clown

On a visit to Coyoacán, I took a stroll through the plaza and came upon a crowd gathered around a street clown. Anything he did provoked a communal laughter—fake falling, scratching his head, dribbling water on his red clown shirt. I would have moved on quickly, unimpressed by the performer’s antics, perhaps even embarrassed by the deficiency of his dress, by the poverty of the audience that didn’t have to pay admission to see this clown in his homemade suspenders, a painted nose instead of a manufactured one, and a pair of old work boots, not the regulation oversized squeaky clown shoes. I would have gone about my afternoon, purchasing trinkets to take back with me to the United States, to decorate my wall with the colorful folk art of México. But then, from the kiosk, a little girl leaned over the railing, pointing and gushing and bouncing with her hands over her cheeks, so tickled by the unexpected gift of a clown outside a circus.

I remembered myself in that child, pleased by the simplicity of surprise: the ice-cream vendor ringing his bell around the corner, warm sweetbread fresh from the bakery, the canary escaped from its cage and fluttering around the living room.
clown

How undesirable to grow up and move away when all the wonderful things are within reach: the candy dish, the television, mother and father.

The losses, the heartbreaks, the hungers—all the dark days have yet to come. Until then, the little girl will stand on her toes in the kiosk as if that will lift her voice above all others as she yells to the clown, “Behind you! It’s behind you!” when he asks in his high-pitch voice, “Where did my little hat go?”