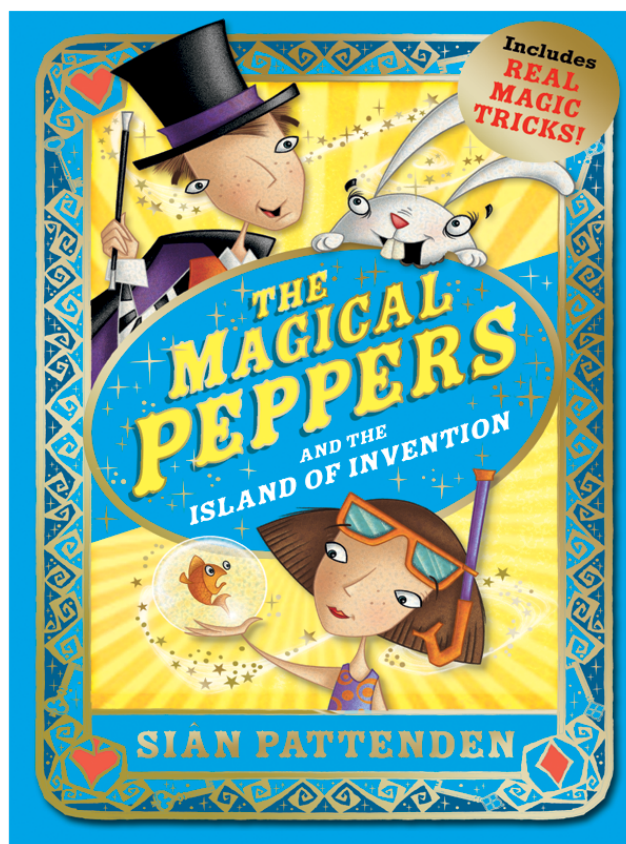




Sian Pattenden

**The Magical Peppers and
the Island of Invention**

«HarperCollins»

Pattenden S.

The Magical Peppers and the Island of Invention / S. Pattenden —
«HarperCollins»,

A strange old theatre at the end of the pier is the setting for the next fantastic adventure full of magic and mayhem with unbeatable double act, Esme & Monty Pepper, and their madcap Uncle Potty...The Pepper twins, Esmé and Monty and their uncle Potty have been summoned to the Sea Spray Theatre on the end of Crab Pie Pier. They're on a mission to keep the old theatre from closing and must perform the show of a lifetime to reel in the crowds. But not everyone wants the theatre to survive and a certain someone is determined to sabotage the show, whatever the cost...Add a strange island hideaway full of zany inventions (including the Great Crab Pie flytrap and the Banana-Powered Test Your Strength machine), a hair-raising helicopter rescue-mission, some dodgy fortune-telling and the world's biggest goldfish bowl and the Peppers are in for an unforgettable summer.

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THE MAGICAL PEPPERS

AND THE ISLAND OF INVENTION

SIÂN PATTENDEN



Illustrated by Jess Mikhail



HarperCollins Children's Books





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Dr Pompkins – Totality Magic

Welcome once more to the magic world of Dr Pompkins. As I sit at my study chair with a small pot of tea and a basket of fresh pastries there is just one word I'd like to mention: style. Now that you have learned the basics of magic, you need to know how to augment your tricks with verve and panache – this is as necessary as your practical know-how. If you follow me through these colossal pages, dear reader, you will learn how to make every trick your own. The world is our oyster... and we are but hungry explorers on a mountain ledge of possibility...

In all totality,
Dr Pompkins

CHAPTER ONE

The Sea Spray Theatre

Boomph!

Esmé and Monty Pepper were on the beach when they heard the first explosion.

“What was that?” asked Monty, turning round.

“It came from that tiny island just out to sea,” replied Esmé, who had been looking for fossils. “I wonder what could have caused it.” Esmé wrinkled her brow and stood up facing the island, which looked like a palm tree pudding in a bowl of blue custard.

Boooooomph!

There was another bang, bigger this time and closer.

“Oh, dear,” said Monty.

“It’s Potty!” said Esmé. “Come on, take your flippers off, Monty – we’d better go and check if he’s all right.”

It was springtime and the Pepper twins were spending the school break at the seaside with Potty – a professional and very tall magician with wispy, worm-like hair and one long eyebrow.

