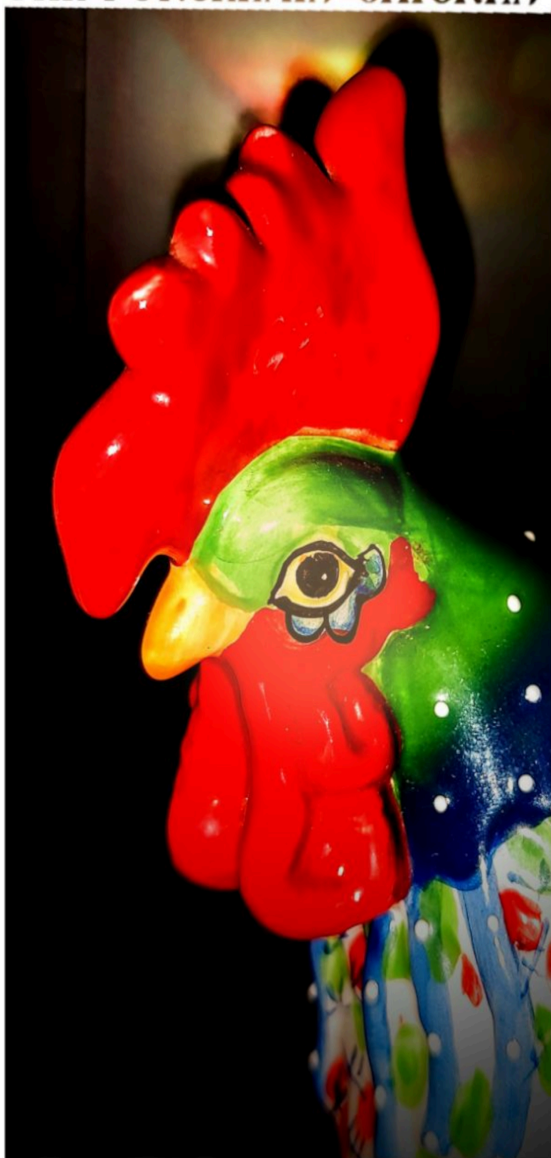


THE PORCELAIN CHICKEN



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EXT. HOUSE. NIGHT

Scenic views as a van drives toward a yet unknown location. He arrives. A man closes the door of his van and steps out. His papers fall everywhere. He adjusts his glasses and stands. He walks up to a door, looks at it skeptically, and knocks.

INT. A SECLUDED HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

We see a brief sequence of objects around a dimly lit room, filled with shelves upon shelves of magical artifacts. We hear the soft humming of a woman, from a source we don't yet see. Dust particles dance in the air, adding to the eerie atmosphere. We hear a repeated knocking at the door, impatient, but not frantic; a hard and official kind of knock. A frail, wrinkled woman, **ADELAIDE**, paces around the room, sipping from a steaming cup of... something.

ADELAIDE speaks to a one eyed stuffed animal surrounded by full cups, the volume of which makes it obvious she has clearly been alone having tea parties with her objects for quite some time.

ADELAIDE

(as if having a conversation with the silence)

Too right. *(pause)* Something's in the air today. No, I suppose it's just the mold.

The sound of another heavy *KNOCK* resonates through the house. Adelaide opens the door to reveal **MR. EVERETT**, a well-groomed man with an air of apprehension.

MR. EVERETT

(looking around)

Ah, I was beginning to think you weren't home. Adelaide, I presume?

ADELAIDE

Yes, that's me.

MR. EVERETT

I'm Mr. Everett. I'm here from the Magical Artifacts Agency.

ADELAIDE

Has something come up?

MR. EVERETT

It's routine. We only need to make sure you don't have any contraband, dark magic, the standard list. Nothing to worry about-- unless you have something to hide.

ADELAIDE

Well, come in then, Mr. Everett. Now, tell me, what do you drink? Chamomile? London fog?

MR. EVERETT

I'm rather in a hurry. I wish to make this as quick as possible.

He pushes past her into the house brusquely.

ADELAIDE smiles mischievously at his back.

TITLE: THE PORCELAIN CHICKEN

We see them looking through various magical artifacts, as the opening credits roll over the items. We hear their voices overlaid. Everett mutters under his breath, only occasionally speaking up to speculate on the prices of various artifacts, or their potential safety/storage hazards, while Adelaide is prattling on and on about various things.

MR. EVERETT peers at the clown doll.

MR. EVERETT

Hm. That could be worth quite a bit.

ADELAIDE

Ah yes, her name is Mother Dearest.

ADELAIDE picks it up uncarefully to press a kiss to it.

