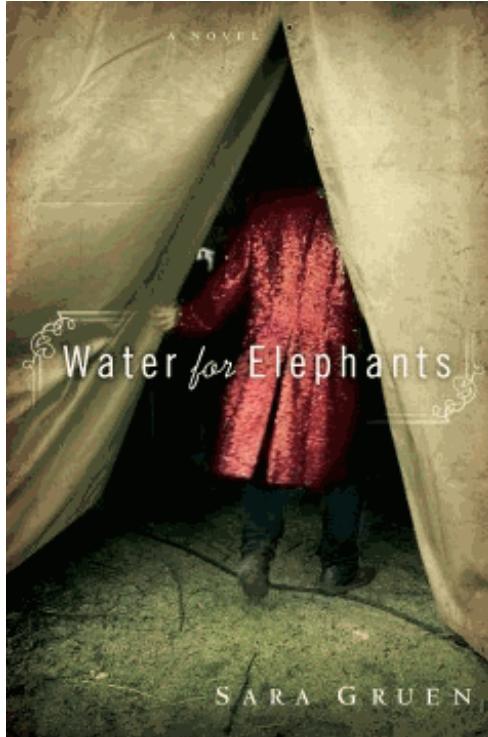


# WATER FOR ELEPHANTS



*Adult*

**By Sarah Gruen**

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## **Book Summary:**

An elderly man recalls his time working for a circus and falling in love.

## **Summary of Concerns:**

This book contains obscene sexual activities; sexual nudity; violence; animal cruelty; profanity and derogatory terms; alcohol use and abuse; references to prejudice; and reference to suicide.

**4** / 5

**Not For Minors**  
BookLooks Review Rating

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1	The rest of the midway—so recently writhing with people—was empty but for a handful of employees and a small group of men waiting to be led to the cooch tent. They glanced nervously from side to side, with hats pulled low and hands thrust deep in their pockets. They wouldn't be disappointed: somewhere in the back Barbara and her ample charms awaited.
8	Sometimes I think that if I had to choose between an ear of corn or making love to a woman, I'd choose the corn. Not that I wouldn't love to have a final roll in the hay—I am a man yet, and some things never die—but the thought of those sweet kernels bursting between my teeth sure sets my mouth to watering.
11	For a moment I think I sense a chink.
15	I am, as far as I can tell, the oldest male virgin on the face of the earth. Certainly no one else my age is willing to admit it. Even my roommate Edward has claimed victory, although I'm inclined to believe the closest he's ever come to a naked woman was between the covers of one of his eight-pagers. Not too long ago some of the guys on my football team paid a woman a quarter apiece to let them do it, one after the other, in the cattle barn. As much as I had hoped to leave my virginity behind at Cornell, I couldn't bring myself to take part. I simply couldn't do it.
22	Alistair Barnes, whose father shot himself in the head.
44	<p>The interior is dim, illuminated by a string of red bulbs that casts a warm glow on the woman methodically removing her clothes.</p> <p>My job is to maintain order and periodically smack the sides of the tent with a metal pipe, the better to discourage peeping toms; or rather, to encourage peeping toms to come around front and pay their fifty cents.</p> <p>...Moonshine is passed from man to man, each blindly groping for the bottle because no one wants to take his eyes off the stage.</p> <p>The woman is a statuesque redhead with eyelashes too long to be real and a beauty spot painted next to her full lips. Her legs are long, her hips full, her chest a stupefaction. She is down to a G-string, a glimmering translucent shawl, and a gloriously overflowing brassiere. She shakes her shoulders, keeping gelatinous time with the small band of musicians to her right. She takes a few strides, sliding across the stage in feathered mules. The snare drum rolls, and she stops, her mouth open in mock surprise. She throws her head back, exposing her throat and sliding her hands down around the cups of her brassiere. She leans forward, squeezing until the flesh swells between her fingers.</p> <p>I scan the sidewalls. A pair of shoe tips peeks under the edge of the canvas. I approach, keeping close to the wall. Just in front of the shoes, I swing the pipe and smack the canvas. There's a grunt, and the shoes disappear. I pause with my ear to the seam, and then return to my post.</p> <p>The redhead sways with the music, caressing her shawl with lacquered nails. It has gold or silver woven through it and sparkles as she slides it back and forth across her shoulders. She drops forward suddenly at the waist, throws her head back, and shimmies.</p> <p>The men holler. Two or three stand, shaking their fists in encouragement. I glance at Cecil, whose steely gaze tells me to watch them.</p> <p>The woman stands up, turns her back, and strides to the center of the stage. She passes the shawl between her legs, slowly grinding against it. Groans rise from the audience. She spins so she's facing us and continues sliding the shawl back and forth, pulling it so tight the cleft of her vulva shows.</p>

