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| 14 pence | **The Peculiar Periodical** | | | | | | | August 8, 1954  Morning edition | |
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| **The marks of the side show**  *For today edition, our inexhaustible journalist Louna Cocault brought back from her trip to Delevan, Wisconsin, the exclusive and astonishing interview of young woman working as a sideshow performer for the Barnum and Bailey Circus. Once again, our meticulous reporter uncovers the truth about these freak shows and the mysteries surrounding the lives of its workers.* | | | | | | | | | |
| **Louna Cocault**  After her successful beginnings with the inquiry of the murders in the Rue Morgue, Louna Cocault kept on investigating in odd cases over the years, currently compile in her book *A Strange Age: to the discovery of the hidden truths*. | | | | | | | | | |
| **The reality behind the curtains**  ***L.C.:*** *Thank you, Mrs. Stains, for agreeing to answer my questions.  To begin with, can you explain what your distinctive feature is for the readers?*  **Alice Stains:** Yes, of course. I have an autoimmune skin disease called vitiligo. It corresponds to the skin’s depigmentation under the form of white marks on the body. This dermatosis can appear at any moment of someone’s life, and, with time, it spreads all over the skin. Its evolution depends for everybody. Generally, the hands, the feet and the face are the first areas affected by the vitiligo.  There are two forms of this disease: the segmental form, where the spot is on only one side of the body and in only one place, and the non-segmental form, where all the skin can be touched. The second one is the most common form, and it is this type of vitiligo that I have. | |  | | | | | Une image contenant habits, personne, Visage humain, écharpe  Description générée automatiquement | | |
| Une image contenant Visage humain, personne, plein air, Humain  Description générée automatiquement  *Alice Stains*  ***L.C.:*** *Is there medical consequences to this sickness?*  **A.S.:** A doctor told me that it raises the risks to have an autoimmune thyroid disease but otherwise, the vitiligo is completely harmless. In reality, it is the gaze of the others that hurt the most. I can’t go out without people looking at me like I am coming from another planet. I understand their reactions, it is not a usual event to see someone whose face look like they were splashed with paint or | | | | | eaten away by acid. But it is still rude and painful to be look at this way.  ***L.C.:*** *Then why did you agree to do this interview?*  **A.S.:** I believe that people are misinformed which is why they are afraid or weirdly fascinated by people like me, who look or act differently. I think explaining who we are can make the mentalities change and lead to a more accepting society where us, “freak”, could have a normal and decent job. If people understand us, then we won’t have to earn our living by showing ourselves in a circus anymore.  ***L.C.:*** *How did you get in the show?*  **A.S.:** Well, I was abandoned by my parents when my first marks appeared, at 8 years old. They were | | |
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| very religious, and they were convinced that the Devil was trying to take my soul. According to them, these marks and their progression were the proof that I was slowly being possessed. The Church attempted many exorcisms which were ineffective. In the end, my parents drop me at the Barnum and Bailey Circus, where they thought I would be with the same kind of damned persons as me.  Vitiligo : causes, symptômes et traitements – Conseil Santé  *Alice Stains’ hands*  ***L.C.:*** *What is your performance on stage?*  **A.S.:** I hide in a spotted background. The audience seek where I am, especially the kids, then I suddenly reveal myself to the public for a dance act. I also share the scene sometimes with Ian, another sideshow performer. I am attached to a special wheel of death, where it is hard to distinguish my skin from the wheel. Hopefully, Ian knows very well the trick, so his knives never touched me. This show makes a strong impression on the spectators.  ***L.C.:*** *You are performing in the Barnum and Baley Circus, which previously received Schlitzie, the “Monkey Girl”. What are your thoughts about his popularity?*  **A.S.:** I am horrified by the way ill-intend persons used him. On top of describing sideshow performers as | | | dangerous and inhuman in the movie *Freaks*, Schlitzie is showed under a pathetic and ridiculous light. Most people don’t even gender him correctly! Maybe because of his condition, he isn’t touched by this kind of things (and yet, I am not so sure of it), but it proves that us, freaks, don’t worth much for the others. The fact that our identity can be taken away according to someone else desires’, for a show in which we don’t really want to be a part of, is terrifying. It means they can make us do anything as long as we attract a crowd. I am afraid to end up like Schlitzie : to become an amusing little monkey who could be played with like a puppet.  ***L.C.:*** *How is your daily life in the show?*  Une image contenant Membre, veine, personne, jambes  Description générée automatiquement**A.S.:** I work every night of the week expect the Tuesday. My co-workers and I don’t have the same day of rest. So, the circus is always open to the public. During the day, we practice our acts or find a new one. When we have free time, we talk about the recent news or play sports together. Some of us stay alone in their tent. But we almost never go out of the circus. It is only the ones we are the more “normal” who can go out for an urgent errand. I am often chosen for this, but I never do it with pleasure. I don’t feel safe outside and I got insulted and attacked several times. One time, stones were thrown at me by a group of young men while I was walking in the streets. Our food is delivered by a  *Alice Stains’ leg* | | | company, which work alongside the circus, as well as other things we need. Our everyday life is like that when we establish the circus in a city. Otherwise, we are on the road.  ***L.C.:*** *Do you have any family besides your parents?*  **A.S.:** No and I don’t want one. I don’t want to impose this life to any children nor want a partner who will always see my spots first and look at me like an exotic creature rather than his wife. I know I say that I want people to be more comprehensive and I want to fit in the crowd, but I am not naïve. I am aware that it will take time and that I will probably not see the day where normal people will stop to look at me like a monster, a freak. However, in some ways, my co-workers are my family. We understand each other better than anyone else, we know how it feels to be ostracised and we got each other back.  ***L.C.:*** *So, you don’t think your situation will change one day?*  **A.S.:** I do have the opinion that it is changing but not in a good way… Freak shows like this one are less and less appreciated. The only work that allows us to live is becoming unpopular for people, and thus, we are becoming useless. Our existence is going to be a lot more difficult for the coming years if we lose our job. I don’t like to work here and be exposed like an animal, but I prefer this situation rather than to be penniless and homeless. I don’t want to lose my colleagues either. I am scared for the future since I am marked by my spot as well as by my present profession… | | |
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