

Circus: Spotlight on the Ring

Late afternoon outside the lion tamer's show, a man in a Caterpillar baseball hat shoves his son's chest with a closed hand. The boy is eight, red-faced, crying, his shoelaces untied and his hands up in front of his face. No one looks twice. The father shouts but organ music drowns out his words. Then a clown passes by, wide, baggy pants, too-big shiny shoes. He sees the man hit his son and then shake him by the shoulders. The clown



drops his head and plows towards them, parting the crowd. He shoves his arm through the father's so they are stitched together by crooked elbows. The clown stumbles about, dancing with the father in tow, circling a fountain, a hot dog vendor. Amid the grind of the Ferris wheel and children's shouts and a whistle that blows when a beanbag finds its target, the clown mouths a soundless song. His painted eyes wide, curved upward red lips.

The boy watches them, dried tears on his cheeks like a stiff mask. His father in a green shirt and the dotted clown, whirling about. He watches his father's face, first angry, then slack, then laughing as if to willingly turn from his own shame. The clown and the man dance back towards the boy. People have gathered around now. *Is that your dad*, a pigtailed girl asks him and he nods. Then a plane passes by, close overhead, and everyone looks up.

Note: This is excerpted from a longer story. To read the rest, visit www.broadsidedpress.org.