The Rural Sublime

"I am nothing!"
- Coleridge

Farmwives conjure elaborate quilts. Woodworkers busy themselves at their stations. No shortage of craftspeople here, to be sure, but however deft these artisans, their work’s no balm for my sudden unease. Today I’ve sampled maple balls and pockins, and from provisory bleachers, heard the roars of the Tractor Pull, and outside of airplanes I couldn’t see, the gunmetal clouds dropping ever downward.

I’m at the Tunbridge World’s Fair, set in a hamlet from picture postcards. I’ve been awed by oxen with legs so long and stout that if my eyes didn’t wander to mammoth heads (we’re all so small) I’d imagine black-and-white trunks of trees—the Holsteins— and winey red—the Herefords. There’s a scattering too of paler breeds like Brahma or Charolais. All wonders.

Wonders everywhere in fact: 100-pound Hubbard squashes and pumpkins, Brobdignagian potbelly hogs—“Kevin Bacon,” “Spamela Anderson,” “Tyrone the Terrible”—that plod through the final Fig Race, intent on the cookie reward. Though I feel the weather grow ever grimmer, the announcer rattles his comic words at the crowd, consisting mostly of parents with enthusiastic sons and daughters.

Is any gripped by nameless fears like me? I shuddered less when leaning from a Ferris Wheel car or in the wild orbits of the Tilt-a-Whirl and Whizzer Demon than when standing right here. Pink cotton candy cones look like torches, puny beacons in evanescent afternoon. The ozone scent of imminent lightning fills the air like the whiff of corn dogs, funnel cake, hush puppies frying.

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