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	<p>“Take it off, baby! Take it all off!”</p> <p>The men are getting rowdier; more than half are on their feet. Cecil beckons me forward with one hand. I step closer to the rows of folding chairs.</p> <p>The shawl drops to the floor and the woman turns her back once again. She shakes her hair so it ripples over her shoulder blades and raises her hands so that they meet at the clasp of her brassiere. A cheer rises from the crowd. She pauses to look over her shoulder and winks, running the straps coquettishly down her arms. Then she drops the bra to the floor and spins around, clutching her breasts in her hands. A howl of protest rises from the men.</p> <p>“Aw, come on, sugar, show us what you got!”</p> <p>She shakes her head, pouting coyly.</p> <p>“Aw, come on! I spent fifty cents!”</p> <p>She shakes her head, blinking demurely at the floor. Suddenly her eyes and mouth spring open and she pulls her hands away.</p> <p>Those majestic globes drop. They come to an abrupt stop before swinging gently, even though she’s standing perfectly still.</p> <p>There’s a collective intake of breath, a moment of awed silence before the men whoop in delight.</p> <p>“Atta girl!”</p> <p>“Lord have mercy!”</p> <p>“Hot damn!”</p> <p>She caresses herself, lifting and kneading, rolling her nipples between her fingers. She stares lasciviously down at the men, running her tongue across her upper lip.</p> <p>A drum roll begins. She grasps each hardened point firmly between thumb and forefinger and pulls one breast so that its nipple points at the ceiling. Its shape changes utterly as the weight redistributes. Then she drops it—it falls suddenly, almost violently. She hangs onto the nipple and lifts the other in the same upward arc. She alternates, picking up speed.</p> <p>Lifting, dropping, lifting, dropping—by the time the drum cuts out and the trombone kicks in, her arms move so fast they’re a blur, her flesh an undulating, pumping mass.</p> <p>The men holler, screaming their approval.</p> <p>“Oh yeah!”</p> <p>“Gorgeous, baby! Gorgeous!”</p> <p>“Praise the sweet Lord!”</p> <p>Another drum roll begins. She leans forward at the waist and those glorious tits swing, so heavy, so low—a foot long, at least, wider and rounded at the ends, as though each contains a grapefruit.</p> <p>She rolls her shoulders; first one, and then the other, so her breasts move in opposite directions. As the speed increases, they swing in ever-widening circles, lengthening as they gain momentum. Before long, they’re meeting in the center with an audible slap.</p> <p>Jesus. There could be a riot in the tent and I wouldn’t know it. There’s not a drop of blood left in my head.</p> <p>The woman straightens up and then drops into a curtsy. When she stands, she scoops a breast up to her face and slides her tongue around its nipple. Then she slurps it into her mouth. She stands there shamelessly sucking her own tit as the men wave their hats, pump their fists, and scream like animals. She drops it, gives the slick nipple a final tweak, and then blows the men a kiss. She leans down long enough to retrieve her diaphanous shawl and disappears, her arm raised so that the shawl trails behind her, a shimmering banner.</p> <p>“All right then, boys,” says Cecil, clapping his hands and climbing the stairs to the stage.</p>

