

An excerpt from George and Benji

Written by  
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EXT. CARNIVAL, NIGHT

The year is 1941. The fairgrounds are packed with people of all shapes, sizes. The sounds from the carousel create an upbeat melody when mixed splendidly with the dings from the games, the jovial jests from the carnies, and the laughter of children.

A woman, clearly of status, SHELLY, 25, stands in the center of the chaos. She looks frantically for her lost son. She screams his name in a panic.

SHELLY

Benji. Benji! Benjamin!

Her voice blends with the cacophony of the fair, fading into the carnival almost as quickly as she speaks.

EXT. CARNIVAL, NIGHT

A curly haired, two year old boy, BENJI, wanders lost through the chaos of the carnival. He holds a melting, mint chocolate chip ice cream cone. He stops. He looks around for mother. Tears begin to well up in his eyes. He speaks, barely above a whisper.

BENJI

Mommy. Mommy.

Benji begins to cry. He looks around frantic. He speaks her name slightly louder, as the tall, scary world passes him by.

BENJI (cont'd)

Mommy!

EXT. CARNIVAL, NIGHT

Shelly rushes up to a police officer in front of the tilt-a-whirl. The police officer seems disinterested at best.

SHELLY

Excuse me, sir. Can you help me? I've lost my son.

POLICE OFFICER

Where did you last see him ma'am?

Shelly points to the ice cream stand.

SHELLY

Over there. I bought him and ice cream. I was putting the change in my pocket book. I looked up and he was gone.

POLICE OFFICER

What does he look like, ma'am?

SHELLY

Brown, curly hair. Blues eyes. His name is Benji. Is there someone you can radio? We're wasting time.

POLICE OFFICER

Calm down ma'am, we'll find him.

SHELLY

My son is missing. Do not tell me to calm down. Help me.

Shelly, flustered, rushes off with an aggressive exhale.

EXT. CARNIVAL, NIGHT

Benji wanders alone, getting lost in the shuffle of the giant passers by. His face is tear stained and he cries. He exits the sea of walking skyscrapers to a clearing. He spots a dog.

BENJI

Dogie.

He points and heads toward the dog. The dog sits on a bench next to a man. The man, George:, a black man, late 60's, homeless, dirty, and scary to most adults.

Benji wanders over to him, without noticing the man.

BENJI (cont'd)

Dogie.

The old man looks at Benji, and beyond him, wondering where his parents are.

GEORGE

His name is Duke.

Benji looks at the old man, noticing him for the first time.

He is not afraid. Benji sticks out his hand toward the dog. He repeats his name in the delightful language of a toddler.

BENJI

Duke.

GEORGE

Where is your mother, young man?

BENJI

Mommy?

GEORGE

You better stay here with me, Son.  
She'll find us.

George picks Benji up and sets him on the bench next to him.  
Duke licks Benji's face and Benji laughs.

EXT. CARNIVAL, NIGHT

Shelly rushes up to another person at the fair, this time it is a woman running the game in which people throw darts at balloons and win giant stuffed animals as prizes.

SHELLY

Excuse me ma'am.

ELIZA, 54, has been living the carnival life for most of hers, chuckles heartily.

ELIZA

Ma'am? Young lady, I don't think anyone has ever called me ma'am.

SHELLY

I'm sorry. My son. I've lost... he's wandered off.

ELIZA

Oh honey. You'll find him. Fair's fenced in. He can't have gone too far.

SHELLY

Thank you. He's two. Brown curly hair...

ELIZA

Sorry hon. Wish I could help.

Shelly gains the look of a woman determined to win at any cost. She turns to rush off. Eliza removes one of the large stuffed animals from its clip.

ELIZA  
Here. For your son.

SHELLY  
Thank you.

Shelly takes the prize and goes to leave. She notices a few spots of melted green ice cream on the ground. She heads purposefully in that direction.

SHELLY (cont'd)  
Benjamin!

EXT. CARNIVAL, NIGHT

Benji sits on the bench with George and Duke. George has his arm around Benji so he does not fall off the bench. Duke happily licks the remainder of Benji's ice cream cone.

GEORGE  
Well, son, we need to find your mother. Do you know her name?

BENJI  
Mommy.

GEORGE  
And what's your name son?

BENJI  
Benji.

GEORGE  
My son's name was Benjamin.

George's eyes fill as he remembers his son. The police officer from earlier walks over to them.

POLICE OFFICER  
I think this boy was reported missing.

The police officer crouches down to Benji.

POLICE OFFICER (cont'd)  
What's your name, son?

Benji looks scared. Tears well up in his eyes. He snuggles close to George.

EXT. CARNIVAL, NIGHT.

