

Ethan Telyanin**Age 26; Bungee Trapeze,
Flying Trapeze II (Angel 4)**

Ellen and I are the best of the best, and it used to be that everyone knew it. We were trained just about from birth for the trapeze, by our parents, the best of their generation. The circus was a family business, and any performer worth knowing wanted into our show, but we were the stars: the twins on trapeze, with motion perfectly synchronized.

But the heyday of our circus was before the rise of the “nouveau cirque” movement, before Circus Oz and Cirque du Soleil. In recent years, the old show families have been losing revenue to the new style, and we've lost so many of the big tops. One of the last to fall was our family's show, bankrupted just last year.

We had no other trade, and many of our relatives are still out of work now. Ellen and I, and our younger brother Jeremy, were instructed by our father to take the offer from this poor imitation of the great circuses of yesteryear, an offer extended by our traitorous uncle, Nigel.

We should have been stars in this two-bit show, too, but the managers refused us. Even Nigel wouldn't support our claim to stardom. Tina was the incumbent, the darling of this circus. Eventually Ellen forced her to quit, and we thought then that she would take the lead for sure, and naturally I would be her partner.

But Alice came on board, and stepped right into the lead parts. She was good, I admit, maybe even better than El. My sister started making her plans to shove Alice aside too, but in this, I had some ideas of my own. There are some things a man can't do with his sister and more than one kind of partner in a circus. I started dating Alice.

Alice hadn't escaped the attention of the other men in the troupe, though. She refused to allow our relationship to progress past the casual. Normally, I'd had seen off any rival, but she refused to tell me who he was. Maybe I could have forced Alice to tell me, or just told her to get rid of him, but there are lines you don't cross in circus, and reasons you don't cross them. Gwen's stalker showed us all where the line is.

The Stalker

Gwen is one of the newest recruits, along with Dominic and Susan. She does a very sensual tissu performance, I don't think she even realises how sexy it is. Somebody did, though. Some psycho saw her perform and started stalking her, sending her flowers and shit, and the stupid girl didn't say anything, just let the rest of us go on thinking they were from her boyfriend.

One night, the nutter showed up in the backstage areas, went after Gwen. Hannah spotted him, and told me, Daniel and Dominic. We caught him before he got to Gwen, just. I beat the fucker bloody, 'til Daniel pulled me off him. The cops made some noise about charging me with battery but in the end they called it “defence of another” and made it all go away. I knew they would. Tell the truth, felt pretty good laying into the psycho that way. I needed a release, what with Alice jerking me around the way she had been.

Apparently Ellen was looking for a little “release” too. She managed to hook up with Gwen within a few days of the attack. El's never been much into girls before. She probably just got fed up with the boys around here.

Safety-Free

Everyone knows the circus is in trouble, but it was only Ellen who had the balls to put a plan into action to fix it. Clowns and tumblers fill out the show, but it's the aerial acts that people remember, that draw in the crowds again and again. If you can't sell tickets, you need a better headline act – more spectacular, more daring, more dangerous!

Ellen suggested working without safety harnesses – put our bodies on the line, up the ante, give the audience heart palpitations. Ellen already had Gwen wrapped around her finger, so that put three of us on-side. It should have been shouted down by the others, but somehow Ellen got Alice's support for the idea. I have no idea how, but it had to be Ellen, nobody else could have pulled that off. That was four aerialists out of seven, and three out of four women – it's the women who accept the most risk here, because they are almost always the fliers in partner work. Matt and Daniel had to go along with the idea or risk their macho images, and Clarice's parts are low-risk even without harness. So for this new show, we've been rehearsing safety-free.

The Fall

This morning, before our shortened rehearsal, Alice came and found me, said she wanted to talk. "I'm sorry," she said, "It's not you, it's me," she said, all the clichés women use when they dump a guy, but I wouldn't let her get away until she told me what was really going on. Then she said she wanted to settle down, get married, and she didn't think I was ready for that. She wanted someone "more mature" than me. Fuckin' bitch. But at least now I knew who she was fucking. It had to be Matthew, he's a few years older than Alice, and Daniel's got as much sex drive as a statue. Goddamn hypocrite, always pretending to be such a gentleman and he's screwing Alice behind Caitlin's back.

