

LE CIRQUE DE FLEURS

By Maggie Smith

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Draft Two

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“Only you can prevent forest fires.”
-Smokey the Bear

CHARACTER LIST

LOTTIE — 32, the ringleader in every sense of the word; prideful, self-assured; unable to separate her onstage persona from her offstage actions

HAZEL — 19, a tightrope walker; recently left home, been at the circus long enough that she's comfortable with the others but short enough that she has no connections

WARREN — 43, advertised as the funniest clown touring in the big tops, not that you'd ever be able to tell

MARJORIE — 21, a contortionist; a loyal observer, logically-oriented, not one to admit emotions; Victor's twin sister

VICTOR — 21, a contortionist; intelligent, seemingly knows everything that's unsaid; Marjorie's twin brother

ANNA — 25, a magician; Florence's fiancé; reluctant to be caught in the mess, much more fearful than expected

FLORENCE — 24, the Cirque des Fleurs owner's only daughter and Anna's fiancée; strong-willed, loving, and curious

SETTING

Le Cirque de Fleurs, 1919

NOTES

Welcome to the threshold between wonder and horror (I hardly know her).

This circus is a good one. A well-funded and entertaining one. One of the best in the country. It should be designed as such.

As usual, casting is completely open for all races, disabilities, and any identities. Don't be an asshole.

Thank you for reading this work. I'm sorry it got so dark.

ACT ONE
A PROLOGUE

[The circus is charred and smells of smoke. A fire engine's bell rings three times. ANNA stands in the rubble and remains, staring at the ruined land she stands on. In the rubble, there's movement— A person, just as burnt and broken as Le Cirque de Fleurs. Then another body. Then another. Five corpses have come to life. Each move as though they once were human, but are now the fuel for permanent and lifelong trauma. Their bodies are all bone and flexibility. Their clothes singed and faces unrecognizable. As they rise from the ashes, a calliope begins to play the slow music of a carnival, growing faster and faster. As ANNA sees the bodies, there is a Chorus, either performed in unison or split evenly amongst the actors. FLORENCE is not included in the Chorus.]

THE CHORUS

The circus came to town upon a day of dreary rain,
And mother let me go to see the strange and the arcane.
The clown was kind and made me laugh and showed me his round nose,
He danced with me and showered me with water from a rose.
His clothes were big, his head was small, he held it up with pride,
But painted smiles don't fool me from sadness that's inside.
The circus came to town and I knew that I had to go,
If I'm lucky I'll get to see the best part of the show,
The body-benders contorted and wormed through all their tricks,
The way their bones writhed was almost enough to make me sick.
They flexed and moved and one flew up above on a silk chord,
Yet their faces proved to me they were nothing more than bored.
The circus came to town and it was something to behold,
Excitement drowned the air as I saw their accents of gold.
The ringleader dressed in fancy clothes I could not afford,
In velvet, satin, clean and pressed, could never be ignored.
Her voice was loud and booming in the crowded circus tent,
Enthralling me with each new act she's slated to present.
Her lips red, her hat black, enthusiasm organic,
But if I looked deep in her eyes I saw she was manic.
The circus came to town and I walked into it alone,
And now I wish I wasn't left friendless and on my own.
The tightrope walker on her toes had made herself look tall,
She carried herself in the air and balanced on a ball.
Nearly floating overhead without so much as a quake,
She thought that no one saw when she had felt her ankle break.

CHORUS (cont.)

The circus came to town one day and made us all pretend
That none of us would remember the night it all would end.

[FLORENCE enters some point in the chorus and waltzes with ANNA, at first barely moving, but then around the entirety of the rubble. The chorus stops, all of the bodies gone. The calliope has ended, and all that is heard is the footsteps of the two women as they dance and the fire engine bell. Then, a transition:]

ACT ONE
SCENE ONE
HAPPY LAST SHOW

[In a dressing room of Le Cirque des Fleurs, the early afternoon of an evening show. In the room is a torn couch, and on top of it ANNA sits. Vanities sit around the room with mirrors attached, covered in face paint, glitter, plumes, and any other form of decoration that fits the late 1910s circus acts. There are other chairs strewn around the room, some belonging to the vanities, others not. The room is unkempt. No one needs to take care of it, it'll be cleaned by the time the circus packs itself up and moves on. ANNA sits for a few moments, relishing in the silence. LOTTIE enters to break it, already dressed and made up for the show.]