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	<p>"Let's have a big hand for our Barbara!"    The men cheer and whistle, clapping with hands held high.    "Yup, ain't she something? What a lady. And it's your lucky day, boys, because for tonight only, she'll be accepting a limited number of gentleman callers after the show. This is a real honor, fellas. She's a gem, our Barbara. A real gem."    The men crowd toward the exit, slapping each other on the back, already exchanging memories.    "Did you see those titties?"    "Man, what a rack. What I wouldn't give to play with those for a while."    I'm glad nothing requires my intervention, because I'm trying hard to maintain my composure. This is the first time I've ever seen a woman naked and I don't think I'll ever be the same.</p>
49	<p>I spend the next forty-five minutes standing guard outside Barbara's dressing tent as she entertains gentleman callers. Only five are prepared to part with the requisite two dollars, and they form a surly line. The first goes in and after seven minutes of huffing and grunting emerges again, struggling with his fly. He staggers off and the next enters. After the last of them leaves, Barbara appears in the doorway. She is nude except for an Oriental silk dressing gown she hasn't bothered to tie.    ... "That's it, honey," she says, waving me away. There's whiskey on her breath and in her eyes. "No freebies tonight."    I return to the cooch tent to stack chairs and help dismantle the stage while Cecil counts the money. At the end of it, I'm a dollar richer and stiff all over.</p>
55	<p>"Speak in English, you fucking Polack!" Then he retreats back under the bunk, shaking his head. "Some of these guys. Right off the fucking boat."</p>
63	<p>I'm lying on the floor, looking up at the stripper's dangling breasts. Her nipples, brown and the size of silver dollar pancakes, swing in circles—out and around, SLAP. Out and around, SLAP. I feel a pang of excitement, then remorse, and then nausea.    And then I'm . . .    I'm . . .</p>
76	<p>In front of the scrambled eggs:    "They heard we was carrying booze. There's gonna be a raid."    "There's gonna be a raid, all right," comes the reply. "But it's on account of the cooch tent, not the booze."</p>
78	<p>Rumor has it that Chaz's tiny penis even gets erections.</p>
81	<p>I flip one open. A crudely drawn Olive Oyl lies on a bed with her legs open, naked but for her shoes. She spreads herself with her fingers. Popeye appears in a thought bubble above her head, with a bulging erection that reaches to his chin. Wimpy, with an equally enormous erection, peers through the window.</p>
91	<p>"Where are my manners? Would you like a beer?"    "Thank you," I say. "That would be swell."    She flutters past me to an icebox.    "Mrs. Rosenbluth, can I ask you something?"    "Oh, please, call me Marlena," she says, popping the bottle cap. She tips a tall glass and pours beer slowly down its side, avoiding a foam head. "And yes, by all means. Ask away."    She hands me the glass, and then returns to get another.</p>

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	<p>"How is it that everyone on this train has so much alcohol?"    ...I touch mine to hers and take a sip. It's a cold, clean lager. Magnificent. "Don't the border guards check?"    "We put the booze in with the camels," she says.    "I'm sorry, I don't understand," I say.    "Camels spit."</p>
94	<p>"It took some doing," says August, emptying the remains of one champagne bottle into my glass and then reaching for another.    ...He pulls her to him by the chin and kisses her full on the lips.</p>
97	<p>Kinko is sitting on the edge of his cot, an eight-pager in one hand and his penis in the other. He stops midstroke, its slick purple head extending beyond his fist. There's a heartbeat of silence followed by the whoosh of an empty Coke bottle flying at my head. I duck.    "Get out!" Kinko screams as the bottle explodes against the doorframe behind me. He leaps up, causing his erection to bounce wildly. "Get the hell out!" He lobs another bottle at me.</p>
102	<p>Finally I pick up the rifle, slide the shell into the chamber, and throw the bolt. Silver Star's muzzle is pressed up against the end of his stall, his ears twitching. I lean over and run my fingers down his neck. Then I place the muzzle of the gun under his left ear and pull the trigger.    There's an explosion of sound and the butt of the rifle bucks into my shoulder. Silver Star's body seizes, his muscles responding to one last synaptical spasm before finally falling still. From far away, I hear a single desperate whinny.</p>
107	<p>Bathing is even more embarrassing, because I have to strip down to my birthday suit in front of a nurse. Now, there are some things that never die, so even though I'm in my nineties my sap sometimes rises. I can't help it. They always pretend not to notice. They're trained that way, I suppose, although pretending not to notice is almost worse than noticing. It means they consider me nothing more than a harmless old man sporting a harmless old penis that still gets uppity once in a while. Although if one of them took it seriously and tried to do something about it, the shock would probably kill me.    Rosemary helps me into the shower stall. "There, now you just hold on to that bar over there—"    "I know, I know. I've had showers before," I say, grabbing the bar and easing myself onto the bath chair. Rosemary runs the shower head down the pole so I can reach it.    "How's that for temperature, Mr. Jankowski?" she asks, waving her hand in and out of the stream and keeping her gaze discreetly averted.    "Fine. Just give me some shampoo and go outside, will you?"    "Why, Mr. Jankowski, you are in a mood today, aren't you?" She opens the shampoo and squeezes a few drops onto my palm. It's all I need. I've only got about a dozen hairs left.    "You give me a shout if you need anything," she says, pulling the curtain across. "I'll be right out here."    "Hrrrmph," I say.    Once she's gone I quite enjoy my shower. I take the shower head from its mount and spray my body from up close, aiming it over my shoulders and down my back and then over each of my skinny limbs. I even hold my head back with my eyes shut and let the spray hit my face full on. I pretend it's a tropical shower, shaking my head and reveling in it. I even enjoy the feel of it down there, on that shriveled pink snake that fathered five children so long ago.</p>

