

Clowns of Circus Sinclair

A short collection of clown articles from
the
Sinclair Circus Stories

FOREWORD

September 1986

Jamie Sinclair sat at the cleared dinner table with his cousins, Carlotta and Jessica. The three children stared miserably out of the window of the circus caravan at the pouring rain, which had been making deep pools across the muddy meadow since before they arrived this morning. The last of the lorries had squelched on to the field at seven o'clock and Jacky Sinclair, the girl's father and the owner of the circus, had announced after breakfast that it was too wet to build up the tent today. They had dodged through the rain to help lay out the stakes and pull up the king pole, fed and cleaned animals, and helped pull up the horse tent before was time for an early lunch.

Now they were dry and fed. They had done the washing up for Lee Sinclair, mother to the girls and aunt to Jamie, and tidied up the little end bedroom where they slept last night. They had come back to the saloon half an hour ago. Jamie had tried to read. Jessica was sitting with a sheet of blank sheet of paper and pencils, and Carlotta looked half asleep. It was boring.

Their Grandfather held out a long stemmed plastic rose between his finger and thumb to Jamie with a sorrowful look on his face. The boy looked at it, smiled and took the stalk in his hands. With another look of pity, Grandfather took his fingers, and the rose, away. Jamie was left looking at the bare stalk in the hand, not quite believing his eyes.

At last Jamie laughed, for the first time in hours, as the girls laughed at him, and then with him.

"You ought to write another book, Grandad, just about your clown tricks," suggested Jessica.

Her father got up from his seat by the door and reached up to a shelf above the window to hand to down several books and large scrapbooks of magazine articles.

"Okay, then. Here's all the stories your Grandfather ever published and some more that didn't make it. Why don't you three go through them and look for the best clown tricks for yourselves? We're going to talk business next door and perhaps when we come back later, you'll have found enough for your book.

The grownups went out, leaving the three children excitedly opening the books they had chosen.

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“ONE HAND”

June 1946

I must have been nine at the time, at least not quite ten years old, because it was still the school summer term and I was home that week, recovering after a bad bout of summer ‘flu.

It was a Wednesday. Mother had gone off with Grandmother on the early bus to visit my Auntie Monica in Bury and I was trusted to stay at home on my own.

You know me by now, I didn’t stay home on my own! Almost before they had turned out of sight at the end of the road, I had fetched my bicycle out of the wooden shed opposite the back door and ridden off to Denmark Green to see what this Circus looked like.

The circus posters had been up for days. Big impressive posters, and lots of them. I didn’t think that such a big show would have come to Diss, even just for the one day stand, and I wasn’t going to miss it.

I was in plenty of time, too. When I arrived there were only two lorries, plus a box trailer and a four wheeled caravan, standing at the front of the common. Two men and a small boy were wandering about throwing metal stakes on to the ground.

“Want to help?” the boy asked me, and I did want.

I certainly learnt more about circus tents that day than I have ever learnt since. Julio, the owner’s son, wasn’t even as old as I was, yet he and I did that build up together. His father and the elderly tent man did all the heavy work, but when it came to pulling out ropes and, a bit later, to building up the seating and the ring fence and the props then we did it all.

“Does he want to go in as a clown?”

It was about half past three and the old tattered green tent was up and everything was ready for the show. As ready as it would ever be. Julio’s father found us in the ring doors, where I was brushing one of their two ponies, and made his invitation.

I accepted.

By the time the five o’clock started, at a quarter past, I was dressed in an old, one-piece clown suit and wearing the clown face that I still use now. Julio’s father showed me the trick of finding where to put the mouth and the eyes that day. As someone once told me it’s bad luck for a clown to change his face, I never did bother to find a new one.

We stood in the ring doors before the show, waiting as the last customers came in. Julio had been making my mind churn by telling me all the things I’d have to do.

“Don’t worry!” Said his father. “Do what comes naturally,” and went in to make the opening announcement.

That circus was a fake!

Julio and his parents were the show! His father had a story that the major part of the show had broken down along the way, and the best acts and animals were not able to come in time. "But the show must go on!"

But that didn't matter to me. I was part of it, instead of looking at it from outside.

We went in the ring after every act and did our best to pad out the program with the help of a selection of old and worn out clown props. But one trick still sticks in my mind.

I practised the trick from the time Julio showed me how to do it, and was still practising when his mother came out of the ring with the counting pony and grabbed the props out of my hand. We raced into the ring and were doing leapfrogs when she came in with the glass full of pale red liquid.

"Julio! Peppi!" she called. "I've got something for the cleverest clown in the circus!"

"That's me!" we both shouted, as we ran to see what it was.

"I've got a glass of wine, but it's for the one who is cleverest."

I announced that I was cleverest, but Julio was certain he was.

We argued for a while until she interrupted us with a loud cry of "STOP!"

"You have to prove it. You have to drink it with ONE HAND."

What a thing to say! Who needs two hands to drink a glass of blackcurrant cordial, even if you do call it wine?

We were right at the front of the ring, walking round telling the children in the boxes how silly she was, and that gave her a chance to place a saucer upside down on the top of the glass. She turned the whole thing over and put it on a chair by the ring door curtains, where we found it.

Julio looked at it with a very puzzled face. He tried lying on his back under the chair and his mother just stopped him lifting the glass bodily off the saucer in time to prevent him making a mess.

"I can do it!" I announced to everyone.

Julio accused me of being big headed!

"Let him prove it!" ordered his mother.

I had practised long enough not to make a mess of the trick. I knew it perfectly by now, and it's not at all difficult. I knelt down in front of the chair and picked up the saucer with its glass.

"One Hand!" I shouted.

I leant back and balanced the saucer on the forehead. Now the tricky part comes!

But was quite easy after all. I grabbed the saucer and pressed it into my forehead as I stood up. With my hand transferred to the glass, I nodded forward. Then that left the glass the right way up with the saucer on top, so I could put it back on the chair and grab the saucer away. I ran to front of the ring and waved my saucer to the audience.

“One Hand!” I said, proudly.

“One Hand,” shouted Julio by the ring doors, picking up the glass from the chair and pouring the cordial into his mouth. Which was not what we had practised!

I thought I was supposed to drink it!

I was not at all amused...

“THE WATER of TRUTH”

January 1968

It was snowing hard outside the warm caravan and no one wanted to go to bed. David and Jacky had come back late last night with their parents from the Christmas show and this morning Commander Sinclair had told them to look outside.

“Our own trailer?” Jacky had asked, and the two brothers had rushed off to see it. Now they had moved in and their parents and great aunt were sitting in the warm little room with them, drinking their celebration cup of cocoa and talking. The discussion came round to clown gags, which the boy’s great interest at the moment.

“It’s funny how often you see a clown gag and connect it with a certain person or a particular circus” said the boy’s great aunt.

“There’s one gag that I always remember from years ago,” she started. “It’s so old that I’ve forgotten where I first heard it. But my older brother always did it in our show. It’s call the water of truth, and it always reminds me of him.”

“I remember it,” said Janine Sinclair, the boy’s mother. “Is it really that old?”

Jacky looked at the two women. “Are you going to keep it yourselves then?”

His great aunt laughed. “It’s so simple,” she said, picking up an empty lemonade bottle and hugging it to her chest.

“What have you got there?” asked Jan’, speaking as she always did when she was being the ringmaster.

“It’s secret and it’s all mine!” exclaimed the old lady, smiling at them as she remembered the words.

“Please tell me,” asked the boy’s mother. “Tell me, please!”

“All right then, I will tell you,” came the answer. “It’s the most valuable discovery of the century. It’s the Water of Truth! Anyone who takes a sip of the water will immediately tell the truth.”

