



When our assailants came round, they took one groggy look at me and, not wishing to be pummelled by my advanced fighting-skills again, took flight. I was pretty sure we wouldn't be seeing them again any time soon.

Marvello took a little longer to wake up. His first words were simply,

“My suitcase!”

I handed it over to him. He studied the burned edge and eyed me sharply.

“Did you root around within the contents of this case?” he demanded.

“First of all, why would I do that when you've told me ten thousand times not to and second of all, how about a thank you for saving your life?”

“Yes, well, of course, Cassie, that goes without saying. Your fighting-skills have once more come in remarkably useful. Did either of those two ruffians snatch anything from within it?”

“No, because I was too busy extinguishing their lights,” I replied. “Now can we head for Chandler's Inn because I could do with a good night's sleep on a comfortable bed for a change?”

The Great Marvello

Marvello agreed that this would be the best course of action and we were delighted on arrival at the inn to see it was an establishment of great quality and comfort. The landlady, a Mrs Jenkinson, was hospitable to such a degree that by the end of the evening we were sitting round a table with her and sharing stories as if we had been fine friends for many years. She took a shine to me as, with no children of her own, she enjoyed the company of younger people whom she claimed were more honest and fiery than cynical adults.

And I got my own room! It even had a sink with running water and a hand towel. I felt like a queen returning to her quarters after a long day of horse-riding or shooting grouse. However, while I luxuriated in all these comforts, a plan had formed in my mind, driven by feelings of anger and betrayal. As I drifted off to sleep, I knew without a shadow of doubt that I would act on it first thing the following morning.

I was up early. Of course I wanted to lie in in the delicious bed but there were more important things at stake. I snuck out of my room and headed for the village square. There were already quite a few kids milling around but I spotted a boy with frizzy hair who looked about ten. He was on a dented, rickety bike. I beckoned him towards me. He frowned but pedalled over.

“What’s your name?” I demanded.

“George.”

“Well, George, I need you to go on a journey today,” I said.

“But it’s the funfair,” he replied.

“I’m well aware of that but I reckon you’re the sort of boy who can move pretty quickly on that bicycle.”

He shrugged his shoulders.

I handed him a piece of paper. “Can you read?” I asked.

“Yeah.”

“So read the instructions and do as they say. In return you get this.” I held up two silver coins.

“How do I know you’ll give them to me if I do as you ask?”

I handed him the first coin. “One now, one when it’s done.”

The Great Marvello

He looked over his shoulder at the other kids in the square, tucked the note into his trouser pocket and began cycling away as fast as his battered travelling-machine would allow.

The day passed incredibly quickly. There were blurs and flashes of movement as people hurried this way and that. At midday, when the town crier officially opened proceedings, Harwood's Open Ground was already awash with people. The crowds grew steadily through the afternoon.

Just after two, I spotted George cycling in my direction. He looked exhausted.

"All done," he whispered to me. I flicked him the second coin and said,

"George, you have just provided a most vital service."

He gave me a funny look and cycled off.

The evening came and the shows began in the marquee. Because Mr Fallon and Mr Flack had been so impressed by Marvello's quick tricks, we were top of the billing.

That meant I had to sit through a woman who could bend herself into various bizarre shapes, a fortune-teller (who got half of his "readings" wrong) and a troupe of acrobats.

Then it was our turn.

Marvello began as usual with some simple card and coin tricks that always warmed the audience up well. Then he moved on to levitation, "floating" in the air for a few seconds with the help of an unseen contraption made from metal tubes. After an elaborate disappearing act that involved a series of mirrors, it was finally time for the pinnacle of the show – the "flying" jewellery.

He paced the stage, his intense stare increasing the audience's excitement, until he finally selected a woman and asked her to stand.

"YOUR NAME PLEASE, GOOD LADY?" he said, smiling.

"Elizabeth Gowan," she replied quietly.

"PLEASE COULD YOU SHOW THE AUDIENCE IF YOU ARE WEARING A NECKLACE TONIGHT?"

"Yes I am," replied Mrs Gowan. "It's a gold necklace my late grandmother left me."

The Great Marvello

“WELL, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, I WILL COUNT TO THREE AND THIS NECKLACE WILL FLY ACROSS THE ROOM BEFORE YOUR VERY EYES!”

As always there were gasps of shock and surprise.

And of course I was there under Mrs Gowan’s seat.

When Marvello shouted, “THREE!” I released the smoke, quickly untied the necklace, scuttled down the aisle and handed it through the makeshift trapdoor to him.

When the smoke cleared and the audience exploded with appreciation, Marvello invited Mrs Gowan on to the stage, bowed to her and handed her back her valuable gold necklace.

At this point the stage curtain was due to close but, like a speeding bullet, I jumped on to the stage and held up my arms.

“STOP!” I yelled at the top of my voice.