

Age 20; *Physical Comedy/Magic (Sorcerer)*,
Physical Comedy/Magic (Minion), **Human Ladder**

Dominic Richards

I joined the circus about eight months ago, the same time as my friend Gwen. We met at Circus Oz, where we trained together, first as an after-school thing and then more intensively after we finished our HSCs. I got into circus from gymnastics; Gwen and her boyfriend were dancers.

I think we all would have liked to have stayed with Circus Oz, but they accept a lot less people into their performing troupe than their classes, so if we wanted to work in circus, we had to look for work elsewhere. Gwen and I both auditioned with this company, and they accepted us both. That makes me low man on the totem pole, except for Susan who joined even later, which means I do mostly clowning and stilt-work – not exactly what I was hoping for, but just getting into a performing group is hard enough. Anyway, it means I got to stay with Gwen. See, I always had a... thing... for Gwen, but at Circus Oz she had a boyfriend. I thought maybe with him going to work with a troupe in Sydney, they'd break up, and maybe then I could say something to her.

I didn't say anything for a little while, though, just wanted to settle in here first. Then I heard a rumour that Gwen had been getting deliveries; flowers and cards, stuff like that. I mentioned Gwen's boyfriend to some of the others, and word got around pretty quick.

The Stalker

It wasn't until the attack that I realised Gwen really had broken up with her old boyfriend. The presents were from some psychopath who had seen Gwen perform. He turned up here one night, after most of us had headed home, snuck into the dressing rooms and attacked her. She was just lucky some of us hadn't left yet.

Hannah was the one who noticed the psycho, and came and found Daniel, Ethan and me in the men's dressing area. Hannah's pretty odd, but if she said there was a guy who shouldn't be there in the women's dressing room, we weren't going to sit around asking her questions. We raced into the women's dressing room. I dove straight past the psycho to where Gwen was huddled in the corner, frightened out of her mind. Daniel got between him and us, and Ethan just laid into him. Daniel pulled Ethan away eventually, but the guy got taken away in an ambulance, not a cop car.

I stayed with Gwen until her parents arrived and the cops wanted to take our statements. The next few days, I hung out with Gwen a lot, just trying to be there for her. I thought about telling her how I felt, but I didn't think she'd want that, not so soon. Ellen hung around with us a lot too. Hell, everybody did, nobody wanted to leave Gwen alone for a while, but Ellen and me were there the most.

A week or so later, I decided I couldn't take it any more, I had to say something to Gwen. Holding it in was killing me. But I couldn't get time with her alone to talk to her. Everyone else was always hanging around, especially Ellen.

Then one day I saw Ellen and Gwen in the wings. They were kissing. I snuck away and never talked to Gwen about any of it.

Street Performance

There's been some talk about how the company is in some trouble, following the day a few months back when some of us didn't get paid on time. I haven't had very many jobs, but even I know that's not a good sign, even if it did get sorted out quickly.

Luke took the initiative and came up with some ideas about things we could do to increase the company's revenue, mostly involving opportunities for shows that we've been missing out on - small venues, street performance, and similar. It would mean more work for those of us

whose acts are more suited to smaller venues, but it might help, and we clowns tend to have some time to spare anyway, as we usually don't need to rehearse so intensively.

But today, Nigel has told some of us – me, Paul and Hannah – that Jeremy has come up with another version of the plan. He wants to ditch the aerial acts entirely, maybe even leave the company with a smaller troupe.

The four of us didn't come to any decision before we were interrupted, but Nigel did tell us that he thought it would be a good idea for us to stick together on the issue. Our views are sometimes overlooked as coming from "junior performers", and this may make that harder.

The Fall

Clowns are supposed to be happy, to make people laugh, and for the first half of this morning's rehearsal, I was doing it. Even the other performers, who have seen the act a dozen times, were chuckling at us. But after Gwen did her tissu act, I just didn't feel like it any more. Her performance is always so expressive, and the pain and vulnerability she showed... it breaks my heart all over again seeing her do that. I know I was just going through the motions after that, and Nigel, at least, will have seen that.