As everyone watched, Jan’ Sinclair took the bottle and pretended to take a sip from it. Slowly a look of disgust appeared on her face, and she pretended to spit the water out again. The boys could still see the look on their mother’s face as she passed the bottle back.

“It’s not water! It’s vinegar!” She complained loudly.

The old lady laughed, wickedly.

“It’s the water of truth,” she cackled. “You took one sip of it, and you certainly told the truth!”

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“EGG NUMBER”

January 1968

The boys were always being impressed by the things their mother knew; after all she'd kept her secret well. The boys hadn't even known that she and David were both born in circuses until she told them one summer. So Jacky turned to her, next.

“What about you, Mother. Do you remember any more old clown gags?”

“I suppose I recall a few, but your father will know lots more than I do. But yes, there is one his grandfather Oskar and his uncle used to do in our show, though it's more elaborate than just a run-in.”

David looked at her with interest, as she picked up the empty biscuit plate and held it by one edge with her fingers behind it and her thumb along the edge. She picked up a red Ping-Pong nose that Jacky had painted and left to dry. She threw it up with her other hand. She caught it easily.

“You just have to practise throwing an egg into the air and catching it. You watch, I actually catch it in the palm of my hand and not on the plate at all. Practice that, and then you can do this trick anytime.

She repeated the throw and this time they could see that it rolled down the front of the plate rather than hitting it.

“Actually I was about your age when I found out that our clowns had three eggs. One hard boiled one to catch, one raw one to smash on grandfather's head, and a china egg to smash the plate. He used to break two or three more plates by falling about, and then another by letting the china egg hit it. Then he'd smash the last raw egg on his face.”

She grinned.

“I thought it was marvellous when I was little, because my uncle would catch the egg every time without breaking it.”

She threw the ball up again.

“Did you see? You hold the plate like a Ping-Pong bat but you slice it downwards instead of hitting it. I practised for ages and broke dozens of eggs too. I thought I'd never get it, until I discovered why my uncle always had hard boiled egg sandwiches for supper.”

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“Three threes are Ten”

“Pick Up Five”

January 1968

Commander Sinclair was nodding.

“When you say about connecting a gag with a circus, there’s one trick that I’ll always remember. It so simple, and it always works too!

Everyone waited for him to tell them his story.

“Barry and I had been down to see the Anglo American Circus near Chichester, and we were coming back through the South Downs. As we drove through one of the smaller villages we saw another circus, built up on the green, so we stopped and went to meet them. A real family show where you rely on your own talent. But, that’s where I first saw ‘Three Threes are Ten!’”

“Pick up Five,” said his aunt.

He nodded. “Exactly! The ringmaster asks the clown where he has been all the day, and the clown says he’s been at school.”

“What has he learnt....” Prompted his aunt.

Commander Sinclair grinned.

“The clown tells the audience that he’s been learning arithmetic....”

“...*Tickle me quick,*” corrected the boy’s mother.

“Who’s telling it? You or me?” He waited a moment to see if she was going to interrupt again.

She didn’t.

“The ringmaster says the clown can’t be any good at sums, because he plays truant from school too often. But he’ll test him all the same.”

His wife didn’t interrupt this time, so he carried on.

“The ringmaster tries him with two times two. Four, he says. Very good! So he tries three times three. The clown says TEN.”

Commander Sinclair took the last three chocolate biscuits out of the packet and laid them in a line across the plate.

“Watch carefully how the clown counts....”

He picked up the biscuits, one at a time, lifting them from the plate and putting them down again as he counted. The boys counted with him.

“One. Two. Three. Four.”

He started to pick up the biscuits and put them in the other hand as he continued.

“Five. Six. Seven.”

He looked guiltily at his aunt as he put them back down again.

“Eight. Nine. TEN.”

He sat back, looking very satisfied with himself, as the boys tried it. David made it nine on his first try, but Jacky looked at his great aunt. He gripped his lower lip

between his teeth, and winked at her, because he had remembered the name that she had called the trick. He lifted and dropped the biscuits in turn, counting to four. He picked them up to reach seven, and put the down, eight --nine – ten!

His great aunt clapped.

“I bet you put that in the show at Easter,” she said, smacking at Jacky’s hand as he started to move one of the biscuits towards his mouth.

“Destroying the evidence?” said his mother. “Give your brother another try before you eat them all.”

“YOU CAN’T DO THAT THERE ‘ERE”

March-April 1968

(This appears as a chapter of *The Children of Circus Sinclair – Lee*)

The school activity week ended with an exhibition followed by the theatre and circus entertainment’s on the Friday afternoon. Actually, although they suspected it had been though up because of them, both Jacky and David had chosen not to be in the circus activity even though they would have liked it. There were too many other interesting things to do in the other groups.

All the same, the other activities had helped the circus and the theatre groups after all. David was in the photography group and was very proud of the pictures he’d taken at the rehearsals and which were now on the home made posters advertising the shows. Jacky had worked hard in the radio and electric’s group, but had ended up in charge of fitting the light and amplifier for the circus show in the gym.

At the end of last week, two days before the activities started, the head teacher had called them into his study and talked them into helping the circus group to make the show and asked them to do an act for it as well. As a result they’d had a lot of fun thinking out a western act for themselves and, because there was no homework this week, teaching tricks to two volunteer clowns in the evenings.

The one hour show was timed to be in the gymnasium at three o’clock, and it was crowded with parents and children. The woodworking group had fashioned a ring fence out of hardboard and rigged a curtain over the changing room door, so they had made it as much like a real circus as they could. Jacky said it was good enough to make him feel homesick.

David had managed to get his Ringmaster’s jacket and top hat sent from home, and had been down town with Jacky to get all the props the needed. Everything was as ready as it would ever be as they waited for the signal to start.

David blew the whistle. Jacky started the record for the fanfare. David stepped through the curtains to announce the trampoline act, and their show was on.

After the first act, as David and Jacky carried the trampoline from the ring, the clowns came in.

They were brothers too. One was a school prefect from the sixth form and had a big mouth organ, the younger the one from the prep’ school class carried a drum. They stood side by side on one side of the ring, playing “the saints come marching in.”

They were quite good, too. But at the end of the verse the curtains opened and David came through into the ring.

“You can’t do that here!” he told them.

“Are you sure we can’t? I just heard us.” Answered the taller clown.

“I mean, you can’t play music here. It’s not allowed.” David was polite and patient.

“Sorry, Mr. Sinclair!” said the clown. “We won’t play music here.”

David went out between the curtains. But the clowns just walked over to the opposite side of the ring and started to play the tune again.

David came back.

“I thought I told you, you couldn’t play music here?” he asked.

“No!” Replied the clown, pointing across the ring. “You said we couldn’t play THERE.”

David was still polite.

“Here nor there. Neither one nor the other.” He held out his hand, took the instruments away from them, and carried them out with him.

The clown reached inside his coat and brought out a new musical instrument, a triangle and its little brass hammer, which he gave to his partner with a gigantic flourish. He turned his trouser pockets inside out, and back again. He turned his breast pockets inside out and found a miniature eight note mouth organ, which he showed to the audience with a like a magician producing a rabbit out of a hat.

They started to play again.

David appeared again after the first few notes.

“Really!” he said. “It’s not that I don’t like your music. It’s just not allowed. They have some very funny rules round here.”

The boy’s from the school cheered and roared with laughter, and David looked at the audience in faked surprise, which turned real when he saw that the masters were laughing too.

He took the instruments away again.

The bigger clown was standing facing the curtains, blowing a whistle and making rude faces, as David came back. He stood still whilst David came to fetch it, at the last moment turning and pretending to hide it behind the ring fence.

