

The Best Interest of the Child

by Timothy Gager

He was here and then he was gone. He wasn't at my ex-wife's house either. On Tuesday we were at the circus and that's the last I saw him. I jumped into my '68 Beetle, one step above a clown car, and I stopped by The Big Top.

The carnies were there, smoking cigarettes and muscling out of their cut-off shirts. In their congregation, at a table held together by blue masking tape, I saw them all together. There was Maggie: The Girl With No Arms or Legs, The Bearded Lady, The Man who Hammers a Nail into his Skull, Wolfboy, Alexander the Dancing Bear and Doc Snickens. Alexander threw down his cards and they stopped the game, staring at me as if I were a freak about to ask them to go out for a Budweiser.

"Has anyone seen a ten year old boy?" I asked. Doc Snickens drank his miracle cure. It was whiskey.

"It'll cost you \$300," he said.

"\$300 dollars for information?"

"No, for monthly support. The boy made a choice. Many boys do when shit happens."

Wolf snorted, straining to pull the legs off a Star Wars Action figure that belonged to my son. Alexander the Dancing Bear removed his head, revealing a stubbly-faced man underneath the mask.

"Hey!" I shouted.

“What were you expecting?” he said.

“My son loved The Dancing Bear.”

“It's like the guy from that movie who loved grizzly bears... and they ate him.. It's like that, love will eat you up.”

They all laughed and the Bearded Lady coughed up a phlegm ball that cemented itself to her facial hair. She wore an old wedding dress covered by a huge singular stain. At one time it was brand spanking new, each button a sparkly promise.

Funny how life changes, I thought as I found myself up on the tight rope. “You can make it!” they shouted from down below. Snickens pushed Maggie around in a shopping cart and from this great distance I swore she was clapping. “Come on, you can do it!” Snickens yelled so I took a step. Then, I went to the same place I go to when I sleep.

“Do you know who you are?” Snickens shouted as I shook in his hands.

“I'm only one person,” I replied as a truck stuffed with elephants backfired, headed toward its next destination.

