

The Balloon Maker

By

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FADE IN:

EXT. FAIR GROUNDS - NIGHT

The Great State Fair is in full swing. Choruses of children's sugar rush induced laughter mix with the blaring trumpets and charming bells of the marching band.

SFX: POP. CHARLIE (7) strikes a balloon with a dart. Charlie jumps up in joy. This feat and the bright LEDs light up Charlie's face and smile, his eyes glowing neon green.

CHARLIE

Yes!! Did you see that? Mom, look!

Charlie's mom, BETTY (35) is engrossed by the pig roast a stand down. She takes a pic with her iPhone; the iPhone is never absent from Betty's hand. Betty stands with her arms folded, observing the vibrant chaos around her.

BETTY

Wild...

CARNIVAL WORKER #1 points at tiny teddy bears.

CARNIVAL WORKER #1

Which one you want kid?

Charlie reaches out for a blue bear. His hand is met by one of Betty's disinfectant wipes. One hand for the iPhone, the other for the wipes.

CHARLIE

Mom...

BETTY

You don't want these toys, Charlie.

Betty fixes Charlie's collar. With his white polo, crisp khakis, and gelled hair, it looks like Betty made a wrong turn on her way to drop Charlie off at Sunday school; her destination - a PTO meeting.

Charlie and Betty move along. Charlie's head turns back and forth and up and down. He soaks up every bit of his bright and bouncy surroundings.

(CONTINUED)

CHARLIE

Hey mom, look! There's the ferris wheel. Can I go on?

Betty lifts her head up from the glowing screen of her iPhone. She reads the sign next to the ferris wheel: MINORS MUST BE ACCOMPANIED BY ADULTS!

BETTY

No

CHARLIE

But why not?

BETTY

You can't go up by yourself and sweetie, I'm not going on that thing.

Charlie's eyes search for something his mom might not say no to. Ah-ha – a food stand!

CHARLIE

Mom. MOM. Mooooommm...  
Can we get food here?

Betty is staring at the assorted population of humans around her. She closes her mouth and snaps out of her stare to research her son's new request.

BETTY

Ehh... N-Oh sure!

They go up to the food counter.

CHARLIE

Hello, I'll have a... hello?

CARNIVAL WORKER #2 is behind the counter, silent. They blankly look at Charlie.

CHARLIE

Okay... I'll have a corn dog, please!

While Charlie is ordering, he puts his hands on the counter. Out come the wipes. Before Betty has the chance to sanitize her son, CARNIVAL WORKER #2 is addressing her.

CARNIVAL WORKER #2

And for you ma'am?

BETTY

I'll have a, uh, Palm Tree Pinot  
Paradise.

CARNIVAL WORKER #2

Okay, that'll be 6 tickets.

Charlie takes his corndog and Betty gives Carnival Worker #2 the tickets. Carnival Worker #2 hands Betty a tall, plastic cup in the shape of a palm tree. Wipe still in hand, she accepts the cup. Charlie scarfs down the hotdog.

BETTY

(in between sips)

Hmm... Maybe I should start...  
using bendy straws...

Betty juggles sips of pinot paradise and her email inbox. Charlie searches for the next move. He sees a small cart that reads: BALLOON-LAND. The cart stands alone, and is less polished than the well-lit game or food booths.

Charlie's head jolts, shaken by the screams of a dying cat.

BETTY

MY PINOT!! MY PHONE!!

Nope, just his mom. Betty turns to yell at the two kids chasing each other who had bumped her, spilling the contents of her plastic cup on to her PTO-ready ensemble.

BETTY

HEY! Watch where you're going!!

Betty reaches out for the napkin dispenser and pats her blouse furiously.

Unable to pretend to care about his mom's wine, Charlie turns to the balloon cart. The cart is adorned with a massive heap of balloon shapes of all colors. A BALLOON MAKER (50) stands behind the cart. He works diligently to keep the line moving.

CHARLIE

Mom, what are we gonna do now?

Charlie turns to Betty, who is still moving furiously to fix the mess PinotGate has caused to her phone. Her face melts in awe at her son.

BETTY

You are so tender to care about mommy's phone like that. God, I'm raising you right.

CHARLIE

(pointing to the balloon cart)

Mom, please. Can we go over there?

Betty cranes her neck and studies the area Charlie points to. She reads a sign: DUMPLINGS! SPRING ROLLS! WONTONS! Betty runs over to the stand, ignoring Charlie's request.

BETTY

Hiii, excuse me. Hi. Do you guys have uhm, how do I say this without being offensive? Do you, uh, do you guys have...

(whispering)

rice?

Although he stands next to his mom amidst hundreds of fairgoers, Charlie sees that he is alone.