Whilst David looked for it beyond the ring fence, the clown threw it to his partner, who blew it too and also attempted to hide it.

David turned round sharply, seeming not to notice that the whistle was passed back again, and ran across and looked for it on the other side of the ring. The bigger clown blew the whistle again whilst David was looking by the feet of the front row of the audience.

“Where is it?” asked David, going across to where the smaller clown was pulling his pockets inside out.

The whistle was on a cord, and the cord had a spring clothes peg tied to the end. The bigger clown crept up and hooked the whistle to the belt at the back of David’s jacket, and blew it.

As David turned round, the whistle went round too, and the other clown could blow it. They turned faster and faster, with the clown blowing the whistle and David appearing to not notice it, until he suddenly turned half round and caught the bigger clown with the whistle to his mouth. The clowns ran, David chased them, and in front of the curtain they all turned and bowed.

The clown's went out, and David waited for the clapping to stop. As Jacky lowered the rings on the ropes, David announced the next act, and the boy who was doing ran in as the brothers ran out.

In the changing room outside the gym the two clowns were sweating.

"It's hard work!" exclaimed the prefect. "I'll have a bit more understanding when I watch a circus in the future. How did we do?"

"Not bad for beginners," said David, pulling the curtains closed behind him. "How'd you like to it for a living?"

“KEEP YOUR SHIRT ON”

March-April 1968

David looked at Jacky's watch as the last act but one went into the gymnasium. The activity week circus was running well, but it was running a little too fast and one boy in the group who were to do the last act wasn't ready yet. The clowns had done all the tricks the boys had taught them, too. The teacher looked at his 'experts.' Jacky was still wearing his jeans and western shirt, and David was dressed as Ringmaster again. They were all waiting outside the curtains and up to now the teacher had simply stood back and let David run the whole show as if the boys were at home.

“Dad's Shirt trick!” exclaimed David, unclipping his bow tie, stripping off his jacket and starting to unbutton his shirt. It was only work of a few moments to hang it over his back and do up the top button round his neck and the sleeves at the wrist. Jacky helped him put his jacket on and pull the shirt up a bit more to get another few buttons done up.

“How does it look?” asked David, clipping the bow tie back on, putting his top hat on his head again and adjusting the shirt cuffs.

“It'll do,” Jacky confirmed.

“Ladies and Gentlemen, Boys and Girls,” said David, coming into the ring and flourishing his hat. “There will have to be a short pause....”

“Oy!” said Jacky, coming through the curtains. He had snatched the rainbow-coloured jacket from the smaller clown and put on the boy's red ping-pong nose.

“Oy!” he repeated. “I can take your shirt off for you.”

“I can take my own shirt off myself, thank you Jacko.”

Jacky made faces at the audience.

“I can take it off, without you having to take off your jacket. You can't do that, can you?” he said.

“I'll bet you can't do it either.” Said David.

As the two circus boys pretended to argue, Jacky saw the leader of the last act wave to them from the curtains and give a thumbs up sign.

“Then I'll prove it!” he said. He held up David's arms in turn, making a show of unbuttoning the cuffs. He pulled off his brother's bow tie and undid the three front buttons, counting ‘two, three, six,’ as he did so.

David stood up straight and swept off his hat.

“Ladies and Gentlemen, Boys and Girls. The great shirt trick. Clown Jacko will attempt to remove your Ringmasters shirt, through that person's body.”

He didn't sound all that convinced.

“Clown Jacko!”

As David bowed, Jacky grabbed his brother's shirt collar at the back of the neck and in a single sweep pulled the whole shirt clear.

They took their bow, and a shirtless David announced the final performers and went out to dress again.

The master in charge of the group was waiting for them behind the curtains and was bubbling with enthusiasm.

“I know you didn’t want to do this activity, but the last thing made up my mind. The headmaster wants us to repeat the show for the local hospitals. Will you do it for us?” The boys looked at each other, and Jacky gave a stifled giggle.

“Of course we will,” said David. “We’d love to.”

He didn’t add that they’d done their activities that they’d chosen, after all, and more shows would be more time off school!

“HONEY BEE, HONEY BEE, WHAT HAVE YOU BROUGHT FOR ME?”

August 1968

The high school riding act wasn't good enough to go into the programme, but Lee kept saying that she wanted to do something other than her own ground-acrobatic act in the show. Commander Sinclair had told the boys to try to think of some clown gag where she wouldn't be a passenger.

“It's got to be something where she comes off best.” He insisted. “The audience mustn't see her being caught out. Even if she doesn't mind, they'll say it's not fair to trick a person when they're blind.”

The three boys, David, Jacky and Paul, sat on the ring fence beside her after the early show and made suggestions to the circus owner as he tidied the ropes around the king pole. Lee had never heard so many peculiar names. The “can't do that.” “The Echo.” “Three Threes.” “It ain't gonna rain no more.”

She listened to the discussion and hoped that with so many to chose from they'd soon find something she could without much practice.

Paul hit on the solution. “Honey Bee!” he said, jumping up.

Honey Bee it was. Auntie Jan' dressed Lee in one of Jacky's one piece clown suits before the late show started, and made up her face for her. Lee tasted the grease paint that had strayed on to her lips and decided that it was harmless enough, although the powder made her sneeze when Auntie Jan' dusted off the makeup.

“Are you sure can do it, Lee?”

Lee was certain, with the certainty of any normal eleven-year-old. Paul had explained it, and they'd done a dry run before going to eat their teas. David was certain she could do it. They'd already found out, a long time ago, that she could remember the words to any gag after hearing them just once, better than any of the boys could do. More important, she was as good as Jacky was at improvising when they made a mistake.

Though it was David and not Jacky who had sat at the tea table and convinced his father they didn't need any more practice and she could do it tonight.

Twenty minutes into the first half of the show, as auntie Jan' rode the big white horse out of the ring, David and Jacky ran in with Lee between them. The boys were carrying folding chairs and stood them in front of the king pole. David and Lee sat down.

“Let's play a game!” suggested Lee, loudly and confidently.

The boys looked at her.

“I know,” said Jacky. “I'll pretend to be a honey bee!”

He ran around in a circle, waving his arms and making a buzzing noise.

“I fly off to get honey, and when I get back you have to ask me what I have brought for you.”

“Honey Bee, Honey Bee, what have you brought for me?” He recited. “Do you understand?”

Lee understood... “Indubitably.”

Jacky waved his arm up and down, and made his loud buzzing noise, and as he did so he went around the ring until he was behind the others. He picked up a bottle from behind the ring fence by the ring door curtains and showed it to the audience. Then he took a mouthful of water, and corked it again.

He buzzed again, and came back, but Lee and David were talking to each other and ignoring him, as if he wasn't there.

He made a big show of spitting the water out.

“Hey!” he complained. “What are you doing? You are supposed to say something...”

Lee stood up. “Yes... Honey Bee, Honey Bee, what have you brought for me!”

“Not now.” Said Jacky.

“Sorry!” Lee said, “We're ready now,” and sat down again.

He repeated his buzzing and went off to take another mouthful of water. Jacky stopped in front of Lee. He coughed, and Lee looked straight toward him, but she didn't say word even when he coughed and buzzed as loud as they could. They appeared to look at each other, until Jacky gulped down the water.

“I forgot what I had to say,” Lee explained, grinning at the audience.

“The audience knows the words, don't you?” Jacky asked, going over to the royal box seats.

They did, with David's and Jacky's help, and they all helped Lee to recite it again.

“One last try!” Said Jacky. “Honey Bee, Honey Bee, what have you brought for me?”

