

RICHARD BOWES

SO MANY MILES TO THE HEART OF A CHILD

1

New York city twenty years ago was a merry-go-round. Everyone felt that as we spun through the nights and days.

On a certain night in those carousel years of the late seventies, I awoke from a dream of light and motion, looked down at George Halle with his head resting on my groin and knew we were being watched. Naturally, I first thought it was my Shadow.

My name is Kevin Grierson, and I've been stalked by my doppelgiinger for as long as I can remember. At the point of my waking up that night, I'd been clean and sober for a few years. A wise man had taught me to recognize my double as the embodiment of my addictions, of my will to self destruction. Since then my Shadow and I had kept our distance.

In my roaring days, I would awaken strung out, hungover, to feel the cold tingle of my Shadow's contempt. Back then, he was in total control of our lives and we both knew it.

This time, the one watching felt different. If it was my Shadow, he seemed somehow hesitant, almost scared by what he saw.

When I woke up all the way and looked around, though, the only one in the room with me was George, fuzzy and compact, a businesslike medium-sized bear. My legs entwined with his, my hand against his dark shoulder looked pale. I watched him sleep in the slatted light from the street and marveled that my peaceful companion had a full round soul when I had only a sliver of one.

Despite all my wonder and worship, though, George and I were long past those moments when my spine felt like an arrow shot at the sun or anywhere near it. In bed, I paid him back with sex for the pleasure and generosity of his company. But with each passing season the occasions grew more frequent when I awoke feeling empty and alien.

That night, a cry came from the next room. Not the voice of a small child, but not that of an adult either. George stirred and I knew that, if he heard it again, he'd be awake and concerned.

Remembering to put on a robe, I went to look. For privacy George had arranged screens at one end of the living room. Behind them, on the couch, tangled in a sheet, skinny, long-haired, was Scott Calendar, fourteen. He lay facedown in a pair of the beloved surfer jams we hoped he took off in the shower but weren't

sure.

Blanche, George's elegant and reserved Siamese dowager, curled above Scott's head. Since the kid had arrived for a barely announced visit two weeks before, the cat had attached herself to him like a familiar.

As I stood over him, Scott, still asleep, twisted his head like he was shaking away a dream. Out of the corner of my eye I caught a spark like a firefly. Blanche's eyes narrowed as she scanned the dark corners, tail twitching. She watched through slits as I adjusted the sheet over the kid.

Scott moaned, his muscles rigid. My own father was dead before I knew him. And seeing the kid like this, I felt, with heart in throat, that his life was in my hands. Carefully supervised by Blanche, I stroked his neck and whispered, "Just a nightmare," until I felt him relax. When I looked around, there was no trace of the fiery spark.

Years before, back at college, I had awakened to feel my Shadow watching me. That night, I lay next to a girl my age named Sarah Bryce. Time spun on. A guy named Scott Calendar appeared on the scene and married Sarah. Scotty himself showed up a year or so after that. He amazed me from the moment he was born.

Scott Junior and I had in common dark legacies. Scott's father lived on speed and violence. He died in a fiery motorcycle crash and I can't say I was blameless in that. But I can't say he was entirely gone either. He left behind a little family memento, a book called *A Garland Knot for Children*.

Those times that Scotty needed help, I did my best for him. When Sarah Calendar remarried, George and I attended the wedding. The new husband, unlike the first, was not at all the kind of guy who was inclined to set the kid on fire for kicks or fly to eternity on a flaming motorcycle. The three of them moved to the South Shore of Long Island.

As unofficial godfather, I sent him birthday and Christmas presents: toys at first, then checks. I saw him rarely enough to be shocked each time at how tall he had gotten. And I waited.

The call came one morning. Scotty's voice was half changed. Sounding desperate and choked, like he was afraid someone might overhear, he asked if he could visit. Before clearing it with his mother, I asked George who, bless him, said yes without hesitation.

His mother told me, "Getting rid of him for a couple of weeks just might keep me sane. If he gets to be too much, is that military school they sent you to still in business?"

Too old for camp, too tough for the Hamptons, was my take when Scott showed up. He brought a skateboard and a duffle bag that seemed to be stuffed entirely with T-shirts. But he didn't bring *A Garland Knot for Children*. Believe me, I checked.

Scotty was a little reserved around me. And I guess I wasn't fully prepared to deal with a haunted fourteen-year-old. But George immediately hired the kid for two dollars an hour and put him to work preparing for our big Disney sale. George and I had opened HALF REMEMBERED THINGS, selling antique toys, a little over a year before. Scott followed my partner like a puppy. Children would have saved our marriage, I understand now.

When I crawled back into bed after checking on Scott that night, George, still asleep, asked, "S all right?" I whispered yes.

Even if he had been awake, what was I going to say?. "Georgie, the kid's haunted. His late father is this kind of flaming match-head. But his son can summon him through this enchanted book. Scott Calendar St. has it in for me, by the way. Just because he knows I contributed to his death. Some ghosts will never learn to lie down."

No, the beauty of George, like Sarah long before him, was his being so warmly mundane. That was enough to make me snuggle up against him in the air-conditioned chill.

Not enough to keep me faithful, or even nice to him, of course. The romance dribbled out of our relationship and our partnership almost sank in ethical differences. In those years, I grew and trimmed a beard just like a hundred thousand other guys my age. We were all timeless, interchangeable, smooth as glass.

The next morning, or one shortly thereafter, I spent at the store unpacking Donald Duck toothbrushes and coloring books. Our Disneyana Sale was make or break for us. George and Scotty were doing a window arrangement, stringing an inflatable Dumbo so that it flew above a Mickey Mouse plate like the cow sailing over the moon.

For our partnership in HALF REMEMBERED THINGS, I contributed bigchunks of my time and followed outside leads. George, who put up our initial investment, handled display and promotion.

For our Disney sale, an old Italian woman in the neighborhood had told me, dribbling it out slowly, warily, that her brother had "Mickey Mouse toys." And that he lived in New Jersey. And finally that he wanted to see what I thought they were worth.

So, I spent a mind-boggling afternoon in a Hoboken cellar up to my nuts in wind-up Goofies, Minnie Mouse coloring books, a streetcar with Pluto driving and Huey, Dewey and Louie, Mort and Ferd aboard. Enough stuff to stock a small store. Like ours.

The guy who owned this looked like the animated version of Gepetto. So much so that I thought my nose was going to start growing when I told him, "Twenty-five hundred is as far as I can go. I don't know if anyone wants to buy this stuff."

Partly this was true. That was all the capital we had available. And I didn't know what this was worth. No one did. These kinds of toys were just starting to be widely collected. But my bet right from the first was that this could do it for us.