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	Sometimes, when I'm in bed, I close my eyes and remember the look—and especially the feel—of a woman's naked body. Usually it's my wife's, but not always. I was completely faithful to her. Not once in more than sixty years did I stray, except in my imagination, and I have a feeling she wouldn't have minded that. She was a woman of extraordinary understanding.
118	"Join me for a drink, my boy. There's lemonade in Marlena's dressing tent, and not that sock juice from the juice joint either. We'll put a drop of whiskey in, hey hey?"
124	A bottle of champagne appears. He presents it for Marlena's inspection with a deep bow. Then he unwinds the wire top and pops the cork.
130	<p>Marlena removes a bottle of blended whiskey, pauses, looks at August, and then puts it back. She reaches for the single malt instead.</p> <p>...She pours a good four fingers' worth of whiskey into three tumblers.</p> <p>...I throw my whiskey down my throat and leave.</p> <p>IT WAS A BIG WHISKEY, and it starts to take effect somewhere between the staterooms and the coaches.</p>
131	<p>The gatherings run the entire gamut, from celebratory soirées characterized by radio jazz and outbursts of laughter to the desultory gatherings of dirty men who huddle some distance from the train and pass around various types of intoxicant.</p> <p>...I hear thrashing in the long grass and pause to investigate. I see a woman's bare legs spread wide with a man between them. He grunts and ruts like a billy goat. His trousers are down around his knees, his hairy buttocks pumping up and down. She grasps his shirt in her fists, moaning with each thrust. It takes me a moment to realize what I'm looking at—when I do, I wrench my eyes away and wobble forward.</p> <p>As I approach the ring stock car, I see people sitting on the open doorway and milling around outside.</p> <p>There are even more inside. Kinko is lording over a party with a bottle in his hand and drunken hospitality on his face.</p>
133	<p>"Well now, what have we here?" says a sultry voice from somewhere very nearby. My eyes pop open. A foot's length of tightly packed cleavage is directly under my nose. I run my eyes up it until I see a face. It's Barbara. I blink quickly, trying to see only one of her. Oh God—it's no use. But no—wait. It's okay. It's not multiple Barbaras. It's multiple women.</p> <p>"Hi, honey," says Barbara, reaching out and stroking my face. "You doing okay?"</p> <p>"Mmm," I say, trying to nod.</p> <p>Her fingertips linger under my chin as she turns to the blonde crouching beside her. "So young. Oh, he's cute as a button, isn't he, Nell?"</p> <p>Nell takes a drag from a cigarette and blows the smoke from the side of her mouth. "Sure is. Don't think I've seen him before."</p> <p>"He was helping out at the cooch tent a few nights ago," says Barbara. She turns back to me. "What's your name, honey?" she says softly, running the backs of her fingers up and down my cheek.</p> <p>"Jacob," I say, around the edges of a belch.</p> <p>"Jacob," she says. "Oh, say, I know who you are. He's the one Walter was talking about," she says to Nell. "He's brand new, a First of May. Handled himself real well at the cooch tent."</p> <p>She grabs my chin and raises it, gazing deep into my eyes. I try to return the favor but am having some trouble focusing. "Oh, you are a sweet thing. So, tell me, Jacob—you ever been</p>

