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by James Lloyd Davis

There is a carnival with rides and children, clowns and balloons, Ferris wheels, and an unseen calliope's strange pipes are making music like screams from the wide, chaotic doors of Purgatory itself. The tune... it never stops to rest, a tune like twisted ribbons, pasted end to end, like infinity for sale in distress... two for a dollar, a bargain.

There is a tunnel of love with carved boats like swans. Two people go in, but only one comes out.

In the midway, a smiling man in a colorful coat calls everyone around... says, "Here, my friends, for the price of a dollar... here, good people, is just what you need. It's the secret of life, the philosopher's stone, the map to the elephant's graveyard, the long sought after mysteries of the universe. And it's yours for the price of one dollar. Step up... who's first."

A little box wrapped with a ribbon, I bought one and walked away from the crowd, but, when opened, I saw that the box he gave me was empty. I turned, and was startled to discover that the man was standing there behind me.

He spoke to me in Spanish, and asked me, "What's wrong?"

I showed him the empty box and he smiled... not kindly, but with silent contempt.

"You think that the box I sold you is empty..." he said, "...and now you're thinking that you want your money back? You think you've been swindled, but you haven't. You bought yourself the secret of life, dear lady... the secret of life... it's guaranteed."

I came suddenly awake and the rain was beating a furious rhythm on the rooftops, like a thousand shaken tambourines, like a thousand angry mojaves. Lightning flashed and thunder shook the

windows. In the fields, the dampened seed grew softer, and in the morning, burst.

