

Daniel Higgs

Age 27; **Straps**, *Flying Trapeze II (Angel 2)*,
Cradle (Catcher)

“Circus”. The way some people say that word, you can hear reverence in their voices, like it’s a calling. They make it a way of life, they bring up their families, their children to it.

It’s not. It’s just a job. Granted, it’s a job I love doing, but it’s just a job like any other. I do it well, and I do it professionally.

It’s a good thing I do perform well. I’m not sure what I’d be good at if I wasn’t in the circus. I’m not that smart, I don’t have much education, and I don’t talk real smooth. My body is my one great asset. I’m tough, and very strong, and I can make myself move exactly the way I want to, or not at all.

Some people make a big deal out of aerial acts, too, the same way they make a big deal out of circus. Ellen and Ethan are like that, especially, thinking they are some sort of big-shots because they do trapeze and cloudswing, and Alice and Tina both had too high an opinion of their “starring roles”. Me, I’m an aerialist because straps was a natural act for a man with my physique. I can do acrobalance just as well, but even a lot of acrobalancers have trouble with some of the straps holds I do.

Having Caitlin here has been a big boon to my career. She and I see eye to eye on a lot of things, and we worked together pretty naturally in partner acts. That helped expand my repertoire. Since Ellen and Ethan joined the company, I haven’t been doing much with Caitlin, because they are a stronger pair, but it’s good to have the versatility.

I sometimes wish there was more call for male-male partner work, but for the story-based shows the company does, we need male-female pairings much more often. Australia is more accepting of homosexuality than it once was, but it still raises eyebrows. It’s not like you can do a gay love story and have most of the audience get what is going on straight away.

Yes, I’m gay. It’s not a big deal, usually, but it would be nice to be able to do more partner work with my boyfriend, Matt. It’d be nice if we could be open about the relationship, too, but he’s not ready for that, so we keep that a secret. Caitlin helps with that, by pretending to date Matt, just on a casual basis. She’ll stay with him long enough to get out of everyone’s sight, and then they’ll split up and Matt and I will meet instead.

Safety-Free

About a month ago, it came out that the company was in far more financial difficulty than anyone had realised. The owners didn’t disclose that until after some of us didn’t get paid one week. They found the money within a couple of days, but the cat was out of the bag at that point.

Following that, Ellen came up with an idea that she says she thinks will help draw the crowds in a little more. She proposed doing our aerial work without safety harnesses, on the theory that the public responds to the perception of danger.

Frankly, I suspected it’s more a ploy on her part to put her rivals off their game. The reason safety-free is perceived as dangerous is because it *is* dangerous, and we all know it. My straps act is often safety-free anyway – there’s too much you can’t do without tangling safety lines with the straps – so it wasn’t likely to be a big issue for me, but I was worried about Alice and Caitlin.

Then Alice surprised Caitlin and me by backing the idea. Gwen and Ethan do anything Ellen asks, and even Beth fell in with her mentor, Alice, so that rather settled in, despite Caitlin and Matt’s misgivings, and my own.

The Stalker

We had some trouble, a few months back, involving one of the new girls, Gwen. We all thought the gifts that kept turning up were from her boyfriend, but it turns out that she broke up with the guy she had been seeing about the time she joined us. Anyway, some lunatic fixated on her after seeing her perform, and she didn't know how to deal with it. I wish she had told someone, we could have helped her handle it before it got even more out of hand.

Eventually the guy turned up in the dressing areas after almost everyone had left one night. I was in the men's dressing room with Ethan and Dominic when Hannah raced in, hissed at us in her best stage-whisper and started pushing us out the door. Well, her account was barely coherent, but if something distressed her that badly, we weren't going to sit there with our thumbs up our arses until she collected herself. We raced into the women's dressing room, where Gwen was cowering in a corner and this guy was standing over her. Dominic dove straight past him and took Gwen in his arms, so I put myself between the stranger and them, figured I'd protect them while I talked him down.

Ethan didn't put any thought to calming the situation down. He just started beating the guy. It turns out it was the stalker I had to protect. I'm not sure anyone else in the company could have pulled Ethan off the guy.

