

Episode 205b - CIRCUS OF DREAMS

The Tales of Sage and Savant
Season 2 Episode 5 pt b

Created by

Eddie Louise & Chip Michael

Written by

Eddie Louise

785 San Remo. Irvine, CA 92606
970-576-8917
Eddie@SageAndSavant.com

ACT ONE

FADE IN: MUSIC

NARRATOR

Greetings and welcome to the audio-aetheric transmission THE TALES OF SAGE AND SAVANT, a Twinstar production. This broadcast is brought to you on the first of each month from the Twinstar Studios in sunny Southern California. Our tale stars Eddie Louise as Doctor Petronella Sage, Chip Michael as Professor Erasmus Savant, Emily Riley Piatt as Mx Abigail Entwhistle, and myself, Justin Bremer as your humble Narrator. It is our pleasure to bring you the second installment in our special double episode for the holiday season. The special program, entitled CIRCUS OF DREAMS is sponsored by EDGE SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY PUBLISHING and features the music of THE NATHANIEL JOHNSTON BAND. And now, without further ado, we bring you THE TALES OF SAGE AND SAVANT.

THEME SONG

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

When last we saw our heroes they had recovered from the cholera to discover they had joined the circus. To be more specific, they had inhabited the bodies of a husband and wife team. Savant is a marksman with rifle, pistol, knives and bow and arrows. Sage is his shapely and enthusiastic target. As you might imagine, this has caused some level of consternation. Doctor Sage is not all that fond of being a pincushion, and though Professor Savant has begun to master the fine motor skills possessed by the body he is currently inhabiting, this particular couple are well known in the troupe for their tempestuous relationship and the progress has been fraught with contentiousness.

(MORE)

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

There have been many distressingly public rows, not the least of which involved Sage moving into separate quarters. The Doctor claimed to need personal space as she was unused to sharing a bed with a man. In reality, she needed the space to overcome the lusts of this body. It is obvious to this narrator that these bodies possess keen sexual appetites, placing our heroes at disadvantage when attempting to work.

SCENE: THE PROFESSOR AND THE DOCTOR ARE AT THE BOW OF THE BOAT IN THE IMPROVISED PRACTICE AREA THAT WAS CREATED FOR THE SICKEND MARKSMAN TO PRACTICE AND REGAIN HIS STRENGTH AFTER BEATING THE CHOLERA. THE PROFESSOR IS DRESSED IN A BILLOWING RED SILK SHIRT, BLACK SERGE TROUSERS AND BLACK BROCADE WAISTCOAT. HIS GLOSSY BLACK HAIR AND MUSTACHE HAVE BEEN OILED AND STYLED TO PERFECTION. THE DOCTOR IS IN A RED AND ORANGE SATIN CORSETED LEOTARD WITH A SPANGLED MIDNIGHT BLUE DRAPE AROUND THE HIPS CALLING ATTENTION TO HER ATTRIBUTES - SPECIFICALLY, HER FISHNET CLAD EXPOSED LEGS.

SOUND: Riverboat sounds, Knife thunks.

DR SAGE

{Yelps} Eek! Careful, Erasmus! That nearly pinned me.

PROF SAVANT

I am being careful, Petra. The object is for me to place the knives as close to your body as possible for dramatic effect. If you wish to avoid getting stuck, you really must stop all the wriggling and heaving bosoms.

DR SAGE

My bosoms are heaving because I am hyperventilating! You try standing still, wearing nothing but a scrap of spangled satin and a pair of fishnet tights, whilst cocking a leg suggestively and sticking out your chest just to stare down the concourse towards a madman planning to throw viciously sharp knives at you and NOT have heaving bosoms!

PROF SAVANT

Yes, I know but you have watched me practice, I am certain I have gained the mastery of aim needed to begin to rehearse the actual act. After all tomorrow we will have to perform it for real, and I haven't even begun to rehearse with the firearms yet.

DR SAGE

Firearms?!

PROF SAVANT

Yes, didn't I tell you? Last night I did as you suggested and plied Mule Jenny with alcohol and romantic attention to get her to describe the full extent of our act. Which, by the by, is a low to which I shall never again stoop. It is immoral to take advantage of a young girl like that. The mere fact that she was emboldened anew by my attentions sickens me.

DR SAGE

I am sorry. It was entirely inappropriate for me to suggest it, but I was desperate to know what we were facing.

PROF SAVANT

It would be easier to hold off the ardor of that particular filly if you would move back into the marital bed.

DR SAGE

You know as well as I, Erasmus, why I cannot do that. We are scholars, and the appetites of the body should not be allowed to overwhelm our senses. You are correct however, we mustn't lose sight of ourselves and our values, no matter the provocation.

PROF SAVANT

Yes, well, I am glad we are in agreement about young Jenny at least. So, shall I tell you what I found out last night?

