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Teddles and the Magic Cubes

Cindy was making the most of this final hour with her Uncle Martin because today was the day she and her Mum and Dad were flying to America. She'd been told it was to do with her father's job; although she was too young to understand why sometimes annoying things like that had to be. Making matters worse, her favourite Uncle wasn't coming with them – he was to stay and look after the house. "It's only for a year, sweetheart," Martin had said, "Then you'll be back again. You'll see – the time will fly by."

Cindy doubted it very much; but she didn't want to ruin these last precious moments, so she pushed the thoughts to the back of her mind and returned her focus to the task in hand; a very important one. "In mystic cubes from red to green, by magic fly and not be seen," she chanted. As Cindy performed the magic, she waved her hands over the red box then made a sweeping motion towards the green box on the far side of the magician's cave. Actually, it wasn't a cave at all. It was really just a shed in the back garden; but it was where her Uncle Martin's magic stuff was kept and the two of them had dressed it up to look like a theatre stage. Although Martin was retired he still liked to practice some of the magic tricks he used to perform at shows in front of big audiences. Now, aside from the odd family gatherings, the only one who got to see them was his niece Cindy; and, he supposed Teddles, Cindy's teddy bear.

The red and green cube trick had always been a favourite of his, and in the past Martin, or Marvo the Magnificent as he called himself back then, would amaze audiences with what truly did seem like magic. This time, however, he had agreed to let Cindy to perform it all on her own. She had already spoken the words to summon the magic; yet, to an outsider nothing appeared to have happened. The two cubes just sat metres apart as they had before. After a few moments, Cindy let out the breath she had been holding to ask: "Is it alright to carry on, Uncle?" Martin smiled and nodded. It was time to see if the trick had worked.

The little girl went to the red cube and lifted up the lid to peer inside. She beamed widely and turned to face the very small audience of her Uncle and Teddles sitting side by side on chairs. "How strange," she said. "You saw me put Norman the white rabbit into the red cube, but look..." and she tilted the box so that it could be seen to be empty. "He has disappeared. Where, I wonder, might he have gone?" Placing fingers on her cheek, she tilted her head slightly, acting as if she was thinking and mused: "I do recall, though, that I just sent Norman somewhere else by magic." Following a theatrical pause, she continued: "Of course, now I remember – he should have flown to the green cube. But is that possible? We would have seen, surely? Perhaps I should check." Across the floor she went in a way that made her purple cloak waft and billow like a stage magician's. Once at the green cube, she raised the lid and declared as if in surprise: "Well, *there* you are Norman!" Reaching in, she pulled a white soft toy rabbit out by the ears. "And none the worse I see. Did you enjoy your magical journey, Norman?" Turning to face her audience she asked: "Did you, gentleman and teddy bear, enjoy Norman's mysterious flight to the green cube?"

The only applause was Martin clapping extra loud for himself and Teddles. "Bravo," he called out, "And very well done, Cindy. I think you'll make a fine magician one day."

"When you've taught me all of your tricks, Uncle Martin," she said. "Of course, I will need to know how they work before I can do them properly; and you've told me about most of the others; but not the secret of the cube trick. Why is that?"

"Because I don't know the secret myself, Cindy," Martin had to admit. He noticed a puzzled frown cross his niece's face and tried to explain: "The cubes were given to me by a very old magician, and from what he said they had been passed down from generation to generation, unlike the secret of how they work which somehow got lost over the years. As the old magician told me, all we can do is trust that they do work without asking why. Now, if you put Norman back in the red cube, you can perform the trick again to make sure you've got it right." He was watching Cindy place the white toy rabbit into the red box when the sound of a voice came from the garden – it was Cindy's Mum: "Telephone for you, Martin – it's the bank."

Martin sighed and called out: "Okay, just coming." Then he turned to his niece. "Sorry sweetheart. I'll be as quick as I can." And with that, he hurried away.

After a few minutes had passed it seemed the phone call was taking longer than expected and Cindy was becoming impatient. She also had a thought and spoke it aloud: "Norman is probably getting lonely on his own in the box, Teddles. How would you like to keep him company?" Holding the teddy bear's mouth against her ear, she made out that he had actually spoken to her: "You would? Okay, you can sit in the box with Norman until Uncle Martin comes back." Opening the lid, Cindy placed Teddles in the red cube alongside Norman. "I have to close the lid because that's the way it's done, but I'll be right here beside the box."

