

## Circus

by Vine McCasland

### I. SIDE SHOW

Her scant skirt spreads above her knees.  
Her hands lie folded in her lap.  
She looks ahead, and does not shrink  
To see the mixed crowd nudge and gape,

While dirty men with roving eyes  
Press close and whisper, "Look!  
Tattooed wherever you can see!  
Say, she's a walkin' pitcher-book!"

Madonna pricked upon her back  
Complacently she lets them view,  
And on the calf of one bare leg,  
Christ crucified—tattooed in blue.

### II. GRAND ENTRY

Monsters in trousers baggy and grey,  
With harness of scarlet and brass,  
Trunk looped to tail in rhythmic array—  
A frieze on a temple of Asia—pass

Solemnly round the tan-bark track.  
The breasts of the sulky girl in red  
Perched on the leading elephant's back,  
Shake to the lurch of his ponderous tread.

Then follows a bamboo palanquin,  
Borne by the camels' shambling strength.  
The fringes slap as, jolted within,  
A tawdry sultana reclines at full length.

Forty dull clowns hobble awkwardly by.  
"Hey! That's my mother!" one leers.  
He points at the charmer, and then at his eye,  
And grins through his painted black tears.

### III. RING-MASTER

Tethered to the canvas top  
Undulating shadows writhe—  
Snaky flags that seem alive.  
"What an awful way to drop!  
Look how high it is up there."  
"Shucks! They never get a fall."  
"Who's that man-in glossy black  
Satin knee-pants, and the coat  
Red as pepper, on his back?"  
"He's Ring-Master. Hear um bawl,  
'All eyes on the center ring!  
Attention, please! Attention all!"

#### IV. THE WATCHER AT THE ROPES

Stretching her toes until they kiss  
The dizzy roof on her upward swing,  
Blindfolded, Marie makes a spring  
In faultless curve above the abyss.  
The man on another frail trapeze,  
Clipping the bar with supple knees,  
Catches her ankles. The nervous crowd  
Closes its eyes or gasps aloud,  
Watching from very far below,  
Hypnotized, as to and fro,  
The pendulum swings, till they leap apart.  
A mother's hand goes to her heart.  
A boy in uniform shouts or drones,  
"Soda-pop, candy and ice-cream cones!"  
Attendants slouch by the ropes and wait.  
Unseen among them, watches Fate—  
His lips move, counting—his deep eyes stare  
Upward at Marie, Queen of the Air.