

# Billy Luck

by [DC Diamondopolous](#) (August 2025)



Carnival (Ben Shahn, 1946)

**Billy Luck's bones rearranged themselves** on the bus headed out of Gibsonton for the Tampa train station. He looked out the window, away from his trailer, all rusted, awnin torn, bricks holdin down tarp over a portion of the roof, lookin like other junkyard leftovers from his carnival days.

The bus passed an old train car that jailed tigers, vines growin through it, a giant planter. Gibsonton was a has-been like him, still some carnies left but most dead, or dyin, or just plain up and left, like his good friend Daisy, the most beautiful woman his eyes ever seen, a midget, but perfect, no

matter.

Now Billy's friends all had bodies from the shoulders up: Judge Judy, and that good-lookin gal on The People's Court. He always took to smart, in-your-face broads—don't take no shit type—like Daisy, who called, askin him to come see her in Miami, cause she was dyin.

What a foul mouthed little mother she been, tough, had to be, no taller than three feet, perfect proportion, and a great pick-pocket, long as people was sittin down. She been with the Gerling since nineteen fifty, five years after Billy started workin the carnival, a legend, Daisy was.

He figured since she git religion, and was close to dyin, that she wanted to talk bout that night sixty-five years gone, somethin they never spoke bout, but it was there, danglin, an untouchable. So's Billy wondered if she got that on her mind, bein religious and all.

The bus turned the corner and he saw the corpse of a high-striker. The black numbers erodin, the bell tarnished and hangin on by a bolt. He chuckled to himself at how the marks showed off for their ladies when they took the hammer and slammed it on the lever—suckers, all of em, not knowin that life in the midway was rigged.

Billy's memories weathered inside his head like peelin wallpaper. The old days with freaks and geeks and nights where it was so damn excitin, pickin up, settin down, movin on and on until the midway was in sight and stakes hammered, where people in scanty towns ran out to watch, hopin to catch sight of the merry-go-round or the Ferris wheel settin up, maybe glimpse a hoochie-coochie babe runnin between trailers. Billy resented the fake imitation of amusement parks nowadays, though he was glad few had animals. In his day, he'd done seen too much bad done to the beasts, Billy done seen too much cruelty, period.

Drivin along the Hillsborough River, Billy pictured Daisy as she was when he first seen her. What separated her from other midgets wasn't just her womanly child looks but her husky voice, almost like a norm and she could sing, too. That's what saved her when she got caught stealin at Ringlings and had to work peepshows in the basements of tenements on the lower east side. Bein a midget wasn't freak enough she was told by the boss, "What talents do ya got?" The curtain would open and Daisy would sing, struttin her little body on the platform while doin a striptease. Her singin saved her from fuckin God-knows-what, which she wasn't above doin. Daisy'd do whatever to survive. She come across all innocent same as one of them dolls in the window at Woolworth's, but if you looked long enough, you'd see lots a smarts and a cellar-full a hurts.

It was her husband, Jack, who told Billy this, who saw her in the slums and brought her to Gerling's Traveling Carnival of Fun.

Billy's clean flowered shirt stuck to the back of the vinyl seat like loose skin bout to pare off. He used to love the humid muggy days, but now it made him tired, like standin in line for hell. Most of the time he resisted goin down the road of the pity-pot. It reminded him of liquor. It went down real good in the moment but the more you drink the more blurred your vision for any good comin your way. He knew that from his daddy, the meanest son-of-a-bitch to walk the earth.

The bus traveled up the I-75, crossed the river and stopped in Progress Village pickin up several black men who looked as parched and worn as Billy now felt, then the bus sped north, where there was as many as four lanes. Billy sat up. He liked the breeze stealin in through the window, how it reminded him of that time his daddy got a job drivin a bread truck and took Billy along, that was the year before his brother died from havin his innards cut from the saw. They tried to stuff em back in, but Jimmy passed. Only time he ever seen his daddy cry, why, for a moment it ripped him apart, his Daddy's

sadness, so like his own.

He blamed Billy, though he was nowheres near the sawmill. Jimmy just plum forgit to put on the safety belt.