LOTTIE

Happy last show!

ANNA

Where did you come from?

LOTTIE

Outdoors. Checking on everything. My work is never finished.

ANNA

We don't have to get ready for a few hours.

LOTTIE

I said my work. Not our's.

ANNA

Don't push yourself too hard.

LOTTIE

It's the last day that I get to.

[MARJORIE and VICTOR enter. MARJORIE takes a seat at a vanity and emptily stares at herself in the mirror. VICTOR stands behind her and does the same. Eventually, the two put on small remnants of what will be their show makeup. ANNA moves herself to the other vanity.]

LOTTIE

Happy last show!

MARJORIE

[Off-guard] Yes.

LOTTIE

Excited?

VICTOR

To bend myself into a box and lock myself inside? No.

LOTTIE

Marjorie?

MARJORIE

To do the same to myself with an even smaller box? No.

ANNA

I love the enthusiasm. I hope we keep in touch after this ends.

LOTTIE

I'm sure we will. It would be better to travel back to New York together than alone.

[HAZEL enters in a robe, clearly not anywhere near ready to perform. She drops herself onto the couch and shuts her eyes.]

LOTTIE

Happy last show!

[HAZEL makes a noise of disinterest.]

LOTTIE

Hazel. Hazel. I said happy last show.

HAZEL

And what did I say back?

LOTTIE

Nothing, really.

HAZEL

I'm begging you to take that as a hint.

VICTOR

Listen, Lottie, we've been up all night. I want a nice, quiet morning where I get to pretend I'm the only person in the room.

MARJORIE

A nice quiet morning with no speaking.

LOTTIE

Right. No speaking.

[A silence.]

LOTTIE

But also aren't you just so excited?

HAZEL

To get out of here?

LOTTIE

Well, yes. But— Oh, I don't know, the thrill of it all? Months of work leading up to this. The final performance. The last time you get to look the audience in the eye and say, "Yes, I know. I amaze you." Getting to bask in the glory of it all!

HAZEL

Oh. No.

LOTTIE

Fine. Then about the afterwards. Are you excited about that? Leaving?

HAZEL

I've never felt excited a day in my life.

MARJORIE

Relieved, is a better word.

VICTOR

Absolutely relieved.

LOTTIE

Did none of you enjoy any of this at all?

HAZEL

Not particularly.

LOTTIE

Anna?

[ANNA is jolted from not paying attention to anything anyone was saying in the past few minutes.]

ANNA

Huh? What?

LOTTIE

What about you?

ANNA

Oh. I mean, I certainly... Didn't hate my time here.

LOTTIE

Are you serious?

ANNA

I... Don't know how to describe it. I liked the tigers. The music was fun. I enjoyed some of our time in here. Some of my time with you... All.

HAZEL

All of her time with Florence.

ANNA

Shut up. Yes, but shut up.

LOTTIE

But are you more excited about leaving than the actual prospect of performing?

ANNA

I wouldn't be planning on leaving if I wasn't.

LOTTIE

It's almost as if you all think none of this was worth it.

HAZEL

It wasn't.

LOTTIE

What about the cheering? Or the music? Or the smiles on everyone's faces?

HAZEL

Ew.

LOTTIE

I thought it was worth it.

MARJORIE

How much money are you leaving here with?

[There's no answer.]

MARJORIE

More than you started out with, right?

[Another silence.]

MARJORIE

I thought as much.

LOTTIE

None of you are any fun.

[A longer silence. Much more uncomfortable, and much longer.]

ANNA

I liked the makeup.

LOTTIE

Oh! Me too! And the costumes and colors and—

ANNA

Yeah. And painting faces.