Potty had done a good job of looking after Esmé and Monty last summer. When they had arrived back from holiday, Mr and Mrs Pepper were impressed to hear how the twins had saved a local magic club and organised its new junior division. Now, Esmé and Monty’s hippie parents wanted to use the springtime school break to catch a quick glimpse of the Sacred Mountain of Terry in Goa, and sing a hymn to the Indian Goddess of Soil – or something like that. So again they entrusted Potty to look after their children at the seaside while he put on his latest Sea Spray Theatre show at the end of Crab Pie Pier.

Had Mr and Mrs Pepper been given details about last summer’s exploding toaster, flooded kitchen, spilt baked beans, damaged laptop, etc. then they might have thought twice about leaving their children with Potty again. But, luckily for Esmé and Monty, they weren’t told anything of the sort.

By the sound of explosion number two, Potty was up to his old tricks again. The twins ran towards the theatre as fast as they could.

Esmé, dressed with practicality in mind for a spring break on the British coast, was wearing a yellow mac over a sweatshirt and navy blue straight-fit trousers. Her plimsolls had plenty of grip that helped her to run across the pebbly beach without slipping. Monty, on the other hand, had dressed this morning in a Victorian blue-and-white striped bathing suit, complete with rubber ring and flippers, and his usual black velvet cape. Having been on the beach for the last two hours, Monty had picked up plenty of seaweed, which hung from his rubber ring and made him look like a cross between a sea monster and a chandelier. The curling fronds of seaweed trailed behind him as they ran up the steps to the Sea Spray Theatre.

The Sea Spray Theatre had been built on Crab Pie Pier in the 1930s. Throughout the decades it had played host to many top names: Pat Daniels, Timothy Cooper, Fay Presto. It was a great example of art deco architecture – featuring a curved facade, wooden panels around the front entrance and magnificent geometric arches along the roof. Well, it would have been a great example if the exterior had not been crumbling away – decades of salty air biting into the smooth, rendered surface, destroying the varnish on the wooden panels and bleaching the once-bright colours. The seagulls that always sat in a line along the top of the building had also added their own, rather sticky, decoration over the years.

The twins came running in through the main entrance, knocked over the spider plant by the main door and rushed into the auditorium.

“Potty, Potty!” called Monty. “Are you OK? We heard a loud noise...”

Potty stood alone on the dim, unlit stage.

He was wrapped up in a huge fishing net, struggling to get out. Underneath he wore a brand new cape, which had replaced the old tweed one because it smelt of smoked mackerel. This cape was yellow with vertical satin stripes and had the words, ‘The Potty Magician’ sewn on the back. Esmé thought that it made Potty look like a particularly happy banana.

“Oh, totality,” said Potty when he saw the Pepper twins, his huge eyebrow knotting into a frown. “I’ve blown the lights.”

“What happened?” asked Esmé.

Potty sighed. He was not a happy banana.

“I was trying to come up with the main trick for my new show,” he explained, gesticulating under the net. “I heard the sound of the waves lashing against the beach, the wind whistling over the sea and the seagulls squealing outside. I closed my eyes, trying to capture the essence of the great briney oceans thereof.”

“Briney oceans thereof?” asked Monty.



“Certainly, and very cold too,” replied Potty. “One minute I’m experimenting with the Flying Fish trick – the next minute the small turbot in my hand explodes and fuses the lights.”

“You had a live fish in your hand?”

“It’s not a real one,” answered Potty. “It’s made out of rubber.” He pointed to his left. “It’s over there.”

“I see,” said Esmé, glancing at the small fish lying on the ground.

“Then I got caught up in the net...” explained Potty. “And now I can’t get out.”

“We’ll help,” said Esmé.

“Wonderful,” beamed Potty. “The fact that I had spring-loaded the fish beforehand may have added to the problem.”

“Oh, dear,” said Esmé, trying to disentangle Potty. She remembered the toaster incident from last summer, when Potty decided to heat up a dynamite sandwich. “We had better phone the theatre owners.”

“No need,” replied Potty, his long, banana-coloured limbs now almost free of the net. “The Table sisters own the place – they live down the pier in the gypsy caravan, to the left of the coconut shy.”

“OK,” said Esmé, moving towards the auditorium door. “You and Monty stay here and tidy things up a bit and I’ll go and let them know what’s happened...”

