



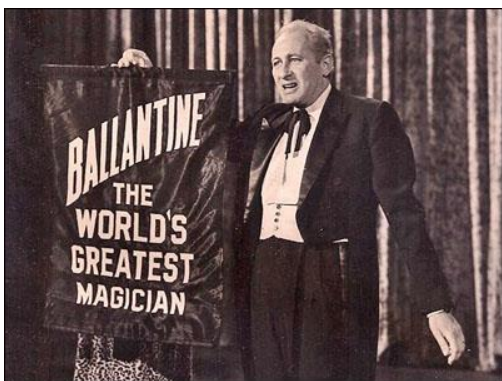
**The Spineless Prevaricator**

## **Chapter 12**

### **Cashman The Magnificent**

I always wanted to perform before an audience... to savor the applause, to luxuriate in the adulation, and to bask in the approbation of my adoring fans. While living in New York City, I once attended a Rolling Stones concert in Madison Square Garden where Mick Jagger commanded the undivided attention of 20,000 mesmerized fans. I was amazed by Jagger's ability to manipulate the crowd, one minute gesturing for their absolute silence; the next minute provoking raucous, uncontrollable cheers from the audience. Beholding the reaction caused by Mick Jagger's antics, I fantasized to myself, "That's what I want to do." That was my dream.

As was usually the case with my dreams, there was one glaring obstacle, namely that I lacked a scintilla of talent or skill that could possibly elicit applause from an audience. I couldn't sing... I couldn't dance ... I couldn't act ... I couldn't tell jokes ... I couldn't play a musical instrument. It seemed that a lazy, unscrupulous scoundrel and spineless prevaricator whose only talents were deceit, guile, and a mellifluous line of bullshit was never going to pack Carnegie Hall. If I wanted to experience the adulation of an audience, I needed to find some other hidden talent.



My epiphany occurred one night in 1973 while I was watching the Ed Sullivan Show, that corny TV variety show that was a Sunday night staple for most New Yorkers. I was already dozing off after watching several non-inspiring acts, when Ed introduced his next guest by exclaiming, "Ladies and Gentleman, straight from the Paramount Theater in Manhattan, I have the pleasure of welcoming 'The Amazing Ballantine ... The World's Greatest Magician'."

Here it comes, I thought to myself, another cheesy magic act. But The Amazing Ballantine was different. Instead of deft sleight of hand, he performed magic tricks that tended to flop and go hilariously awry, accompanied by jokes from the wisecracking magician. This was followed by uproarious laughter from the audience. I had to admit that this act was not bad. Immediately, a thought entered my mind. Here's a guy doing magic tricks that seem to bomb. He then mumbles a few one-liners as if he's annoyed or embarrassed at his ineptitude, and the audience laughs uproariously, followed by an outburst of applause. Larry Cashman can do that!!!

For his final trick, though, The Amazing Ballantine pulled out a brown paper bag, poured a pitcher of water into it, made a magical gesture, turned the bag upside down, and lo and behold the water had miraculously disappeared into thin air. The audience went totally bananas. The entire routine — all the blown tricks and blunders and cheesy jokes — was apparently a setup to get some laughs and some sympathy from the audience. When he nailed the final trick, the audience loved it, awarding Ballantine with a thunderous ovation. I turned to Sabrina (we had married the year before) and said, “That's it. That's how I can perform in front of an audience. I will become a magician.”

Sabrina rolled her eyes and in her characteristically blunt manner said, “Cashman, you're crazy. Being a magician requires some talent and you have none that I know of.”

“Didn't you just see The Amazing Ballantine? He botched almost every trick but made a few jokes and the audience went crazy. I can do that.”

“As usual, you are overestimating your meager talents. Did you notice his final trick? Ballantine is a serious magician, which the audience realized after his last trick. Without that closer, his act wouldn't make it.”

Sabrina was right. If I wanted to have an act like The Amazing Ballantine, I would also have to perform some serious magic tricks. But magicians were just scammers who used deceit, guile, duplicity, and sleight of hand cloaked in mindless patter to trick people into believing that reality had been altered. That's what I'm best at. So I decided to study magic, become a magician, and develop a magic act.

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My first order of business was finding a magician who could teach me some magic tricks. Fortuitously Myron Katansky, the middle-aged proprietor of the corner discount store located two blocks from Columbia Presbyterian Medical Center, (where I was presently enrolled in my senior year at Dental School), was an amateur magician. I convinced Myron to accept some amateurish dental work from me in exchange for some amateurish magic lessons. As per our agreement every day at lunchtime Myron would teach me how to palm a coin, force a card, and make a sponge ball disappear.

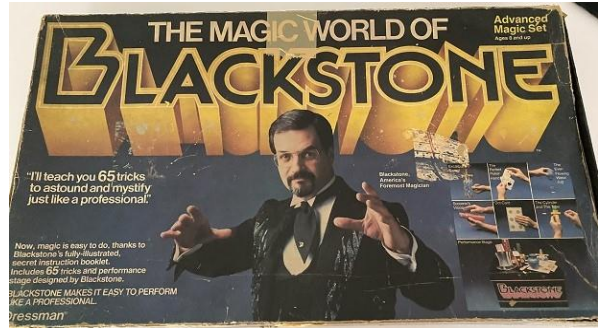
One day several noisy ten year old boys from the neighborhood entered Myron's store during our lesson and were enthralled by the magic tricks. The next thing I knew, I was taking a group lesson with two 10 year old brats who tried to steal my sponge balls, cut my ropes in two, and pull Myron's hair whenever his back was turned. Once, one of these mischievous runts clandestinely lifted a five dollar bill from my pocket while I was performing a trick, but evaded my grasp when I tried to strangle him.

