<u>"PRESTO CHANGE-O!"</u> A Magical Comedy in Two Acts by P.S. Drake

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# <u>Characters:</u>

- ABRACADABRA DAN: Male-presenting, age/color blind Third-rate magician who has quite literally lost the magic. Gets more than he bargained for when he agrees to enter a magic competition at Maggiano's Restaurant.
- <u>BLAIR HARRINGTON:</u> Female-presenting, age/color blind A government food inspector that gets tied up in the chaos of the play when asked to inspect Maggiano's.
- <u>CINDY:</u> Female-presenting, age/color blind Abracadabra Dan's magician assistant.
- <u>HELEN MAGGIANO:</u> Female-presenting, 55+, color blind A notorious mob boss who runs Maggiano's Italian Restaurant and Banquet center as a cover-up for her illicit activity.
- <u>JOHNNY MAGGIANO:</u> Male-presenting, age/color blind Helen's son and henchman. Is the "muscle" of the family business. A total meathead.
- ANGELO MAGGIANO: Male-presenting, age/color blind Helen's other son and Johnny's twin. Problems arise when Helen decides to step down and put him in charge of the family's affairs. A womanizer.

<u>Place:</u> Maggiano's Italian Restaurant and Banquet Center

> <u>Time:</u> Modern day

Lights go up to reveal DAN's magician assistant CINDY. There is a black scrim behind her, currently hiding the set. (Or lights on the set are out.) She is about to introduce DAN.

## CINDY

(*Unenthusiastically*) Ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls- are you ready for a night of magic that's completely forgettable?

DAN

(0.S.) Unforgettable!

CINDY

Then put your hands together for Abracadabra Dan.

## DAN

(*Enters*) Thank you, thank you. For my first trick- an illusion. Cindy, my wand. (*CINDY checks her phone*) Cindy? CINDY.

## CINDY

What? (DAN nods his head toward the cart. She begrudgingly hands him a rubber chicken)

DAN

On the count of three, a flower will appear in this hand with a wave of my... chicken. Ahem. One, two, three! (*A flower appears in his hand*)

#### CINDY

(Unenthusiastically) Amazing. Wow.

## DAN

Oh no, audience. I seem to be coming down with something. (*He coughs, then pulls a magician mouth coil out of his mouth*)

## CINDY

(On her phone) Magic.

DAN

Now, for my next trick, I'll need a deck of cards, a blindfold, and a rusty sword!

A cell phone rings.

The phone continues to ring. In the audience, BLAIR shuffles around and pulls out her phone. BLAIR (Answers phone) This is Blair. No, I'm not busy. DAN (To CINDY) Is she serious? HEY! Lady! BLAIR (On phone) One second. (To DAN) I'm on the phone. (Shushes him) DAN BLAIR You're excused. (On phone) What were you saying? DAN CINDY to BLAIR in the audience. DAN BLAIR DAN

DAN

Turn off your phone.

That wasn't me.

CINDY

- Excuse me for interrupting.

- I don't believe this.

(On her own phone) Technology is a disease.

BLAIR continues chatting on the phone. DAN groans with disgust and marches up

Put your phone away.

It's a work call.

You're at a magic show.

## BLAIR

Is that what you're calling this?

CINDY

(To DAN) Did you still want that sword?

BLAIR

*(On phone)* I'm sorry, sir- I'm being accosted by a wannabe Criss Angel.

DAN

Okay, that's enough! (*Grabs her phone*) Hey there, it's *Criss*. She'll call you back. (*Hangs up*)

## BLAIR

Are you insane? That was my boss!

DAN

And this is my magic show! (*CINDY gives him the sword, he offers it to BLAIR*) Here, how about this. For my next trick, why don't you just stab me? Huh? Right through the heart!

BLAIR

I can't believe I paid twenty bucks for this.

DAN It should've been fifty! Cindy! It should've been fifty!

#### CINDY

Math is hard.

BLAIR It should've been free. You're intolerable.

DAN

Me? You're here all alone. At least I have friends.

## BLAIR

Who? (*Gestures to CINDY*) Her? I bet the only reason she's up there is because she's sleeping with you.

## CINDY

BLAIR

Excuse you!

We're through here. Best of luck, Criss.

