

HIGH WIRE

Written by

Ryan Hoover

**1 EXT. CIRCUS GROUNDS - DAY****1**

The sun rises on a calm day. Birds <CHIRP> and wind swiftly <BLOWS> upon a metal stake. Suddenly, a hammer pushes it into the ground, <CLANKING> on impact.

We zoom out to see other muscular workers do the same as lankier men bring in a large tarp, tie it around the stakes with rope and work together to hoist it in the air, building a big tent.

Elephants and their trainers push wagons of wood across the grounds, carpenters build stands and ticket booths and two women hoist a banner reading "Panini Bros. Circus: The Eighth Wonder of the World". The ringmaster, ZEPOL PANINI (late 50s), supervises with daughter DANI PANINI (16), by his side.

ZEPOL

(to the ladies)

5A. Perfect! Now unload our costumes, times a-wastin'.

The ladies give a salute and rush off. Zeppol and Dani take a stroll through the grounds. Horses and wagons pass behind and in front of them.

ZEPOL

5B. Another year off and running, 'ey dear? Why, I'm sure this year will be our best yet. Signing those Florentinos was a big coup for us.

YOUNG DANI

2A. Ooh! Dad, can I join you this time?

ZEPOL

5C. (laughs) That's the Panini gumption, alright. Your pop's still got a lot in him, but you'll get your chance. I promise.

**2 EXT. PRACTICE AREA - SAME TIME****2**

Zeppol and Dani walk past a small tightrope set-up, home base to their stars, BIANCA DI ANGELO FLORENTINO and EMIL FLORENTINO (mid 30s). They keep an eye on their young daughter MARIE FLORENTINO (4), standing on a platform on one side.

BIANCA

4A. You can do it, honey! Just remember what we practiced. Keep your feet tight and don't look down.

YOUNGER MARIE

1A. I can't. I'm scared.

EMIL

3A. Just imagine you're walking on a narrow road, okay. And if you get scared, we can catch you.

BIANCA

(To Emil)

4B. Dear, have a little more faith. I know she has it in her. Just watch.

YOUNGER MARIE

1B. O...Okay.

Marie nervously closes her eyes as she takes her first step. The rope shakes her but she manages to steady herself, slowly moving step by step. Her parents watch in excitement as she gets closer to the end of the rope, stepping onto the other side.

YOUNGER MARIE

(demure)

1C. Ta da.

Bianca <CLAPS> for her daughter. Emil does as well, but with a more muted enthusiasm.

BIANCA

4C. Bravo! *Brava!* A perfect 10 for my little princess!

Marie curtsies and steps off the platform.

BIANCA

4D. Why, in no time she'll be ready to join us in the center ring and the famous Florentino duo will be a trio!

YOUNGER MARIE

1D. Really?

EMIL

3B. Maybe one day. But for now, I think we're fine with just the two of us.

He and Bianca share a <KISS>.

FADE TO BLACK.

**3 INT. CIRCUS ARENA - NIGHT (EIGHT YEARS LATER)**

**3**

A spotlight shines on Dani (now 26), now ringmaster of the circus, as she looks out into the crowd of people before her. A <DRUMROLL> is heard.

DANI

(to audience)

2B. And now, ladies and gentleman, the moment you've all been waiting for! Direct your attention to the top of the tent as we show you the man who can traverse any wire as small as a mere fishing line! Straight from glorious *Italia*, please welcome...

Emil (now mid 40s), stands on the platform leading to the circus' grand tightrope.

DANI (O.S.)

2C. The Flying Florentino!

<APPLAUSE> rings through the arena as Emil begins his walk. Marie (now 12), sits on a small bench hidden from the audience. She <CLAPS> for her dad.

MARIE

1E. Yay, dad!

As Emil continues, steadfast and unflinching, we get a closer view of the tightrope, tattered and unstable. He senses a bare patch in the rope and stumbles a bit. Caught up in the suspense, the crowd <GASPS> as he tries to keep it together.

BEGIN FLASHBACK:

**4 INT. CIRCUS ARENA - NIGHT (SIX YEARS EARLIER)**

**4**

Bianca and Emil walk the tightrope hand in hand, lovingly eyeing each other. Much like in the present, the rope has a few bare patches.

As they approach the middle, Bianca's leg slips and she loses her footing. Emil grabs ahold of her for dear life, but it proves to be too much weight. His foot drags against the rope, suddenly pulled back as we hear a <SCREAM>.