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	<p>with a woman?" "I . . . uh . . .," I say. "Uh . . ." Nell giggles. Barbara leans back and puts her hands on her waist. "Whadya think? Wanna give him a proper welcome?" "We practically have to," says Nell. "A First of May and a virgin?" Her hand slips between my legs and slides over my crotch. My head, which had been wobbling on its stem, snaps upright. "You think his hair is red down there, too?" she says, cupping me in her palm. Barbara leans forward, unclasps my hands, and lifts one to her mouth. She turns it over, runs a long nail across the palm and then stares me in the eye while running her tongue along the same path. Then she takes my hand and places it on her left breast, right where the nipple must be. Oh God. Oh God. I'm touching a breast. Through a dress, but still— Barbara stands up for a moment, smoothes her skirt, looks furtively around, and then crouches. I'm pondering this change of position when she takes hold of my hand again. This time she pulls it under her skirt and presses my fingers against hot, moist silk. I catch my breath. The whiskey, the moonshine, the gin, the God-knoks-what—all of it dissipates instantly. She moves my hand up and down, over her strange and wonderful valleys. Oh shit. I may come right now. "Hmmmm?" she purrs, rearranging my hand so that my middle finger presses further into her. Warm silk bulges around both sides of my finger, pulsing under my touch. She removes my hand, places it back on my knee, and then gives my crotch an experimental squeeze. "Mmmmm," she says, her eyes half-closed. "He's ready, Nell. Damn, I love them at this age." The rest of the night passes in epileptic flashes. I am aware of being propped up between two women, but I think I fall out the door of the stock car. At least, I am aware of finding myself cheek down in the dirt. Then I'm swept upward again and jostled along in the dark until I'm sitting on the edge of a bed. There are definitely two Barbaras now. And two of the other one, as well. Nell, was it? Barbara steps backward and raises her arms in the air. She throws her head back and runs her hands over her body, dancing and moving by candlelight. I'm interested—there is no question about that. But I simply can't sit upright anymore. So I fall back. Someone's yanking on my pants. I mumble something, not sure what, but I don't think it's encouragement. I'm suddenly not feeling well. Oh God. She's touching me—it—stroking experimentally. I prop myself up on my elbows and look down. It's limp, a tiny pink turtle hiding in its shell. It also seems to be stuck to my leg. She peels it free, delves both her hands between my thighs to spread them, and reaches down for my balls. She rests them on one hand, juggling them like eggs while she examines my penis. It flops hopelessly under her manipulations while I watch, mortified. The other woman—now there's only one again, how the hell am I ever going to keep this straight?—lies next to me on the bed. She fishes a skinny breast from her dress and lifts it to my mouth. She rubs it all over my face. Now her lipsticked mouth is coming at me, a gaping maw with tongue extended. I turn my head to the right, where there is no woman. Then I feel a mouth close around the head of my penis. I gasp. The women giggle, but it's a purring sound, an encouraging sound, as they continue trying to get a response. Oh God, oh God, she's sucking it. Sucking it, for God's sake.</p>

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	<p>I'm not going to be able to—    Oh my God, I need to—    I turn my head and hurl the unfortunately varied contents of my stomach onto Nell.</p>
135	<p>“Where am I?” I croak. I cough and try to clear my parched throat.    “Clown Alley,” says Kinko, fingering some paint jars on a dresser.    I lift an arm to cover my eyes and notice it is clad in silk. A red silk dressing gown, to be exact. A red silk dressing gown that is wide open. I look down and discover that someone has shaved my genitals.    I snatch the edges of the gown together, wondering if Kinko saw.    Dear God, what did I do last night? I have no idea. Nothing but scraps of memory, and—    Oh God. I threw up on a woman.    I struggle to my feet, tying the dressing gown. I wipe my forehead, which feels unusually slick. My hand comes away white.    “What the—?” I say, staring at my hand.    Kinko turns and hands me a mirror. I take it with great trepidation. When I raise it to my face, a clown looks back at me.    I POKE MY HEAD out of the tent, look left and right, and then streak across to the stock car. I am followed by guffaws and catcalls.    “Whooeeee, look at that hot mama!”    “Hey, Fred—check out the new cooch girl!”    “Say, honey—got plans tonight?”    I dive into the goat room and slam the door, leaning against it. I breathe heavily, listening until the laughter outside dies down. I grab a rag and wipe my face again. I rubbed it raw before I left Clown Alley, but somehow I still don’t believe it’s clean. I don’t think any part of me will ever be clean again. And the worst part is that I don’t even know what I did. I have only snippets, and as horrifying as those are it’s even more horrifying not knowing what happened in between.    It suddenly occurs to me that I have no idea whether I’m still a virgin.    I reach inside the dressing gown and scratch my stubby balls.</p>
137	<p>I can’t tell him that not only have I disgraced myself beyond belief or redemption, but I have also failed at my first opportunity to have sex—something I’ve thought about pretty much constantly for the last eight years. Not to mention throwing up on one of the women who was offering and then passing out and having somebody shave my balls and paint my face and stuff me into a trunk.</p> <p>...“Oh, and a word to the wise?” says Kinko. “Some flowers for Barbara wouldn’t go amiss. The other one’s just a whore, but Barbara’s a friend.”</p>
139	<p>Naturally, I head behind the menagerie to find out what Marlena’s not supposed to see. I round the corner just as Pete slits the throat of a decrepit gray horse. The horse screams as blood shoots six feet from the gaping hole in its neck.    “Jesus Christ!” I yelp, taking a step backward.    The horse’s heart slows, and the spurts weaken. Eventually the horse drops to its knees and crashes forward. It scrapes the ground with its front hooves and then falls still. Its eyes are open wide. A lake of dark blood spreads from its neck.    Pete glances up at me, still leaning over the twitching animal.    An emaciated bay horse is tethered to a stake beside him, out of its head with terror. Its nostrils are flared, showing red, its muzzle straight in the air. The lead rope is so taut it looks</p>

