

The Enchanted Cirque

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There hasn't been a time when Delilah Rose hasn't loved the Enchanted Cirque. Since she was a little girl, she always begged her parents to take her to the Cirque to watch the animals jump through fiery hoops and walk through the different themed tents. The aroma of vanilla and candied popcorn in the air grows stronger as she approaches the enormous night-blue and violet-striped tents. She's glad the air smells the same way it always had.

Delilah closes her eyes and breathes in deeply. The Cirque calms her; it smelled and felt like home. She opens her eyes, looking at the tents looming up into the still, violet-colored clouds. The sight seems surreal. She looks over her shoulder, searching for John Mlean, the Cirque's Suiveurs Leader and the owner of Etherviel's newspaper shop. All she sees are people wearing the same dark blue and violet scarves and lavender flowers with love-in-a-mist flower arrangements made for when the Cirque comes.

John would be in a blue jacket, but every other homme is wearing blue too. Giving up, she keeps walking through the morning dew grass, her feet crunching it. Delilah reaches the front entrance of the Enchanted Cirque. It looks even more beautiful up close. And just as beautiful as the last time she walked through the entrance. "Mademoiselle Delilah, your invitation?" asks the person at the entrance.

"Oh yes," she says. Delilah puts her hand in her coat pocket and grabs the invitation that was tied to her door along with the scarves that are now around her neck. "Here you are. Have a good day," she says.

"Yes, thank you, Mademoiselle Delilah, and you yourself have fun at the Enchanted Cirque." He winks at her.

Delilah walks through the entrance and immediately bumps someone.

"Pardon, I didn't see you there," she says, looking for signs of who it was she bumped.

"Delilah, that is quite alright," says a deep voice.

"John! I've been looking for you," she answers with a smile.

“Well, I guess now you found me. I like what you did with your hair, by the way,” he says.

Delilah smiles, putting her hand to her blue and purple streak in her short black hair. She had dyed it the week before when she heard from John that the Cirque might come.

“Thank you, and I like what you did with yours too,” she says.

“Bah what hair,” he says. “Are you ready for the Enchanted Cirque? I heard a new tent has been added and the magician is picking a new caretaker for it.”

“Really,” she says. She wonders what kind of tent the magician, also known as Aristo Clelance, picked for the Cirque. “What kin-.” She is cut off by a voice echoing through another entrance.

“Come one, come all to the Enchanted Cirque! Come and you will see that it might not be the ordinary Cirque you thought it was, but a magical one,” echoed the voice.

Delilah wonders which one of the Cirque’s players had announced it.

“I have to get a front row seat since I am the leader of the Cirques Suiveurs.”

“Alright, bye now, John,” she says. She giggles as John rushes away through the entrance.

The inside looks even better than the last time she was at the Enchanted Cirque. Pillars of marble line the corners, plants flowing down them. Delilah knows this is likely Cecile Evalignes doing. Cecile is the Cirque’s plant-grower; most people whisper that she grows fake plants, while others think she just has a stash of plants in her caravan. But Delilah knows that Cecile's powers are not fake since she has seen them for herself.

Delilah finds a seat in a violet chair that matches her own jacket. Her brown eyes roam the room. She is surprised people aren’t fawning over her as most do in Etherviel, but she decides they are all paying attention to the Cirque’s beauty and not her own. Though her mom always said they were admiring Delilah’s beauty from faraway, Delilah never liked it.

“Welcome! Welcome, I am The Enchanted Cirques’ Magician, Aristo Clelance,” Aristo says, walking into the middle of the purple and blue-striped stage. Violet and dark blue crystals and flower enchantments line the stage, ensuring no one gets to Aristo. It has been said that they added the magical security because someone hated how people worship the Cirque, so they tried to get rid of the leader. But Delilah knows that Aristo probably would not care if someone tried to do it again; his confidence in his own power was overwhelming.

