Being a Safety Net is Hard

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The bright lights, the booming sound, the cheer of the crowd, and the anticipation of your greatest feats. The people come for you. To see you and what you have committed your life to. The ring of the circus horns and the stomping of the stampede of events. You are the trapeze artist. The most daring, most humble, and most envied. You live a life of excitement, twirling and flipping through it. Swinging from one trial to the next with the utmost of confidence and ease. Your flashy costume is a deceiving front. Brilliant hues of red, gold, and orange, you are the fire of the night and the main attraction of the show. In the hearts of your fans, you are flawless and invincible.

But I know better.

The lights dim. Spotlight. You fly through the ceiling of the tent, somersault, flip, boom, crash. Your hands release the first swing, the audience gasps at the unknowing darkness in front of you. As your hands reach and you begin to descend, a hand suddenly grabs yours. The crowd cheers as the spotlight reveals a fair hand clutching yours; the flood of the tent lights show an alluring, swinging beauty who holds you safe from the fall.

But I’ve seen you fall.

Like her short dress, her smile shimmers in the light. The “ohs” of the crowd encourage you and your counterpart to attempt more dangerous tricks. I close my eyes, scared and waiting for when you need me most. I am your most trusted friend, reliable to a fault. I have given you the extra bounce you needed when you thought your life was over. But you don’t even give me a second thought. Your main focus is she. Your life depends on what she does, her moves, her jumps, her flips. Sometimes she lets you down. She turns away or she’ll yell at you. I have seen her let you fall. But she is your priority.

I don’t understand.

The life of a safety net is not a life well-lived. My life is put on hold just so
I can be sure that you’re ok. I am not the priority, I am the option, and yet I am the most vital element in your act. If you fall, I catch you. If you feel like you can’t continue on, I give you the extra jump to get you back in the game. I applaud with the crowd at the success you achieve with your daring show. I am always there for you, in smiles and tears, in anger and in fear. You tell me I’m beautiful and perfect, the kind of person you’d want in your future, or the best for someone else. Yet I’m here for you.

I’m tired of being second place.

I may not be center stage to your life. I know that I don’t wear the glitz of the circus or take the daring risks. But I could if you’d take the time to see me for me. I wonder why you wouldn’t want to be with someone who has never let you fall or would die to see you hurt. I could fit the outfit, I could learn the routine, I would be humbled in front of the audience and share the happiness of our success.

But you choose her. And I am still your safety net, here for when you fall next.

Ashleigh Mills is a senior in rhetorical studies and English education from Des Moines, Iowa. Her hobbies include reading, creative writing, music, her dog, Teddy, and extreme skateboarding. She is an avid watcher of terrible reality television, plays a mandolin, and enjoys being with her family. She truly believes that the best stories come from a broken heart, and that any and all writing is a brief snippet of a person’s soul and mind.