

## Taking It All in at East City Park

This living, captivating canvas  
breathes a kaleidoscope  
of mothers and fathers,  
boys and girls, their dogs—tails wagging—  
a live circus here.

A preschooler leans over  
the shoulder of her father, kneeling,  
balanced, a steady prop for a sideshow.  
Only feet away, another father  
squats flat-footed; his charmed daughter  
towers behind him—her chin on his thick,  
brown crown—palms his bearded cheek.

Who is that clown downstage?  
...“The Entertainer” that Joplin imagined?  
Parents, grandparents, children grin-mirror  
astonishment. They belly laugh, chuckle,  
SCREAM-HAPPY! The bold  
dance up and down, arms  
extended, wrists twisting, waving  
hands to exclaim, “Pick me—Me—ME!”  
L-Bow the Clown doesn’t see *me*—  
*he* doesn’t know *I* talk a child’s words, beg  
in whispers—as if the clown could hear.

An absent ragtime piano rolls from speakers  
and this jester—with azure hair,  
Rudolph-red nose, candy cane socks—  
pantomines a high wire walk  
between metal chairs. Kids snicker, point  
left stage at the chair, folding; he follows  
their lead; then, the right stage chair folds,  
collapses—crashing. We howl at his fall,  
our medicine laughter; then, he picks  
himself up by his own suspenders—  
and wanders out into the child crowd  
among the many-colored, many-aged.

—Susan Hodgin

This poem was written for Susan’s first Moscow Arts Commission meeting as Moscow Poet Laureate, 10 July 2018, following the appearance of L-Bow the Clown at East City Park.