END FLASHBACK.

**5 INT. CIRCUS ARENA - NIGHT (PRESENT)**

5

The same foot holds on as the rope untethers. Then <SNAP!> All goes quiet except for a small <THUD>.

The crowd <GASPS>, this time in horror. Dani freezes in shock. Marie's expression shifts from delight to terror. She jumps out of her seat, rushing out into the arena.

MARIE

1F. Dad!

Marie rushes over and sees her father in pain. She comforts him, unable to keep from breaking down in tears.

**6 INT. CIRCUS ARENA - DAY (THREE MONTHS LATER)**

6

Dani paces nervously in the center ring as Marie stands by her side.

In front of her are a smattering of the circus' acts; JAVIER PALMERO (the daredevil), DIMITRI SMIRNOFF (the strongman), LOUIE (one of the clowns), MARCELLO MAGNIFICO (the illusionist), DEE DEE (Marcello's assistant), BUGSY (a "little person"), and LOTTE KOCHENDORFER (an animal trainer).

Their expressions range from concerned, to peeved, to dejected.

BUGSY

6A. Well, c'mon toots! What's the word? Is ol' high and mighty comin' back?

DANI

(Nervously)

2D. Yes, and...

The other acts <GROAN>.

JAVIER

7A. I knew it! We're in the hole again.

DANI

2E. Don't worry everyone, I'm sure he'll be back soon.

(egging Marie on)

Isn't that right?

MARIE

1G. The doctor says he's making progress, but it'll still be about ten weeks until they heal.

DIMITRI

9A. That's what she said ten weeks ago.

LOTTE

8A. We've got to get back up soon, or no one's going to see us anymore. The circus is our life. Where will we all go?

MARCELLO

10A. We'll never get back on our feet. At this rate, I'd be surprised we lasted two more weeks before that banker shuts us down.

The acts complaints turn into a <CACOPHONY OF NOISE>. Marie lowers her head.

DANI

2F. Quiet!

Everyone quiets down.

DANI

2G. (sighs) Look, I know we haven't had the best of times lately. Everyone's leaving us for that new-fangled "television", we lost half our crew in the war, and then (pause) Bianca's death...

They all bow their heads in respect.

DANI (CONT'D)

2H. But we're all in this together. We're a family, and families stick together through thick and thin. And I won't let some banker take that away from us.

LOUIE

11A. Oh, boy. Here she goes.

DANI

2I. I understand Emil needs to heal, but we need to get back on our feet soon or else we're done for. We can't afford to go another month without a show.

DEE DEE

12A. But we haven't had a new act in years. What can we do to compete?

DANI

2J. Then we'll make something new. Something fresh. Something they can't get anywhere else. Something that'll have them coming for miles on end. But what?

Dani ponders this query. Marie stares up at the grand tightrope, deep in thought.

BEGIN FLASHBACK:

**7 EXT. PRACTICE AREA - NIGHT (SIX YEARS EARLIER)**

**7**

Marie (now 6), sits on the left side of the practice tightrope. She takes a <BREATH> and, <SNIFFLING>, wipes tears from her eye. She steps off, pulls the platform up from the ground and aggressively kicks dirt on it. Her father (now late 30s), comes to her.

EMIL

3C. Woah! Hold on, sweetie. What are you doing to our practice rope?

YOUNG MARIE

1H. You mean *your* practice rope. I never want to get on this thing again!

EMIL

3D. You've been on it practically since you could walk. What's changed?

YOUNG MARIE

1I. You should know!

She turns away from her father.

YOUNG MARIE (CONT'D)

(with a quiver in her voice)

1J. It took her away from me just like that. I don't want to end up like her.

She tries to hold back tears. Unable to hold it any longer, she turns around and runs to her father, who embraces her.

YOUNG MARIE

1K. I miss her, daddy.

Emil takes a second to think of a response.

EMIL

3E. I miss her too, sweetie. But, what happened tonight was a sad... very sad accident. And, in what we do, that can happen.

He pauses, staring off into the distance. His face shifts from sorrow to hopeful. He meets Marie eye to eye.

EMIL (CONT'D)

3F. Look, Marie. What you're doing... what I'm doing is very dangerous. Things could go wrong when you least expect them to. But that shouldn't stop you from pursuing your dreams. She'd want you to keep going. Promise me you'll keep that in the back of your mind.