Thinkin bout his older brother always brought on the blues, how Billy missed him. The way Jimmy threwed himself on top of him and his mama when his daddy felt like beatin em.

The night Jimmy passed, his daddy got wasted and told Billy he'd wished it was him that died instead. He was drunk, but Billy knowed he was tellin the truth.

At fifteen, he packed a bag and hitched a ride from Montgomery to Birmingham, decided to change his last name from Lock to Luck, cause God knows he needed some and joinin the carnival seemed a good pick. He carried his hurt deep, like Daisy's, guess that was one reason he took to her so.

He peered through the grimy pane as the bus pulled into the station. His hand reached for the back of the seat in front of him, his heart pumpin, an adventure, no matter, and Daisy lay waitin, just for him.

Everyone but Billy stood. The driver left the bus, and Billy watched as he opened the side panel and took out the suitcases.

When the last person left, he ambled down the aisle. The driver waited for him and offered a hand.

"I ain't that old, I can git down myself."

"Don't want you to fall and sue us, young fella."

Billy laughed. His dentures dropped. He pushed them up with his tongue, remindin him that his kisser was as fake as his hip and stepped off the bus.

"I've never seen a suitcase this old," the man said, handin

Billy the luggage.

"Had it since the sixties, before you was born, I bet." Billy took the leather handle and felt the moist exchange of sweat.

"You have a good day, sir."

"Goin to Miami, I am. On a way to see a friend."

The man already climbed up the steps of the bus, leavin Billy talkin to himself.

He shuffled toward the train station, with the closeness of the Hillsborough Bay; Billy caught a breeze, rufflin his straggly white hairs under the straw hat. His sense of smell worked just fine as he breathed in the sharp crude from the cargo rigs mixed with the bay.

A woman held the door for him as he headed toward her.

"Thank you, ma'am. Fine day, ain't it?" He pointed his index finger to the brim of his hat and winked. She smiled and hurried on.

Air conditionin stung the sweat on his body. Billy shivered. "My God," he whispered as he gazed around. The place was beautiful with long wooden benches, ferns growin in large pots at the end of each row. The last time he'd been here the place was fallin apart. But now, wrought-iron gates, wall lanterns, the floor so shiny looked like you could take a dip in it, so much light from all the glass windows it seemed the sun had eyes just for the station.

He shuffled cross the depot and out the door to the number 235 train.

Climbin aboard the Amtrak, Billy strained as he stretched for the handrail and tightened his grip round the metal. The steps were damn far apart for a man his age, but he made it. Course it knocked the air clean outta him.

It was stupid to act like he was younger than his years, he couldn't hide the hearin-aid behind his ear, the bum leg with the dummy hip, the missin lower teeth his tongue liked to suck, or the skinny ropes of white hair once blond and thick as a Fuller Brush mop. But he ain't gonna turn into a mark where's he trusted someone else to tell him what was up, no, Billy thought as he put on his glasses and matched his ticket with the seat number. All he wanted right now was to be able to walk on his own and see his friend without fallin down.

He found his seat by the window, four chairs two on either side with a table between em. Not sure if he could lift his suitcase to the luggage rack without seemin lame, besides, someone might steal it, so's Billy set it next to him on the empty chair.

He took off his hat and put it on the table. He'd never get use to people rollin their suitcases. His been a friend for years, made of wood and leather, like him gouged with character, the handle worn from his grasp of luggin it from midway to midway.

A man put his bag on the rack above where Billy sat.

"Want me to put your suitcase up?" he asked.

Billy marked him as a businessman; suit, tie, bag strapped cross his shoulder, late thirties, nothin stand-out bout him cept for the flashy watch, gold and turquoise ring, and a ruby stud in his ear that made him look ridiculous. Somethin bout him seemed familiar.

"Naw, thanks though."

He sat cross from Billy, next to the window. Another guy stood lookin down at him from the aisle.

"You're going to have to move your suitcase. This is my seat," a man said, holdin up his ticket. "I'll get it." The guy

grabbed Billy's case, lifted the luggage and shoved it onto the rack.