(MORE)

PROF SAVANT (CONT'D)

Can you guess the full scope of our act and what the dramatic conclusion is?

DR SAGE

You shooting an apple off my head whilst the band plays the William Tell Overture?

PROF SAVANT

No! Better! It involves knife throwing and the bow and arrow display, and for the finale - firearms! This is a full-ring act entitled Gunpowder Gallant. You are tied to a broken wagon wheel and the clowns portray viscous red Indians intent on doing you harm. First, I throw the knives to obtain your release. Then, as the clowns jump and cavort about, I use bow and arrows to shoot strategically thrown targets. As each target falls, so too does one of your attackers. When I have eliminated them all, you mount my horse, stand in the saddle and gallop around the ring holding up various targets whilst I shoot them from a small stand in the center using a succession of firearms. In the end you vault off of the horse and flip into my arms for a dramatic kiss!

DR SAGE

That is impossible! I can't ride, you can't shoot.

PROF SAVANT

Haven't you noticed, Petra, how athletic the body you are occupying is?

DR SAGE

Well, yes, but...

PROF SAVANT

No, buts Petra. Your physical form is in peak shape. This body knows what to do. Our challenge is to stop thinking problems for ourselves. Have you read the teachings of Zen Buddhism?

DR SAGE

Briefly, years ago. I do not see the benefit in emptying my mind; thoughts are too precious to waste.

PROF SAVANT

Zen does not teach you to destroy thought, Petra. Simply to not let our thoughts, worries and preoccupations control us. In this case, if you could clear away the worries of Petra Sage and allow the natural grace and practiced showmanship of Hildy's body to take precedence, then you might find you are entirely capable of many things, including trick-riding. Now, I really must practice the bow and arrow bit.

SOUND: arrow twanging

NARRATOR

And so they passed their last day on the riverboat as they approached Arrowrock and disembarkation. As the paddle wheeler approached the dock, the circus troupe broke into a flurry of activity in preparation. The roustabouts were pulling crates next to the gangway. Performers were packing trunks and adding them to the pile. The Equestrian Manager Hiram Marks issued the call for all performers to assemble in the salon where he would make announcements and hand out assignments for the evening. Sage and Savant joined the press of people streaming up the stairs into the center of the ship.

SOUND: People moving up stairs en mass

SCENE: IN THE SALON OF THE RIVERBOAT. HIRAM MARKS, A MAN OF MIDDLE HEIGHT AND COLORING WITH DRAMATIC MUTTONCHOPS SIDEBURNS STANDS ON A CHAIR SURROUNDED ON ALL SIDES BY CIRCUS PERFORMERS.

HIRAM MARKS

Alright, ladies and gents, listen up. Mr. C.

(MORE)

HIRAM MARKS (CONT'D)
has gone ahead to prepare the burg
of Arrowrock for a parade tonight
to drum up business for a matinee
showing on the morrow. Because of
this, the roustabouts will offload
your trunks whilst all performers
participate in the parade. I want
Gus and half your boys to lead off
and warm the crowd up, followed by
the band, play something jaunty
boys, then Raul and the aerialists
and tumblers, Mule Jenny and two of
your mules, then let's have Rosa
and our sideshow troupe...

JENNY
{Interrupting} Hey! I don't like
that. Folks will assume I'm part of
the side show if I'm separated out
from the rest of the equestrians!

HIRAM MARKS
Hush up Jenny, the order is being
determined by the unloading order
and your mules are closest to the
gangway. Now, as I was saying,
after the Sideshow we'll have
Chester and the big cats, followed
by the rest of the equestrian gang
- Sasha and Tasha - let's have you
two standing in the saddle - and
finally, Tubbs and Hildy - Tubbs
let's have you mounted and Hildy on
the wheel in the wagon so you can
demonstrate just a hint of your
knife skills. The other half of the
clowns will bring up the rear and
paper the locals with handbills for
our performances. Are there any
questions?

GUS
Yeah, boss. When we gonna get our
supper 'midst all this folderol?

HIRAM MARKS
Don't you worry, Gus. Cookie will
be setting the mess tent and you'll
get your supper right after the
parade. Anyone else?

DR SAGE
Anything in particular about what
we should wear?

HIRAM MARKS

Full parade uniforms for all Hildy, you know that. Feathers, spangles and paint - that's what brings in the punters.

DR SAGE

I meant - do you have a preference of colors, Mr. Marks, I have green and blue, orange and red or black and white to choose from.

HIRAM MARKS

What's gotten into you Hildy? You know to call me Hiram. And as usual, we wear the orange and red on first night, green and blue for the second, and black and white for closing night. If I want anything to change, I'll tell you.

PROF SAVANT

{whispering} So I guess that means we wear the Orange and Red?