An excerpt from

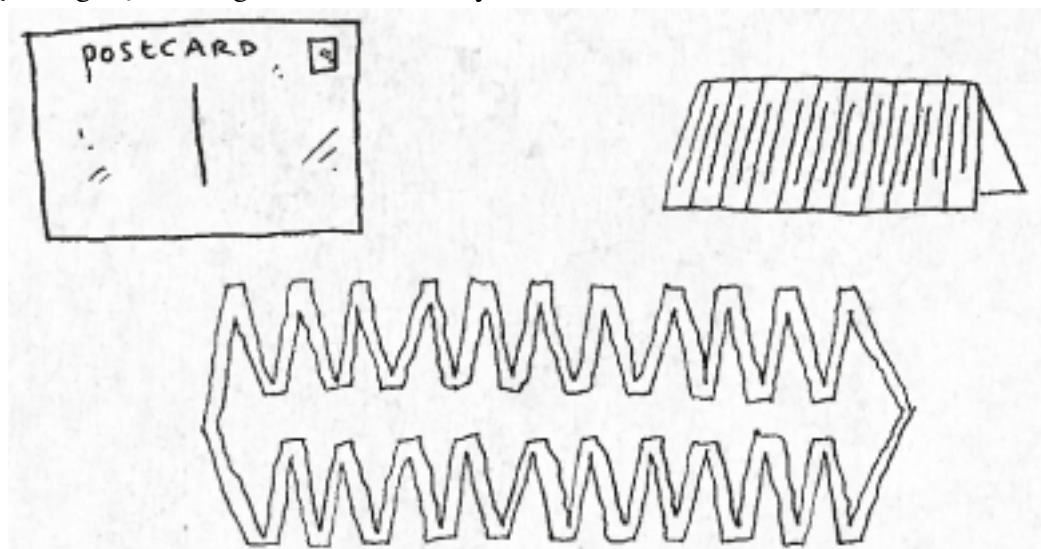
Dr Pomkins – Totality Magic

TRICK: How to Walk Through a Postcard



Friends, this is a marvellous trick, which goes back to Victorian times. Tell your chums that you can walk through a postcard.

It seems impossible, but fold a postcard lengthways, take a very sharp pair of scissors and cut like so {see fig. 1}, making a series of sideways slits.



Carefully open the card and see how it expands into a ring of enormous girth. Step into it, pull it up to your middle then over your head.



A resounding, “Amazing!” will be the cry from your audience.

Opening Act

At the start of your show, when the curtains open and you walk out on stage or at a simple gathering, the first thing that everyone will notice is your outward appearance... Walk briskly, as soon as your name is announced – the audience will see that you mean business. Smile to acknowledge the applause and start your act immediately. Confidence is all – get in there and do it.

Your exit is just as important; take your time to smile and bow. If you have performed well, come back on stage again – but only if the audience still applauds. If they have run away, have a

big think about becoming a magician. You might want to look into the role of a chartered surveyor instead.

In all totality,
Dr Pompkins

CHAPTER TWO

Teapots and Light Bulbs

Esmé walked out into the afternoon sunshine. The pier was buzzing with activity. Visitors munched from large bags of candy floss and gnawed at brittle Crab Pie rock. The radio from the coconut shy was playing loud pop music and the seagulls squawked sharply overhead. It was a splendid day, a perfect seaside morning. Apart from the strong breeze Esmé could detect from the ocean. And was that a storm cloud in the distance?

Esmé reached the gypsy caravan within a minute. Outside was a plyboard sign that read “Tabitha and Twinkle Table, fortune tellers to the stars – £10 for a future you’ll never forget!” Underneath was pinned a signed photograph of the boxer Frank Pruno.

Esmé raised her hand to knock at the wooden door of the caravan.

“Come in, deary,” came a voice, a fraction of a second before Esmé’s knuckles touched the wood.

Esmé popped her head through the door. It was completely dark inside. “H-hello?” she stuttered. “I’m Esmé Pepper, the Potty Magician’s niece.”

“We know,” said a voice from the void. There was a fumbling sound and a bare light bulb flickered on. Two smiling ladies were at once visible, sitting around a square table. The Table sisters must have been in their eighties but their eyes shone like baubles on a Christmas tree.

“I’m Tabitha Table, and this is my sister, Twinkle.” Tabitha thrust out a large hand in greeting and smiled, revealing slightly fewer teeth than Esmé had expected. She wore a dusty-pink cardigan, a white shirt and green nylon trousers.

Twinkle Table seemed smaller – and shyer – than her sister. She had a kind expression on her face, and fine features, with a distinctive beauty spot painted on to her left cheek. She wore a purple dress with tassels falling from the hem, and long lengths of russet-coloured chiffon hanging loosely around her shoulders and over her head. From her ears hung large dangly earrings shaped like feathers, which made a soft sound whenever she moved.

