

Nigel Telyanin

Age 40; **Physical Comedy and Magic (Sorcerer),**
Fire-Twirling

I come from a family with a long tradition of circus. The performance is in our blood, handed down from our ancestors from Russia, who brought some of the finest techniques of Russia acrobatics when they immigrated to Australia. I learned to somersault before I could walk and my earliest memories are of being strapped to my father as he flew through the air.

But despite my family's plans for me I never wanted to be an aerialist or an acrobat. I wanted to be a clown. I love doing physical comedy, making people laugh, telling them a story with movement and expression. I so disappointed my relatives that eventually I left the family circus to pursue my own dreams. I worked with a dozen troupes and small shows, even a few comedy clubs before I signed up with Ophelia when her troupe was just starting up.

During our first big expansion to the troupe, I learnt that my family's circus had gone out of business. While I hadn't talked with my parents or my brothers in years, I got in touch to see if I could offer them any help re-locating artists. We needed a few new performers, young people with skills to match those of the people we already had. My niece Ellen and nephews Ethan and Jeremy fit our requirements nicely.

I hadn't realised just how arrogant they had become, though. Ellen and Ethan came on board with the idea that they would soon be the stars of the show. They hassled Tina enough that she quit, forcing Ophelia to bring her friend Alice in to replace her.

Not only was Alice a brilliant performer, she proved to be a wonderful person too. Alice and I were dating for months. However, she admitted that she was seeing someone else, too.

Financial Problems

Ophelia confessed to me some time ago that the recent recession hit the company pretty hard. Attendance at our performances were actually slightly up, probably because circus is a cheap form of entertainment, but our operating costs were higher than was expected, what with having more performers and support staff than ever before. The company was undercapitalised.

Ophelia had hoped to keep the problems under wraps but it all came out when almost half of the performers' pays didn't go through, including mine and Ophelia's. In the months that followed, several plans emerged to help ease the pressure.

The first idea came from Ellen and Ethan. They wanted to do away with the safety harnesses in the aerial acts, supposedly to add to the spectacle. It was stupidly dangerous and while similar has been proposed before in other groups, I've never once heard of a case where it made a noticeable difference to the take. Somehow they managed to get the support of the other aerialists for the plan, though – including Alice, though I never understood why.

Then there's Luke's rather more sensible plan. He's talking about scaling down our acts, working in smaller venues and doing street performance. It's a good idea and it would really give some of our underappreciated acts more of a chance to shine. Sure, the aerial acts would miss out a bit as their apparatus is cumbersome, but we'd still be able to do some large shows.

Finally, there's Jeremy's version of Luke's suggestion. He is talking about ditching the large-scale acts entirely, and even taking a smaller troupe and leaving the company to do it. I'm uncertain about whether that's a good idea, but I promised him I'd put it to some of the other clowns. That's what I was talking to Paul, Dominic and Hannah about this afternoon, just before... well, we talked a bit about the pros and cons of the ideas, and I told them that I thought it would be a good idea for the four of us to stick together concerning our decision. Nobody else is likely to care much what we think, but if we stand together on the issue, what we say is more likely to matter. That's about as far as we got before we were interrupted.

The Fall

Alice found me this morning just before rehearsals, said she wanted to talk. I should have refused, we were going to be late for rehearsals, but Alice was still shaken up from the slip last night and I wanted to make sure she was okay. Alice said she had finally made up her mind, that she wanted to be with me, only me. We spent a few minutes cuddling and kissing, as long as I dared. I knew we'd be a little late, but it was worth it after all the waiting.

The rest of the morning was frustratingly hectic. I just wanted to get some free time to spend alone with Alice, but immediately after rehearsal, Ethan cornered me in the office as I was straightening out the payslips for some of the clowns, to make sure they actually got paid this week. He wanted to talk about Alice, insisted that she wasn't ready and that he and Ellen should do the dangerous flying trapeze act. Well, I knew why Alice had been off her game, and figured it wouldn't be a problem after we talked this morning but I couldn't very well tell Ethan that. So, I just told him, flatly, that the roles were already worked out, and we weren't changing them now.