YOUNG MARIE

1L. I promise.

Emil hugs his daughter.

YOUNG MARIE

1M. But, does that mean I'll never get to walk with you on the big rope?

EMIL

3G. Not for a very long time, my little pumpkin. But some day, when you're old enough, you will. A few more years of practice and you're sure to become a tightrope walking champ.

YOUNG MARIE

1N. Just like mom?

EMIL



3H. Even better. Now, how about we  
put our rope back up?

Marie dashes over, <HAMMERS> the platform back into the  
ground and gets back up, preparing to make another walk  
across.

END FLASHBACK.

**8 INT. CIRCUS ARENA- DAY (PRESENT)**

8

Marie smiles as she comes back to reality.

MARIE

10. What about me?

DANI

2K. You?

OTHER ACTS

12. Her?

MARIE

1P. Yes, me!

BUGSY

6B. Look, kid. No offense, but  
you're just a little ol' thing.  
Your pop's practically a behemoth  
compared to ya'.

LOTTE

8B. Don't you think you're a little  
young to walk all the way up there?

MARIE

1Q. Of course not! Dad was  
practically half my age when he  
first stepped on the high wire.  
Plus, I'm the daughter of two of  
the most famous tightrope walkers  
around. I've been practicing as  
long as I can remember, so I'm sure  
of it.

The acts take a moment to think.

JAVIER

7B. Eh, why not. After all, if  
we're going under, might as well  
throw a hail mary.

Everyone excitedly <MURMERS>.

DANI

2L. Hold on a second, everyone.  
(to Marie)

Marie, I love your enthusiasm, but I'm not sure this is the best idea. We need a guaranteed hit, not an inexperienced upstart. Your dad said he won't even let you go...

MARIE

1R. Until I'm older? What does he know! He promised I could go up when the time came, and now the time's come.

Marie gives Dani a pleading look, the other acts awaiting an answer. Dani bends down to Marie.

DANI

2M. Look, I've got to go with your dad on this one. Trust me, I'll think of something.

Dani walks away. The other acts follow her out in despair.

Marie stands alone in the center ring. She gazes up at the grand tightrope, its call beckoning her like it never has before.

Marie shakes off her doubt, a confident look on her face.

**9 EXT. PRACTICE AREA - AFTERNOON**

**9**

Marie gets up on her practice rope, trying to make a clean run across. She crosses the rope, stumbling along the way. Suddenly, she loses her balance and falls into the net.

MARIE (CONT'D)

1S. <OOF!>

She lies on the ground for a moment. Then, determined, she brushes the dirt off her skin and picks herself back up.

MONTAGE:

Marie makes various attempts to cross her practice tightrope. Each time her confidence improves, her walk becomes more graceful, and her balance becomes almost perfect.

END MONTAGE

**10 EXT. DANI'S WAGON - SAME TIME**

**10**

Dani is on the phone with the businessman attempting to buy her family's circus.

DANI

2N. C'mon, please just give me a little more time. (pause) One more show. Trust me, I've got something that'll have us rolling in the dough!

She hangs up the phone, her faux confidence suddenly fading away.

DANI

2O. (sighs) Now if only I knew what it was.

**11 EXT. PRACTICE AREA - SAME TIME 11**

Dani nervously paces around the grounds. Out of the corner of her eye, she sees Marie making a near perfect run on her rope. Her face lights up as she rushes over to talk to her.

FADE TO BLACK.

**12 EXT. CIRCUS GROUNDS - NIGHT 12**

The circus grounds bustle with energy as crowds of people pour into the main tent. Lights and colors shine all around, as if the circus is back to where it was nine years ago.

**13 INT. CIRCUS ARENA - NIGHT 13**

A single spotlight makes its way to the center ring. A <CYMBAL CRASH> is heard as it lands on Dani.

DANI

(to audience)

2P. Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. Have we got a treat for you! Tonight, for one night only, the Panini Brothers Circus is proud to present the beginning of a new era for this fine establishment.

Behind the curtain, Marie adjusts her bow and straightens her posture.

DANI (CONT'D)

2Q. Trust me folks, this is a night you'll want to tell your grand children about! The night you witnessed the next in the fabulous Florentino family line make her grand debut in what's sure to be a long career to come. She may only be twelve, but I guarantee she can stand with the best of them. Why, she's so good I bet she can do it without a net to catch her fall.