The fella was closer to Billy's age than the guy with the ruby and this side of obese. When he took his seat, Billy smelled Bengay. He pulled down the armrest so's the guy's fat would stay on his own side.

The train began to rock. The conductor welcomed the people aboard the Amtrak then Billy experienced the thrill of movin. The wheels forward motion caused him to lurch toward the table. He stared out the window as the air-conditionin blasted through the vents, just like old times, like watchin a movie, it was, lots of overgrown shrubs and cast-offs as rusted and troubled as his own trailer. Metal stuff with graffiti sprayed on it. Crap didn't make no sense. Billy wasn't great at spellin, he'd made it no farther than the fifth grade, but what he saw out the window was nothin but young man's rage who don't care whether it make sense or not, just wanna leave somethin of themselves, like a dog pissin on tires.

As the train picked up speed the cool air faded, cheap-trick, made the customer think they git their money's worth, then slight them, like he used to do out on the bally. Can't dupe a con, Billy thought smilin to himself.

He felt like talkin so's he took out a quarter from his shirt pocket and rolled it cross his knobby knuckles. Not with the skill like in the old days but a conversation piece, no matter.

Sure enough, the young man cross from him raised his eyebrows and smiled.

"Where did you learn that?"

"Worked the carnival for over half a century."

"What did you do?"

"A talker, mostly."

The guy frowned. "A barker?"

"People don't know nothin call us that. That's some watch ya got there," Billy said.

"My husband bought it for me."

Billy grinned, it never took him long to git used to the freaks, like Jamie, the half man, half woman, and Angelo, with his twin's arms and legs comin outta his gut, but it would take some time for him to git accustomed to a man callin his partner, a husband. "Oh," Billy said. "Guy's got good taste. You look familiar."

The man unzipped his bag and took out his computer. "I'm a reporter for WSFL. Maybe you've seen me on TV."

"That's where," Billy said. "Boy, do I got stories to tell you." But Billy read people like a canvas banner hangin in front of a sideshow. This guy was through talkin.

He put his coin away. He woulda enjoyed answerin questions. He often played the interview game, pretendin someone like Lesley Stahl asked him questions on 60 Minutes and him talkin bout his life. He imagined microphones, and lights spread all around as he sat center stage for the world to hear his story.

He woulda even enjoyed a conversation with Ben Gay, but he was too busy gawkin at his phone.

People ignorin him did have its advantages, like stealin butter and Hershey bars in the grocery store, snatchin things in the bank, like pens and paper tablets, sometimes right under the nose of the tellers, just to show em. So what if they caught him.

Billy sunk in his seat thinkin that the reporter cross from him woulda jumped through dog-hoops to interview him if he



knowed what Billy had done out past the midway on that sweltering August night back in nineteen fifty.

That night, he remembered the marks had all left. But somethin nagged at him, call it sixth sense, or maybe it was that new guy who strutted into town, and took a job with the carnival, sold popcorn, cleaned up the tiger and monkey cages and the johns, jobs he did when he first joined. Billy didn't like him from the git-go.

One day he caught him stickin his cigarette into Tuffi. Tuffi reared on her hind legs, her trunk swingin wild. He knocked the new fella to the ground, told him if he ever caught him doin that again he'd make him real sorry. Well, bout two weeks later, he saw him kickin the freak, Stumpy. Billy done did what he promised. He slugged the guy so hard he doubled and rolled on the ground, moanin. Billy thought that'd be it until the guy git up and come after him swingin and givin him a black eye. Mason was his name, mean, as cruel as Billy's daddy.

That night, Billy went from tent to tent lookin inside, makin sure no one was there. He recalled checkin under the stage where the kids used to hide so's they could look up the costumes of the hoochie-coochie girls and how the sawdust would have to be scattered real nice like in the mornin, he could smell it now, how it always reminded him of his brother.

The trailers had their lights on. He heard laughter, people talking; ice cubes clinkin into glasses, fiddle music comin out of a radio, like any other, cept it was hotter than most, sultry, the kinda night Billy wished he had a woman to keep him company.