George, who could get a little self-righteous and anal about stuff like proper ownership and taxes, saw what I did and much more. He handed over the money and we grabbed the merchandise.

The pricing was all guesswork. George's book *Discovering the American Toy* got its start when he catalogued our purchase. Word started to get out. People started calling. *New Magazine* and *The Daily News* sent around photographers. The stories would appear after Labor Day. We spent late August getting ready.

A friend of George's gave us a two-hour tape of Disney music. It had "When You Wish Upon A Star" and "Someday My Prince Will Come," "Hey Diddle-Dee, An Actor's Life For Me," "Zippity-Doo-Dah," and all the rest. George and Scott played it constantly.

On the day that I remember, they were bringing stuff up from the cellar and singing "Hi-ho, hi-ho, it's off to work we go." Maybe it was the music. More likely I was cranky because I was the one Scott had supposedly come to see but now we seemed just nodding acquaintances.

It revived my feeling that I was nothing much more than a reformed drunk, a guy who had just come in off the street. I thought that if you looked at me sideways, I wouldn't be there. "I'm going to ask that 'Hi -ho, hi-ho, it's off to work we go' be played at my funeral," I told them.

They were setting up rows of dwarves made of rubber, of metal, of plastic and paper. "Let's see," said George, "We have Doc and Dopey, Happy, Grumpy .... Who's this one?"

"Sleazy," I said. "Didn't you see the bronze figure of him wearing a Mac Daddy hat?" They ignored me.

Right then the phone rang and a woman with the kind of Brooklyn accent you only hear in 1930's Hollywood comedies told me, "My name is Ellen Clark. I've asked around and heard you might be interested in something we have. It's like a toy and old. Antique." When I suggested bringing it by the store, she said, "No. It's way too big. Kind of an amusement park thing."

Then she told me what she had and I was fascinated. But I anticipated some months-long waltz like with the old Italian lady. This one, though, said, "We can drive you to see it. Today. It won't take long." The intrigue tickled me and I made an appointment for that afternoon.

Then I realized the time and was relieved at being able to slip out of the store, saying, "I'm having lunch with Addie. We made the date last week. What do

you want me to bring back.?" I don't remember what George wanted. Scotty, of course, would have ordered a cheeseburger, which was all he ate that summer.

What I do remember is that George nodded and lost his smile. It seemed to me ridiculous that he was jealous of Addie and me of all things. It turned out, of course, that he was right. But not at all in the way he imagined. Not even in any way I did.

Pausing in Sheridan Square to buy hummus-and-falafel pita sandwiches and a double order of stuffed grape leaves, I watched a tour bus full of Japanese snapping pictures. Some of them focused on a hopeful but wary young man decked out in tight jeans and T-shirt embarking on Christopher Street, probably for the first time, and oblivious to their attention.

Nothing but minor dust devils stirred on drowsy, sunny Cornelia Street. I pressed a button on a wall, said, "Kevin," in response to an oracle voice asking, "Who," pushed open an iron gate as a buzzer sounded, passed down a narrow cobblestone alley, and unlatched another gate.

Then, as if I had followed a ritual prescribed by a genie, I found myself in a place of trees and ivy-covered walls, where finches chirped and a black and white cat batted at a leaf floating on a tiny marble pool. There, across a flagstone path, was a tiny, two-story house. Addie Kemper stood smiling at the worn wooden door with the quizzical owl on the brass knocker. Behind her in the office was a table with plates and a pitcher of iced tea ready.

The living space was a single huge room upstairs. The ground floor, aside from the kitchen, was Addie's office, and a blue room, its walls lined with shelves of toys: plastic Indian villages, carved wooden elephants and giraffes from East Africa, cast metal knights and ladies, tiny cardboard houses, paper dragons and silk birds, any and everything children might need to populate their fantasies and dreams.

Addie knew the weave of magic. She was a psychiatrist dealing mainly with children. Play therapy was one of her tools. We'd met at the store. And right at the start, I learned that her instinct was unerring. If a piece came into the shop that attracted me, she showed up that week and bought it. Gradually she told me why she was interested in them.

After that she would stop by and we'd talk. We stepped out for coffee a lot. She was a good listener. The first time I had visited her house, we ended up playing on her sand table and I found I continued to do that.

On that summer afternoon a few years later, I had saved snatches of the dream that awakened me the night before. "It was lights," I told Addie, looking at her shelves. Then I spotted a small German passenger train and caught a memory. "It's too bad this isn't an electric train. The neat thing about those is that the windows light up."

Addie shook her head. "Imagination is better for our purpose."

She was right, of course. Because as soon as I placed the train on the kitchen table amid the plates, I remembered waking up the night before. "I had this dream about a train last night. It involved an old-fashioned smoker/club car, and somehow lights were spinning. I can't call the dream back, but it reminded me of something that happened when I was real small.

"When I was maybe four my mother and I lived in this apartment house in Jamaica Plain in Boston. It probably wasn't all that great. But I loved it because out the back windows you could see the old Boston, New Haven and Hartford tracks.

"One night I woke up, came out to the kitchen and found my grand aunt Tay reading the papers and drinking tea. Maybe she was taking care of me because my mother was away. Anyhow, she poured me some milk.

"As she did I looked out and saw on the tracks what seemed like a single brightly lighted railway car and got very excited. Thinking about it now, I imagine it was a club car full of people, salesmen and good-timers in that strange and distant year of 1948. The rest of the train would have been baggage cars and dark pullmans. And it must have paused for a signal on its way into Boston or through the night to Providence and New London and New Haven and New York.

"Now Tay was a woman with powers and she sometimes used them. All I can remember on that occasion was her drawing me away from the window and turning out the light saying something like 'We don't want to waste electricity.'

"What I took her to mean was that all those people in the barcar had wasted electricity. And they were condemned to a lifetime of sitting on that train and never getting home to bed."

"Sounds like a description of the West Village," Addle said and we both laughed. But expectation hung in the air, like she had wanted the story to go further. I too began to wonder. Then we heard the voice of a child, Addie's next patient, coming through the yard, and I remembered the time and the Disney sale.

That afternoon, on my way back to the store, I caught a sidelong glance, turned to a guy, dark and skinny with a little mustache, seven or eight years younger than I but, of course, absolutely smooth and timeless. I gave him my best profile. "You could be a cop," he said, a challenge and an invitation.

Various things made that unlikely. When I spoke, though, it was in the voice of my Uncle Mike the Irish policeman. "I could." His eyes were brown. I kept my gaze riveted on them. My eyes are blue and, thus, can be quite cold. Brown-eyed people sometimes find that fascinating. "You could be a punk," I told him and he sneered. The guy handed me a slip of paper. On it was a telephone number and the generic boy's name, "Johnny."