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	like it's going to snap. Pete steps across the dead horse, grabs the rope near the bay's head, and slices its throat. More spurting blood, more death throes, another collapsing body. Pete stands with his arms slack at his sides, his sleeves rolled up past his elbows, still holding the bloody knife. He watches the horse until it dies and then raises his face to me.
141	The photograph on this page depicts a woman wearing a dress with the top pulled down exposing her breasts. <i>See Figure 1.</i>
150	A glass is plunked in front of me. A second later August drops down beside Marlena. I investigate the glass and find it contains ice cubes and scotch. ...August tosses his scotch back. The second mine hits my lips, my tongue instinctively blocks its progress. August is watching, so I pretend to swallow before setting the glass down.
153	I take her by the shoulders and press my mouth to hers. She stiffens and gasps, sucking air from between my lips. A moment later she softens. Her fingertips rise to my face.
154	There are some girls there, too, and one couple is copulating. They're not even in the bushes, just a little farther from the fire than the others. One or two of the boys watch in a disinterested manner.
156	But my final thoughts are tactile: the underside of my forearm lying above the swell of her breasts. Her lips under mine, soft and full. And the one detail I can neither fathom nor shake, the one that haunts me into sleep: the feel of her fingertips tracing the outline of my face.
168	<p>“What is that anyway?” I ask.      “Gin and ginger ale,” he says.      “You’re kidding.”      “Elephants love alcohol. See? One whiff of this and she doesn’t care about cabbages anymore. Ah!” he says, batting the trunk away. “Powiedziałem przestań! Później!”      “How the hell did you know that?”      “The last show I was on had a dozen bulls. One of them used to fake a bellyache every night trying to get a dose of whiskey. Say, go get the bull hook, will you? She’ll probably follow us back to the lot just to get at this gin—isn’t that right, mój małutki paczuszek?—but better get it just in case.”</p>
172	He turns and rummages in his crate. “Here,” he says, tossing me an eight-pager. It skids across the floor and stops beside me. “It’s not Marlena, but it’s better than nothing.” After he turns away, I pick it up and thumb through it. But despite the explicit and exaggerated drawings, I can’t muster any interest whatever in Mr. Big Studio Director boning the skinny would-be starlet with the horse face.
183	<p>“Someone made a big batch of bad jake—put plasticizers in it or something. It went out all over the country. One bad bottle, and you’re done for.”      “What do you mean, ‘done for’?”      “Paralyzed. It can start anytime within two weeks of drinking the shit.”</p>
197	Walter kneels, puts his hands under Camel’s armpits, and lifts him into a sitting position. Then he pulls a flask from his pocket. ... “What the hell do you think it is?” Walter says. “It’s liquor. Real liquor. The good stuff.”
211	“Because I just know. There’s not a human bone in that kike’s body.”