He was down at the end of the midway, near the draped cage where the monkeys was cooped. The sun been gone for a couple of hours, and it was like openin night for the stars, millions of em. He recalled takin in the wonder of it, magic, real

magic, where the night was brushed by the stroke of a master.

Billy began to hike. In those days, he had so much sex surgin through his twenty-year-old body, some nights he just had to walk it off. Till the day he died he'd remember the moon, wide and plump, near full, the crickets loud as he headed north toward an empty field and beyond that the woods, tree branches rustlin, spiky against a dark blue sky.

Billy breathed in the air, thick with the long leaf pine. He was thinkin bout his ma, feelin blue bout leavin her behind with the devil. Billy kept walkin. His shirt drenched in sweat. He wished he had a smoke, but he kept goin, crossin the brink of the woods.

He was gonna jack-off when somethin sounded. He stopped. An animal? Yeah. A moan cut off. No. Not an animal. Somethin muffled. A cry. Human.

Billy led with his toes feelin for twigs and dried leaves, like huntin with his daddy. He moved toward the moan. The hairs on his body sprung up. From the light of the moon, he saw somethin white swipe back and forth cross the ground. The hunched form of a man. The cries. Billy crept forward. Listenin. Strainin his eyes so's to make sure.

Mason held Daisy's face to the dirt, rapin her from behind. Her tiny fists battered the ground. Her little body struggled under his.

He sneaked up on Mason as he pumped away, groanin like a pig, loud enough so's to make it easy for Billy to come up behind him and wrap his strong young fingers round his neck and squeeze. Mason grabbed at his hands. Billy felt his nails gouge his skin. Blood spewed wet and sticky, but Billy put all six-foot, two-hundred pounds into stranglin him.

Sweat ran down his chin and fell on Mason's head, Billy felt it roll off the backs of his fingers, but so tight was his

hold it never got the chance to threaten his grip. With the wrong this man done to Daisy, Billy's hands made sure Mason never do it again. He held on, even when he felt life surrender. Then, Billy rolled him on his side with Mason's little pecker exposed. "Let me!" He remembered Daisy demandin. Pullin down her dress she done give him a kick to the nuts and then one to the face and spat on him. She looked up at Billy, hair all tangled, nose bleedin and said, "You ever say a word about this, I'll kill you myself." From that day on, as long as they traveled together, no one would hurt her.

Billy stared out the window, passin the North bound Silver Star, long fences of hedges, warehouses. He nodded. The conductor garbled somethin bout Winter Haven. The forward movement, the click-clackin over the rails, relivin that night with Daisy and him bein eighty-five years old—Billy slipped into darkness.

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He stood with his suitcase gazin at the green home with yellow shutters, and window boxes crammed with geraniums. Its wide porch with four pillars featured a swing where as many as three people could dangle their old swollen legs. House looked to be well over a hundred years old.

Daisy and Jack invested well. Freaks always made more money than norms, at least till the sixties before it become incorrect, but midgets and dwarfs worked on, cause they wasn't too scary lookin.

The home with a rail leadin up to the veranda reminded him of all the times he passed by in trucks and trains thankful he never had to settle down in one place, made life hard for the wives, cept for Alice, who divorced him cause he was still married to Betty. And kids? Well, he ain't sure how many he done fathered. None never showed up on his doorstep, course he never had a doorstep, till '05, the year they made him retire.

He trudged up the walkway. It'd be three years since he last seen his girl. He come down for Jack's funeral and what a spectacle it turned into, musta been more ex-carnies and circus folk there than in Gibtown; fire-eaters, sword swallows, even a Wallenda showed up, tights an all. But Jack was no ordinary midget. He was a magician, an entertainer, a munchkin in the Wizard of Oz, so charmin he could con a con and how he loved shootin craps. Billy chuckled, just thinkin bout his friend Jack.

Sure enough, Billy's pants sagged in the butt and his shirt forced its way out of his belt. If only he could turn back into that tall blond stud with light blue eyes that drove women loco. Ah shit, least he was alive and not in some sick home like Daisy. He held onto the railin and shuffled up the porch steps.