“Yes. I know it, now,” she said, looking at David and grinning from ear to ear. Jacky did the buzzing and arm flapping, and went and filled his mouth again from the bottle.

While Jacky was pretending to fly around at the front of the ring and pointing at his mouth to tell the audience, he tripped over and fell flat on his face. He sprayed water on to the grass. Meanwhile David made haste over to the ring fence and fetched the bottle of water so Lee could take a good swig of it. He dashed back again and got it into place as Jacky came to fetch it.

As Jacky returned to where Lee and David were waiting, he looked at her innocently and waited as she stood up. They stood looking at each other, for quite a while before Jacky, losing patience, swallowed the water.

He bent forward and looked into her face.

“Honey Bee, Honey Bee, what have you brought for me?” he shouted in a very annoyed voice.

Exactly on the cue, Lee sprayed her mouthful of water in a fine jet - into Jacky's face.

FUN WITH FUNNELS

August 1970

It was bank holiday weekend and baking hot. The small one pole tent of Sinclair Brothers Circus was built up on the big country meadow in the middle of Berkshire, along with all the other attractions of an 'Old Time Steam Fair.' It was hard work and the whole family were tired out.

It was harder work than usual because they had been working here as a 'fairground circus' since ten o'clock on Saturday morning. Now it was a quarter past two on Monday and the customers were still coming in to get out of the burning sun and to be entertained.

You might well wonder what a travelling circus was doing on a fairground, but this was an exception because this was an Old Time Steam Fair and circuses belong there. The tiredness was because they were only five handed, because they were the victims of a double booking. Somehow the London Agent had fixed the circus to be at two places at once.

There was only one solution! Commander Sinclair had taken the decision and sent Alli and Mary off with the Williams family and most of the horses to be the arena show somewhere in Hertfordshire. Which had left just the five of the family to work ten hours of the three days of the show.

It was a new experience for the children and exiting too, even if it was hard work. It would have been even harder, but they only performed for twenty minutes in the ring and then had an at least twenty minute pause while the boys father tried to fill the tent again.

At least that was how it started, but by now the adults were flagging. The children, thirteen year olds Lee and Jacky and fourteen year old David, were taking turns outside to give Commander Sinclair and his wife time for a rest.

Lee had borrowed David's ringmaster suit, with its top hat and red tailcoat, and was standing with her guide dog, Max, at the side of the ring door curtains. She had just picked up the microphone, preparatory to beginning the spiel for Jacky's father's white yoga and fire eating act.

"You can catch a coin in a funnel, can't you?" asked Commander Sinclair, putting his hand on her arm.

"Yes, Uncle Peter, You remember, don't you?"

Lee had done the trick, just that once, two summers ago in Wales. You have to balance a coin on your nose, and flick it forward and catch it in the funnel. The funnel is tucked down the front of your trousers, and what happened at the end of the trick appealed to her even more.

As Commander Sinclair came out, David and Jacky ran into the ring. David had a bucket of water and placed it by the ring fence.

They did the hand and hat routine together. David always had a lot of trouble with that particular trick, where the clowns reach out to shake hand or lift their hats to each other. He could never get it right, although the trick is very simple. One clown has to move his hand forward to shake hand whilst the other lifts his hat, and then they do the opposite thing. They repeat it several times, usually until one makes a mistake.

Lee could hear Jacky saying 'hand' and 'hat' quietly to David, and could imagine him having trouble too, having to do the opposite to his cue!

David made a big show of fetching the bucket, which was obviously full of water, and hiding it behind the king pole where everybody could see it. Jacky meanwhile ran round shaking hands with people in the boxes.

"Jacko?" David asked. "You did say you were the best juggler in the family, didn't you?"

"No!" he answered, coming over to look at the funnel, which David was now holding. "But I'm much better than you!"

"Right then, Jacko. I'm going to let you prove it!" he announced, and stuck the big funnel into the front of his brother's trousers. "Put your head back, and close your eyes."

David gave Jacky half-a-crown, which Jacky put carefully on his nose as he leaned back and held his arms back and away from his body.

"Ready?" David asked. "You can't see, can you?"

Jacky shook his head, and the coin flew off.

(The coin's not actually on the nose, but on the eyebrows just above the eyes where you find a hollow!)

After they had found it again, made difficult because Jacky was making a big show of standing on it, David managed to get him set up again with the funnel in his waistband and the coin balanced.

David was standing beside Jacky, with the bucket now behind his back.

"Right? On the count of three, drop the coin into the funnel."

"One!" David called.

"Two," he called, and poured lovely cool water into the funnel.

Jacky stood for several moments enjoying it, and then remembered to grab the coin from his nose, he didn't drop it, and pretend to be annoyed.

"I'll get you!" he shouted, pulling out the funnel and trying to hit his brother with it.

"No, Stop!" Called David. "Here's Miss Lee. Let's trick her with it!"

As Lee came in, her hand on Max's harness, David came over to meet her.

"You are a better juggler than Jacko is, aren't you Miss Lee?" he asked.

“I’m the best juggler in the whole circus!” Lee answered. “Do you want me to show you?”

“Yes please, Miss Lee,” they both shouted. Jackie helped her put the funnel in her trousers and she took the coin from David.

“Balance it on your nose and close your eyes,” David commanded Lee, and when she got it balanced he tapped her on the shoulder.

“You can’t see it, can you?” He asked.

She took the coin off her nose and waved it in front of her face.

“Not even with my eyes closed,” she said happily, putting it back on her nose and balancing it again.

“Ready!” She called.

“One!” Called David and Jacky, as David passed his brother the bucket of water. “Two!” They shouted as Jacky poured water into the funnel.

There was no reaction from Lee. The two boys stood back, throwing surprised looks at the audience and pointing at her.

“Three!” called Lee herself, letting the coin drop into the funnel.

David fished it out and gave it to Jackie, who was busy feeling the dry material of her trousers and making faces at the audience. David was holding the bucket. Lee knew what was going on and was waiting patiently for the next step.

David poured another generous measure of water into the funnel. He put the bucket aside and took a pace backwards.

“But what have you done with the water?” Asked Jacky, taking out the funnel and shaking it. He turned it upside down, shook it, and even tried lifting the bottoms of her trousers to look for it. He put his hand on her arm.

“Where is it?”

“Here!” She said, pulling a rubber hot water bottle out of her trousers and pouring all the cool water over Jacky’s head and shoulders. He shook himself, grinning widely, and three children and a dog took their bows and left the ring.

“Well done, Lee!” Said Auntie Jan’, David and Jacky’s mother, who was waiting to take a pony into the ring.

“But I wish I could get cool *too!*” answered Lee.

+ + +

HORN OF PLENTY

August 1970

Lee had her wish, about forty minutes later.

Her usual spot was the first act in the section of the show and came out as Auntie Jan' went in with the two monkeys. Lee was wearing her usual skimpy two piece swimsuit, today without tights, and was gleaming with sweat.

"You want to get cool, don't you?" Asked Jacky and she nodded.

"You'll let her do it with me, won't you Dad?" He asked his father, who was holding the big plastic funnel in his hand wondering what to do next. "People will understand, won't they?"

"I expect so, especially if she looks as though she's enjoying it," he agreed. "All right, yes!"

Lee threw her arms around him, and reached up to kiss his face.

Jackie explained. "We're going to do the Horn of Plenty trick."

She nodded, remembering the routine and how they'd caught her with it in practice, shortly after she met them for the first time. She rehearsed the trick in her mind, remembering how it finished.

"At least I won't get caught this time," she thought to herself. "I know what to expect."

