

2009 Cyberspace Open  
Screenwriting Competition Submission

by  
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INT. CIRCUS STRAUSS BIG TOP - NIGHT

In the center ring, a dozen clowns dance and flip in a blur of kaleidoscopic color.

A thousand SPECTATORS, in elegant Forties dress, convulse with LAUGHTER and APPLAUSE.

On the uppermost tier, one section remains quiet. Reserved. A row of German uniformed officers flank a man with a short rectangular moustache and penetrating eyes.

The clowns tumble out of the ring and file past the SPIELER, who wears a red coat and black top hat. His face glows with practiced enthusiasm as he bellows at the crowd.

SPIELER

You are too generous with your  
applause Ladies and Gentlemen. I  
assure you there is no talent  
involved in their performance. Just  
several pints of beer.

LAUGHTER echoes throughout the tent as the clowns push through a curtain, fashioned from a swastika flag, into the

PERFORMERS' ENTRANCE

past BERNHARDT STRAUSS, 20's, shirtless Aryan perfection in tights. His physicality in stark contrast with his emotions.

He glares through the herd of clowns, at EMMA KLEIN, 18, an exquisite mix of feminine grace and athleticism. She plays with the frill of her short silky skirt. Distracted.

BERNHARDT

Emma! We're up.

She gazes at him. Forces a smile.

MAIN TENT

The Spieler turns to the Performers' Entrance.

SPIELER

So without further delay, Circus  
Strauss is pleased to present the  
death-defying Trapeze Tango!

Hand in hand, Emma and Bernhardt prance out from behind the curtain, beaming like pageant contestants, to the center ring. A wide metal trapeze dangles behind them.

The lights and applause dim. The duo begins a slow, artful dance to SOFT OPERATIC MUSIC. They lean back on the trapeze swing. Grip its metal frame, as it rises to the ceiling.

Below them, LIEZEL, mid 20's, svelte with reptilian eyes, slinks out of the shadows. Smirks up at them.

EMMA

Why isn't Liezel raising the net?

BERNHARDT

Perhaps she has confidence in our abilities?

EMMA

What's wrong with you?! We've never even practiced without one before!

The SWING CLANKS to a stop 75 feet in the air.

BERNHARDT

You're right. We should go down.

Bernhardt spots the WINCH OPERATOR below. Raises his arm, but Emma stifles the gesture.

EMMA

Wait! If we stop now we won't get to meet the Führer.

BERNHARDT

I didn't realize you were such an admirer of his.

EMMA

(steadies herself)

Look, that jealous bitch isn't going to ruin this. We don't need a net. I trust you with my life Bernie.

Bernhardt glowers at her as she stands, twirls into the center of the trapeze frame. He locks his knees against the outside of the bar. Hangs upside down, swings, just as...

Emma flips backwards. Falls, arms outstretched. Bernhardt clasps her hands at the last moment. The AUDIENCE GASPS.

BERNHARDT

(intense)

Too bad I don't trust you Emma...  
Or should I say, Sophie Rosenberg?

Eyes-wide, helpless, the blood rushes from Emma's face.

EMMA

Bernie, I can explain!

In one swift movement, Bernhardt hoists her back onto the swing. They pose for a moment, as the AUDIENCE APPLAUDS. Then continue their dance. They eye each other like two wounded animals forced to share a cage.

BERNHARDT

How could you do this to me? How could you put my family at--

EMMA

The Nazis killed my family! All of them. I watched as my two year old sister was beaten to death with the butt of a gun.

(stares into his eyes)

I needed a place to hide. You needed an acrobat.

They spin to the center of the trapeze. Hold each other close. Bernhardt squints at Emma. Yanks a small black knife out of a sheath concealed in the small of her back.

BERNHARDT

And just what is this for? Hitler?

As though performing a rapid dance move, Emma grabs the knife out of his hands and slips it back into the sheath.

EMMA

It's for my sister.

BERNHARDT

Why didn't you tell me... all of this?

EMMA

You would have tried to stop me.

BERNHARDT

You're right.

Bernhardt grabs Emma by the hips, thrusts her out into the darkness. She twirls through the void like a top. Catches a parallel trapeze bar.

RELIEVED CHEERS, as Emma swings through the air. Builds speed. Tears well in her eyes.

Bernhardt stands on his trapeze. Rocks it back and forth. Swings. Gathers momentum.

EMMA

If you want to stop me, this is  
your chance.

BERNHARDT

Don't be ridiculous. Just focus on  
the *one* somersault.

She grins at him.

He scrunches his face up and falls into a hanging position on  
the bar. Arches his back. Eyes firm on Emma, as she...

launches herself off her trapeze into a dizzying spin. One  
somersault. Two somersaults. Three somersaults. Her body  
extends. Arms flail at Bernhardt...

who misses her with one hand, but catches her with the other.  
A CHORUS OF GASPS. They smile at each other as he reclaims  
her other hand. Hoists her onto his trapeze. They embrace.

BERNHARDT

You know I'd never let you go.

EMMA

And what about Liezel...

BERNHARDT

She was my past. You are my future.

They take a bow to THUNDEROUS APPLAUSE. The smiles are real  
this time. And short-lived. Emma spies Liezel below.

She holds a wanted poster. Waves over several armed guards.

EMMA

Oh no.

BERNHARDT

She wouldn't.

Liezel points to the poster, then up at the trapeze.

EMMA

She just did.

Frantic, Emma's head ratchets around, searches for an exit.

BERNHARDT

We're trapped up here.

EMMA  
I'm trapped. You didn't know  
anything about this, you hear me?!

BERNHARDT  
We're in this together.

EMMA  
No, we live to fight another day.  
(peers over his shoulder)  
Do you trust me?

Below, Liezel gestures to the Winch Man to lower the trapeze.

BERNHARDT  
With my life.

EMMA  
Then I need you to swing me as hard  
and as fast as you can in that  
direction. Right now.

BERNHARDT  
But you'll overshoot the trap--

EMMA  
NOW!!!

Emma pushes Bernhardt down into a hanging position. She dives off the trapeze, grabs both his hands and swings for all she's worth. Back and forth. Higher and higher. Until her feet point at the roof.

BERNHARDT  
I love you Em.

Bernhardt grunts. Launches her high into the air, just as the trapeze begins to lower.

Emma soars like a missile, twists, cartwheels, grabs a rope support that descends from the ceiling. She climbs it to the top. Pulls her knife. Cuts a slit in the tent.

She takes one last look down at the chaos below.

EMMA  
I love you too Bernie.

Emma kicks up, through the slit. Projects herself onto the roof. Disappears into the night.