The Ringmaster

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Abstract

Life is a circus, whirlwind-paced; and Time, in a tall silk hat, Cues the acts with the snap of a whip, held in his practiced hand...
number. You cut off the toe that corresponds to the rat’s number.”

“And you cut the toes off?”

“No... The experienced help does that when they’re still alive. I don’t get them till they’re dead.”

“Oh... Yes... And — why are the rats numbered?”

“So I can tell which one died.”

“It makes a difference?”

“Of course.”

“Yes... One more thing — what are the rats used for?”

“Experiments. They’re injected with typhoid germs and then exposed to atomic radiation.”

“I see. — You’re trying to cure them then — to aid human medicine.”

“No, we just see how long it takes them to die. Then I record their numbers and throw them in the garbage can.”

“Oh.”

“I haven’t always worked with rats. I started out on Droso-
phi la — you know — fruit flies.”

“And did you spread their toes apart too.”

“ Heck no, I just put them to sleep with chloroform. —
Well, here’s my stop. It’s been nice talking to you.”

“Yes...”

The Ringmaster

by Bruce Butterfield

Life is a circus, whirlwind-paced; and Time, in a tall silk hat,
Cues the acts with the snap of a whip, held in his practiced
hand.

Wearing our pointed caps and dressed in ruffs, like
clowns,

We take our turns in the ring, to the blare of a skull-

fac ed band.

Birth and struggle and death—
Through our paces we go;
Love and labor and loss—
These are the tricks we know.