

You loved your last book...but what  
are you going to read next?

Using our unique guidance tools, Lov**ereading** will help you find new  
books to keep you inspired and entertained.

---

**Opening Extract from...**

# **Revenge of the Red Square**

Written by  
Mark Penny and Jonathan Penny

Published by Matador

All text is copyright © of the author

This Opening Extract is exclusive to Lov**ereading**.  
Please print off and read at your leisure.

---

Copyright © 2012 Mark and Jonathan Penny

The moral rights of the authors have been asserted.

Apart from any fair dealing for the purposes of research or private study, or criticism or review, as permitted under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988, this publication may only be reproduced, stored or transmitted, in any form or by any means, with the prior permission in writing of the publishers, or in the case of reprographic reproduction in accordance with the terms of licences issued by the Copyright Licensing Agency. Enquiries concerning reproduction outside those terms should be sent to the publishers.

All characters appearing in this work are fictitious.  
Any resemblance to real persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental.

**Matador**

9 Priory Business Park  
Kibworth Beauchamp  
Leicestershire LE8 0RX, UK  
Tel: (+44) 116 279 2299  
Fax: (+44) 116 279 2277  
Email: [books@troubador.co.uk](mailto:books@troubador.co.uk)  
Web: [www.troubador.co.uk/matador](http://www.troubador.co.uk/matador)

ISBN 9781780880686

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data.

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Typeset in 11pt Bembo by Troubador Publishing Ltd, Leicester, UK  
Printed and bound in the UK by TJ International, Padstow, Cornwall



**Matador** is an imprint of Troubador Publishing Ltd



## *Part One*

### *A strange way to make a living*

---

In the leafy garden of a 1950's semi in Cricklewood, *The Amazing Harvey*, as he was professionally known, prepared to entertain an attentive and appreciative party of wide-eyed children. That, at least, was the theory. He stood at the far end of the immaculate lawn, past the potting shed by the strawberry beds, footling around with his props in the fruitless hope that his assistant, Boltini, would arrive in time to draw fire from the kids from hell. If the guy was half cut again, he'd have his guts for garters.

He'd never had much luck with assistants; the Lovely Leanne had run off with the man with the squint from the Job Centre while they were resting between bookings; the Daring Denise had broken her leg on the ski-slopes of Val Doonican or some such far flung resort, and Sharon had jacked it all in for the mystic allure of stacking supermarket shelves in West Croydon. Finally, he'd decided to get a male assistant, and *this* was the result; standing around in a field in Cricklewood waiting for pisshead to arrive. His real name was James Bolton - hence Boltini - and he'd seemed so promising at the start, when he ran into him behind the bar at *The Dog and Duck*, doing occasional card tricks for the punters. No wonder the guy had agreed to work for peanuts, when he wasn't monkeying around he was practically useless.

The lady of the house, Mrs Olga Flanagan, heiress to a Russian-Irish shipping tycoon, sailed down the path with an imperious air like

a pocket battleship on manoeuvres. She had no time for children's entertainers, having always found something deeply suspect about men in their mid-forties who made a living from wearing fancy dress and deceiving minors.

"Well, Mr Harvey?"

"Just call me *Amazing*."

She arched an eyebrow in disbelief. "Have it your own way, but the children are getting restless," she said. "I think you should begin."

Harvey cast a last forlorn glance down the garden for Boltini, then resigned himself to his fate. He wouldn't have minded so much but he needed an assistant to divert the audience's attention away from his woeful performance.

"Can I have the money *now*?" he asked sheepishly.

"Surely it's customary to pay *after* the performance," she said.

"Not for me. The number of times I've worked for nothing..." Mrs Flanagan looked concerned. "...is few and far between," he added hastily, "but I do like to be sure of getting paid. I'd hate to have to drop by one night and turn your car into a heap of manure."

Two pencilled eyebrows were raised in mounting concern.

"Look, your money's safe in this envelope," said Mrs Flanagan, retrieving exhibit A from her cardigan sleeve, like a white rabbit from a hat. "There's nothing to worry about. You do the show, you get paid and you leave. Simple."