DAN

It's DAN. ABRACADABRA DAN.

DAN walks back to the stage. BLAIR walks towards the exit and dials her phone.

BLAIR

(On phone) Hello, sir? I'm sorry. Where did you say my next assignment was? Maggiano's on fourth street. Right. Have a good night. (She hangs up) Ugh. Italian food. (Exits)

CINDY

Is the show done? Because I have a thing I need to get to-

DAN

Give me that! (*He takes the phone out of her hand, throws it off stage*) Go fetch!

## CINDY

Ugh! You psychopath! I can't believe I'm sleeping with you! (She runs off to get her phone)

DAN

(Addresses the audience) You wanted a show. Well, you got one! Afterall, we know this isn't *really* magic. (*Picks various magic props* off his cart) The hand-cuffs are fake, the wand collapses, hellthere's loads of stuff up my sleeves. So why even do this? Why try?

CINDY

(Re-enters) It's broken- you owe me \$800.

DAN

Please, Cindy. I owe you more than that.

CINDY

Yeah, like a paycheck for the last three performances?

DAN

Make it four! Alright, everyone. Shows over. Refunds won't be issued.

CINDY

Give me your phone. I need to order a ride home.

You're not coming over? (*CINDY glares at him*) Fine. Wait- I'm getting a call from Mickey.

#### CINDY

Our manager?

DAN

No, the mouse. (*On phone*) What's up? A competition. When? Next Saturday. Maggiano's- the banquet center. Okay, yeah, Mickey, thanks. (*To CINDY*) You free next Saturday?

#### CINDY

Don't tell me you're taking me on a date.

DAN

Better. I'm taking you to a gig. (*He exits*)

CINDY groans and wheels the cart off-stage after DAN. The scrim is removed to reveal an Italian restaurant and banquet center. Stage left is made up to look like a restaurant, with tables and chairs and a bar. Stage right is a small kitchen, separated from the restaurant by a door or partition. JOHNNY, a middle-aged mobster-type man has a stagehand pinned to a table. HELEN enters and watches.

## JOHNNY

Where's my money, dirtbag? Huh? Where is it? Oh, the old silent treatment, eh? You think that's gonna work on me? I'm Johnny Maggiano! I always get my money!

HELEN

Technically it's *my* money, dear. (*She approaches*) We're not having a problem here, are we?

JOHNNY

No Ma, not at all.

HELEN

He'll have my money by next week, right? (*The stagehand nods furiously*) He knows what I did to the last man that didn't stay true to his word. Doesn't he?

#### JOHNNY

Don't you? (They nod furiously again)

HELEN

Good. The last thing I need tonight is blood on my linens. You're dismissed. (*JOHNNY lets go of the stagehand and they run off*)

JOHNNY

I didn't need your help, Ma. I had the situation under control!

HELEN

Keep it together, Johnny. This is our most important night of the year. Have you seen Frankie?

JOHNNY

The chef? I haven't seen him all night.

HELEN Wonderful. Another problem to add to my list.

## JOHNNY

Another?

HELEN Johnny, listen, there's something I've been meaning to tell you.

JOHNNY

What? What is it?

## HELEN

Well, you see, I-

HELEN's other son ANGELO enters. He looks like a douchebag, probably because he is a douchebag.

## ANGELO

What up, butthole!

JOHNNY

Angelo?

HELEN

Angelo! My dear boy. I've missed you. (She kisses ANGELO) You're late.

ANGELO Aw, c'mon, Ma. Let me celebrate for two seconds.

# JOHNNY

Celebrate what?

ANGELO

My promotion, big bro! She tell you the good news?

HELEN

I was about to.

# JOHNNY

I don't understand.

# ANGELO

You losing your marbles? (*Knocks on JOHNNY'S skull*) No wonder I'm gonna be the Maggiano in charge.

# JOHNNY

Will someone tell me what's going on here?

# ANGELO

That's on you, Ma. Speak loud and *slow*.

# HELEN

Your brother Angelo is now in charge of all business operations - legal and otherwise.

# JOHNNY

What?! But Ma you're the boss around here!

# HELEN

You've always known there would come a time when I would be stepping down. I've been doing this for longer than you've been alive.

# JOHNNY

And you're the greatest mob boss this side of the-

# HELEN

Shh! That word, "mob"- it's so pedestrian. I'm an organized crime boss. Well, I was.

