



1st prize 14-16 years age group

Name: Lucy R

Age: 15

Bio of author: My name is Lucy Riddle and I was born in Edinburgh, Scotland. I'm 15 years old, I love to read and write and I attend Mentone Grammar School.

Title: Le Cirque de L'amore (The Circus of Love)

Judge's notes:

"Beautifully written, with an excellent vocabulary"

"An interesting concept with a lot covered in the allocated word limit. It leaves you wondering what will face our narrator as she follows the young man into the big top. Clever use of vocabulary and pacing."

"This story is beautifully written and evocative. I couldn't help but read the whole text completely absorbed in the world she was describing."

"Well written and intriguing."

Le Cirque de L'amore (Circus of Love)

Psychedelic lights dance in a display of prismatic refractions. Each transition like the patterns of a kaleidoscope. Stereotypical murals of clowns and carousels adorn the circus gates, tainting the exterior with a certain craziness fit only for those insane enough to join. The cliché circus music plays eerily, creeping its way along the tops of tents and winding through the endless throng of people. The tune lingers, like a bank of thick morning fog. Its repetitive nature capable of driving even the simplest of minds to madness. The smell of buttery popcorn wafts through the air. The soft scent contrasting with the startling ferocity of the circus, blending together in a glamorous display of crimson and gold.

Everywhere I look I find diversity in the culture and yet all the performers are clad in the same impressive attire. To the left, contortionists bend and arch in ways one can barely comprehend. One brings their left leg up and over their perfectly painted head, creating a scorpion-like pose. Her foot a stinger, poised and ready to attack anyone who dares to come closer. To the right, a fire-eater surrounds himself with blazing flames, his tongue licking the night sky, turning the navy-blue canvas into a smoky haze. He becomes engulfed in the display of fire, melting his silhouette.

Up ahead the Big Top looms, superior to all attractions that came before the monstrous structure. Curtains have been draped across the entrance, closing off what wonders are kept inside. I stare, waiting for the covers to part, but no such wish is granted yet.

We often talked of visiting the circus, to experience the magic. I heave in a breath, as the heartache I shut out begins to flood back. My chest tightens, as I remember my lost love.

I remember the feeling of his hand in mine. His soft curls as I ran my fingers through his cinnamon hair. Our fits of laughter – the ones that left our sides aching for hours. Those good hurts.

Muted shades of blue and orange dance before my eyes, the world no longer clear to me as my tears spill over. I stand reminiscing about memories from years ago.

If only I could enter, my troubles would disappear - at least for a little while.

"Step up, step up! Don't you want to see what's inside?" I look up to see a young man standing in the threshold of the now-open Big Top. He gives me a look, one eyebrow up in question. I walk closer, curiosity getting the better of me. Walking past him, I flash him a smile, dropping a few coppers into his hand. He grins triumphantly and bows deeply at the waist.

"Welcome to the Circus of Love."

The alluring stranger starts to walk away, disappearing into the shadows of the tent, his warm smile full of mischief, and while it might have been the moonlight or my imagination, I could have sworn he winked.