

Jeremy Telyanin

Age 22; **Trampoline**, Flying Trapeze I (Angel 2),
*Bungee Trapeze, Chinese Pole, **Human Ladder***

Circus is in my blood. It's my family's passion and mine too. Like my older sister Ellen and brother Ethan, my earliest memories are of training for performance.

Times change, though, and those who don't change with them are doomed. So it was for our circus, the family business. It was too old-style to survive today. Nouveau cirque is where it's at today, all acrobats, contortionists and dancers, and beyond all of that, theatre and story-telling. An animal act is not only expensive but an invitation for protestors to picket your show, and collecting money to show a freak is bad taste.

But the acts that require true talent do live on. There are places for highly trained performers like me and my siblings. We just have to look for the opportunities. The rest of my family spat on the name of Nigel Telyanin when he left the family show, but really, he was a pioneer for us, and when everyone else was out of work, he was even able to offer the three of us places with this company.

I'm an acrobat, acrobalancer and trampoliner, which isn't much different from what I was doing with the family show. I was being groomed for aerial work in the old circus, like every Telyanin, but even then I still wasn't on the trapeze very much, so my role here isn't much different.

Ethan and Ellen were able to step right into aerial roles. They have always been shitty that they didn't step straight into starring trapeze roles, forgetting that the company had one of the best aerial acts around before we joined. The aerialists here might not have generations of tradition to back them up, but nevertheless they are good enough that even my siblings will have to prove themselves.

Street Performance

We all know the company isn't doing so well. A while back, there weren't even enough funds in the bank to make payroll, not for everyone. Sure, everyone got paid, but some of us had to wait for a transfer from "another account". That's code for "yet another cash injection from the backers".

The owners have pinned all their hopes on this new show, on drawing enough attention with some spectacular acts to keep the crowds coming back all season. I've been through this before, and that's exactly the sort of wishful thinking that let the family's circus go under. All the eggs in one basket, hold tight long enough and it'll all come good eventually. Well, the world's just been through a depression, Australian circus is saturated with performers, and holding tight isn't good enough. If it was, Ellen, Ethan and I would still be shareholders in the family circus.

A few weeks back, Luke tackled the issue head-on. He got a bunch of us together, and talked with us about other performance opportunities, chances to use our skills outside of the big auditorium shows. We're talking small theatres, street performance, public performance art, that sort of thing.

It's a great idea – more baskets for our eggs, alternate revenue streams. But when you get down to it, it's not going to be enough. There are good reasons why troupes our size don't get into that – it's because we've got too much overhead.

So the other night, I talked to Luke about leaving the company – not permanently, just until the economic situation favours the big shows again. Put the whole thing on hiatus for a season. In the meantime, we split up into small groups, individual acts.

We wouldn't be able to sustain all the acts this way – the aerial acts need bigger venues than we'd often get, and the acts where we have a dozen or fifteen of us on-stage at once just

wouldn't be economical. Some of us might have to find other work for a while. The office staff would go, and we'd cut back on riggers and trainers – we just wouldn't need them so much.

But it'd just be temporary, and it's better than losing the company entirely, right?

Luke didn't see it that way. He's dead set against any form of hiatus for the company, or anything that might put anyone out of work. He doesn't have the will to do what has to be done.

Well somebody has to. These people I work with every day, I want to protect them. It's about us, not about the owners and their seed money.

So I've talked with Uncle Nigel about it, and he promised he'd put it to the clowns – they really look up to him, and if anyone can make them listen, it's good old Unca Nige. I've previously told Susan about it, when we've been alone together, and I talked to Lily about it over lunch today, too, but that's as far as I've gotten with it.

The Fall

I'd promised Uncle Nigel that I'd give him a chance to talk to the other clowns about my proposal, something he said he'd do today, but in the meantime there was nothing stopping me from talking with some of the others about it. I particularly wanted to catch up with John, Lily and Maria, the others with really strong acrobatics skills, so when I spotted Lily coming out of the ladies' change area shortly after this morning's rehearsal, I grabbed my chance. I waited until Susan and Hannah, who had come out a little before Lily, were out of earshot, heading into the canteen with Dominic, before I called out to attract Lily's attention. Then I asked if she had lunch plans, and said there was something I wanted to talk with her about.

So we headed out to find ourselves a quiet little café, and I put forward my ideas for circus performance under a new structure.

While we talked – and it wasn't all about that one topic, either, we made chit-chat too – Lily warned that she had to get back to the performance venue soon. She had promised to meet Maria for some last-minute work on the tightwire. So, when we were done, we headed back to the venue. Lily headed back to the change rooms, and I went to the canteen to see if Susan was still there with Hannah and Dominic.

I'd hoped to be able to spend some time with Susan this afternoon. Even when it isn't just the two of us, I just enjoy being around her. I was disappointed that I didn't get a chance to do that. She was still there, sharing a table with Hannah and Dominic, but she excused herself only a few minutes after I joined them. She said she wanted to do some extra training on her own, but I'm not sure why she felt she needed it. Maybe she's just nervous about tonight, but it felt like something else, and I'm not sure what.

I hung around with Hannah and Dominic for a little while, until Nigel turned up. He said he wanted to go over some stuff with Hannah and Dominic, and since that was probably the conversation he'd promised they'd have, I said I'd leave him to it. I hung around in the foyer for a few minutes, wondering whether I should stick around to find out how things went, so I was still there when Hannah walked out and headed for the performance area. I don't think she noticed me, she was busy with her phone.

I guessed she was going to fetch Susan, and I was tempted to wait and say hi again, but her leaving so quickly after I arrived had already been awkward enough. I decided to head back to the hotel, maybe find Ellen or Ethan and see if they wanted to go see a movie or something.