Charlie returns his gaze to the balloon cart. Charlie untucks his polo out of his khakis and walks toward the cart.

Charlie stares at the Balloon Maker's quick hands. The Balloon Maker bends, twists, folds the latex in to a football for a waiting kid. He catches Charlie's stare.

BALLOON MAKER

Hey! Where's your mom?

CHARLIE

Right there.

The Balloon Maker continues to shape balloon creations for the kids waiting in line. He crafts a heart, and then a

butterfly. He starts on another balloon.

CHARLIE  
Hey what's that?

BALLOON MAKER  
It's a giraffe.

CHARLIE  
Really? That's cool. How many  
colors are there?

The Balloon Maker focus remains on the customers in line. He exchanges the giraffe for 2 tickets from a kid.

CHARLIE  
What other things can you make?  
Have you ever made a lion or a  
dolphin? What about a rainbow? How  
did you learn how to make these?

The Balloon Maker looks at Charlie then returns back to his work. The Balloon Maker laughs to himself.

CHARLIE  
Can you make a dog?

The Balloon Maker points to the enormous bouquet of balloon shapes floating together above the cart. Up close, the power of the balloons over the cart is apparent. The cart isn't heavy enough to secure the balloon structure to the ground.

BALLOON MAKER  
You see that one there? That's a  
chihuahua. Or I can make a corgi,  
or a poodle...

When the Balloon Maker takes a hand off the cart to point, the little cart lifts a smidge off the ground. A foot steps on the right wheel, while a hand reassures the left side of the facade. A foot on the right wheel, an elbow in the center of the counter space. It's a challenge to balance making the balloons and holding the cart down. Sweat rolls down the Balloon Maker's face. It's like a dance, and Charlie happily watches the performance.

CHARLIE

How many balloons do you make a day? What is your favorite balloon? I wanna learn how to do this! Did you read a book about balloons? Do you think they'd have it at the library?

Charlie takes a step closer to the cart, but stands by the cart's side. The Balloon Maker doesn't get a chance to stop; One kid after another lines up. His steady pace is rhythmic. He maneuvers the cart and the customers well. Sweat rolls down from his head on to his faded denim apron.

BALLOON MAKER

(to a kid)

That'll be 2 tickets.

Charlie is very close to the Balloon Maker now.

BALLOON MAKER

(to Charlie)

Hey, are you going to get a balloon, Mr?

CHARLIE

Charlie!

The Balloon Maker looks at Charlie silently, hands still bending latex.

CHARLIE

You can call me Charlie. Mr. Charlie, I guess. That sounds fancy. Can you make a fancy balloon?

The Balloon Maker inflates another balloon. He catches Charlie's glowing green eyes. Charlie is actually interested in watching him make the balloon. The Balloon Maker cracks a smile.

BALLOON MAKER

I can make pretty much anything.

(CONTINUED)

CHARLIE

How many flower balloons can you  
make?

BALLOON MAKER

12

CHARLIE

Can you make a baseball?

BALLOON MAKER

I can make a baseball, a football,  
a soccer ball, a tennis ball.

The Balloon Maker rattles off the answers to Charlie's test.  
The Balloon Maker is aceing it.

CHARLIE

What about zoo animals?

BALLOON MAKER

I can make 'em all. What do you  
want?

Charlie looks back at his mom. Betty cradles a bowl of rice  
in her hand. She rocks it back and forth like its a new-born  
child. Betty's other hand still holds her pinot paradise.  
Charlie returns his attention to the cart.

CHARLIE

Hmmm... What about a monkey?

BALLOON MAKER

Good choice.

CHARLIE

You know this is my first balloon  
animal ever. And actually, you know  
this is my first time at the fair.  
How many times have you been here?

Charlie stands so close to the cart, he sees the details of  
the Balloon Maker's hands. The latex of the balloon renders  
his hands red and tender. Some fingers are adorned with  
bandaids, others with blisters. He continues with Charlie's  
balloon.



BALLOON MAKER

I've been at the fair for a long time.

CHARLIE

I love it here! It's really really fun. I love the ferris wheel! Oh... but I didn't go on it. And I won a teddy bear!! Oh... but I didn't get it.

Charlie's voice races. He tries to catch a breath in between his fast words.

BALLOON MAKER

Almost done...

CHARLIE

You said you've been at the fair a long time. How long?

The Balloon maker twists and bends another section of the balloon. All the while, he steadies the cart.

BALLOON MAKER

30 years.

CHARLIE

Wow. That's a long time.

(beat)

How many minutes is that?

BALLOON MAKER

(slowing down)

A lot of minutes, Mr. Charlie.

The Balloon Maker finishes the monkey and places it on the cart, smiling big at Charlie.