JOHNNY

We can't stop now. The Maggiano name is notorious. We run this city!

HELEN

Our name's not going anywhere. I built Maggiano's from the ground up. What started as a front became my pride and joy. And now I'm passing it all down to my son.

#### JOHNNY

Why Angelo? I'm the older one!

ANGELO

By three minutes. You think that entitles you to the whole kit and kaboodle?

# JOHNNY

No, but me sticking around here and getting my hands dirty does. You hide your face for the last decade and now you're in charge?

#### ANGELO

I've been busy. Doing.. things.

JOHNNY Oh yeah? Do these *things* have long hair and big fake knockers?

## HELEN

Johnny!

#### ANGELO

Unlike you, I've been busy developing an IQ higher than my age!

JOHNNY Oh, so *that's* what this is about! You all think I'm stupid.

### HELEN

That is not true.

## ANGELO

It's entirely true. If he was left in charge of this family we'd buy the farm in a matter of days.

#### JOHNNY

I'd never buy a farm! I'm allergic to dander.

ANGELO Here, let me translate for you- (*speaks in a very belittling tone*) JOHNNY BIG DUMB DUMB. JOHNNY NO GET FAMILY BUSINESS. *Capisce*?

JOHNNY

Why I oughta-

JOHNNY attacks ANGELO and they get into a physical altercation. It's pathetic.

HELEN

Boys. Enough. I said stop it! (*The boys stop*) If you must fight for the love of God, have some dignity about it. Now, Angelo is in charge. Johnny, you're dismissed.

## JOHNNY

But, Ma-

HELEN I said you're dismissed. Go see if they need help in the banquet hall.

JOHNNY exits.

#### ANGELO

We got a party going on?

HELEN

A competition. The 10th Annual Maggiano's Championship of Magic.

ANGELO

Oh right, I forgot that's our thing. (A pause) Why is that our thing?

HELEN It brings in good business. And... (*Giddily*) I love magic.

ANGELO

(Gesturing toward her office door) Shall we go talk logistics?

Yes. But Angelo...

#### ANGELO

HELEN

What? (HELEN doesn't move) What.

HELEN Johnny's right. The girls. They have to stop.

## ANGELO

Ha! Okay, Ma.

#### HELEN

You can't be chasing every broad you lay eyes on! You have to get serious.

## ANGELO

I'll try.

### HELEN

That's not good enough. After your father passed, I never even looked at another man. The opposite sex is nothing but a distraction. Now, do you understand me?

## ANGELO

I do, Ma. I do.

#### HELEN

Then let's step into my office.

HELEN and ANGELO exit into HELEN'S office. CINDY enters wearing a blindfold and carrying a stuffed rabbit.

## CINDY

Dan?! Dan! Where'd you go? Is the trick over? Can I take this off now? Dan! (*She sighs*) Why did you talk me into this? I hate Italian food. You know I have gluten-induced narcolepsy. DAN! (*She exits, presumably bumping into things*)

ANGELO enters from HELEN'S office.

## ANGELO

Hello? Someone there? Must've been my imagination. My sex-crazed, horn-dog imagination. (*Scoffs*) As if I can't keep it in my pants for two seconds!

CINDY enters, still blindfolded with the rabbit, in a hurry. She runs right into ANGELO.

CINDY

Ahh! Dan?

## ANGELO

Oof! What the- (CINDY removes her blindfold, ANGELO falls in love) Hi.

You're not Dan.

ANGELO

CINDY

(Sticks his hand out) Angelo.

CINDY

Cindy.

# ANGELO

Nice uniform. You a waitress? (Gestures to rabbit) Chef?

#### CINDY

Magician's assistant. Do you know where banquet hall C is? I'm super lost.

#### ANGELO

Yeah, I got you, it's... Well, it's... probably through there.

#### CINDY

Probably? Do you work here?

#### ANGELO

Actually, I own the place.

## CINDY

Really? (Now interested) Oh.

ANGELO Yeah. You're talking to a bonafide man of business.

I love business.

