

Circus Performer

The winter is always a quiet time for me. A quiet time for all of the circus in fact. No one comes; television, films and pubs take over their lives. It gives us a chance to unwind a little, polish our acts and polish ourselves.

When I was younger, probably back o before I turned 10, people used to come at all times of the year. That was when my family wee at the peak of their career. Mum and dad were trapeze artists, much like my father's parents, much like my mother's.

I used to love the warmth of the crowd, the warmth of the other performers, the warmth of the places the animals lived and the warmth of the big top. That's what kept me here. That's what kept me performing and even wanting to perform.

Even after the accident that killed dad.

Even after the accident I knew that I would keep with my family. The only thing I did no want was to keep on the trapeze. Somehow death had spoiled it, ruined the sense of freedom. Almost literally brought the ground to me – or me to the ground.

The only way that I could see to bring back the feeling of flying and freedom was to go one better.

Human cannonball it was.

There is often laughter when I get to this point – surely this is even more dangerous than the trapeze they guffaw, why be even more at risk.

Mechanics, I reply.

The mechanics of the machine. With the trapeze it is you that is the machine. You that make catch after catch after catch after catch after drop.

All it takes is the one drop and that's the career gone, the family gone, the safety gone/

The human machine is all too quick to break, and usually because of the mind. Even with all of the working out and the exercise and the day upon day practice you still get to the point where you are thinking about sinner, thinking about the next town, thinking about finding your wife with another man, thinking about the unthinkable things that normally only wait until 2am to wake you.

2am as oppose to 200 feet in the air.

Whereas with me, the mechanics are simple. I can strip, rebuild and keep clean and tidy the cannon. If my mind wanders I stop and return only when I am once again ready to give my full attention.

Of course, I have to keep fit. It is not easy being aerodynamic (even a ball has to fly straight and keep curled) so I make sure I work out every day, even if just for an hour, a half hour. Whatever I can afford.

But the main thing on the night is the technique of curling up and letting yourself go where the winds will take you.

The audience is a big part. You can sense their nerves, they are the ones that have the jitters and the worries. Never me, I have done this too many times and there is nothing that can go wrong if I have tripled checked and had my –

lovely – assistant do the same. So they worry for me and I can relax and make myself be free to enjoy the moment of weightlessness.
The landing is always a second of anticlimax a petit-mort which is suddenly replaced by the sound of the crowd applauding and then my bow and the claps rise to a crescendo.
At times like this I long for the summer.