Even with the lid closed Cindy knew the two toys were in the box because she had put them in there herself. So, Teddles and Norman waited in the dark, while the little girl paced around the magic cave for a bit, every so often going to look out of the door across the garden. A few more minutes passed, then her mother was calling to her: "Come along Cindy. It's almost time to go."

Cindy frowned. "Oh, fiddlesticks. Now I'll miss doing the trick one last time." Walking over to the box, she was saying: "We have to go, Teddles. Say goodbye to Norman and ask him to..." She had opened the lid and was reaching in to pick up her teddy bear, but there was no sign of him. Norman was sitting in the box all on his own. "Where did Teddles go?" she asked the white rabbit; but naturally, Norman just being a soft toy, he didn't reply. Cindy called out across the magic cave: "Teddles where are you?"

Then her mother was at the shed door. "We have to go, Cindy," she said. "The taxi's here."

"But I've lost Teddles, and I can't go without him," the little girl protested. "I have to find him."

"I'm sorry, darling," said her mother. "There isn't time. We'll ask Uncle Martin to look for him; and when he finds Teddles, he can send him on to us."

Cindy's eyes grew wide. "What, like send him by magic?"

"No, silly," replied her Mum with a smile. "By post."

Everything was done in a rush. Suitcases were loaded into the taxi and the family climbed in. Martin was there to see them off and Cindy leaned out of the window. "You won't forget to look for Teddles and send him to me, will you Uncle Martin?"

"I promise," replied Martin. "Dad wrote the address down for me. Just phone when you've arrived at the new house." Following a wave as the taxi drove off, Martin returned to the shed. He looked around for a bit, but the teddy bear was nowhere to be seen. Although it was unlikely Teddles was in there, he checked the red cube. There was Norman sitting on his own as expected because Cindy hadn't even started the magic trick. Or had she? He went to look in the green cube and, lo and behold, there was the teddy bear. "I wonder how that happened?" he asked himself. "Maybe Cindy put him in the green cube to wait for Norman; but if she had,

she would have known were to find her teddy. Maybe there's more to the magic cubes than I realised." It truly was a mystery; but he had found Teddles and that really was all that mattered.

True to his word, Martin carefully packed Teddles in a cardboard box which he covered in brown paper. As an extra precaution he also tied it with string, then set about writing the American address he had been given. Next came his own address. This was in case the parcel couldn't be delivered for some reason and had to be returned to sender. To make sure, he wrote his address on two other sides as well. That same evening he got the telephone call: "Hello, Uncle Martin," said Cindy excitedly. "It's me calling from America. Did you find Teddles?"

"I most certainly did," Martin told her; and he was going to ask whether she had put Teddles in the green box but decided against it. "He's all wrapped up in a parcel ready to send. I'll do that first thing tomorrow."

"Promise?" asked the little girl.

"Promise faithfully," Martin assured his niece. "Now, could I have a word with Dad, please?"

Next day he took the parcel to the post office and, having put the stamps on he handed it back over the counter to the sales assistant. That was quite normal; what wasn't, however, was a tiny, muffled voice that said: "Goodbye, Marvo. See you in a year."

The sales assistant frowned. "Pardon?"

Martin also frowned. "I didn't say anything," he replied.

"Well, someone did," said the lady; then she shrugged and dismissed the peculiarity. "Whatever. I'll make sure this goes with the next post."

Seeing that the parcel was being sent to another country it wasn't likely to arrive for at least a week. It did, in fact, take much longer. This was due to an unfortunate accident which ripped off most of the brown paper. Martin's return addresses had gone, all three of them. Some of Cindy's new address remained, though, still trapped under the string. Missing was the country, State and the zip code; but the rest of the address was still okay, including the town. So, not knowing it was supposed to go to America, the postal people just sent it to a town of that name in Martin's own country. That was how it started. Then, when it couldn't be delivered there it was sent to another town in a different country; and so it went on for ages.

In the meantime, Cindy was becoming very upset. "There must be some way to find Teddles," she said tearfully over the phone.

"I reported the missing parcel to the post office," her Uncle explained, "But they can't find it. What I don't understand is why it was never returned to me. I did put my sender's address on it, three times actually. I don't know what more I can do."

The phone line went quiet for a few moments, then Cindy asked: "Where did you find Teddles, Uncle?"

"He was in the green cube, sweetheart," replied Martin.

"Well, I didn't put him in there," said the little girl. "I put him in the red box with Norman; and I didn't have time to perform the trick, so the magic cubes must have done it on their own."

