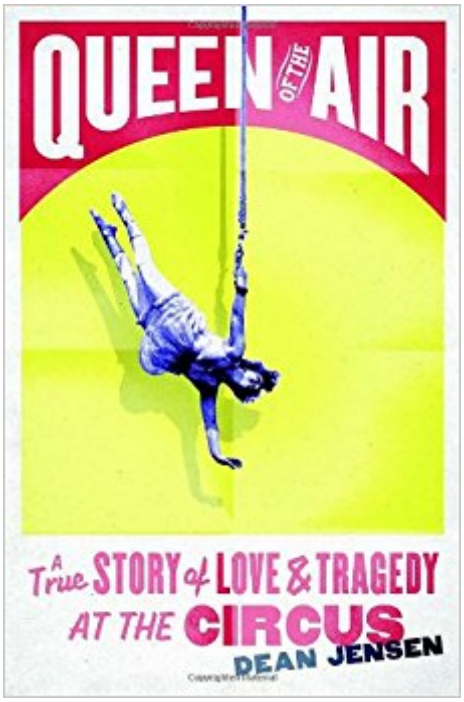
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Queen Of The Air: A True Story Of Love And Tragedy At The Circus



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Synopsis

A true life Water for Elephants, Queen of the Air brings the circus world to life through the gorgeously written, true story of renowned trapeze artist and circus performer Leitzel, Queen of the Air, the most famous woman in the world at the turn of the 20th century, and her star-crossed love affair with Alfredo Codona, of the famous Flying Codona Brothers.Like today's Beyonce, Madonna, and Cher, she was known to her vast public by just one name, Leitzel. There may have been some regions on earth where her name was not a household expression, but if so, they were likely on polar ice caps or in the darkest, deepest jungles.Ã Â Ã Â Ã Â Ã Â Ã Â Ã Â Leitzel was born into Dickensian circumstances, and became a princess and then a queen. She was not much bigger than a good size fairy, just four-foot-ten and less than 100 pounds. In the first part of the 20th century, she presided over a sawdust fiefdom of never-ending magic. She was the biggest star ever of the biggest circus ever, the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus, The Greatest Show on Earth. Ã Â Ã Â Ã Â Ã Â In her life, Leitzel had many suitors (and three husbands), but only one man ever fully captured her heart. He was the handsome Alfredo Codona, the greatest trapeze flyer that had ever lived, the only one in his time who, night after night, executed the deadliest of all big-top feats, The Triple--three somersaults in midair while traveling at 60 m.p.h. The Triple, the salto mortale, as the Italians called it, took the lives of more daredevils than any other circus stunt.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Praise for QUEEN OF THE AIRÃ Â "[A] moving and deep portrait of two central figures in a largely

forgotten chapter of Americana.Ã¢â ¬Â•Ã¢â ¬â •USA TodayÃ¢â ¬Å“[A] tale told in broad, bold swathes of primary color, like the gigantic posters that commemorate the big topÃ¢â ¬â„¢s golden days, yet as with any good book, delight awaits in the details, as wellÃ¢â ¬Â¦[I]rresistibleÃ¢â ¬Â¦thrillingÃ¢â ¬Â¦strikes just the right balance between the intimate and the showmanly. In addition to the mystery and glamour conjured around their acts, Jensen leaves you with an awed respect for Leitzel and CodonaÃ¢â ¬â„¢s almost perverse devotion to their craft and to the circus life.Ã¢â ¬Â•Ã¢â ¬â •Salon Ã Â Ã¢â ¬Å“Dean Jensen has pulled off an amazing temporal triple play. He's told a story that's completely of its time, yet often resonates with ours, and in its tragic dimension feels as timeless as a Greek mythÃ¢â ¬Â¦Jensen re-creates the world of circus life so vividly a reader's almost tempted to check the ground for elephant droppingsÃ¢â ¬Â¦ Like a gifted ringmaster, Jensen knows what every performer, major or minor, in this show can do, and seems to bring each one on at just the right time. While Leitzel, Codona and their circle may have almost passed from public memory, Jensen brings them back to the center ring in his book.Ã¢â ¬Â•Ã¢â ¬â •Milwaukee Journal Sentinel"For anyone who knows that stardust can be a tarnished and magic is an illusion, Queen of the Air absolutely soars."Ã¢â ¬â •Eagle Tribune"[S]hocking and heartbreaking... Artfully choreographed, this act is sure to draw big audiences."Ã¢â ¬â •Publishers Weekly, starred reviewÃ¢â ¬Å“The true story of Leitzel, a circus aerialist who was the Evelyn Nesbitt of her time, is mesmerizingÃ¢â ¬â •part fable, part history and part dream.Ã Â Meticulously researched, QUEEN OF THE AIR reads like a fine novel.Ã¢â ¬Â•Ã¢â ¬â •Jacquelyn Mitchard, author of The Deep End of the Ocean and What We Saw Last NightÃ Â Ã Â Ã¢â ¬Å“Daring the devil with consummate grace is what many of the circus arts are all about, aerially or in the ground game. These two nonpareil performersÃ¢â ¬â •flyers bothÃ¢â ¬â •ultimately crashed, but not before putting on a glistering show.Ã¢â ¬Â•Ã¢â ¬â •Edward Hoagland, author of Children are Diamonds

DEAN JENSEN is the author of three earlier books focusing on subjects from the worlds of the circus, carnivals, and the vaudeville stage. Jensen was an art critic and arts writer for the Milwaukee Sentinel (now the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel) and has received numerous awards for his writing. He now operates an eponymously named contemporary art gallery in Milwaukee.