EVERETT

Oh, do be careful with it, that's--

ADELAIDE

She'll be alright. Anyway, forgive the mess. it's not often the agency sends someone out this far, especially with the potholes being what they are. It's like Swiss cheese, isn't it? Did your car have trouble?

Cut to a brief picture of all the check lights on at once. The seatbelt unclicked sound plays.

MR. EVERETT

Nothing of note.

ADELAIDE

And did you see anything interesting on the way? The views really can be spectacular.

MR. EVERETT

Yes. You seem to be the only person left out here, I didn't really expect anyone to still be living here.

ADELAIDE

Ever since my father passed, it's just been me, here. And all of them.

She gestures to her stuffed animals, sitting around a tea set. A drop of something hits **MR. EVERETT** on the head and he looks up to see a large crack in the ceiling.

ADELAIDE

(Cheerfully)

This ceiling is always having trouble. Always hanging there, waiting to fall... But we mustn't let it. Sadly the city repairmen don't come out this far, or I would--

MR. EVERETT

Very interesting. So, are your magical items stored correctly? They seem to be in moist conditions.

ADELAIDE

I keep most on the shelf, and they're cleaned very often.

MR. EVERETT runs his fingers over a few of them doubtfully, as they come away absurdly dusty. He makes a mark in his notebook. He glances over the other items on the shelf.

ADELAIDE

What's that you're doing now?

MR. EVERETT

Oh, just a bit of magic.

ADELAIDE

You're a wizard yourself then! So how does it work?

MR. EVERETT

Company secret, it's mostly a lot of math. It's used just to assess the quality and value of the item. *(approving)*
That could sell for a few hundred, and that one too, so long as it isn't haunted...

ADELAIDE

Oh, they aren't for sale.

MR. EVERETT

For your own use, then?

ADELAIDE

No, no. People are surprised when I tell them this, but my own family never had any magic, just the artifacts, many of these were passed down by my father, he was simply fascinated by it. I'm not such a magic person myself. Do you collect anything, Mr. Everett?

MR. EVERETT

(scribbling notes, half listening)

Don't see the point, it all just becomes a liability... If you have all this junk, you could break it, lose it, and have to clean it. It's all so pointless... *(realizing)* Er, that's not to say your collection is... anyway. Do you have the proper certifications for this rabbit's foot?

ADELAIDE

Yes... And you're certain you don't have time for one cup of tea?

MR. EVERETT

Positively. Well, all seems to be in order, I'll just be going.

ADELAIDE

Ah, but there's one more item that you've forgotten! The most precious of my collection, in fact!

She gestures to the porcelain chicken. He approaches cautiously.

MR. EVERETT

(unimpressed)

A decorative chicken?

ADELAIDE

Much more than that.

MR. EVERETT

(he scans his hand over it)

It doesn't seem to have any price.

ADELAIDE

That is because it is priceless. It's not like the others, this is ancient, powerful magic.

MR. EVERETT

Ma'am, do not waste my time. I've got several stops to make after this, and I've had a long day.

She is silent, looking at him with a mischievous half smile.

MR. EVERETT

...But if this is contraband, you are legally required to inform me.

ADELAIDE taps an empty cup at the seat at the table she has set for him.

MR. EVERETT

(sighs)

I suppose I must complete my inventory. Let's have it.
What does it do?

ADELAIDE

Earl gray?

He glances at the cups around the stuffed animal, full of
some unappealing red substance. Reluctantly, he sits.

MR. EVERETT

...Coffee. Black.

ADELAIDE passes him a cup. He takes a sip and
grimaces.

ADELAIDE

(about the chicken)

It really is a darling little thing. I came across this item in
my travels in the mountains. Wonderful place in the
summer. I recall that the sky that day was a shade of--

MR. EVERETT

(cutting her off)

Please. The chicken.

ADELAIDE

Yes, of course. The porcelain chicken grants wishes, but
for a price.

MR. EVERETT

The price is...?

ADELAIDE

You must make the chicken laugh.

Beat.

MR. EVERETT

That's it?

ADELAIDE

Yes. That's all there is to it. Well, now you know, so you can leave!

MR. EVERETT

Right.

He hesitates, half out of his seat. He's curious despite himself.

ADELAIDE

Unless you'd like to see for yourself? You could give it a try.

MR. EVERETT

(awkwardly)

I'm not exactly known for my sense of humor. But... well...

Beat.

MR. EVERETT

...Why did the chicken cross the road?

Beat of silence. He runs a hand over his face.

MR. EVERETT

(trailing off weakly)

To get to the... other... side.

