At the Carnival

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At the Carnival

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.

Ron McFarland