David and Jacky, both wearing clown trousers and singlets, ran out with the wooden step ladder and set it up the center of the ring. David ran back out of the ring and patted Lee's shoulder as he came up to her.

"Don't forget!" He said, pulling off his loose baggy trousers and helping her put them on.

"I won't!"

Jan' had coiled Lee's long hair on her head. David went to collect the pony for the next act as she pulled on his singlet and a spare nose. Lee walked into the ring with Max.

"Lee!" called Jacky. "Would you like to help me with a trick?"

She picked up Max's harness handle again and let the dog bring her to Jacky. They stopped and she looked round to where he stood.

"What do you want to show me?" She asked.

"Did you ever hear of the Horn of Plenty?" Asked Jacky, handing her the funnel. She felt it all over, and looked in his direction.

"It's just a big plastic funnel, Jacky?" She asked. "Like we use to pour petrol into our petrol tank?"

"Aha!" Exclaimed Jacky. "It *looks* like a plastic funnel, OK, but it's really a *can you soap your ears.*"

“You mean it’s a ‘*cornucopia*.’” Lee corrected him. “That’s what they call *the horn of plenty*.”

“That’s what I said,” continued Jacky. “It’s a *what-you-said-was*. You hold it above your head, count to ten, and it’s full of a big surprise. Shall I show you?”

Jacky lined her up at the bottom of the ladder and adjusted her position so that she was holding the funnel immediately above her head. She started to count, slowly, and Jacky counted with her as he picked up the bucket of water and climbed the steps.

On “Ten!” He filled the funnel, brim full with water, which fell over her in a welcome shower.

She jumped around, enjoying it, and Max sat looking at her in disgust until she had finished.

Commander Sinclair came in through the ring door curtains.

“Here’s Mister Twizzle!” said Jacky. “You show it to him now!”

“Show me what?” Asked Commander Sinclair.

“Jacko has just shown me his Cornucopia,” she said.

“His what?”

“*Can you soap your ears!*” Said Jacky.

“Don’t start that again,” said his father. “Show me!”

The three of them, Jacky, Lee and Max the dog, lined him up under the ladder, facing to one side. Max retreated to a safe distance and lay down with his nose on his front paws, as if he knew what was going to happen and didn’t want to be any part of it. Lee stood in front of Commander Sinclair and looked out at the audience.

She handed him the funnel.

“It’s very simple. You hold it over your head and count, one, two, three,” she explained. “When you get to ten, it’s full of something you always wanted.”

“Ready?” Asked Jacky, climbing the ladder with the bucket.

“Ready!” Said his father.

All three of them counted, and Lee held Commander Sinclair’s elbows as if to hold him still.

On ‘ten’ Jacky poured, but no water came out. His father had a thumb over the hole in the end of the funnel. Jacky came down the ladder.

“Where’s the surprise?” His father looked all around.

“You’re supposed to get all wet!” Said Lee, looking towards him and up at the funnel.

“Like this?” He asked, holding it over her head and letting it pour out all over her.

Lee was a bit cooler after that.

“AN ECHO”

January 1971

Lee was sitting in the dressing room she was sharing with her mother, ‘Veronique, Star of the Air.’ Lee had done her own acrobatic turn at the ‘Christmas Variety Revival’ and was waiting for her mother to come back from doing her trapeze act. If she had been sighted she might have stayed upstairs in the wings and watched, but she found the whole show rather amateur after the circus where she lived. Not that the acts were poor, judging by the reaction from the audience, but somehow the way it was put together felt wrong to her. Her mother came in and switched the light on. Lee closed the book she was reading and put it down beside her.

“You look bored out of your mind!” exclaimed her mother.

Lee nodded.

“You miss the boy’s, don’t you?” Asked Veronique. “I never thought you’d take to the circus life when Freddy phoned me to say he wanted to go to you to them. When was it?”

“Two and a half years ago, and I knew it was right, straight away,” answered Lee, and then reached over and kissed her mother. “It’s your fault, Mum; you know. If you hadn’t taught me acrobatics as a baby, I would never have won that school competition. By now I’d be working for O-Levels and thinking about being a lawyer or something stuffy, instead of learning to run the circus and having lots of fun at the same time.”

“Run a circus?”

“Yes. Run *our* Circus. Auntie Jan’ lets me write nearly all the letters for the show now, and Jacky has promised me I can be manager for his circus when we grow up.”

As they finished changing for the finale, Veronique lit a cigarette and leant back in her chair.

“Lee. What do you like doing most, in the ring I mean?”

Lee looked thoughtful.

“I like my own routines most, the High School Riding and my acrobatics, because they’re mine and if I make a mistake it’s my mistake. But I really like being Ringmaster, too. Max likes too because that way he can come in the ring with me. She bent down and patted the golden Labrador’s head. He looked up at her, and snuggled down happily again. “But I like being a clown with the boys. You can hear the children in the audience and....” She paused. “It’s work, really!”

“And what could you do as a clown?”

Lee chuckled at a private thought.

“Anything! It’s not what I can do; it’s what Commander Sinclair will let me do. He’s very strict that no one ever catches me out. I mustn’t get tricked, or wet, or get custard pies in the face. I don’t mind, but he says the audience might take the wrong way.”

“There is one special trick that Jacky and I always do together with David, and even the little children like it. It’s a ghost story. Do you know it?”

Veronique said that she probably didn’t know it.

“We come into the ring and sit down on chairs, Me and Jacky, and Max sitting between us just if he’s a clown too and not a dog.”

Max sat up and licked her hand.

“Jacky and I start to sing, *it ain’t gonna rain no more* until Auntie Jan’ come as if she’s going to announce an act, and tells us to stop.” Lee put on a solemn ringmaster’s voice, speaking an octave lower than her normal voice, just as if she was Jan’ Sinclair in front of an audience. “Stop! You didn’t ought to sing that song. You’ll wake up the ghost, he comes every time you sing that.”

“Jacky tells her he’s not afraid of ghosts, we’ll sing it any way. We sing it louder, and whist we sing it, David comes in under a sheet, pretending to be a ghost. I pretend to see him, and feel him, and play as if I am frightened. When he goes away into the ring doors I finally make Jacky aware of it. He doesn’t believe me...”

“Not the second time either, though I stand up and sit down when David goes back inside the ring doors. But the third time, David blows in my ear and I pretend to be scared stiff. Max and I run off to the ring doors and David sits down next to Jacky.”

“When Jacky starts to sing again, he tries to get me to sing, but it’s the ghost next to him now. He realises at length, and the ghost and Jacky run out shouting.”

Veronique reached over and hugged her daughter, looking at the happy face in the dark mirror.

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The Echo

January 1971

“If you can do that, then you can do the gag I used to do,” Veronique said.

“You did clown gags? When were you in a circus?”

“I wasn’t in a circus, it was in the theatre. When I was little, much smaller than you were, about eleven if I remember it rightly. My parents, your grandparents, had to turn their hands to everything to live. I wasn’t all that interested but I remember one trick I always like to do.”

“It goes like this. My Dad and I, the clown and his partner, come on stage and the clown tells her the theatre has a famous echo.”

She paused for effect.

“Whatever sound you make goes off that way. It travels all the way round the world, and back again. When the clown says, *all the way round*, he turns round and whacks her round the ear....”

“Like we do? With our two hands clapping together and making a big noise?” Asked Lee.

“Exactly. Anyway she says she’ll try it, and she holds out her arms and claps them together. Then they pretend to follow the sound around, until the last moment he claps behind her back.”

“When she tries again, she decides to shout ‘hello’ instead. So when they follow ‘the echo’ round the world he shouts ‘hello’ behind her, but she smells a rat because she recognised the voice.”