“Let me tell you what this magical Cirque has to offer for all you fine people,” Aristo continues. “Tents imagined by Oliver Baid and made real by Olia Baid. New and whimsical plants grown fresh from Cecile Evaligne, and twins Leo Avante and Jane Avante here to tell your fortune. And later today, a new tent and caretaker will be revealed. But now, let me introduce you to the Enchanted Cirques’ animal caretaker, Theo Dane!”

A new tent? Delilah wonders what sort of enchantment the twins might have dreamt up now, but a flash of silver draws her attention back. Theo Dane in a silver waistcoat saunters onto the stage and Delilah smiles with glee. Theo Dane's performances are always one of her favourites. The way he trains the animals in command to do tricks is nothing short of delightful. But Delilah knows they aren't just ordinary animals, they are magical.

"Bonjour, Bonjour, Bonjour! I am Theo Dane and I would like to welcome you to meet my great and majestic animals," he says.

Two doors burst open, one on his right and one on his left. On his right, a lion, a cheetah, and a gorgeous black jaguar walk in. On his left, an elephant with a blue and purple blanket draped on its back lumbered through the door. A giraffe follows behind the elephant, and then a hippo.

"What trick would you like to see first?" Theo asks.

Delilah raises her hand as Theo's green eyes roam the room, finally landing on her. His smile widens. "Delilah Rose, would you be so kind as to tell me what trick I should do?"

"What about...the one where the animals fly?" she says. That one is her favourite.

Theo nods his head and closes his eyes, his brown hair falling over them. Delilah leans forward with excitement, and Theo puts his hands up.

After a moment, all the animals in the room start to levitate through the air. She hears murmurs and gasps of excitement and disbelief drift through the tent. The animals begin moving in a pattern in the air, almost like a choreographed dance. Music blasts all around the audience.

When the animal's dance routine is complete, Theo says, "Now who else wants to make a suggestion?"

August 21, 1995 11:00 am

Delilah walks through the tent of Wish Upon a Star. Millions, maybe even trillions, of stars hang on strings of stardust. The tent itself is pitch black with mirrors lining the edge making it look enormous when in reality it is quite a small tent compared to others. She lifts her hand to touch one of the stars, but the higher she reaches the more the star looks as if it is an actual star in the night sky and not suspended on a string of stardust. She remembers the time she came to Cirque when the Wish Upon a Star exhibit first opened. She had wished to find her true home.

"She's here, Oliver! She's here! Delilah is back," says a voice Delilah recognizes as Olia. Olia is Cirques' dreamer, the one who makes the tents become real. Her twin, Oliver, is the one who

imagines the tents based upon people's expectations. The twins are ten years old. They have always insisted that she is old, but she is only 20. She supposes that to ten-year old's, adults seem ancient.

"Delilah!" they shout in unison as they run and jump into her arms.

"Oof," she says. "It's nice to see that you two misfits still have all the energy in the world." In truth, she was excited to see Olia and Oliver; when she was last at Cirque, they had only been six. She is surprised they still remember her. Delilah ruffles Oliver's blond hair and then Olia's. Their smiles grow wide.

"You came back," they exclaim.

"Of course, I always come back," she says. "Oh, that reminds me, I brought you two something."

"You did," says Oliver in disbelief.

"Yes," she says.

"Oh, he is just excited you brought him something because no one else at this Cirques does. Well, except for me," Olia said with a shrug.

"Well, maybe I'm not *no one else*," she said. "And don't tell anyone but you two are by far my favourite."

"We are?" asks Oliver.

"Mmhm," she says. Delilah reaches into her other coat pocket and takes out two small boxes. Olia and Oliver's smiles widen as they take the boxes from her hands. "Now, open them." They take the tops off of the boxes and gasps pass their lips. Olia pulls out a necklace with a glass bottle on it. Inside, it is full of purple and blue crystals. Delilah searched many different shops to find the jewelry.

"I love it, thank you Delilah," she says.

"You're welcome," says Delilah with a smile. She looks over to Oliver. She can barely see his face in the dark but she is glad he likes the present. It is always hard to please Oliver; he is shyer than Olia. He pulls out the compass with gold stars engraved on the back.