After the rehearsal, Gwen grabbed me and asked me to do her a favour. She said she was going to head back to Ellen's hotel room, and wait for her there, and could I let her know? I guess there were just too many people around, and Gwen wanted to get away pretty quick. I said yeah, of course I'd do that for her.

So I went and hung around outside the women's dressing room, telling myself that I'd let Ellen shower, then pass on the message. About ten minutes later, she came out, and Susan was right behind her. Ellen barely glanced my way, but Susan walked right up to me and asked what I was up to now. I almost asked her to wait up for a sec while I talked to Ellen...

... but I didn't. I just couldn't bring myself to pass on a message from Gwen to Ellen. I mean, I'm happy for Gwen, but I'm not *that* happy.

Instead, I just went to the canteen with Susan and Hannah. Nigel had asked us to meet him there a bit later, to discuss some things and do another rehearsal this afternoon.

Jeremy came and joined us after a while, and Susan quickly excused herself, saying she wanted to do some training on her own. Those two... they obviously like each other, but...

When Nigel arrived, Jeremy left the three of us alone so we could talk. Straight away, Nigel asked us if we had seen Matt. We hadn't, not since the rehearsal, and when I asked what it was about, he said that Alice had agreed to do the extra rehearsal that Matt wanted, but he hadn't been able to find Matt to pass that on, and his mobile was off.

Then Hannah jumped up, saying she'd go and get Paul, so we could get started. I'm pretty sure she had her own mobile in hand as she went. While she was gone, I explained to Nigel that Susan seemed to want some time to herself, and we agreed to have our discussion without her, and without Ophelia either, because Nigel knew she was busy.

When Hannah came back with Paul, we were ready to get down to business, but there was yet another interruption. Matt had turned up, and spotted Alice and Bethany at another table. When Matt threatened to do the flying trapeze act with Caitlin tonight, Nigel looked like he was ready to punch him, but I warned him, "Nigel, don't," and Paul glared at him. He stayed put while Alice snapped, "Fine, let's go then," and the two of them headed out.

After a few minutes for Nigel to compose himself, we finally talked, but it wasn't strictly tonight's act that we talked about. We actually talked about Luke and Jeremy's proposals, but only briefly. We were interrupted by a scream, and then yelling, coming from the stage. Somebody roared, "Get an ambulance!" and we knew something very bad had happened.

Other People

Alice Taylor (NPC)

Alice was the big star, the prima donna. She didn't have much time to spare for the newest clown, not with two secret boyfriends on the go.

Bethany Summer

Bethany was always with the acrobats and aerialists recently, and especially with Alice. Nigel says that she and Alice had become very close, and that Alice was determined to bring out Bethany's best talents.

Caitlin Chin

I hear that Caitlin has been around since the earliest days of the company. She seems like a very good performer to me, but then what do I know about aerial work? She mustn't have been that good, or the owners wouldn't have brought in Alice the way they did.

Daniel Higgs

Before the incident with the stalker, I hadn't really had much to do with Daniel. He's hard to get to know, because talking with him can be like talking to a wall.

But since the attack, Gwen has liked to stick close to Daniel, and that's given me a chance to get to know him better. He actually treats Gwen very gently, and it doesn't seem like it's because he's interested in something other than friendship. It's more like he can afford to be gentle because he has nothing to prove.

Ellen Telyanin

I don't want to like Ellen. I really don't. But the way she cares for Gwen means I can't hate her for being the one with her. I used to think she was a bit stuck up but I guess that all comes from being a top-class artist – she loves Gwen though so I guess I can forgive her a little bit of pride.

Ethan Telyanin

Ethan scares the shit out of me. I didn't get a good look at his fight with the stalker, but

I saw the other guy afterwards, and for anyone to have done that to another man... it just boggles me. It's not just that one time, either. He's got a nasty temper, and I'm not sure he'd bother keeping it under control if nobody was around to do it for him.

Ellen is his twin sister. Fortunately she's a lot more stable than Ethan is, and she seems to keep him on a short leash. I'm not sure how, though.