BALLOON MAKER

That'll be 2 tickets.

CHARLIE

Okay. My mom has my tickets...

Charlie turns to look back to call Betty over for tickets. She is nowhere in sight.

(CONTINUED)

CHARLIE

Oh. Uhm. So, what should I do with  
the balloon?

BALLOON MAKER

What do you mean Mr. Charlie?

Charlie shrugs.

CHARLIE

What do you use it for?

Charlie's questions deflate the Balloon Maker of reasoning;  
they sting like a dart.

BALLOON MAKER

(looking up at his giant  
bouquet)

Well Mr. Charlie, I, I, I...  
Balloons are... for...  
I don't know.

CHARLIE

You don't know?

BALLOON MAKER

I don't know.

The Balloon Maker looks at Charlie. At this moment, there is  
no line at the cart. The Balloon Maker and Charlie stand in  
silence. The jubilant mood deflates.

BALLOON MAKER

Do you want the balloon?

CHARLIE

I, I... I don't have tickets.

Charlie turns to see if his mom is around. Charlie spots  
Betty who is in the vicinity again. Betty is on the phone in  
hysteria, a mix between crying and laughing. New pinot  
paradise in her other hand, she sips and laughs. The Balloon  
Maker follows Charlie's green eyes. The green eyes begin to  
water. The Balloon Maker puts his hand on Charlie's shoulder

(CONTINUED)

BALLOON MAKER

Hey there Mr. Charlie, I thought  
you liked the fair?

CHARLIE

I thought you liked making  
balloons.

The Balloon Maker takes his hand off of Charlie's shoulder  
and stares blankly into the sky. Charlie blinks his tears  
away and sees the Balloon Maker.

The Balloon Maker looks at Charlie. Those big, curious green  
eyes stir something within the Balloon Maker. It clicks.

BALLOON MAKER

Yeah, they don't do too much,  
Charlie.

(beat)

It's the endless possibilities of  
what they can be that makes them  
special.

The Balloon Maker hands the balloon monkey to Charlie.  
Charlie takes the balloon and smiles.

BALLOON MAKER

Give a balloon a little air to  
breath and it could become  
something great--

BETTY

CHARLES THOMAS LEWIS, WHERE IN GODS  
GREEN EARTH HAVE YOU BEEN??

Betty grabs Charlie's collar by her free hand.

CHARLIE

I'm sorry mom, I'm sorryyy...

BETTY

Yeah, you better be! I had to  
borrow SOMEONE ELSE'S phone to call  
your father because I thought you  
were mizzing.

(Hiccup. Sips drink)

I just about had them send out the

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

(cont'd)  
dogs looking for you.

Betty sees the balloon monkey in Charlie's hand.

BETTY  
Charlie, what iz this? How'd you  
get this?

BALLOON MAKER  
Ma'am, I gave it to him.

Betty's glassy eyes work overtime to focus on the Balloon  
Maker.

BETTY  
Ohhhisthat so?  
(uses the palm tree to point  
to a trash can)  
In that case, Charlie, throw it  
away.

CHARLIE  
But mom-

BETTY  
No "but mom's"!

CHARLIE  
Please mom please! It's the one--

BETTY  
Fine, I'll do it! Gimme the damn  
balloon. Gimme!!

Betty grabs the balloon but Charlie isn't letting go without  
a fight. They struggle for a few seconds then, POP, POP,  
POP. Charlie watches the remnants of the balloon creation  
fall through his hands.

BETTY  
(sips pinot)  
Let'z go.

The Balloon Maker watches Betty pull Charlie by the collar  
away from the cart. Tears stroll down Charlie's face. The  
Balloon Maker's eyes follow Betty and Charlie. Their bodies  
become silhouettes against the glow of the fair.

CUT TO:

INT. CAR - NIGHT

Charlie is in the back seat of the car. He is a shell of the boy that walked in to the fair. Slumped against the interior of the car, he looks out at the fair grounds. Betty buckles herself in.

BETTY

We are never going to the fair again. You hear me?

Betty takes one last swig of her pinot paradise then starts the car. Betty's rant and hiccups fade in the background as Charlie looks out the window.

CHARLIE'S POV

The bright fair ground grows increasingly blurry as the car picks up speed.

BACK TO SCENE

Charlie squints and sits up taller. He sees something peculiar. He cranes his neck up to the corner of the window to look at the object in the sky.

CHARLIE'S POV

On any other night, the magnificent bouquet of balloon creations would've gone unnoticed. But the field of neon fair lights below provides just enough light to silhouette the unmistakable shape of the Balloon Maker's balloon bouquet.

BACK TO SCENE

Charlie relaxes back in his seat, his neon eyes stuck on the sky.

FADE OUT.