#### ANGELO

CINDY

That right? What else do you love? CINDY Italian restaurants. Italians. ANGELO You've really got a way with words. CINDY I know. Applewood Elementary Spelling Bee Champion- third runner up. ANGELO Ah. (Gestures to himself) High school dropout. CINDY Dropout, d-r-o-p (she thinks) You get it. ANGELO Impressive. Can I pet it? CINDY What? ANGELO Your rabbit. CINDY Oh. No. He bites. Isn't that right, Humper? ANGELO His name is Humper? CINDY Yeah, haven't you seen "Bambi?" ANGELO No, that's not-HELEN'S booming voice can be heard from her office. HELEN (O.S.) Angelo!

ANGELO

What?!

HELEN (0.S.) Don't raise your voice to your boss!

ANGELO

Sorry, Ma!

CINDY

Your mom is your boss?

ANGELO

No, no, I'm the one in charge here.

HELEN (0.S.) Dilly-dally for one more second and you're fired!

## ANGELO

Yes, Ma!

#### HELEN

(0.S.) And where the hell is that chef?

ANGELO How would I know? (*To CINDY*) I gotta go. I'll see you at the competition.

ANGELO exits into HELEN'S office. DAN enters.

DAN There you are! How'd you get out of that box?

## CINDY

I'm not sure.

DAN Why do you have Humper? We should go practice. When does the competition start?

## CINDY

God Dan, am I being interrogated?!

DAN Look, I don't want to be here any more than you do.

CINDY Then why are we here "Abracadabra Dan?" What a joke.

It's a stage name.

CINDY It's a lie. Your tricks don't even work anymore. Kids' birthday parties? Gigs at Italian restaurants? You wanted so much more than this.

DAN

DAN

I grew up.

CINDY Then why do you still act like a five year old?

Cindy, I swear-

JOHNNY enters.

CINDY

DAN

(To JOHNNY) We're kind of in the middle of something.

JOHNNY Well I'm Johnny Maggiano! The... the chef. Who are you?

CINDY

Cindy, magician's assistant.

JOHNNY Ah, magicians. Banquet hall's that way.

CINDY C'mon Humper, let's get out of here. (*To DAN*) You coming?

DAN

Yeah, in a sec.

CINDY exits.

You're a chef?

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DAN

#### JOHNNY

Uhhh, yup. Chopping and dicing. Pounding, skinning, beheading.

DAN

I didn't know cooking was so violent.

## JOHNNY

It can be a real blood bath.

#### DAN

And you like it? Being a chef?

#### JOHNNY

Yeah, yeah, it has its perks. You see, sometimes, you have a run-in with a real mean... chicken. Like you hate this chicken. This chicken insulted everything you stand for. Now imagine, you get to wrap your hands around that chicken's neck and squeeze until the life leaves its eyes. That, my friend, is bliss.

DAN

(A pause) I'm a vegetarian.

#### JOHNNY

Good for you. Helps you live longer.

#### DAN

Eh, who cares about that?

#### JOHNNY

Why the long face, friend?

#### DAN

You seem so fulfilled. In a weird, unsettling way- but still.

#### JOHNNY

My job ain't all rainbows and butterflies. In fact, I got a punch in the gut from my boss today. She's promoting a total schmuck with zero experience over me. As if I was chopped liver!

#### DAN

I feel you. I've been in the magic biz for a decade and I have nothing to show for it.

#### JOHNNY

Hey, why not show me! Show me what you got.

DAN

A trick? Well, okay. Um, let's see. You got any noodles?

JOHNNY

I think I could spare some.

JOHNNY heads into the kitchen, opens the fridge, and grabs a bowl of noodles.

DAN

Excellent. And I'll use this table. And yes, there's my wand.

## JOHNNY

What do I do?

DAN

You watch, and enjoy. What I have here is a boring bowl of noodles. Chef Johnny, please inspect the bowl to ensure I have not tampered with it in any way.

> JOHNNY inspects the bowl- looks at it, smells it, and eventually eats a noodle.

#### JOHNNY

Tastes fine.

DAN

Now watch in amazement as I, Abracadabra Dan, make these noodles float! And now the magic words! (*He looks at JOHNNY*)

JOHNNY Me? Oh. Uh… Where's the money, dirtbag?!

DAN

(He waves his wand over the bowl) And a one, and a two, and a-

The bowl of noodles doesn't move.

