



“What on earth are you doing?” hissed Marvello. “This is our cue to leave!”

I ignored him as if he were a sparrow flying into a tree.

“Ladies and gentlemen,” I announced. “I have been working with The Great Marvello for some years now and, as well as respecting his magical performance skills, I have always trusted him to be an honest man. But I can tell you tonight that he is NOT!”

“Close the curtains and bring her some smelling salts!” roared Marvello. “The girl has lost her wits.”

“NO!” I shouted. “Because as well as Mrs Gowan here tonight, I would like to introduce you all to Mr Basil Johnson and Miss Irene Robson. My friend George at the back has spent much of the day tracking them down and guiding them here.”

Basil and Irene stood up at the back and walked down the aisle to join us on stage.

The Great Marvello looked panic-stricken.

“Good night, ladies and gentlemen,” he croaked, “you have been a wonderful audience.”

He made as if to pull the curtains shut but I kicked him hard in the shin.

The Great Marvello

“Last night, I made a crucial discovery,” I announced. “I found out that Marvello is not just a brilliant illusionist, he is also a master criminal.”

“This is ridiculous!” cried Marvello, massaging his aching shin, his body shaking with nerves.

“I now know that when Marvello receives the valuable item that has supposedly ‘flown’ to him – the item which I as his assistant pass to him – he does not return the real thing.”

There were gasps from the crowd.

“This is what he does.”

I have never heard such a silent hush inside a venue or looks of such intense concentration on people’s faces.

“We arrive a day early at each venue,” I explained. “This is under the guise of getting to know the territory and getting everything ready for the show the following day. But while I spend time arranging props and calculating crawling distances, The Great Marvello spends his time mixing with the local people. He hones in on someone who will be coming to the show, someone who possesses a very expensive piece of jewellery. Tracking this person, his skill as an artist allows him to make intricate sketches of the valuable item this person possesses.”

“Please!” begged Marvello, “this is a deranged girl’s fantasy!”

“WE WANT TO HEAR IT!” shouted the crowd.

“Not only are his drawing skills exceptional, he is also a master craftsman, having attended an Arts College in his younger days – information that is all contained in the beloved suitcase he always carries.” The audience’s attention immediately focussed on the burnt-cornered case.

At this point, Marvello tried to make a run for it but a burly man in the front row held him tight.

“Please!” begged Marvello, sweat pouring from his brow.

“So, he makes an exact replica of the valuable item he has selected, he points me to where this person is sitting and I hide under their seat with a canister of smoke. On releasing the smoke, I swipe the valuable, crawl to the stage and pass it to him. After the audience’s applause has died down, he returns the item... Except we now know that it is merely a very, very clever forgery.

The Great Marvello

That is why we travel so far from town to town: because he is scared that one day someone will find out his trick and try and track him down. So far this has never happened because his work is so perfectly exact.”

Snatching Marvello’s case, I opened it and pulled out Mrs Gowan’s REAL gold necklace, Mr Basil Johnson’s real watch and Miss Irene Robson’s real silver brooch. Each one I handed back to its very grateful owner. I then revealed the bundles and bundles of cash that Marvello had made from selling previous items he had stolen.

“I’m afraid the town jail is the only place for you, Mr Marvello,” announced Freddie Spright, the town’s police officer, who marched to the stage, handcuffed Marvello and led him and his suitcase away.

“Oh and by the way,” added Spright as they neared the exit. “Although I will endeavour to track down every person this charlatan has robbed, I assume that there will be quite a few I shall not find. As a result, I suggest at least half of this money in that case goes to young Miss Cassie here as a reward for her superb detective work.”

Cheers and applause thundered through the marquee. The Great or now Not-So-Great Marvello gave me one last furious glare as he was marched out of the marquee.

And then someone else stood up. It was Mrs Jenkinson from Chandler’s Inn.

“I understand that this girl is an orphan and that her parents left her under the care of that despicable criminal, surely assuming he was a legitimate businessman. Well we now know he isn’t and that means Cassie has no legal guardian.”

I looked at her with a raised, inquisitive eyebrow.

“She seems like a sterling and feisty young lass and I would like to apply for a court order that she can come and live with me at Chandler’s Inn where, as well as expecting her to do some light cleaning and serving, I will treat her as my own daughter.”

There was silence for a moment, everyone waiting for my reaction to this offer, but the beaming smile on my face told its own story and more cheering broke out.

After much chatter and excitement and many a handshake with both me and Mrs Jenkinson, the audience filed out and the show was truly over.

The Great Marvello

“Will that really be OK?” she asked me. “Coming to live at the Inn, helping out a bit but being part of my family?”

“It would be better than OK,” I grinned. “It would be perfect.”

We left the venue, arms-linked, me feeling like I’d won a prize beyond worth. As we neared Chandler’s Inn, I spotted the two ruffians who had twice attacked Marvello and me, nursing their wounds beneath the shadows of an oak tree.

I marched straight over to them and their eyes stretched wide with fright.

“I’m telling you this once,” I declared in my firmest voice. “I am going to be living round here from now on and if I see either of you within a three-mile radius of this place, the beatings I dished out before will seem like a nursery party-game. Do you understand?”

They both nodded and, in spite of their injuries, ran away as fast as I had ever seen someone run before.