get to the RV. It was only five years after the Pandemic, and people were still leery of her pushing them around, coming within a six-foot distance.

Two large men and an equally large woman sat precariously on large folding chairs, each drinking cans of Coors Lite.

“Who’s Fatsy?” she demanded.

“Who’re you?” the larger of the two large men snapped at her in the same tone.

“I’m Dr. Shaun Conway. I’m a vet.”

“Fuck,” Fatsy set down his beer. “They all got their rabies shots.”

Seagn put her hand on her hip, a sure sign that a tirade was coming soon. “Those animals yours?”

“Yeah.”

“I want to examine them.”

“You can see ’em through the fence, can’t you?”

“They’re under duress.”

“They’re under the tent.”

“Fatsy,” said the woman. “Don’t give the doctor a hard time.” She smiled, although it was forced, at Seagn. “We have all the necessary papers to display these farm animals.”

“They’re sick. Depressed.”

Fatsy snorted.

“What do you suggest? We send the clowns over to entertain them?” This from the other large man, obviously “Webby”.

“As a matter of fact, I do have a few suggestions,” she said, going to lean on the precarious table, then stepping back when it jostled the cans of beer. “How much to buy the animals from you?”

Fatsy and Webby blinked.

“They’re not for sale,” said the woman.

“Now, hold on —” began Webby.

“No,” said Seagn. “*You* hold on. I want control of those animals, and I’ll bring them up to snuff. Healthy, and even give pony rides on that little Shetland you have there. I’ll give people

a reason to come to your carnival, to see beautiful specimens of farm life in the middle of the city. Sell them to me.”

“Eight thousand dollars.”

The woman glared at Webby.

Seagn rocked. It was a hefty amount. “Including the trailer and tent, all the trappings it has.”

“Agreed,” said Webby. “If you can do what you say, then it’ll be worth it. You gotta buy your own feed, though.”

Now it was her turn to blink. That was going to cost a lot, especially the healthy kind of feed she had in mind. “I accept that. Draw up a contract.” She looked to Fatsy. “Got any problems with that?”

Fatsy struggled out of the chair, as if it had molded itself around him. It came up when he stood and he had to push the arms of the chair off his hips to get clear. “Where’m I gonna go? All my crap’s in the truck.”

“I don’t care,” Seagn said. “You didn’t care about the animals, why should I care about you?”

Fatsy looked as Webby went into the RV. Fatsy then looked at Seagn. Her fury eased somewhat at seeing Fatsy’s helpless face, but this man abused these animals. She knew it, and she wasn’t about to let him get off scot-free. He seemed the type to have a Plan B for himself, anyway.

She wasn’t worried about the eight grand. She had more than enough saved up from the sale of her parents’ house a few years ago when she started her job at the Central Avenue Vet. Five years later, she was bored to tears with dogs and cats and the every-once-in-a-while rabbit. Farm animals were not her specialty, but she had the Internet.

The carnival advertised that it was going to be in town for the weekend, so she had a lot of work to do. Clean up the apartment, settle her debts, and first: quit her job.

She smiled. Hailey was going to love that.



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“No notice?”

Seagn packed her few personal belongings from their shared desk. She checked the computer, but nothing personal was on it. Maybe some pictures, but not much.

Hailey yanked on the end of her own ponytail.

“You’re — You’re just ... leaving?”

“Yes. You’ll be fine. In fact, you can hire that guy who worked here this winter.”

Hailey exhaled. Seagn tried not to grin. Hailey, younger than Seagn by three years, never let her forget who the owner and boss of the place was. Since the owners changed hands last year and Hailey was in charge, it had been a crappy job. Seagn had been looking for a way out.

God (or Whoever) had seen fit to present her with this opportunity: to do what she loved with a whole new set of exotic-to-her animals.

Seagn straightened with the box full of her stuff. “So there it is.”

Hailey again tugged her pony tail.

“Goodbye,” Seagn said, while she finally grinned.

