

## **RUNNING AWAY (TO JOIN THE CIRCUS)**

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Junior Division Poetry

I had never been  
To the fair before  
Never seen the flared tents  
Lift their skirts  
To scandalize  
The public eyes  
Before.  
And that was the first time, too  
That there was a circus in town.

I arrived In early morning.  
There wasn't much  
There yet.  
They were still getting settled  
Around the bony ankles  
Of the Ferris wheels.

Crowds of fog juggled  
Over the dry, cold ground  
Because spring didn't know  
There was a fair today,  
That it couldn't play  
Gray vanishing acts In the air today.

All the people in their  
Freak shows  
Weren't so broken  
As the paraplegic spine  
Of the roller coaster  
That contorted around them.  
It wasn't yet  
Running for the day.  
Nobody was hurtling  
Through space, not yet.

The gates opened –  
Fair flyers fluttering  
About the bars  
Like people on a tall swing ride.

The sun hung low,  
A diabolo,  
Swinging slowly.

I couldn't have believed  
Unless I'd seen  
The things that came alive  
Once inside

The fairgrounds;  
Popcorn jittered  
Tapping to be let out  
Until they bought it  
And the man scooped  
Buttery buckets full  
From his greasy glass aquarium.

I was spinning  
To take in everything:  
Cotton candy colored teacup rides  
And Haunted Houses with  
Splitting sides  
Emitting screaming people.  
But everyone seemed  
To like it here.

There were bumper cars  
Too, that whaled on one another  
But were too hard to bruise.  
I'm not sure why  
They needed those –  
Weren't the crowds enough?

Calliope music reflected back  
From every angle  
Somersaulting faster  
Than rolling eyes in a funhouse mirror.

But best of all –  
The circus.  
I didn't know people  
Could live on applause –  
Because that must have been all  
That was holding those ropewalkers  
Up high in the tent  
Like rafters  
Of flesh and string.

Their spangled eyes  
And costumes to match  
Took my breath away.  
And by the time the horizon  
Swallowed the sun In a fire-eating act  
That evening  
I was theirs entirely.

I had never been  
To the fair before  
And I never left  
Again.