

TIM SEIBLES

Amusement Park

Shuffling along, shouldering softly through the crowd,
you don't remember the admission or planning

to come. The rides look new, but it's mostly
the paint. Every day the sun disappears

and reappears as if unsure of the situation.
Your parents used to talk about being

"young once." Now, you wonder what they
really wanted to say. Shadows

scratch the sidewalk. Popcorn, hotdogs,
pizza: aromas stoke the breeze.

Of course, fear takes the air too—
like the kind of perfume you only notice

when it's gone. You told your friends
"I'm sick of this shit," but somehow,

here you are back in line,
itching for the Wicked Flea, a ride

famous for jumping the tracks, but
the whole park is like that. Even

the cross-eyed calico creeps
low to the ground, as if ready

for some bad surprise. Worrying
this way, the cat is a lot like

the people who come here
to undo their daily lives:

built on hard work
and scary news—and bigotry

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which usually moves around disguised
as someone else. Wherever you turn,

women, men: almost every hue, some skin
so dark it holds a hint of stars, other faces

white as paper, cinnamon-gold, cocoa
with a kiss of brass. Of course the fear

is shared unevenly—with all these colors
and the history they recall—but the people

remain lovely, enticing, a smorgasbord ready
to be consumed and, though strangers

exchange harmless glances, each
suspects the rest of playing a part

in a story that seems impossible
to explain—like the park itself:

both natural and not, both
deadly and full of fun.

The Crazy Crook is the scariest: *guaranteed*
to remix your mind the neon winks. Some get on

with glee, some with stolid faith, but you go
half-doubting, half-hoping it'll be alright

like your parents said though lately, you haven't
seen them on any rides. Its height is legendary,

the loop-de-loops, ridiculous: that long first climb,
the haphazard twists and dives, the whoops,

the shrieks and every time somebody yelling,
“Look, ma, no hands!” Maybe

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the loudmouth is a superhero
ready to pretend the courage

that might make Death and his shiny badge
back off or maybe he's just another

dumb chump begging to be noticed
in a world that repaints and forgets,

refuels and drives on.
"Sit your simple ass down!" you snap,

while the Crazy Crook rolls over those bone-
bending swerves that snatch the riders

back to their bizzy, befuddled, stampeded lives:
out of hand and harder, faster—

as if some cranked up kidnapper has everyone
locked in his trunk and won't stop

stomping the gas: the days blur, each month
honks by like a V of Canada geese—you

spin around: your friends keep testing their
new knees. How did you get used

to this? When did you forget
how to sleep? What

made your parents
play certain words over

and over—*job, success,*
love, responsibility—and where,

exactly where did they go?