

25.

Tightrope Walker Prompt

**Write a poem about actual or metaphoric tightrope walking.
Perhaps the poem itself is the wire walker.**

Poets are like aerialists: the wire they walk stretches from history to eternity, fact to dream, language to silence. When they get across we feel rapture. They've taken us with them.

Margo Jefferson

in the New York Times 5/11/2003

collected in *Quote Poet Unquote: Contemporary Quotations on Poets and Poetry*
edited by Dennis O'Driscoll

Writing that is discovering is reaching, is tightrope walking.

Sina Queyras

To write a good line of poetry is successfully to walk a high wire from perception to perception without falling into banality or self-indulgence, to retain a musical rhythm without breaking into conventional song, and to express meaning without lecturing or posturing.

F.D. Reeve

in *Poets & Writers*, April 1996

collected in *Quote Poet Unquote: Contemporary Quotations on Poets and Poetry*
edited by Dennis O'Driscoll

Untangle your heart.
Now throw
the newly freed line
out across the chasm.

Step off onto your line.
Trust yourself and the wire
you have drawn on air.

It is this simple to become
an aerial artist,
a wire walker,

balancing upon
imagination alone.

The Tightrope Walker

The tightrope walker does not remember
where he began.
He does not know
where he is going.
On one side lies error,
on the other side terror.
Carefully he places foot after foot
along the knotted rope.
He walks through the curlicues of white clouds.
Far, far below him lie the pointed tops of snowy mountains
and a streak of silver river.
Just above him two jets have drawn loud white pencil marks.
All else is silence.
The tightrope walker does not look up
he does not look down
he keeps his shining eyes ahead
to the unknown
future.

Steffi Fletcher
2023

Tightrope Walker

High on the thrilling strand he dances
Laved in white light. The smudged chalk faces
Blur below. His movements scorn
And fluently insult the law
That lumps us, munching, on our seats,
Avoiding the question that slyly tweaks:
How much do we want to see him fall?
It's no use saying we don't at all.
We all know that we hate his breed.
Prancing the nimble thread he's freed
From what we are and gravity.
And yet we know quite well that he
Started just as we began,
That he like us is just a man.

(We don't fall off our seats until
We've drunk too much or are feeling ill.)
But he has trained the common skill,
Trained and practiced; now tonight
It flogs our credence as high and white
In the spotlight's talcum he pirouettes,
Lonely, scorning safety nets,
The highly extraordinary man.
But soon, quite softly, boredom starts
Its muffled drilling at our hearts;
A frisson of coughs and shuffles moves
Over the crowd like a wind through leaves.
Our eyes slide down the air and walk
Idly round the tent as talk
Hums on denial's monotone.
It's just as well the act ends soon
Or we would leave, though not stampede.

Vernon Scannell
in *Selected Poems*

My Hunger

The way the high-wire walker
must carry a pole
to make her arms longer

You carried me I carried you
through this world.

Jane Hirshfield
in *Ledger*

Life is always a tightrope or a featherbed. Give me the tightrope.

Edith Warton

Exercise rebellion and live your life on a tightrope.

Philippe Petit,
(who walked a wire between the Twin Towers 8/7/1974)