The crowd <OOOHS>, some in awe, but some in fear.

DANI (CONT'D)

2R. So, without any further ado...

She gestures to the band's conductor, who <TAPS> her baton on a music stand as the circus band gets ready to play.

DANI (CONT'D)

2S. Please welcome to the stage marvelous Ms. Marie Florentino!

The arena is filled with the sounds of the audience's <DEAFENING APPLAUSE> and the band's <TRIUMPHANT MUSIC> as Marie enters, waving to the audience with huge smile on her face. She takes a moment to curtsy to the audience before she climbs the ladder leading to the grand tightrope.

The audience <MURMERS> as the music stops. As Marie stares down at the ring, she begins to hesitate. She shakes the feeling off and takes a <DEEP BREATH>.

The snare drummer begins a <DRUMROLL>. Marie starts walking with great caution. Sweat runs down her face as she approaches the middle of the rope. Suddenly, she loses her balance, trips, and grasps on for dear life.

Dani, the other acts, and the crowd <GASP> in horror. Lotte and Dee Dee cover their eyes while the rest look on stunned.

DANI (CONT'D)

(to herself)

2T. Marie!

EMIL (O.S.)

3I. Ahem!

Dani slowly turns around. She sees Emil behind her, wheelchair-bound with his legs in a cast, Hands crossed and a scowl on his face, he looks her straight in the eyes.

DANI

(Naively)

2U. Mr. Florentino! What a surprise! What are you doing out of the hospital so soon?

EMIL

3J. You know very well why, Ms. Panini! Letting my daughter talk you into putting her in mortal danger.

DANI

2V. I know, I know! I was desperate. We can talk about how stupid and selfish I am later. Right now we've got to save your daughter!

MARIE (O.S.)

1T. Help!

DANI

2W. Ooh, If the audience thinks this was an accident, I'm done for! But no one else can get that high except for you. Oh, I knew I should have listened to my gut. What am I going to...

She feels something bump up against her leg. Emil wheels closer to her.

EMIL

3K. She doesn't need anyone else. She can do it. Even if I've never said it, (pause) I know she can.

Dani looks back at Marie. She straightens her top hat and turns back to Emil.

DANI

2X. What do you need from me?

EMIL

3L. She needs the one thing every performer needs, the audience. Their applause. You. Go do what you're best at, Dani Panini, and put on a show!

Dani nods in reply. She signals off-screen. A light shines on her as she steps into the ring.

DANI

(to the audience)  
 2Y. Oh, no! The brave young  
 daredevil is about to fall!  
 Everyone, give her your support.  
 Cheer your newest star!

As the crowd, Emil, and the other acts begin to <CHEER>, Marie's worry fades away. With a sudden burst of courage, she defiantly picks herself up. The crowd <OOOHS> as she flawlessly forges ahead and successfully crosses to the other side.

MARIE  
 1U. Ta da!

The crowd goes wild with <THUNDEROUS APPLAUSE>. Marie bows to them with a genuine smile on her face. She glances toward the side and notices her dad in the massive crowd. Happy tears form in her eyes.

**14 INT. CIRCUS ARENA - NIGHT**

**14**

Dani and the other acts walk toward an opening, her carrying a stack of money.

DANI  
 2Z. What do you guys think, drinks  
 on me?

BUGSY  
 6C. How 'bout a few smokes as well?

Everyone <LAUGHS> as they exit. Marie waves "goodbye".

EMIL  
 3M. Young lady!

Marie, startled by the sudden noise, but with full knowledge of who made it, slowly turns around to her father. She stands embarrassed and helpless.

MARIE  
 (sheepish)  
 1V. Hey, dad. So, about me going up  
 there...

EMIL  
 3N. I don't want to hear it, young  
 lady. You were very irresponsible  
 tonight.

MARIE

1W. I'm sorry, okay! I just wanted to prove I was ready!

She lowers her head in shame.

MARIE (CONT'D)

1X. I wasn't.

EMIL

30. Marie Florentino, you are grounded for a year...to your practice rope.

Marie lifts her head.

EMIL (CONT'D)

3P. After that, we'll see how things go.

He winks at Marie as a knowing smile stretches across Marie's face. She hugs her dad as they head out to join their fellow acts.

**15 EXT. CIRCUS ARENA - NIGHT**

**15**

As Marie and Emil leave, we see a new poster up outside reading "The Florentino Father-Daughter Spectacular".

THE END