

# The Amazing Jonathan Latherby

He applied the spirit gum gently to his face. He had always wanted to grow his own goatee, but it never came in quite right. The sides didn't grow in and it made it look funny. He always thought that the goatee was the perfect addendum to a magician.

*Three minutes - Jonathan Latherby was young and inexperienced as a magician, but he had a lot of raw talent. That's why Maxwell hired him as an apprentice. Jonathan absorbed much and quickly made a name for himself in the little corner of Manhattan where he performed. Soon, he was on his own. He didn't limit himself to simple card tricks and making doves appear, Latherby idolized the great Houdini and his escapes. Ropes, chains, handcuffs, strait jackets and locked boxes, those were his attention getters. No real tricks to those, besides palming a key occasionally. Those required skill, endurance, and a shoulder he could pop out of socket.*

Latherby looked in the mirror. It looked like he had put the goatee on straight. He checked his pockets, sleeves, tie, etc. Everything was in place. He would open with the doves tonight. Then some card tricks with an audience member. He hoped there were more than 10 people out there tonight. Times were tough and his show wasn't as popular as he thought it should be. All that would change tonight. He would close with the special act. He hadn't practiced it as much as he'd like, but he needed to draw a crowd soon, or he was going to get evicted from his apartment. Small shows don't make much money, but if he could get their attention tonight. The crowds would show.

*Three and a half minutes - The other kids at school thought he was weird, reading magic books at the lunch table. He didn't have trouble making friends; he just wasn't interested much of the time. Performing tricks he had read about in*

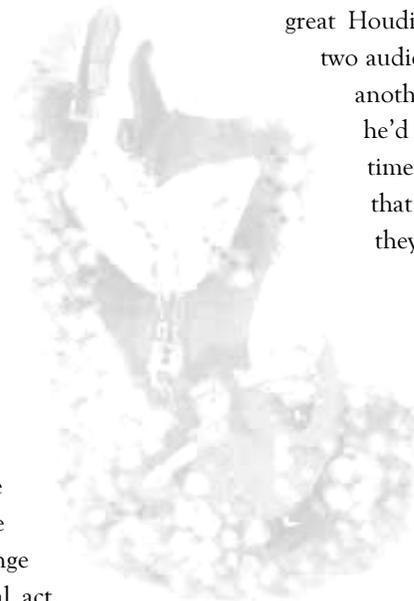
*front of his family made him very happy. His parents even bought him his own "Magic Kit". It had a hard plastic top hat, a wand, magic cards, rope, interlinking rings, little silk scarves and a hollow plastic thumb, everything a little magician could need to start his own cardboard stage show.*

The audience applauded as the man pulled his card out of the sealed envelope the other woman had been holding since the start of the show. They both went back to their seats as Latherby took a small bow. No one had left early this time, as far as he could tell. Good. Now for the finale. His assistant wheeled out the tank slowly. It was very heavy with all the water.

The audience fell silent as he told them about the great Houdini and his water escape. He had two audience members look over the tank as another helped him into the straitjacket he'd used in other performances many times. All the audience members knew that tonight was different. They knew they were in for a treat.

*Four minutes - Jonny blew out his birthday candles making a wish for a new bike. His parents had hired a clown for the party, but he had gotten sick and a magician had taken his place. All the kids were greatly impressed by the well dressed man that could pull flowers out of thin air. When he cut the rope in half, tied it back together and blew the knot off to reveal the rope had been reconnected, Johnny was hooked. He wanted to take the wish for that stupid bike back. He wanted to be a magician when he grew up.*

The jacket was a little tighter than usual. Jon would have to choose a smaller man to help him with the jacket next time. The air bubbles meant to obscure the audiences view also made it a little bit harder to find the hidden key at the top of the tank near his



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feet. He could hold his breath for just under three minutes and he could tell by the fire in his lungs that it was getting close. His hand cramped and he dropped the key. He needed that to get the chains off his ankles. The bubbles obscured his vision as he fished around for it at the bottom of the tank. He needed to find that key now.

*Four and a half minutes – He was cold and it was dark, but he knew he wasn't alone. Jonny pulled the blanket back down from over his head to see the giant rabbit creature. While incredibly large and intimidating, the creature did not look threatening. In fact, he looked genuinely concerned for the boy. He told Jonny that he was all but dead, but he could come back from the edge if he truly wanted. All he had to do was try. Jonny nodded. The rabbit man came closer and Jon saw power surge forth from him into his own body.*

Water poured out of Jon's mouth and he stood up. He wasn't the only one standing. The entire audience was up and applauding, a standing ovation, his first. The Amazing Latherby looked around to see water and broken glass all over the stage. The chains were broken and the tank had burst. "You're going to be very popular now", he heard in his head, knowing that it was his Avatar. Latherby took a bow, thanked everyone for coming and exited stage left. He later found out that he had been under water for over 5 minutes. They had tried to get him out, but the lock wouldn't budge and the fire axe only put chips in the glass. His assistant didn't understand why she wasn't let in on the "real" trick beforehand. She could have faked the concern and screaming for help, if that's what he wanted.

That was all months ago. His audience is darker now. Those that are drawn to him want to see something more deadly, to see blood, to see him almost die. He saves the really morbid stuff for the finale most of the time. Tricks and illusion are still a majority of his act. He's even getting good at hiding the real stuff with fake stuff, so that the inquisitive don't find out the truth.

