At the Carnival

Ron McFarland
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By the glare of naked bulbs rowed up 
to throw the eyes 
away from the soiled hands 
of the man at the ring toss game, 
I saw at the age of twelve my father 
by a different light. 
Strangely, as if in a dream, he fished 
dollars from his worn wallet 
chasing a portable radio 
while my mother stood 
quivering in angry tears 
till the sheriff came and the carnie 
raised his grimy fingers 
glittering with thick false diamonds 
above the counter. 
The next ring plopped over a peg 
with a pocketknife. 
I have it still with its almost mother-of-pearl 
handle and its two dull blades. 
I saw at the age of twelve my father 
shrug his shoulders at the clattering carnival 
while his hardware store 
quietly went under back in town, 
and my mother complained the last thing 
we needed was a portable radio, 
and my father calmly explained 
we all have our limits.

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