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Dark Carnivale

Photography by WinterWolf Studios

Article by Acid PopTart

I used to threaten I was going to run away to the circus – didn't every kid do that at least once? Unfortunately the threat holds little weight when your uncle actually did run away and successfully joined the circus. He was an aspiring musician and ended up playing music for "the hoochie coochie girls" my grandmother used to say with a hint of disgust. This usually brought some sort of laughter from my grandfather who would then curse in Greek – who he was cursing I was never really sure.

But the circus was a fantastical escape for a lot of kids, even some adults. The glittering spotlight combined with a gypsy's lifestyle, roaming from town to town with no roots, and seemingly no responsibility. Common circuses of the Ringling Brothers variety lost their shine for me once I learned the horrible treatment of animals held as performing slaves. I still have yet to see the thrill of watching wild animals



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essentially do stupid pet tricks and I'm much more impressed with humans who do death defying acts or even slight of hand at their own choice.

Carnivals, circuses, fairs, essentially all those festivals and celebrations, have existed for thousands of years and seem to offer some sort of portal to abscond from the normality of everyday life. A chance to party sure, but for so many chances to step outside themselves and become someone else, or someone they once were.

As a young girl, I found the lure of darkened midway games and their fun houses transfixing – although I became unnaturally mortified of the horror rides after a traumatic mishap on one where the rubber creature jumped at you in your roller coaster cart and my mess of far too long hair got caught on the mechanical hand, ripping out a good chunk. I will admit the drunken carnies with bad tattoos didn't do much to fuel my imagination, but the rides and games themselves, the capricious atmosphere, even the airbrushed exteriors of the booths, did capture my mind, almost as much as it must have done to Ray Bradbury, inspired by his own childhood and a carnival magician named Mr. Electrico. Setting the stage for his 1963 novel, *Something Wicked This Way Comes*, later developed into the 1983 horror movie of the same name.

It's that sort of mysteriously eerie carnivale that captures the minds of so many today, especially in fashion. Hints of Victorian may peek in, perhaps a touch of 30's and 40's glamour will ooze, transfused with a glint of unseen far away lands and a thousand unwritten stories bloom within the creases of a magician's tailcoat or the torn lining of his top hat. A patchwork of tattered silks and gaudy jewels, hand



me down canes and secrets to the best snake oil to cure all that ails you, a promise of love in the eyes of the gypsy who takes your money and a dance to make you forget the life you wanted to leave. It's all within the rich and chimerical tapestry that surrounds the enticement of the carnivale. If nothing is what it seems in a place where people always wear masks, then you never really have to take off yours, or do you find another mask to wear? Are you the freak or are the ones on stage you pay to see? The goat lady, tattooed snake charmer, conjoined twins, the hermaphrodite. You feel comfortable here, don't you? Do you wish to blend into the crowd, or do you wish to join them front and center, to be a part of the unearthly show?

The allure of the carnivale look incorporates more vivid colors than traditionally found in the narrow box Goth seems to have worked its way into. Shying away from the brightness of Mardi Gras festivals and Las Vegas acts, this look is more dynamic in its tones – textured and layered like the pages of a story, where you have to come closer to discover more. Corsets are costumes for the doll like girls who dance for the love of their puppeteers, who make the music for the love of the money. Feathers and jewels adorn the performers sent to bring you in further into their circle, where the slick balderdash of the charming ringleader sounds like truth to ears eager for change. There could be a stolen kiss in the folds of an aged and weathered tent with the acrobat or the gypsy girl who promised you love with the turn of a card and a turn of your palm. There's danger, it seems, in the way they live, the way they perform, even in the way they bring you into their world. It's the dark carnivale we seek, the chance to run away one last time. ♦

Page 55 Top: Acid PopTart is wearing the red & black laced Romance Corset by Versatile Fashions (versatilefashions.com), Dia de los Muertos skull necklace by Smearred Lipstick Arts (francella.net). Kynt is wearing the white Bastion shirt by Kambriel (kambriel.com), black and white Vertigo Vest by Kambriel (kambriel.com).

Page 55 Lower Right: Betty Valentine is wearing the black Lily's Velvet Bow Coffin Dress by Heavy Red (heavyred.com), Femme Noir Topper Hat with Rhinestone Bird Skull & Antique Lace Details by Hey Sailor! Hats (hey-sailor.com). Acid PopTart is wearing the Isadora Tilt Top Hat with Spider Brooch & Antique Lace Crown Details by Hey Sailor! Hats, Drew & Dara Torn and Tattered b&w shirt by Heavy Red, vintage striped pants. Kynt is wearing the white Bastion shirt by Kambriel, Bone waist cincher by Louise Black (louiseblack.com).

Left: Betty Valentine is wearing the Jewel Orchid custom carnivale outfit by Exquisite Restraints (exquisiterestraint.com), Carnivale Ringmaster Hattie by Topsy Turvy Design (topsyturvydesign.com).

All shoes except for Betty's (model's own) provided by Pleaser USA (pleaserusa.com)
Makeup for set by Ruby Randall, Hair by Christopher Fiffe and Thomas Eli Johnson, Set Design by House of S&M