“Don't waste your energy Cashman,” Myron advised. “I know how to teach those brats a lesson.” Myron had a tiny circular gadget that, if held in the palm when shaking hands with another person, would give them an electric shock. “Wrap a five dollar bill around this gadget and let's see what happens”

At the next lesson when the kid reached into my pocket to pilfer some cash, he got a shock that made his hair stand on end. The little imps took off and never showed up for another lesson.

As the reader may have discerned, Larry Cashman dislikes kids and these two urchins cemented that disdain. I vowed that, when I finally developed a magic act, I would never perform for scamps like these two ragamuffins.

After practicing with Myron for a few weeks, my next order of business was to purchase a magic set and see what I could actually do. Myron suggested "The Magic World of Blackstone," an inexpensive set with enough tacky props to perform a dozen passable tricks. All I needed now was an audience and a stage name.



Choosing a stage name presented a dilemma. I could go with something prosaic like "The Amazing Cashman" or "Cash the Magic Man." But these were too pedestrian. I wanted something with a little more pizzazz. What I wanted to be called was "The Magnificent." So I settled on "Cashman the Magnificent," adding the flamboyant modifier, "Master of Prestidigitation and Legerdemain." This moniker was perfect, a grandiose name that would raise audience expectations and intensify their sympathetic response when I flubbed my magic tricks.

Finally, I needed to find an audience for my first performance. Where can an inept wannabe magician with no experience or stage presence find an audience willing to watch his sorry act? But just then, an opportunity arose. A farewell party had been arranged for Sabrina and me as we prepared to leave New York City for the Navajo Indian Reservation in New Mexico in 1975. About 40 guests were expected to attend, providing me with a captive audience for my first performance.

When I announced that there would be a magic show at the party, the response was immediate. The guests wanted to come to the party to see the magic show. People love to see magic tricks performed live. Magic viewed on TV or as part of a video can be manipulated by special effects. When you see magic tricks performed live, reality must be altered right in front of your eyes. People love that.

With the unexpectedly avid response to my announcement, I realized that I needed to perform at least 10 or 12 tricks with reasonable proficiency, knowing that if I blew a trick, I could display some annoyance followed by a few snide remarks "ala The Amazing Ballantine," and still get some laughs. Using my trusty "The Magic World of Blackstone" magic set, I found enough relatively easy magic tricks that even a novice like me could perform with minimal proficiency.

On the night of the party one could feel the energy surging through the air. Everyone appeared anxious for the magic show to begin. Sabrina did the introduction, which I had written, expounding on the incredible skills of the world renowned magician about to perform. My adage has always been "... never miss an opportunity to toot your own horn...." Sabrina closed her introductory remarks with "Ladies and Gentlemen, here is the one and only Cashman the Magnificent, Master of Prestidigitation and Legerdemain."

When I walked on stage with my black cape and top hat, the tepid applause from the audience oozed with skepticism. Now came the hard part. Here I was, a complete charlatan who had taken some cheesy magic lessons from a discount store owner in Manhattan while fending off two nasty brats, purporting to be a famous magician who now had to entertain 40 people watching my every move for the next half hour. I was nervous in extremis.

I started with the famous "sponge ball routine," performed with misdirection, props, and sleight of hand. When I made two sponge balls appear, the audience erupted in applause. I couldn't believe that they didn't see me snatch two sponge balls concealed in my folded right arm as I directed the audience's attention to my empty right hand. But they didn't.

This phenomenon was repeated at every step of the routine, and for every trick in the show, followed by enthusiastic applause. I performed amateurish sleight of hand that seemed so obvious, but the audience was apparently oblivious to what was actually going on. There were a few busted tricks, of course, but in "The Amazing Ballantine" fashion I feigned annoyance and embarrassment, made a few snide quips, and the audience erupted into uproarious laughter.

The final trick, however, had to be a good one. For that I performed "Bake a Cake in a Hat." For this trick the magician pours water, flour, and two broken eggs into a hat; sprays the contents of the hat with lighter fluid, throws in a lighted match, and flames spontaneously burst from the hat. Ostensibly pleased that the trick has gone so well, the magician suddenly realizes that he forgot to put the cake pan in the hat, and accordingly retrieves the cake pan, places it over the flaming contents in the hat, turns it over, and produces a nicely baked cake with icing lying in the cake pan.

After I nailed the "Bake a Cake in a Hat" trick, the audience erupted into deafening applause. It may have only been 40 people in the audience, but I, Larry Cashman, suddenly felt like Mick Jagger performing in Madison Square Garden, basking in the adulation of my adoring fans. I was living my dream. I had found my new avocation.