The small table in front of them was filled with objects. Two pairs of binoculars, a china teacup and a gleaming crystal ball. From the ceiling of the caravan hung various items – an old gas lamp, a set of wood chimes, a large metal teapot, tea cups, a bundle of small white crystals and what looked like a long jawbone filled with three rows of pointy teeth.

“Mandible of the trout,” explained Tabitha matter-of-factly. Esmé noticed her fingers were adorned with enormous mystical-looking jewellery: a large ring in the shape of a frog, one that looked like a crown and another a skull. They clicked sharply together as Tabitha pointed to the jawbone. “Brings us good luck and you can also use it as a cake ingredient.”

Esmé thought that sounded rather horrible, but chose not to say anything.

“Do sit down,” said Twinkle softly to Esmé. “Would you like us to read your destiny?” she asked, trying to reach the teapot hanging from the ceiling. “The tea leaves perhaps?”

Tabitha took one look at her sister struggling and grabbed the object herself with her well-ornamented hands.

“I’m pretty sure we should be talking about practical matters, like mending the theatre lights,” Tabitha said.



Esmé blinked. How does Tabitha know? Maybe I said something when I came in...

Tabitha eyed Esmé’s practical clothes. Esmé’s cheeks began to go red – she felt out of place in the caravan with all its trinkets and wonder.

Meanwhile Twinkle fiddled with the chiffon on her head, producing a teaspoon from one of its many folds. Once her sister had finished adding tea leaves and water from the freshly boiled kettle to the pot, Twinkle stirred the contents slowly and thoughtfully with her spoon.

Tabitha brought out a packet of sweets from her pocket and offered one to Esmé. “Werther’s Original?” she asked.

“No, thank you,” said Esmé, politely.

“Aha! I can see that you are a very sensible young lady,” said Tabitha. “You worry that if you take a sweet you will ruin your teeth. You don’t sit down in a stranger’s home until you are asked. Hmm... I can also tell that you do a good job looking after your twin brother and your beloved uncle.”

“Tabitha, don’t start yet – I haven’t even spoken to the tea leaves,” said Twinkle, who was still messing about with the teapot and the spoon.

“Twinkle, you know that if I am inspired I like to do my personality readings as quickly as possible,” replied Tabitha, breathing in deeply, jewellery still clinking. “I can see that Esmé Pepper is a logical person and good at problem solving. I would even go so far as to say that she has a talent for it, and in the future she would make a great scientist or indeed a super sleuth.”

Esmé was taken aback – and secretly impressed. Tabitha gave her a big, not-so-toothy grin.

“I’m ready now,” said Twinkle Table as she concentrated hard on pouring the remnants inside the teapot into the cup in front of her. She swirled the cup in a clockwise direction and peered in. Esmé watched as Twinkle closed her eyes and wrinkled her nose. “I see a long, happy life ahead of you. I also see a small notebook and a sharpened pencil that you carry with you at all times.”

Esmé flushed again – this was true.

Twinkle went silent and, teacup still in hand, her head dropped to one side and her mouth fell open. She made a small gurgling sound.

Esmé stared at Twinkle, fascinated. She had never seen anything like this before – was there something wrong?

“Is Twinkle all right?” Esmé asked Tabitha.

“She’s fine,” came Tabitha’s reply. “Just a swoon. It’s part of the reading, part of the fun.”

Twinkle started murmuring. “Ah, I see a vision. An illumination, a fire in a fish tank. Yes, that’s it – flames, rising high, engorging everything in their wake. Trouble, Esmé, trouble. You must be on guard at all times.”

Twinkle abruptly opened her eyes. “There was also something about ‘Thai summer rolls’, but I couldn’t make sense of that.”

Esmé was startled, but as if nothing had happened, Twinkle put the teacup down on the table and shook Esmé’s hand.

“Thank you,” said Twinkle, eyes shining bright. “That was a very intense reading.”

“Now that’s enough of the mystical stuff,” remarked Tabitha. “Let’s get on with fixing those theatre lights.”

“We’d better phone Keith,” said Twinkle, slipping into the back to make the call.

“Keith is our fix-it man,” explained Tabitha. “He’s very talented. He can fix or make just about anything – lights, fuses, entire air-conditioning systems that also emit the smell of patchouli oil. He built us this caravan out of two hundred empty cola cans, half a canoe and some cement.”

“Keith’s on his way to the theatre,” said Twinkle, replacing the receiver. “Let’s head over and meet him there.”

They all left the caravan into the sunshine outside and the three of them walked arm in arm up the pier, passing posters for Potty’s show along the way.

“Our last magic show,” said Tabitha, with a broad sigh.

“Why ‘last’?” asked Esmé.

