

# THE MAGICIAN

by Tony Beckwith © 1997

*My grandfather had a talent for saying things in a colorful way. When I was being a difficult little boy he would say, "Next time I bring you I'll leave you at home." When I asked him his age he replied, "I'm as old as my tongue, and a little older than my teeth." He was a natural communicator, one who seemed to have an almost magical gift for both understanding and being understood. This story is about him.*

HE WAS A TALL MAN and still held himself straight even though he was now seventy years old. His two grandsons held his hands as they walked slowly along the open platform at the railway station. It was a cold, cloudy morning and they all wore overcoats and gloves and hats. His was a stylish dark fedora as usual, and the little boys wore the brightly colored woolen hoods and scarves their mother had knitted for them.

The station was on a suburban line in Buenos Aires and there would be no trains coming through until the twelve forty eight to the city. The platform was deserted and looked drab in the gray light. It had rained earlier and the boys looked sideways at the puddles glistening between the tracks. The old man would have liked to step into the waiting room, to sit for a while and smoke his pipe, but he didn't want to let go of his

grandsons' hands. And he did want to get to where they were going. They all did.

At the end of the platform they stopped and turned to look across the tracks at a building a couple of hundred yards away.

Square and simple and three stories high, the building itself was not special in any way. But on the roof was a sign that said, in large, red metal letters, "Adams Chiclets

Factory." The little boys stood quite still, their eyes shining, not saying a word.

He let go of their hands and reached into his coat pockets for just a second. Then he raised his arms above his head with both fists tightly clenched and slowly, rhythmically moved them from side to side. "Abracadabra," he said in a deep, serious voice, drawing out the syllables. He threw his head back and spoke the word again, and then a third time quite loudly, his eyes closed and his arms stretched up till he almost seemed to touch the clouds. The boys kept staring at the sign on the roof of the building, their mouths half open, blowing little puffs of steam with every breath.

Then the old man stepped back a pace, opened his eyes and lowered his arms. He knelt down and held out his hands, slowly

unfolding his fists. On each palm, on the shiny black leather of his glove, lay a small yellow box with the words "Adams Chiclets" printed in red. The boys shrieked and grabbed the boxes, excited smiles flashing

across their little pink cheeks. They tore open the flaps and poured the two shiny white pellets of sugarcoated gum straight into their mouths, chewing and grinning.

He took their hands again and led them back towards the station. The older boy looked over at his brother and said, "See? Grandpa is a magician." The old man squeezed their hands and smiled, blinking in the chilly morning air. ★

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