That experience taught me an important lesson in life; namely how incredibly gullible human beings are. If my cheap tricks and clumsy sleight of hand could fool an entire audience, people were either astoundingly naïve or extraordinarily stupid. The intervening years have taught me that it is the former rather than the latter. This insight was a valuable piece of information for Larry Cashman, whose very existence depended on using duplicity and guile to deceive the unsuspecting masses, as Sabrina and I proceeded to New Mexico and the Navajo Indian Reservation in 1975.

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I have previously expounded in nauseating detail about my distaste for clinical dentistry and my revulsion at having to meet and treat patients. That didn't change when I began working as a dentist at the Crownpoint Indian Hospital in New Mexico. One day chaos unfolded in the clinic waiting area, caused by 20 uncontrollable elementary school kids playing boisterously while awaiting their annual health checkups. I suddenly got a brilliant idea.

I went home, picked up some magic tricks, returned to the hospital, and performed a magic show in the clinic waiting area. The unruly children immediately became silent when I produced the first sponge ball. Every one of those brats sat in rapt attention waiting for the next trick. If I told them to be quiet, they were. If I told them to move so others could pass, they followed my instructions without a murmur. They would do anything as long as I performed more magic tricks. I could have had them all stand on their heads if I wanted. Damn it....why didn't I have them do that?

Wayne Morrison, the Crownpoint Service Unit director, could not help but notice that my little performance had restored order to what, shortly before, was a scene of total chaos.

“Bravo Cashman,” he intoned. “Those cheesy magic tricks got their attention. I hope you’ll perform again when chaos engulfs the waiting area.”

More importantly, from my perspective, was the fact that my little escapade had gotten me out of the clinic – and seeing patients – for two hours. And Wayne wanted me to do it again? There are more unsavory things I would do to avoid seeing patients for two hours.

Sensing an opportunity, I suggested, “Why don’t I perform some magic tricks every day?” Thus for the next several months I would head into the clinic waiting area at about 10 AM, do a bunch of hokey tricks, and only return to my clinic as we were breaking for lunch. Soon I was spending half the day out there acting like a magician rather than a dentist.



**Contestants for Miss Navajo Crownpoint Beauty Pageant**

Soon “Cashman The Magnificent’s” reputation began to spread far and wide, and I was deluged with invitations to perform magic shows in different venues. There was a strange phenomenon involving beauty pageants on the Navajo Indian Reservation. These pageants were festive events that included talent contests, judges, and contestants decked out in traditional garb adorned with Navajo turquoise jewelry. During the intermissions, Cashman The Magnificent would perform his cheesy magic act as the local denizens enthusiastically cheered every trick.

This gig went well for a while. The audiences were large and the applause was lavish. But I learned an important lesson doing those shows. You must cater the magic tricks to your specific audience. Certain tricks work well on kids. Others work better on adults. Certain tricks are not suitable for an audience comprised primarily of Navajo Indians.

The “Ghost in the Scarf” trick belonged in this category. With a magical hand gesture the magician grabs a spirit from the air, throws it into a folded scarf, the scarf begins to gyrate, then the magician releases the spirit. Sounds exciting ... but perhaps not for the Navajo.

I first noticed the audiences’ discomfort when I told them I could see invisible spirits. The Navajo believe there is a robust spirit world where good and evil spirits battle for prominence. Bad spirits are harnessed for casting spells. Good spirits protect people and eradicate spells. Only shaman and medicine men can communicate with spirits, and even they couldn’t see them. Not only could I see spirits; the audience gasped in anguish when I grabbed one in midair and tossed it under the scarf.

Tossing the spirit under the scarf may have disturbed the audience, but the next sequence entirely unnerved them. With the spirit safely sequestered under the scarf, I waved my magic wand and the scarf began to elevate ... slowly at first and then it gyrated wildly in the air.

The audience now went totally ballistic. The men ran forward to confront the spirit. The women cradled their children to protect them from the spirit. I should have ceased and desisted right there and

then, but this was not in Larry Cashman's nature. I was about to perform the *Prestige*<sup>1</sup> segment of the trick and Larry Cashman lives for that *Prestige* moment in magic.

As the scarf twisted and twirled, I pulled the scarf away to show that there was nothing there. Only the audience thought that I had unleashed an evil spirit into the world, which would turn its wrath on them. The audience panicked. The crowd stampeded toward the exits. The beauty contestants were hustled to safety. A Navajo policeman with two menacing ruffians came onstage to directly confront me.

"You angered the spirit," the policeman said "That's why it was twisting and turning. Where is the spirit now? You must find it so that a medicine man can perform incantations that will appease it."

If I had any sense, I would have merely produced a spirit, wrapped it in a scarf, and be done with them. But not Cashman the Magnificent! I looked at them in disbelief and said, "There's no spirit here. This is only a magic trick. The scarf has a wire in the lining that I manipulated to make it gyrate."

My antagonists didn't buy that explanation. A particularly loathsome brute put his face about three inches from mine and shouted in an aggressive and unfriendly tone, "Don't lie to us. We saw the spirit in the scarf. Now hand it over."

Could it be that these miscreants were even more naïve than I thought? Perhaps this was an opportunity for more Cashman The Magnificent mendacity. "So you want the spirit? Hold on for a second and maybe I can find it."