DR SAGE

{Whispering} He really wasn't very specific. I suppose the parade qualifies as first night - but does that mean we change to the green and blue tomorrow for the actual performances?

HIRAM MARKS

Alright, gang. Finish up your packing tasks and assemble at the end of the pier immediately after docking. Gus, send one of the boys for the handbills. Look lively now.

SOUND: Group disperses

JENNY

Tubbs, would you be so kind as to help me get Treacle and Licorice down the pier? You know how skittish those mules are on the docks. They just can't stand the hollow sound of their hooves echoing over the water.

PROF SAVANT

Well, I was going to help Hildy...

JENNY

Oh, Hildy won't mind, will you Hildy? After all, the roustabouts will bring out the cart, and Butterscotch is just the sweetest horse, why even an imbecile could lead him down the docks.

DR SAGE

I am not an imbecile!

JENNY

Of course you aren't, Hildy. Why ever would you think such a thing. Do you see, Tubbs? Hildy said she can manage Butterscotch without you.

PROF SAVANT

I don't think that is quite...

JENNY

{Interrupting} Thank you for lending me your man, Hildy. See you in the parade!

NARRATOR

And without waiting to see the reaction, the little vixen attaches herself to the Professor's arm like a limpet and drags him away.

HIRAM MARKS

Is everything alright with you Hildy? You've been a little off since your sickness.

DR SAGE

What do you mean, off?

HIRAM MARKS

Mule Jenny, for one thing. I've never known you to suffer nonsense like that from the girl. If you don't watch out, she steal away your man.

DR SAGE

My man? He cannot be stolen. I don't own him.

HIRAM MARKS

Well, suit yourself, but I don't want our showpiece act broken apart because of domestic troubles. So, for the sake of the act, keep an eye on that man, and make sure he maintains a healthy distance from the type of temptation being peddled by young Jenny.

SOUND: riverboat docking, etc.

NARRATOR

The concern of the manager has rattled our Doctor more than she would care to admit. As she made her way down the stairs to prepare for docking she considered the parameters of fidelity for transmigrators. If the Professor, in the body of Tubbs has congress with the girl, is it infidelity? Sage is not Hildy, Erasmus is not Tubbs, so there is no injury to Sage if Tubbs' is bodily unfaithful. On the other hand, Erasmus is her oldest and closest friend, and given time there might be more between them. Would he be committing an infidelity against her should he choose comfort in the girl's arms, especially since Sage herself had expressly stated that their married host bodies did not create an automatic condition for marital congress between the travelers. It is a confusing tangle and so we will leave the Doctor to her worries and pause for a short musical break.

MUSICAL GUEST INTRO MUSIC

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

And now dear friends we invite you to listen to the talented melodic expressions of THE NATHANIEL JOHNSTONE BAND.

MUSICAL GUEST

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

And now, back to our story.

ACT TWO

INTRO MUSIC

NARRATOR

When we left our friends, they were
struggling with the marital mess
they inherited from their host
bodies, but that moral conundrum
has been set aside in the
excitement of the circus parade.

SCENE: MAIN STREET OF A DUSTY SMALL TOWN. THE SINGLE STREET IS LINED MOSTLY BY WOODEN CLAPBOARD BUILDINGS AND A COUPLE OF FINE BRICK INSTITUTIONS. THE CROWD LINES BOTH SIDES OF THE BOULEVARD, CLAD IN FARMER'S CLOTHES, DENIM AND COTTON, STRAW HATS. THE CIRCUS PARADE PROGRESSES SLOWLY DOWN THE CENTER OF THE STREET, THE MOOD IS RAUCOUS. IT IS TWILIGHT AND THE SEQUINED CIRCUS COSTUMES BLAZE WITH THE REFLECTED LIGHT OF THE SUNSET.

SOUND: Brass band, crowd cheers, parade noise

NARRATOR

The Doctor is mounted, in all her pulchritudinous glory, on a great spangled wheel carried forth in a flat-bedded cart pulled by two of Jenny's mules. The wheel itself is suspended from a stand and mounted via bearings allowing it to spin so that Petra's head is now up, now down, her arms and legs braced outwards like Gray's famous anatomy of man. Twenty paces back, Erasmus sits astride a great palomino stallion. Over his dark vest and red silk shirt, he has added a magnificent fringed coat, the strands of which sway dramatically each time he flings a knife at the rapidly spinning form of his partner. Six knives fly. Six knives sink home into the wheel mere inches from flesh. Then, a small denim clad boy flips the lever that stops the spinning and as soon as Petra is arranged suitably upright, pulls free the knives and jumps off the cart to run them back to the Professor.

(MORE)

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

In between the vertigo inducing demonstrations of knife-throwing skill, our heroes wave to the cheering crowd and smile until their cheeks cramp.

