

Caitlin Chin

Age 24; **Dance Trapeze, Cradle (Catcher),
*Flying Trapeze I (Angel)***

I'm a dancer at heart. For me, dance trapeze and dance acrobatics has always been a means use my body to tell a story. I tried doing theatre and singing when I was in high school, but my voice is terrible, so I got into dance instead. I found myself capable of achieving some of the more extreme physical feats in dance, and that eventually led me to a career in circus.

My father laughed when I told him I was joining a circus. At first, I thought he was being disdainful of my choice of career, but he explained that my great-grandmother had performed with Shanghai Circus World, and it amused him that I would follow so long after. I hadn't ever known about my great-grandmother.

Financial Trouble

A few months ago, shortly before Luke and Maria's wedding, it came out that the company is having financial problems. Something went wrong with the pays, and while some of us got out money – mine came through just fine – some of the pays were delayed by a few days while they sorted out a cash flow issue. It wasn't a big deal in itself, but it isn't a good sign for a company.

Since then, there have been a few schemes thought up to try to deal with the issue.

Safety-Free

The first idea to increase profits has been a mad scheme to draw in the crowds by making our acts even more spectacularly risky. The idea is to work without safety lines. The aerial acts are already what really wows an audience – I know that the tumblers are just as skilled as aerialists, but the typical layman just sees the danger. Since it is the danger that catches their breaths, an increased risk means bigger crowds and more money, right? Well, there might be something in that, if you care to work the publicity that way, but the risk is huge.

I think it was Ellen who first suggested working safety-free, or maybe Ethan. Alice didn't seem happy with the idea at first, but eventually surprised me by coming out in favour of it. I expected Ellen to be all over this issue, but it's been Alice who has been the strongest proponent of the idea. Bethany has fallen in line behind her mentor, though frankly I've seen her training without the safeties, and she loves it. Gwen just goes along with anything her girlfriend, Ellen, says. Daniel doesn't like it any better than I do, but even if we convinced Matt to back us up on it, we'd still be outnumbered.

So we've been working without safety lines in the lead-up to the new show.

Street Performance

The second idea being bandied around has been to cut back on the aerial work and target our shows more at street performance and small venues. That's an idea being bandied around by the tumblers and the clowns. As an aerialist, nobody has really wanted my opinion on that subject.

The Recruiter

I had a plan of my own, though. I've been talking to a personnel manager from Cirque du Soleil. Cirque is huge, and he was looking at me for a role in an overseas production. It's a great opportunity, and he reckons I've got the talent to make it in Cirque. He said he was taking a close look at me, had seen some of our shows, even took copies of some of our training footage. I was sure it was going to happen.

But then he turned around and said he wasn't sure. I've got the skill, he's sure of that, but he's not sure I've got the drive he's looking for. He asked me some questions about how Alice came in and took the lead when Tina left, and why didn't I push for the part myself? Why am

I the understudy if I'm really the best? I know I can do it, but just because I didn't push for the top part when there was an opening, I might have lost a golden opportunity.

Well, I hate the way it's happened, but now the part is open again.

The Fall

Tonight's the start of a new show. I've always been in two minds about rehearsals on the day of a new show. On the one hand, if you aren't ready twelve hours before opening, another rehearsal won't do more than tire you out; on the other, getting it right is a rush for any performer, and for many of us, that does help clear away the jitters. Frankly, the way things have been recently, most of us need a confidence boost, so this morning's rehearsal seemed a wise call.

Unfortunately, our performance didn't do much to inspire confidence. We started with people straggling in like grazing cattle on a roadside. At 9:00am, there were only fifteen of us on the stage ready to go, with Ophelia hurrying down the aisle and Hannah having forgotten to put her shoes away again. Nigel arrived just after we were supposed to have started; so many of the performers look up to him, and he sets such a poor example. And Alice, the star of the show, wasn't there until a few minutes after Nigel. We're supposed to be professionals, capable of millisecond-precise timing, and we can't even get to our final rehearsal on time!

Our performances were... scattered, I guess. Some of us were brilliant – Ethan is rarely so precise, I could tell that Gwen was feeling a little vulnerable but she somehow harnessed that to enhance her performance, Luke and Maria were doing fine, and you could tell the clowns were loving it, except maybe Paul. But Alice was shaky, Matt let his concern for Alice show too much, John and Jeremy seemed distracted, and Dominic lost his focus about halfway through.

Immediately after rehearsal, Matt confronted Alice – yes, confronted, I can't call it anything else – essentially demanded that she rehearse with him again this afternoon. He's right, they really did need to do some work to get confident again, but arguing about it in front of everyone wasn't going to bring her confidence back. Daniel caught my eye, so I did what I'd been considering anyway, and dragged Matt off to his room. Daniel followed behind, and I left to give them some private time.

I jumped on a tram into the city, so that everyone would assume that Matt was with me and not think about Daniel and Matt together. I stayed on it all the way up to Melbourne Central, so I could get in out of the sun and into the air con.

Just before 1pm, I got a call from Hannah. With typical bluntness, she just asked if Matt was with me. Since we hadn't sorted out a story in advance, and Hannah was obviously expecting a yes, I told her he was. Just then the big clock they have in the middle of the shopping centre started playing music – the 1:00pm chime. When I could hear again, I said Matt was in the men's room. I asked why she wanted him, and she told me that Alice had agreed to the extra rehearsal he wanted, and she thought he'd want to know right away, but his phone was off.

I told Hannah I'd let Matt know, got off the call, then tried Matt. Sure enough, his phone was off. So was Daniel's. This was a problem. If Matt talked to Hannah before I got in touch with him, Hannah might figure out the lie.

I took the tram straight back to the hotel, but they had already left by the time I got there, undoubtedly back to the circus. I knew they wouldn't have been dumb enough to turn up together, because that could give the whole game away, but even so, I really needed to find Matt before Hannah did.

