

## The Girl Who Walked on Air

Read the passage below, then answer the questions that follow.

The bigger the danger, the bigger the crowd. One look at tonight's punters said it all. With just minutes till show time, the big top was almost full and I was quite ready to burn with excitement. Every last ticket was sold. And still the queue snaked out of the field and down the lane until all you could see were people's hats bobbing above the hedgerows. 5

First thing this morning, the posters had gone up all over town. 'MORE DARING THAN EVER!' they'd said in blue and gold letters. 'WATCH MONSIEUR MERCURY DEFY GRAVITY ON HIS TRAPEZE!' To me, M. Mercury was good old Jasper, who I lived with in a tiny trailer, and who drank lapsang tea out of dainty cups and let me have first dibs on every piecrust. Which was more than could be said for my mam. When I was just a baby she left me at the circus, the way most people forget an umbrella. 10

Inside the ticket booth where I worked there wasn't space to swing a cat. I jiggled from foot to foot, impatient to get finished so I'd be free to watch the show. My dog Pip sensed it too; sat beside me, he watched my every move. At last, the final punters filed past to claim their tickets. They were a noisy bunch, laughing and nattering, their breath like smoke in the evening air. They'd be quiet soon enough. Once they'd squeezed up on a bench inside the big top, they'd look upwards. And what they'd see would leave them speechless. 15

A little shiver went down my neck. *Imagine if I was about to perform. All those eyes gazing up at me. Just imagine it!* 20

I came back to earth with a bump. The circus owner, Mr Leo Chipchase, was in the doorway. He'd put on his best tartan waistcoat and was smiling, which made a change.

'Think of all those backsides on seats, Louie,' he said as he squeezed in beside me to count the coins. 25

'The bigger the danger...'

'...the bigger the crowd,' I finished for him.

He did have a point. There were grander circuses than ours, with more animals, more curiosities, more sparkle. Backsides on seats mattered. So, what better way 30

1



## Unit B

to draw the crowds than a thrilling new routine. And tonight that's exactly what they'd get. Jasper would perform not a double but a TRIPLE somersault from his trapeze. No other circus boasted such a stunt. It was genius.

But it was dangerous too. Now I'd reminded myself of this fact, it grew like a little worm inside my head. Tonight's shows had that WHIFF OF DEATH all right. 35  
How anyone could hang mid-air for so long I didn't know. Jasper made it look easy. And I thought of Charles Blondin – the GREAT Blondin – who'd crossed Niagara Falls on a *tightrope*. One hundredthousand people had turned up to watch him. They placed bets that he'd fall and die. He didn't, of course, but I still felt sick thinking about it. 40

At last the queue ended.

'Can I go now?' I asked, unable to stop fidgeting.

If I was quick, I'd get to wish Jasper luck. And be sure of a good viewing spot at the back of the big top.

Mr Chipchase waved me away. 'Go.' 45

I darted across the showground straight for the big top. Smells of horse sweat and gingerbread filled the air. There was music too, the organ and drums all fast and furious, signalling the show was about to start. It was the bit of circus life I loved best, that moment before the action, when the very air tingled. 50  
And tonight I felt it keenly. How I dreamed of being a showstopper like Jasper. Breathed it. Lived it. But in this subject Mr Chipchase was clear. 'Not a chance, Louie,' he always said. 'You're too young.'

Never mind that Mighty Ned the ringmaster was my age. Or Kitty Quickblade, who threw knives, was only a tiny bit older. But when I'd pointed this out Mr Chipchase went red enough to burst. 55

So these days I watched from the sidelines. And I kept my dreams to myself.

Extract from *The Girl Who Walked on Air* by Emma Carroll



- A *The bigger the danger, the bigger the crowd.*

Find and copy **one** other word in paragraph one that refers to the crowd. [1]

---

- B In paragraph one, why is *snaked* an effective way of describing the queue? [1]

---

- C Why are some letters in paragraph two written in capital letters? [2]

---

---

- D What does the reader learn about Jasper in paragraph two? [2]

---

---

- E Reread paragraph three. Describe how the crowd's behaviour will change as the show begins. [2]

---

---

- F Which words in paragraph three show that it was a cool evening? [1]

---

- G *A little shiver went down my neck.* What causes the shiver to go down Louie's neck? [1]

---

- H Reread paragraphs five, six and seven. Circle the correct answer. [1]

Mr Chipchase was smiling because:

He was excited about the stunt.

He always smiled.

The large crowd meant lots of money.

He was pleased to see Louie.



# Unit B

---

I *it grew like a little worm inside*. What does Louie mean? Tick **one**. [1]

She didn't want to think about it

The idea was getting bigger the more she thought about it

The idea was too dangerous to think about

She was able to stop thinking about it

J Circle **one** answer. The phrase *the whiff of death* suggests that: [1]

It smells bad in the tent.

Someone will die.

The stunt is extremely dangerous.

The stunt looks harder than it is.

K Reread paragraphs 10 to 15. Find and copy **three** words or phrases which show Louie is both excited and nervous. [3]

1 \_\_\_\_\_

2 \_\_\_\_\_

3 \_\_\_\_\_

L How does paragraph 15 make it easy for the reader to imagine the fairground? Refer to the language used. [2]

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

M From the information across the whole extract, what impression is created of the fairground owner? [2]

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

N *And I kept my dreams to myself*.

What is the 'dream' that Louie keeps to herself? [1]

\_\_\_\_\_



- ⓐ Based on what you have read, predict what might happen next in the story.

Use evidence from across the extract to support your prediction. [2]

---



---

- ⓑ Tick whether the following statements are true or false. [1]

	True	False
No other circuses had a triple somersault stunt.		
Kitty Quickblade was younger than Louie.		
The ticket booth was small.		
Louie's dog can tell that something exciting is about to happen.		

- ⓒ Match the characters from the extract with the events. [1]

Charles Blondin

abandoned her baby

Jasper

crossed Niagara Falls on a tightrope

Louie

performs stunts in the circus

Louie's mother

dreams of performing stunts