PROF SAVANT

{Calling to Petra} The crowd seems quite impressed!

DR SAGE

Don't let it go to your head. I am quite sure they are as excited by my bare legs as they are by your knife skills.

PROF SAVANT

{Laughing} Ah, Petra, how you keep me humble.

SOUND: Parade fades out.

SCENE: THE CIRCUS CAMP. A BIG-TOP TENT SURROUNDED BY A DOZEN SMALLER TENTS, HOLDING PENS FOR THE HORSES AND MULES, A MESS TENT, AND CONCESSIONS TENTS PAINTED WITH BOLDFACE PROCLAMATIONS OF POPCORN! LEMONADE! HOT DOGS!

SOUND: Camp building, tent raising noise.

NARRATOR

After the excitement of the parade, the hustle of the camp seems calm for our transmigrationists. The roustabouts have raised the big top and a series of smaller tents that will serve as concessions, side-show and housing for the performers for the next week. The final set up will continue through the night and into the morning - ending with the adorning of the grounds with banners and flags, the popping of corn and rope-line footpaths. For now though, it is enough to get costume trunks and sleeping cots settled and then adjourn to the mess tent for dinner. Cookie is not a gourmet chef, but he is a whiz with stew and biscuits. The chatter in the tent is lively and full of excitement.

(MORE)

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

After nine days on the boat - three to make the trip and 6 quarantined thanks to the cholera, it is a great relief to be on terra firma.

SCENE: INSIDE MESS TENT. PERFORMERS IN VARIOUS STAGES OF CASUAL DRESS ARE GATHERED AROUND LONG TABLES MADE OF PLANKS LAID OVER SAWHORSES. GUS, THE CLOWN, WEARING A WIFE-BEATER AND DUNGAREES IS STANDING AT THE END OF THE TABLE, A STEAMING CUP OF COFFEE IN HIS HAND, TELLING A TALL TALE.

SOUND: Noisy group around dinner table, hearty laughter

GUS

And then he says, he says as straight as a judge, says he... Because Tuesday's your day in the barrel! {Laughs at own joke}

SOUND: Laughter

PROF SAVANT

{to Sage} That was a bit off-color.

DR SAGE

{To Savant} I find it refreshing. These people do not spend time trying to prove superiority or acting according to frivolous social niceties.

ROSA THE BEARDED LADY

Did I ever tell you about the time I was mistaken for the Viscount D'Aubrey at the University? I was younger, and still slender in a boyish manner, and when my beard first came in it was quite soft and winsome in a classical sort of way. I was quite proud of it and would oil it and curl it to fine affect. Well, I was taking a stroll by the strand when a very pretty young woman approached me and in the most patrician of tones demanded that I make an honest woman of her.

SOUND: Laughter

HIRAM MARKS

Now that would have been a trick!

SOUND: LAUGHTER

GUS
Hey! I've paid for that trick!

SOUND: MORE LAUGHTER

ROSA THE BEARDED LADY
Alright boys, settle down, it isn't what you think. So I played along, right, to see what she was on about, and if I am honest, she was quite comely...

SOUND: CALLS OF HUBBA, HUBBA, ETC.

ROSA THE BEARDED LADY
So, I follow her down the strand over the Savoy and onto University grounds. The entire way she is chattering about some fork or other and the need to shut up a most irritating creature. At this point I am imagining having to butcher a pig with a fork.

GUS
I've done that - it ain't easy

SOUND: LAUGHTER

ROSA THE BEARDED LADY
So, she drags me up the quad, mind you I've never been to a university before so I am well and truly impressed with all the tall white buildings, all the columns and such. The girl keeps Viscount this and Viscount that, so I do my best to act nonchalant as she pulls me into a great marble hall bristling with statues and ferns. Up the stairs we climb on carpets softer than my bed until we enter an antechamber full of serious looking students in black robes and tasseled caps.

(MORE)

ROSA THE BEARDED LADY (CONT'D)

The girl who has my elbow in a vise
tows me in front of an imposing
group of young bucks and announces
{putting on a snooty British voice}
Ernest, Clive, I have brought the
Viscount D'Aubrey as I said I
would. Viscount {now in own accent}
she says to me, so I have no doubt
I have been mistaken for a dandy,
{back to snooty British} Viscount,
tell these boys what you explained
to me about Hume's fork! {back to
own voice} Now I had no idea who
Hume was nor why his fork was so
damned important, but even in my
youth I knew you did not leave a
young lady in the lurch.

PROF SAVANT

{Getting into the spirit} So what
did you say, Rosa?

ROSA THE BEARDED LADY

I said, {adopting an overly posh
British accent} Hume is correct,
gentlemen. You CAN use a fork as a
spoon, if you use it rapidly
enough.