LOTTIE

Oh yes! You're good at painting faces!

ANNA

I might... Miss that. The art things.

[WARREN enters.]

LOTTIE

Happy last show!

[WARREN freezes.]

WARREN

Don't say that.

LOTTIE

It's not like anyone—

WARREN

People are everywhere. Absolutely everywhere. You know how many people are on payroll? I'll give you a clue: It's a lot.

HAZEL

Calm down. It's not like we're out in the open. We're the only ones here.

WARREN

Do you know how easy it is for sound to pass through tent fabric?

ANNA

No.

WARREN

Believe it or not, Miss I'll Miss the Face Painting, it's not hard at all to hear you all from the outside.

VICTOR

Come on, she was just joking around.

WARREN

I'm counting down the minutes you get to continue to joke around. The second we start work is when you turn all of that off.

LOTTIE

We can still have fun.

WARREN

What did you just say?

LOTTIE

I mean, we're still performing, right? Why can't we have fun while doing it?

WARREN

You're right.

[Everyone stills. They know what's coming next.]

VICTOR

Warren, you don't need to—

WARREN

No. No, don't back down, now. She's right. Let's relax. Let's have fun. No need to stick to a schedule. Let's not be strict about it. In fact, let's all change the plan, yeah? I'll go on as ringleader. Stay on the entire show, keep the audience engaged. Distract. And Lottie, you can take my job. Sad clown for act one, and then handle everything I have to do after. Get out of makeup, take off the costume, and the new job I have where I set the goddamn tent on fire! That's a good job for you, isn't it? And no need to be worried. It's not like playing with fire is dangerous! It'll be fun! Let's have fun!

VICTOR

Enough.

WARREN

What? I thought you wanted fun? Is this not fun?

MARJORIE

Okay, she gets it. Lay off.

WARREN

Does she, though? Because we can't have this keep happening. I have enough to deal with without you coming in and questioning my every move. You got that?

LOTTIE

I've got that.

WARREN

Good. I'm glad we could reach an agreement. Do we have coffee? I need coffee.

HAZEL

We have coffee beans.

WARREN

That's fine. Where?

HAZEL

One of the carts. I don't know. I'm not the one that wants it.

WARREN

Fine. I'll be back.

[WARREN exits.]

VICTOR

I hate him.

MARJORIE

In less than twelve hours we'll never have to see him again. Or anyone, for that matter. For all we know this could be the last time we ever talk with each other.

VICTOR

I'll have to see you again.

MARJORIE

Not strictly speaking. If you want to split up that's fine— We could just switch off Christmasses with Mom.

VICTOR

Nah. It'll get too quiet without you.

LOTTIE

Do you think it'll be a good show?

HAZEL

Jesus Christ— Enough with the show!

LOTTIE

It's only a question.

VICTOR

If we say yes will you stop asking?

LOTTIE

Yes.

VICTOR

Then yes, it'll be a good show.

[A beat.]

LOTTIE

But how good do you think it'll be, because I—

MARJORIE

I'm getting dressed somewhere else.

VICTOR

Me too.

[The siblings leave. HAZEL smirks.]

HAZEL

For a ringleader you're not really good at keeping an audience on your side, are you?

LOTTIE

Sure I am. I'm just not for every crowd. Speaking of, I need to head out, too.

HAZEL

People won't be arriving for a few hours, what could you possibly have to do?

LOTTIE

My work is never finished.

[LOTTIE exits.]

ANNA

You aren't going to get ready?

HAZEL

I try to avoid the dress as long as possible.

ANNA

You could ask for a new costume?

HAZEL

Anna, we're burning the circus down in less than twelve hours.

ANNA

Fair point.

HAZEL

Besides— I like complaining. It gives me something to do.

ANNA

You'd rather complain than fix something?

HAZEL

Sure. Pent-up rage is what allows me to commit pre-planned arson.

ANNA

You can't just commit the arson without it?

HAZEL

Well, sure. But if I get caught? I'm going to need a good story to back it up. Especially if I get a death sentence or something. I already have my last words planned.

