The Night Circus:

His parents had just tucked him in and he was nestled under the sheets trying to fall asleep when he first saw the lights. Wildly beautiful beams in every color that danced around the far corner of his room. The boy sat up in the dark, amazed at the lights. Why were these strange lights here?

He slid off the bed and approached the far corner. It seemed they were coming from somewhere outside and had come in through the window. He cracked open the pane and looked to where they led.

Soft theatrical music started to chime its way to the boy and he saw, to his amazement, a circus tent pitched in the distance. The large red and white stripes of the tent undulated with the rhythmic noise pulsating from inside. The bright lights he had seen shot out from the open top and spanned in every direction.

The dark night sky was no longer dark. It lit up like multicolored cotton candy. Hoards of people were making their way down to the tent. Anticipating chatter infused the ringing chimes.

*Awesome! I bet Mom and Dad are there even now. Of course they wouldn’t let me go!*

But the lights and the noise and the people were all funneling towards that enchanted tent and the boy could not be stopped. He opened the window fully now, hopping out of his first floor room, and ran among the crowds of people until he had entered the tent.

Inside was an amazing display of choreographed chaos with movement everywhere he looked. Acrobats swung high above while clowns and animals danced below. *So this is what the circus is like!* Sounds of every tune blared, undertoned by the roar of the audience. But one sound rang louder and clearer and fuller than the rest.

“Come one, come all, ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls, to view the greatest spectacle the world has ever seen!” The ringmaster, brightly dressed with slicked back hair, opened his arms and ushered in a new roar of applause. “For the first act, let’s take it to the skies!”

On queue, the trapeze acrobats began to fly overhead, swinging gracefully from the ropes, their bodies twirling and contorting. They flipped and jumped and seemed to swim in the air. It was the most amazing thing the boy had ever seen. After a while, one by one, they swung from that great height and let go, falling and thudding onto the tent floor. There was no net, just the hard ground to catch their limp bodies. But the audience roared.

“Yes! Yes!” the ringmaster yelled into the night. The audience, real faces he had never seen, had a wild look in their eyes. Their bodies were painted in that mystical chromaticism and the music blared on. *So this is what the circus is like!*

The boy was excited now, invigorated. He had heard tales of the circus, but had never been in the tent. Now he was really seeing what the famous shows were like.

“And for the next trick, let’s get a little more dangerous!” Flames shot up from behind him, revealing a man tied to a spinning wheel. A different man held knives, and now began throwing them at the wheel. The first knife struck the man in his stomach. Blood gushed out. Subsequent knives struck him in his head, arms, and legs until he was a spinning bloody mess.

“Ha-ha-ha-ha!” The ringmaster cackled and cracked his whip. Somehow, the cheers and music got louder. Fire shot up everywhere and the lights were blinding. The boy was entranced, loving the show. He couldn’t get enough.

“And for the final act,” the ringmaster’s voice boomed, “I ask for a volunteer!”

“Me! Me! Me!” The boy wasn’t even thinking, just feeling and absorbed by the noise and the beautiful lights. The ringmaster stared him down, procuring a rictus beneath his beady eyes.

“Yes, of course! Our volunteer! Step right up!” The boy walked onto the central carpet towards the ringmaster. The ringmaster picked him up, set him down on a table, and pushed him inside a long coffin-like box. “Prepare to watch as I saw this boy in half!” He took out a long saw and raised it up to the boy. At this, the crowd went manic and the heat of the fire licked the boy’s skin. The ringmaster’s tailcoat looked like flames shooting off him. Fire danced in his eyes.

With the saw he began to cut at his torso. Blood spurted onto the boy’s face, but he felt no pain. He saw his legs separate from his body. The space in between himself grew larger. It was not possible because the boy knew those were his legs, he could wriggle them, and yet they were not attached. He stared in absolute awe at the separation until eventually the ringmaster slid his halves together.

Amazingly, when the boy got out of the box and onto the ground, he found no suture marks around his torso. Nothing to explain what had just happened.

“Ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls, I hope you enjoyed the show!” The ringmaster gave a generous bow, his eyes remained fixed on the boy. Applause ensued and the music changed to a gentler tune as the audience filed out, sweeping the boy with them. He was very tired now. Excited, but tired.

Eventually he climbed back through his window, taking one last glance at the large red and white striped tent and hearing the enthralling jingle of the circus music, before getting into bed. The colorful lights in the far corner began to fade.

When the boy woke up he looked to the corner, but it was just a dull white. He dashed to the window, but there wasn’t a sign of the circus. And he would never have believed it truly happened had his face not been speckled in blood.