"Thank you, Delilah," he says.

"You're welcome. I gave you a compass because I remember when you told me how you loved going on adventures," she answers.

"We should get you something," Olia says, putting her necklace on.

"No worries, you already gave me the chance to live all this here at the Cirque," she says. "It is quite enough."

"Still," says Oliver. Olia gasps and Oliver jumps.

“What? Is everything ok?” he asks Olia, worried.

“Yes, I just got an idea but me and Oliver will be back,” Olia says. “We will be right back.”

“Ok,” Delilah says hesitantly. They leave in a hurry and Delilah sighs. She looks around the room, closes her eyes and wishes the same wish she asks every time the Cirque arrives. *Please find my true home.* She opens her eyes and takes one last look around the tent. Delilah bids it goodbye until next time and walks through the exit in search for a new tent.

August 21st, 1995 11:30 am

The sign on the rail surrounding the ghost of the tree reads: The Eternal Tree lives forever. Delilah Rose looks around the eternal tree tent. People inside the tent adjust their scarves and put down their flower arrangements. In Etherviel, the flower arrangements of lavender and love-in-a-mist were picked because of their purple and blue colours. But it also meant thank you, a thank you for the Cirque coming to Etherviel. People place them around the tents and the members of the Enchanted Cirque search for them in the end. She had done that the last time she was there, helping Aristo pick up every single arrangement, even the one she had placed.

Delilah walks around holding a small flower guide that the person at the entrance had handed to her. She doesn't need it of course but it is still nice to know what the new flowers are and what they mean. Like the one that she stands in front of called: Dragon Everheart. A deep red rose grows before her, the petals fall to the ground, and an orange dragon the size of a hummingbird flies out of the flower. It flies into the air in front of her and she smiles. She always likes the creations that Cecile makes. The dragon lands on her shoulder and she looks at the meaning.

Dragon Everheart- A new beginning. The Dragon discovers a new beginning every time the Rose petals fall.

The dragon takes flight again off her shoulder and disappears into the flowers, swaying delicately around their petals like a butterfly. Delilah smiles and continues to follow the path.

“Delilah, is that you?” someone asks behind her. Delilah turns to see Cecile standing behind her. Cecile's long green dress flows to the ground. She almost looks the same since Delilah saw her last.

“It is,” she says. “And it is good to see you again, Cecile.”

Cecile steps closer to Delilah, her eyes moving to the blue and purple streak in her hair.

“It is good to see you, too,” Cecile says with an accent Delilah can’t decipher. It is probably because the Cirque travels so much that Cecile adopted a new accent. “I see you did something with your hair. It looks good.”

“So I have been told,” says Delilah.

“You dyed it the Cirque's colors,” says Cecile.

“I did. I thought it would be good since I heard the Cirque was coming again.”

“How did you hear we were coming?” Cecile asks.

“I’m a part of John's group of followers, the Cirque’s Suiveurs,” she says.

“How did this John know we were coming? Did he see an invitation earlier? I told them to put the invitations out when we came,” says Cecile.

Delilah laughs. “No, he smelled candied popcorn and vanilla that always comes with the Cirque.”

“Oh, I see,” answers Cecile though she doesn’t join in the laughter.

A moment of silence passes between them and Delilah takes the opportunity to look around.

“It’s beautiful, isn’t it?” Cecile says. “I tried to add new plants in ways so people would know that my magic is not fake but they still think it's a trick.”

“I suppose everyone will always think that magic is... complicated. As Aristo said before, yours comes from the entertainment of the people. They will probably always think that but at least they are enjoying the magic,” Delilah says looking around at the smiling people and kids pointing out different plants.

“You are different from them, Delilah,” says Cecile. “I actually made you something.”

“You did? You didn’t have to,” says Delilah.

“Oh, but I did,” she says. “Here, come with me and I will show you.”

