

The Genie

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Genies still exist.

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My cell phone rang. "This is Genie, where are you?" "Yeah" I thought. "Some joker is pulling my leg." I had put an add in the paper, "Genie wanted" and listed my phone and this was a response. Nonetheless, going along with the joke, I said, "I'm at Starbucks." "Which one?" I gave him the address. "Be there in a couple of minutes."

To my amazement, a couple of minutes later a casually dressed guy sits down at my table with a cup of coffee. "I thought I'd better come as a human being. People would think you were nuts if they saw you talking to a wisp of smoke."

"Good idea."

"What did you want to see me about?"

"Mainly, I just wanted to see if you guys really existed outside of 'The Arabian Nights'."

"Oh yes, we exist, have for centuries. You should know, though, that according to genie rules, I can't grant you any wishes unless you find my bottle and let me out."

"Fair enough, I wasn't looking for wishes, but tell me something: how come you're here and not in your bottle?"

"That's easy to explain. There's nothing more boring than being cooped up in a bottle for years on end waiting for somebody to find your bottle and let you out. A lot of us stay out in the world until we see somebody get close to our bottle, then we get back in the bottle and wait for the stopper to be pulled. Meanwhile, we enjoy ourselves. Come with me."

The genie let me in to the high-rise apartment with a nice view of the seaside park. "Come in and make yourself at home."

"I thought you guys lived in bottles on beaches."

"As you can see, this is much nicer than a bottle and there are scads of nice apartments just waiting to be taken by a genie. Well, maybe, strictly speaking, not just waiting. The folks who own this apartment are on a six month world cruise that the wife won, if you get my drift, after telling her husband, 'I wish we could go on a cruise.' It really wasn't an official wish, because they hadn't let me out of a bottle. But she was a nice lady and they had a nice apartment so I bent the rules a little. Before they get back some couple in Paris or Rome or Madrid will get lucky. You just never know. Besides, the last time I was in a bottle sort of turned me off bottles. Let me tell you about it and you'll see why."

I was resting in a really nice antique glass bottle, worth a lot of money when all of a sudden it just shattered. When I gathered myself up, standing there proud as punch was this idiot with his brand new rifle and his moronic Labrador retriever, tail wagging ecstatically and tongue lolling out ready to administer a revolting slobber bath to the next unfortunate human being it saw. I was severely ticked but I composed myself.

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â OK,â I said, â you have three wishes.â

â What do you mean?â

â Listen, Einstein, Iâ m a genie, you just broke the valuable antique bottle I was in, thus setting me free. According to the genie rules I have to grant you three wishes. What are they?â

â Yeah, right. My wife reads stories to our kid about genies getting out of bottles and granting wishes but I donâ t believe any of that garbage. If youâ re a real genie, prove it.â

â OK. Here goes.â With that I turned the Labrador into a chicken.

â That was just some kind of trick. It donâ t prove nothin. That dog has always been so scared of his ownself that he might as well be a chicken.â

â With that I had the chicken fly up to his head and leave a present on his bald spot. When he felt with his hand and found what the chicken had done he got so mad that he grabbed it and wrung its neck. According to genie rules, that automatically changed the chicken back to a dog.

When he saw his dog lying on the ground with its neck twisted funny and dead as a hammer he went nearly berserk and started shooting at my smoke and hollering, â You killed my dog.â

Well, I hadnâ t, of course, but there was nothing I could do about it. We canâ t revive the dead. As he sat on the ground holding his dead dogâ s head in his lap and blubbering, I said, â Youâ ve still got three wishes, you know.â

â I wish youâ d go away and leave me alone.â

That was a legitimate wish, so I did. But Iâ d wasted a perfectly good bottle and decided that in the future Iâ d check out the wishers before I let one find me.â

He was looking intently out the window. â I think I see a wisher now. Youâ ll let yourself out, wonâ t youâ He was gone.

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