I reached in my pocket and found a thumb tip that I keep for special occasions. A thumb tip is a hollow thumb that the magician uses to conceal a scarf or a \$10 bill. I grabbed the scarf that I used to capture the ghost and stuffed it into my left hand where the thumb tip was concealed. With a magical gesture, the scarf disappeared.

I intended to make it reappear and give them the spirit in the scarf. But the Navajo police officer leered at me impatiently, obviously not appreciating the chicanery and growled, "That's enough of your nonsense. I'm detaining you until you stop playing games and produce the spirit."

The next thing I knew, I was handcuffed, blindfolded, and led off to the local jail. A medicine man appeared outside my cell, chanting incantations to banish the spirit, and me, from the premises

I languished in the jail cell until the next morning. That's when Sabrina came walking in, accompanied by Wayne Morrison, the Crownpoint Service Unit Director. From the expression on her face it was clear that my better half was clearly not too thrilled with my latest shenanigans; or the fact that the local Navajo nation was up in arms about how I had nonchalantly threatened their well-being by releasing an evil spirit on to their reservation. .

"You and those stupid magic tricks!!" she chided me. "You just can't turn down an opportunity to perform in front of an audience and run your big mouth. Look at the trouble you got into this time. That is enough with your foolish magic shows. Cashman the Magnificent is finished." It should be noted that

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<sup>1</sup> There are three parts to every magic trick. The first is the *Setup*, where the magician shows the props and explains what will be done. The second part is the *Turn*, where the magician either uses a gimmick or performs the sleight of hand that distorts reality. The last part is the *Prestige*, where the magician reveals how reality has been changed, and the audience responds with oohs, aahs and applause. Every magician performs for the *Prestige*. Larry Cashman was no exception.

Sabrina was, from the start of this adventure, not a fan of Cashman The Magnificent. She thought my tricks were infantile and my act was hokey. Most of all she hated when I practiced my tricks on her to see if they would work on others.

“You’re lucky Wayne intervened with the Navajo police to get you out of jail. I wanted to leave you here for several days to teach you a lesson. Cooling your heels in jail just might make you stop doing that idiotic magic act,” Sabrina uttered as she departed the premises — yet another sterling vote of confidence from my loving wife.

Now Wayne took center stage. “When you didn’t show up in the clinic, Cashman, one of the nurses told me you were in jail.” Wayne was enjoying my discomfort, and he relished Sabrina’s lambasting. I was not one of his most stellar employees.

“We need you in the clinic so, despite Sabrina’s entreaties to let you rot in jail, I convinced the police to let you go. Somehow you still have to find that spirit you unleashed yesterday.”

“No problem there, Wayne. I’ll put it in the scarf again but I will not let it get out this time. The medicine man can go to town on it for all I care.” I was home free. “Thanks for getting me out of this mess. I am eternally grateful.” And with that, I grabbed my things and prepared to skedaddle.

“Not so fast Cashman. There’s one more thing.” There always seemed to be one more thing whenever I thought that I had escaped from a tight spot. I couldn’t wait to hear what Wayne had in store for me.

“We’re having a Christmas party next week for our patients in the hospital. I want you to perform your magic act at the party. And no ghosts or spirits this time.”

“I must respectfully decline your offer, Wayne. You just heard Sabrina put the kibosh on my magic performances. Maybe I can do it some other time.” It was an airtight excuse.

“And maybe I need to speak with the police about keeping you here for several days until you change your mind. Maybe you’ll enjoy eating Navajo Tacos three times a day, sleeping on that hard mattress in this cold cell, and taking a dump in that tiny hole in the floor. I suggest you suck up to Sabrina and convince her to let you perform one more show, Cashman. I just need 30 minutes of entertainment for the Christmas party.”

Wayne could see that I was still hesitant. When Sabrina laid down the law, I was loathe to cross her. So Wayne offered a sweetener.

“I can offer you a stipend for your effort, Cashman. I have a small fund for such purposes. That should appeal to your venal instincts.”

Now Wayne was speaking my language. Reluctantly I replied, “OK Wayne. You win. I’ll perform at your bloody Christmas party.”

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I was not totally dissatisfied with this outcome. Doing a 30 minute magic show was chocolate cake for me. Plus Wayne’s stipend marked the first time I would receive a pecuniary compensation to perform. Convincing Sabrina, however, was another story. Her preference was to send me back to jail. But I promised her that there would be no more magic tricks laying around the house. There would be no more magic shows. And I would never practice a magic trick on her again. She finally relented.

My performance at the Beauty Pageant had taught me an important lesson – cater the magic tricks to the audience. My show at the Crownpoint Hospital Christmas party would teach me another lesson – magicians should be selective about their audiences. Sometimes you need to walk away from a gig...even one that pays you to perform.

Well, I should have walked away from that Christmas party gig. When I arrived at the hospital, I expected a venue with a stage in front of several rows of seats. Instead, the hospital venue was an empty room with no chairs. As I set up my magic tricks, they started wheeling in the patients. The first one was semi-comatose. The second one was hooked up to three IVs and a feeding tube. The third one was attached to an EKG machine. The fourth one was intubated and connected to a ventilator. And on it went.



