‘From now on’

“A man learns who is there for him when the glitter fades and the walls won’t hold,” Barnum whispered, blinking back his ever-threatening tears, “because from that rubble what remains can only be what’s true.”

Looking up, Barnum’s furrowed brow seemed to melt away and he slowly began to nod as he looked around at his devoted troupe.

“If all was lost, there’s more I gain because it led me back to you,” he continued, delicately.

Standing slowly, Barnum made his way through the parted performers as they watched on, heartbroken. Some had eyes transfixed to the floor whilst others’ heads were lolloped in their still-shaking hands as they embraced one another sympathetically.

“I drank champagne with kings and queens and the politicians praised my name,” Barnum sang, growing in confidence with each word, whilst walking along the dark, picture-lined corridor. Stopping in front of a newspaper article of the captivating Jenny Lind, Barnum sighed heavily and remorsefully shook his head.

Further along the corridor, Barnum’s breath was stolen by his beautiful wife and children. He gazed into their eyes and thought of where they may be. Without barely having replaced the Barnum family portrait back on the wall, he quickly turned on his heel and walked, stronger now, through his captivated company. Raising his brimming glass in the air, he signalled for them all to be given a drink.

Within a heartbeat, the room had exploded into a hive of activity: dancers- whose hope for the future had all but faded- flailed dramatically from pillar to post; stools were upturned and spun on their legs; gymnasts flipped backwards, landing seamlessly every time; people, and drinks, were thrown from one end of the bar to the other; and, a roaring chorus of cheers and song reverberated between the antiquated walls of the bar’s parameters. Barnum, whose life had seemed all but over, beamed. Perhaps, after all, he could pick himself up and get the troupe back to performing?

Standing still for a split second, Barnum’s eye was drawn once more- across the action-packed, pulsating room- to his precious family portrait. Immediately detecting the sadness in Barnum’s heart as his broad shoulders fell and he subconsciously froze, Lettie Lutz handed him his coat. Without another moment’s thought, Barnum burst through the exploding bar’s doors and began fiercely sprinting for the next train out of his still-smoking city.