So I rushed over to the theatre. By the time I got there, though, everything was a mess. Matt and Alice had already gone up on the trapeze again, and Alice had fallen.

Other People

Alice Taylor (NPC)

Personally, I liked Alice, but professionally, having her come in and step into leading roles was a bit much to take. What were the owners and managers thinking? I had been with the company almost as long as Tina, and sure, Alice was good, but doesn't loyalty count for something? And experience with your partners matters in circus. I don't like him, but I'd worked with Matthew for ages before Alice replaced Tina.

Bethany Summer

Beth has been with the company for a while now, and she's a nice person, but recently she's been training heavily with Alice and Matt in aerial acts, especially flying trapeze. It's almost as if she was Alice's real understudy. Good for her for improving herself, but I'm the understudy for that part, and I'm not giving up my opportunity for her.

Daniel Higgs

Daniel is my closest friend. When I first joined the company, he looked out for me. He's strong, gentle and utterly dependable. I realised some time ago that we'd each do pretty much anything the other asked.

Except the one thing he can't do, and I would never ask. Daniel is gay. People have, in the past, suggested that we should date, but we just laugh at that. We're friends, and that's what really matters to us.

Dominic Richards

I haven't had much to do with Dominic since he started with us. He's one of the newest recruits, and it'll still be quite some time before he could be considered for aerial work.

Ellen Telyanin

We had a pretty good aerial group before Ellen joined the company. I didn't mind Tina's star status, because she really was a better artist than me (not by much, just a little), but Ellen obviously thinks she

deserves special treatment just because Mummy and Daddy were circus performers too. Well, around here the best roles go to the best performers, and if you want something, you have to prove that you're good enough.

Ethan Telyanin

Ethan is Ellen's twin brother, and very much like her in attitude. He's not as smooth as his sister, but just as ambitious, and has a certain dangerous charisma to him.

Gwen Palmer

Gwen is a very talented performer who does a beautiful tissu act, so good that she's started in the aerial group despite being a recent recruit. She's still has some technical imperfections, but she more than makes up for that in expressiveness. Of course, technical precision becomes more important when working with a partner, as in our new cradle act.

The poor girl was attacked backstage by a maniac a little while back, and I know she's still not over it. She was rescued by Dominic, Ethan and Daniel, and the three of them still look out for her. She has also become close to Ellen, far too close for it to be good for her.

Hannah Riordan

Hannah is a quiet little mouse most of the time. Her skills with fire are pretty specialised, which means she's unlikely to ever move into other roles in a circus, but she's also unlikely to ever be pushed aside. Her role in this particular show is bigger than hers often is, as we needed a ground-based act that really stands out.

Jeremy Telyanin

I suspect that Jeremy is using his trampoline work as a springboard (so to speak) to step up into aerial work like his siblings Ethan and Ellen. Even so, I can respect his attitude a little better than theirs. At least he is willing to work his way up to the roles that he wants.

John Perrett

I really respect the versatility that John has in his performance skills. I think he may have forgotten how valuable that is to our troupe. He has been putting more effort into aerial training recently, without even being an understudy for any aerial act in the new show. His partnership with Lily has been suffering as a result, and they were one of the best pairings we had.

Lily Gardner

Lily seems to only really shine when working with a partner. I think she needs somebody to push her. She started performing a lot better when she and Maria started working up their tightwire act, and her adagio with John improved at about the same time.

Luke Conolly

Luke and Maria didn't perform during the last show, because they were off on their honeymoon instead. It's good to have them back. Luke takes his performance seriously, and it's good to have at least a few people around who aren't jockeying for "better" roles.

Maria Conolly

I have to admire the courage Maria shows in her new risley act with her husband Luke. It requires incredible precision on their parts, and despite being performed close to ground if something went wrong I could easily see Maria getting badly hurt. Maria has also shown a good head for heights with her wire acts with Lily, though she hasn't shown much inclination toward more aerial work.

Matthew Mills

Matt really gets my goat. He's impulsive, ill-tempered and tactless. I've had to work with him more than I like as the understudy for Alice's role, and he was even ruder to Alice than to me.

But Daniel loves him. I really don't get that, but he does, so I keep my feelings under wraps and help Daniel deal with Matt as best I can.

Matt is still in the closet, too. Maybe his poor manners are a result of having to suppress that part of himself. That's his choice, though, and to help him and Daniel keep their relationship secret, I've pretended to date Matt, casually. Generally I just have to leave with him, and then we split up so that he can go and meet Daniel and I spend a few hours doing my own thing.

Nigel Telyanin

I'm not surprised that Nigel left his family's show to come to work here, given how rudely his niece Ellen and nephew Ethan have treated him since they joined. Nigel is really very talented, and a huge resource for the rest of us, with his strong understanding of physical drama. He's been a mentor for most of us since the company was first formed. I just wish he was a little more organised.

Ophelia Seymour

Ophelia was one of the founding performers of the company, and has remained a clown all that time. She shares that with Nigel, and the two of them seem to get along pretty well.

Paul Morris

Paul has been putting in some good work on the rigging recently, and he isn't even getting paid for it. He's a clown, and the tech work he's been doing has been entirely extracurricular. I understand he's been dating one of the actual riggers.

Susan Michaels

Nigel has talked about how talented Susan is, but she's been a bit short on the physical fitness side. That's okay, it'll come in time, though it is a bit of a worry if Gwen is ever unavailable for the cradle act, as Susan is the understudy and cradle is quite demanding physically. Cradle is the aerial act which most resembles floor acrobatics in terms of timing, which is good for Susan, because I don't believe she's yet had enough training to step into aerial acts. She could also stand to be a bit more confident than I've seen so far.