"Great," he said, without conviction. He walked back up the lawn to his makeshift stage, where a group of hyperactive eight-year-olds were beginning to disassemble some of his props with vandal-like glee.

Harvey tugged at the cuffs of his jacket and cleared his throat.

"Ladies, gentlemen, children... well, children, anyway. Prepare to be astonished, prepare to be astounded, prepare to have your faculties disconfabulated, discombobulated and disconfuscated as I mesmerise you with the magical, mystical enchantments of a thousand ages of wizardry. Way back in the mists of time... I tell a lie, it was last Tuesday."

He paused for the laughter that never came. Someone at the back of the audience blew a raspberry.

Harvey looked up with ill-concealed irritation. An anaemic youth with wire-framed glasses, an electric yellow tee shirt bearing the letter 'B' in fluorescent red and a purple cape appeared at his shoulder.

"Boltini, where the h...eck have you been?"

The assistant took an early bow, tripped over his untied shoelaces and fell headlong into the props so meticulously arranged on the magician's stage table. Rising unsteadily to his feet, Boltini made his way shakily past the potting shed and was violently ill in the strawberry beds.

Fourteen eight-year-olds laughed like drains, poked each other in the ribs and pointed at the less than magical figure of Boltini as he returned to join his mentor. Mrs Flanagan, meanwhile, bore a striking resemblance to a battleship which had come under fire in the midships and knew exactly what to do about it.

Harvey blundered on.

"Thank you most kindly. I appear before you today fresh from a thrilling expedition to the mythical isle of Maroonga, a voyage blessed with the discovery of a positive plethora of new and astounding tricks. As I'm sure you will know, on the isle of Maroonga, *everyone* is a magician and they have normal people like yourselves to entertain them. Why? I hear you ask. Well, it's a strange and mystical place. They all sit around in deckchairs wearing big hats and playing the bongos while watching people making tea and crumpets."

"Get on with it, mister. Do a trick or summat," chivvied an exasperated eight-year-old in the front row, whose patience had been sorely tested.

There's always one, isn't there, thought Harvey.

"Why are we waiting? Why are we waiting?" sang a boy with goofy teeth, in a tuneless wail.

Or two...

"Come on granddad, are you a magician or wot?" cried the teenager from next door, who had been standing on an old tea chest

to see over the hedge. "This show's not even worth gate-crashing!"

But when it gets to three, thought Harvey, then it's definitely time to...

"Go!" shouted Mrs Flanagan. "And never darken my yew again."

Harvey had been about to pack up his remaining props and beat a hasty retreat, when he suddenly realised that she was talking to the interloper from next door. At least that was the only inference he *could* draw from the sight of the stately Mrs Flanagan flinging a moth-eaten old tennis ball at the hedge.

"Thank you, thank you," he resumed. "Now without further ado, let me show you a miraculous card trick I learned from Houdini." Harvey reached into his trouser pocket and pulled out a deck of Bicycle playing cards. As he did so the packet opened, spilling half of them onto the floor.

"Surely he was an escapologist?" queried Mrs Flanagan, as the children began to laugh like a pack of hyenas at the collapse of the trick.

"Ah, no, I meant Sid Houdini, Harry's brother's grandson," said Harvey vaguely, as he tried to pick up as many cards as he could. "Now then, which of these delightful children is the birthday boy or girl?"

"Go on, Sophie, stand up," said the boy with the buck teeth.

A sweet little girl with her hair in bunches stood up.

"Happy Birthday, Sophie," said Harvey. "How old are you?"

"Eight."

"You know, I was *ate* once... by a lion at the circus, but the ringmaster cracked his whip and it spat me out in the nick of time," said Harvey.

Sophie smiled, in a vain attempt to humour the funny man, who was obviously nuts.

"Pick a card, any card," continued Harvey, offering a woefully small selection of playing cards to the little girl. Shyly, she took one and held it to her chest.