SOUND: LAUGHTER

DR SAGE

But that is not the meaning of
Hume's Fork at all. He was
investigating the dichotomy between
sophistry and knowledge derived
from experience. You see, Hume held
that genuine knowledge must either
be directly traceable to objects
perceived in experience or result
from abstract reasoning about
relations between ideas...

SOUND: Hooting derision and Laughter

HIRAM MARKS

Hildy! We had no idea you
were a philosopher!

GUS

Tubbs?!? Did you teach your
doll to read?

Sound: Laughter

DR SAGE

No, he didn't teach me to read!

PROF SAVANT

Now, Hildy. No reason to get all riled up. Gus didn't mean nothing by it, did you Gus.

GUS

'Course not, Hildy. We all knows just how smart you are.

JENNY

I wouldn't say she was smart...

PROF SAVANT

{Cutting her off}... Hildy may not be well schooled, but she is book smart and a crack performer and that is all that is required here, isn't it boys?

Sound: Cheers and laughter

NARRATOR

The Doctor's hackles are up, but as usual, Erasmus manages to smooth them before she does something intemperate. The evening winds down and our pair take a stroll before bed to talk over the coming day's events.

PROF SAVANT

So, I finish off the red Indians by shooting down the targets thrown by the braves and then taking out Gus in the chief's bonnet, whilst you go and get mounted onto Butterscotch.

DR SAGE

I really wish I didn't have to do the horseback part.

PROF SAVANT

You'll be OK - Butterscotch is a peach, and the rest is just balance and flare, which you have in abundance. My only worry is how you will carry and present all the targets. The act calls for twenty of them.

DR SAGE

That is nothing to worry about. One of the roustabouts brought me the box of targets earlier. They are rather ingenious little things. They are made of silk and each of them is bounded by a small coiled wire - when you grab them by the sides and twist, they collapse into small rounds about a quarter of the size of the whole. Evidently I store them in the hip flounce and when I fling them out of concealment they pop to full size. It just takes a rather specific flick of the wrist to make them seemingly appear out of thin air!

PROF SAVANT

Ah, that explains what Jenny was on about.

DR SAGE

Oh?

PROF SAVANT

She said that we could do this maneuver so fast that it would appear I had shot before the target was in place. Evidently it is quite the crowd-pleaser! I was having a hard time picturing how wooden targets could be positioned so fast.

DR SAGE

Erasmus, I just had a terrible thought. What if you miss and hit someone in the audience. What if I hold a target at a bad angle and the bullet goes through it and into the body of some poor little kid who just wanted an exciting day at the circus?

PROF SAVANT

You don't have to worry about that, Pet. Firstly, you are to hold all the targets very high - that is why you are standing in the saddle as Butterscotch gallops around the ring.

(MORE)

PROF SAVANT (CONT'D)

Second of all, evidently the powder load in these bullets has been specially calibrated to shorten the trajectory. As long as you stay four feet inside the edge of the ring, I'll hit the target and the bullet will fall spent to the dirt.

DR SAGE

I wish there was a chance for us to practice this before the show.

PROF SAVANT

I asked, but it seems Hiram has a strict policy against exercising the animals on show day. He does not wish them to be tired or lazy in actual performance so we are not allowed to run them out day of. I will get a chance to practice with the firearms though, so I'll know what's what.

NARRATOR

The lack of practice means there is nothing for it the next day but to dress, apply the proper greasepaint and hope. And speaking of greasepaint, the Professor looks quite startling and handsome with his eyes ringed with kohl. I often wonder why it wasn't until the 22nd century that men fully embraced the refining effect of cosmetics.

SOUND: Sounds of the midway - crowd noises, barkers, popping corn etc.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

The Doctor passed a fitful night on her cot, but with Rosa's help applying cosmetics and hot-tonging her hair into a mass of curls she looks stunning as she steps out of the girl's sleeping tent and onto the midway.

PROF SAVANT

{Whistling appreciatively} Whew-ee are you a sight! I can see why this Tubbs fellow made you his bride. I can't see why on earth would he jilt you with Mule Jenny.

DR SAGE

Oh, you're just saying that because this body is so young and lush.

PROF SAVANT

Petra, you should know by now that I see your soul shining through, no matter what form you are in. It is your life-spark that animates this body and gives it true beauty.

NARRATOR

Though the Professor's words are sweet and he means well, they have an unintended consequence. Mule Jenny has overheard them and taken offense. Like many a jilted lover in the past, her fury burns white hot and she immediately plots her revenge. The intemperate girl sneaks into the props tent, where the props master keeps all the show props, such as throwing knives, guns, and gunpowder-shy bullets arrayed on tables for easy access by performers.