Later that same afternoon, I was in the store with Scotty. George was away. On business, I had not the slightest doubt. We were sticking price tags on Jimmy

Cricket puzzles, Bambi teapots, Donald Duck alarm clocks and a whole slew of Three Little Pig items. Three Little Pig wind-up toys and plush dolls, Three Little Pig toothbrushes and cereal bowls, flashlights and coloring books.

"George is practical pig," Scott said, holding a Big Bad Wolf mask up to his face. I had no argument with that. "But I'm the one who builds his house out of wood."

"The hell you are! You'd be lucky to build one out of straw."

"Fuck you! I do more work than you."

Unexpectedly, that hurt. Before replying, I caught myself. "Unbelievable! I'm arguing about which of us is a harder working pig."

Scott was laughing. Sometimes there were hints of his mother about him, on occasion traces of his father. "Anyway," he said abruptly. "Thanks for inviting me. You and George."

Suddenly the conversation he had, perhaps, come to this city to have, started falling into place. "Glad to. I thought when you called and asked to stay that your old man and the book were back."

"In dreams, sometimes. A lot, actually. But mostly calling and asking was like, you know, a test. Like the emergency door in planes. There's all these instructions about what to do in case of emergency. And I always want to test it before takeoff to make sure it works. Sometimes even after takeoff."

"Remind me never to fly with you."

"You're the only one who understands about my father and me, about the book, my whole family curse thing. My mother, I think, knows something. But she doesn't want to talk about it. With someone like my stepfather, or even George, there's no way to start in about that stuff, even if I wanted to. You had no problem with it."

This was the moment to tell him the reason why that was. "What I have is a little different. But since I was a kid younger than you, I've had this kind of double. My mother had one. And her father. The guy who got me off drugs and booze called him my Silent Partner .... "

Scott leaned forward, hanging, for once, on what I had to say. Only then did I realize how little I knew. I paused. When the bell rang, we both jumped. The moment got shattered.

At the front door was a woman maybe fifty, dressed up as if for church in high heels and fake pearls, a kerchief and a short raincoat. She had big, serious sunglasses, as close to a mask as you can wear on the street.

"I'm Ellen Clark, the one who called you earlier," she said when I let her in.

Something, the Village, Bleecker Street, me, seemed to make her nervous. "You said to come by and we could go take a look at it."

This, somehow, didn't feel right. In a city as ethnic as New York, a name as bland as Ellen Clark sounded fake. It occurred to me to apologize and tell her to come back in half an hour. By then George would have returned and could tell me whether this was or wasn't a good idea.

In the meantime I could talk to Scotty about his dad and my Shadow and what I remembered about being fourteen and an alien in the land of humankind. But, as if he had caught my own uncertainty, like quicksilver, like an autumn sky, the kid went from engaged to withdrawn. So the easiest thing was just to tell him, "Let me do this. We'll talk tomorrow before you go back." He shrugged and the opportunity went away.

The first place Ellen took me was a car, a Buick four-door, around the corner. At the wheel was a guy who could have been her husband, her boyfriend, maybe her brother. He wore a blue polo shirt and double-knit slacks and aviator sunglasses. They exchanged nods. Uncomfortable, I found myself noting details.

His name was Walt, that much I got. The last name was blurred. She slid in back and I sat in front with Wait. Something about them made me remember an old street rule: "One trick at a time; two, almost never; three, turn and run."

Out of nowhere, I recalled myself, not much older than Scotty was at the moment, racing down a commercial street deserted on a summer evening. Behind me, a car with three guys in it backed up fast. One of them hung out the window and yelled. "Stop, little boy, if you know what's good for you!"

Then a voice in my ear, said, "They catch us, they lock us up in a cage!"

So I stretched my legs and got to the corner. Boston Common full of people strolling was across the way. The guys who had tried to pick me up seemed to flicker as they shifted out of reverse and drove off. The memory put me on edge.

When I say I'm from New York, I mean Manhattan. Wait and Ellen and I crossed the Williamsburg Bridge. Of that I was sure. But the other side of the river was unknown land. My head spun as the skyline flowed past on the left, and my sense of direction deserted me. On my right were the streets and low houses of first Brooklyn and then Queens.

"You must see a lot of strange stuff in your business," Walt said and sounded like a john trying to make conversation on a date.

"You should see the store Kevin's got," said Ellen. "All Donald Duck and Bambi. Stuff you would have tossed out not knowing it was worth anything."

We pulled off the expressway and into a neighborhood of row houses and corner stores, of kids frantic with play in the last days of vacation. Church steeples dominated the skyline. On the next block, along the East River, lay warehouses



and factories, piles of lumber and steel and industrial debris. The water and the street, both almost empty of traffic, evoked the feel of a quietly decaying river town.

"Here we are," said Walt as he pulled up to the curb in front of a big brick warehouse, old and closed. Getting out of the car, I looked down and saw tracks running along the cobblestone street. This was a streetcar line, long unused, and I didn't know whether touching the rails or stepping over them would bring me luck.

"This is the guy to see the item," said Walt. I looked up to find that the door of the warehouse was open and the forbidden third on the date stood looking at me. "Kevin, this is Al."

He wasn't young his eyes were hidden under the bill of a baseball cap. He wore a big cigar in his face. Still, I caught a flash of slit-eyed recognition. Over the years, I'd learned the meaning of that look. This guy had met my Shadow.

He barely nodded, but I felt his gaze on me as I was led through an office and down a hall. They slid open a big freight door and I stood at the edge of a huge loading bay. Afternoon sun filtered through cracked and dusty skylights.

The item took up most of the floor space. It was very old, but even in the dim light, it was all flashing eyes and gold skin, bared teeth, and striking hooves on horses that were halfway to being dragons.

Stunned, I stepped forward. The roof and platform of the carousel were faded red and black and yellow, all covered with mystical symbols, suns and stars and hieroglyphics.

Behind me a switch got thrown, and loading doors at the back of the bay rolled open. Outside, sunlight bounced off all the glass in Manhattan, glanced over the ripples on the river, caught the gold and ivory of the carousel. And for a moment the eyes of the horses seemed to follow mine, the muscles in their legs to shimmer.

It was set up in the middle of the floor. As I walked all the way around, I was aware of the three of them watching me from the door. Looking closely, I saw chips in the ebony hooves, hairline fractures in the ivory manes. I wondered if my Shadow had seen this thing and what he had made of it. "Does it function?" I asked.