Beat. We cut to each of the stuffed animals at teatime, seeing their deadpan expressions. How awful. Not even the inanimate would think that was funny.

MR. EVERETT

I know that was-- Still, I'd... I'd like to-- I need to see the process, for my records.

ADELAIDE

Some advice. It is finicky about what it finds funny. It tends to like funny stories over simple jokes, I suppose because they're more original. Or maybe they're more true to life. Do you have any stories to tell?

MR. EVERETT

I don't think so.

ADELAIDE

Come on. Everyone has a story.

MR. EVERETT

I really don't do anything too interesting... I could read a section from the employee handbook?

ADELAIDE

Alright, I'll try first, just so you can get an idea. Let's see... here's a classic, from my youth. I was wandering through the forest and became quite lost, wandering in circles for some time, until I came across a sphinx. in typical fashion, it asked me three questions. Being the stupid young thing I was, (*looks at mr. everett*) I was nervous. It asked me the name of a unit of electricity, but I didn't quite catch the question, so I just said, "what?" And to my surprise, it nodded, and moved onto the next question.

While she speaks, we see some imagery of her house, or something visually relevant to what shes saying.

Cut back to **ADELAIDE**, and we hear the sound of a fishing pole reeling. **MR. EVERETT** looks over her shoulder at something.

MR. EVERETT

Are you going to get that?

ADELAIDE

(*glances back*)

Ah! yes.

Cut to a fishing rod positioned over the sink, something tugging at the line from down in the drain. She goes to the sink and starts reeling it.

ADELAIDE

So, Everett, can you refill the sugar with your magic?

MR. EVERETT

I'm really only supposed to use it for company related purposes.

ADELAIDE

(sitting back down)

Alright. Where was I? Oh, the Sphinx. The next question, though, that one really stumped me. What do you get, it asked, when you cross an elephant and a rhino? So I answered honestly. I said, "ell if I know!" And again, it nodded, and went to the next question.

She is interrupted by a high whistling sound. The kettle is boiling.

ADELAIDE

Take this for me, he's fighting.

She passes off the rod to **MR. EVERETT**, and goes to tend the pot on the stove. **MR. EVERETT** rushes to pick up the rod but it snaps.

ADELAIDE

On the third question, this one was a real kicker-- it asked me-- "I am the beginning of everything, the end of everywhere. I'm the beginning of eternity, the end of time & space. What am I?" So, not knowing the answer to such a big question, I decided to stall.

MR. EVERETT

Stall?

ADELAIDE

Sure. I told it I needed time, shaming it for not realizing that a short human lifespan isn't long enough to reason out those kind of questions the way a sphinx could! I told it that if it let me pass and find the answer I would return in a year. If it found my answer lacking, I would of course let it eat me.

MR. EVERETT

Of course.

ADELAIDE

I set off on my journey. I was searching for the wisest person on Earth, a philosopher who might know the answer. He said that the answer was *God*. I told him I wanted a second opinion, so I went to the most foolish person on earth, and he said the answer was *Dog*.

MR. EVERETT

Well, that doesn't seem right.

ADELAIDE

No, I knew it wasn't. Unsure what to do, I went to the most average person on earth, who told me the obvious.

The answer was something I had never considered, never even fathomed... the answer to the beginning of everything, the end of everywhere, beginning of eternity, the end of time & space... was the letter E. I went to where I had met the Sphinx so it would know to let me pass.

MR. EVERETT

Did it?

ADELAIDE

What? Oh. It turned out it wasn't really a Sphinx at all, just a guy in a costume who worked for a nearby

amusement park, and by then he had gotten another job.
So, he wasn't even there!

They glance to the chicken. It does not laugh.

MR. EVERETT

So the whole thing was pointless? All for nothing?

ADELAIDE

No, didn't you listen? It was the beginning of everything
and the end of eternity. Oh Mr. Winkles, where are my
manners! You must be dying for another cup! Everett,
dear, could you please grab the creamer?

MR. EVERETT sighs, and uses his magic to do it.

ADELAIDE claps in delight.

ADELAIDE

You really only use it for company reasons?

MR. EVERETT

That was a one time thing.

She goes over to pour tea for one of the stuffed animals,
adding another full cup in front of it.

ADELAIDE

(pauses)

Well, there's a few other stories I could try, but you might
not find them very interesting, Mr. Everett, they're all
about contraband, dark magic, and you wouldn't want to
hear about all that. After all, I know you're in a hurry to
get back.