#### DAN

I said, a one, and a two, and a-

Should it be happening by now?	JOHNNY
Shhh! I SAID A ONE, AND A TWO-	DAN
Do you want me to try?	JOHNNY
GAH! I swear this never happens	DAN .
Hey, it's okay. We've all been t	JOHNNY there.
DAN It's not okay! Why does this keep happening to me? I just need to <i>hgnn</i> . Maybe if I <i>hgnn</i> !	
Let's not force it.	JOHNNY
I can do it, I know I can!	DAN
Maybe you should-	JOHNNY
Shut up, will you? I can do it!	DAN
Pretty sure you can't.	JOHNNY
I can.	DAN
Mmm, doesn't look like it.	JOHNNY
I can.	DAN
You can't.	JOHNNY

DAN

I CAN! WATCH ME.

DAN throws the bowl of noodles not knowing BLAIR has entered. They splatter in BLAIR's face.

DAN: Aah! BLAIR: Argh! Shit!

DAN

Look out!

BLAIR

Thanks.

DAN Wait a second, I know you. You were at my magic show.

BLAIR (*Preoccupied*) Really? Maybe, I don't know.

Yeah. It was you- on the phone! You were wearing that same hideous pantsuit.

DAN

DAN

BLAIR Beige is practical! Oh, yeah, I remember now. You're that pathetic magician who can't do magic.

I'll show you magic!

HELEN enters from her office.

HELEN What is the meaning of all this noise?

BLAIR

Some of us can't hold our spaghetti.

HELEN Patrons? Oh, dear me. Welcome to Maggiano's. I'm Helen Maggiano. Is there anything I can get you?

BLAIR A table, actually. HELEN For how many? DAN BLAIR One. One. And a napkin. HELEN Of course. (To JOHNNY) While I get her seated, might you figure out where the hell our chef is? DAN (Overhearing) Chef? Aren't you speaking to him? HELEN To whom? DAN Your chef. Chef Johnny? JOHNNY Yeah! Duh! I'm the chef! HELEN Okay. Then I suggest you return to your kitchen, chef. JOHNNY Duty calls. (Exits to kitchen) HELEN (To BLAIR) You'll have your pick of the place. Most everyone's at the magic competition. BLAIR Magic competition? (Looks at DAN) Oh. HELEN Maybe you'll come watch after dinner? BLAIR

Definitely not. I find it all quite childish.

DAN We have a word for people like you- emotionally constipated.

BLAIR

That's two words.

JOHNNY sticks his head out from the kitchen.

JOHNNY

DAN

BLAIR

Hey, Ma? Which one's the oven?

HELEN Excuse me. (She exits into the kitchen)

You wanna know what I think?

No.

DAN I think you're a left-lane bandit.

A what?

## DAN

BLAIR

A left-lane bandit. I think you drive your car, probably a sensible little eco-friendly thing that gets 100 miles to the gallon, and when you get on the highway you stay in the left-lane, at a sensible 60 miles per hour, and no matter how hard someone rides you, you refuse to get over. Tell me I'm wrong.

BLAIR

DAN

You want to know what I think?

I sure do.

BLAIR

That's too bad. (Reads the menu) Now move, you're blocking my light.

DAN

Might I suggest something made for your palate? Perhaps a whole human heart? A vial of pig's blood? Maybe a liver, with some fava beans and a Chianti?

#### BLAIR

What is your problem?

DAN

You called magic "childish."

BLAIR

Because it is! The fake props, the misdirection, the costumes- it all serves to set up a world of illusion believable only by a child.

And tell me, how was your childhood?

## BLAIR

DAN

It was fine. Better than yours, based on your chosen profession.

DAN

And what is it you do?

## BLAIR

I'm a health inspector.

DAN

Are you inspecting Maggiano's? Right now?

#### BLAIR

Well not right now. Right now I'm trying to get an idiot to stop talking to me. I should write you up for impeding the work of a government official.

#### DAN

So do you like, have a badge?

## BLAIR

Please. Of course I have a badge. (Shows DAN her badge)

DAN

Ah, I see. Well Blair, I must admit you are quite impressive. Much more so than I. But I do have one thing over you.

#### BLAIR

Oh really? What's that?

DAN

(He gets up) I'm not the one handcuffed to my chair.