Harvey closed his eyes and walked clockwise in a circle three

times. He put his hand to his forehead, feeling giddy. He'd forgotten to say the magic words! They could kick you out of the Magic Triangle for a lesser offence, if you were in it to begin with. Perhaps they wouldn't notice. He closed his eyes and put his finger tips to his temples. He was getting a migraine.

"It can only be the...eight of clubs. Am I right?"

Sophie looked at her card in confusion.

"I don't know, mister, I don't play cards, but it's got a funny man on with a curly hat."

"It's the joker, how apt," said Mrs Flanagan.

"That would have been my second choice," he said, hurriedly taking the card back from the little girl and placing it in his pocket. He lifted his collapsible hat from the props table, tapped it twice with his wand and the hat opened out with a pop. He just needed a distraction other than the sight of Boltini vomiting in different parts of the garden. He placed the hat on his head and smiled what he hoped was a winning smile.

"Now, who can tell me what a magician keeps in his hat? Can anyone? Mrs Flanagan?"

"In your case I'd hesitate to guess," she replied, frostily.

"Sandwiches?" wondered a boy in the second row.

"Chocolate biscuits?" asked Sophie.

"Cake!" cried another, as the food motif took hold.

The children had begun to lose interest and started picking their noses or dead-heading Mrs Flanagan's prize petunias. The boy with the goofy teeth was clearly in need of the toilet.

"Good ideas but not the right answer I'm afraid. Shall we see?" added the magician. He lifted his hat to reveal a small and terrified white mouse. A couple of the girls screamed and the mouse took off like a rocket down the garden.

"This," said Harvey, gesticulating at the recently vacated space, "is Rover." He looked inside his hat in the vague hope of locating the rodent, but further probing of the top of his head revealed only a small pile of moist mouse droppings. At least he finally had their attention.

“Where’s he gone, mister?” asked Sophie.

“Don’t worry, kids, I expect he felt like a bit of exercise. It’s quite cramped in my hat so he probably came over a bit faint. He suffers from claustrophobia you know.” He was babbling; he often did when there was nothing useful left to say. It was better than admitting that his act was a shambolic farce and that he should have stuck to teaching.

“Boltini! We have a mouse missing! There...over by the shed, quickly, get him, now!”

Boltini stared at him, green to the gills, with a look of sullen defiance on his pale yet uninterested face.

“The name’s James, mate, and sod this for a game of soldiers!” he said, walking off towards the house and his transport out of there.

“You’ll never work in show business again!” called Harvey, after him.

Another raspberry wafted on the breeze, this time from Boltini. “I should have listened to them all,” said the disgruntled assistant aloud as he slouched off. “Never work with children or animals. Only there’s a third category to watch out for...pillocks called *The Amazing Harvey!*”

Sweat broke out along Harvey’s hairline. Disaster loomed. He was reminded of his first professional engagement – ‘The Mendelssohn Job’ – when everything that *could* go wrong *had* gone wrong, resulting in the end of his career as far as Hendon, Golders Green and Finchley were concerned. In retrospect, it had been a walk in the park compared with *this*.

“Ladies, gentlemen, children... the kid with the goofy teeth, I’d like to say what a fantastic audience you’ve been...I, I ...” he looked around him for inspiration, but none was forthcoming. He felt like he was stranded in a wilderness of despair and all hope was lost.

“You’re rubbish at magic, mister,” said a girl with ginger hair and freckles. “Your assistant threw up, your mouse ran off and you don’t even know any card tricks. I’d give up if I were you.”

Mrs Flanagan looked at him with a combination of disappointment, annoyance and pity and returned the envelope she



had been holding for safe keeping to her handbag.

“Out of the mouths of babes,” she said.

Harvey opened his jacket to see if he still had anything left up his sleeve and was met by the flutter of wings and a face full of flying feathers as Maurice, his white dove, made a bid for freedom. Flying off into the wide blue yonder, Maurice dropped a message from on high, all down Harvey’s shirt front. It seemed profoundly symbolic.