Well, I was pretty pissed, and even during rehearsal, Ellen knew. She pulled me backstage and asked me what was going on, so I told her Alice had dumped me. Ellen was almost as pissed as I was. She knew what a fuckin' humiliation it would be for us, me getting turned down like that. I saw her eyes flare with hate whenever I said "Alice", brighter than ever before. I didn't dare tell Ellen what plan I'd thought up, not there where anybody could have overheard, but I knew Ellen would have approved if I did.

It was a bit late to remove the competition, but I don't take the kind of shit that Alice said to me. I'd get them both, and I'd do it so that nobody would ever know she'd chosen him over me.

After rehearsal, I went and found Uncle Nigel. I knew Alice respected him, trusted him like her own father. He had enough influence over her and if I could make him want her to do what I wanted her to do... I found him in the offices, and told him I was worried about how Alice and Matt were doing. I said I was worried Matt was right about him and Alice not being ready for the show, that I wanted to do the flying act with Ellen because I knew Ellen wouldn't get hurt. Nigel said no way, it was their act – I knew he would – so I said alright, how about if Alice and Matt did another rehearsal this afternoon, just to prove they were ready? If nothing else, a flawless performance this afternoon would boost their confidence, and that can make all the difference in the air on opening night. Good old Unca Nige agreed, said he'd see if he could talk Alice into it.

Then while everyone else was having lunch or sneaking off to fuck somewhere I snuck back to the rehearsal area and waited, hidden in the stage curtains, until Paul stopped fiddling with the rigging and cleared off. I climbed up to the trapeze platform, the one Alice would be leaping off, and adjusted her rigging. I knew just how to do it, to lengthen the trapeze arms just enough to put her into the catch too low, and to move the platform down so that she'd never notice the difference.

All I had to do then was hope Uncle Nigel could be convincing enough, and wait for the screaming to start.

It worked. Alice splattered all over the stage and Matt's the guy who dropped her. He might get off without criminal charges but no-one will ever trust him as a catcher again, not the guy who dropped the falling star. Tonight, it'll be Ellen and me on the flying trapeze, the way it always should have been.

Other People

Alice (NPC)

A beautiful, gentle yet conniving bitch. She really had the talent for the lead, both in the air and in the politics, but she messed with the wrong man when she turned me down.

Bethany Summer

Beth has been working hard the last month or two, training with Alice and Matthew. For this show, she's just an acrobat, but Alice was grooming her to become an aerialist. She's got the talent, and with Alice gone she'll get an opportunity – maybe sooner than people expect. Caitlin has a long track record of getting brushed aside, and I wouldn't be surprised if Beth continues the trend.

Caitlin Chin

Caitlin's got talent, enough that I've wondered whether she's descended from one of the old Chinese circus families. She's a wuss, though. When Tina quit, she'd have rolled over and given the female lead to Ellen in a heartbeat, if Alice hadn't stepped in.

It's not surprising that Matthew was cheating on Caitlin with Alice. Alice probably wasn't giving it up for him either, so he's kept Caitlin around to screw on the side until she did.

Unfortunately, we still have to keep an eye on Caitlin. She's the understudy for Alice's role, so Ellen and I might have to crush her underfoot to take the lead.

Daniel Higgs

I'm pretty sure he's a faggot, but I wouldn't call him a pansy. I learnt just how strong Daniel is when he pulled me off Gwen's attacker. He's as tough as stone, and about as cold as stone too. It must be the straps work he does; it's not the prettiest act, but there's no aerial act so demanding.

Dominic Richards

Dominic is one of the newest performers, having started the same time as Gwen and

Susan. He's only a clown, so I haven't had too much to do with him, but I've noticed him watching El and Gwen. I reckon the kid might have a little case of puppy love, and I can't blame him. He's lucky he's too green to be useful to Ellen.