SCENE: INSIDE PROPS TENT. LONG TRESTLE TABLES HOLD A VAST ARRAY OF PROPS - EVERYTHING FROM THE LION TAMER'S WHIP TO THE SHARPSHOOTER'S GUNS. ONLY ONE MAN STANDS GUARD OVER THEM.

JENNY

{Muttering to herself} I'll show him. He worships her soul so much... Well he can just worship it for eternity - in paradise!

MAN

Oh, hi Jenny. What can I do ya for?

JENNY

Hey, Joe. I was sent to relieve you so's you can get yer breakfast.

MAN

Cookie normally brings that by, on show mornings. Once all the performers have eaten.

JENNY

Yeah, well, today they decided that the roustabouts could eat like civilized people. Don't know why.

MAN

You don't have to tell me twice -
I'll never turn down early
breakfast! So, everything is
prepped and ready, just in case any
of the performers stop by asking.
All props are present, accounted
for and show ready.

JENNY

Got it! You can count on me, Joe!
Enjoy your breakfast.

NARRATOR

Once the man is gone, Jenny hones
in on the sharpshooter's props. I
am not sure what she plans to do,
but I know her plans are nefarious.
Will she succeed in sabotaging the
tools of the Professor's
performance? We'll find out after
this quick word from our sponsor.

ADVERT

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

Yes, dear friends, you heard it
here. EDGE SCIENCE FICTION AND
FANTASY PUBLISHING for BOOKS THAT
TARGET ENJOYMENT. And now, back to
our show.

ACT THREE

INTRO MUSIC

NARRATOR

When we left our story Mule Jenny, the stubborn girl, was attempting to sabotage the props used in the sharpshooter's act. Will her actions imperil our Doctor? Unfortunately, we won't find out until the act, because the show has started!

SCENE: INSIDE THE BIG TOP - HIRAM MARKS TAKES CENTER RING ON A PLATFORM PULLED INTO THE RING BY A TEAM OF SNOWY WHITE HORSES. GREAT RANKS OF BLEACHERS RING THREE QUARTERS OF THE WAY ROUND THE OUTER EDGES OF THE TENT, EACH AND EVERY SEAT FILLED WITH EXPECTANT FACES. HIRAM IS DRESSED IN THE TRADITIONAL RED TAIL COAT AND HIGH POLISHED BOOTS OF THE RINGMASTER. HE LIFTS A MEGAPHONE TO HIS LIPS:

SOUND: circus crowd, music

HIRAM MARKS

Ladies and gentlemen! Boys and girls! Mesdames and Monsieurs! Welcome to the big top of the N.E. Camp Grand Southern Circus! Leave behind your cares and worries and prepare to enter a world of wonder, magic, laughter and spectacle.

SOUND: LAUGHTER and cheers

HIRAM MARKS (CONT'D)

This afternoon, for your edification and entertainment, our performers will reach for dazzling heights...

NARRATOR

As the ringmaster gestures dramatically skyward, an aerialist wearing spangled tights steps from the shadows that concealed him and onto the trapeze platform at the highest spot on the pole. He is muscular and handsome. He gives a jaunty wave as he unhooks the trapeze bar from the pole, takes a firm grip with both hands and leaps off the platform!

SOUND: Cheers and applause

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

Ladies and gentlemen, this is very exciting! Look how easily he swings over the heads of the enrapt audience as if Gravity has no claim on him! I have, of course, seen the historical records on circus performance, but reading about it is so very different than actually seeing it! If this is an indication of the excitement ahead, we are in for a most invigorating time!

HIRAM MARKS

Yes, ladies and gentlemen, you will see acts of high-flying derring do as our aerialists fly far above your head! But that is not all we have in store for you. Now to start your afternoon of wonder and excitement off, I call into the ring, the complete cast of the Grand Southern Circus, Let the show begin!

SOUND: Cheering, parade music.

NARRATOR

Perhaps, dear listeners, you have seen the circus yourself. Perhaps you are not impressed by the costumes, the derring do, the sheer spectacle of it all. If that is the case, then I cannot help but wonder what horrible event has shuttered your soul? What blackness obscures your vision? Because the circus is wondrous, loud, exuberant and mystifying! It is bravery and athleticism, ingenuity and surprise. In short, as act follows act, I cannot help being swept away with the self-same excitement and joy evident on every turned up face in this big-top.

SOUND: clown music, laughter, cheering

HIRAM MARKS

Give it up ladies and gentlemen for The Gus Simple Clown Brigade! Have you ever laughed so hard?

SOUND: Cheers, applause

HIRAM MARKS (CONT'D)

And now, we have a special treat for you, my friends. Snatched back from the jaws of the cholera with eyesight keener than ever, I give you the remarkable sharpshooting skills of Tibault Durand and his lovely assistant Hildy Hotpants Hoffman!

