

## The Great Fox Illusion extract - 18.9.24

"You're up there at the moment but whether you stay or not depends on the next few seconds." He fixed her with his lizard-green eyes, weighing her up, before he continued. "You see those two on the left, the fair-haired boy and girl?"

Flick studied their photos. Masses of curly almost-white hair and pale skin - the brother and sister who had been performing in the tent.

"They are both..." Drake trailed off as an engineer walked by. He waited until she was out of earshot before he continued in a quieter voice. "I have reason to believe they are working for Synergy. You've heard of them?" Flick nodded thoughtfully to show she was paying attention.

"What do you know about them?"

"Synergy? Well, they're a group of street magicians. They've had three series now on PDEN. They do some pretty cool stuff. Looks very improvised, although of course it isn't. They did that famous flying over the Houses of Parliament trick as a climax to their last series."

"Very good." Drake smiled at her. "Now, I have no doubt that Synergy would be very interested in getting their hands on the secrets hidden in the Fox's Den."

Flick could just make out the children's names in small text at the bottom of the screen - Harry and Ruby Townsend.

"The plan is clearly that these two will win the competition and hand over the Fox's secrets to Synergy."

"Isn't that against the rules?" Flick asked.

He laughed. "It is against the rules," he said, in a tone you would use for a small child. "But once someone has won, it's very hard legally to control what they do with their winnings. They will be able to do whatever they want with it. And my bet is they'll give it all to Synergy."

A couple of the camera crew had strayed a little too close, so Drake put his hand on Flick's shoulder and ushered her into a corner where no one would overhear them.

"Now," he whispered into her ear. "I would like you to do something similar for me. I'll let you be in this competition it, when you win it, you give me one of the secrets you find."

Flick opened her mouth to say something and then thought better of it.

"You need to remember that once you're in that house, everything you do will be filmed and recorded. So you can't talk to anyone about this. No one. If you do, there will be consequences."

"What if I say no?"

"Then you don't make it through and you go home today. Is that what you want?"

"And I give you all the tricks?"

"No. Listen to what I say. You can keep all of them apart from one. What you win will set you up as a magician for life. You'll have all his secrets, all his illusions, everything. Except the Great Fox's last trick: one suitcase-sized wooden box. The Bell System. You need to give that to me."

Flick felt like she'd been punched in the stomach.