

thinking about Sue Ellen, though, and it hurt me awful to watch her looking at him with those eyes full of worship, but if she was happy, that was all that counted.

And then I began to get bigger ideas. Why fool around with a small-time circus? I wondered. Why not expand? Why not incorporate?

I got off a few letters to the biggest circuses I knew of. I told them what I had, and I told them the boy was under exclusive contract to me, and I told them he would triple attendance, and I told them I was interested in joining circuses, becoming partners sort of, with the understanding that the Fallen Angel would come along with me. I guess the word got around by then because all the big-shot letters were very cordial and very nice, and they all asked me when they could get a look at Angeli because they would certainly be interested in incorporating my fine little outfit on a partnership basis if my boy were all I claimed him to be, sincerely yours.

I got off a few more letters, asking all the big shots to attend our regular Friday night performance so that they could judge the crowd reaction and see the Fallen Angel under actual working conditions. All my letters were answered with telegrams, and we set the ball rolling.

That Friday afternoon was pure bedlam.

There's always a million things happening around a circus, anyway, but this Friday everything seemed to pile up at once. Like Fifi, our bareback rider, storming into the tent in her white ruffles.

"My horse!" she yelled, her brown eyes flashing. "My horse!"

"Is something wrong with him?" I asked.

"No, nothing's wrong with him," she screamed. "But something's wrong with José Esperanza,² and I'm going to wring his neck unless . . ."

"Now easy, honey," I said, "let us take it easy."

"I told him a bucket of rye. I did *not* say a bucket of oats. JuJu does not eat oats; he eats rye. And my safety and health and life depend on JuJu, and I will not have him eating some foul-smelling oats when I distinctly told José . . ."

"José!" I bellowed. "José Esperanza, come here."

José was a small Puerto Rican we'd picked up only recently. A nice young kid with big brown eyes and a small timid smile. He poked his head into the wagon and smiled, and then he saw Fifi and the smile dropped from his face.

"Is it true you gave JuJu oats, José, when you were told to give him rye?" I asked.

"Yes, *Señor*,"³ José said, "that is true."

"But why, José? Why on earth . . ."

José lowered his head. "The horse, *Señor*, I like him. He is a nice horse. He is always good to me."

"What's that got to do with the bucket of rye?"

"*Señor*," José said pleadingly, "I did not want to get the horse drunk."

"Drunk? Drunk?"

"Yes, *Señor*, a bucket of rye. Even for a horse, that is a lot of whiskey. I did not think . . ."

"Oh," Fifi wailed, "of all the— I'll feed

2. *José Esperanza* (hō sā' es pe rān'sā).

3. *Señor* (se nyôr'), in Spanish, Mister or Sir.

the horse myself. I'll feed him myself. Never mind!"

She stormed out of the wagon, and José smiled sheepishly and said, "I did wrong, *Señor?*"

I shook my head, and José left, and when I turned around Sam Angeli was standing there. I hadn't heard him come in, and I wondered how long he'd been there, so I said, "A good kid, José."

"If you like good kids," Angeli answered.

"He'll go to heaven, that one," I said. "Mark my words."

Angeli smiled. "We'll see," he said. "I wanted to talk to you, Tony."

"Oh? What about?"

"About all these people coming tonight. The big shots, the ones coming to see me."

"What about them?"

"Nothing, Tony. But suppose—just suppose, mind you—suppose I don't fall?"

"What do you mean?" I said.

"Just that. Suppose I don't fall tonight?"

"That's silly," I said. "You have to fall."

"Do I? Where does it say I have to fall?"

"Your contract. You signed a . . ."

"The contract doesn't say anything about my having to fall, Tony. Not a word."

"Well . . . say, what is this? A holdup?"

"No. Nothing of the sort. I just got to thinking. If this works out tonight, Tony, you're going to be a big man. But what do I get out of it?"

"Do you want a salary boost? Is that it? O.K. You've got a salary boost. How's that?"

"I don't want a salary boost."

"What, then?"

"Something of very little importance. Something of no value whatever."

"What?" I said. "What is it?"

"Suppose we make a deal, Tony?" Angeli said. "Suppose we shake on it? If I fall tonight, I get this little something that I want."

"What's this little something that you want?"

"Is it a deal?"

"I have to know first."

"Well, let's forget it then," Angeli said.

"Now wait a minute, wait a minute. Is this 'thing'—Sue Ellen?"

Angeli smiled. "I don't have to make a deal to get her, Tony."

"Well, is it money?"

"No. This thing has no material value."

"Then why do you want it?"

"I collect them."

"And I've got one?"

"Yes."

"Well, what . . . ?"

"Is it a deal, or isn't it?"

"I don't know. I mean, this is a peculiar way to . . ."