SOUND: Wild cheering

NARRATOR

The Professor thunders into the ring riding Butterscotch, wearing his dramatic fringed coat and a very large hat. The Doctor is perched sidesaddle in front of him, her long and shapely legs draped over the horses' withers. The pair smiles with a matching glint, waving to the crowd as they make the circuit of the ring, the tail of their mount streaming behind like a banner.

HIRAM MARKS

Life in the Great American west can be hazardous to the uninitiated ladies and gentlemen, but Tibault Durand has a bevy of skills to keep his lady safe against the privations of the open prairies and the trackless wilderness beyond these shores.

NARRATOR

As the ringmaster delivers his patter, Erasmus pulls Butterscotch to a stop near the center platform, delivering Petra into the waiting arms of the ringmaster. Then he wheels away to meet a pioneer style wagon driven into the ring by one of the equestrian team. Executing a very athletic leap, Erasmus jumps onto the driver's bench, neatly taking the reins as the other man slips from the seat and trots out of the ring followed by a dutiful Butterscotch.

HIRAM MARKS

The West is full of dangers, ladies and gents, not the least of which is the pernicious red menace! Yes, the wild tribes of the trackless prairies will fight to the death to keep the pioneers out, and they have no compunctions towards protecting women and children.

NARRATOR

As the Ringmaster speaks, the entire twelve man troupe of clowns runs into the ring. They have adorned themselves in a narrow parody of those people they call savages - all painted feathers and misapplied war paint. I must stop the action a minute, dear friends, to express my dismay on the cultural blindness and casual cruelty displayed by people of this time against the First Nations peoples. Ah, for the wisdom of a later age. Still, my job is to report things as I see them, so forgive me, I must go on.

SOUND: war whoops, audience reactions, ladies scream

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

The ersatz 'Indians' take hold of Hildy and strap her to the wagon wheel they have manhandled onto the center platform. Once again, Petra finds herself spreadeagled and staring down the concourse towards her friend as he prepares to fling knives towards her - only this time her arms and legs are roped into place. She looks over at Erasmus with panic, but he smiles and shakes his head softly. He must have known about the ropes. The clowns set the wheel spinning and Erasmus draws his first knife, takes careful aim, and releases it! His aim is true. The knife thunks into the board, inches from Petra's ankle, slicing away the ropes as neat as scissors cut hair. Petra sensing what is called for, extends the leg, pointing her toes prettily. The crowd roars!

SOUND: Crowd cheering

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

As the spinning wheel begins to lose momentum and slow down the Professor throws again. Six other knives follow in close succession.

SOUND: Thunk, thunk, thunk, thunk

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

Each knife flies true, slicing away the ropes and freeing the lovely limbs of Hildy until there is only one rope left - that which encircles her heaving breasts. The wheel stops spinning bringing the Doctor to an upright position. Erasmus pulls forward the final knife, but something causes him to frown. He transfers the blade to the other hand and scrubs his palm down the legs of his trousers as if trying to remove something sticky. He flexes his fingers a couple of times, transfers the knife back into his throwing hand, takes careful aim and releases the blade. It tumbles end over end through the air, the throw obviously wobbly and uncertain. Time slows as we watch the deadly blade fly towards the tender breast of the maiden... And at the last minute, the blade seems to straighten and regaining a true trajectory, it slides into place alongside the girl's ribs, slitting the rope and sinking into place in the board under her arm. Without missing a beat, our Doctor steps away from her confinement and sweeps a curtsy towards the audience.

HIRAM MARKS

My! Folks, wasn't that exciting. Why don't we let Hildy go catch her breath while Tibualt takes care of these pesky injuns'? What say you? Shall we give them a dose of their own medicine?!?

SOUND: Wild cheering, renewed war cries

NARRATOR

Petra skips out of the ring as Erasmus whips the horses pulling the wagon back into a run, places the reins in his teeth and takes up a bow. He nocks an arrow in place, loosing it towards one of the clowns who flings up a target and tumbles dramatically to the dirt as the arrow pierces the silken target.

SOUND: Crowd roars approval

HIRAM MARKS

That is how we do it, folks!

SOUND: Crowd roars approval

NARRATOR

One by one, as the wagon thunders around the ring, the clowns throw up their targets and plunge into hysterical pantomimed death. The crowd voices enthusiastic approval until the last clown, this one wearing the grand bonnet of a chieftain, makes a final stand on the central platform, throwing not one, not two, but three targets into the air which the Professor takes down with three rapidly fired arrows. I have to tell you, troublesome ethnic portrayal aside, this is quite exciting. Erasmus brings the wagon to a screeching halt at the center platform, vaulting neatly into a bow next to the ringmaster and the crowd expresses their appreciation!

SOUND: Crowd cheering

HIRAM MARKS

We're not done yet, folks! How would you like to see Tibault Durand's marksmanship with firearms?

