

John Perrett

Age 23; **Chinese Pole**, Cradle (Flier or Catcher),
Dance Trapeze, **Adagio**

It's tough being a troupe's jack-of-all-trades. It gets hard to carve out a niche of your own, to really put your stamp on an act, when you get called on to fill in for all sorts of different things. My solo acrobalance act is better than anyone else in the troupe can do, but I know that my adagio with Lily is better. Then there's climbing, dance, I even get called on to fill in female roles. My body shape is unusual, which lets me do all these things relatively easily. In a pinch, I can be either flier or catcher in cradle or flying, and who else can claim that?

The Buck's Night

I was Luke's Best Man, so it was up to me to organise his Buck's Night. We decided to make it a week before the wedding, on a Saturday night, so he wouldn't be hung over on the big day.

It was Lily who came up with the idea of us guys all coming round to her apartment at about midnight. She wanted to combine both parties, so we could all have a chance to party together, guys and girls all at once. It isn't exactly traditional, but Luke was okay with the idea, and I guessed Lily had already checked with Maria, so we made it happen. It took a bit of organising – it seems women are a bit more concerned about the details than men are – but with some work, Lily and I got it sorted out. Really, it was kind of fun, doing that with Lily.

So, around midnight, Luke and me and the rest of his best mates rocked up to Lily's place. Some of the guys thought it was a bit odd to meet a bunch of girls – real girls, not strippers – during the buck's night, but I made sure they were too pissed to be complaining about it by the time we got there. It was a pretty typical party, loud music and booze, but nobody really seemed to know what the protocol for a buck-and-hen's night was, since we couldn't really slip money in the girls' panties, could we?

So I wound up sitting on the couch with Lily, with Maria and Ellen nearby, just kind of making small-talk, and to tell the truth, I found myself enjoying it more than the clubs we'd been to earlier. Unfortunately Maria decided to pull Lily away, wanted to show her something in the kitchen, and it was pretty clear that the invitation didn't extend to me.

Or to Ellen, it seemed, because she stayed with me. "Well, what are you and I going to do while they do secret wedding stuff, hmm?" she asked me. With a huge grin, she took my hand and pulled me up out of the couch. "C'mon, let's dance," she whispered as she wrapped herself around me.

The dancing must have lasted five minutes, maybe ten, before Ellen tugged me in the direction of the hall. By then my crotch was buzzing almost as much as my head. She pushed the bedroom door halfway open and started to slip through, then pressed back against me again as she backed out even faster. "Oops, occupado!" she giggled. "Hold on, this'll be a lark." She fished a mobile out of her cleavage. I should have stopped her, but I wasn't thinking real fast. She held it through the quarter-open door, and light flared in the bedroom.

"Sorry, lover-boy, gotta go!" Ellen cried as she fled the scene. Nonplussed, I pushed the door gently open. Alice and Luke were hurriedly pulling on their clothes. I pulled the door closed, and stood outside to make sure nobody interrupted them again.

I never talked to Alice about it, and I didn't talk to Luke until the next day. The conversation went much like you'd expect: "What the fuck were you thinking?" and "You can't tell her, ever," pretty much covered it. Except Ellen knew, maybe even had a photo. I told Luke I'd do what I could.

Ellen was surprisingly nice about it. I was afraid she'd be a bitch about it, but I guess she's got more class than I gave her credit for. She said she'd keep quiet, as a favour to me. Then she drew me in close, her breath against my face as intoxicating as the beer that night...

And then she sprang away again, giggling. Damn that woman's hot.

Street Performance

Shortly before the wedding, we all learnt that the company had been having some financial problems. They were serious enough to delay some people's pay coming through one week.

This is circus, though, and when we say "The show must go on," we mean it. Especially Luke, he's a real never-say-die bloke. Sure enough, he came up with plans to deal with the problem. He wants us to focus on producing smaller, more versatile shows, ones which can play in a greater variety of venues, right down to acts that can be performed on the street.

I can certainly work in those environments. Acrobalance is great for small spaces. The only problem is, I was really hoping to get into some aerial acts, so I can partner with Ellen. Under that plan, there would be less opportunity for aerial acts, and we're already aerial-heavy.