“Alright,” says Delilah, curious what Cecile made for her. She knows it’s probably a plant. But what kind of plant? And what sort of magical properties might it contain? Maybe it’s not a plant at all, though Delilah would be quite surprised by that.

They walk through a connected entrance to another tent. The tent is lit with a swinging bulb, swaying back and forth in the sudden breeze. Delilah pulls her coat closer, squinting her eyes through the semi-dark room. Her breath floats through the air.

“Unlike other plants that need warmth and sunlight, this one requires darkness and coldness,” says Cecile.

“That sounds fascinating,” answers Delilah.

“Just wait until you see the tree,” says Cecile.

Delilah wonders what kind of tree it is to require no sun and coldness. Her thoughts are stopped short when she sees it. A ghost of a tree smaller than the one outside but it seems to have color on it. Purple, Delilah's favourite color.

“An eternal tree,” says Delilah, amazed by the sight. Eternal trees are rare and hard to nurture. But if anyone can nurture a tree perfectly it would be Cecile.

“Your eternal tree,” clarifies Cecile.

Delilah walks over to the tree, running her hand along the leaves. It doesn't go through, but the tree still looks like a ghost which makes it seem almost impossible.

“My eternal tree,” she says. “But how am I going to be able to take care of it or see it? It might be months, even years until you come back.”

“Things change Delilah,” chimes Cecile.

Delilah doesn't know what she means by that.

“They do, but I'm not sure how that goes with me not being able to take care of the tree,” says Delilah.

“I guess you will have to wait and see,” says Cecile. Cecile walks out of the tent before Delilah can answer. She supposes that she should go and check out another tent. Delilah bids the eternal tree tent farewell before walking through the exit.

August 21st, 1995 1:00 pm

The sea moves around Delilah in a mesmerizing way. The sea moves the way a sea should, undulating, rolling, surging. Waves surround her, but she never gets wet. That is the way the sea tent works. The visitor can float on their back as if in the actual sea. But the sea never gets them wet even though they can still somehow feel the water.

Not a single drop of water gets on Delilah's jacket. Delilah throws a piece of her candied popcorn in the air and catches it. She looks around at the children laughing and splashing each other. Even though none of them are getting wet, their excitement is giving the tent more power. Fish and different sea creatures move through the water. Some people shriek at the sight but Delilah doesn't mind it. She walks closer to the dolphin that just appeared in the water. Unlike a regular dolphin, this one is night blue with stardust on it. People before her who met the dolphin thought it was paint but Delilah knows that it is a magic dolphin, created from people's excitement and expectations.

“Delilah, it is good to see you again,” says someone behind her. The sound of laughter dims and she knows that is from the magic of him.

“Aristo,” she says. Delilah turns from the dolphin to face Aristo.

The magician moves away from the spot in the tent he was leaning against, stepping towards her, his brown eyes finding hers under his top hat. She always found it stereotypical the way he wears a top hat or a dark blue tailcoat suit rimmed with violet.

“It is good to see you too,” she says.

“It has been a long time,” he says.

“It has,” she says. He is about to reply but she cuts him off. “Why didn’t you come back sooner? You told me you would come back in a month to see me but it has been four years.” She doesn’t want to be angry with him, but she is.

“Delilah,” he says, his voice sad. She can see the frown on his face. “Believe me I wanted to come as soon as I could. But the weather and that big storm happened, and I had another show.”

“Your excuse is the weather? For four years?” she says. “I was a fool to wait for you.” Delilah turns back around to hide her anger before facing him again.

“It isn’t an excuse, but you are welcome to think what you want, Delilah,” he says. “When I heard you were here, I wanted to see you as soon as possible. I sent Olia and Oliver to see if you were here and they came back to me and said you were. And I wanted to see you so much sooner.”

“Then why didn’t you?” she whispers. A part of her doesn’t want to hear his answer but the other part of her does. “And don’t say it was because you couldn’t see me or the weather or because you had other shows.”

Aristo steps closer to her through the water. It moves as if obeying his every choice. She guesses that if Aristo asked anything in the tents to obey him the magic would listen. The water parts away from him and Delilah. The ground looks like the night sky with stars on it. The water moves around them creating a circle shape that they stand within.

