



Duffy's Circus Limerick

That's what's left
of all the magic
was our Duffy's Circus:
that child playing his toy
trumpet, stomping barefoot
on the fair green alone.

But to that staccato lyric note
and the golden noisy band was able,
now departed too far elsewhere,
dance brightly coloured clowns; could
swing trapeze artists, balance tightrope walkers...

I recall those magic days ago
when school gave us the afternoon free
and we scruffy headed children marched
up one side madhouse Whalgrave Street to the Circus
and the madmen, and mad women too,
from our local lunatic asylum,
were marched up the mad side
with their gray abandoned faces, lost eyes.

And there we crouched in the Big Top - we
the children on one side, they the lunatics
on their facing other, laughing our lungs out;
grasping for terror of a fall, wide eyes, open mouths
at the highwire walkers - surefooted as flies.

I remember best that saddest of anonymous clowns
blowing his wailing lament on his trumpet while,
unsuited by him, his big toe ballooned larger
and larger the more heartfully he blew his lyric cry.
And then the ballooned balloon of his toe exploded: Bang!
to the delighted shrieks of children and lunatics alike.

Desmond Calverley
Limericks, 1983