The children hooted with laughter. This guy may be a rotten magician but he was a master of chaos and failure.

“Can you do balloon animals?” asked the kid with the buck teeth, on the basis that if they tried long enough they might be able to find *something* Harvey could do.

For the first time, *The Amazing Harvey* seemed to get really pissed off.

“Do balloon animals?! What do you take me for? I’m an artiste, not some drongo who ties *balloons* into funny shapes! I don’t have a big red nose and long flapping boots, do I? No, I ruddy don’t. Look, has anybody got any pets?” he asked.

“I’ve got a gerbil at home,” said the girl with the ginger hair. “Timmy, his name is.”

“What bloody good is *that!*” snapped Harvey. “I’m looking for an animal I can use in my act; a cat from Cricklewood, not a terrapin from Timbuktu!”

The girl started sobbing uncontrollably and Mrs Flanagan fixed him with an icy stare until he was forced to apologise.

“Sorry, young lady. I do apologise, it’s just that as you may have noticed, one or two things have gone a little wrong with the act today so I was hoping to show you some *real* magic to make up for it.” He smiled to hide the pain.

“I’ve got a goldfish called Sammy,” said Sophie, quietly. “Would he be any good?”

“Yes! Brilliant! Thank you, Sophie,” said the magician. “Would you go and fetch him for me, please.”

As she walked off up to the house, the long lank figure of Boltini shuffled back towards the party.

“I knew you wouldn’t desert the act, Boltini,” said Harvey. “One day all of this will be yours,” he said, gesturing grandiosely at the tatty collection of broken props. “All you need to do is fetch Maurice down off the neighbour’s roof and track down Rover, and we’re back in business.”

Boltini looked at Harvey with a pained expression. “Has anyone seen the keys to my van?” he asked aloud, to no one in particular.

“Now, kids, while Sophie goes off to get the goldfish let me entertain you with some juggling. I used to do this in the circus you know,” said Harvey.

“What happened?” asked Mrs Flanagan, out of morbid curiosity. “Are they still in business?”

Harvey picked up three patchwork juggling balls and threw them into the air, one after the other until they formed a flying circle. Boltini wandered back over to the strawberry beds to see if he could locate his keys among the vomit spattered plants.

“Oh, yes. Uncle Henry’s Flying Circus, it was called. We toured Army bases mainly.”

“Poor devils,” added Olga Flanagan, “dodging bullets all day and being forced to watch your act when they got back.”

“This is rotten,” said the kid with the buck teeth. “All you’ve done is lose things and a juggling trick my dad could do.”

Harvey’s self-confidence finally seemed to desert him. He was on the verge of throwing in the towel when Sophie returned with a goldfish in a bowl.

“Ah, yes, but can your father do *this*?” said Harvey, taking the bowl. His juggling balls hit the ground unheeded.

He took a large red handkerchief from an inside jacket pocket and draped it over the goldfish bowl. The audience fell silent. Even Boltini, who had been moping around looking for his keys, paused momentarily to watch and marvel. He hadn’t seen this trick before.

“The illusion I am about to perform is technically impossible,” said Harvey.

He lifted the hankie and removed the fish from the bowl with his

hand. He placed it into a large brown paper bag and blew into the bag until it was fully inflated. Holding it out in front of him, Harvey passed his left hand over the top of the bag and recited the familiar incantation, "Hocus Pocus, fish-bones choke us." Then he placed the bag on the table in front of him and hit it three times with a wooden mallet. The silence deepened into a deathly hush. You could have heard a gnat fart.

Harvey picked up the paper bag and peered anxiously inside.

"And that, as they say, is magic!" he cried. "You've been a wonderful audience, thank you and goodbye!"

He fixed Boltini with a knowing look. "Here are your keys," he said, "get the stuff and meet me at the van in five," he added, legging it for the garden gate.

"Oi, mister, where's the fish?" asked the kid with the buck teeth.

"I'm sorry, I'm a magician, not a pet shop owner," said Harvey over his shoulder as he vanished.