The Fall

Alice may have been a sweet girl but you could see her heart wasn't in it. It'd been a relief to have her as the lead this season – I'd been dreading Ellen as the diva; she's malicious enough when she's not in a position of power. Rehearsal this morning though... I started to wonder if perhaps she'd been given a lead too early on. The last couple of months she's seemed awfully distracted and I know she's not happy working without the harness, no matter what she says. Even just 6 metres up is a bad place to doubt yourself. And it was starting to wear Matt down – he was getting more worried as the season went on that she'd have an accident. Frankly, I was always grateful whenever Alice needed a break and he could work with Caitlin instead. Otherwise it took him hours to wind down every evening.

Anyway, morning rehearsal wasn't a complete disaster but everyone could tell Alice was holding back. No surprise – after a close call yesterday it's natural to be cautious but this was ridiculous. She looked awkward, like a novice. By the time rehearsal finished I could see Matt had had enough. He tried to talk Alice into rehearsing once more but she was determined not to go up again. I caught Caitlin's eye long enough for her to drag him back off to the rooms. God, I don't know what we'd do without her. She disappeared to give me a chance to calm him down. He ranted and yelled for a bit but it's hard for anyone to maintain that level of anger for long – especially when I do my statue impression. Yes, I know the rest of the crew joke about me being as human as a rock but I find that not engaging tends to prevent having to deal with all the emotional outbursts that tend to come with performers.

Matt headed off to lunch before me – why he insists on keeping us a secret baffles me but anything for a little calm. When I got there about 10 minutes later he and Alice were heading to the rehearsal rooms. I curled up in one of the corner benches – most people had left to chill out before tonight's performance. A few people wandered through – Hannah, Ellen – and then suddenly there was a break in the peace. Ellen was in front of me all the way to the rehearsal room – she took off again after just one peek through the door. When I got past her I could see Luke standing over Alice who was crumpled on the stage, Maria was over by one of the benches with Matt.

And the worst thing? All I could think was that I wasn't able to go over and comfort him – I'm rather ashamed of that. I ended up checking Alice for a pulse and pulling Luke away once it was clear there was nothing any of us could do for her now.

Other People

Alice Taylor (NPC)

Caitlin was unhappy about Alice coming into a leading position the way she did, but I didn't mind so much. If Caitlin and Matt paired up, I doubt I'd ever get to do much more partner work with Caitlin again, and I believe we are the better pairing.

Bethany Summer

Bethany has been training heavily in aerial work with Alice and Matt recently. Matt has told me repeatedly of how much he has come to enjoy working with her. Officially, she isn't even recognised as an understudy for any of the aerial acts, so I hope all that work she put in doesn't go to waste.

Caitlin Chin

Caitlin and I were partnered up when we first joined the company, and we quickly discovered that we see eye-to-eye on a lot of things. She's a very professional performer, and calm and patient.

I really don't know what I'd do without Caitlin in my life. She's been such a big help managing my relationship with Matt, especially with keeping it a secret. She even sometimes pretends to go on dates with him, essentially giving us an opportunity to be alone without anyone questioning Matt's absence.

Dominic Richards

Dominic is a good kid. He obviously cares about his friend Gwen a lot, and that counts for a lot in my book. We don't have much to do with each other performance-wise.

Ellen Telyanin

It takes a lot to get me angry, but Ellen has managed it. She is responsible for driving Tina out of our troupe and breaking up one of the best aerial combos around. She's a manipulative schemer with an overinflated ego courtesy of an "old circus" family tradition going back generations.

I have to tread carefully around Ellen at the moment, though. Partly because we are

going to need her skills to get through this show now that we don't have Alice, but also for Gwen's sake. Ellen and Gwen have begun a relationship, and after Gwen's recent experiences, it could do her a lot of damage if I was to mess that up for her.

Ethan Telyanin

Ethan has a bad temper and the physical ability to back it up, big time. I don't like to judge a man, but Ethan scares me. It's not me that I worry about, of course, I already know I can stop Ethan if I have to, but he could hurt somebody else real bad if he wanted to.