**Audience for Cashman's Hospital Magic Show**

There were 10 patients in all attending the show. As far as I could ascertain from my spot on the stage, only four of them were conscious. It's not easy to find a spectator to assist with a sponge ball routine when none of them can walk. And it's not easy to find a spectator to blow up a balloon when all of them had tubes in their mouths to enable them to breathe.

I've played to some dead audiences before, but this was the first time my audience was literally dying right in front of me. If Wayne Morrison was not standing there with a Navajo policeman, I would have bolted when they escorted the "audience" into the empty room that served as my theater. It looked as if I would have to suck it up and tough this one out.

Halfway through the performance, while I felt like I was dying on stage just like my audience, I decided to perform one of my go-to tricks, "the Needle through the Balloon." In this one the magician magically inserts a one foot long needle through an inflated balloon without breaking it. Then the magician bursts the balloon with the needle to show it is real. That is the *Prestige* segment of the trick, so I couldn't pass it up. The loud **POP** when the balloon burst elicited a response from the audience, at least from those who could move.

Suddenly a red light started flashing on the EKG machine. Then a loud bell began clanging. It was a Code Red. It seemed that a member of the audience was going into cardiac arrest precipitated by the sound of the burst balloon. As the nurses and a doctor swarmed around the patient, all eyes — even Wayne's and a local cop — were on the patient. This was clearly a signal for me to cut and run.

However, there was still the small matter of my promised stipend. While Wayne Morrison hovered over the medical staff trying to resuscitate the patient, I tapped him on the shoulder.

"Sorry to bother you, Wayne, but didn't you mention something about a stipend?"

From Wayne's reaction, this was perhaps not an opportune time to raise this issue. "A stipend!! You have the nerve to ask me about a stipend after you nearly killed this patient? You are a venal, contemptuous cur, Cashman. I should have listened to Sabrina and let you rot in jail."

I know when it's time for me to exit stage left. I didn't even bother to gather my magic tricks. As Sabrina had noted so incisively, they were just a bunch of "stupid magic tricks."

One thing was certain. In the future Cashman the Magnificent would be more selective about his audience.

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Well, it should come as no surprise to the reader that I did not learn my lesson. My desire for adulation and approbation and my addiction to magic's trickery and deceit quickly exceeded my caution. When the Cashman family moved on to Thailand and Indonesia, the demand for Cashman the Magnificent's magic act was equally unremitting. I performed at U.S. Embassy functions and expat parties. I performed at Carmencita's school and her friends' birthday parties. Reverting to form, I agreed to perform anywhere I could get a gig. The more I performed, the less patience Sabrina had for my magic act. "Are you still doing those stupid magic tricks," was her standard reaction whenever I practiced for a show. Only now I had to find somebody else to practice on. This soon included my two young children, their nannies, and the maid.

When we lived in Indonesia, my magic act had become a "must-see" routine. Clara Miller, my colleague at the US Embassy in Jakarta (see Chapter 5), wanted Cashman the Magnificent to perform at her 10 year old son Martin's birthday party. I was reluctant to do so as kids at this age are the worst possible audience for a magic show. They hate to be tricked because they think they're too smart to be tricked. But I couldn't resist Clara's blandishments. I agreed to perform at the birthday party.

The 15 brats assembled for the show reminded me of those two imps who had crashed my magic lessons at Myron Katansky's discount store in Manhattan. They were the same age, they were equally obnoxious, and they were all smartasses. I have little patience for rascals like these. As soon as I started the show, the nasty urchins started to heckle me. "What's in your other hand?" "I saw you put it behind your back." "I can do that." "Show us that trick again."

One kid snuck up to the stage and tried to examine my Disappearing Vase. I swatted his hand to discourage him. Undeterred, the little bugger tried to steal my sponge balls. I smacked him with my magic wand and said, "If you try that again, I'll stick this magic wand so far up your ass you'll choke on it." That got his attention. It also got Clara's attention. The scowl on her face said "Cut it with the foul language Cashman. They are only kids."

These "kids," however, turned the entire performance into a living nightmare. They hassled me, heckled me, interrupted me, and even threatened me. In return I cussed them, ridiculed them, and frustrated them whenever I had the chance. By the end of the show, we had reached an impasse ... the kids were pissed that they had been tricked and I was fed up with their shenanigans. I was glad the show was over.

Then, overcome with frustration, the little brats attacked me ... all 15 of them. They swarmed the stage and rummaged through my props and gimmicks to see how the tricks were done. While I tried to deflect them, they pulled on my cape and rifled through my pockets to see what was concealed there. I was about to beat the little rascals to within an inch of their lives to get them to back off. But Myron Katansky had taught me not to let brats get away with their mischief. I had a surprise for them.

I had a gimmick fake hand attached to a bag with red dye that looked like blood. If you pretend to shake someone's hand and pull away quickly, the red dye spurts out. I put on the gimmick hand and slapped one of the brats trying to see my tricks. When he grabbed the gimmick hand, I pulled away and the kids saw blood squirting from my ostensibly dismembered extremity. To my monumental satisfaction, they screamed, panicked, and skedaddled. That's when Clara Miller interceded to stop the mayhem. I vowed then and there that I would never perform magic for kids again.

