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Franz Babel, a Justice on the Republic's High Court of Final Supplications, was a serial seducer. His third wife, like the previous two, refused to engage in atypical forms of sex with him. Unable to experiment at home, the elderly jurist found unconventional partners elsewhere, typically in traveling circuses.

Aware that carousing carried risks for a High Court Justice, especially a septuagenarian who espoused a belief in the sanctity of marriage, Babel was careful to wear disguises and use assumed names when on the prowl.

One evening, after a tedious hearing, he donned a fake beard and taxied to the Fettig Fairgrounds, the Capital City's mecca for traveling circuses. His heart fluttered in feral anticipation as he purchased a front row, center aisle ticket. The featured act was The Flying Trotskys, a troupe of trapeze artists comprised of five men in tuxedos and thirteen women in skimpy outfits. Squinting through opera glasses, he scanned meticulously until Isabella Trotsky came into view. Her powerful mid-air twists and leaps, muscular arms, taunt thighs, and bulging calves excited him. Closing his eyes for a brief reverie, he imagined a post-performance tryst with the flexible acrobat, replete with positions he had never seen before. Opening his eyes, he observed Trotsky hurtling airborne toward the waiting arms of a male trapeze artist. Unable to contain himself, he hastily removed a notepad from his overcoat and scribbled this message:

Mon Amour. Your moves are magnificent! You belong on the stage. As a playwright, producer, and director, I would like to meet you after the show to discuss a starring role in my next play, "In the Eyes of the Beholder." You will see me in the first row. I am the handsome man with a beard and red beret. Wave to convey acceptance of my offer. From a

secret admirer who is no longer a secret—Ishmael Cervantes.

Babel handed the message to a male Flying Trotsky temporarily stationed on the ground. Pointing to the object of his lust as she dangled upside down from a flimsy rope, the panting Justice said in a contrived Latinate accent, “Señor, I would be honored if you deliver this to that muscular lady up there when you re-ascend.” He watched the tuxedoed courier take flight and seamlessly deliver the note to his target. After she appeared to read the missive, he detected a faint wave. Although the gesture was less enthusiastic than Babel hoped for, it nevertheless buoyed his spirits. As Isabella Trotsky dangled upside down from a trapeze, the serial seducer thought: *After I have introduced her to my incomparable repertoire, she will wave uncontrollably as I bid her adieu.*

After the performance, Babel approached the acrobat outside her dressing room with beret in hand. Barely five feet tall, he stood on his toes to make himself appear taller. Looking up to Trotsky, the Justice effusively praised her moves, then identified himself as Cervantes, the note’s author. “At your service,” he intoned while gracefully bowing to feign respect for his prey. Before Trotsky had an opportunity to speak, he invited her to a high-end restaurant, ostensibly to discuss the lead role in his fictive play but actually to ply her with strong drinks, a key part of his modus operandi. The trapeze artist conditionally accepted the invitation, stating that they would have to dine in the dressing room since she lacked evening wear suitable for dining out. “Wherever we meet, I shall be at your service,” he cooed.

The supple woman took Babel by his tiny hand and led him into the dressing room. Things proceeded briskly from there. After ingesting a few crackers, the couple shared drinks from a bottle of cheap gin Trotsky kept on hand for such occasions. When both were suitably lubricated, they negotiated ground rules for foreplay, after-play, and

other aspects of the tryst. Asked whether he had a prophylactic, he told Trotsky, "You needn't worry, my angel, as I'm a skilled practitioner of the ancient art of *coitus interruptus*." As fate would have it, Babel was too excited to withdraw prior to seeding the trapeze artist with a volume of spermatozoa too small to notice.

Sated and desperate to leave, Babel straightened his fake beard, which had shifted during the raucous affair; kissed Trotsky gently on the forehead; nibbled on each ear; tenderly patted her cleft chin; and massaged both of the trapeze artist's biceps. Wishing to create the impression he wasn't a man who engaged in one-night encounters with floozies, the Justice disingenuously said he looked forward to another rendezvous when the circus returned to the Capital City. She politely rejected the overture, stating that she had no interest in seeing him again. "Sexual repetition with the same person is boring," were her last words as she showed him the door.

Babel felt soiled by the trapeze artist's post-coital remark. He skulked from the circus grounds, wondering how a woman with whom he had shared his aged body could be so insensitive. *Perhaps the floozie noticed the beard-shift or prefers taller men*, he rationalized while returning to his domicile and third wife.