"Not yet. We still don't have it rigged." Al spoke for the first time and sounded like phlegm or voices heard under water. "You can go up and sit on it, if you want. It's real sturdy." I shook my head. That would not be necessary. I had visions of the machinery magically activating and suddenly whirling away with me.

"Reminds me of the old-time carnies. Remember them? The sideshows? Siamese twins." He stared at me with dead eyes. His hand was on the switch that would

close the bay doors.

"You know a guy named Fred?"

Indeed I did. The name Fred was one both my Shadow and I had sometimes used.

I've always felt that it would be unfair to get killed for my doppelgainger's crimes. I had moved over toward the open doors. "I need to think a little about this," I said. The doors seemed to lurch. But two paces took me out to the loading dock and the warmth of the sun.

On the drive back over the bridge to Manhattan with Walt and Ellen, I asked about AI. "He's a business partner," said Wait. And though he said more, things became no more specific. The only point they were definite about was the price. As I got out of the car in front of the store, Walt promised to get back to me.

George asked, "What did you see?"

"Something real big," I replied. "And real old and without a scrap of paper." I told him about Ellen, Wait and AI, omitting the part about my Shadow. I described the carousel, failing to mention the rolling eyes and trembling hooves or the way it had a hook in me. "They want twenty-five grand," I said.

George shook his head. "Sounds shaky and shady, Kev. Even if we had the money." That meant NO. And I had to agree. But that didn't stop me from thinking about it. Or, it turned out, from dreaming.

Deep in the night, I felt an elevator drop a dozen stories and land on my heart. The fall left me awake and gasping for breath. I lay still until the pain was gone. George had his back turned to me and never stirred.

Out in the living room, Blanche lay above Scotty and stared unblinking into my eyes. The kid was going home the next day, and I'd hoped he'd be awake. Scott was someone who might understand the dream I'd just had. But he slept gently, openmouthed and vulnerable. He was still a child in most ways and it would have been unfair to get him involved. I wanted so much for things to turn out right for him.

That afternoon I told Addle, "I saw him off on the train first thing this morning. George kind of arranged not to be around so that Scotty and I could talk." I shrugged. "But it wasn't the right time. His visit went okay, I guess." She made no reply.

Then I said, "I had a dream last night."

She sat across the sand table from me. I looked around the room. "You need a merry-go-round," I said. She just gestured toward shelves with dozens of horses, high stepping wood and plastic and metal ones. I nodded and made my own carousel. But the horses, instead of following each other around in a circle, faced out tails toward the center, defiant and fierce.

"Remember my telling you about the lighted railway cart The one I saw from my window when I was little? Well, last night's dream started out in this bright, loud place surrounded by dark. It was an old-fashioned barcar like one I remembered from when I was, maybe, three and my mother and I were getting off a train. That one had a bartender, lots of smoke and noise and cards. All of it had frightened me and I held on tight to my mother's hand.

"In the dream, I noticed we weren't moving forward. We were just going around and around like a carousel. And horses powered it. Outside the windows they cantered, snorted without sound, flashed their eyes, bared their teeth like guard dogs. Then I looked out into the dark and I saw a lighted window and, in it, this little kid my age and an old woman behind him. It was Aunt Tay and me.

"That's when I realized that the hand I held in the dream belonged to my mother's Shadow. And that I was my Shadow as a child looking up at me in the window. It was as if the dream was from my Shadow's memory and not my own. That's part of what woke me up." Addie's eyes narrowed a millimeter or two. This wasn't the first time I had mentioned my doppelganger.

"After I was awake, I remembered more clearly what happened with Aunt Tay in the kitchen way back then. When she saw what was on the tracks, Tay had plunged us into darkness and pulled me back from the window not all that gently. 'It's ones like those that waste all God's light,' she told me. The way she said that scared me. So she brought me back to my bed and sang me to sleep with the old song that starts:

Go brazen light

Come healing dark."

When I was done, Addie asked, "Whose fear was it you felt in the dream?"

I thought that over without finding an answer. Then I said, "The fear triggered a pain like a weight crushing my heart." Just remembering that made the air go out of me and left me gasping there at the sand table.

Addle took my hands and asked, "Darling, how long is it since you've seen a doctor? Not counting the clap clinic?"

I couldn't remember and Addie wanted to set up an appointment with a colleague right then and there.

That's when I remembered that without Scotty we suddenly were very busy at the store and said I'd do it later. On the way back to work, I stopped at a pay phone and made a call. An answering machine came on and I said in the cop voice that lay somewhere deep in my race memory, "Johnny, this is Detective Sergeant Burke. I want to ask you some questions."

The carousel's second pass through my life didn't occur at any magic interval like after seven days and seven nights, or a year and a day, or a thousand and one nights. Magic comes around with a logic beyond our understanding.

Walter and Ellen, as it turned out, never got back to me. The incident slipped out of my mind.

When I think of those years, I recall the city through a kind of fever haze. I woke up more often in the small hours feeling empty and alien. I remembered things that had been done to me by humans. A lot of the stuff, especially what happened when I was a kid, made me mad. I started to explore the anger. Some guys were turned on by the scenarios I laid out. George wasn't. I left his bedroom for his living room. Blanche watched me intently when my eyes flew open at four A.M.

One afternoon at HALF REMEMBERED THINGS, a customer was nibbling at a Robert the Robot from Ideal. Light came down the street at an angle the sun only finds in October. My mind kept jumping back to the past, ahead to the night, and it killed me to waste this day.

George came in with Andrew, the photographer who had done the artwork on Discovering the American Toy. At that point, I was looking for a place of my own. As he passed the counter, George remarked, "I found these in with the laundry" and handed me a set of handcuffs.

"Thanks," I pocketed them. The cuffs were one of the toys for my Sergeant Burke persona. I had a rendezvous scheduled that evening with the guy who called himself Johnny. It occurred to me that George and Andrew had embarked on an affair and would be happy if I got out of the way. Amazingly enough, this hurt my feelings. "I'm going to lunch, if that's okay with you," I said and stalked out. I didn't return to the store that afternoon.

"With Johnny, the game is cops and robbers," I explained to Addie at her place one rainy evening shortly afterward. My head spun. The night before, in the darkened kitchen of a restaurant, empty after closing, I'd made a young guy I'd never seen before stand and deliver, cuffing his hands to a pipe, fucking him as he stood against the sinks, saying not a word.

"And you're the robber." She watched me closely.

"No, silly. I'm the undercover cop because I'm older and wear a beard and because I can do this. 'DROP THE FUCKING PANTS, MOTHER! ASSUME THE POSITION!' I learned to yell like that at military school. Not those exact commands. But the intent was the same."