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When our daughter Katerina turned four years old in 1989, it was time for her to attend an English language playschool. While her Indonesian was fluent, as she was constantly in the company of her nanny or our maid, she needed to improve her English. There were not many English speaking playschools in Jakarta in 1989, and only one in our neighborhood, the Jakarta International Playschool.



**Jakarta International Playschool**

When Sabrina went there to enroll Katerina, she was told that enrollment was closed and there was a two year waiting list. She could, however, fill out the application form and put Katerina's name on the waiting list as spots occasionally opened up, but that was a long shot. This response was not unexpected. Sabrina was disappointed, but she completed the application form, understanding that we would have to

continue searching for another English language playschool.

A question on the application asked "Do either of the parents have a special skill?" Not giving this question a second thought, Sabrina wrote down "My husband is a magician," and handed in the application.

As the headmaster perused the application, her face lit up. "Your husband is a magician? Does he perform magic for children?"

Sensing an opportunity, Sabrina pounced and replied, "Oh yes. He loves performing for children of all ages. He has a special magic act just for kids."

Upon hearing Sabrina's response, the delight on the headmaster's face was palpable. "In that case I have a proposal," she explained. "The Jakarta International Playschool is having its annual Spring Fair this Saturday. We've been searching for a special performance to attract more children. A magician would be perfect. If your husband would perform his magic act at the fair, I think I can guarantee a spot for Katerina in the incoming class."

Sabrina was ecstatic to hear this news. Her mood transformed from gloom to elation. Without skipping a beat, or consulting with me for that matter, she immediately responded, "I can guarantee right now that my husband would love to perform at your Spring Fair."

"And I can guarantee that your daughter will have a spot in our incoming class," said the headmaster in return. They shook hands and sealed the deal.

"There's one more thing," added the Headmaster. "He will have to perform six shows, one after another. When the children hear that a magician is performing, they'll all want to see the show. We'll set him up in a classroom that accommodates 20 children. He can perform a 25 minute show then have five minutes to prepare for the next show. The children will be in "Seventh Heaven."

"By the way, how old are the children?" Sabrina asked, knowing that I hated to perform for kids but really hated that special "10 year old" group, my most obnoxious and zealous adversaries.

"There will be children from 5 to 12 years old. We've asked the parents to bring our school children plus their older siblings. Now that we have a magician I'm sure the turnout will be excellent."

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Sabrina was all smiles when I returned home later in the day from work. "Well, darling, you'll be happy to know that I secured a place at the Jakarta International Playschool for Katerina."

I was pleased to hear that. We never thought there would be space for her there. But as Sabrina fidgeted, I could sense some discomfort in her usually stolid demeanor. Plus she never called me "darling." I was more accustomed to being called "idiot" or "candy ass."

There's one catch, however," she mumbled sheepishly.

When she told me about the magic show, I was pissed. But getting Katerina into the Jakarta International Playschool was more important so I was prepared to bite the bullet and do the show.

Then Sabrina added very gingerly, "Did I mention that you have to do six shows, one after another?"

I nearly choked when I heard that. "Are you shitting me? I might survive one show with a bunch of screaming brats. After six shows they will have to carry me out on a stretcher because I will most probably shoot myself before the last performance. We need to find another playschool for Katerina."

That's when Sabrina put her foot down. "You're such a sissy pants Cashman." She knew how much I hated being called a sissy pants. I much preferred candy ass. "I've had enough of your whining. You will do the six magic shows and Katerina will attend the Jakarta International Playschool. And if you decide to shoot yourself, I will make sure that you do not do so until you finish the last show."

And that was that. There was no arguing with Sabrina when her mind was made up. I would be doing six magic shows the following Saturday.

I was in a deep state of depression, paralyzed with anxiety, as I prepared my magic tricks for the Spring Fair. When you finish a magic trick, it takes time to prepare the props for the next show. Today I would have five minutes before the next show... and the next... and the next... and the next.

I was actually feeling pretty mellow when I arrived at the school for my shows, no doubt due to the valium I took before leaving home to soothe my anxiety. The headmaster was at the entrance to meet me.

"We are honored to have you perform today, Mr. Cashman," she greeted me warmly.

And I, preferring to be tortured by the KGB in a Siberian Gulag rather than performing at this bloody school, responded, "Just call me Cashman. Everyone does."

"Okay Cashman, " she replied cheerfully. "By the way several mothers have asked if you also perform at birthday parties. I would be so grateful if you agree. These mothers play an important role in fundraising activities for our school."

Then she turned to Sabrina and said, "And Mrs. Cashman, I think I can get Katerina into Ms. Kartini's class with her friend, as you requested. There are just a few loose ends to tie up."

This old fox must think I was born yesterday, pulling a scam like that on me. I was about to tell her that I would rather drink poison than perform at kids' birthday parties, when Sabrina jabbed me in the ribs and interjected, "Please tell the mothers that my husband would be more than happy to perform at the birthday parties."

When the headmaster left, I pulled Sabrina aside and said "Are you crazy? I'm in this far enough. I hate kids and I hate doing birthday parties. I'm finished after today's performances."

