



The walk to Harwood's Open Field was not a short one as the fair's advertising was spread over a wide area. This was clearly going to be a well-attended event.

On Thursday, at 2 pm, we made our way through a dense thicket of trees and found ourselves in a large clearing. At the far side, a table had been set up and two men in black jackets were poring over some plans or charts.

We made a beeline for the men and before either of them could get a word in, my boss began his patter.

"Gentlemen, as I assume you are the organising committee for this splendid and lively event, allow me to introduce myself to you. I am the legend that is known as... The Great Marvello!"

The men looked at him strangely. One had a thick beard and knotted, black hair. The other was short, dumpy and had creases in his cheeks as if his face had somehow been constructed to be foldable.

"Never heard of you," said Beardy, "and if you're thinking of booking a spot here, you're far too late. The programme was finalised weeks ago."

The Great Marvello

“How terribly sad,” replied Marvello, taking a coin from his pocket, quickly making it disappear (by slyly passing it to me) and then asking me to retrieve it from under Beardy’s hat, which I did... or, at least, pretended to.

Marvello then took a pack of false cards and proceeded to make all of the faces disappear and then reappear again – he’d bought them from a small magic boutique in London’s Smithfield market the previous year.

It was instantly clear that the men were impressed. “Fascinating,” murmured Foldy Cheeks. “And we don’t have any magical performers for the funfair.”

“That was a fine little show,” nodded Beardy thoughtfully. “The night-time gala has dancers and an acrobat but a top magician would add some extra sparkle to the event’s closing spectacular.”

“Well?” I asked keenly. “Have we got the job or not?”

Beardy and Foldy Cheeks withdrew into a huddle and conducted a short, whispered conversation.

“Although it is unconventional to add an act so late in the day,” said Beardy, “we are willing to make an exception for you.”

“In fact,” cut in Foldy Cheeks, “we are willing to give you top billing for the evening’s closing event. What do you say to that?”

I was about to say, “Magnificent, thank you very much!” but Marvello’s words came out more rapidly than mine. “What is the payment?” he demanded.

“Fair question,” nodded Beardy, who was clearly used to negotiating wages and fees. “You will be rewarded with a quarter of the takings for the night’s show and, believe me, the marquee we are using is very large and is always full. If your show goes according to plan, you will walk away a much wealthier man than you currently are.”

Marvello smacked his lips. The deal on offer sounded generous and very promising

“You have yourself a deal,” he nodded, shaking both men by the hand. “But as it is only Thursday and the show is not until Saturday night, what provisions will be made for our accommodation?”

The Great Marvello

“All performers stay at Chandler’s Inn on Friday and Saturday night. Before and after those dates, your choice of accommodation is strictly up to you.”

Marvello was about to protest but I stamped on his foot. He glared at me but remained silent, leaving me to do the talking this time.

“That all sounds very reasonable,” I nodded cheerily. “We will find somewhere to sleep tonight, get to know the area over the next couple of days and close your funfair with a magical spectacular.”

Marvello was displeased by my impudence but at the same time could see that my argument was right. One more night in a ditch or on a forest floor was a small sacrifice to make for two comfortable nights in an inn and an evening with a potentially huge influx of cash.

“Indeed,” nodded Marvello, withdrawing his foot from under mine. “We accept the terms and look forward to contributing to your festivities.”

“Excellent!” nodded Beardy. “My name is Mr Fallon and this is Mr Flack. We are the organisers of the event and any questions about materials needed or setting-up facilities should be directed at us.”

We strolled away from Fallon and Flack, me with a huge grin on my face, Marvello with a small smile adorning his lips.

“Shame about tonight,” he said. The man always liked to get in a moan or two.

“But think of the takings,” I replied, knowing that talk of money would soon cheer him up. Of course it did the trick. By midnight we’d found a small, well-tended stretch of grass on the other side of the wood and we both got a relatively good night’s sleep in our grassy beds, delighted that we’d possibly just secured the show of a lifetime.