“ ‘I know where I can get a pint of beer for nothing.’ She shouts, and he falls into the trap.”

“ ‘Where’s that,’ he shouts, and realises what’s he’s done,”

Lee laughed. A happy laugh.

“I expect the boys know that one, but I’ll get them to do it with me. Jacky will pretend he doesn’t know it, whether he knows it or not, and we’ll have fun. Thanks Mum. I wish you come tenting with us one day, though, not just a week at Christmas.

“Maybe I will. It sounds so exciting the way you tell it.”

Veronique looked at the clock.

“Come on, Lee, its time to go upstairs for the end of the show.”

BAT AND BOTTLE and BUTTERFLIES

May-June 1985

Jamie dropped his rucksack in the deserted kitchen and went across the back yard in case his grandfather was working in the garden shed. It was the school half term, since midday today, and for the first in Jamie's life, his father had said he could go away with someone. That someone was Grandfather, and it wasn't just a visit to this little house where he often spent time at weekends. This time, Grandfather had promised to take him to stay with Uncle Jacky and his cousins who lived on their family circus. Much to Jamie's surprise, his father had he could go.

Jamie liked circuses, at least he thought he did. After all, just as his mother and father were, he had been born in a circus caravan. But he had been born in the year when his parents had decided to buy the stables and build the bungalow, which was the only home he'd really known. His mother had taken their caravan and gone back to circus, the day after his fifth birthday, leaving him with his father who still bred and trained performing horses at the stables.

Jamie liked watching circus shows on television, and going to see them when they visited the town. Being part of one, even for a long weekend, was going to be a new experience and, Jamie hoped, really exciting.

Grandfather was working with a file at something in the vice on the workbench "Aren't you ready?" Asked Jamie. "It's past four o'clock. When are we going?"

"Hello Jamie!" Said Grandfather, without looking up. "I thought you'd want to be part of the show, not just a passenger, so I'm making a couple of clown props for you. We aren't going to leave until breakfast time tomorrow, so we can make a good job of it."

Jamie looked at the flat piece of brass that Grandfather had taken out of the vice. It was just a three centimetre piece but had a keyhole shape cut into it and two tiny fixing holes. He was holding it in his hand, and wondering what it was for, when Grandfather tapped his shoulder.

"Pass me that piece of broomstick, Jamie."

Jamie picked up the half-meter long wooden rod and looked at it. One end had been flattened on two sides to make it easy to hold and there were marks where Grandfather had been cleaning it up with the Surform. He passed it over and watched as Grandfather clamped it in the vice and took a small chisel from the tool rack above his head.

After Grandfather had carefully cut a small section out of the side of the wood, and had tried the metal piece in it, he carefully trimmed the bottom and edges of the slot until the top of the metal laid flat with the surface of the rod. He shook the brass keyhole shape out onto the bench and took an even smaller chisel to make a deeper slot in the center of the cut out. He offered the metal plate into the cut out, the narrow end to end of the stick, and glued it. He looked satisfied as he finished gluing, tapped two small nails through the fixing holes and set the rod aside to dry.

"You can do the other part of that job for me, in an hour or two. I would have used a toy baseball bat if I'd had one, but I didn't have. You can sandpaper the ends of the rod and let you varnish it to make it a bit nicer."

“I had to wait for you to get here before I could finish the second prop I’ve made.” Grandfather picked up a red baseball cap, one of those simple things with a peak and an adjustable band at the rear. “Put the cap on your head.”

When Jamie put it on, he found that it had had a long piece of thin wire sticking out in front of his head. He took it off again and examined it. The wire looped inside a cloth band that someone had sewn to its sides, and then it stuck out into a curve that stood out a long way in front of his head. Grandfather adjusted the studs at the back of the cap and pulled the loop tight before taking it off the boys’ head. He tightened the joint of the wire at the front of the head and bent the wire a little more.

“Now we make the butterfly,” said Grandfather, taking a sheet of coloured gift wrapping paper. He carefully folded it like a concertina and inserted it through a hook at the outer end of the wire, where it turned up and down again. He dropped a small blob of instant glue on each side. He smiled at Jamie.

“Let’s leave the butterfly prop to dry, and we can try out the *bat and bottle* that we have just made,” he picked up the wooden bat he’d made and tested it to see if the glue was dry. It was.

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“Are you good at balancing things?” Asked grandfather, swivelling round on his stool and picking up a beer bottle from the floor.

He held it upside down at the end of the bat, looking at Jamie as if he was waiting for him to say something.

“You mean, balance the bottle on the end of the stick?” Jamie asked. “I don’t think so, it’s difficult!”

Grandfather took his hand away from the bottle, leaving it upright at the end of the end of the rod. He made wide sweeping movements as if he balanced the bottle, which stayed safely on the end. Jamie grabbed the bottle and looked to see what was happening. He grinned at what he found when he took it apart.

His Grandfather had pushed a cork into the neck of the bottle and screwed a woodscrew into it. When he had pretended to balance it on the bat, really he had slotted the screw into the keyhole shaped plate and slid until it locked.

Grandfather took back the prop, hooked on the bottle, and put the bat over his shoulder so that the ball hung down.

“That’s the way you end the trick,” he said. “But first, you get the ringmaster to put two chairs, one each side of the ring, and he tells you to run all around the ring balancing it and climbing over them. Of course you can, but nobody knows how easy it.”

“Lets have some tea, then you can try both tricks outside.”

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Tea was Welsh Rarebit, and Jamie wanted to cook it.

Under Grandfathers instruction he measured a dessert spoon of margarine into a saucepan and splashed in some milk. Grandfather gave him two pieces of bread to

crumble up as small as possible whilst he grated a lump of cheese. When they had finished, and put their crumbs and cheese into the saucepan, they added an egg and seasoned it with salt, pepper and mustard powder.

Grandfather lit the gas and handed Jamie a wooden spoon.

“Keep it from sticking by stirring it, whilst I make toast!” He ordered, and put bread in the electric toaster.

The toast was soon ready, and buttered on the plates. As the cheesy topping melted, they spooned it on and ate it whilst it was really hot.

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Grandfather poured out a cup of tea each and then picked up the baseball cap and the wire. He carefully flattened out the ends of the folded paper to make a flat pair of wings, and put the cap on his head. Jamie watched. By moving his head to control it, he landed the wings on the teapot.

By moving his head to control it, it flew to the side of Jamie’s plate. Jamie waved his hand as it to brush it away, and stopped, laughing.

“It’s good!” He exclaimed. “Can I try?”

Grandfathers put the cap on Jamie’s head.

“That’s what it for, Jamie.”

There was another surprise for Jamie before they could go outside and rehearse the tricks. When they had washed up and put the tea things away, they went into the living room.

Grandfather passed Jamie a pair of trousers and a jacket made from material with big square black and yellow patterns on it. They fitted well too. The trousers were held up with yellow braces and there was a big red bow at the neck. Jamie ran out into the hall and looked at his reflection in the big mirror.

“It’s good!” He exclaimed, “Where did you get it?”

“I made it myself, but nearly anyone could have done it as good, or better. It’s only a pyjama pattern from the shops, but the thicker material makes into a suit.

“I don’t care how you made it!” Answered Jamie, proudly, hugging him. “I’ll really have to practise hard to live up to this clown suit. Can I go out and try the props now?”

“THE CLAPPER BOARD”

July 1985

Jamie came into his grandfather’s kitchen like a whirlwind. He’d obviously run up the hill from the bungalow beside the stables and was out of breath. Grandfather took a sip of his breakfast tea and smiled.

“The letter has come,” Jamie managed to say after standing for a few seconds, “can I have a glass of milk?”