He is Ellen's twin and I suspect that she knows how to direct that temper of his. They have their arrogance in common, too, the idea that they are the best of the best just because of their family.

Gwen Palmer

Ever since the stalker attacked Gwen, I've tried looking out for her. I hadn't realised just how vulnerable she was. I'm not used to looking at people that way. Fortunately, I think she'll grow from the experience, but for now, it's best to let her lean on her friends as much as she needs to.

I just wish she'd pick her friends better. I know she trusts me now, and Dominic has been her friend for ages, but she has taken Ethan into her confidence too, and has formed a relationship with Ellen – I mean a sexual relationship.

Hannah Riordan

I think a lot of us think there's something a bit off about Hannah, but I wonder if maybe she's just quiet. Since she saved Gwen from the stalker, I've been paying a little more attention to Hannah, and she's really quite bright and very observant, but it's sometimes hard to tell because she's socially awkward. I wouldn't have noticed either, except I know how to be quiet too. Maybe if she did more physical training it would increase her confidence.

Jeremy Telyanin

Jeremy seems less narcissistic than his older brother and sister, but maybe he's just more subtle about it. On the other hand, maybe Nigel got this one away from the rest of the family early enough.

John Perrett

You wouldn't think it to look at him, but John is one of the most solid men here. It's guys like him who prove that the stuff we do is really about skill, not just brawn. If he decided he wanted to stand in one place, I could move him, but I'm not sure anyone else could. Unfortunately he's become Ellen's latest groupie.

Lily Gardner

Lily has really come into her own as a performer of late, especially since Maria joined up. The two of them are very close friends. Unfortunately Lily's adagio act with John has been suffering recently, and I haven't spotted any change on John's end.

Luke Conolly

It used to be that Luke seemed determined to cheer up all the ladies Matt would disappoint with his lack of follow-up. He's settled down a lot since he met Maria, though. She's been a good influence on him, on and off the stage. They married a few months ago.

Maria Conolly

Before Maria came along, John, Luke and Lily were like a car missing a wheel. Throw Maria into the mix, though, and suddenly everything came together for the four of them. Not only did Maria form strong partnerships with Luke and Lily, in each case both personal and professional, she seemed to influence Lily's partnership with John somehow, too.

Matthew Mills

I don't know why I fall for guys like Matt. I've definitely got a "type": hot-headed, promiscuous, passionate. At least I can be pretty sure that Matt is faithful. He won't even acknowledge that he's gay, tries to

make out that it's just me that he likes. Most of the flaming-man-slut types don't think anything of sleeping around with any guy who crosses their paths, and I've been burned a couple of times that way in the past.

The downside, of course, is that we have to hide our relationship. Caitlin has been a huge help in that, by pretending to date Matt. I don't think Matt realises just how big a deal it is that she does that for him. After all, it's not really her that he's dating.

Nigel Telyanin

Nigel is the "old man" of our circus. I know he's not that old, only about 40, but compared to the rest of us, that's getting on a bit. He's got a lot of experience, though, and as a top clown, it doesn't matter if he can't quite keep up with the top acrobats physically. I've got a lot of respect for the man, and for what he knows about performing. I just wish he hadn't brought his niece Ellen and his nephews Ethan and Jeremy to us.

Ophelia Seymour

'Phelie is sort of the "talented amateur" type who only gets a role 'cos she has friends in the right places. She seems to have settled into acts she finds fun, and not be interested in pushing beyond that envelope. She likes making herself useful to the company in other ways as much as possible, though.

Paul Morris

It's one thing to be happy doing the same old over and over, like 'Phelie, but another to stick with one thing and still do it badly. Paul seems to be just marking time.

Latest word is that he's dating a rigger.

Susan Michaels

Nigel says she's a natural, and if he sees potential, I'm won't gainsay him. Susan has been training as an understudy for cradle, and there's few aerial acts that require such precision. Jeremy is responsible for a lot of her acrobatics training, but I've noticed that she also spends a lot of time training alone.