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## ROLLO AND APOLLO

**R**ollo and Apollo were famous high-wire saltimbanques, twin boys born to an aerialist whose flings were fierce and fleeting. But their history held more than those who watched them could suspect.

Conceived under the big top, they thought the very sky was striped. The mother who bore them whirled above, the trapeze springing as she flew. Their babysitter was the bareback rider who looked good in a tutu—who wept, unwilling to give them back when their mother’s act was done.

The bareback rider or the aerialist—which mother would they pick? Tiny Rollo and Apollo babbled at the choice.

The aerialist fumed. How dare this girl withhold her sons! Yet the rider, squeezing them tightly under the elephant’s huge shadow, showed no deference, crying hysterically, “You promised I could keep them!”

What were they?—dogs bred for the ring, expected to leap through hoops of fire? Or actual living people?

The aerialist was livid; the bareback rider felt betrayed. “Bait and switch!” she cried. This the brothers overheard. *Which one is our mother now?* asked Rollo in a realm past language, like Apollo gazing up to find the bareback rider’s face. Beyond her, the sons caught sight of the elephant’s gnarled hide, the creature’s breathing like the ceiling of some great cave come to life.

But the performance wasn’t over. Suddenly, a spotlight flashed; a cry went up from the crowd. The aerialist waved gaily, soaking up the mob’s acclaim. The bareback rider flinched. Would someone take the boys away?

Look at the aerialist: so pretty, ribbons dangling from her costume, face flushed from her exertions on the high wire and below...How did that tiny womb hold twins? Had the boys forgotten this woman gifted with the power of flight—this slight bird (so it seemed) who’d once enclosed them in her wings?

But did she want her sons enough to risk exposure to the crowd?

The bareback rider wondered: could she just ride off with the twins? Would anyone notice in the chaos or follow in pursuit?

Rollo and Apollo held more tightly to each other...

Clippings would celebrate their career, the risk and daring that defined them, though the reason they reached such heights is that they couldn’t wait to fall.