BLAIR What? (She checks and sees she has one hand handcuffed to the chair) Are you kidding me?!

DAN You have to be careful around us children. We like our toys. I have to go rehearse.

Dan, wait!

BLAIR

DAN

Hm? Yes?

BLAIR (*Vulnerable*) There's something I didn't tell you.

What? What is it?

BLAIR

DAN

I drive a Porsche.

DAN exits in a huff. JOHNNY enters, dressed as a chef.

JOHNNY May I entice you with tonight's specials?

BLAIR (Holds up her handcuffed hand) Is one of them a key?

JOHNNY Magicians. They're a surly bunch, eh? Hold still.

BLAIR

What are you doing?

JOHNNY

It's a little trick I learned in... culinary school. Kee-yah! (*He karate-chops the handcuffs, setting her free*)

Aah!

JOHNNY

BLATR

BLAIR

You're welcome.

Thank you. I need to go freshen up, make sure I got all the spaghetti out of my hair.

JOHNNY

Can I take your order?

BLAIR Yeah, I'll take one of everything. Thanks. (*She exits to the bathroom*)

JOHNNY

Everything?

HELEN enters.

HELEN

What are you doing?

JOHNNY

I'm picking up the slack. Missing chef, everyone busy with the competition. Someone's gotta do it. Plus, I like the way I look in this apron.

HELEN

Where the hell is our chef? All those people without food? They'll riot!

# JOHNNY

What, don't you trust me?

## HELEN

No! Maybe I can call in a favor...

# JOHNNY

That's the problem, isn't it? When have I ever given you a reason not to trust me?

#### HELEN

What about last week, hm? When I asked you to take out that Hungarian?

#### JOHNNY

I thought you said aquarium!

# HELEN

Tell that to those sea turtles. Or that other time, when I specifically told you not to touch the bloated corpse. What was the first thing you did?

#### JOHNNY

I touched the bloated corpse.

### HELEN

My son, I love you. But I know you. Your thick muscles have done more for this family than that thick skull ever will. Now just let mother handle this, okay? (*Calling 0.S.*) Angelo?

## ANGELO enters.

# ANGELO

Yeah, Ma?

#### HELEN

Come here, I've got your first assignment.

# ANGELO

Oh, goody. What is it? Money-laundering? Forgery? Murder?

## HELEN

Management. You need to find a chef. Gerry's down the street owes me a favor, I'd start there.

A ringing noise is heard.

## ANGELO

Could that be him?

#### HELEN

JOHNNY

No. The bell's for deliveries.

Then it's my basil!

JOHNNY goes to open the delivery door. ANGELO (To HELEN) Is there a reason he's dressed like Chef Boyardee? HELEN Bad parenting. JOHNNY (He opens the door and looks out) Oh, wow. HELEN What? JOHNNY drags in a human-sized black bag. JOHNNY Look at all this basil! Gee, how much did they give me? ANGELO

Basil, you said?

JOHNNY

HELEN

JOHNNY

Yeah. It's an aromatic herb.

ANGELO (Opens the bag) That ain't basil.

Oh, shit.

Hey Ma! I found our chef!

HELEN (Looks in the bag) You're late.

## ANGELO

JOHNNY I saw we were low and put in a rush order. Dang, they weren't messing

## Basil?

around!

JOHNNY

He can't hear you.

# I know!

# ANGELO

HELEN

Wait, there's a note. (*He picks a note off the bag and reads*) "This is for what you did to Tiger. He was our favorite." Who's Tiger?

#### HELEN

A damn sea turtle!

## JOHNNY

I thought you said aquarium!

HELEN

Put him in the freezer. We'll deal with this later. (*To ANGELO*) Soon all these problems will be yours.

## ANGELO

You seem to be taking it alright.

## HELEN

Eh, he was always burning the manicotti.

BLAIR enters and sits back at her table.

## HELEN

(*To distract her from the body-bag*) Ah, our lovely patron! Can I interest you in some freshly baked bread? Angelo? (*He leaves to retrieve bread from the kitchen*)

BLAIR Hey, uh, what's that? (*Pointing to the body bag JOHNNY's dragging*)

## HELEN

BLAIR

Hm? Oh, that. That's… fresh basil.

It looks heavy.

## HELEN