

The Illusionist's Shadow – Nozomi, Year 7, NSW

In the saloon bar of The Magic Pudding Tavern, the Friday night drinkers were spellbound by the top-hatted man shining in the spotlight - an illusionist of considerable skill, with a familiar repertoire. Long lengths of ribbon came out of his mouth, an audience member was cut into pieces while trapped in a box, then reassembled, and a rabbit was pulled from a top hat. The audience watched with rapt attention as one magic trick after another unfolded. What the audience didn't know was that it was being robbed right under its nose.

Snaking through the audience of urban professionals drinking to forget another week of drudgery, was a young boy clothed in suspenders and a busker's hat. With all attention on the illusionist, he went unnoticed. Ever so surely, the boy would slip his gloved hand into a patron's pocket or handbag, ease the wallet or purse out, empty it of cash, slyly return it and then slither on to the next mark.

When the boy had finished his task, he slipped from the tavern.

"Ladies and Gentlemen, that's a wrap!" the illusionist declared. He disappeared in a cloud of smoke before the audience realised anything was amiss.

The illusionist's cane kept pace with his steps, its clicking and clacking like unintelligible morse code carrying through the empty streets of what was once London's docklands. Finally he stopped after entering a dingy, misty, narrow alleyway, his tall, malevolent shadow projected on the walls. A figure emerged from the mist. It was the pickpocket.

"Here ya go," the boy said as he handed over a grubby, bulging pouch.

The illusionist looked inside, nodding with pleasure. "Good work. Here's your share." he said with a satisfied smile. The illusionist briefly closed his steely blue eyes and reflected on how far the pickpocket had come. The boy followed him about, acted on instructions, yet was rarely noticed. The boy was, he decided, a mischievous shadow.

"Now to business," the illusionist said, turning the knob of a handle attached to a rusty metal door blending in with its meagre industrial environment.

The shadow followed the illusionist into an abandoned factory. With the flick of a switch, the factory floor was illuminated, revealing a blackboard on wheels, covered in paper.

"This," the illusionist gestured to the blackboard, "is the plan for the ultimate heist, robbing the Empire Bank!"

"WHAT?! The Empire Bank is the most prestigious bank in London. It's impossible to rob!" The shadow's incredulous eyes were saucers.

"Not with my glorious plan it isn't!" the illusionist smirked, taking the shadow through his plan.

Hours later the two shook hands before departing individually, so as not to draw unwanted attention. They need not have worried. Not many people are out and about at the witching hour.

The day of the heist arrived.

“Are you sure about this?” the shadow said from the passenger seat of the mail delivery truck.

“Trust me, it’ll be fine. This plan is...mostly full proof.” the illusionist said as he adjusted his top hat. The shadow gulped.

The two of them exited the truck, taking a cart from the back. The cart had two shelves, the space from the bottom shelf to the top shelf was cloaked by an emerald green, velvet curtain and was big enough for a person to squeeze into uncomfortably. Checking that no one was looking, the illusionist folded himself into the space, groaning as he did so. The shadow adjusted the curtain and then placed stacks of envelopes onto the cart’s top shelf. Pulling his cap, emblazoned with the words “Mail Delivery Service”, lower on his head, he carefully wheeled the cart into the foyer of the Empire Bank.

The bank was milling with people, but for the shadow, time had stopped. Customers ruffling through their purses and pockets and employees, with smiles never reaching their eyes, seemed motionless. Sweat trickled down the shadow’s neck as he wheeled the cart. He willed himself to be calm and brave.

The shadow nodded to a security guard as he said, “I’m just delivering some mail to Mr Leary.” The security guard nodded in response.

Upon reaching Mr Leary’s office, the shadow knocked.

“Come in,” a gruff voice said.

The shadow found Mr Leary, a middle aged, balding man with a luxurious beard and wide framed glasses, stirring tea in an intricate china cup. As the illusionist had said, the master key for the security boxes was attached to a key ring hanging from Leary’s trousers. Nonchalantly, he wheeled the cart as close as he could to Mr Leary.

“I have a letter for you!” the shadow said, forcing himself to smile.

“Well give it here,” Mr Leary drawled.

While Mr Leary was preoccupied with opening the letter with an ivory handled letter opener, a pair of nimble hands shot out from behind the cart’s curtain and stealthily removed the master key from his trousers.

“I will leave you to your work Mr Leary. Have a marvellous day!”

The shadow wheeled the cart out of the office, closing the door behind him. When he was out of the office, he finally let out a deep sigh of relief.

“Good job partner,” the illusionist said, extricating himself from the cart.

They walked to the bank's security boxes, unnoticed. The first box they opened overflowed with gold, shimmering with the power of a thousand stars. Their jaws dropped to the ground. They were going to be stupendously rich.

The illusionist gleefully scooped the gold from the box, handing it to the shadow, who stashed it in the curtain covered compartment. Walking towards a large security box, the illusionist heard a latch click. Spinning around, he found an iron barred gate trapping him with the security boxes.

The illusionist smiled calmly. The foolish shadow had forgotten that the master key would open any lock in the bank. He reached into his trouser pocket, but found nothing but lint.

The shadow was no fool at all. He was a cunning, villainous pickpocket!