

How did he do it?

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How did he do it? That's what I want to know. It happened six days ago, and though I've thought about it every second of every hour since, I still haven't worked it out.

Ok, I'm not the world's greatest brain, but I've always been interested in tricks. When I was a kid, I'd slip away from my mother in the market, and go and see John. John was an entertainer - he'd stand on his head while telling a story, juggle with live mice, and he'd do tricks. You know the sort of thing - he'd pull eggs out of his mouth one after another or turn a small silk cloth into a gold coin. One day, he put his hand into my tunic and pulled out a live scorpion! I ran off screaming, but later he swore me to secrecy and told me how he'd done it.

After that I used to help him and act as his stooge. He taught me how to do some tricks myself, and for a while we were quite a double act until my mother put a stop to it and told me I was old enough to work.

Of course, I don't do that sort of thing any more now. It's not suitable for a head servant, but I still like to watch magicians at work, and I pride myself on being able to spot how they do it. But how that man did it with the wine ...? .

It was my master's son's wedding. I was in charge of all the arrangements - the food and drink, the seating and decorations, hiring the extra help, and making sure they wore clean clothes and didn't smell.

We wouldn't have run out of wine, but it was hot, the hottest day we'd had for ages, and the guests just kept on drinking. Even so, we would have been all right if I hadn't slipped on a piece of melon and crashed into two of the others as they were bringing out more wine for the guests. The next thing was four pitchers of wine fell to the ground and shattered.

At first I stood rooted to the spot, unable to move, staring at the debris and the wine spreading across the floor. I felt like I wanted to scream and cry at the same time, because I knew there was only one pitcher of wine left. I picked it up, and walked back out to the guests, wondering how the hell I was going get out of this mess. Almost immediately a man to my right lifted his hand to catch my eye. I went over and filled his goblet.

"Is everything all right?" I turned. It was a woman who had spoken. "That was quite a noise in there."

"Oh, yes. Fine." I said quickly, too quickly. "Would you like some more wine?"

She said nothing. She just stretched out her hand and rested it lightly on my arm. "You can tell me," she said. Or did she? Did she say anything? Or was it merely her smile - gentle, sympathetic, encouraging - that told me that I could tell her.

So I told her. Surrounded by oblivious guests, who chattered and laughed amongst themselves, I told her how the wine was all but finished, how I couldn't get any more, how the wedding would be ruined, how I'd be kicked out of my job, how I'd be the laughing stock of the village ...

She nodded and waited for me to dribble to a stop, and then she spoke.

"My son can help you."

"Your son?"

She turned to the man at her side. He sat there, silent. I couldn't tell if he was listening or deep in thought. "Jesus," she said, "they've run out of wine."

He turned his head, his eyes fixing mine as if they would never let them go. "What's that got to do with me, Mother?" he said, still staring at me. 'My time has not yet come.'

It seemed a rather odd way to say he didn't want to help, but she ignored him.

"Do exactly as he tells you," she said, and she touched me lightly on the arm again.

The man sighed, and pointed towards two ceremonial pitchers standing by the wall. "Are those empty?"

"Yes."

"Fill them up with water."

I wanted to ask him why, but he had already turned back to his friends. So I got them filled up, right to the brim, and then returned to him.

"Fill a goblet from one of them, and then take it to your master," he said. "Let him try it."

I was flabbergasted. My mouth opened, but I couldn't find any words to say.

"Trust me," he said. He smiled, and turned away. His mother was looking at me too, and she gestured with her hand towards my master.

So I did it. I went over and dipped a goblet into one of the pitchers, then took a deep breath and walked over to the master.

"The new vintage, my Lord," I announced. "Would you care to taste it."

He took a sip. I shut my eyes, and wished I could be anywhere on earth but where I was. Anywhere!

"My dear boy!" my master was saying. I opened my eyes. He was standing up, his goblet lifted high, and he was calling to his son. "Bravo. Most people start with a few skins of good wine, and then serve plonk when everyone has had a bit to drink. But you have saved the best until last. Bravo!"

He was right. I had a drink myself and it really was superb wine. But I never found out how that man did it. It was an amazing trick. One of the hired staff must have been in on it. And the woman. I reckoned she must have persuaded one of them to switch the water with wine while I wasn't watching. Her son never left his seat, that much I do know. And he couldn't possibly have done it from there all by himself.

But it was - make no mistake - one heck of a trick. For trick it must have been. After all,
no-one can turn water into wine, can they! Can they?