Billy tucked in his shirttails, he unstuck his hat from his sweaty head and steered a comb over his damp scanty hairs.

He rang the bell.

A black woman opened the door dressed in white pants and a lime-green jacket. "Why, you must be Mr. Luck."

"That's me, Billy."

"I'm Geneva."

"How's Daisy?"

"Well, Miss Daisy is having a rough day, but seeing you will lift her spirits."

Billy wondered. She was a tightfisted little mother, always lecturin him on savin his dough. Comin down for her funeral woulda been enough money spent. But callin him before and spendin more bucks to come down after she died? Musta had somethin to do with that night, and gotten religion an all.

"Leave your suitcase and hat here in the lobby. Ruben will take it up."

Billy stepped into a foyer with a tall potted palm tree next to a narrow table. There was a stairway in front of him and on either side the ground floor fanned out to where he couldn't see no more, just the fronds of palm trees wavin from the air-conditionin. The place seem all spick-and-span.

"We have your room ready for you. It's on the third floor."

"Hope I don't have to walk up no steps."

"Lord have mercy! You wouldn't find me walking up three flights of stairs. No, Mr. Luck, we had an elevator put in years ago."

"I'd like to see Daisy, right soon. An call me, Billy."

"Sure, Mr. Billy."

He smiled at Geneva callin him Mr. Billy.

"We're going to have dinner in couple of hours. Would you like to join us in the dining room?"

"That sounds right nice, ma'am."

"Let's go see Miss Daisy."

Billy followed Geneva past the stairway. The house seemed bigger on the inside.

He passed a room where people watched TV with a piano off to the side, and several white-haired ladies sat on a couch. Three old geezers played cards at a table, lookin like waxworks they did, till one of em eyed Billy—the scrape of emptiness passin between em.

"How sick is she?" Billy asked.

"She's had hospice this morning. She ate some and that's a good sign."

"How long she gonna live?"

"Months, maybe weeks."

"Can ya fix her with chemo?"

"Mr. Billy," Geneva said, pausing at the doorway, "Miss Daisy refuses to have any more chemo."

"She got tubes and needles in her?"

"No. We're keeping her as comfortable as we can. She's a spirited soul."

"She always been stubborn. Her sickness got anythin to do with her bein little?"

"Not that I know of. But she's eighty, that's a long life."

"Don't seem long enough even when you's ancient like me," Billy mumbled.

He followed Geneva though a courtyard with hangin ferns the size of bushes and flower beds, all kinds, roses, pansies, other plants and colors he didn't know the names of, all of em shootin toward the sky.

A fountain splashed down into a small pool. Billy wiped his upper lip with his handkerchief. "My that water looks invitin," he said.

"We have a pool. Guest are allowed to swim. If you'd like."

"Oh I don't look so good in trunks." Billy chuckled. "Used to," he added.

"Well, if you change your mind we have bathing suits for our guests."

"Don't think so," he said.

Billy tried to keep up so's not to look feeble.

Geneva stopped at a door, knocked and inched it open. "Miss Daisy, Mr. Luck is here." Geneva pushed the door open for Billy to enter.

A sweet sickly smell like hamburger goin bad greeted him as he took a step inside. He'd been so eager to see her but sometimes emotions made him feel lost, runnin blind into nowhere.

Through the cracked door he saw a child's dresser with pictures on it, a kid's table and a small chair.

"You okay, Mr. Billy?"

"Oh, I git all sorts of tummy problems."

He went into the room. There on a child's bed he saw his old friend, tiny, scrunched and shriveled, her white-blonde hair thin and dull. She looked at him.

Not movin no further, he stood in the middle of the room wonderin what to say, what to do, how to bring cheer to his friend who was dyin.

He turned to Geneva. "I wanna be alone with her."

Geneva nodded and closed the door.

Billy swallowed containin his sorrow. He felt that sudden grab that never left him alone when in Daisy's presence, it wedded him to her like no other woman ever done. But he never seen her lookin so bad. She always wore make-up, fixed her hair, a real looker, presentin herself like a lady.