## *Part Two*

### *Meanwhile somewhere in North London*

---

In the ill-kempt offices of *JP Confidential, Private Investigators to the Stars*, Hymie Goldman and Mike Murphy sat amid the clutter with sour expressions, drinking a murky brown liquid. It was a substance whose composition had long since baffled the finest forensic scientists of NW3 and was known to habitués of the Black Kat café as ‘coffee’. Certainly a medium sized dose precluded sleep for several days and had been known to stun an adult male gorilla but when you’d said that, you’d said everything.

“How’s the case going, Goldman?” asked Mike; the primate in question.

“I presume you’re referring to the *new* case, Mike?”

“Well, I wasn’t asking after your luggage, mate.”

“The only baggage I have to lug around is you, Murphy. As for the case, it’s too early to tell.”

“Is there any money in it?”

“Mike, if there wasn’t, I wouldn’t be wasting my time, would I?”

“I hope not, Goldman, but you’re not even the best businessman at this end of the Finchley Road. I wouldn’t trust your business nous as far as I could throw it. What’s the client called anyway? You’re being very secretive about the whole case.”

“Secretive? Pah! It’s just that I have to respect client confidentiality.”

“I’m not buying it, mate. Who’s your client?”

“Mr Redrum,” said Hymie, quietly.

“Mr who?”

“Redrum,” repeated Hymie.

“That’s the name of a horse, you wally. You haven’t gone and got mixed up with the county set again, have you? After all the trouble we had last time. Are you mad?”

“Look, Mike, this is why I didn’t tell you about the case, because I knew you’d jump to conclusions, wrong conclusions. It’s about the only exercise your feeble mind gets these days. Okay, so it sounds dodgy. No one’s called Mr Redrum. That’s why I’m trying to find out how much baloney this guy’s feeding me before I get in too deep. So how are tricks with you, my massive chum? Heard from the bird in Blackpool?”

Mike fell silent and took another sip of coffee. He winced.

“No, and I don’t want to talk about it.”

“I’ve always said women are a curse,” said Hymie, insensitively. “They bat their eyelashes at you, you fall like a ton of bricks and then they hang you out to dry. It’s only a question of time. Been there, done that, got the tee shirt,” he concluded.

“I never met your wife, did I, Goldman. Were you in love?”

“It was a long time ago,” said Hymie. “Some things are best left in the past.”

“Was she a looker?”

“As I said, it’s best left in the past,” repeated Hymie.

“I’ll take that as a ‘no’ then. Did it hurt when she left you?” continued Mike.

“Blunt as a badger’s bum, aren’t you, Murphy. I don’t need a bloody psychiatrist or a shoulder to cry on. I get along fine without all that hearts and flowers crap, so just leave it out. And if this is another diversion to stop me asking about *your* caseload, think again, mate. Come on, how many new clients have you got?”

“Plenty, mate, plenty. I’m a client magnet. Ask Janie. Come to think of it, where is Janie?”

“Family funeral, I thought,” said Hymie. “Her Uncle Len died.”

“No, can’t be,” said Mike. “She hasn’t got an Uncle Len. Besides, she hasn’t been in for weeks, just look at the dust on those files.”

“I wondered why everything was in such a mess,” continued Hymie, “but without Janie to point it out to me, it didn’t really register.”

“Maybe she had a better offer?” said Mike. “She is the best personal assistant we’ve ever had.”

“What? A better offer than JP Confidential? No, she’ll have been kidnapped or won the National Lottery or something. We should call the police,” said Hymie, impulsively. “No, on second thoughts...” he added hastily.

“Have you heard anything of Inspector Decca lately?” asked Mike. “He was your best buddy in Blackpool. It’s funny how he’s disappeared since we got back.”

“It’s like you said, Mike; what happened in Blackpool stays in Blackpool. Now, you call the agency about a new receptionist cum bottle-washer, while I go and earn the dosh to keep us afloat.”

“That’ll be the day, Goldman,” said Mike, heading for the peace and quiet of his own office to make some calls.