“Well, the truth is, we may not be in charge of the Sea Spray Theatre much longer,” Twinkle told Esmé. “A local businessman named Mr Portobello is interested in buying it from us. We are relying on him to make a good offer.”

“You’re selling the theatre?”

“Yes,” said Twinkle. Esmé noticed she was wearing tiny satin shoes with pointed toes. “We’ve been running the theatre for thirty years – but it’s a sideline, really, to our more spiritual calling.”

“If Mr Portobello offers us a healthy sum,” said Tabitha brightly, “then we can not only concentrate on the psychic readings but there’s a lovely bungalow on Tide Street that we would very

much like to move into – more space, more light, more resonance. The spirits are getting sick of the caravan, there's not enough room for them. They keep bumping into each other.”

Esmé smiled. She had never met anyone who believed in spirits before, apart from Monty's dabbling in what he called ‘vibrations’. She was beginning to like the Table sisters very much.

“We tried to sell the Sea Spray last year but Mr Portobello made us such a low offer we had to pull out of the deal,” confided Twinkle. “It was after the famous magician Gary Meringue had been due to perform. People were queuing all the way along the pier to get a ticket...”

“Only he dropped out at the last minute,” revealed Tabitha. “He simply disappeared. Whatever happened we will probably never know. We tried the spirits but they couldn't tell us either.”

Esmé and the Table sisters arrived at the theatre, walking through the front door in turn. “This is why we need Potty to wow the audience and wow Mr Portobello,” Tabitha confirmed as she stopped to examine the spider plant. “The soil is a bit dry,” she said, then turned to Esmé. “The offer we get rests on Potty's success.”

“We will do our very best,” said Esmé. “I'm sure that Potty will perform the show of a lifetime. If he can just manage to avoid getting caught up in his fishing net and his props exploding.”

“He must,” said Tabitha, with a serious look.

Esmé and the Table sisters entered the auditorium.

On stage Uncle Potty stood on a ladder with Monty on his shoulders, arms outstretched. The ladder wobbled first left, then right. It wobbled forward, then back.

“Oooph!” said Monty.

“What are you two doing?” Esmé called out. “Be careful! You'll fall.”

“We thought we'd have a look at the light fitting,” shouted Potty, now extending a long leg outward to balance them both on the wobbling ladder.

“Please, come down now,” urged Esmé. “There won't be a show if you're both in hospital.”

“Woooooargh!”

Potty and Monty wobbled on the ladder for the last time and fell in a heap on the floor.

“Oooofph!” exclaimed Monty. Esmé helped Potty up.

“Are you all right?” she asked.

Potty rubbed his shin. “I think so. My new cape is slightly padded, so it softened the fall.”

“I'm fine too,” replied Monty who was sitting in a heap on the floor with the seaweed-strewn rubber ring still round his waist.

“Oh, dear,” said Twinkle, gazing with concern at the magician and his assistant on whom all their hopes were riding.

“Hm,” said Tabitha, looking first at them and then at the lights. “I hope Keith can fix this.”

“I have a strong feeling that he will appear shortly,” said Twinkle, her nose twitching. “I am certain I can sense his aura, almost around the corner. Ooh, I feel a little faint.”

She raised a hand to her forehead. Esmé recognised the glazed look in Twinkle's eyes from her swoon in the gypsy caravan.

“A chair!” squeaked Twinkle. Esmé ran to get one from backstage.

As Twinkle sat down, she closed her eyes and murmured softly, “Keith Chalk, the spirits tell me that you are near...” Her raised hand quivered a little, then with a thud fell on to her lap.

Tabitha opened up her skull ring and read the time from the miniature watch face inside. “Well, you did just call him.”

A split second later Keith Chalk appeared through the main door.

“Keith is here, everyone,” shouted Twinkle. “I knew it.”

An excerpt from

Dr Pompkins – Totality Magic

TRICK: The Vanishing Stamp



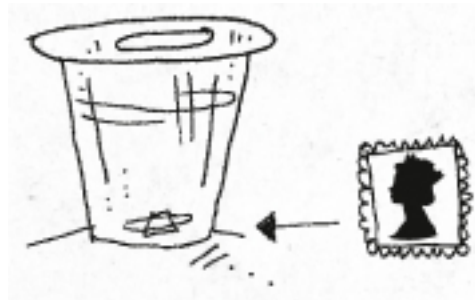
A little close-up magic. Start by exclaiming that you can make the Queen disappear! Of course, by that you mean the Queen's head on a stamp, not the actual Queen...