ANNA

Right. Do you ever feel weird about it all?

HAZEL

Not particularly. I mean, it's all just something that's going to happen, you know? I mean, you hear things like this all the time— Factory catches fire, dozens dead— Things like that. At least we're trying to avoid the “dozens dead” part, you know? We're good people. Good people ruining an entire business, sure. But a business that doesn't give a shit about us. So it all balances out. And even if we ignore the fact that we're doing it for a good reason, things catch fire all the time. It won't point back to us. In fact, you can probably even convince yourself you didn't have any part in it. So no. Not weird.

ANNA

It feels weird to me.

HAZEL

It feels weird to you because your girlfriend owns the circus.

ANNA

Fiancée. And she doesn't own it.

HAZEL

Her dad does, so it might as well be her, too. It's going to be her's, someday. Well, it was going to be hers. And I guess it was going to be yours, too. Sorry about that.

ANNA

If we owned it— Me and Florence— We would've done a better job. You guys would've been getting paid more. Or more time off. Or something.

HAZEL

It's the thought that counts.

[HAZEL prepares to leave.]

HAZEL

Oh— I've got a little going-away gift for you.

[HAZEL hands ANNA an unlit match.]

HAZEL

Well, it's actually from Warren. Don't get it wet. He says that everyone only gets one.

ANNA

Why?

HAZEL

Less matches means there's less chances for you to make a mistake or whatever. You know him. Have to stay focused.

ANNA

Thanks, then.

HAZEL

No problem. Not like I have much of a choice, anyways. I always liked you, you know. You're the only person I could tolerate. Well, you and Warren, but we both know he can get a little...

[She trails off and does some kind of gesture that she believes encapsulates WARREN as a person.]

HAZEL

You know. That. Anyways— You do your thing. I'll do mine. Hopefully everyone else does their thing, and no one else does anything outside of their usual thing. We'll be fine. And maybe when all of this is over I can visit you and Florence in whatever fancy house you two live in.

[HAZEL exits. ANNA holds the match and looks at it. This can be as theatrical as you want, that's up to the kind of show you want. Transition into:]

ACT ONE
SCENE TWO
FROG

[FLORENCE enters from behind, ANNA doesn't notice. She puts her arms around ANNA from behind, startling her partner. FLORENCE notices.]

FLORENCE

You're jumpy today.

ANNA

Just nerves.

FLORENCE

Nerves?

ANNA

Always get them.

FLORENCE

Yeah. You're just usually better at hiding them.

ANNA

Just feels different today, I guess. Maybe a little more tired.

FLORENCE

You've only got three more months.

ANNA

Yeah.

FLORENCE

Come on, what's wrong?

ANNA

It just feels so long, you know?

FLORENCE

Three months? That's, what, a fourth of your contract. That's barely anything— You and I have been together for a lot longer than that. Three months is nothing.

ANNA

It's not the work that feels long.

FLORENCE

Then what is it?

ANNA

It's the waiting.

FLORENCE

Okay. Waiting for?

ANNA

Us. The whole... Us thing. Getting married.

FLORENCE

It's not like we aren't allowed to be in the same room until we're married. Hell, we already sleep in the same bed most nights. Being married won't really change anything.

ANNA

No, I know. But it's the... I don't know. The excitement of it all. Like— That's it, you know? It's the rest of our lives. Our joint lives. Our two lives becoming one... Life. I don't know, I just want it to happen so badly.

FLORENCE

Anna...

ANNA

What if we did it right now?

FLORENCE

In the... Dressing room?

ANNA

What? No. Absolutely not. Like, what if we just— I don't know, ran?

FLORENCE

Ran?

ANNA

Who says we need to stay here?

FLORENCE

The circus's lawyers, for one. My dad, for the other.

ANNA

It can't be that easy to find someone once they've run away— Hazel ran away from home a year ago and no one's found her yet!

FLORENCE

I have a suspicion no one's looking for her...

