

The Great Fox appeared on the screen wearing his trademark fox mask and standing in what looked like a library with rows and rows of books behind him. He spoke directly into the lens.

"If you're watching this, it means I've performed my last vanishing trick. I won't be reappearing. Don't be sad; don't mourn me. I've had an amazing life and been very fortunate to perform illusions all over the world. I leave behind me six series of *The Great Fox Presents* and two series of *Fox Night* — and let's not forget my *Fantastic Fox* show in Vegas that ran for six years. It's been a blast." He paused as if remembering some special moments. "Nothing lasts for ever. But let's get down to business. The big problem I have is that I've no one to inherit my legacy. I have no children, and most of my more distant family don't like me. And yet I have a lot of very valuable secrets. I want these to go to someone worthy. Hence *The Great Fox Hunt*."

"For the last five years, I've had teams of builders in my house following my designs. What I've constructed is a series of tests to find someone who deserves my legacy. Think of it as a giant treasure hunt! The most important rule of the hunt is this: no one over fourteen can take part. This is the age I was when I first got into magic. It's a very special age. I want the person who wins my treasures to still have the imagination to introduce my magic to a new generation. I want someone young enough to dream big and not be constrained by commercial concerns or limited by an adult perspective."

He hesitated, choosing his next words carefully. "Magic is about dreaming the impossible and making it possible. It's the innocent young mind in all of us that loves it. We want to be filled with wonder; we want to believe. I want the winners of this competition and the recipients of my legacy to dare to dream big. So, let *The Great Fox Hunt* begin. I wish everyone who takes part the very best."

The film ended and the screen faded to black.

Christina faced the audience. "We're very pleased at Channel Seven to have won the rights to make *The Great Fox Hunt* into a TV show. We hope that the winners will go on to become stars of the future. With all the Fox's tricks, they'll certainly have everything they need. The Great Fox listed his career highlights in that video, but maybe his best show will be the one he'll never get to see. And you could be the star!"

There was some more cheering from the first few rows. Flick rolled her eyes. Where had they found these people?

"Let's start the selection process. It's a very simple concept, but very hard to crack'. This will test you, so I hope you're all ready!" Christina flashed her blindingly white teeth like she'd once seen a photograph of someone smiling and now thought she'd have a go. 'But you'd better get used to being tested because this competition will only get harder.'

She paused again to laugh.

Just get on with it, Flick thought.

'You're about to see a magic trick. After you've watched it, we'll interview each of you and ask how you think it was done. From those who get it right, four of you will be chosen to enter the Fox's Den.'

This statement was not met by manic cheering, just a lot of muttering. Someone near by threw up his arms and shouted, 'What? No way! Too hard.'

Flick, on the other hand, didn't think it sounded very hard at all. Her dad was a highly skilled magician and he'd taught her all his secrets. He was a better performer than the *Great Fox* had ever been, and she was certain she could easily work out how any trick was done. Not that she cared about winning the stupid competition. She wasn't interested in the Fox's legacy. The *Great Fox* had destroyed her family, and a man who'd done such a thing didn't deserve a successor. She was going to search that house and find the Bell System, the trick her father had invented, something that was rightfully hers, something that the Fox had stolen from her family, denying her a legacy and taking away a piece of her father. She was going to get it back. Because the Bell System was her only hope of saving him.

The *Great Fox* and Flick's father had been rivals, performing similar magic acts on the same tour circuits. Years ago, her dad had had a big show on Blackpool Pier and the Fox had been performing in London. Channel Seven visited both shows but chose the Fox to front their new TV project. Her dad's contract at Blackpool expired at the end of the season and it was replaced by a punk magic act. The *Great Fox* went on to receive rave reviews for his TV show.

Flick knew her dad had been just as good a magician as the Great Fox, but the chief executive at Channel Seven had disagreed. Later she found out that the chief executive's sister had been dating the Fox at the time, which surely wasn't a coincidence. After that everyone wanted to book the Fox and her dad's career took a nosedive. As the years went by, her father struggled to find work, and recently it seemed as if no one had wanted to book him at all. Finally after one very poorly supported small-scale show three months ago, he had disappeared. He'd packed his bag and walked out of their lives.

The Great Fox had destroyed her family as surely as if he had pulled a trigger.

A couple of months before he walked out, her dad had told her he'd invented the Bell System. He was so excited to have created something that he believed was a game changer. He'd said it was his last chance. But he had no show, nowhere to perform his vision and no means of making it a reality. So he'd sent it to the Great Fox and begged for his help in promoting it. And it had to still be here, inside the Fox's house. It would end up being bundled up with all the other tricks and given to whoever won the competition. Flick had to stop that happening. She was determined to find the Bell system, for her father. If he knew she had it, he might come home.

Her mission wouldn't be easy. There weren't many female magicians, and there were even fewer female magicians. In order to win this she didn't just need to be better than her male, two-legged colleagues. She needed to be a hundred times better. But the Bell System was her chance to save her family and no one was going to stop her.

The lights in the tent dimmed and hundreds of intense faces became transfixed by the big screen.

Flick sat forward. She didn't want to miss a single detail of what was about to unfold.