

## Leopold the Clown

Unfortunately for him, Leopold the Clown was not very funny. That is not to say that he was not a good clown. He was in fact quite good. And that is also not to say that he was not usually funny, for he usually in fact quite was.

Even though he was in fact a good clown and usually quite funny, Leopold the Clown was sad. He was sad because no one laughed, and not even because he wasn't a good or funny clown. No one laughed because they were all too scared. Any silly face and the children screamed. Any pratfall he performed made fathers scowl for causing such a scene. After each gag, all the ladies declared they'd rather have a bat in their hair since he was so scary.

Poor Leopold.

When he was a boy, Leopold loved the circus, and the clowns most of all! The aerialists were all fine, and the acrobats were all well, but he loved to laugh – and clowns made him do just that. He thought their faces were funny, and their pratfalls quite silly – the gags were the best part of all.

He went to university and became a mathematician. He was smart and was clever, and was really quite good. He liked it well enough, but something was missing. That's when he realized, and said to himself, "It's clown that I'm missing!"

So away went equations, went Leibniz, went Euler. He studied the greats, like Keaton and like Skelton. His cleverness helped in his being funny, and when the day came to be in a real circus, he was only a little bit nervous. He became great, and the



audiences loved him. Children squealed with delight, and even the adults couldn't help but guffaw. The ovations he received were deafening. He was finally happy.

But one day, a little boy did not laugh. Leopold tried everything to make the boy smile, to at least grin just a little. But nothing worked, because the boy was scared. Yep, scared – of Leopold! Soon, every child stopped laughing. Leopold didn't know what to do. He couldn't understand why he was so scary. He became so sad.

After one show, Leopold was sitting all by himself on the bleachers. “What am I going to do?” he asked himself. He thought and he thought, until suddenly an idea hit him in the ear.

“I've got it!” he declared. The idea that he got was a good one, he thought. “Antonio the Wirewalker gets all kinds of applause. No one thinks he's scary. Maybe I should be a wirewalker like him!”

So off he went to become a wirewalker.

Leopold practiced and practiced, and he watched and watched. He watched as Antonio did cartwheels, the splits, even a back flip on the tight wire. Leopold could not believe some of the amazing things that Antonio could do.

Leopold tried all the tricks, but even after practicing and practicing and watching and watching, he was not very good. His feet hurt from standing on that steel wire. Still, he performed with Antonio in that night's show. He was excited, but something was missing. And when he saw the wire so up high, he became so scared that he couldn't do anything! He didn't get any applause at all.

When Leopold asked Antonio why he wasn't a good wirewalker, Antonio laughed and said, “Leopold, it has taken me years and years to learn what I have learned. You

cannot expect to be good at something so quickly. It takes a lot of control and balance to be good at wire-walking.”

“I guess you are right,” said Leopold.

After the show, he was again sitting alone in the bleachers. He was sad, but he was determined. Suddenly, an idea hit him square on the nose!

“I’ve got it!” he declared. The idea that he got was a good one, he thought.

“Svetlana the Handbalancer gets all kinds of applause. No one thinks she’s scary. Maybe I should be a handbalancer like her!”

So off he went to become a handbalancer.

Leopold practiced and practiced, and he watched and watched. He watched as Svetlana did a handstand perfectly, and then she did one on just one hand. She bent her back practically in half and did the same thing! Leopold could not believe how flexible and strong she was.

Leopold tried all the tricks, but even after practicing and practicing and watching and watching, he was not very good. His back and his legs ached from being stretched, and his arms hurt from trying all those handstands. All Leopold wanted to do was go take a hot bath. Still, he performed with Svetlana in that night’s show. He was excited, but something was missing. And he couldn’t even hold a handstand and he was so sore that he could hardly move. He didn’t get any applause at all.

When Leopold asked Svetlana why he wasn’t a good handbalancer, Svetlana laughed and said, “Leopold, it has taken me years and years to learn what I have learned. I strengthen and stretch my body every day. You cannot be a handbalancer without discipline.”



“I guess you are right,” said Leopold.

After the show, he was sitting alone in the bleachers for a third time. He was sad, but he was determined. Suddenly, an idea hit him in the eyeball!

“I’ve got it!” he declared. The idea that he got was a good one, he thought. “Pauline the Aerialist gets all kinds of applause. No one thinks she’s scary. Maybe I should be an aerialist like her!”

So off he went to become an aerialist.

Leopold practiced and practiced, and he watched and watched. He watched as Pauline twisted and turned about her hoop. Her legs were so straight and her toes were so pointed. She even hung by one heel! Leopold could not believe how graceful and powerful she was.

Leopold tried all the tricks, but even after practicing and practicing and watching and watching, he was not very good. He got all kinds of blisters and rips, but he was so brave that he didn’t even cry. Still, he performed with Pauline in that afternoon’s show. He was excited, but something was missing. And his hands hurt so badly and his toes weren’t even pointed, so he didn’t get any applause at all.

When Leopold asked Pauline why he wasn’t a good aerialist, Pauline laughed and said, “Leopold, it has taken me years and years to learn what I have learned. I spend hours developing material and I have to keep my body strong. And you can’t be a good aerialist without good form.”

Leopold was so angry. “I am not a good wirewalker, I am not a good handbalancer, and I am not a good aerialist. What do I need to do to get applause again?”

“Why do you even want to be a wirewalker, or a handbalancer, or an aerialist?” she asked him. “You are a clown.”

Leopold sighed. “Because people are scared of clowns. No one laughs anymore.”

“Leopold, you are a silly goose.”

“I’m not a goose.”

“You are silly as one!”

“Why am I silly as a goose?”

“Leopold, many people are scared of clowns. But that’s no reason to stop being one.”

Leopold was about to say something, but Pauline beat him to it.

“You are going to have some rough shows. But don’t let those rough shows get you down. You are a great clown and nothing anyone says should make you forget that. You shouldn’t reject who you are just because of what someone else thinks of you.”

“But, Pauline, everyone is scared of me. Nobody laughs anymore.”

“That’s not true. I think you’re very funny.”

“Yeah, well, you know that I’m not scary.”

“I’m sure many people think you aren’t scary, but you are only focusing on the people who do. I’ll bet that if you stop worrying about people’s fear of clowns, you will find that indeed many people love you!”

Leopold took Pauline’s advice and did that evening’s show the best that he could do it, as a clown. He tried not to think about all the children who were scared of him, and instead thought about those who liked him.



And by golly, he was funny! It was not his best show ever, but he heard a chuckle here and a giggle there. And these chuckles and these giggles soon became laughs, and those soon became guffaws. Leopold was so happy. When he left the ring, he even got applause. Nothing was missing.

He was a clown, and even though some people were scared of him, Leopold always remembered who he was. In spite of the scared people, he stayed happy. And when he was happy, he was funny, which was rather fortunate for Leopold the Clown.