



Animal Circus

And the sea lion jumped onto the circular box and clapped his fins together again... For what seemed to be the hundredth time in a row...

“What on Earth am I doing here? Out of all the acts I could have come to see, why this one?”

Mark Hampton was bored. He thought that his relationship with his boss was good enough not to have to be sent to review “Zantaffio’s Great Animal Circus”, the one that in its greatest years had people coming from all five continents, to watch the massive elephants riding a bike, the wonderful penguins walking on tightropes and the brown bears in tutus ballet dancing. But the major attraction was none of these. No act could be compared to that of the apes, the chimpanzee violinists, the piano playing orang-utan and the gorillas that played the flute, all of that to Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony. However, after ten years as the best circus in the world, the most popular animals got too old to perform and the ringmaster had a lot of trouble replacing them. Rumours were starting to go around saying that the animals were not treated properly. After that, the circus lost all of its value and originality, nobody went to watch the acts anymore and the owner went bankrupt. Nowadays the circus collects reviews worsening every time and now he was the one that had to write something so terrible that it would deliver the final blow to the ringmaster, the recent owner since the other one had gone broke and left the circus. Mark felt bad for this man in a way, he had fought for ages to keep his animals and the circus running but it was inevitable, the show would end very soon.

But that would have to wait until it ended, and right now he needed to go to the toilet. He saw the sign indicating that he had to go down to the sand covered stage and then walk around it. Lucky the tent was nearly empty and that everyone else had left. He started to go to the side of the stage and saw all the rotten wood used as boxes painted with cheap blue paint that was already starting to rip off. Then he followed the arrow leading out of the tent. The night air was chilly and he could see his breath disappearing into the dark. He finally found the toilets and when he had finished he started going back to the tent. Just then dark, looming shapes caught his eye and at once he thought that they looked like cages. He started moving towards them and because he wanted to see for himself what everyone was saying about how the remaining animals were treated. As he approached the mysterious cages he was overwhelmed by the stench that came from them. The stench was like that of corpses. All that made him even more curious about what could be hidden there.

When shapes started to be visible, he jumped in surprise. All the apes were still alive, in terrible condition but still alive. The animals looked beaten, all of them had lost their fur and were pressed up in the darkest corner of the cages. They were terrified of anything that moved and made horrible screeches as he passed next to them, scrutinising every one of them. One of the apes intrigued him above all, like all the others he could not tell from what species he came from, but this one had something special about it. It was an old male sitting down crossed legged and this human position was what caught his eye. Mark paused and looked at this creature all over his face, his eyes were different and as the animal turned his head towards Mark, he looked at him right in the eyes. That was amazing. None of the others would have been able to establish eye contact and even less keep it that way. The gaze was that of someone that had no hope left yet had knowledge of life worthy of Buddha's.

Mark, a bit confused by this vision, went back to the tent. The show was over, everyone had left. "Anyway, he thought, I could not have stood 5 more minutes of that nonsense".

All of a sudden, the ringmaster appeared in front of him and Mark bowed down in front of him congratulating him and saying that the show was stunning. However whilst doing that he realised that this was something he had never done before and he would not have said it but no matter how unwilling he bowed down he could not help it. Mark looked up at the ringmaster's face when he was looking down at him and heard him mutter the words "good boy" in a soothing and caring voice, one that would be used when petting animals. This calmed Mark down a little, but only his body; his thoughts were getting more afraid every second. This man, standing in front of him seemed to have managed to subdue his body and Mark knew that he would not stop there. Slowly, he felt that not only he had lost control over his body but his mind and thoughts were starting to dilapidate. He dropped to his knees and started crawling back away from the ringmaster. He felt terrified and in danger, a human was standing in front of him! He looked down at himself, what was he doing in human clothes? He ripped all of his clothes off and tried to run! However, was trying to go on his four feet and so tripped over and got caught up by the ringmaster who called for assistance. Soon after two people came over carrying a cage and brutally threw him into it. Mark whimpered and as he was getting locked up, he tried relentlessly to remember his name, at least his name! "Mark... Mark... Mark... Mar... M... ...".

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