"Oh, I don't think that's very likely," Martin began to say; then he had a thought which sent a strange tingle up his spine. "On the other hand, you could be right, Cindy. Leave it with me and I'll see if I can come up with a solution."

Once the phone call was over, Martin went to the shed. There he sat on a chair and stared at the cubes. Was it possible that they could have sent the teddy bear from the red cube to the green one without the magic words being said? Even if it were true, how could that help to find the lost parcel when it was in some unknown place far away? Could the magic of the cubes work over a longer distance than a few metres? There was one way he could put it to the test. Picking up the green cube, he took it out of the shed, into the house and set it down in the family room. Next, he returned to the shed. Norman was now back in the top hat which was another trick Marvo the Magnificent used to perform with the white rabbit. Martin took Norman from the hat to place him in the red cube. Just before closing the lid he said: "I know I'm probably stupid

talking to a stuffed toy, but maybe the magic of the cubes can make you understand. So, we have to find Teddles somehow and I'm hoping you can help." Closing the lid of the red cube, he added: "I'm not going to say the magic words. You have to think yourself to the green cube. Just trust in the magic, Norman."

Martin's heart missed a beat when he heard a tiny voice say: "Okay, Marvo." He stared long and hard at the red cube for a few moments, then shook his head and muttered: "I must have imagined it – Norman can't speak. He never has in the past..." Then he remembered that Teddles hadn't been able to speak until he was in the parcel in the post office; which was after he had been in the cubes. Anyway, none of this mattered if this test failed to work. He was sorely tempted to look in the red cube to see if Norman was still in there; but the old magician's words came back to him and he knew he just had to trust the magic of the cubes.

Spinning on his heel, he rushed out of the shed and back to the house. His hand on the lid of the green cube, he took a deep breath and held it; then he raised the lid. Air escaped from his mouth in a relieved sigh on seeing Norman sitting in the bottom of the box. Martin was glad the toy rabbit didn't speak again – it was more than enough to know that the magic had worked. He didn't need Norman chattering away while he thought out the next part of his plan. Leaving Norman in the green cube, he took it back to the shed and set it down on the floor where it would usually be. Lifting Norman out, he took him to a table and popped him into a waiting cardboard box. This was made up into a parcel the same as the one Teddles had been in: covered with brown paper, tied with string and addressed in exactly the same way. Now it was simply a matter of conjuring some magic before he took it to the post office.

This, he was hoping, would be created by the cubes as the parcel with Norman inside was flown by magic from red to green. Deciding not to say the magic words, he waiting a short time before going to the green cube to get the parcel which, during its flight from one cube to the other, should have taken on the magic that would guide it to wherever Teddles was. Only, something had gone wrong – the parcel wasn't in the green cube! Hurrying back to the red cube, Martin raised the lid and gasped – it wasn't in there either!

Meanwhile, poor Teddles sat in his parcel which had been sent from town to town and country to country. Finally it all stopped and it seemed he was going nowhere. "Where am I now?" he said in his tiny teddy voice, and was really only talking to himself.

But it seemed someone had heard. "You're in the dead letter office," said an eerie echoing voice. "It's where all letters and packages end up when they can't be delivered."

"Who are *you*?" Teddles asked.

"I'm the Ghostmaster General," said the voice. "I'm in charge of the dead letters."

"What happens to them?" asked the teddy bear still in his cardboard box.

"Here's where they stay," said the Ghostmaster, "Well, usually; but I have a strange feeling there's magic in the air and a special friend of yours is coming for you. In actual fact he's arriving at this very moment."

Teddles also had a strange feeling, in particular that someone he knew was close at hand and right next to him. Then Norman could be heard speaking from inside his parcel: "It's time to go, Teddles. Think yourself into my cardboard box; and do it quickly – I don't know how long this magic will stay working." There was a brief pause, then Norman was saying: "Ah, here you are. Move over a bit – you're squashing me. I just hope this magic journey doesn't take too long."

Luckily it didn't. Unlike the long time Teddles had been bounced around from place to place, this trip was over in a flash. Soon after the parcel arrived and it had been opened, Cindy was on the phone: "Thank you, Uncle. Teddles is here at last, and Norman's with him. That was a surprise. How did you manage to do it?"

Martin smiled and just said softly: "I didn't ask, Cindy, and neither should you. Like the old magician said, we simply have to trust in the magic."