My mouth was out of control. I'd never talked about this stuff with Addie or much of anyone else. "My dick is not the biggest. But it's uncut. Almost all American guys are circumcised, so that makes me exotic. When I was a kid, I looked too young. Like I looked fourteen when I was sixteen. Kids my own age

weren't interested in that. They had just recently escaped being fourteen themselves. Certain older guys were turned on. And they were willing to pay. I had this whole other identity as Fred, a tough slum kid, close to the street. My Shadow fit into that. Sometimes he was Fred. Sometimes I was.

"That kind of game carries over. Like, I know that Johnny's real name is Stanley and he's a graduate student in film at NYU and not a street punk. That detracts from the scenario for me. But if he knew I was an antique dealer, it would kill the relationship."

"You mean he wouldn't love you?"

"He doesn't now." I shook my head impatiently and found it made me dizzy.

"That's not the point." Sweat was on my neck and upper lip.

"I'm leaving George," I said. "We agreed. I'll look for an apartment. I have nowhere...I mean it's uncool right now at home."

Addie was shaking a thermometer I didn't remember her having a moment before.

"Open up, Kev."

"Cut it out." I turned my head away.

"In your mouth, Key, or we take it anally. Under your tongue." Addle was well used to fractious but disoriented patients. She handed me the business end of a stethoscope. "Open your shirt and put this on your chest. A little lower. Okay. Breathe deep. And exhale. "Stand up. Open your pants." She probed my groin. "How does it feel?"

"Like I'm turning a rough trick." She slapped me on the butt. "Ever think of becoming leather trade?" I asked and realized I could no longer stand.

What I remember about the next week or two is lying in Addie's big bed, soaking in her tub, while below me children spoke, sang, cried. I remember one night waking up, looking out the window and seeing a familiar figure outside the gate. My Shadow stared across the silent autumn garden. Instead of seeming tougher than me, he looked sick. And very scared.

One day George came by, bringing some of my belongings, telling me not to worry about the shop. Downstairs, I heard him whisper to Addle about a strain of very bad flu that was going around. She said I had pneumonia, then murmured something to him and he thanked her.

I remember the office of a friend of hers, a lesbian doctor who did tests on my heart. I remember sitting on the edge of the bed with Addle rubbing my back and telling her, "When I was a kid, a lot of my contact with guys was pretty brutal. Cops and perverts and relatives. I never felt I had any control. With Johnny and these other guys, it's like I replay all that but with me as the other guys. Like I'm looking for my childhood in all the wrong places."

"You're searching for your doppelganger?"

"No. Him I have no trouble finding. The other night, I saw him. He looked unwell. Like my pneumonia was a kind of pale reflection of what he had."

My liaison with Addie lasted a couple of months while I looked for a place to live. She taught me how to use condoms. Once or twice I thought I was a research paper of hers. Then she'd go out dressed in my clothes. Hers mostly didn't fit me.

That winter I found a large, low-ceilinged studio apartment on Mott Street. It was opposite St. Patrick's Cathedral, the old one the Irish built before they went big time up on Fifth Avenue. It was now the local parish church. Lots of mornings, I awakened to the sound of bells. But I never went inside the place.

That winter I thought that George's and my partnership would end just like our relationship. That winter too the Scott Callendars, Junior and Senior, swung back through my life. One evening Sarah called, sounding tense, to say her son had disappeared.

A few days later on a gray afternoon that promised snow, I returned to the shop from an auction and found him scarfing down hot chocolate and muffins as fast as George could serve them. "I'm in the city for keeps," he announced. "I thought you two were still together," he said, angry and hurt.

Walking to my place with Scott in his tangled hair, bomber jacket and torn jeans with thermal drawers underneath, I caught the glances directed his way. The admiration and longing was so intense as to look like resentment. Scott seemed oblivious.

Intentionally, I led him under the Gordian knot of sneakers that hung on a lamp pole at Mott and Houston. "That's the local gang. They take the shoes off kids who violate their turf and sling them over the wires."

"Cool," said Scott with barely an upward glance.

A year and a half before, his last visit had been easy. He was basically still a child and afraid to stir too far from George and me. This time an adult lurked inside him. I asked, "Seen A Garland Knot for Children lately?"

And he replied, "I met your Shadow today. Uptown on Lexington."

"What were you doing there?" Is there any regret sharper or stupider than for the conversations we didn't have?

"Casing the territory. I considered not telling you I was in the city. This guy spoke to me and, fucking Christ, Kevin, I thought he was you. In this decayed version of those same leathers you're wearing stinking and needing a shave.

"And he kind of was you. He calls himself Fred, talked about what you and he did

when you were a kid. Said he's old and savvy now, and I was a great-looking boy with a lot of potential. I said I was straight and he said that being queer would just get in the way. He showed me what it's like for the kids up there." Scott looked like he couldn't decide whether to vomit or cry. "Why did you let them do that stuff to you? Fuck you, Kevin were you that desperate when you were my age?"

"Lonely. Things were different then. I was looking...." But what I'd been looking for seemed too stupid to talk about. Instead I said, "You got that much trouble with my being gay, your staying here isn't going to work."

He just shook his head. "You know that's not it. I got friends that are gay. And you and George were great together. Why did you do that, Kevin? Break up with George? Your Shadow thinks that he and you aren't gay. Or straight. Or anything human. That all you want is some little comer to be warm in. Like a reptile. That's what he says. That together you don't add up to one person. That you know that. But you're scared to face it."

We stood in front of my building. My mouth tasted like rust. My life seemed worse than worthless. "Scott. I'm going to have to tell your mother you're here. She wants you back."

He stepped away from me then, ready to take flight. "Tell my mother I'll drop off the face of the earth and peddle my ass like you did. I figure it's that or the flaming cycle. Which way, Dad's way or Kevin's way? That's the question."

At that moment I felt the primal male urge to wipe the defiance off this kid's face, to hand him the same bad times I remembered. But one more wrong move by me and he'd go back to my Shadow. I would lose him forever.

From somewhere I found it in me to say, "Maybe you got sent here to teach me patience or humility or something. If you enroll in school and work in the store, I'll ask your mother if you can stay."

A day or two later, Scott came home barefoot, lips white with rage. What I wanted to do was yell at him and call the cops. What I did was check to make sure he wasn't actually tracking blood and order pizza with pepperoni, his favorite food that year. Next morning before dawn Scott slipped out of the apartment wearing old shoes, with a familiar book under his arm. I heard him go up to the roof and did not follow him. Naturally, I couldn't go back to sleep.

He returned that evening with the shoes slung over his shoulder wearing a tight grin and expensive sneakers I hadn't seen before.

"Those belonged to the guy who did it to you?"

