

THE CIRCUS SCHOOL IN MONTREAL



Written by

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of RECLAIM

THE CIRCUS SCHOOL IN MONTREAL

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Chapter 1 Coming to Montreal

New words: seatbelt, fasten, circus, room, station, performer, student, aunt

"Please fasten your seatbelts. We are landing at Montreal." Katie heard these words as she looked down from the window of the plane. Below her was the city of Montreal. She was going to be living here for the next two years.

Katie had come from Holland, where she lived with her family. They all liked going to the Circus, but Katie loved it. She loved it so much that she wanted to be a circus performer.

Katie was going to be a student at the circus school. She would learn how to train her body for circus acts. This circus school did not work with animals. They trained only people. Most of their students found work in a circus. It was a very good school. And it was the only one in Canada.

She picked the circus school in Canada because she had an aunt here. Her aunt lived in Toronto. It was scary to come to a new country, all alone. But in Canada she knew one person. So she had spent two weeks with her Aunt Vera. Her aunt had told her about life in Canada. Now she knew a little about Canada.

After the plane landed, Katie took the bus into Montreal. At the bus station, she was met by Annette. Katie and Annette would be roommates.

The school had told Katie that one of their new students needed a roommate. Katie had called the girl, Annette, and they had talked. The other girl sounded nice.

When Katie and Annette stood face to face, they had to smile.

"Hello, Katie, I'm Annette."

"Hi, Annette. Well, you were right. When I saw your red hair, I knew it had to be you." The girls were both short and slim. They looked as if they could be sisters.

They were going to live in an apartment on Mentana Street, on the first floor. It had two bedrooms. Katie was glad that each of them had her own room.

Their apartment was near the old part of the city. It was not far from the circus school. They could walk there every day.

Katie looked forward to getting to know Montreal. And to do it with a new friend was wonderful.

Katie and Annette were both happy that they had a nice place to live. A place in a new city, with new things to see and do. It was a good feeling.

Chapter 2

A New Friend and a New Home

New words: neighbourhood, playground, concerts, summer, winter, skating, baseball, restaurant, tennis, rink

Katie and Annette had a few days before classes started. At breakfast on their first morning together, they made some plans.

"I want to take a walk around the neighbourhood," said Katie. "I want to know what it's like."

Annette agreed. "Let's start with Lafontaine Park. We're very close to it, so I go there often. There's a bicycle path, a place for concerts, and a children's playground. But the lake is the best of all. It's right in the centre of the park. In summer, you can rent a boat. In winter, it becomes a big skating rink. They have music and a restaurant. You can skate at night, too. There are lights all over the rink."

"It sounds like a wonderful place," said Katie. "Let's go there first. Then we can see more of the neighbourhood. We can go see the school the day after."

On the way to the park, they passed a police station. The building was of grey stone. It looked very new. A large parking lot behind it was full of blue and white police cars. Next to the police station was a fire hall. It was good to live near the police and firemen.

Katie stood still when she saw the size of the park. They passed people playing baseball. They saw people playing tennis, too. The paths were full of people walking their dogs. The playground was full of children having a good time. But the lake was the best part, just as Annette said.

They walked around the lake for a while, watching the little yellow boats. It was a nice day. There were many people on the water.

After a while, the girls left the park. Then they walked for a while through the street. They looked at the many shops and restaurants until they got tired.

"I like the neighbourhood very much," said Katie. "But let's call it a day now. I want to be fresh when we visit the school." Annette agreed that she was tired too. They began to walk back to their apartment.

On the way there they passed a small coffee shop. They went inside and had a snack. "I feel much better now," Annette said. "My feet were getting very tired."

Chapter 3 The Circus School

New words: renovate, gymnastics, climb, dance, ceiling, program, routine, door, rope

The next morning, the girls walked down Berti Street to Old Montreal. They were heading for the Ecole Nationale de Cirque, the national circus school. They would be spending the next two years there. They had both dreamed about this day for a long time.

The school building used to be a train station. It was renovated to fit the needs of the circus school. Annette and Katie went in the door and down the stairs. There they found the office and a lunchroom. They asked where their classes were held. "Upstairs, through the big doors," said the man in the office. His name was Alain. They climbed back up the stairs, and opened the big doors.

They found a wonderful space. Both girls said "Wow" at the same time. "Look at the windows, Katie!" Annette yelled. "They're so big and let in so much light." Katie looked but couldn't speak. She had never seen a room that big.

The room they were in was very, very high. The windows went right from the floor to the ceiling. Ropes hung down from the ceiling. Mats for gymnastics practice were piled in the corners of the room.