The Fall

I was at a bit of a loose end after this morning's final dress rehearsal, so when I spotted Ellen heading towards the front entrance, I fell into step beside her. She slowed her pace when I joined her and returned my banter as we walked. She feigned concern for Gwen's feelings as an excuse to part company with me in the corridor between our rooms, but she was giggling as she made the claim.

I hadn't really intended to walk all the way back to the hotel. I had just wanted to kill some time to allow the rest of the performers to disperse after the rehearsal, so I could get some space on the stage to myself for a while. I always like to get in some last-minute training before a show. Never anything too strenuous, because muscle fatigue is an acrobancer's worst enemy, but enough to stretch myself out. Still, I had all afternoon, so I grabbed a bite to eat on my way back to the theatre.

Lily and Maria were already on the stage when I arrived, but they were practicing their paired wire routine, so there was plenty of floor space for me, and for Susan when she came in a little after me.

Alice and Matt came in a little later. I didn't pay much attention to them, except to shift my equipment away from the centre of the space. I knew they would want to use the trapeze apparatus, and much as I've always trusted them to know what they are doing, the movement overhead always gives me the willies.

When I heard the scream and the thump... It took me a few seconds to get my feet back on the ground, and then I saw Susan standing over Alice's crumpled body. I ran past Susan, and dropped to the floor beside Alice. She was alive, I could see that, but her injuries...

She looked right past me, and said, quite clearly and calmly, "She'll finally get what she wanted." I don't think she knew I was there.

We needed help, and Lily and Maria weren't down from the wire yet. "Get an ambulance," I ordered Susan, but she didn't move. She just stood there with her mouth wide open. I stood and stepped between her and Alice, breaking her line of sight. As her eyes met mine, I shouted at her, "Get an ambulance! Go!" And she turned and ran.

I turned back to Alice, knelt down... I could tell that one arm was broken, but there was too much blood to have come from that. I think some of it came from the back of her head. I didn't dare move her to check, so I took a hold of her good hand, tried to tell her it was going to be alright. Now she was looking at me, and she knew it wasn't. She said, "Oh, God, I fell, didn't I? Nigel..." and then she was gone.

Other People

Alice Taylor (NPC)

I could hardly believe my eyes when I saw Alice in bed with Luke. It didn't seem like her at all. Sure, she liked her fun, I watched her flirt with a number of the guys here – Matt, Ethan, even Nigel and Jeremy a little – but she always seemed to pull up well short of those sorts of shenanigans.

Bethany Summer

Beth has cut right back on her acrobatic work recently, in favour of learning trapeze from Alice. As a result, she is doing less in this show than she has in the past. I hope she's not putting her career at risk, a performer who doesn't perform is worth nothing at all in this industry. On the other hand, I guess the troupe may have room for another aerialist with Alice... gone.

It's good to see that Beth has been throwing herself into the chinese pole act. She was always wary about climbing acts in the past.

Caitlin Chin

Caitlin's the kind of performer you want to work with – focused and consistent. I do think it's a bit weird that she's dating Matt though. She and Daniel were always so close that I kept expecting them to get together.

Daniel Higgs

Daniel's a great acrobalance artist – it takes incredible strength to hold the positions with his sort of bulk – but he transitioned into aerial work a while back. Maybe he can give me some pointers on applying our style to aerial acts.

Dominic Richards

Dominic is one of the clowns, along with Paul, crossing over into serious acrobatics to join with Jeremy and me for a human ladder act. He sure is more dedicated to it than Paul. That willingness to throw himself into anything will take him far. He's got a way to go, but he's only been

here a little while, and this is his first paid work in circus.

Ellen Telyanin

Before Ellen, it had been ages since any woman had shown an interest in me. I think it's my physique, all slight and wiry, not at all like muscle-men like Daniel. And wow, is Ellen something! She's hugely talented but she's also exciting and passionate. I know she's afraid her family would look down on her for dating a non-aerialist but she's made it clear if that wasn't an issue that we'd definitely have a chance together. I'm not sure how Gwen fits into that picture but I have to admit I'd love to find out!