Grandfather fetched a glass and poured out a generous portion. He waited until Jamie had cooled off a bit and was ready to talk. “What letter is that?” He asked.

“You remember when Father said I had to write to the girls at the circus after we went there that weekend, because they said I could visit them in the summer holidays? Well I sent a letter to the winter quarters, weeks ago!” He explained, sliding a letter out of an envelope. “The answer came just now, and they said I could come as soon as we break up and I can stay for as long as I like. Father says I can go for as at least a week, possibly even two.”

“Lucky boy, but what’s the hurry?”

Jamie looked sheepish.

“We—ell, actually. It’s like this. They liked the tricks, the ones you taught me before we went to see them, and in my letter I told them I’d have a new trick to show them.... But I haven’t”

“And I’ve got to make you one?” Smiled Grandfather.

Jamie nodded and Grandfather laughed.

“You’re in luck. I’ve got nothing special to do this morning, and I’ve got an idea. Help me wash up, and I’ll see what we can do.”

They went across to the garden shed and Grandfather rummaged in his stack of timber. He pulled out two pieces of wood with a grunt of satisfaction and Jamie looked expectantly as he saw what they were. There were two identical pieces of flat board each about as long as Jamie was tall and about thirty centimetres wide.

“That’s going to be a big prop!” Jamie exclaimed.

“Big and very expensive. You’d pay fifty pounds for what I am about to make.”

Grandfather selected a piece of wood about thirty centimetres wide and about forty long and about two thick. “I think that will do for the spacer. Shall we go inside and assemble it now?”

Grandfather took an electric sander to the edges of the boards and smoothed them down. “Stand back, it’s going to be dusty. You don’t want to get your hands caught on a snag, do you?”

He sanded for a few minutes in all four sides and edges too, and switched off. “O.K. I don’t think you’ll hurt yourself now. We’ll glue it now!”

He laid one board horizontally on the bench and took a pencil. "I'll just find middle of the length for now." He said. "Measure the length, and divide by two.... Now do the block."

"The block is wider than the board." Said Jamie. "Will you have to trim it?"

"I wait until the board's done, until I can see it. See, the block's got to be narrower than the board, just." He took the block and offered it up. He adjusted the block to about five millimetres to one side of the board, and drawn a line down the other side of the board with a ruler. "We cut there!"

"Now we'll glue it!" Grandfather said. He put the one board on the bench and painted his white wood glue onto the middle forty centimetres of the board. He placed the block on the glue and pressed. Now he glued the block and finally took the other board and placed it on the block. He adjusted it and nodded....

"Now we'll leave it three quarter's of an hour to set."

Jamie and his Grandfather drank a cup of cocoa each, and while they waited for it to cool, Jamie asked him "What is it?"

"It's a *clapper board*. It really takes twenty fours to set, but we'll drill two countersunk screws into each side, to stabilise it."

Jamie carried it cautiously into the yard and stood holding across his hand. Grandfather smiled and took it from him.

"Not like that, like this!" He put it across Jamie's shoulder, edge down, and placed the boy's hand on the top edge.

"Turn round, fast!" ordered Grandfather.

Jamie did as he was told, and the board met his grandfather's hand with a very loud bang.

"Turn back the other way!"

This time it caught grandfather from the other side and made another bang! Jamie took it off his shoulder and looked at in surprise.

He was going to ask why it was so loud, and then he realised. By the block, as Grandfather had done, the ends were now nearly a centimetre apart. When he struck the board it made the open ends clap together, like somebody clapping hands. That's why it made the noise.

"The more area of wood that touches, the better sound it makes." Grandfather explained. "Now I suppose we'd better go indoors and work out some routines you three can do with it?"

“THE DEAD SHOT”

May 1986

Jamie Sinclair and his father were sat in the Royal Box, the ringside seats opposite the artists entrance curtains. They were on a job for Jamie’s dad, delivering three matched ponies for this small circus and they had only arrived a few minutes ago and unloaded the ponies.

It was far earlier than they had intended and the afternoon show hadn’t finished, so the owner asked them to wait. They had gone in the half full tent to watch the last few acts, although they were going to stay for the evening show as a special treat for Jamie’s birthday today.

“If they do any new clown tricks, I’ll try and learn them so I can show the girls,” Jamie started to say, and then remembered that he wasn’t going to see his cousins for a while. They’d gone abroad with their parents, his uncle and aunt, and there’d be no visit to them this summer.

Two clowns with brilliant red hair came running into the ring, one carrying a big red balloon and the other holding one of the old fashioned guns called a blunderbuss. “Paddy!” Called the one with the gun. “I’m going to do my sharpshooting act.”

“Does Sharp know you’re going to shoot him?” Asked Patrick.

Michael, his partner and brother, patted him on the head.

“Not shooting Sharp, sharpshooting. Do you understand?”

Patrick nodded. “When you say sharp *shooting*, you don’t mean shooting ¹Sharp. You mean sharpshooting. Of course I understand.”

He looked at the audience but his expression, and the way he nodded his head, said something different. Michael patted him on the head again, and turned him to face into the middle of the ring.

“Hold the balloon above your head, then, I’m going to do my greatest speciality for you!”

Patrick did exactly as his brother showed him, standing exactly four paces in front of the curtains with the balloon above his head. Michael walked towards the front of the ring, holding his gun ready. He turned at the last moment.

Patrick had followed him, footstep and footstep. Michael bumped into him.

“Look!” Said Michael. “You stay here, and I’ll go across the ring.”

When he got to the curtains, Patrick still had his back to him.

“Turn round!” He called.

Patrick turned round. However he turned completely round so that he was facing the audience.

“The other way round!”

¹ Mr. Sharp, of Sharps Toffee fame, owned the original Sangers Circus during the nineteen sixties.

“Half way round, then,” said Michael as his brother completed his turn in the other direction and still faced the audience.

At last both clowns were ready. Michael took aim at the balloon and fired.

Patrick let go off the balloon, which flew off into the air with a whistling noise, and let himself slide very gently towards the ground. Michael walked across the ring. Patrick slid down again.

Next time, when Michael tried to prop him up with the gun, one arm stuck out from Patrick’s side. He pulled it down, and the other arm flew up. He pushed the other arm down, and the first one flew up again. He pulled it half way up again, and the other went half way down.

Michael looked towards the royal box and grinned. He walked behind his brother and pulled both arms down. He grinned at the audience, and let go. Both arms flew up.

At that moment, the ringmaster came in.

“That’s enough of that!” he said, commandingly. “Go!”

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“A CANDLE (THE TORCH GAG)”

May 1986

Thirty minutes later, Jamie was talking to the clowns, two men about his father’s age and two men who really did have red hair.

“Are you here to work?” Asked Michael.

Jamie was looking toward the ring, where his father was showing the ponies for the new owner. They watched for a minute or two as he put them through the act, and then he handed the two whips over for the circus owner to take them and try. Although the man was good, it was still easy to see that Jamie’s father was much the better showman.

“Circus lost a top class performer when David and Michelle set up their stables,” said Patrick. “But it gained one top class horse trainer, even if it didn’t lose the other act for very long.”

Jamie knew that last comment referred to his mother, who he saw once every year if whatever show she was working with came near their town. He was thinking of the last time he visited his mother, when Michael tapped him on the shoulder.

“I asked you twice, dreamer. Are you here to work?”

Jamie’s head shook, not saying ‘no’ but making that rapid movement that said he been far away with his thoughts.

“Sorry,” he said. “You mean I could work with you? In your ring?”

He did mean that Jamie could work in the show. Michael had a son called Brendan, who was about Jamie’s size even though he was much older. He lent Jamie a clown costume and helped him get ready.