SOUND: Crowd roars approval

NARRATOR

I did not think it was possible to feel more excited and yet, dear friends, as Petra charges back into the ring on Butterscotch, standing in the saddle and Erasmus pulls out a long rifle, I am affected with the same hushed quiet that has gripped our crowd. Thus far all has felt dangerous, but not deadly. The sight of the Winchester has put a hush in the air, the glinting barrel, and burnished stock - this is an instrument of death and we know it. Petra sets Butterscotch into a canter around the edge of the ring, making small flourishes with her hands and smiling broadly as Erasmus cracks open the rifle in preparation of loading it. There is a moment of hesitation as he discovers the gun is already loaded, but he covers well as he removes the bullets in the chamber, and replaces them with the ones from his pocket.

HIRAM MARKS

Ladies and gentlemen, Tibault will first demonstrate his accuracy with the Winchester Centennial model - the self-same lever-action rifle used by the Texas Ranges and Theodore Roosevelt himself!

SOUND: Anticipatory clapping, horse hooves, rifle crack.

NARRATOR

Petra plucks a target from her pouch, flicks her wrist to open it and holds it far out to the side. Erasmus takes careful aim, waiting for the horse and rider to reach that blank spot at the back of the tent, squeezes the trigger and bang! Drills a hole straight through the middle of the target. The rest of the act passes in a blaze and by the time our heroes have taken their final bow and left the tent, they are both drenched in sweat and full of a strange exultation.

SCENE: ON THE MIDWAY, SAGE & SAVANT WALK BETWEEN TENTS

DR SAGE

That was amazing! Is this what performers always feel after a performance?

PROF SAVANT

I don't know, but you are right - my spirits are quite high - and that is even after noticing that someone was trying to kill you.

DR SAGE

{Back to earth} Trying to kill me - what do you mean?

PROF SAVANT

Our props were tampered with. One of the knives was weighted with a small piece of metal attached with rubber cement. It made the throw go a bit wonky.

DR SAGE

That was the last knife wasn't it? My god, Erasmus, you could have killed me.

PROF SAVANT

Well, killed this body certainly, but you would have been fine.

DR SAGE

{Skeptical} Huh. But why do you say someone was trying to kill me? Maybe you just picked up the wrong knife.

PROF SAVANT

That is what I thought - until it was time for the firearms. Joe, the props master told me he always gives me the guns unloaded. I put the bullets in my pockets. This way there is no accidentally using regular bullets rather than the low powdered ones.

DR SAGE

Yes.

PROF SAVANT

Well, when I cracked the Winchester it was already loaded. With full charge bullets.

DR SAGE

So the bullet would have gone through the tent? You weren't aiming for me - but for the target.

PROF SAVANT

Yes, but a full charge bullet would cause a different kickback. When Joe and I practiced this morning he taught me how to compensate for the kick and keep my aim true.

DR SAGE

And if the gun had pulled high...

PROF SAVANT

The bullet might have struck you in the head, yes.

DR SAGE

But who would do such a thing?

PROF SAVANT

I think I know. Petra, I think it is time you set things straight and reclaim your man as it were.

DR SAGE

Reclaim my man?

PROF SAVANT

For a genius, you can be especially dense when it comes to affairs of the heart. Mule Jenny needs to see you in my bed tonight. I want you in my bed tonight.

NARRATOR

And without waiting for permission, Erasmus sweeps Petra into his arms and strides boldly across the midway and into a private tent, conveniently waiting at the edge of the encampment. It is almost as if things had been arranged in advance.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

And so... with delightful thoughts of finding true love for the holidays, we will leave our story here. Will Sage and Savant enter a new phase of their relationship? Will Mule Jenny succeed in doing harm to the budding romance? Will Sage and Savant decide to run away and join the circus? We'll find out in the next episode of THE TALES OF SAGE AND SAVANT.

END MUSIC STARTS

CREDITS

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

The TALES OF SAGE AND SAVANT is a Twinstar production, starring Eddie Louise as Sage, Chip Michael as Savant, Emily Riley Piatt as Abigail, and Justin Bremer as Narrator.

Soundtrack music, sound design and audio engineering by Chip Michael.

Special music in this episode was provided by The Nathaniel Johnstone Band. Check them out at <http://nathanieljohnstone.com/>

We would like to extend our gratitude to this month's sponsor EDGE SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY PUBLISHING.

Episode 205b CIRCUS OF DREAMS was written by Eddie Louise. Are you interested in the historical and scientific information we included in this episode? Like us on Facebook or check out our website www.SageAndSavant.com to find the facts behind the fiction.

The cast of Sage and Savant would like to wish you and yours a very Happy Holidays.

Finally, as always, we urge you to remember that: DEATH IS NO BARRIER TO SCIENCE.