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223	<p>Apparently August stormed into the menagerie and banished everyone. The puzzled menagerie men and a handful of others stood outside, their ears pressed to the seams of the great canvas tent as a torrent of angry screaming began. This sent the rest of the animals into a panic—the chimps screeched, the cats roared, and the zebras yelped. Despite this, the distraught listeners could still make out the hollow thud of bull hook hitting flesh, again and again and again.</p> <p>At first Rosie bellowed and whimpered. When she progressed to squealing and shrieking, many of the men turned away, unable to take any more. One of them ran for Earl, who entered the menagerie and hauled August out by his armpits.</p> <p>...The remaining men found Rosie lying on her side, quivering, her foot still chained to a stake.</p>
224	<p>A few minutes later he returns, carrying a large bottle of whiskey in each hand.</p> <p>...“Here. Pay him no mind,” says Walter, shoving a bottle of whiskey against my chest.</p>
225	<p>“I’ll bet you five bucks it’s a woman,” he says, taking another drink. His Adam’s apple bobs up and down and the brown liquid lowers by almost an inch. It’s astounding how quickly he and Camel manage to get hard liquor down their gullets.</p> <p>...He holds the bottle up to Camel’s lips again and lets him have several long swallows. Then he caps it, leans across, still on his haunches, and hands it to me.</p> <p>“Take her this one, too. You tell her I’m also sorry. Real sorry, in fact.”</p> <p>“Hey!” shouts Camel. “There ain’t no woman in the world worth two bottles of whiskey! Come on now!”</p> <p>I rise to my feet and slip a bottle in each pocket of my jacket.</p>
229	<p>I scrutinize him, watching for chinks, but the new August persists.</p>
230	<p>Instead, Walter reads Shakespeare and Camel gets drunk and cranky and increasingly demanding.</p>
240	<p>“He thinks he’s getting better, but I don’t see it. I think he doesn’t notice as much because he doesn’t have to do anything. Well, that and he’s usually drunk.”</p> <p>...“Where’s he getting liquor? It is liquor, ain’t it? He ain’t drinking that jake shit no more, is he?”</p> <p>“No, it’s liquor. My bunkmate’s taken a shine to him.”</p>
245	<p>“The devoted wife, hiding away in a closet, sewing up a storm. Or was it a closet? Maybe it was right here. Or maybe you went to that whore’s tent. Whores look after each other, don’t they?” He looks at me. “So, where did you do it, eh, Jacob? Where, exactly, have you fucked my wife?”</p>
271	<p>“Don’t say anything,” she says softly. Her fingers flutter their way around my ear and down the back of my neck. I shudder. Every hair on my body is standing on end.</p> <p>When her hands move to my shirt, I open my eyes. She undoes the buttons slowly, methodically. I watch her, knowing I should stop her. But I can’t. I am helpless.</p> <p>When my shirt is open she pulls it free of my trousers and looks me in the eye. She leans forward and brushes her lips past mine—so softly it’s not even a kiss, merely contact. She pauses for just a second, keeping her lips so close I can feel her breath on my face. Then she leans in and kisses me, a gentle kiss, tentative but lingering. The next kiss is stronger still, the next one even more so, and before I know it I’m kissing back, clutching her face in both my hands as she runs her fingers over my chest and down my body. When she reaches for my trousers, I gasp. She pauses, tracing the outline of my erection.</p>

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	<p>She stops. I am reeling, teetering on my knees. Still staring into my eyes, she takes my hands and brings them to her lips. She presses a kiss into each palm and then places my hands on her breasts.</p> <p>“Touch me, Jacob.”</p> <p>I am doomed, finished.</p> <p>Her breasts are small and round, like lemons. I cup them, running my thumbs over them and feeling her nipples contract under the cotton of her dress. I crush my bruised mouth to hers, running my hands over her rib cage, her waist, her hips, her thighs—</p> <p>When she undoes my trousers and takes me in her hand, I pull away.</p> <p>“Please,” I gasp, my voice cracking. “Please. Let me be inside you.”</p> <p>Somehow, we make it to the bed. When I finally sink into her, I cry out.</p>
276	The old man lies with his eyes closed and mouth open, snoring. Walter must have just given him booze.
278	<p>I lift my glass and swirl the brandy, staring at the point where the stem meets the glass.</p> <p>...“To August and Marlena,” I say, thrusting my glass upward. The brandy sloshes up the sides.</p> <p>He lifts his glass slowly.</p> <p>I toss back the rest of my brandy and smile.</p>
281	IN POUGHKEEPSIE, WE are raided, and for once the social strata are bridged: working men, performers, and bosses alike weep and snizzle as all that scotch, all that wine, all that fine Canadian whiskey, all that beer, all that gin, and even moonshine is poured onto the gravel by straight-armed, sour-faced men.
287	<p>An ancient roustabout is also looking through the stands but facing the other direction. He's looking up a woman's skirt.</p> <p>...He stands on tiptoe, holding the edge of a floorboard with his fingertips and peering upward. He licks his lips.</p>
319	She rolls forward onto her toes and kisses me.
326	I'm sitting at a Formica table in the back of an impressively appointed RV sipping an equally impressive single malt—Laphroaig, if I'm not mistaken—and singing like a canary.