"You look swell, Daisy." Course bullshit was like breathin for Billy.

"Liar," she rasped.

"Ah, you gonna be okay. Bet you just layin there sick-like cause you want me to feel sorry for ya." His jokin fell flat. "Everyone treatin you good? Geneva looks to be a right nice colored gal."

"African American," Daisy said.

"I forgit. Use black most of the time. Miss talkin on the phone but git your letters. You git my postcards?"

She nodded toward the dresser.

"I keep yours too," he said glancin round the room that was good size even for a norm.

The window with open curtains let in light, and she had a small patio with a little chair and table right outside her room.

Everythin was make-do for her. The bathroom door was half closed and he wondered if that too was re-done.

"There's something," the effort to talk took her breath.

"Oh, I know you git religion and all," Billy said, raisin his palms up. "You gonna preach, well I ain't interested."

Daisy scowled.

"Well, can't be just a good-bye. You too practical for that. So's if you lookin for me to ask forgiveness for what I done to Mason or somethin, I ain't gonna do it."

Daisy rolled her eyes. "Stupid, old goat."

Billy turned his right ear toward her. "Whatchu say?"

She shook her head. He'd seen that same scorn in her eyes when she thought he or Jack said somethin dumb.



"I heard ya."

He felt his cheeks burn. He done read her wrong, bet she never give that night another thought. Daisy moved on, while it tailed him the rest of his life. Billy blew troubled air through his mouth. He was angry at himself, lettin Daisy know that night lived with him right up to now.

"Took a portion of my social security check to come down to see ya, so's whatchu want?"

She struggled to sit up. Billy come over to help but she shooshed him away.

"Open the top dresser drawer," she said in a weak voice. "There's an envelope—for you, under the garments."

"You want me to poke around in your girlie things?"

"Go on."

Billy shuffled over to the dresser and crouched down first on one knee then the other. He saw pictures of Jack as a young man, another of Daisy lookin gorgeous in a black dress. He picked up one of the three of them together taken back in the seventies. "Look at us then," he said, turnin to Daisy. "That was taken the day Abner's magic trick backfired and the dove done flown out of his fly." Haha, haha. Billy laughed hard bringin his butt down on the heels of his tennis shoes. He glanced over at Daisy, who smiled back at him. "We seen some funny things in our time, huh, girl?"

She nodded. "The drawer," she said in breathy voice.

Billy jiggled it open. He saw her nighties, the sheer see-through fabric. Didn't seem right him goin through her personals, he never so much as touched Daisy, she bein special and all. He put his hand under her clothes feelin the feminine softness till he reached the envelope. He pulled it out and shut the drawer.

Billy labored as he pushed off from the dresser to git to his feet. Once standin, he spread his legs apart to balance himself, he took his glasses from his pocket, put them on and opened the envelope. He found a paper. It looked all serious with a picture of a funeral home and a payment made for \$8,500. He never liked showin how ignorant he was, and that defect git him into trouble sometimes, so's he picked up symbols to help him along. He studied the words and pictures he knew, three plots, one taken. He looked at Daisy. She done wanted him buried with her and Jack. It touched him, she wantin him near her.

"I coulda used the money it took to buy this."

"You would have wasted it on whores."

"Hell, nowadays thinkin bout a roof that don't leak turns me on more than a long legged hooker."

Billy took off his glasses. "So's that why you called for me to come?"

"I want you buried with Jack and me."

"That's mighty nice, girl," he said. "Just thought the county would come take my ole body and cremate me or somethin. Didn't give it no thought." He stuck the paper in his back pocket. "Never did git use to livin in one place even after ten years. Guess when we die, we don't have much choice. Glad I'll be with friends, least my ole bones an all."

He went to the chair by her bed and sat down. "I hate bein old. Live in my memories I do, cause that's where I feel safe." He stared down at his hands, hands that once could do anythin. He kept his eyes lowered, feelin blue, sad for the way life turned on Daisy. "Least you git religion," he said, lookin up.