"This is the room we will use for almost every class," said Katie. "I can hardly wait to get started."

They went back down the stairs to the office. They asked Alain about the other students. "There are 30 full-time students here. They come from Europe, the United States and Canada," he told them. "Everyone has some training in gymnastics. And many have done some acting. Some students have learned dance."

"Is everyone a full-time student?" asked Annette.

"No," said Alain. "We also have part-time students. They come to the school to learn new routines. They are often older than the daytime students. Many of them are already working in a circus."

The girls headed home. On their way out of the building, they saw a sign. The sign was about programs for children. These classes were held five nights a week. They also saw that classes were open for groups. These were held once a week, in the evening. "The group classes will be for people who want to have some fun. I bet they love the circus, just like we do," said Katie.



Chapter 4

First Term

New words: muscles, exercise, difficult, term, juggle, holiday, explore, harbour, tourist, Christmas

For the next three months, Katie and Annette worked hard. They had classes five days a week from 9 o'clock to 4 o'clock. They became friends with the other students.

Each day began with warm-up exercises. Then they moved on to different things. Some worked on dance movements, while others worked on gymnastic routines.

The teachers spent time with each person, helping them over the tough spots. Katie grew close to one of her teachers. Her name was Suzanne. She came from France. "We come from the same part of the world," she said to Katie. "We are both far away from home."

Annette also had one teacher she liked best. Her name was Joy. She came from Texas in the United States. Joy began each lesson by asking: "How are your muscles today? I know they will be sore for the first few weeks. That won't last long. Soon you won't feel them at all."

The timetable for each afternoon was also busy. Students got together to do gymnastic routines. Jugglers worked throwing clubs. They laughed when they missed a throw. Some people began learning how to walk on a tightrope. Everything they learned was important. They would use all of these routines again and again. Everyone hoped to work in a circus some day.

Annette and Katie hurried through lunch so they could see the sights of Old Montreal. The old harbour was very close to the school. They liked watching the boat traffic from the shore. They saw ships from many countries and also from Canada. Some of the ships were as large as a building.

Old Montreal is the place where tourists come when they visit the city. Some of the old houses close to the river have been renovated. They are now shops and restaurants.

"Let's just look around a bit," Katie would say. "We don't have to buy anything."

"Okay," Annette would agree. "But maybe you'll find something to send back home. I bet your family would like a gift from Canada." Katie would smile. She would look for a small gift for her family. She thought about home often.

The girls liked Jacques Cartier Square. Some of the circus school students tried their routines there. Katie and Annette dreamed of doing the same next summer. "We will put on a really good show for the tourists," they agreed.

Both Annette and Katie missed their families. Annette phoned home once a week. Katie wrote letters. Christmas was coming soon. Katie would not be going home yet. Annette's family was coming to Montreal for the holidays.

Chapter 5 Christmas in Montreal

New words: messy, decorations, popcorn, tinsel, trapeze, silver, angel, wall

When Katie and Annette looked out the window, all they saw was white. Katie had seen snow before, in Holland, but not so much of it. "It looks so pretty," she said.

"Just you wait," said Annette. "It will look messy very soon."

The day before, Annette had gone to buy a small Christmas tree. Christmas would come in two days. They had made the decorations for the tree. Now they were ready to put the decorations up. Annette had made long strings of popcorn. Katie's mother had sent chocolate rings from Holland in red and green paper. They hung the rings from the tree. They hung tinsel all over. And on top they put a silver angel. They had found the angel in a little shop down the street.

When they were done, they both knew their little tree was very pretty. "You know, Annette," said Katie, "now this place feels more like home!"

Katie had sent letters to Holland. Her family had written to her and sent pretty cards. Annette had cards too. They hung the cards on the wall. The room looked so nice today.

Then the phone rang. It was Katie's Aunt Vera from Toronto.

"Hello, Aunt Vera," Katie said. "How nice to hear from you. How are you? Merry Christmas. Yes, it snowed here last night, and outside looks all white. It is very cold, but inside it is warm. Our tree looks so lovely. We don't have school for more than a week. We have learned a lot of new things."

Annette said, "Katie, tell her about the juggling."

"Right, Aunt Vera, we are juggling four balls each now. And we are also juggling with clubs. We are starting trapeze very soon. Suzanne, our teacher, says that our gymnastics are much better. When I arrived from Holland, I thought I knew gymnastics. But now I know that I have much more to learn. It is hard work, but it is a lot of fun. Well, Aunt Vera, thank you for calling. Happy New Year."

