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The Emperor

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The Emperor

Once upon a time, time stopped
Mattering to a little girl
Whose heart sat down heavily
In the gutter of a crowded highway
Down which the emperor danced,
Arms over his head, flaunting his scepter.
“He doesn’t have any clothes on,”
The little girl whispered, and buried her face,
Like something dead,
In her folded hands he’d held once.
No one understood her,
Because it was obvious to all
The emperor was, literally,
Not wearing any clothes. This
They could understand, and this
They enjoyed immensely,
Shushing the child
By stuffing the emperor’s scepter
Into her mouth.
Choking, she wandered alone
Down a narrow footpath
In hopes of meeting the author
Who could tell
How the fairy tale ended:
Death by exposure
Or white robes ever after.

DOROTHY BANDUSKY