MR. EVERETT

I... I think I'm legally required to hear them, now that
you've admitted that. You know you could go to prison
for--

ADELAIDE

If you insist! Now you know the chicken has a bit of a dark sense of humor at times, and so I told it this one. My mother was a circus clown who had died in a frankly hilarious incident with a French horn. She had always loved music, and of course, what you love kills you. My father, he was a collector of magical artifacts. In the months following her death he became a shadow of himself--

MR. EVERETT

Wait, are you not gonna go into the french--

ADELAIDE

I thought he was cruel, locking himself away in his study for days at a time, the lights on at all hours and the rest of the house dark with grief. Finally, after months of this I confronted him, asking what he was doing in there while he left me out here all alone in the empty house, and-- I had thought perhaps he was cleaning some ancient artifact, or studying something, or... But he said he was making an artifact of his own, this time. A way to keep her soul forever. That she would soon be with us again.

MR. EVERETT

(serious)

Necromancy is a felony. It's a monstrosity, it strips away your humanity.

ADELAIDE

Yes, I told him that, and more. I couldn't stand the thought of my mothers memory being desecrated, I was so angry, I wouldn't hear a word from him, I... screamed at him. Broke half his collection, told him I disowned him as my father and would never speak to him again. And I didn't. More coffee?

MR. EVERETT

I'll have tea.

ADELAIDE

Alright. Where was I? I didn't speak to my father again, and one day, a woman came to my door and told me he had died. I had inherited all his possessions. I went through them carefully, after all, for all my anger at him, I knew their value. Among them was one I didn't recognize. It was a music box. I wound it up. And the moment it played its first note, I knew exactly what it was. It was her song. He hadn't trapped her soul in any literal meaning of the word, no, he only held it, the memory, the part of it that sang. It feels like yesterday I spoke with him saying those awful things. It's funny how time flies. Perhaps if I had one wish from the chicken it would be to turn back time and... well. The joke is on me.

They look to the chicken. The chicken does not laugh.

MR. EVERETT

Could we... I'd like to... check the clown for dark magic. For company purposes. Just in case there is a soul or something in there, after all?

She nods and shows him. She winds it up and it plays. She hums along to the song, the same one she was humming at the start. He hums along too, hesitantly and off key, and they are in harmony. It is a long, quiet moment of resonance between them.

ADELAIDE

I get so lonely out here. *(beat)* Are you alone, Mr. Everett?

He does not answer. After a long moment, he changes the subject, pointing at another artifact.

MR. EVERETT

How about this one? It's got a dark energy about it, tell me the story.

ADELAIDE

Ah, my magic shoe. I had made a deal with a fairy and gave up my sole.

MR. EVERETT

(Exasperated)

Soul selling is illeg--

ADELAIDE holds up the shoe, and the bottom is missing.

MR. EVERETT

...Ah. That sole.

ADELAIDE

Verbal contracts are tricky. You can talk all day about magic but it's the little mundane things that get you. Here, let's look at the others. We really only skimmed them earlier.

She surreptitiously turns the clock back, so that when Everett looks at the clock it seems earlier than it is.

MR. EVERETT

Well, I suppose I've got a bit of time...

ADELAIDE

This is my wooden wizard, he can create consciousness
in non-sapient creatures--

MR. EVERETT

Contraband.

ADELAIDE

My aquarium, that you can shrink down and swim in--

MR. EVERETT

Against ordinance 27b of the magical items handbook.

ADELAIDE

My constellation chart, right there is the big dipper--

MR. EVERETT

That's not even the big dipper. *(pause)* What's this one
do?

ADELAIDE

Oh, when you poke it, it moves the actual star in the
actual sky!

MR. EVERETT

Wow, that is... deeply concerning. And illegal.

ADELAIDE

Here's my--

MR. EVERETT

(loudly)

How about we get back to the chicken before I have to arrest you!

ADELAIDE

Oh, alright. I don't suppose you've thought of a story.

MR. EVERETT

No.

ADELAIDE

Let me give it another try then. This ones a bit funny, I think you'll like this one, chicken. I had this garden full of flowers, and little bugs would always come and eat them before I could finish growing them. There was this one particular caterpillar --

MR. EVERETT

You recognized a specific caterpillar?

ADELAIDE

Yes, by the malice in his eyes. I hated him so. Now, he had been terrorizing my garden for months, and on top of my mothers recent death it was all too much, so one day I stepped on him, finally ending it, or so I thought. But he came back the very next day, sitting on a leaf, crunching away, of course.

MR. EVERETT

Of course.

ADELAIDE

I squashed him again, but the next day he was back.
Naturally I knew what had happened, he had become a
ghost, it was obvious.

MR. EVERETT

Of course.