I am not sure how or why this book was classified as an art book in the Vine program, but it got my attention. Somewhere between biography and non-fiction, this book tells the story of aerialist Lillian Leitzel and her fellow aerialist husband Alfredo Codona.Leitzel, as she was commonly known, was

the equivalent of a rock star in the world of the bigtop. Her act was so precise and daring that she quickly became a standout among many talented performers. She was pretty and tiny, weighing in at 95 lbs. and standing at no more than 4’9". She was immensely popular and well known and had played all the capitals of Europe as well as the United States. With two failed marriages and other relationships behind her, she met Alfredo Cadona and their three year union would define the rest of their lives.Leitzel enjoyed all the trappings of celebrity and could be part diva and conversely kind to children and a giving person.While appearing in Copenhagen in 1931, the metal of one of the two rings she used in her act crystalized and resulted in her crashing to the ground. She lingered for two days and died from her traumatic injuries. Cadona, in his grief, carried on and eventually remarried but by 1937 would also be dead under circumstances nearly as tragic as Lieitzel’s.While I knew some general facts about the circumstances surrounding their deaths, this book did a magnificent job telling Leitzel’s story as well as Cadona’s. This book was extremely well researched and very well written. A huge plus to me as a reader was how visual the narrative was. It captured circus life as well as the acts that were performed. The end effect was dizzying in regard to the work of Cadona as part of the Flying Cadonas act and Leitzel’s performances.Almost as interesting as the sweeping narrative were the notes the author had at the end of the text. Dean Jensen, the author, managed to clear up some misconceptions and inaccuracies and clearly sourced his information. This may seem picky to some readers, but to me it helps explain how information is extracted/validated.I really loved this book. It was evocative of Water For Elephants but was an interesting true story that had everything including ghost like spectres, romance, tragedy, conflict, death by accident, murder, and suicide. It also captured the excitement of the circus and realistically presented the nomadic lives of its performers.

This was book not only about Leitzel as Circus Queen but of her husband Alfredo Codona too. Both reigned as super stars in the Big Top during the early 1900s. The Circus was by far very different than what it is today. The grandeur was palpable then. People lauded the performers with a high regard for their talent. These two performers were "super" stars! Both Lilly and Alfredo were beautifully portrayed here. The book is factual down to personal letters and interviews. But, a definite page turner here. Written well...researched well!! But, such a tragedy for the two stars. A book worth reading!!

A far superior work about the bygone days of the traveling tent circus and the unique people that inhabited it.Mr. Jensen’s work may not be in league with the ’great biographies,’ but it is a worthy,

credible, and, I think overdue, acknowledgment of two of the circus world's greatest and most pioneering performers: Lillian Leitzel and Alfredo Codona. Unless you are something of a circus fan, you probably never heard of either one of them. Mr. Jensen tells their story well..a story that is compelling in its own right. His ability to evoke life in the long-vanished traveling circus (at least the huge operations such as Ringling Bros. Barnum and Bailey) is wonderful, and the book literally cries out to be made into a motion picture. (WATER FOR ELEPHANTS probably ruined that possibility) Ultimately the experience of reading QUEEN OF THE AIR, takes one to an era that is gone forever, a less jaded time when literally thousands would gather, in a huge canvas tent no less, to witness physical dexterity combined with show business artistry. The idea of a tiny, gnome-like woman swinging with one arm on a rope would be considered 'old school' quaint by today's audience demands. Mr. Jensen creates very well, a time, a place and a world that found it not only incredible, but ethereal. a fitting, overdue tribute to extraordinary people.

Queen of the Air was well written and gave you a great deal of understanding as to how the circus live was lived. A great sense of community unity and hard work, was the only way for a circus to survive the rigorous life style of creating a fantasy, in each new town day after day. The constant lack of job security and jealousy must have been very depressing at times. The change in the circuses from small operations, to the need to combine into large companies just to survive had to be a constant stress for both performers and owners.The sad story of the Queen and King of the Air, the love they had for each other, the jealousy, the total self-centeredness created nothing but pain and heartache for them. Only the adulation from the fans could fill the void in them momentarily.Floretta's Thoughts

Excellent memoir about the acrobatic flyers & stars of the wire,high above the multitudes of people that came to see the King & Queen of the high wire.Their love story was one of high highs & low lows,all centered around the Big Top.If you loved the circus,as a kid,this book will be sheer entertainment !

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