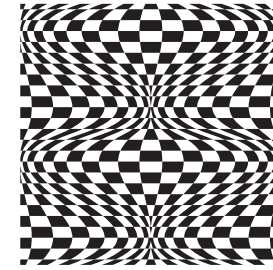


CHAPTER 1

A MAGICAL AWAKENING



‘Come on Steven, get in the bin,’ the boy cackled as his brother lumbered towards me. For a second, I almost gave in. I’d been in that dustbin so many times it was almost my home away from home. The younger brother, let’s call him ‘Paul’, and his older sibling, ‘Ben’, would pick me up, and as I struggled against their grip, they would force me inside. Thanks to my small frame, I was no match for the two of them. Then, once I was cowering inside the stinking plastic, they’d kick the bin and off I’d go, tumbling down what we called The Tits. They were two hills next to each other in the school grounds that were shaped like... well, you can probably guess. Inside, I’d feel every bump and pothole as I rattled around inside that bin, my pointy elbows banging into the sides, my ankles and knees twisting and turning. But the worst pain was the fear I felt deep inside me. My chest would constrict so tightly, I could barely breathe, but that feeling was something I slowly became used to. I was rolled down those hills so often I could have mapped out every rock and stone.

Being thrown down a hill in a rubbish bin wasn’t a particularly pleasant experience. The bins always stank of old nappies and mouldy sandwiches and I would hear Paul and Ben’s jeers as they ran behind it. Careering down the hill towards school,

54 which people would collect and cover themselves in from head to toe. We killed it.

We'd make a lot of money playing in Leeds, Bradford, Sheffield or Manchester and then drive home.

We'd get back to Nan's, where I was living at the time, at three in the morning, or whenever the club shut. 'Shush, Marcus, you'll wake me Nan up,' I'd whisper as we sat around Nan's dinner table and shared all the tips. 'One pound for Alex, one pound for Johnny, one pound for Marcus and two pound for me.' Everyone agreed that was a fair way to divvy up the cash.



Nothing is impossible
Whatever time we got home Nan would appear. 'Oh, you're back, boys. Who wants some bacon sandwiches?' she'd ask. I think she worried about me and couldn't sleep until I was home and safe. Nan did everything for me and tried to keep my feet on the

ground. If I said I wanted to be a magician she'd say, 'Yeah and I've heard ducks farting in deep water before.'

Nan fed me, she did my washing, and she paid the rent. I can't even tell you what I spent all that money on. Stupid stuff that I couldn't afford growing up: adidas trainers, Eckō hoodies and New Era caps, rather than the non-branded cheap clothes from Woolies or hand-me-downs that I'd had as a child. 'I'm gonna buy us all an Xbox each, then we can all play at the same time,' I told the boys. We couldn't have all just played on one together, of course. Stupid.

These were the days, though, before I had any formal business plan. In my mind, I loved magic and performing, and it happened to be a great way of making money to buy nice trainers, but I didn't even consider I could make a career out of it. We were just living day-to-day on whatever money we had. It was just pocket money really but it was nice to feel like I was making my own way in the world.

With every booking I did, I quoted a low fee, so I was pretty much guaranteed to get three bookings off the back of it. I'd always set myself up for the next week on the night of the first gig. I wouldn't charge people the earth so they'd book me, but then they'd tip me on top, and their friends would tip me, and before you know it you've covered your costs with a little extra. Occasionally, you would see the high rollers who want to show off to their friends. 'Here you are mate, here's fifty quid, good on ya,' they'd say. But that rarely happened.

It's funny but it felt like I had a lot more spending money, doing things the way I was back then, than I do now. I'm very comfortable financially now, of course, but because I had no outgoings the little bit of money I had went a long way.