As Jamie finished making up his face as his Grandfather had taught him, Brendan gave him a belt with a battery and a switch on it. It had a light bulb with a flexible lead.

“Put that on under your costume, and I’ll fix the light.”

The two boys went off towards the ring doors with Brendan, in costume for his riding act, explaining the trick Jamie had to do.

“Sure you can do it, Jamie?” He asked.

“Of course I can,” answered Jamie, confidently. “I’ve been in my uncle’s circus for one long weekend and two whole weeks holiday, and I got on all right.”

“He’ll do it.” Said Michael, smiling at the two boys. “Brendan can do it, and he’s no genius.”

The two clowns had an apprentice for the sharpshooting act tonight. Instead of the balloon, Patrick had given Jamie an old fashioned bedroom candlestick with a lit candle in it, but he still had follow Michael across the ring and do the gag where he had to turn around each way.

“Hold the candle above your head,” Michael ordered.

Patrick put his hand on the candlestick, and nodded. Jamie didn't lift it above his head. He pretended to bite off the flame, blowing it out as Brendan had shown him.

They looked everywhere for that flame, but there was no sign of it. No sign of it at all until Patrick gave Jamie the signal for him to reach into his costume and push the switch on the belt. A high power lamp lit up in the back seam of Jamie's trousers.

"I've found it!" shouted Michael, and the two of them chased Jamie twice round the ring and out through the ring door curtains.

As Jamie finished changing back after the show, Michael gave him a carrier bag. "Happy Birthday, Jamie!" He said.

Jamie looked inside. There was something familiar about the leather belt, which he took out. It was the one he had worn in the act. He took out the battery and the lamp too, and almost kissed the clown. He was so pleased.

"Thank you for the present, and thank you for letting me help," said Jamie.

"You're welcome. Come and help any time," said Michael. "We need a young clown to learn the trade."

Jamie thought for a moment.

"I'd like to learn, very much," he answered, and he sounded almost grown up. "But there's our horses at home to think about too. I'm starting to learn all about training them."

Michael patted his shoulder.

"You could always learn both. Get your dad to come tenting with us."

"I wish he could, but he's always too busy."

A PIECE OF NEWSPAPER

Summer 1975

Mr Twizzle was abroad on business and was visiting some old friends for the day. He hadn't intended to do anything in their show and was chatting to his old friend the circus director when somebody came running across the ground and pounded on the door. "Juergen has broken his arm again, and Karl has taken him off to the hospital. We can cover his trapeze act, but with them both away there's no one to do any clowning!"

The director looked straight at Mr Twizzle, as if waiting for him to say something.

As the show got going, Mr Twizzle changed into the jacket and trousers that Karl's wife had loaned him and waited in the ring doors. He prepared several sheets of newspaper, using scissors and a paste stick, and was watched with interest by the director's son and daughter. He stowed two long paper loops in one pocket, two more in his trousers, and dropped the last over his forearm. As the previous act came out he ran in with the two children and greeted the audience.

"Anna! You're a clever child!" He said, grabbing the younger child. "Would you like to prove it?"

Anna said she would like to prove it, so Mr Twizzle drew one of his paper loops from his trousers and handed it to her. He started to tear his loop longways down the middle, and stopped.

"If you tear yours like mine, what will you have?"

Anna thought about it.

"Two loops?" She asked.

"That's right! One new loop each from yours, one new loop each from mine," answered Mr Twizzle. Two loops each. Let's go!"

Mr Twizzle was fast at tearing his paper, and spent a lot of time looking to see if Anna was doing it right and telling her to be careful. As she tore the last piece, he held up his two separate narrow loops, and watched as Anna held up what she had made. She looked extremely surprised as she found she had just one loop, twice as long as before. Mr Twizzle looked surprised too, and compared his two with her one.

"You made a real mess of that!" he complained. "Do it again, and do it properly this time!" He took another loop out of his jacket pocket and put it into her hands.

"Remember. Two loops. One each!"

Anna tore the new loop of paper with great care. as Mr Twizzle looked over her shoulder. He had already prepared it for her, divided it into two over part of the length, but she needed to concentrate because he was keeping up a continuous stream of advice.

"Is it two?" he asked as she finished.

Anna nodded, and moved her hands apart. They wouldn't go far apart, though. The two loops were linked together! Anna shrieked with laughter, and chased Mr Twizzle from the ring.

During the interval, Anna her brother Micki demanded to know how it was done. Mr Twizzle was tearing at a quarter of a sheet of newspaper, and didn't stop.

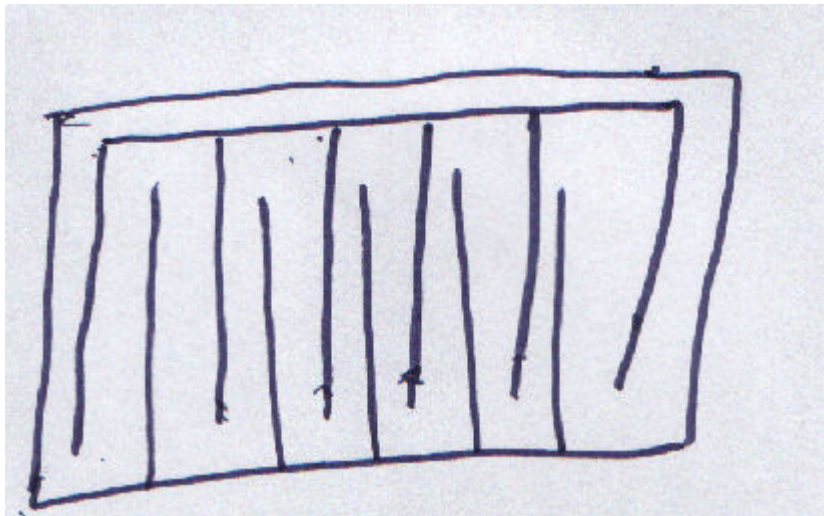
"Do you think us three could stand inside a hole in this sheet of paper?" He asked, still tearing.

Micki shook his head. "You couldn't make a big enough hole!" He said.

Mr Twizzle continued tearing, and then stopped.

"Are you ready?" He asked.

He pulled the two children towards him and held the paper in front of them to shake it out. It fell into a long narrow circle which he lifted over their, and his, heads. Anna looked at the strip of paper and felt it.



"You did it!"

"But, how does the other trick work, the one with the loops?"

Mr Twizzle handed Anna a paper loop from out of his trouser pocket.

"Look at it more carefully this time," he told her.

She turned it through her hands, without seeing anything at first. Then light dawned on her.

"It's twisted!" She said, excited by her discovery. "The front is glued to the back."

"That thing is called a 'Möbius Band'," he said. "It's got only got one edge and one side."

Mr Twizzle handed her the other one from his jacket. "Now look at the other. It's the same, but different."

Now Anna knew what to look for it was easy, even though from the first she could see that this one didn't have it's multi coloured front glued to it's black on white back. But she could see that it was twisted all the same.

"It's twisted twice." Said Micki. "That must be the one that make two loops joined together, so the first one is the long loop."

"Thanks for showing us, Mr Twizzle." Said Anna. "Show us some more?"

“POST-WORD”

It had stopped raining, and the children started to tidy up as the girl's father came into the wagon. Carlotta handed a sheet of paper to her father.

“There you are. Book and Page for all the clown tricks we found.”

“We are going to do them all in the show!” Said Jessica.

“If you'll let us?” asked Jamie.

He looked at their afternoon's work and grinned.

“I don't see why not. When do you start to practise?”

“Just as soon as you make us the props.” Jessica answered.