



CHAPTER ONE

‘Ladies and Gentlemen, Boys and Girls, what you are about to witness is a magical feat which has been a year in the making! A treat for the imagination the likes of which has NEVER been seen at Sunny Haven Holiday Park before. A splendiferous illusion that will knock your socks off . . .’

Abby watched breathlessly through the red velvet curtains at the side of the stage, her stomach in a knot as Dad slipped his magic wand from his trouser waistband and waved it mysteriously over the box on the rickety table in front of him. Although the stage lights were blinding, Abby could still make out the sweat on her dad’s forehead, the tension in his jaw and, to her left, the dozens of expectant upturned faces in the crowd. The younger kids were, as usual, sitting cross-legged on the

floor in the front. Their older brothers and sisters were chewing gum and looking at their phones, and behind them were the usual frazzled mixture of sun-burned mums, dads, grandads, aunts and uncles who were hoping that the onsite entertainment would at least give them an hour's peace from their energetic families and a nice sit down.

'As you can see,' continued Dad mysteriously, picking up the box and sweeping it dramatically from side to side, 'this box is completely empty.'

'Can you please confirm to me that it is empty?'

There was no reply, just the sound of coughing and crinkly crisp packets and the odd baby crying.

'I said, can you see that it is empty?' he asked again, louder this time, while cupping his hand behind his ear theatrically.

'Yes!' came the bedraggled response. Dad smiled and returned to the table and placed the box down, again with a flourish, but Abby could tell by his breathing that he was nervous.

Dad was telling the truth; he had actually been practising this trick for over a year. Ever since Little

Mike, the holiday park site manager, had threatened to sack him if he didn't up his magical game. Barbara the cabaret singer had had to modernise her song choices from Songs That Won the War to chart-topping hits, the ballroom dancers had been dropped for a street dancing group and Dad, well, Dad was on thin ice. This was the first show of the season, and his last chance to impress Little Mike, who was now stood on a box in the back of the entertainment hall so he could see over the heads of the audience. His twice-dyed hair was slicked down and his suit was so sharp it could draw blood. And even in the low light, Abby could see Little Mike's over-whitened teeth shine against his tanned face, practically glowing in the dark.

Abby watched as Dad waved his magic wand over and around the box in order to show that there were no tricks or wires, that there wasn't anything suspicious going on . . . Then, when he was ready, he grabbed the box and threw it into the air before catching it again and this time, he reached into the box and pulled out Abby's white rabbit Ta-da, who blinked uncertainly in the spotlights.

There came a small ripple of clapping from the

audience and the little children started laughing and pointing.

‘Now!’ said Dad gaining confidence, ‘I’m going to make this rabbit disappear again!’

Dad stroked Ta-da before putting him back in the box and picking it up once again. Then, as he had practiced, he threw it into the air. Abby heard the audience gasp as it sailed upwards as if in slow motion, before landing back in her father’s hands.

This time, there was absolute silence. Some of the little ones in front had their hands over their mouths in shock. And then, with a broadening smile, Dad showed them . . . the empty box. Ta-da had disappeared!

There came some proper applause this time, and Abby could just about make out Little Mike looking pleased. Abby’s shoulders relaxed as she watched Dad hit his stride.

‘Now!’ he said, ‘YOU! Madam in the front.’

The old woman who was knitting in the second row looked up over her glasses.

‘Yes, you. May I have your bag please?’

The old woman looked around like someone who had

been singled out by a teacher.

‘May I have your bag?’

The old lady stuffed her knitting into her pocket and hauled herself to her feet. She picked up her bag and walked through the gaggle of children on the floor who parted like the red sea with her every step. They watched her as she handed her bag to Dad.

Dad took it and thanked her before waving his magic wand over the bag and reaching in. First, he took out a small flask of tea. The old lady blushed at that, but Abby couldn’t blame her, the prices they charged for a cup of tea around here were extortionate.