“Listen Cashman. I have watched you perform your idiotic, inane magic act for the past 15 years and what has it gotten you? You’ve been thrown in jail, caused a patient to go into cardiac arrest, and pissed kids off so badly they attacked you. Now we have a chance for your magic act to actually help Katerina and we’re going to take that opportunity. You always wanted to perform in front of an audience, right? Well today there are 100 kids waiting to see you perform. Now prepare your tricks. The first show starts in 10 minutes.”

I will not go into the details of my six-show marathon. Suffice it to say that it was a four hour nightmare. There was no air conditioning in the classroom and my props and I slowly wilted in the heat. Some of the kids were rowdy, some were nasty, and some were clueless. I never had enough time between shows; and I was constantly badgered by mothers asking me to perform at their son's or daughter's upcoming birthday party. And the headmaster never left the classroom. She obviously didn't trust me. Thinking about it, I must commend her perceptive judgment.

By the end of my ordeal I had already been booked for eight shows over the next two months. With Carmencita as my assistant I dutifully trudged to children's birthday parties on the following four Saturdays. After four shows I had enough of the little monsters, their birthday parties, and their mischief. Then, one night, I received a phone call.

It was unusual to receive phone calls in Jakarta in 1989. First of all, very few people had telephones in their homes. US Embassy staff had them for security reasons. But more importantly, no one ever phoned me. As the reader can imagine, Larry Cashman wasn't the most popular guy in town. As such a phone call always created some anxiety for me.

*“Ist das Cashman zee Magnificent?”* the voice on the phone was a deep, husky woman's voice speaking with a menacing German or Eastern European accent. “

The tone of her voice scared me. I composed myself and answered, “Yes, this is Cashman the Magnificent. But you can call me Cashman. Everyone does. With whom do I have the honor of speaking?”

*“I am Koko the Clown.”* When I heard this I nearly had a heart attack. I am deathly afraid of clowns. I had seen clowns before but I had never spoken with one. What could a clown want with me?

*“Ve undersdand zat you haf been performing magic schows at birthday pardies for free. Is zat korrek?”* Koko seemed quite agitated when she said this.

“Yes, that is correct. What is this about?”

*“By performing for free you are ruining zee market for us. Zere are performers in zis community — clowns, balloon sculbtors, jugglers, acrobats, pony vagen rides — who make zere living doing birthday pardies. Zince you shtarded performing for free, mozers haf shtarted complaining about our fees. ‘If Caschman zee Magnificent performs for free, vy can’t you do zee zame?’ zey ask.”* Koko was clearly getting pissed. The last thing I wanted to do was piss off a clown.

“What do you want me to do?” I asked innocently.

*“I vant you to shtart charging zee zame fees as ve do.”*

“And how much is that?”

*“\$150 for ein half hour schow. Zat is zee going rate.”*



**Koko the Clown scared the daylight out of Larry Cashman**

I was flabbergasted when I heard this. \$150 was a stiff price for Jakarta in 1989. But these kids lived in mansions in Pondok Indah, the ritziest neighborhood in Jakarta, and their parents worked for oil companies in Indonesia. For them \$150 was chump change.

Now I am not averse to earning \$150 for my cheesy magic act. However, there was a complication that prevented me from acceding to Koko's wishes. As an employee of the US Embassy, I was prohibited from receiving financial remuneration from outside sources. The uptight Embassy wallahs in Jakarta hated me and were always eager to find some reason to get rid of me.<sup>2</sup> I didn't want to give them another excuse.

When I informed Koko of this impediment, she was less than sympathetic. In her sternest Eastern European accent, Koko replied adamantly, *"Zat is your problem, Caschman. Zee free shows must stop now. Or elze!!"*

I froze in my tracks when I heard this. "But I have a show this Saturday that I have agreed to do for free."

*"Zen you petter call zem right now und tell zem zee show vill now cost \$150."*

"I'm not sure I can do that, Koko." My reply elicited silence from Koko. It was clear that she was not happy.

*"Let me make zis clear, Caschman. If you berform one more schow for free, I vill find you und smasch your knees mit eine baseball bat."*

That was enough for me. I imagined Koko as some 5 ft. 10 inch 230 lb. babushka with a Bozo the Clown hairdo kneecapping me with a baseball bat. I needed no further convincing.

"Now that you mention it Koko, I will call the host of my Saturday show and mention the small matter of my remuneration. How could I have overlooked that? Thank you so much for reminding me."

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When I got off the phone, I was perplexed. The US Embassy prohibition on receiving outside income was a fact. But \$150 per show would buy a lot of single malt scotch whiskey and Cuban cigars. And a few rounds of golf to boot. Plus how would the US Embassy ever find out? The parents of these kids worked for oil companies. No Embassy families were paying \$150 for a magic show. This new development might actually work out in my favor, I mused.

Sabrina confronted me as soon as I got off the phone. "What was that all about?"

After I told her, the next question was "You're not going to charge for your magic shows, are you?"

"Sabrina, I have no choice. If I don't, Koko the Clown will take a baseball bat to my knees. My knees are bad enough without a 230 lb. babushka smashing them with a heavy blunt object."

"And what, may I ask, will you do with the \$150?"

That's when the neural connection between my brain and my mouth misfired, as it had so many times before. "I can finally buy that 18 year old Glenmorangie single malt scotch I've been dying to try. And I sure would love to smoke a few Cohibas."