“I wanted to see you. After you were last here and we went through all the tents, I knew that I didn’t want to leave Etherviel. But if I stayed here, the people would lose their excitement if they kept coming back. Over time, it would wane. I thought maybe over time, your feelings too, would wane. Just like the people’s excitement. I was afraid you might only like me because I am Cirque’s Magician.”

“I did not just like you because you were the magician of this Cirque,” she says after thinking for a moment. “My feelings are deeper than that.”

“And now I know,” he says, sounding relieved. And Delilah can’t help but feel guilty for being angry with him. Maybe it was just as he said, he wanted to come back and see her but he couldn’t bring himself to.

“Can I take you somewhere? In one of the tents?” Aristo asks.

“Of course,” Delilah says.

The tent that Aristo brings her into looks new. She has never seen it before and guesses they made it while they were away. It looks like a labyrinth, except with clouds instead of shrubs. The sign outside says: The Cloud Maze, *full of clouds and dreams*. Unlike the other tents, the cloud maze is full of light. The clouds rise up before her; they almost look as high as the clouds in the actual sky. It makes her wonder how so much can fit in just a tent. But that's the thing about magic, she remembers, it can be bent.

“I had Olia make this one after we last left Etherviel,” says Aristo.

Delilah turns to Aristo, her arms crossed. He looks at the maze with a smile on his face. “I was going to show it to you when I came back in a month.” His smile turns into a frown, reminded that he didn't return.

“Did you make this tent for me?” she asks.

He meets her eyes and smiles.

“When you were last here, you said that life was like a maze and the end was the prize,” he says. “I already found my prize.” He turns to her, his eyes shining from the light. “I guess you are still searching for yours. Am I right?”

“Yes,” she says hesitantly.

“I hope you find it soon, Delilah,” he says. He turns to leave and Delilah knows that this will probably be the last time she will see him until the Cirque comes back. She doesn't want it to end so soon.

“Wait,” she says.

Aristo pauses. “Yes?”

“Will you accompany me through the maze?” she asks.

“Of course,” he replies.

August 21, 1995 2:00 pm

Dreams can be many things. Something you want so much that you manifest for it to come true. Dreams can be something that happens to people at night. They can also be much more but that

is the main purpose of the dream tent. People lay in a semi-conscious state around the tent. Some people are on beds, some on the floor or others against the tent. It is always the quietest tent at the Enchanted Cirque. Even though it isn't one of her favourite tents, Delilah always dreams of the true home she wants. When she leaves, the dream vanishes and she remembers only the tent. She always wondered if others recall the things they dream.

Delilah sits on the floor. Her eyes are closed even though she can see perfectly clear. She doesn't see the tent around her with people laying on the ground. Instead, she sees another tent, one she never saw before in the Cirque. This one is a mix of light and dark stars and dreams and illusions. But beauty too. People gathered around a stage of violet and blue. In her dream, she sits in a chair watching the stage.

Murmurs of wonder pass around as people talk about who they think is the caretaker of the tent. She looks at the stage in wonder too. At first, she thinks she isn't dreaming when she sees Aristo walk into the tent. His eyes roam the crowd until they land on hers. This time he isn't wearing a top hat so his black hair hangs over his eyes. But when he sees her, he smiles. "You all are probably wondering who the new caretaker to this tent is. And I will tell you, welcome to the Cirque's-," Aristo disappears.

Delilah opens her eyes. She turns to the person who just shook her awake. Theo sits before her.

"I know you were probably dreaming a wonderful dream," he says. "But when I saw you earlier, I wanted to see you again."

Delilah smiles. She isn't angry that he woke her, only annoyed that she doesn't know who the owner of the new tent is. But she knows that the Cirque will reveal it later that day.

"That is alright," she says. "And I wanted to see you again anyways."

"Can I show you something?" Theo asks.

Delilah nods, standing up from her sitting position. "Where are we going?" she asks as they head through the exit.