Then Ethan pointed out that Matt had been pushing for another rehearsal, just him and Alice, to make sure they had the act right. He suggested that I talk Alice into agreeing to do it, and if she did, and everything went well, he and Ellen would back off.

Frankly, I couldn't think of a better compromise than that. I had been worried for ages about Alice working without safety and with all our personal problems. If she had one good rehearsal it'd boost her confidence and everyone else would feel better about the show tonight too. There wasn't a downside, really. Or so I thought at the time.

So I agreed, and when I was done in the office, I went to find Alice. She was back at the hotel, where she could have her post-rehearsal shower in private. We talked about a few things and then I brought up the idea of one last rehearsal with Matt this afternoon. I could tell Alice was not happy about the idea, but she wasn't willing to come right out and say so. I told her why I thought the extra rehearsal would be a good idea but I didn't mention Ethan or my conversation with him. She said she'd do it but first she was meeting Beth for lunch. I let her go, thinking it wasn't a good time to push her further.

I was meeting some people for lunch too. On my way to the theatre's canteen, I looked around for Matt a bit and tried calling him on my mobile, to let him know that I'd gotten Alice to agree to another rehearsal, but I couldn't find him or get through to his phone. By the time I arrived at the canteen, Alice was already talking with Beth, and Hannah and Dominic were waiting for me with Jeremy.

Jeremy excused himself, knowing that I wanted to talk with Hannah and Dominic. I asked whether they had seen Matt. They hadn't, and when they asked if it was important, I told them I wanted to let him know that Alice had agreed to rehearse with him again. Hannah jumped up, saying that she'd go and get Paul. I noticed that she had her phone in her hand as she left.

Just after Hannah brought Paul back, Matt finally turned up. He walked straight up to Alice and demanded another rehearsal. I'd have had a go at him for treating Alice so rudely, but Paul and Dominic warned me not to. Alice looked about ready to gut him, and maybe even me, but she bit her tongue and just said, "Fine, let's go."

I let them go. I really didn't think it would be wise for me to interfere further just then, so I just stayed and had the conversation with Dominic, Paul and Hannah about Luke and Jeremy's ideas.

Less than twenty minutes later that we were interrupted by the noise from the auditorium. Alice had fallen from the trapeze, during the rehearsal that I had talked her into.

Other People

Alice Taylor (NPC)

I've been very deeply in love with Alice for some months now, but she wasn't willing to make a commitment to me until just this morning. I've been telling her how I want to spend the rest of my life with her, and she always responded positively, even to the point of saying that she wanted to get married and start a family soon, but just stopped short, every time, of making a similar commitment.

This morning, she finally made up her mind to be with me. I'd already started thinking of how I might propose to her. Now she's dead, killed in a freak accident during a rehearsal I persuaded her to do.

Alice joined the company as a favour to her friend Ophelia, and she really hasn't enjoyed her time here very much. She loved performing, but I'm sure Ellen made life as hard for Alice as she did for Tina, from whom Alice took over the starring role.

Bethany Summer

Alice has become very fond of Bethany. She took Beth under her wing, determined to turn her into another top aerialist. Bethany had never done any aerial work, but Alice was sure she had talent that even I didn't see. She just had to help Bethany find the love of flying. I've watched them practising, and Alice was right. Beth really is very good, perhaps as good as Alice was.

Caitlin Chin

It was hard seeing Caitlin miss out on an opportunity when Alice replaced Tina. Caitlin was good enough to do it, though not as good as Alice. She deserves better.

Daniel Higgs

It's hard to tell through the stone mask he wears, but Daniel is proud of what he has achieved here, and he should be.

Dominic Richards

Dominic is new here, but we got along famously from the day he started. He won't

say it, but it's pretty obvious he has been pining for Gwen all along, and Gwen being with Ellen is killing him. He's one of only two people I've told about my relationship with Alice, as a result.