ANNA

We could have a nice, small wedding— Just the two of us! Or more, I mean, if you wanted to invite people you could if you really wanted to, but... It would be nice.

FLORENCE

What about after?

ANNA

That's when we start the rest of our lives.

FLORENCE

And money? What about money? You won't have a job.

ANNA

I wouldn't have a job even if we waited the three months. That's the point of the contract running out.

FLORENCE

If we ran my father couldn't help with any of it.

ANNA

I don't want to have to rely on him.

FLORENCE

It's not relying, it's just setting us up for a comfortable first month or so. While we look for work. There's really no other option.

ANNA

I've been saving money from here.

FLORENCE

You and I both know that's not enough.

ANNA

Whose fault is that?

FLORENCE

I tried to talk to him about your salary, he / was—

ANNA

I know. I'm sorry.

FLORENCE

It's not... I understand why you're upset. I can't just tell you not to be nervous about this. I know it doesn't work that way. And I know you have this whole life planned out for the both of us, and I love that. I just don't know how easy it's going to be to start that plan without his help.

ANNA

I didn't renew that contract for a reason, Florence.

FLORENCE

What do you mean?

ANNA

I want a fresh start from this. And taking his money to get that, especially when everyone else is leaving here with barely anything, it doesn't feel right.

FLORENCE

A fresh start isn't that easy, though. Not for me. This— All of this— It's my life. And, yes, moving away from here— I'm all on board for that. I want a life with you. But one day, this is ours. We can own this. And I don't know what we'd want to do once that's our reality but... This place is a part of me. And it's certainly a part of you. You can't pretend that it's not. It wouldn't be fair to either of us.

ANNA

You're right. I just... It's hard.

FLORENCE

I know. But stop and think about it, for a second. When this is all over and it really is just us. Me, you, living in some house far away from here. Alone. Well, maybe not alone. We could have a cat. Or a dog. Maybe a fish, if you didn't want something that ran around everywhere. Or no pets, if you didn't want any.

ANNA

A frog.

FLORENCE

Hmm?

ANNA

If we got a pet I'd want a frog.

FLORENCE

A frog, then. We'll get a frog.

ANNA

Two?

FLORENCE

Two.

ANNA

Three?

FLORENCE

We'll get two and then maybe together they can make a third.

[The two laugh or hug or show some type of intimacy. Relationships have layers.]

FLORENCE

Does that help?

ANNA

Yeah, it helps. It doesn't really... Change how I feel. But it helps a little.

FLORENCE

A little is better than nothing, right?

[ANNA smiles. It doesn't reach her eyes.]

FLORENCE

Are you sure that's all that's bothering you?

ANNA

I... Yes.

FLORENCE

You don't sound sure.

ANNA

I don't... I feel like something... Bad is going to happen.

FLORENCE

What kind of bad? Why?

ANNA

It's just a feeling.

FLORENCE

Is that why you want to leave?

ANNA

Yes.

FLORENCE

So we aren't here when the bad thing happens?

ANNA

Yes.

FLORENCE

I love you. I want to spend the rest of my life with you. But do you realize how paranoid you sound?

ANNA

It's not paranoia.

FLORENCE

Is there a reason, then?

[ANNA knows she can't tell FLORENCE.]

ANNA

No.

FLORENCE

Everything will be fine.

ANNA

How do you know?

FLORENCE

Bad things don't happen to us.

ANNA

Right. *[Beat.]* Sorry.

FLORENCE

Don't be sorry. It'll all be okay. You'll see. I have to go find my father. You'll be alright without me?

ANNA

Yeah. I'll be okay.

FLORENCE

Okay. Have a good show. I'll be watching!

ANNA

You always are.

FLORENCE

And I always will be. Until I find something better to do, of course.

ANNA

Thanks, for that.

FLORENCE

I love you.

ANNA

I love you, too. I'll see you after your act.

[FLORENCE smiles and leaves ANNA.]

ANNA

Shit.

[ANNA leaves the room. Transition into:]

**[END OF SAMPLE. FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT:
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