Her eyes roamed his face.

"Daisy? You okay?"

"I always believed," she whispered. "I just never talked about it."

"Well, you full of surprises. I never knowed that. Never heard you say peep bout God till you git sick." Billy chuckled. "You didn't live like no Christian, stealin and all."

"God forgave me."

Billy figured if God was in the business of judgin he wasn't worth glorifyin.

"The bathroom. Cabinet." Daisy sighed. "There's a brown bottle. Bring it to me."

"What is it?" he asked.

"Medicine."

"Want me to git Geneva?"

"No."

"What kinda medicine?"

"Morphine."

"Geneva give you the right dose."

"Not the dose I want."

He crossed his arms and tilted his head back squintin at her. "Whatchu askin me is a big deal."

"If I could get it I would." She winced.

He hobbled to the slidin door where he looked out on the lawn with the plastic pink flamingoes and alligator steppin stones. He gazed past the hedges, where he could see through the leaves to the pool beyond. He looked back at her. "I ain't

takin your life.”

“I’m not asking you to.” She slumped further into the pillows.

“What your maker think bout this?”

“God doesn’t want me to suffer.”

“We don’t know nothin till we die,” Billy said.

She stared at the bathroom, her lower lip juttin, gave him the silent treatment, she did.

He looked out the window thinkin bout what Daisy wanted. He saw dashes of white and printed bathing suits, people goin for a swim. He raised his hand to the curtain and pulled it all the way back as if some kinda wisdom was out there waitin, just for him.

Billy scratched his arm. He raked his neck. His whole body crawled with sadness. “Oh girl, I know you feelin bad.” He shuffled to the side of the bed. He bent so close to Daisy he smelled the rot comin off her. “You been my family. My little sister.” Billy sniffed. “Think I’m gotten a cold from all the air condition.”

“It’s a brown bottle,” she said. “Bring it.”

“Geneva gonna know I git it for you.”

“She won’t. It’s time, Billy.” Her voice sounded tinny, like comin through a pipe, it did.

Through the years he denied her nothin, the only woman who could make him walk through fire and feel privileged to do it.

He felt Daisy watchin as he crossed to the bathroom. He went inside. It was a place for norms, even the john. Billy opened the cabinet door and saw several brown bottles, two, with paper round the neck. He took the open one and went back to Daisy.

"You done planned this all along, you little con." But Billy couldn't be mad, just mystified at the way he was fated to this woman.

"Give me the bottle," she whispered. "And hand me my juice."

Billy saw the glass on her nightstand and give it to her.

She poured the medicine. She swished the morphine round and drank. "Put it back."

Billy set the glass on the stand, returned to the bathroom and did as Daisy said. He shut the cabinet door and glimpsed his reflection, turnin away so's not to remember the moment. Grabbin the doorknob to steady himself, he took out his handkerchief and wiped his face. He limped back to the chair. He moved it as close to the bed with him still able to sit.

"Thank you, Billy."

Seemed his whole life got stuck in his throat. He cleared it. Coughed. "Ah girl," he said. "I didn't do me no favor. Who do I got now?" He reached for her tiny hand. Her frail fingers slid through his. Like a bird, she was, flying over the carnival with the merry-go-round music blarin, the Ferris wheel turnin, the people all happy cause they feelin free, in one hand they eatin cotton candy, the other holdin the hand of a sweetheart.

He let go of Daisy.

Billy done feel like his life folded, where his heart was ground into sawdust and just blowed away leavin him alone on the midway.

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**DC Diamondopolous** is an award-winning short story, and flash fiction writer with hundreds of stories published internationally in print and online magazines, literary journals, and anthologies. DC's stories have appeared in: *Sunlight Press*, *Progenitor*, *34th Parallel*, *So It Goes: The Literary Journal of the Kurt Vonnegut Museum and Library*, *Lunch Ticket*, and others. DC was nominated twice for the Pushcart Prize and twice for Sundress Publications' Best of the Net. She lives on the California central coast with her wife and animals. [dcdiamondopolous.com](http://dcdiamondopolous.com)

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