Even though it is day outside all the tents show the night sky, except for the Cloud Maze. Probably from most people's expectations of the Cirque. She always liked the night sky better than the daylight anyways.

"My tent, the animal one," he says. "But what I have for you is a surprise."

"Why is it that every tent caretaker is giving me something?" she asks, half to herself and Theo.

"Maybe it's just because every tent caretaker likes you," he says with a chuckle.

“Do they,” she says.

He doesn't answer but they make it to his tent. Hay is scattered around the floor and people pet and look at animals behind gates. Some in the tent roam free, the chickens and goats.

“Just in this entrance,” he says as they walk through the entrance. Delilah stops as she stares into purple eyes.

“This is the,” she starts.

“The jaguar,” he says. “The one that was in my show earlier today.”

Delilah puts her hand towards the jaguar's head but she hesitates.

“Can I?” she asks.

“Yes, she doesn't bite,” he says. “You can also name her.”

Delilah pets the jaguar and the animal leans into her touch. She wonders how she is supposed to leave when everyone reminds her how much she wants to stay.

“She is beautiful,” she says. “What can she do?”

“She can appear and disappear but also camouflage into whatever she needs to,” he says.

“That sounds amazing,” she says.

“What are you going to name her?” he asks.

“Violette,” says Delilah, her head tilted.

“That is the perfect name for her.”

August 21, 1995 4:00 pm

The fortune teller and his apprentice sit on the ground. Delilah sits across from them, waiting for their answer. She had asked them to give her a fortune. “You, Delilah Rose, have chosen the card of Lady Spring,” says Leo, the fortune teller.

“The card of the spring lady? What does it mean?” she asks.

“That card, my dear, means a new beginning,” says Jane, Leo's apprentice. “It means that you are destined to start something new. However, you've also drawn the card of Life and the card of Crossed Pathways, and those three together mean that you will either be living the life you hate or the life you desire.”

Delilah shivers at the idea of living a life she hates. “Thank you,” she says.

“You are very welcome,” says Leo.

Delilah gets up to leave.

“Wait,” Jane says.

Delilah turns back. “Yes?”

“You must go to the memory staircase tent,” she says. “Oliver and Olia want to meet you there.”

“Thanks for letting me know. Au revoir,” she says.

August 21, 1995 4:30 pm

She is almost to the top. Delilah has watched her memories play out on the glass staircase. All the times she was at the Cirque and the times where she had the most fun. A memory plays on the one she stands on. Her at sixteen running with Aristo through the tents in the Cirque. She smiles, remembering that time. Remembering falling in love.

She wonders why Oliver and Olia wanted to meet her in this tent. But she supposes that she will find out. Another memory plays, one where she and her parents were at the Cirque. This time she frowns. She loved her parents but they never entirely loved her. Perhaps this is why she never felt like she had a true home. Delilah wills herself to keep walking.

She can see the top platform from where she stands. Delilah looks down to see how far she climbed. This is a bad idea because she can't see the ground anymore. She looks back up to the top and gasps as she sees everyone in the Cirque standing at the top platform. Olia and Oliver have huge grins on their faces like they have accomplished something they are brimming with excitement to tell her about. Everyone else is smiling too. Aristo steps forward, his top hat on.

“What is all this?” she asks. “Why is everyone here?”

“Delilah Rose, this is your new family,” he says. “And everyone is here for you.”

Delilah feels suddenly as if she's been handed a prize or a treasure she has been searching for. And maybe this was it; maybe this is the part where she has reached the end of her maze. Her smile grows bigger as her eyes roam everyone's faces.

“My new....family,” she says in disbelief.

“Your new family, yes. Delilah Rose, welcome to the Enchanted Cirque,” Aristo says. “You are going to be the caretaker of the new tent. I imagined it for you, we've all been waiting for you. Now, we never have to part.”

Delilah felt tears brim her eyes. Home. Finally, she had a home where she belonged, and was going to cherish it for as long as she lived.