Then it was time to go to the station. Annette's father and mother were arriving in Montreal. They wanted to spend Christmas with Annette and see where she lived. They had not seen each other in many weeks.

Katie and Annette were such good friends now. And good friends want to know more about each other. So Katie wanted to meet Annette's parents. And they had heard so much about Annette's new friend. Annette talked about Katie all the time.

The four of them had a lovely time. They all went to church together on Christmas Day. Notre-Dame Church in Old Montreal was very beautiful. Then they had lunch in a downtown restaurant, high above the city. The restaurant was in a tower. The sun was in the sky. So they could see for miles. Katie had not known that Montreal was such a big city.

When Annette's parents went back to the Gaspé, the girls were sad to see them go. Annette's mother asked Katie to visit them in the summer. Katie looked forward to seeing the Gaspé. Annette had told her so much about it. It sounded great. After the city, some time in the country was a nice idea.



Chapter 6 Getting Better

New words: acrobat, special, costume, designing, public, performance

After the holidays, Katie and Annette went back to class. "We should work on a special act," said Annette. "Maybe we could begin to zero in on something for the summer."

"We're pretty good at juggling," Katie replied. "We could prepare an act to use in . Jacques Cartier Square. The park will be a good place to practice. We won't break anything if we miss a throw."

"Great idea!" said Annette. "I'd also like to become a better acrobat. Are you willing to work with me on that?"

"Of course I am," Katie answered. "We'll be good enough to get a job. A real job in a real circus!"

Classes finished at the end of April. Some of the students were going to leave school now. They were ready to give a public performance in the gym. This would be early in May. Katie and Annette helped them. Next year they would be the ones leaving.

In the summer, the girls chose to do a juggling routine. They were working in the park every day. Many people stopped to watch them.

"Let's wear costumes," Annette said.

"Great idea, Annette," Katie agreed. "I can sew. I'll make some cotton costumes. They will be easy to keep clean."

A few weeks later, the girls moved their juggling act to Old Montreal. They chose a spot on the street. They put a big red sunhat in front of them. The tourists liked their performance. They would throw quarters and loonies (dollars) into the hat. The girls had fun, and made some money too.

Annette's family had asked the girls to visit the Gaspé. They chose the last two weeks of August.

The holiday was a lot of fun. They went on bicycle rides, and long walks by the shore. They watched big ships heading for the harbour in Montreal. "We'll see them again when we go back to the city," Annette laughed.

In September, the girls began their last year at the circus school. They felt that their work was getting better and better.

"We will learn more about makeup and costumes," said Katie. "We'll practice making up each other's faces." The girls laughed a lot as they tried out the makeup.

Annette was good at designing costumes. Katie was good at sewing them. The two girls were a very good team indeed.



Chapter 7 Beginning the Last Year

New words: clown, joey, toby, accident, props, pail, peg

Katie and Annette came back in time for the start of class. They were in their last year at the school. They knew they would have to work very hard.

Annette was learning to be a clown. Being a clown looks easy, but it isn't. Most clowns do not use words. They talk with their bodies. Annette had to learn how to say things without words. And she had to pick a costume and a face.

Joy and Annette worked together on Annette's clown routines. Annette learned a lot from her teacher. Joy told her: "There are many kinds of clowns. Some wear white face makeup. There are also clowns with happy faces. In the circus all clowns are called joeys. There are also sad-faced clowns. Circus people call them tobys. But all clowns make people laugh. There have been clowns as long as there have been people. People need to laugh. So people need clowns."

Annette said: "It sounds like clowns are very important to the circus. They are like the pegs a circus hangs on."

Some clowns work with props. Props are the things clowns use in their acts. Sometimes the prop is a pail filled with bits of paper. The clown pretends it's filled with water. He or she throws what's in the pail at someone. People laugh when they see that there's no water in the pail.

Katie was working on her juggling. There are always juggling acts in a circus. Juggling is something that must be worked at all the time. Katie practiced juggling every day for hours. She juggled with balls, and clubs, and potatoes and batteries. She worked with everything she could throw up in the air.

Acrobats must practice every day, too. Often acrobats get tired. When they get tired, it's easy to have an accident. One time when she was practicing, Katie slipped and fell. She hurt a muscle in her arm. The doctor told her to put ice on her arm. "Oh, Annette," she said, "I'm cold." Katie was cold all the time in winter. Winters in Holland are much warmer than in Montreal.