"There were a few of them who jumped me. These were the best pair that fit. Today, they were all real happy to toss their shoes up on the wire and run home crying to their mamas. Everyone saw. Their girlfriends stayed and talked with me."

"But that's all that happened to the guys?"

"Except, maybe, a singed eyebrow or two. And their blades getting too hot to handle. I kicked all the knives down the sewer."

"Okay. But I don't want to see the Garland Knot around here again. And I'm going to give you a number. This woman is Dr. Addie Kemper. I'd like you to talk to her." Scott nodded and shook my hand like we had sealed a deal.

Sarah, but not her husband, visited a couple of times. She didn't go into what had gone on between the two of them and Scotty. She didn't need to; having him around, I could imagine. Scott got enrolled in the hip and private LITTLE RED SCHOOL HOUSE not far from the store. Sarah agreed to have him see Addie. I got screens to divide my place. But I had lost my privacy. I couldn't bring guys home. And I lost my peace of mind. I worried about the kid every moment he wasn't in my sight. And mostly wanted to strangle him when he was.

George saved my life or at least what remained of my sanity by asking if Scott could stay with him the last half of each month. "That way I'll know he's getting fed half the time," he said. And, "I'm glad you're being sensible about child custody. That ruins so many divorces."

The carousel swung back into my dreams one dismal Ash Wednesday morning. Lights twirled in the dark as I spun around and around. The barker's voice was loud and his rap was strange. As I rode past I heard him say, "... SAILING INTO THE SUNSHINE OUT OF THE RAIN..." Then he was lost in the waltz music until I came by again. "... WHERE WE SEE OUR OWN CHILDHOODS..."

On one side I passed the lighted midway, on the other I looked out onto the night and a streetcar stop. On one circuit I caught sight of a car rolling to a halt. I was pulled away as the passengers boarded. On the next spin, I saw a kid at a car window, real young, his face clenched so that he couldn't cry out his fear and pain. The car hurtled off into the dark, and I was pulled back toward the light of the carnival. It was as if my heart been torn in two, so deeply did our separating rip me.

And then I was gasping for breath, afraid to move until the angina died away, alone in my place down on Mort Street. Scott was with George. And the kid had pretty much put an end to any affairs I'd been having.

So, I disentangled myself from the covers, pulled on a knee-length Tshirt and went to the kitchen area. Out the window were the worn, brickwailed yards and buildings of the old cathedral. St. Patrick's, with its Irish names on the war memorials, Italian priests and nuns and a mostly Spanish congregation, was just a shade grander than a normal parish church. Down on Prince Street, junkies seeped in as Little Italy ebbed. But on this block bells tolled and kids in uniforms came out of the church with black crosses of ashes on their foreheads.

My chest felt as if it had a huge empty hole right in the middle, like I was a



cartoon character shot through by a cannon ball. I sipped tea and remembered Queen of Heaven parish, my old neighborhood in Boston.

Near the parish was a streetcar line that ran from Ashmont Station through Dorchester Lower Mills along the Neponset River, over marshes, past small patches of trees and clumps of houses built on firmer ground and out to Mattapan.

Along this route, at the end of the summer when I was twelve, a carnival pitched camp on an empty lot just beyond the tidal marshes. It featured nickel-a-pitch booths and cotton candy and hot dog stands, air rifle galleries, a Ferris wheel, a merry-go-round with smiling horses and a pony ride that gave a circus tang to the air.

It also had a sideshow tent closed to kids under sixteen unaccompanied by an adult. My friend Murph and I went to the fair one day, mainly on my nickels and quarters. I said the sideshow was stupid and a fake and he agreed. But it had a pull that we both felt.

Murph was thirteen and could claim to be fifteen without getting much argument. In the subtly shifting alliances of the street, he began hanging around with kids older than he was and I tagged along with him. But I was already going to school downtown which made me an outsider. Murph and the other guys were all a good growth spurt or two ahead of me. It was 1956 and Elvis had sung. They wore pompadours and pointed shoes while I was still dressed like a little kid.

I was there when they planned to go to the carnival that night. I said nothing about it at home, just showed up at Curtis Park after dinner with all the change from my bank. There were maybe half a dozen kids, a couple I knew only vaguely. They looked at me slit-eyed. Murph shrugged and whispered something. On the streetcar out, a couple of them slipped past the motorman without paying. They shouted out the open car windows as we passed over the marshes in the August twilight.

The carnival by dusk was aglow and loud, bursts of "Stars and Stripes Forever" blending with merry-go-round music. The guys were noisy, pushing each other, laughing looking for stuff to swipe. Admission to the tent was fifty cents. We circled around looking for a way in.

"If they say sixteen, they mean fourteen. We need money." They all looked at me.

"Hey, your shirt's out!" Suddenly, my jersey got pulled up over my face. Hands emptied my pockets. I heard change hit the ground. "Pants him!" I broke free, spun away.

"Watch it, you jerk!" I had smashed into the bald, indignant father of a family. The kids, when I turned, were walking away laughing as Murph counted the change he'd taken and no amount of squinting could keep back tears.

Then a man said, "You okay, son?" and put his hand on my arm. He was tall,

serious looking. He must have seen me in trouble and come to help. He picked up some dimes that had dropped and put them in my jersey pocket. "Are you hurt?" I shook my head. What had happened was too bad even to think about. Behind him was light and music, the merry-go-round.

"Is there anything you want? A Coke?" People seeing us together would think he was my father. He kept his arm around me and I wanted so much for them to think that. Then he said, "Like to go on the rides?" Putting his hands on my shoulders, he guided me to the carousel. People sailed by on the horses, shards of dark and light making them look like bits of broken mirrors.

And I knew that if this guy put me up there, I too would shatter. Spooked, I broke out of his grasp. "Hey, get back here!" All of a sudden he was furious. He tried to grab me and I ran.

As I recalled that on an Ash Wednesday morning, the phone rang and a woman said, "Mr. Grierson, this is Ellen Clark. A year or two ago, I showed you a merry-go-round."

I managed to tell her, "There was a problem with authentication. Like who owned it. You ever straighten that out?" It wasn't that I cared. Not like George did. But it felt to me as if the dream had evoked the carousel, and that scared me a bit.

"We've got papers, Mr. Grierson. We've also got a guy who says he can have it up and running?"

My breath ran shallow. This could mean a lot of money. Enough to make me independent of George. And it fascinated me. I couldn't deny that. "Same place?"

"No. You're still interested? We'll be in touch."

That afternoon, I sat in Addie's and told her all I had dreamed and remembered. "What happened after the night at the carnival?" she asked.