Gwen Palmer

I haven't been able to stop thinking about Gwen ever since we were taking classes together after school at Circus Oz. I think it was seeing her do her beautiful tissu for the first time that made me fall in love with her.

Hannah Riordan

Everyone expects a fire artist to be all passionate and outgoing, but Hannah is really shy and awkward. Lots of people seem to think that she's a bit slow, too, but she's really very smart, just not good at expressing herself.

I feel bad for her, 'cause I know what it's like when people don't see the real you. She does bring it on herself, though. She wields her fire like a shield of spinning flames between her and the rest of the world.

Jeremy Telyanin

When I first joined the company, I almost thought that Jeremy was another clown, because he insisted on hanging around with us clowns. He never practised with us, though. It became obvious pretty quickly that it wasn't the clowns he was after, as such. Rather, it was Susan.

He's a nice guy, but a bit pushy. I guess the arrogance is a bit of a family trait, as his sister Ellen and brother Ethan certainly have their share of it.

John Perrett

A lot of the guys here look like real meataxes, but you wouldn't pick John as anything special walking down the street. In

fact, he's almost girly, but I've trained with him, and he's got some real power to him.

John was Luke's Best Man.

Lily Gardner

Lily and Maria seem a study in contrasts. Lily is cautious and steady while Maria is vivacious and courageous. I can't help but feel that Lily is vaguely suspicious of me.

Luke Conolly

Nigel and Paul like to make ribald jokes at Luke's expense. They'd never let Maria hear them, though, and Nigel at least is tactful around Luke, but Paul has been known to cough "groupies" at Luke when drunk. They haven't filled me in on the details, but I can take a few guesses about Luke's past.

That should all be behind him now. He married Maria shortly before the start of the last show run.

Maria Conolly

I hadn't even heard of risley before I started here, and from what I hear that spectacular act was Maria's idea. The highwire acts with Lily were Maria's idea too, and that's a circus staple. And then there's Luke.

It appears that Maria is a woman who knows what she wants and takes it. I gather she's only a little older than me, too.

Matthew Mills

It seems that Matt has taken over from Luke on the man-about-town front. He flirts outrageously with anyone who looks good in a skirt. (Well, except John.) I wish I had the charisma to back it up the way he does.

Nigel Telyanin

Everybody looks up to Nigel around here, except maybe his niece and nephews. He's got the most experience in circus of any of us, and he's an expert showman. When I started, it was pretty obvious he was supposed to be my mentor.

Pretty quickly our relationship became one of friendship, though. He's twice my age, but we still have so much in common.

As it turns out, that includes a taste for unattainable women. Nigel told me and Paul that he had been seeing Alice, but she was seeing someone else too. Nigel tried not to give up hope, but there were times he seemed pretty convinced she was going to choose the other guy, whoever he was, in the end. I guess now that doesn't matter so much, neither of them gets the girl, but I doubt that will help Nigel.

Ophelia Seymour

Something I've discovered about circus is that it's really hard to judge the age of a woman here. The training makes them all appear younger. I'm pretty sure that 'Phelie is a fair bit older than a lot of us, though, because she seems to know a fair bit about business, enough that I doubt circus is her first career. She mustn't have much ambition, since she's still clowning after several years here. She's got hidden talents, though, 'cause I've seen her doing straps, and that requires great physical form.

Paul Morris

Paul and I have become pretty good mates. He's easy to get along with, except it's pretty annoying how he just seems to go through the motions a lot of the time on-stage. Nigel keeps telling me how expressing what you feel is what makes a clown act, but I think Nigel has almost given up on getting Paul to really feel the parts he plays.

Paul is dating one of the riggers, a woman named Cecelia. He spends a lot of time with her, even when she should be working.

Susan Michaels

Susan was the third person who joined the company at the same time Gwen and I did. She's nice, and pretty. Maybe if I hadn't been pining over Gwen, I could have had a shot with her, but even if I wanted to I'm pretty sure I'd still lose out. Something is going on between her and Jeremy, though she runs all hot and cold about it.

Susan also seems very lonely. I've never heard her mention family or friends outside of the company.