She used her hip to push open the half-door leading out of the doctors’ office. The rest of the staff craned their necks to see where she was going. Some rose from their chairs to watch her walk out. Seagn said nothing to the receptionists or the patients in the waiting room.

She put her items in her ancient yellow VW’s “trunk”, which was the front of the car. After slamming down the hood, she glanced back at the clinic’s windows. No one had gathered to see her off.

Seagn frowned. If they didn’t need her, she didn’t need them. She got into her car and drove to the animal shelter on the outskirts of the town of Salem.

Decorated throughout the year with black cats and pumpkins, the Town of Salem’s shelter was adorned in perpetual

Halloween mode. But then, that was the town for most of the year. After all, Salem had a reputation to keep up.

The dogs were out in the spring weather, and the parking lot had only a few cars in it. There were hardly any adopted dogs from the shelter this past year, but most of the ones that passed through her clinic were for the basics of spay/neuter, heartworm, and some with broken bones. Kristen White, one of the Animal Control Officers of Salem, usually presented Seagn with the complicated cases.

“Doc Shaun,” called the receptionist with a wave and a smile.

“Hiya. Is Kristen here?”

“In the back. She just got a new bully, and you know how she is with getting them acclimated.”

Treats and cuddles, Seagn thought. Unless they were stressed, then it was treats tossed to those fighting-breed dogs from a distance.

She walked past the receptionist’s area through to the back office and found Kristen with a ragged bully dog that looked like he had seen better days. He wagged his tail at her approach, though.

Kristen noticed her. “Hey, Doc.”

“Hiya. Who’s this?”

“Don’t know. He was abandoned in the dog park. Probably a fighter.”

Seagn could tell by the scars on the dog’s haunches that Kristen’s guess was probably right. But he was still wagging his tail and bumping up against Seagn to be pet.

“You got him calmed down.”

“Nothing a little trust can’t do. Speaking of which, what are you doing here?”

“I’m leaving the practice.”

Kristen sighed. “It took you long enough. Are you going into your own clinic?”

“No, I’m joining the circus.”

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Kristen stopped playing with the dog and gave her a sidelong glance. “You’re not serious.”

“I’m dead serious. Have you seen the animals in the pens over at the carnival nearby? They’re in horrible condition.”

“You’re going to save them?”

“Every one of them, and turn it into a functioning petting zoo.”

Kristen looked forlorn.

“Hey, the city still has an agreement with the practice,” Seagn reassured her.

“For how long? We come in with the complicated cases and you take care of them for free or near free. Hailey isn’t going to do that for long.”

Seagn shook her head. “The animals need me more than Hailey does.”

Kristen absently stroked the new bully, who seemed to sense the sadness in the room.

“I’ll probably be back in the winter, unless they go south.”

“You don’t know?”

Seagn shrugged. “It was an impulse thing.”

Kristen laughed. “You always do that.”

“It seemed like a good idea at the time,” she mused. “You know how I hate to see animals suffering.”

“It’s part of your charm.”

Kristen fished out a treat from her pocket and gave it to Seagn. The dog watched attentively. Seagn tossed it to the dog, who caught it on the fly.

“Thanks for letting me know.” Kristen got up and hugged Seagn. “Good luck and be careful.”

Seagn returned the hug. “I will. And thanks.”

Seagn had tears in her eyes as she left the shelter probably for the last time for many months.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lisa Jacob has been writing since she could hold a pencil and draw a straight line. She wrote fan fiction before branching out into novels and short stories.

In the early 2000's, Lisa was a carny in a traveling circus for a summer, where she met her husband. Interested in magic(k), cards, and divination, she lives in Rhode Island with her son and three cats.

Lisa is also the author of the "Grimaulkin" and "War Mage" fantasy series, as well as *Real Magic for Writers*.

You can find out more about Lisa Jacob at her website, lajacob.com.

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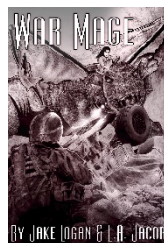


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