Profanity/Derogatory Term	Count
Ass	9
Bitch	11
Fuck	18
Chink	2
Kike	1
Piss	2
Polack	2
Pussy	1
Shit	26
Tit	3

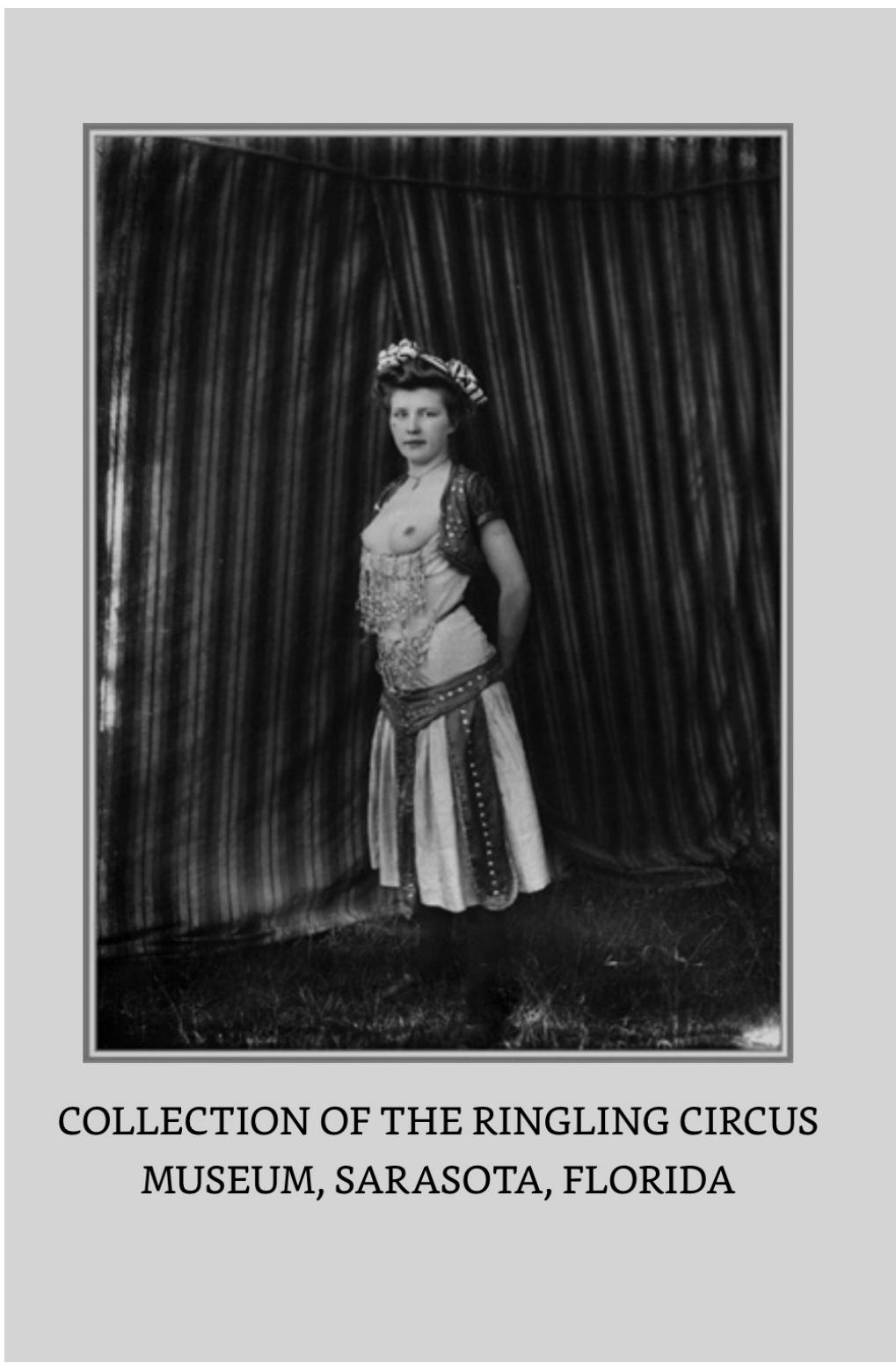


Figure 1