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



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. 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. 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.

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Customer Reviews

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 Codona 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. Codona, in his grief, carried on and eventually remarried but by 1937 would also be dead under circumstances nearly as tragic as Leitzel'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 Codona'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 Codona as part of the Flying Codonas act and Leitzel's performances.

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