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<sup>2</sup> See Chapter 5 of Volume 2, "The Special Arrangement," where Cashman's crude behavior and impatience with the uptight, religious fundamentalist rubes at the US Embassy in Jakarta, almost got him canned and thrown out of the country.

“Cashman, you know that it is illegal for you to receive outside financial remuneration in your position. If you’re caught, you’ll lose your job. Remember that you have many enemies at the U.S. Embassy who would love to take you down.”

“Sabrina, you heard what Koko said. I have to charge \$150 per show. Plus no one at the Embassy will ever find out.”

Sabrina was losing her patience, which is always a bad sign for me. “OK. You will charge for the shows. But you will give the money to me and I will donate it to a worthy charity.”

Needless to say, I did exactly as Koko and Sabrina suggested. I called up the mother hosting my next show and told her that I would have to charge a \$150 fee. She acquiesced without skipping a beat. I did the same thing for the other shows I had scheduled the following weeks. Once again the hostesses acquiesced to my request without any hesitation. My biggest regret was not asking for \$200.

After concluding each show, I immediately handed the money to Sabrina, who promptly donated it to the Indonesian Society for the Blind, whose members performed massages to earn income. I never saw a penny of the earnings from my magic shows, but I did manage to receive several free massages. Unfortunately, I never purchased any whiskey or cigars; nor did I ever play a single round of golf. After I completed the four shows I had previously booked, Cashman the Magnificent's days of doing birthday parties came to its glorious conclusion.

Several weeks later I received a call from the Deputy Chief of Mission at the Jakarta Embassy. This was the same DCM who was still pissed at me for involving him in a marijuana deal.<sup>3</sup> “Cashman, it has come to our attention that you have been receiving payment for performing magic shows. This is a serious violation of US Embassy personnel policy. You have been referred to me for disciplinary action. There will be a disciplinary hearing in my office on Monday.” I could sense the satisfaction in the snake’s voice. He was finally getting even with me.

What the DCM didn’t know was that Sabrina had preemptively gone to see the Ambassador,<sup>4</sup> who was my only advocate at the Embassy, to explain the dilemma I faced and what was being done with the money. The Ambassador guaranteed Sabrina that, if anyone found out about this matter, he would take care of it. I was banking on that guarantee as I entered the DCM’s office the following Monday for my disciplinary hearing.

The Ambassador was there when I arrived, with the obsequious DCM standing next to him, probably hoping for some exposed buttocks to which he could affix his lips. The group also included three uptight, religious fundamentalist Embassy officials (who also hated me) standing by obediently. The Ambassador spoke first.

“Cashman, when I saw that you would be in the DCM’s office today, I asked him if I could use a few minutes first. Larry Cashman, I am pleased to confer upon you the US Embassy Community Service Medal for extraordinary service to the community. It has come to my attention that you have been doing magic shows in your spare time and donating the money to the Indonesian Society for the Blind. I commend your magnanimity and social conscience.” Then staring directly at the DCM and the other three

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<sup>3</sup> See Chapter 5 Volume 2 “The Special Arrangement” to read about Cashman’s run-in with the DCM while doing a marijuana deal in Indonesia.

<sup>4</sup> Sabrina was good friends with the Ambassador’s wife and had excellent access to the Ambassador when the need arose.

toadies, he said, "I wish other members of my staff displayed similar social empathy; rather than engaging in their usual petty, vindictive efforts to cut others down."

Then the Ambassador turned to the DCM and said, "Thanks for sharing the time. Please proceed with your meeting. Do you mind if I sit in for a while?"

The DCM was seething. I rejoiced in the discomfort on his face when the Ambassador sat down and invited him to commence my disciplinary hearing for actions and behavior for which the Ambassador had just given me the Embassy Community Service Medal.

"In fact, Mr. Ambassador, I had convened this meeting to acknowledge and congratulate Cashman for his generous community service," the DCM lied grudgingly, motioning for me to keep my mouth shut.

I wasn't going to pass up an opportunity like this to twist the knife in the wound. Addressing the DCM with a big shit-eating grin on my face, I said, "On the phone you mentioned something about a disciplinary hearing. What was that all about?"

The DCM was visibly shaken. He turned several shades of red and began sweating as he concocted his next lie. Clearly he wasn't as good at lying as me. "Because of your extraordinary community and social awareness, Cashman, we wanted to invite you to join the committee that conducts disciplinary hearings for Embassy employees who have violated Embassy regulations." The snake nearly choked as he spit out these words.

Then, looking directly at the DCM, I replied in my most gracious manner, "I accept your offer. I would like to start by investigating any Embassy officials who have been buying marijuana in Ancol."<sup>5</sup>

If eyes could shoot daggers, then the DCM was shooting them at me right now. As I left his office, the DCM pulled me aside and said, "You got away with it this time, Cashman, but you can be assured that I will get you next time."

To which I replied, "And you can kiss my bloody fucking white ass."

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<sup>5</sup> This jibe was aimed directly at the DCM, who unknowingly purchased marijuana in Ancol when he unexpectedly disrupted Cashman's marijuana deal. See Vol. 2 Chapter 5 The Special Arrangement.