

Here are some of the submissions from our tenth Invite to Write inspired by the following work:



Chagall's 'The Circus'

On a white horse they mime their gestures
of love. It has happened too often to share
a complicitous glance at the grace
of his clasp on her waist, her poise
on the dancing neck, breasts bare.

The rose of her dress and the rose in her
hair are frilled in a rosy fan. Does she sense
the space of a thousand eyes
wrapped round her body like midnight
stars, true love a tune on the old violin?

- Jules Cashford

Animus in Neon, With Tambourine

Dream stole her off to a fair
she caught and stored in ambered mind
summers ago when a carnival troupe
planted tents in the weeds of a sandlot in time.

The steel mesh of a chain link fence
Master of Dreams pulled from a pile
of rubble in a past she both lived and denied
shapes and veils the haunted seem.

Framed in crosshatch,
a freckled girl, just-turned eight
and stuffed white bear, a ring-toss prize,
stand and wait in the flickering light
of a sign on the bar at midway's end;
neon stains her red plaid dress
and streaks her artless face with lines.

Carousel music rises and falls;
a barker's pitch shills the crowd
and blends with the beer-laced slur
of lonely restive men who drink;
crickets chirping summer's end
frogs wooing in a nearby bog
mix with the tinkling of glasses and ice.

The girl turns to a laugh she knows is his
and sees gold light spill out the door
a halo above the young-old rake
she always loved and twice forgave
the Irish one with silver tongue
who gave her name and cause withal
to stand apart and stand alone
scanning night, feeling carnival.

At a million dollar bash in a recent dream
I meet a man of silver tongue:
a Jewish one: Dylan young, before his fame.

He opens the coat of his blue spangled suit
to flaunt his gaudy shirt and pants
and says with a leer
“I’d lay good odds you like the dance.”

We climb to the top of a long hill,
a sweep of Irish heath in bloom,
and sink to the honeyed-scented ground.
He sings a tale of Willie McTell
and gypsy maidens with charcoal skin
who bed with blind sweet-talking men.
And we do the dance for old time’s sake.

In an abandoned fairground down below
An old Ferris wheel circles round
set in motion by chance winds
it turns in time to the ghostly strains
of tambourine
played by a man I once knew.

-Patricia McClelland

when God inhaled: Marc Chagall’s *Circus Rider* (1931)

for Gisela

~

when god decided to invent
everything he took one
breath bigger than a circus tent
and everything began

- e e cummings

1

in a childhood begun in the shadows of war and constrained
by the dark tempers of my strange mother I recall
going to the circus once when I was quite small

the buoyant blare of the raucous music, the interminable
tension of drum rolls, the glitter and glare, the unashamed
brassiness of everything: a small oasis, a bright sojourn
from the stronghold of my mother's austere routines

not for her the flashy stunts of dextrous jugglers
and voluptuous bareback riders; they confronted her
with a tangible passion for simply being alive to the smell
of horses' sweat, the sound of blaring elephants,
drumming hooves, the jests and follies of clowns
she thought quite puerile; she did her best to restrain
my excitement at the cheap thrills, the well-practised skills

2

for just that hour my father's usually deadpan eyes
betrayed his exhilaration in the evening's rapture
for just that hour

3

afterwards the three of us bustled through
the night's dispiriting cheerlessness, going
home where my father performed obediently
under the crack of the ringmaster's whip
she inherited from her war-damaged father
as he trained his troupe of seven children

that night I lay awake in the discomforting dark
remembering the circus animals, their ancient spirits
demeaned and broken by whips and prods
to entertain the crowds. I wanted to open their cages
have them forsake their ignominy and return to living free;
to this day I still long for that for them

4

as for that bareback vixen with the refulgent breasts ...

my mother preferred the unnerving shadow of death
riding his pale horse behind her through the drudgeries

of suburban life. I mourn her need to unearth prurience
in everything gorgeous, magnificent and lovely;
and I mourn for my father whose artist's hands
were never allowed to paint the radiance of the circus ring

5

I went to the circus once
when God inhaled ...

-Tony Ulyatt

I've always hated the circus

I've always hated the circus
The trapeze artists scare me
for fear of their lives

The elephants are prisoners of colonial greed and acquisitiveness
We enslave them in our pride
to serve our vanity

But to watch the ballerina on the draft horse as they trot round the circle
the closed flat circle
Showing off such delicacy on the back of the sturdy beast
We have domesticated and bred this giant quadruped
He is our slave also and seems happy enough to be so

Why should the Lion be made to roar?
To send shivers up our spines.
This noble king held in our tiny cages.

And the tiger must jump through hoops of fire
What an apt image as we tame, domesticate and make sport of the powers of nature

Such hubris

The true daring is ours as we taunt and enslave nature
so we think

Never really facing the inevitable fall
It is off in the distance somewhere
that net-less fall
Crushed on the sawdust floor.

- Walter McGerry

Circus

Acrobats dance on silver backs
above sawdust
bodies stockinged in scarlet satin,
gilt fringe edged.
Performances become perennial
suns of the body,
an absence of earth.
The circle centres far from truth
in a truth of its own.

Jaded clown smiles
cover painted faces,
aged repetitious tired
they trick, trip, tumble
on aquatic feet awash with water.

'All the better to...' quips the big bad wolf,
mouth drips crimson.
Fear and loss railroad around
under surfaces.
How many step outside habit,
view a whole life,
learn from the dust
left by yearnsome mothers?

-Adele Davide

Circus, Circus

A circus ticket, I held strong.
I stood with glee to sing a song.
To feel delight, at what I saw.
I took my seat to see some more.

The circus clowns spread merriment,
as they did dance inside the tent.
Their faces show colors, and white.
They made me laugh with all me might.

They climbed their ladders, oh so tall.
To balance and amaze us all.
For as they moved in silliness,
all worries left, to feel great bliss.

A clown did magic in the air.
he made a flock of birds appear.
And when a horse came he did ride,
it backwards with some inner pride.

The clowns had great juggling style.
and then they came into the aisle.
To move with clown gifts, oh so fine.
They really are yes, so divine.

I laughed when someone got a pie.
He was surprised, as he did sigh.
Then a clown dog did tricks so cute,
and I must say he was a hoot.

It ended in parade true form,
while elephants did march along.
So when we left, we left with glee,
feeling their love, to set us free.

The circus clowns impressed me so,
that deep inside, now I do know.
That someday yes a clown I'll be,
and then I'll bond with love to thee.

-Star Goddess