I never found them. I was back in my hotel room watching an afternoon soap when the police knocked on my door and asked to talk to me.

Other People

Alice Taylor (NPC)

When Alice took Tina's place, she stepped into the middle of a war I doubt she even knew was taking place. There's always consequences for those who get in Ellen's way.

Alice was a lot of fun, very bright and bubbly, but she had a backbone. Tina couldn't take the pressure, but Alice did, and even started to fight back, I'd say. Whether Beth realised it or not, whether even Alice realised it, Alice started lining up her pawns that day.

But since Luke and Maria got married, Alice seemed more subdued, as if she'd had some kind of shock she needed to absorb.

Bethany Summer

Alice changed Beth, big-time. She used to be so insecure, a quiet little mouse, but when Alice managed to get her hands wrapped around that trapeze... Yeah, Beth learnt ambition that day. The question is, will she hold onto it now that her mentor is gone?

Caitlin Chin

She tends to keep people at a distance but she's civil enough to me. As Alice's understudy, she's the obvious choice to step into Alice's role, but she's never shown much willingness to fight for anything before. It's not so much of a matter of if she'll step aside for Ellen, but when.

Daniel Higgs

Daniel really is a statue come to life. He's got this calm, this reserve that makes you feel like he's assessing everything you say or do like he's watching a television show. He just never reacts to anything – it's no wonder he and Caitlin are friends, they're both so stony.

Dominic Richards

Dominic is one of the newest recruits, and as he is a clown, he and Susan have become pretty good friends. He's not a great

performer at the moment, but he's new to it, it'll come. Not everyone can be a Telyanin.

Ellen Telyanin

Look, she's my big sister and I love her but damn if she can't be a pain in the ass. She keeps pulling the 'big sister' act and trying to push for me to get bigger roles. I know she's just looking out for me but I'd like to get roles based on my skills and not on her silver tongue.

Ethan Telyanin

Ethan can play a bit rough occasionally. I still get twinges in my leg from where he broke it when I was six and he decided I needed to toughen up and pushed me off the trampoline I was training on. He's gotten better since then but you really don't want to get on his bad side. Or sometimes even his good one.

Gwen Palmer

Gwen keeps trying to spend time with me although I can see it scares her. Not really surprising given she got attacked by that weirdo in her dressing room but since she's now going out with Ellen I guess she feels the need to play nice with the 'in-laws'. She's a sweet girl but I keep thinking she's a bit too innocent for El – although she may have a lot more fire than she lets us see.

Hannah Riordan

I can sympathise with Hannah – she gets a little bit ostracised very being odd, much as I do for being related to Ethan and Ellen. I try and include her in conversations partly because I'd hate to be her but mostly because it can only look good to Susan if I try and be nice to her friends.

If I was in charge around here, I'd want to get somebody else trained up in fire-twirling, so that Hannah isn't the only one who is really good at it, but I don't think she'd be much of a teacher.

John Perrett

I don't get John – Lily's been making eyes at him for ages and I don't think he's ever even noticed. To top it off all of a sudden he's got it in his head that if he can score an aerial role he can also score with Ellen. Huh. Good luck with *that*.

Lily Gardner

Lily's pretty close to Maria and Luke and I can tell she's got no love for Ellen so trying to talk to her tends to be a bit painful. I just wish I could convince her that I'm trying to look out for all our best interests.

Luke Conolly

I'm not saying he's a bad guy but he's just so stubborn. If it's not his idea he won't listen even when the other idea has merit. But if I can convince him that splintering off into a separate smaller show is a good idea than everyone else who's backing him will fall in line. If only I could find a way to get him to hear me out.

Maria Conolly

Maria's a nice enough woman but there's no denying that she's Luke's through and through. If it ever came to a vote on our plans I know she'd back her husband without thinking about it. If I can get her on-side then maybe she can persuade him to at least consider my proposal seriously, but that's about all I can ever hope for.

Matthew Mills

He likes to play the nice guy card – maybe some of it's real but he always treats me a little weird, as if he's afraid I'll turn around and bite. I guess I can't blame him, he's been under as much pressure from Ellen as Alice was.

Nigel Telyanin

For all that my father used to spit at his name I have to say Uncle Nigel's the only one who offered to help the family when the circus went bust. He's an amazing guy and he really knows how to make you feel good about yourself. I know half the performers think of him as their circus dad

– I know Alice must have, she was always pulling him off for quiet chats.

Ophelia Seymour

I'm sure she means well but Ophelia's protective big-sister act over Susan's really starting to piss me off. What Susan and I get up to is none of her damn business.

Paul Morris

Paul's okay but I'd say he's definitely looking to move out of stagework at the end of the show. With his new girlfriend being a rigger he spends most of his time hanging off the scaffolding fiddling with the equipment instead of rehearsing. Man, he's courting danger if Ellen or Ethan ever realise he's been re-doing their lines.

If I manage to restructure the company the way I want, Paul might be shit out of luck, one way or another. We have to cut overheads to survive, and "overheads" includes "support staff". He might be able to stay on if he's willing to pull up his socks and put on an act worth having, and he'd be welcome to contribute to rigging work too, but there's decent odds his girlfriend will be looking for other work.

Susan Michaels

Susan is one of the most recent recruits for our company. Uncle Nigel insisted on her being hired, saying that she has incredible talent. She's had virtually no training in circus arts before coming to us, though. Nigel asked me to take responsibility for her acrobatics training. She's a very fast learner, though we've had to work on her strength.

She's not just talented though, she's also an amazing person. She seems so untouched by the world and as soon as I met her I felt this huge need to protect her. Maybe I've been a bit pushy about moving our relationship along but I can't understand why she keeps holding me at arms length – it's not like we're children playing games. I love her – she must know I'd never hurt her. But sometimes, I feel like she's just playing with my emotions...