ADELAIDE

And he was haunting me. So I took the nuclear option. I
bought some purified salt-- I hate to do this to my
garden, salinization is no joke when it comes to soil
health-- and I laid it out across the ground. He can't even
set foot here, much less climb to the tops of the flowers,
I thought! But the very next day, I come outside, and
there he is, sat atop the flower once again, eating his fill.

MR. EVERETT

How did he do it?

ADELAIDE

Just to taunt me, he had grown wings and become a
butterfly.

Beat.

ADELAIDE

A thing will grow wings and change before you even see
it happening. Well, chicken, what do you think of that?

The chicken is silent.

ADELAIDE

Ah, that chicken is a fickle one.

She toys with the little butterfly clip artifact in her hand.

They are drinking more tea and Mr. Everett's eye catches on the stuffed animals etc having tea with them. He chuckles lightly.

ADELAIDE

What is it?

MR. EVERETT

...I used to play tea with my dolls as a kid, too. I'd sort of forgotten...

ADELAIDE

Yes? Tell the story, it could be funny.

She gestures to the chicken.

MR. EVERETT

I don't know, I really do need to get going. I've stayed far too long.

ADELAIDE

Didn't you want to see the chicken grant a wish first?

MR. EVERETT

I don't really have a wish, anyway. I just wanted to see it happen.

ADELAIDE

Come, now. Everyone has a wish.

He glances at the clock.

MR. EVERETT

(sounding unconvinced even to himself)

Is that clock correct?

ADELAIDE

Everything can wait, Mr. Everett.

Cut to her placing a bucket under the dripping crack in the ceiling.

MR. EVERETT

I... I need to get back, they'll want to hear about all this... contraband.

ADELAIDE

Before you go, why don't you give it one try yourself, just in case? Give me your best story, now you've heard some of mine.

Beat. His cup is empty. The clock is ticking. The bucket on the floor is full of water. It is time.

MR. EVERETT

Alright.

Beat.

MR. EVERETT

Well... where to begin... As a kid I was obsessed with constellations. You could imagine my surprise when I felt the magic humming through me as I familiarized myself with them, and it was at that moment I dreamed of becoming a wizard. I got to be really serious about it. I studied every night until I was old enough to take the entrance exam to the academies. I got into the best wizarding school, where they taught me geometry and algebra and all. I never had much time to myself outside of studying. When I did try to make friends, they all made fun of me for having a favorite constellation. Is it so weird to have a favorite constellation, As a Wizard?

ADELAIDE

Not at all.

MR. EVERETT

Well anyways, at the end I got this big useless pointy hat and--

ADELAIDE

What is your favorite constellation?

MR. EVERETT

The summer triangle. It's actually an Asterism, a collection of stars in the sky typically belonging to another grander constellation. Not much use in the magical sense, but I liked it. It reminded me of my own self. I wanted to be part of something bigger.

Shot of the stars. Shot of a lit candle among other unlit candles. Shot of a teacup with other teacups. Shot of **ADELAIDE'S** magical items in a little pile together, all her memories.

ADELAIDE

So you went to work at the Agency?

MR. EVERETT

When they offered me the job, how could I say no?
Every wizard dreams of a job there, and only the best
can land it. But... it's one magical emporium to the next,
inventory after inventory, never a moment in between. I
can't even see the night sky most of the time through the
smog in the city. The truth is, I can't remember the last
time I took a moment. Or sang or listened to music, or
even had a cup of tea. It's just not interesting anymore,
any of it.

ADELAIDE

I would think you would see lots of interesting things at
your job.

MR. EVERETT

I see all this powerful magic every day, fire breathers,
powerful magicians who can build and destroy
mountains. I fill out their paperwork, and their magical
items go on the paper as prices and liabilities. But...this
little chicken...this is the most interesting magical artifact
I've seen in a long time.

He touches it with wonder.

ADELAIDE

Well, Mr. Everett, that was some story. It's just... you
know what's really funny?

Beat.

ADELAIDE

This chicken is not magic.

MR. EVERETT

It's...not?

ADELAIDE

Not at all. I bought it at the thrift shop for two ninety nine.

There is a long silence. We see Everett sit there, unsure how to react, multiple emotions flickering across his face.

Realization, hurt, betrayal, contemplation.

And then he giggles.

They make eye contact and they both burst into laughter, the tension from Everett's uptight nature totally dissipating.

The camera pans out to a shot of the chicken figurine on the table, as **ADELAIDE** and **MR. EVERETT'S** laughter can still be heard overlaying it and seeming almost as if it's the chicken itself laughing, and their wishes are sort of granted after all.

END.

