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
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
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?