"Come on, Katie, don't be a baby," Annette told her. "The ice will fix the muscle. Just do what the doctor tells you." Then she smiled. "Would you like some ice cream?"

Katie laughed. She loved ice cream. And she could eat it even when she was cold.

While the muscle was healing, Katie couldn't juggle. She worried that she would forget her routines. But the teachers told her that she could do it all again. "You'll just have to work harder," they said. "But I'm already working as hard as I can," Katie cried to Annette. "How can I work harder?"

After a few weeks, Katie's muscle had healed. She went right back to work. She was happy to see that the teachers were right. It all came back to her when she threw the first club. It wasn't easy, but she practiced long hours.

Both girls also worked on a tightrope act. To do this, they had to learn to walk on a rope. At first, the rope was close to the floor. They learned how to walk well on the rope. Then the teachers put the rope up higher. And higher. And higher still.

At last the tightrope was far from the floor. Annette nearly yelled when she was high up the first time. "Don't look down, Katie," she said, "it's scary"

"I know," said Katie, "the teachers told us that when we began." But when she was up high, she looked down too. Annette was so right. It was scary. She was happy there was a big net to catch them if they fell.

Their last year had a very full timetable. The school was preparing them for a job in a real circus. And they knew that they would go on learning there, too. Circus people never stop learning.



Chapter 8 Graduation

New words: pyramid, bottom, shoe, cheer, clap, graduate, proud, mistake

Katie and Annette were very tired. They had both been getting ready for the graduation performance. The whole graduating class was going to take part in it. Katie was to juggle and be part of the acrobatic pyramid. Annette was also in the pyramid. And she was going to be a clown, too.

The pyramid was made up of five people on the bottom, holding up four more people. On top of the four were three people. The three held up two. The two held up one on top. The girl on top was quite light. While she was on top, she did a handstand.

The pyramid looks very hard to do. And it is very hard, for the people on the bottom. All the acrobats were dressed in bright colours. Their special costumes were very tight. The pyramid came at the end of the performance.

The program started with the clowns. Annette was dressed as an old man. He was trying to pick up his hat. Every time he came near his hat, his big shoe kicked it away again. And again. And again. It was very funny. It made everyone laugh.

Katie and another student juggled with clubs. At first they did it slowly, but then it went faster and faster. It all went well. "Boy, am I ever glad we didn't drop any clubs," laughed Katie.

There were many people to see the performance. They clapped their hands and cheered. They loved all the different things they saw. All the students performed well. There were no mistakes. All the performers were happy with the way things went. The teachers were happy, too. They also cheered and clapped loudly.

Annette's parents were there to see her perform. They clapped more loudly than anyone else. They yelled: "Go for it, Annette, you're doing great!" They were very proud of her. It made Annette feel very happy.

Katie's parents could not come to see her. It cost too much money to fly to Montreal. But they called her. Katie had some very good news for them. Suzanne, her teacher, had written to a circus in France. The circus wrote back that it had jobs for both girls. Katie and Annette could join the circus right after graduation. They had been trained well at the circus school. A circus needs people who have had good training, and who love the circus.

Katie and Annette were very happy. They had jobs now. The circus performed all over Europe in the big cities. This was what they had worked so hard for. A job with a circus! Now they could travel and see the world.

They would learn more every day. And one day they would return to the circus school. The teachers at the school would help them make their routines better. Annette and Katie would always be a part of the circus school.

Learning Ideas

1. On a world map, find Holland and trace Katie/s trip from Holland to Toronto, and then to Montreal.
2. If Katie and Annette went walking in your neighbourhood, what would they see?
3. What do you like best about the circus?
4. Do you have favourite ways of exercising? What are they?
5. Do you celebrate a special time during the winter? What do you do?
6. What kinds of costume would you design for Katie and Annette?
7. Can you think of other props that would be fun for clowns to use in their act?

New Words

Chapter 1 seatbelt, fasten, circus, room, station, performer, student, aunt

Chapter 2 concerts, summer, winter, skating, baseball, rink, tennis, playground, neighbourhood, restaurant

Chapter 3 renovate, gymnastics, climb, dance, ceiling, program, routine, door, rope

Chapter 4 muscles, exercise, Christmas, term, juggle, holiday, explore, harbour, tourist

Chapter 5 messy, decorations, popcorn, tinsel, silver, angel, wall, trapeze

Chapter 6 acrobat, special, costume, designing, public, performance

Chapter 7 clown, joey, toby, decide, accident, props, pail, peg

Chapter 8 pyramid, bottom, shoe, cheer, clap, proud, mistake, graduate