Ellen Telyanin

I should have known bringing Ellen into this company was asking for trouble, but I couldn't turn my back on family. She really is one of the best aerial performers around, but for her "one of the best" isn't good enough, isn't living up to the legacy. I love the girl but I just wish she'd relax a bit and enjoy life more.

Ethan Telyanin

He's a good lad – talented and maybe a little too swayed by Ellen at times but he's a steady performer. And yes, I know he's got a temper – it runs in the family. But he'd never let his temper get in the way of his work so despite the incident with Gwen's stalker I have faith that he can keep his emotions in check.

Gwen Palmer

I should have kept a closer eye on Gwen when she started with us, but when we let her go straight into her silks and other aerial work rather than starting with my clowns, I didn't take as much responsibility as I usually do. As a result, nobody noticed when Gwen started getting stalked, not until the night she was attacked in the dressing room. We're all very lucky that Hannah noticed the man and brought help at the last moment. Ethan, Dominic and Daniel came to the rescue, and Ethan put the man in hospital.

In the aftermath of the attack, Gwen started a relationship with Ellen.

Hannah Riordan

Hannah has so much trouble socially that I wonder whether there's something wrong in her head. I know she tries, though, and I try to look after her. I've been learning fire-twirling from her so that somebody can fill in for her if she can't perform for some

reason, and while she isn't a good teacher, she certainly tells me what I need to know. I just need to listen carefully to what she says.

Jeremy Telyanin

I'm glad I brought Jeremy into the troupe – he needs a little guidance but if I can get him out from under Ellen's influence he'll be the best of the lot of them. He's full of passion and energy and I can see him using them to drive him to his goals.

John Perrett

John could have had a nice girl but he's obviously decided he likes to play with fire. Ellen's got her good points but he's likely to get burnt finding them.

Lily Gardner

Lily's a lovely young lady and I know she fancies John – or did. She's retreated into herself since Ellen took John's fancy and I wish she'd talk to someone about it, get it out of her system.

Luke Conolly

I envy Luke. He's married to a wonderful woman with whom he gets to share not only his life but his career. Sure, he had his wild days in the past, Paul and I still joke about his one-night stands, but he had the brains to change when the time came.

Maria Conolly

An amazing woman in every sense – gentle, considerate, kind and so very talented. I think if Hitler ever walked in and said sorry she'd forgive him. I hope Luke knows how lucky he is.

Matthew Mills

This incident could ruin his career, if he even convinces himself to perform again. He doesn't deserve that.

Ophelia Seymour

Ophelia was the person who recruited me into the company when it was first starting up. She tracked me down, told me that she'd heard how good I was, that she

needed me to get a new project off the ground, and that she could give me the stable work I had lacked since leaving the family show. It did my battered ego good to listen to her, but I was suspicious.

Ophelia showed me her books to convince me. When I realised just how much of her own money she had invested in the project, I figured Ophelia had way too much to lose for it to be a scam.

Ophelia is good enough to hold her own as a clown, but she'll never progress her skills much further. She cares about this circus, though, enough to have invested everything she owns in it. She's got a good head for business, too. I just hope it's good enough.

Paul Morris

Paul doesn't want to be a clown any more. I'm not sure he ever really did, but he performed acceptably well despite his lack of commitment up until recently. After Ophelia, he's been one of my clowns for longer than any of the others, and personally I've come to quite like him, but it'll be better for everyone if he moves on to doing something he prefers – rigging, I believe. He's dating one of the riggers, and he's always been more into the people around him than the job itself.

He's one of the two people I told about my relationship with Alice.

Susan Michaels

When Susan auditioned for the circus, I knew straight away that she had talent but very little training. I could tell that her fitness levels were poor and her diet had been bad for at least a while before the audition. I insisted that we wanted her, but Ophelia had to take care of some things to make that happen, and it was clear to me that I shouldn't press her for the details.

I suggested that Susan work with Jeremy to get her fitness levels up and improve her acrobatic skills. However, I hadn't considered that a relationship might develop between them, and I can tell that it has, but it isn't an easy one. Again, I have tried not to pry.