Place a stamp on a table and a glass tumbler on top of it. Pour water into the glass just over halfway and place a saucer over the glass.

By the miracle of refraction, there is absolutely no way that the stamp can be seen through the glass tumbler.



This is so effective because it is so simple.



Stage Lighting

It's a good idea to use spotlights if you are performing on stage, but remember that strong lighting can change the appearance of things. Take care with shiny metal apparatus and glossy paint – it may reflect the light and make it difficult to see properly, even with just a desk lamp.

Stage lighting can also affect the way you will look, as it drains the colour from your face. You will look like a ghost unless you wear theatrical make-up. Ask your drama teacher or a nice lady how to use it. Mrs Dr Pompkins does my make-up every time and I look healthy and flushed 24/7.

In all totality,
Dr Pompkins

CHAPTER THREE

Keith Chalk

Potty brushed himself down as Keith walked on to the stage.

“You must be Mr Chalk,” he said, holding out a long arm in greeting. “Pleased to meet you.”

“Yes, I’m the fix-it man,” replied Keith, surveying Monty, the fish and the fallen ladder. “Anything you need fixing, just ask me. Looks like you might want help already...”

Keith Chalk had brown curly hair, thick eyebrows and a straight nose. He wore paint-splattered overalls with pockets full of small spanners and wrenches. He held out a large hand and smiled as he was introduced to the Pepper twins.

“The first thing is that there’s a small issue with the light bulbs,” Tabitha told him.

Keith looked up at the lighting rig and scratched his head.

“No problem,” he said, good-naturedly. “I can get this row of lights changed, but is this something that happened during rehearsal? And in which case, is it likely to happen again?”

Potty nodded. “Yes, maybe.”

“If so, we could always try and cover the bulbs in thin sheets of heatproof plastic,” said Keith, enthusiastic about problem solving. “That should deal with the real issue.”

“That’s a great idea,” said Potty.

“I love to think of the bigger picture,” said Keith. “You’re a magician then?”

“How did you guess?”

“The back of your cape has the words ‘The Potty Magician’ stitched into it.”

Potty scratched his chin and looked with intrigue at Keith.

“I wonder if you have any thoughts on spring-loaded objects?” asked Potty.

“Always tricky. They can shoot off and end up anywhere, which can cause problems with your audience – and health and safety. You should really be looking at having more control.”

Potty was impressed. Keith seemed to have something that Potty lacked – a practical take on adventurous ideas.

“Are you a fan of magic?” asked Potty.

“Oh, yes,” said Keith. “I love the skill, the showmanship. I like to work out how the magicians do each trick – it takes a lot of technical skill to make sure everything comes to life.”

Potty nodded enthusiastically in agreement.

“I’ve seen Pat Daniels perform live six times,” continued Keith. “I even managed to catch Trev and Peller once – they did that incredible trick which made it look like Trev was covered in a million dollars’ worth of banknotes and then was run over by an eighteen-wheel truck. For a start, the notes themselves can’t have been real...”

“But I heard that they were,” said Potty. “The money was passed around the audience beforehand...”

“They must have been switched at some point,” said Keith.

“It is possible...” mused Potty.

Esmé watched Potty and Keith talk with interest – they seemed to be getting on splendidly.

“Then of course there’s the truck,” continued Keith eagerly, “which must have had at least one fake wheel, so that when it went over him—”

“...he wasn’t injured! Of course,” shouted Potty, finishing Keith’s sentence. “And maybe the truck was weighted to one side, so as not to hurt poor Trev.”

“That’s it,” said Keith. “You’re a—”

“...genius!” finished Potty – and they both laughed.

At once, Esmé realised that Potty’s act, as great as it was, had been missing something – a person who could make Potty’s ambitions a reality. She was sure that Keith Chalk was this person.

“Uncle Potty,” said Esmé, tugging on his cape. “Why doesn’t Keith help you with this performance? He can make your tricks a hundred times...” Esmé was trying very hard not to say ‘less prone to disaster’, “...more workable. I read a book which said that many of the top magicians secretly employ inventors to make their act the most sensational – and completely unique.”



Keith looked at Esmé. “But I’m just a fix-it man.”

“I think Esmé’s right,” cried Potty. “You love magic, you try and work out how the tricks are done... and you seem to have the technical know-how to help create some incredible, never-before-seen tricks.”

“Well, I do like to tinker with electricals and gadgets,” said Keith. “I’ve even made a few inventions of my own recently...”

“Do say you’ll help us,” said Esmé.

There was a long, tense pause as Keith looked lost in thought.