Ethan Telyanin

If it wasn't for Ellen I'd have nothing to do with the prick. He's got this aerialist complex so far up his ass it's a wonder he doesn't sneeze up harnesses. With that kind of attitude it's no wonder Ellen's afraid that dating me while I'm a ground-performer would hurt her relationship with her family.

Gwen Palmer

Tonight will be Gwen's first return to the stage after an incident after one of our shows several months back. Some lunatic attacked her. Ethan, Daniel and Dominic showed that we can protect our own, but I can see why Gwen has been antsy about going back on stage. This has meant I've had limited chances to work with her, just a little practice on cradle to keep my skills up.

Ellen and Gwen have been sleeping together since around then. I haven't gotten the impression that this stands in the way of Ellen and me. There's ways to work these things out.

Hannah Riordan

I rarely see Hannah talk to anyone – she's really very antisocial. And the way she watches people all the time, plus the weird things she can come out with, makes me think she's really not quite right in the head.

Hannah's fire act is way too specialised. She really needs to diversify her skills to fit in with the company's direction. She has a big role in the new show, but there aren't always options to use fire so much.

Jeremy Telyanin

I've done a lot more work with Jeremy than his brother and sister, and yeah, he's good, maybe even as good as the Telyanin reputation. Still, I wish he'd keep his feet on the ground, so to speak, a bit more. Trampoline really has more in common with bungee trapeze than floor acrobatics. There's nothing wrong with that, of course, but we need to keep up the variety in the show.

Lily Gardner

Lily's a great partner and a good friend, but something's been bothering her the last few months, and I wish she'd tell me what it is. Sometimes it helps to talk about these things. I first noticed it at Luke and Maria's wedding reception. Maybe it has to do with being the Maid of Honour. Lily has said that she's been a bridesmaid twice before, but I think this is the first time she's been older the bride, so that could well be it.

If she'd talk to me, I'd be able to reassure her that she'll find a good man. She's easygoing, fun to be around, and as for her body, well, she's a friggin' circus acrobat, of course she's hot! All she has to do is relax and let it happen.

Luke Conolly

Luke and I have been mates for ages. I can count on him to have my back, and he's full of ideas, but damn if he doesn't half get carried away. That thing with Alice wasn't the first time I've had to pull his arse out of a fire, but it sure was the worst.

Maria Conolly

I hope Maria's feeling okay. I've noticed recently that she frequently puts her hand up to her face or temple, as if she has a headache. Maybe that explains why she's been short-tempered, too. She's normally one of the most pleasant people I know.

Matthew Mills

He's not a bad guy I guess but gods, he's a shameless flirt. I can't stand the way he thinks all he has to do is throw on the charm and any girl will fall for him. Hell, he's still hitting on half the cast when he's dating Caitlin. But the damnable thing is, the girls do seem to fall for it!

Nigel Telyanin

Nigel's the old man of the troupe, and we all have a lot of respect for his knowledge of showmanship. A lot of that comes from his family, it turns out. When his niece and nephews joined the troupe, we learnt that they are all from an old circus family, so Nigel has probably been training since he could walk.

Somehow he wound up a clown here, instead of a top star in the family's show. To tell the truth, I can't imagine him being anything else. He's been happy here the last few years, and even more so of late. It must be good to have family around again, though there has to be better ways for it to happen than to lose the family business.

Ophelia Seymour

Ophelia's okay I guess but she keeps hinting that I'm wasting my time trying to get an aerial role. What would she know, though?

Paul Morris

Paul's been hooking up with one of the riggers, Cecelia. Good for him. I just wish he wouldn't let it distract him so much, he's not the best acrobat in the first place and the human ladder act is trickier than it appears.

Susan Michaels

Jeremy has been in charge of Susan's acrobatics training, and he gets me to help out with it sometimes. He likes using the way I can often take both parts in partner work. Susan really is very talented. I've watched her training for cradle. It gets less attention than most aerial acts, but it may well be the hardest aerial act we've got, and Susan is already Gwen's understudy for cradle flier.