

"Fair Ground"  
Daniel A. Takacs

(An empty stage. Colorful flashing lights from offstage suggest a fair or carnival. A carnival song comes from offstage. A jumble of vague circus sounds. Children's voices hubbub offstage. SAM stands center stage, facing out. He holds a cluster of helium balloons one hand and an ice-cream cone in the other. Enter MAN from up stage left. MAN sees SAM alone and walks up to him.)

(Ding! A bell rings from offstage, and EMILY, a girl of eight, enters. She walks up to SAM, takes the ice-cream cone, and licks it while SAM uses his free hand to fish in his pocket. SAM gives her a quarter and EMILY returns the ice-cream. EMILY stares at MAN, who stares back. EMILY exits stage right.)

MAN

That your kid?

SAM

Yep.

MAN

I got kids. Only on weekends, though, thank God. I wouldn't want my kid around here, too much hubbub, I'd lose 'em in the crowd.

SAM

*(Looking at MAN)*

Yeah.

MAN

Hey! No offense! I just meant it's like an airport, you know, Kidnapper City. *(Pause)* She's gorgeous. She's a beautiful little kid.

SAM

Thanks.

MAN

Really, Sam, she's a sweetheart.

*(Pause.)*

SAM

Pardon?

MAN

She's really a great kid.

(Pause. Ding! EMILY enters. Repeats the ritual with the coin. MAN speaks.)

Hey, kid, you sure are pretty. And that's a pretty little dress. My girl's got a dress just like that. Beautiful, really something.

(EMILY looks at MAN, sticks out her tongue, exits.)

MAN

Adorable.

SAM

My name isn't Sam.

MAN

Kids. You can't live *with* 'em... (Beat) She really is cute, Sam. My girls were always ugly little things. I mean, they get it from me, so I can't complain, but real demons, both of 'em.

SAM

Don't you go near my girl—.

MAN

Jesus, Sam! Can't a man talk to an old friend without the fucking inquisition? Jesus. You sound like my ex.

SAM

You stay away from her. And my name isn't Sam.

MAN

Sure, sure. Anyway, my business is with you, not her.

(Ding! EMILY enters, this time with an enormous teddy bear. She and SAM stare at each other.)

Here, I got it.

(MAN holds out his hand. EMILY does not look at him.)

MAN moves to SAM and takes the ice-cream, SAM fishes in his pocket and gives EMILY a quarter. EMILY gives SAM the bear and exits. MAN begins to lick the ice-cream. SAM looks towards EMILY's exit.)

Where do you think you're going?

(SAM looks back at MAN.)

Truth is, Sammy, I don't like you. I do like that kid, though. I like her a lot. A whole lot. A *baker's dozen*. So how abouts we make a deal.

You run.

I take the kid. You go home to your mom, your wife, whatever. How's that sound? (*Pause*) You are married? (*Pause.*) Hey! I'm talking to you, Jackass!

SAM

I'm not married.

MAN

Shame. Love makes the world go 'round. Take it from me.

(Ding! EMILY enters.)

Hey, kiddo. Mister Sam has to go now. But he told me to take care of you, make sure you're seen to. Okay?

(Pause. EMILY looks at the ice-cream cone.)

SAM

Emily. I'm not going away. Come and get a quarter.

(She takes the bear, gets a quarter, returns the bear, looking at MAN the whole time. She exits.)

MAN

Cute kid. You know, Sam, I really thought it wouldn't come to this. I mean philosophically speaking. Parenthood is such a beautiful thing. It really is, and I commend you. I really do. But Emily deserves a good home... Don't you

think? A good home with two parents? A good home with people who love her?

SAM

I love her.

MAN

Look at me, Sam. Then why did you do this to her? Why did you bring her to this new and dangerous environment?

SAM

They—.

MAN

Account for yourself! Who do you think you are?

SAM

I — I'm Jack —.

MAN

*Look at me!* Guess again.

SAM

I'm—.

MAN

*Why did you take her?*

SAM

They—.

MAN

Wrong!

(Ding! Enter EMILY. She sees that something is wrong and stops.)

SAM

Emily, come here

(She does not move.)

SAM (ct'd)

Emily, baby, it's time to go now.

MAN

Emily come over here, come with me and we'll go home.

SAM

Don't listen to him, Emily. You and me are going home right now.

MAN

Your mommy is probably crying, waiting for you. She must be worried sick - .

SAM

Come with *me*, baby. We have to get away from this bad man.

MAN

Emily, I'm not a bad man at all. I'm a policeman, see?

(He flashes a badge.)

See? I'm here to help you. Rescue you from this very, very scary man. And I just want to take you home, to make your Mommy happy. Okay? To your worried Mommy and Daddy.

(Silence. MAN looks offstage.)

(To EMILY) Okay. Here. If you want, play just one more game.

(MAN takes a quarter from his pocket and holds it out for EMILY. EMILY looks at SAM, who nods. EMILY marches up to MAN, snatches the quarter, exits.)

MAN

Adorable. I could just eat her up. (*Pause*) Hey, look at me, Sam—.

SAM

No, you look at me. You will never get that girl. *Get away*. Or I swear I will break your neck right here, in front of all these people. I was featherweight champion, Buddy. Got it?

(SAM looks towards EMILY's exit.)

MAN

Fine, Sam. You can have the girl. But you'll have to watch her every second of every minute, of every *instant*. I'll be

waiting for you to slip, and then I'll strip her away so fast you'll see *tweety-birds*, Sammy.

SAM

My *name*—.

MAN

Are you sure you locked your car doors? You'd better be careful. And grocery stores can be crowded places. And will you ever be able to trust a babysitter, Sam? I am everyone and I've got friends everywhere. Even at this fair, Sam. Even here.

(Ding! SAM looks towards Emily's exit.)

LOOK AT ME! You take care of that baby girl, because I will be *watching* you. I am God, Sam. Get it? All-seeing.

SAM

Yeah. Got it.

MAN

(*Pause.*) Good.

(MAN looks towards EMILY's exit.)

MAN

See ya around, Sam.

(MAN exits up-left. SAM is relieved. He looks towards EMILY's exit. Ding! He continues to look. Panic dawns on him. He looks all around. Finally, he looks back towards MAN's exit.)

(He releases the balloons, which float away. Music swells. Ding!)

**END**