"That fall, my pubic hairs sprouted. I practiced a hard-eyed smile in front of the mirror. I discovered places where guys would tell me I was a good kid and give me pocket money."

"In return for which you were molested."

"Kind of like now."

Because I had told her about waking up with a pain in my chest, I sat with my shirt opened and Addie examining me. "Do you use butyl nitrite?" she asked.

"Poppers? No. Why?"

"Because your heartbeat is irregular, which makes that a risky activity. Besides, you know a lot of gay men are getting very sick. There's a theory that

poppers might be a cause."

I shrugged. The "gay disease" was part of the background noise of the city.

Then Addie said, "It's interesting that the carousel dream evoked a memory of the carnival when you were twelve." I hadn't even told her about the memory having evoked the telephone call about the carousel.

George and I didn't talk a whole lot at that point. So at the store I didn't mention the call or much of anything else. Then Scott, who was supposed to come to work that afternoon, came in late and just stood staring at me and saying nothing. There were customers present, so I motioned him into the back room and asked what was wrong.

"I saw your Shadow again. It was interesting. He talked about my father's accident. He said he provided the acid my old man took. And he knew what it was going to do but you managed not to know. He says you wanted me as your kid. I think he's right. So, now you got a genuine reptile son and what am I supposed to do?"

My voice come out tight, choked. "Scott, when you were two years old, I found your old man throwing lighted matches at you. I wasn't in any position to call the police. My instinct was to save your life by getting your father away from you." I was somewhere between anger and anguish. "Maybe I was wrong."

Scott turned and was gone. I heard the front door slam. George was alone in the store.

"That does it," I told him. "The kid goes home to his mother or goes out on the street."

George couldn't help himself. He looked at me with concern. "Kevin, take it easy. And don't talk that way."

"Listen, if I die, he's what's going to kill me. If you want, you can have him full time. He'd prefer that."

"You're what he talks about. You and that girl with the huge breasts who works at Zito's bakery. However he expresses it, he adores you. And, honey, I will testify that you don't make that easy."

At Addie's, by her invitation and Scott's, I sat with her and watched him at the sand table. He made a landscape of houses and cars and, in its midst, built two mounds. On one he placed a colorful toy Shaman and on the other a plastic motorcyclist.

"It's like these two wizards fight," he said. "These powerful spirits. Over me."

"I'm not a wizard. Scott. I'm just a fool who did a lot of stupid stuff," I told him when he was finished. "I've wondered, you know, if I did it. Killed your old

man. For the reasons that you said. And I don't know. I don't fucking know. Maybe I was looking for a son. You asked how I could do the stuff I did when I was a kid? The reason is so stupid it's pathetic. I was looking for a father."

"Me too," said Scott.

Ellen Clark called the store on a snowy day right after that. She gave me an address way downtown around the corner from Desbrosses Street and made an appointment for that afternoon. I was willing to forget how scared I'd been the last time. Mystery drew me and the idea that this merry-go-round held my dreams and was worth a fortune. Carousel horses were selling for five figures.

Scott and George were both there. I told nobody where I was going. The snow fell fast and steady. Big wet flakes. Cars drove with their lights on. Taxis had all disappeared. Sound was distant, and the air smelled of ice and iron as I walked alone down the West Side, not even looking to see if I was followed.

A silver stillness hung over Desbrosses Street and what was left of old Iron-Bound Lower Manhattan. Just to the south new office towers rose. Here, snow fell on cobblestones and on the silent river. The building at the address I'd been given might have been an old meetinghouse, a public hall of some kind. Not even stopping to wonder how and why they had moved the carousel, I climbed wide, unshoveled steps and rang the bell.

Just then I had a sudden flashback to a winter years before when I was still very strung out. My Shadow and I rode a freight elevator with two guys whose heads flickered like pilot lights. In a voice only I could hear, my double said, "They're fucking zookeepers, man. They are going to put us in a freak show like we're the two-headed boy. Straights from another dimension will pay a quarter apiece to toss peanuts to a boy and his doppelganger."

The elevator door had opened on a cellar that stretched away like a cave. "Run!" My Shadow dashed one way and I tried to go the other. I got slammed hard. The floor came up and whacked out my lights. But I woke up in a hospital.

As I remembered that, the door before me opened. Ellen stood in sunglasses and a fake fur coat. As I stepped inside, I saw Al dead-eyed right behind her.

Until that moment, I could have backed off. Just then, my option got taken away. Feet pounded on the snow. Scott rushed up, saying, "I'm with him."

Before I could say no, he was inside and the door shut behind us. Ellen and Al exchanged a glance I couldn't read.

Stairs to either side of the cold and dusty lobby led to a balcony. Peeling figures on the WPA mural above the auditorium doors showed something like the Sons of Labor offering the Fruits of Industry to the Goddess of Liberty.

"What the hell are you doing here?" I muttered.

"Watching out for you," Scott said. And I noticed the Garland Knot stuck in his pocket like a pistol in a holster.

"The item is right in here." Ellen and Al watched me as I pushed open the auditorium door. A stage with a raised speaker's platform and lectern ran along the far wall. In another time, dances, strike votes, political rallies must have taken place on the wide, worn floor. Now it supported the carousel.

Harsh ceiling lights shone down cruelly on cracked wood and peeling paint. It could have been pathetic. But the horses themselves, eyes savage and teeth bared, made Scott whisper, "Holy shit!"

Ellen and Al stayed near the door. I wondered how they had gotten this thing in here. I wondered what had happened to Wait. I walked over to the carousel. Scott stuck with me like he was glued. His presence meant there was more at stake. He might get hurt because of his stupidity. And mine.

Still I couldn't help but stare. In the last year or so I had looked at lots of carousels up close and in pictures. I'd found nothing like this. Vlask, a turn-of-the-century Czech designer, had done work somewhat in this vein. But not as visceral. I calculated that, broken down and sold piecemeal, this thing would be worth half a million easily.

Somewhere behind us, Al spoke. Scott looked that way, reached into his pocket. "We have it hooked to an electric generator. You and the kid can sit up there and test it out." I shook my head. It occurred to me that I didn't feel well.

The lights above us flickered, a low rumble began, the carousel horses started to move. I heard a voice, alternately quiet and loud as if the barker was aboard a spinning merry-go-round "...life of Kevin Grierson in ALL ITS MUNDANITY AND HORROR. SEE HIS FRIENDS AND LOVER...as they are and as they will .... "

My head spun. I couldn't catch my breath.

There was George up on a horse along with everyone else I knew from Johnny to Addle. "...be, SAILING OUT OF THE FUTURE INTO THE PRESENT. SEE HIS FORMER LOVER struck down with the gay..." As they passed before me, everyone aged and some changed horribly. "...sees himself AND HIS OWN FATE."