“Why not,” he said at last. “It would be an honour.”

Potty and Keith shook hands; both were grinning widely.

Suddenly Twinkle started to swoon again. “It’s terribly hot in here,” she said.

“Oh, gracious, not again,” said Tabitha.

“I just feel a little...” Twinkle fanned her face with her hand as she slumped back into her chair. “Ooh, the spirits!” Twinkle squeaked as she wrinkled her nose.

“Oh, deary me, not another premonition?” Tabitha was concerned. “You’ve only just finished your last one...”

“I can’t help it,” murmured Twinkle. “These apparitions just arrive... Might be important.”

Twinkle’s head drooped to one side then the other. It looked as if she was watching a very slow game of tennis.

“Hurghmumble,” said Twinkle. “Flurghlehoi...”

“Anything bubbling up from the spirit world?” Tabitha asked her sister.

Esmé watched in wonder as Twinkle was visited – yet again – by some sort of mystical presence. Esmé wondered what she might see this time.

“I’ve got it.” Twinkle’s eyes opened and she shot up in her chair. “It’s a shark in a suit, and it’s coming to get us.”

“A shark in a suit?” asked Tabitha. “Sharks don’t wear clothes.”

“Oh, but this one does...” Twinkle Table said, and shivered.

Just at that moment, a man entered the auditorium.



An excerpt from

Dr Pompkins – Totality Magic

TRICK: Remove an Ice Cube with a Piece of String

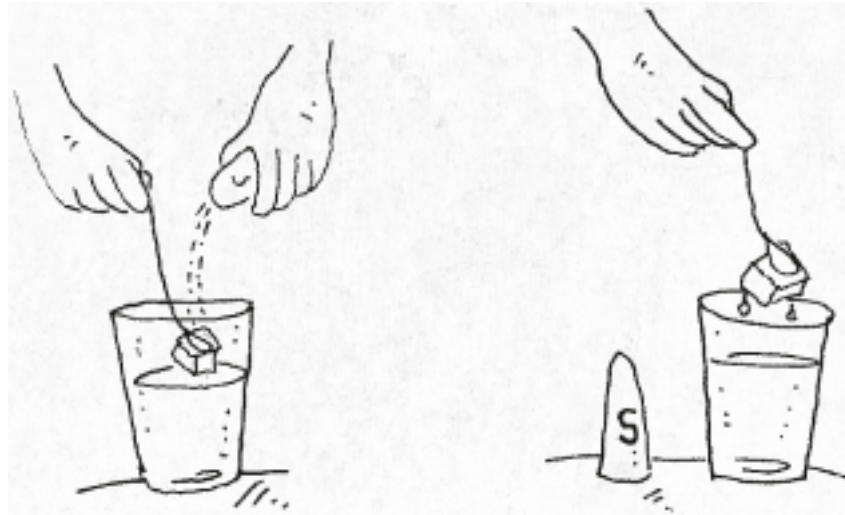
Compatriots and cavaliers, place before you a glass full of water and one ice cube. Give each of your friends a piece of string – medium length – and ask them to remove the ice cube with it.

Watch as they will try to lasso the cube out – to no avail. Once they have given up, take the string, soak it in the water then double it into a loop at the centre.

Rest this loop on top of the ice cube, pour some magic dust over both of them (the magic dust is actually salt, but your audience need not know this) and you will be able to lift the ice cube, which will have become frozen to the loop. The ice melts as you pour the salt on it, and refreezes when you stop.



Now that is magic. Oh, no, it's not – it's science.



Magic Hands

An audience is always watching a magician's hands – they are the tools of his trade – so it is very important to keep them looking good and working well.

Finger exercises:

The best way to improve your flexibility and coordination is by doing regular finger exercises like the ones described below:

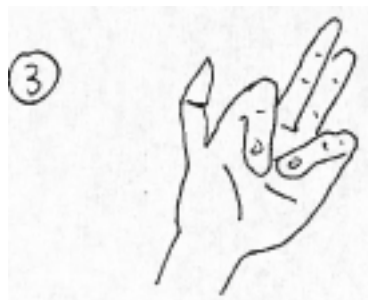
Close your fingers very tightly into your palms, then open them one by one, starting with the forefinger. Then try opening alternate fingers – second finger, little finger, forefinger, third finger and so on {see fig. 1}.



Hold your hand up straight and separate your fingers as illustrated. Now change positions as quickly as you can {see fig. 2}.



Touch the tip of your little finger with the tip of your forefinger – first at the back, then quickly at the front {see fig. 3}.