Shelly rushes through the crowd, holding the giant bear. She follows drops of mint chocolate chip ice cream through the sea of people.

From a distance she hears Benji cry and knows it's him. She heads in that direction.

Shelly emerges from the crowd into a clearing. She sees Benji sitting on the bench with George, the police officer, and a small crowd that has formed.

She rushes to the bench.

SHELLY

Benji. That's my son. Benji.

Benji looks up from the bench.

BENJI

Mommy!

She reaches him through the crowd, crouches down and squeezes him, all in one swift motion.

Through her tears, she speaks.

SHELLY

Benji. You can't wander away from mommy.

Benji points to George.

BENJI

George, mommy.

Shelly looks up and notices George and the small crowd slowly dissipates.

POLICE OFFICER

You okay ma'am?

She nods.

He looks to George.

POLICE OFFICER (cont'd)

You need to come with me. You can't stay here. We'll see about getting you into a shelter.

GEORGE

Now you go on. I ain't going to some shelter.

POLICE OFFICER

Now come on. Don't give me any trouble.

GEORGE

I ain't going.

Shelly stands up as she speaks.

SHELLY

Wait. I'd like to sit here with

She looks to George.

SHELLY (cont'd)

George?

He nods.

SHELLY (cont'd)

Shelly. Nice to meet you.

She turns back to the police officer.

SHELLY (cont'd)

We'd like to sit here with George for a moment. Thank you for your help, officer.

She nods to the officer, dismissing him.

BENJI

Bear for me?

SHELLY

Yes my love.

She turns to George.

SHELLY (cont'd)

Thank you, George for keeping him safe.

GEORGE

Of course Miss. Besides, Duke seems to like him.

She turns and Duke now has his head on Benji's lap.

GEORGE (cont'd)  
I have a son. Haven't seen him in years.

SHELLY  
I'm sorry. It must be so difficult to be separated from the ones you love.

GEORGE  
I do alright. The winter's aren't too cold.

SHELLY  
If it's not too personal, what happened?

GEORGE  
I took to the drink after my boy's mother passed. His grandmother came and took him away. I stopped drinkin ten years ago, but I didn't know how to find him. Ah, he wouldn't want to see me anyway.

SHELLY  
George, I'm so sorry. That's just awful. It's not your fault.

GEORGE  
Well, miss. I can't help but think it is. If I could have a second chance, I'd do a lot of things differently.

Benji stands up on the bench. He climbs over his mother and stands between Shelly and George.

BENJI  
Mommy. I love Duke.

Shelly looks at the dog. She looks at Benji and George.

BENJI (cont'd)  
And I love George and I love you.

Shelly smiles and a tear comes to her eye.

SHELLY  
Perhaps I should get you a dog.

BENJI  
Yay!!!

He returns to Duke and hugs him.

SHELLY

However, Mommy's very busy. If we get you a dog like Duke, we'll need someone to take care of him.

Shelly turns to George.

SHELLY (cont'd)

George, do know anything about horses?

GEORGE

Not a thing, Miss.

SHELLY

Wonderful. Old Bart can train you the way he likes. George, I'd like to offer you a job.

GEORGE

Oh no Miss Shelly. I couldn't...

SHELLY

Sure you can. Room and board and weekly pay. Old Bart needs someone to help him with the horses now that all the hands have been called up.

George ponders this for a moment.

SHELLY (cont'd)

Unless of course you'd rather stay here, on this bench. There's a hot shower, you'll have three meals a day and you'll never wonder where your next meal is coming from. And Duke will love chasing the horses.

Benji comes to George and touches his face.

BENJI

Please George!

George tears up. He speaks through the sobs.

GEORGE

Why would you do that? What if mess up?

SHELLY

You wanted a second chance. Now you have one. You won't mess up.

(MORE)

SHELLY (cont'd)  
And you kept my son safe. This is the  
least I can do.

She turns to Benji.

SHELLY (cont'd)  
Benji, would you like for Mister  
George to come live with us?

Benji jumps up and down.

BENJI  
And Duke?

SHELLY  
And Duke. Would you like that?

BENJI  
Yes, Mommy.

Shelly stands, holding Benji. Duke jumps off the bench, tail wagging.

She sticks her hand out to George.

SHELLY  
George, what you say? Are you ready  
to go home?

He looks at her a moment before taking her hand.

GEORGE  
Home? Yes, Miss Shelly. I'd like  
that.

SHELLY  
Please call me Shelly, George.

He nods.

GEORGE  
Alright. Shelly, Benji, Duke, let's  
go home.

He stands. She puts her arm in his and the four of them, and the giant bear walk toward the exit of the park. People turn to watch as they leave, some whispering to each other.

FADE TO BLACK!