Ellen Telyanin

My dear, dear twin sister. She thinks she's the one in control of everything, but she's not now. She'd be so proud of me if she knew, but as much as I love her, I know the manipulative bitch too. Can I tell her? Can I risk that she'd use it against me?

Gwen Palmer

Gwen's the newest aerialist, just joined up recently, and the youngest by a long shot. She's damn hot, and doesn't even know it. After I beat the stalker who attacked her bloody, she got a lot more friendly with me. I don't think she wanted a boyfriend, just a friend. I don't blame her, after what she went through, and it was okay with me 'cause I was busy with Alice anyway. Besides, I'm not sure I wouldn't have broken her.

Hannah Riordan

A quiet little fire-breathing mouse. I don't have much to do with her, as she's barely even a capable acrobat, but at least her fire acts are spectacular in their own way. She's got a big character/support role in the current show, mostly based around fire-twirling.

Jeremy Telyanin

My little brother has the family talent, but not yet enough skill to have been accepted into the ranks of the aerialists. That'll come in time, maybe very soon with Matthew out of the way. Jeremy's a bit of a softie, though.

He has said he's interested in Susan. I hope he's not too serious, because she's a bit young for him. Still, wouldn't hurt the boy to get a little ass.

John Perrett

John's so effeminate that he's regarded as a backup for some of the female roles. He's a skinny little runt, but wiry enough for acrobalance.

John seems to have it in his head that he has a shot with Ellen. She's been stringing him along ever since Luke and Maria's combined hen and buck's night, but she'll never screw him. He just doesn't have that much talent.

He and Luke are pretty tight. John was Luke's best man.

Lily Gardner

God, it was funny watching Lily at Luke and Maria's wedding. Ellen told me that Lily was really into John, but nothing had ever happened, so she put the moves on John. All of a sudden, John's all "Lily who?" and Lily was just about ready to stab him with a fork by the time of the reception.

On stage, Lily's a good supporting player. It looks like she'll stay that way, and everybody's happy with that. Hey, we need acrobats too, we aerialists can't carry the whole show.

Luke Conolly

Luke has been part of a strong acrobatic duo with Maria for longer than Ellen and I have been with the company. Everyone knew their partnership was more than professional. That's not unusual, but not so many such partnerships go as far as marriage.

Maria Conolly

Maria and Ellen never got along, and since the wedding Maria has barely been civil towards Ellen. Ellen thinks the whole situation is really funny.

Maria and Lily do a decent tightwire act. It's not a real aerial act, but it's respectable.

Matthew Mills

Everyone else thought that Matthew was dating Caitlin. Well, he probably was. After all, Alice had both Matthew and me on the

go at once, no reason why Matt wouldn't have a back-up lay.

But all of that is gone now. Matt's finished, and I'll enjoy watching him trying to squirm his way out of it. I just have to keep the finger pointed firmly at him.

Nigel Telyanin

Half my life, Uncle Nigel has been a traitor to the family, the man who deserted his heritage. And why? Because he wanted to be a clown, not to aspire to the glory of the aerial acts. Maybe he's a coward, too afraid of heights for aerial performance.

It turns out he was right to leave, after a fashion. When the family circus went broke, he was the one who got Ellen, Jeremy and me our jobs here, our last chance to save the family traditions. Now we owe him.

Everybody else here loves the man. Every time someone comes up with a new act, they consult Nigel. Every role in the show, he's got an opinion on how to play it, and everybody wants to hear that opinion.

Ophelia Seymour

Ophelia's half clown, half office girl. Sometimes I'm not sure she wants to be a performer at all, she spends so much time helping with the paperwork.

Paul Morris

Hopeless. Paul's older than me, still a clown, and bad even at clowning. He's dating one of the riggers, and thinks he knows something about rigging himself.

Susan Michaels

Susan's young and very green, but she's got a lot of talent. She's so good that she's already been made the understudy for Gwen's cradle part. Cradle's hard, needs precision. I hope she's up to it, because when El and I take the leads, Gwen will have to move up to a flying trapeze part, and that leaves Susan on cradle.