In all totality,
Dr Pompkins

CHAPTER FOUR

Incomprehensible

“Do my eyes deceive me or am I getting a sneak preview of the performance?” said the man. He had in his hand a poster for Potty’s magic show.

The assembled crew turned towards the darkness.

“You sneaky little ladies,” the man said, wagging a finger at the Table sisters. “You didn’t tell me you were planning another magic show. How wonderful!” He smiled round at everyone, although Esmé couldn’t help but notice that his smile looked a little forced. More like a grimace, she thought to herself.

“And you must be the Potty Magician...”

“Yes, that’s me,” said Potty, walking forwards, squinting into the shadowy auditorium.

The man walked up to the stage and shook Potty’s hand, then waved uncomfortably at Esmé and Monty. He was not used to children.

Twinkle and Tabitha rushed up to greet him.

“How nice to see you, Mr Portobello,” said Tabitha, trying not to flinch as he kissed her cheek, then Twinkle’s.

“Tea?” asked Twinkle.

“No, thanks, Twinks,” said Mr Portobello, wiping his mouth with his sleeve.

So this is the man who wanted to buy the Sea Spray, thought Esmé.

Mr Portobello had greased-back hair and wore a shiny suit that was clearly one size too small for him. Esmé wondered what it was about him that made her feel uncomfortable, but she couldn’t quite put her finger on it. But the man was, for the Table sisters, all important, so Esmé kept smiling and decided to be as charming as she could.

“Potty’s act is going to be fantastic, Mr Portobello,” Esmé said.

“Please, call me Ronnie,” oozed Mr Portobello.



“Keith’s been helping us out too and we’ve come up with some great ideas,” Esmé continued.

“Keith... hmm, interesting,” Mr Portobello mused, stroking his chin while staring hard at Keith. He turned to Esmé. “And are you his delightful young assistant?”

“No, I am, Mr Portobello,” said Monty, a little annoyed.

“Wonderful!” replied the businessman, looking him up and down. “Nice swimming costume.”

Mr Portobello walked up to the ladder and leant heavily upon it with a shiny elbow. “I love a magic show,” he said. “I’ve seen all the greats – Mark Daniels, Terry Cooper, Ray Preston. Love ‘em all. And I can see you’re doing something really special here, in the great tradition of... um...”

“Houdini? Ali Bongo? Dante the Magician – Sim Sala Bim?” asked Potty.

“Bless you! Ha ha ha!” replied Mr Portobello, laughing loudly at his own joke. “Anyway, you’re doing a great job, kids. I know that this show is going to be incomprehensible!”

Esmé wondered if he had meant to say ‘incredible’. Looking around, everyone else was still smiling at Mr Portobello, each with a slightly glazed look in their eyes.

“And if the show is any good,” boomed the businessman, “I’m going to buy this theatre for lots of money, renovate it and turn it into a fantastic venue that the Queen and Pete Middleton can enjoy.”

“We’re so glad you’re behind the show,” said Twinkle, simpering slightly. Esmé could tell how desperate she was to sell the theatre.

“Oh, I am,” oozed Mr Portobello. “And now Keith has workshop space over at Crab Pie Island, where I live. He can see to your props there, when things are not exploding...”

“That was just a minor glitch, Mr Portobello,” Keith reassured him. “I was having problems with the pincer... it’s all sorted now.”

Esmé realised that must have been the first explosion they had heard this morning.

“Good, good,” said Mr Portobello. “And I simply insist you use the space there to construct your gadgets for Potty. It’s the least I can do. That way I can keep an eye... I mean, help you,” said Mr Portobello, correcting himself quickly.

But Esmé had heard the slip up, and didn’t like the sound of it. Why does Mr Portobello want to keep an eye on Keith? she wondered.

Potty, however, seemed completely oblivious to the comment. “What a wonderful setting it must be, Keith,” he said. “Your workshop must be an idyll in an otherwise crazy world. To turn your dreams into reality... To create and create and create!”

“You’ll have to visit some day,” said Mr Portobello. “See my collection of luxury boats.”

“Yes, please,” said Monty, who had caught some of Potty’s enthusiasm.

“And of course,” added Mr Portobello, “you can see some of Keith’s incomprehensible creations.”

Just then a mobile phone rang.

“Ah, David,” shouted Mr Portobello into his device. “Yes. Yes, I’ve heard. Oh, straight away. Hm. All right, see you in a minute.” He put the phone back in his pocket and sighed.

“Right, I must be off,” he announced abruptly. “I have a meeting with my accountant. See you all soon.”

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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