"KEVIN!" I turned to see Scott beside me facing the door. Ellen stood back there like she was ready to flee. Al had his hand on a lever. "You like our merry-go-round, Mr. Grierson, you'll love the rest of our carnival. In fact, you'll be a part of it, you and your friend Fred. Now that we have you, we should be able to nab him easily. Siamese twins will be nothing compared to you two. Stand aside, kid."

A pair of guys I hadn't noticed before moved out from behind the carousel. They flickered in the light. "Turn it off," Scott yelled. "It's making him sick!" He pulled out the book and said, very quietly, "If they take him, I go with him."

He fanned the pages and a tiny ball of flame flew like a bullet. One of the guys reached inside his jacket. The flame was a burning motorcycle and rider. It hit the guy's hand and he howled. The cycle bounced off him and caught the other guy above the ear. He cried and beat his smoldering hair.

Ellen had disappeared. Al ducked as Scott Calendar Senior and his flaming cycle hit the transformer with a shower of sparks.

The next thing I heard was a strangled scream as a giant hand squeezed my chest and forced all the air out of my lungs. Then I was flat on the auditorium floor. Electrical wires smoldered and an icicle was rammed into my heart. I was all alone as the cold spread up my arms and legs. Scott raced back into the room, threw aside the book, fell down, and held me. His tears felt hot.

"Don't die, Kevin. I called the ambulance. Don't die on me. I need you so much."

Snow made the sirens muffled and slow. "I won't," I heard myself say. "For that, I'll live," I said, and the cold stopped creeping.

3.

Only later and by degrees did I understand all that I had promised on a snowy afternoon just off Desbrosses Street. My life after that held shocks but no surprises, like watching a movie when you've already seen extended coming attractions.

The carousel's reappearance seemed inevitable. In tales of magic, there is always a third time.

It came back in the first bloom of spring. On the plane from Boston, I saw the land grow greener as we flew south. I'd been at the funeral of the last of my uncles so it must have been '87. Everyone had said how well I looked. And how prosperous. As if they were rehearsing the lines to be used at my own wake.

A few of the old ones, knowing the family history, may have been searching for a manifestation of the Shadow. But even that connection to my clan seems severed. So far as I have seen and heard, no relative of my generation or the next has shown any hint of a double. Checking that out was my only good reason for going back. I wondered if Me and My Shadow were the last of our kind and if Al had been right in trying to nab us for a ZOO.

Younger cousins looked for the telltale signs of my sexuality and my heart trouble. The first I express in a slight alienation at these gatherings, the other by a slight stiffness of the soul, a wariness of rapture. I stayed at the Copley and went back to New York the next morning.

Trees were budding in Stuyvesant Park when I got home. I'd bought a co-op that winter and had just begun to settle in. The previous weekend Scott and a young lady named Lise had stayed with me on their way out to Long Island. From all I

saw and heard they were very much in love. It amazed me that Scott was graduating from college in May.

Only after my multiple bypass did he tell me it was my Shadow who had warned him I was in danger. "He said I was the only one who could save you. He said otherwise you and he were going to end up in a sideshow in some circle of hell. He thinks they'll stay away after meeting up with my dad."

As I unpacked, I wondered what would have happened if he hadn't pulled my attention away from the carousel. Would the sight of my future self, my destiny, whatever that might be, have killed the curiosity and endless hope that keeps us all alive?

On my answering machine, Addie said, "Kevin, a patient felt she couldn't create an African Palace. Any ideas?" I would call her later. Addie was a certainty in my life. I had already seen her ride through middle age, serene and wise on a wild-eyed wooden horse.

Since it was still early on that spring day I walked over to the store. George's Discovering the American Toy was about to come out in a second edition. I still took out my copy of the original and read the dedication: "For Kevin Grierson, a partner in wonder."

At HALF REMEMBERED THINGS, George sat at the counter doing our taxes. Details like that impressed me. If I was HIV positive, nothing else would ever enter my mind. He took every precaution, held onto his health and waited for the cure I knew wasn't coming. I alone had seen him, defaced and broken by full-blown AIDS, swing out of the future into that old meeting hall.

"How did it go, Key?" he asked.

"Okay. Kind of jolly. Considering it was a wake and funeral." My life, as I've said, contained no surprises. But it was a shock on a bright afternoon to glance down and spot at George's elbow photos of fierce carousel horses, stacked like cordwood in what seemed to be a cellar.

George noticed my interest. "Someone found a disassembled merrygo-round in a barn out in Buck's County. Wants me to authenticate it. The price on this stuff has gone through the roof. Maybe we can drive down Sunday and see it."

He said more, but I felt chilled. Outside the store, tourists stared at the five-story doll apartment house in our window. I turned and started to tell George I thought we could find better ways to spend our time off. His head was down on the counter and he was sobbing.

"Everything scares me, Kev. When I opened the envelope this morning and saw those stupid wooden horses, all I could think about was how Larry looked before he went. And Eric. The dementia...Kaposi's...the Goddamn diapers...Oh Jesus, I feel so sick some mornings when I wake up. And I'm scared even to say it!"

And I wished we had blinds, so I could draw them and stop the eyes of the world from witnessing the misery of this gentle man. Instead, I crossed the store and put my arms around him, crooned the ancient sounds of comfort that we all know. And that we all can utter if we just let ourselves.

Over dinner the next night, I told Addie. "I tore up the photos. Someone else can look at the horses. I slept on George's couch last night. So he wouldn't be alone. He zonked out just like always. Around three in the morning, I woke up from a dream and felt another presence in the room. Someone cautious and wary. But curious about what he saw.

"Then I remembered the dream I'd just had. It was the recurring one where the streetcar with a kid on board rolls away from the carnival. He's ordinary enough, blond, kind of small. A real young twelve. The pain in his eyes, the way he sits like he's been hit, remind me of how they say that Italians bounce back but, when the Irish get hurt, they stay hurt.

"He's me, of course, age twelve. I think of him as Kev. He doesn't seem as scared as he once was. It's him I sense when I wake up in the middle of the night. Not my Shadow. Not anymore."

"What's your Shadow up to these days?" Addie asked like she was inquiring after one of my relatives whom she'd never met.

"He's still around," I said. "People see him. I'm sure he knows about Key. Sooner or later the kid is going to head this way. I want it to be me he goes to and not my Shadow."

Addie smiled and seemed to approve. It's hard to know how crazy she thinks I am. We went on to talk about miniature hand-carved tribal masks, about toy columns and arches the color of sandstone with which a child could make an African palace as twisted and magnificent as a dream.