"Believe me, this thing is of no material value to you. You won't even know it's gone. But if I go through with my fall tonight, all I ask is that you give it to me. A handshake will be binding as far as I'm concerned."

I shrugged. "All right, all right, a deal. Provided you haven't misrepresented this thing, whatever it is. Provided it's not of material value to me."

"I haven't misrepresented it. Shall we shake, Tony?"

He extended his hand, and I took it, and his eyes glowed, but his skin was very cold to the touch. I pulled my hand away.

"Now," I said, "what's this thing you want from me?"

Angeli smiled. "Your soul."

I was suddenly alone in the wagon. I looked around, but Angeli was gone, and then the door opened and Sue Ellen stepped in, and she looked very grave and very upset.

"I heard," she said. "Forgive me. I heard. I was listening outside. Tony, what are you going to do? What are *we* going to do?"

"Can it be?" I said. "Can it be, Sue Ellen? He looks just like you and me. How'd I get into this?"

"We've got to do something," Sue Ellen said. "Tony, we've got to stop him!"

We packed them in that night. They sat, and they stood, and they climbed all over the rafters; they were everywhere. And right down front, I sat with the big shots, and they all watched my small, unimportant show until it was time for the Fallen Angel to go on.

I got up and smiled weakly and said, "If you gentlemen will excuse me, I have to introduce the next act."

They all smiled back knowingly, and nodded their heads, and their gold stickpins and pinky rings winked at me, and they blew out expensive cigar smoke, and I was thinking, *Mullins, you can blow out expensive cigar smoke, too, but you won't have any soul left.*

I introduced the act, and I was surprised to see all my aerial artists run out onto the sawdust: Sue Ellen, Farnings, Edward and the Fallen Angel. I watched Angeli as he crossed one of the spotlights, and if I'd had any doubts they all vanished right then. Angeli cast no shadow on the sawdust.

I watched in amazement as the entire

troupe went up the ladder to the trapezes. There was a smile on Angeli's face, but Sue Ellen and the rest had tight, set mouths.

They did a few stunts, and I watched the big shots, and it was plain they were not impressed at all by these routine aerial acrobatics. I signaled the band, according to schedule, and I shouted, "And now, ladies and gentlemen, the Fallen Angel in a death-defying, spine-tingling, bloodcurdling triple somersault at one hundred and fifty feet above the ground, *without a net!*"

Sue Ellen swung her trapeze out, and Angeli swung his, and then Sue Ellen dropped head downward and extended her hands, and Angeli swung back and forth, and the crowd held its breath, waiting for him to take his fall, and the big shots held their breaths, waiting for the same thing. Only I knew what would happen if he did take that fall. Only I knew about our agreement. Only I—and Sue Ellen, waiting up there for Angeli to jump.

Charlie started the roll on his snare, and then the roll stopped abruptly, and Angeli released his grip on the bar and he swung out into space, and over he went, once, twice, three times—and *slap*. Sue Ellen's hands clamped around his wrists, and she held on for dear life. I couldn't see Angeli's face from so far below, but he seemed to be struggling to get away. Sue Ellen held him for just an instant, just long enough for Edward to swing his trapeze into position.

She flipped Angeli out then, and over he went—and *wham*. Edward grabbed his ankles. Angeli flapped his arms and kicked his legs, trying to get free, but Edward—Edward the Great!—wouldn't drop him. Instead, he swung his trapeze back, and then

gave Angeli a flip and Farnings grabbed Angeli's wrists.

Farnings flipped Angeli up, and Sue Ellen caught him, and then Sue Ellen swung her trapeze all the way back and tossed Angeli to Edward, and I began to get the idea of what was going on up there.

Edward tossed Angeli, and Farnings caught him, and then Farnings tossed him to Sue Ellen, and Sue Ellen tossed him right back again. Then Farnings climbed onto Sue Ellen's trapeze, and they both swung back to the platform.

Edward took a long swing, and then he tossed Angeli head over heels, right back to the platform, where Sue Ellen and Farnings grabbed him with four eager arms.

I was grinning all over by this time, and the crowd was booing at the top of its lungs. Who cared? The big shots were stirring rest-

lessly, but they'd probably heard that Angeli sometimes fell coming down the ladder, and so they didn't leave their seats.

Only tonight, Angeli wasn't doing any falling coming down any ladder. Because Sue Ellen had one of his wrists and Farnings had one of his ankles, and one was behind him, and the other was ahead of him; and even if he pitched himself off into space, he wouldn't have gone far, not with the grips they had on both him and the ladder. I saw the big shots get up and throw away their cigars, and then everybody began booing as if they wanted to tear down the top with their voices. Angeli came over to me, and his face didn't hold a pleasant smile this time. His face was in rage, and it turned red, as if he would explode.

"You tricked me!" he screamed. "You tricked me!"

And all at once he wasn't there any more.