



“Why do we always have to move on so quickly?” I asked, as the green sack dug into my shoulder blades. “And why do we always have to get far away from our last venue?” It was the same every time. We walked for miles, arrived at a new location, spent a day there advertising the show and checking out the local people and the venue, then put on the spectacular and moved on again.

“Which magician on this planet wants someone to come to a show that they’ve already seen? You’d have them all shouting out what was going to happen next. It would spoil the surprise for everyone else.”

“I understand that,” I nodded, “but do we have to go this far?”

I stopped for a moment, placing the green sack down on the cracked path. Two squirrels gave me suspicious glares before darting up a gnarled oak tree. The Great Marvello had many mysterious ways but I had no reason to think he was a swindler or a crook; he was just an excellent showman, who for some reason liked trekking.

“Us men of magic can take no risks,” he said, leaning towards me, the scar on his left cheek glinting in the moonlight. “We share a bond and we never break the magicians’ agreement.”

The Great Marvello

“When your parents passed away, I promised them that I would look after you and see that all of your needs were met.”

“I know that,” I said, looking at the ground and studying a large pebble. “So where are we staying tonight? A tavern? An inn?”

“This evening, I think we will save on accommodation and spend the night in that ditch over there.”

I looked over and saw the murky semi-circle of dry, cracked earth to our left. Luxury quarters these were not.

“Oh, come on,” I groaned. “Surely we can afford somewhere better than that? The takings were great tonight. You said so yourself.”

“The takings will never be enough. Not until we can afford to return to our home town and buy our own property: somewhere we can make a permanent venue for magic and a home for ourselves.”

“But that will take months, maybe years,” I growled.

“No, it won’t,” he said. “Now bring the green sack over into the ditch and we can set up the sleeping bags. You can have the thinner one tonight.”

“I always get the thinner one,” I protested, hopping down into the ditch and unwrapping the green bundle that contained all of our worldly possessions.

I climbed into my bag, arranged some old clothes as a pillow and stared up at the unending black sky, speckled with stars of a hundred different brightnesses.

“Why do we always just do town and village halls?” I asked, shuffling around to get a little bit more comfortable.

“We always play areas where the people are wealthy,” he replied from his sleeping bag on the other side of the green bundle.

“But why don’t we do events in country parks or at funfairs? They would be so much fun and I could go on the rides and things like that.”

“You know I only do events in single buildings, with a crowd that is big enough to pay our wages but small enough that no one can go snooping around the equipment for our illusions.”

The Great Marvello

“I know but think of the money. We’d only need to do one show and we’d be minted. We could take a break from all of this travelling, maybe stay at an inn and have a holiday of sorts.”

There was silence for a few moments and the musty night air swirled over our heads.

“You know what,” he said, “that’s not such a bad idea.”

I sat up. “You’re joking?”

“No, Cassie, I’m being absolutely serious. That whole ‘magicians are witches’ stuff has died down recently. I haven’t heard for ages of any performers being chased out of towns with pitchforks. Something like a funfair could be an extremely lucrative outing. We’d obviously have to get there a few days early, get a spot and take a look around the place but then... Who knows? It might be quite a special show. For once, young lady, I think you may have struck gold.”

I was pleased by the compliment although it was sad that they came so rarely. After all, wasn’t it me who came up with most of the mechanisms and devices that made our tricks work? I suppose everything boiled down to the fact that Marvello and I had a funny relationship. We kind of hated each other and got on each other’s nerves a lot but there was also a grudging respect there too. I think we both knew that without one another our act wouldn’t really work.

“Will you pay me double wages if we get a show at a funfair?” I demanded.

“I’ll give you time and a half,” he replied wearily.

“It’s double or the show doesn’t happen,” I said, snuggling back down into my thin sleeping bag.

“Fine,” he snapped, “double it is, but only when we’ve secured the show.”

I couldn’t help smiling. With double money, I’d have plenty to spend on the attractions at a funfair. Maybe life was finally looking up.

I can tell you that sleeping in a ditch in the middle of summer is not to be recommended. The flies buzz around you as if you’re a museum exhibit but there is no glass case to protect you from their irritating buzzing. Even worse, mice come scurrying along, looking for even the tiniest nibbles, like the crumbs of sugar I had in my jacket pocket that had somehow got in there after the lovely sponge slice I’d eaten at the town hall before that night’s show.

The Great Marvello

Marvello's constant snoring made the whole experience even worse. It was like listening to a hundred workmen constructing a large bridge. But nothing, and I mean nothing, could have prepared me for waking up in the early hours of the morning to see two burly men looking down at us with pistols pointed at our faces.

"Your money or your lives," they demanded.