

You Wish
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Characters:

Genie

Man/Woman

Random person

Set:

Park bench, possibly some shrubbery for dressing.

Props:

Bag with cereal bar inside.

Phone

There is an empty park bench CS. Possibly there is birdsong gently being piped in as SFX.

A MAN enters SR and walks to the bench. He is flustered and displaying all the signs of 21st century living.

He looks at the bench and sees a mark that bothers him but he is tired and wants to sit down, so he tuts and gives the bench a rub with his sleeved hand.

He sits and sighs.

A second later, the GENIE arrives SL and walks confidently to the bench. He sits next to the MAN at a comfortable distance.

The two nod their acknowledgement but neither speaks. The GENIE looks at the MAN and holds a smile.

GENIE

(Cheerfully)
Hello.

MAN

(Awkwardly)
Hi.

The GENIE continues to look and smile.

MAN

(Clearly uncomfortable)
I'm sorry, can I help you?

GENIE

Oh no, it is I who can help you.

MAN

I'm sorry?

GENIE

I am the genie of this bench.

MAN

(Awkward and uncomfortable)
You the...? I'm sorry, what?

GENIE

Genie. Of this bench. You rubbed it
and summoned me.

MAN

(Gathering his things)
Right, sorry, I, er, is this where
you, urm, live?

GENIE

(Laughs)
No!
(Beat)
Well, yes. Sort of. It's
complicated.

MAN

(Not amused)
Right, well, I think I'll be off
anyway so...

GENIE

(Interrupting)
You can't go! I owe you three
wishes.

MAN

(Confused) You owe me... (Thinking
better of it) Honestly, it's fine.
I'm late, I'll...

GENIE

If I don't grant you three wishes, I'll be stuck here. I won't be able to go home.

MAN

No, honestly, thanks and all but I... why don't you have them?

GENIE

Me? Grant my own wishes?

MAN

Yeah. Go nuts.

GENIE

That's disgusting.

MAN

It's what?

GENIE

That kind of self-gratification. I'd be a laughing stock. No. You have to let me grant you three wishes.

MAN

Seriously mate, I'm good. There's nothing I need.
(Checks his watch / phone)

GENIE

You sure? Nothing whatever?

MAN

Nothing. Except some food. My lunch hour's nearly up and I haven't eaten anything.

GENIE

You want food?

MAN

Yes.

GENIE

You've got to wish for it.

MAN

(Incredulous)
What?

GENIE

You have to say: 'I wish for food.'

MAN

(Repeating in disbelief)
I wish for food?

GENIE

(Clapping his hands)
Done!

MAN

What?

GENIE

Check your bag.

MAN

Check my...

GENIE

Your bag. There is food in there.

The MAN checks his BAG. Sure enough, there is a weeks-old cereal bar at the bottom.

MAN

(Removing cereal bar)
This?

GENIE

(Smiling triumphantly)
You're welcome!

MAN

You didn't do this. I did this. I must have forgotten it was in there.

GENIE

You wished for food.
(Gestures to cereal bar)
Food.

MAN

(Chortles mockingly)
This is hardly food. It's full of...
(He checks the ingredients list)
Oh. It's organic. No added sugar...
very little... and there's...
(Looks up at the GENIE)
Huh. You know, these things aren't actually that bad.
(He opens it and takes a bite then sits back down on the bench)

The GENIE is still smiling.

GENIE

So, what next?

The MAN is eating his cereal bar but has visibly relaxed.

MAN

Ha! Okay, okay. If you really are a genie, then I have two more wishes, don't I?

GENIE

(Delighted)
Now you're getting it!

MAN

Okay.
(Considers for a while)
Okay, I wish to be rich.

The GENIE smiles widely.

GENIE

(with quiet reverence)
Granted.

MAN

(Looks around)
Is that it?

GENIE

That's it.

The MAN checks his wallet. No change there. Then he checks his phone.

MAN

(Showing phone to GENIE)
Ha! There, you see?

GENIE

What am I looking at?

MAN

That's my bank account. It, like my wallet, is empty. No money. No granted wish.

(Tuts in a friendly way)

Genie!

GENIE

Can I see that phone for a moment?

The MAN considers this for a moment then shrugs and hands the phone over.

The GENIE taps on the screen a few times and hands the phone back to the MAN.

MAN

What am I looking at?

GENIE

Your contacts list.

MAN

And?

GENIE

You still have both of your parents. And three grandparents. You have fifteen people listed under nicknames; seven of them have an affectionate emoji next to their name.

MAN

So?

GENIE

So? Wish granted.

MAN

What? I asked for money!

GENIE

No, you asked to be rich.

MAN

(Realising)

Well, yeah, but, I mean. I mean,
it's not money is it? I'm not rich
rich. I'm not... I'm...

GENIE

The greatest treasure in the world
is meaningless without people to
share it with.

(Taps phone screen)

Look at all the people on that
list. Read their messages.
Appreciate how much time they give
you; how much they must love you.
You are rich.

MAN

(Taking his phone back)

That's a cop out, isn't it? Anyone
knows that rich means...

He is interrupted by his message alert pinging.
Automatically, he opens his message.

GENIE

(Reading over the MAN's shoulder)

Thinking of you, Suze. Green heart
emoji and three kisses.

(He nods at the man)

Rich.

The GENIE sighs and the MAN surreptitiously taps a reply to the message. Then another. Then makes a phone call.

MAN

(To GENIE, half whispered)
Just checking in on granny. It's
been a while.

GENIE mines *okay, I'll just wait here* while looking smug but it a friendly, non-judgemental way.

MAN

(Locking phone and putting it back
in his pocket)
(To GENIE)
Voice mail. She must have met up
with that chap from the market.
Good for her.

GENIE

(Checking watch)
Well, you'd better get a move on;
your lunch break's nearly over and
you still have one wish left.

MAN

Urgh! Lunch break. More like lunch
hairline-fracture; it's miniscule.

GENIE

How long do you get?

MAN

Forty-five minutes.

GENIE

(Incredulous) Forty-five minutes?!
That's criminal.

MAN

I know.

GENIE

Actually, criminals get longer.

MAN

I know.

GENIE

It's obscene.

MAN

(Getting annoyed)

I know.

GENIE

I mean, I thought my lunch break was short but...

MAN

Genies get lunch breaks?

GENIE

Well, not exactly. But we get breaks between masters and it's a good time to get a snack in.

MAN

How long was your last break?

GENIE

(With a chuckle) Not long enough!

MAN

No, really, how long?

GENIE

You don't want to know.

MAN

I told you mine.

GENIE

Okay, okay. My last break was
(thinks, maybe counts on his
hands)... thirty-eight years.

MAN

What!?

GENIE

Yup.

MAN

For a lunch break?

GENIE

Not just lunch. I have to do
everything in that time.

MAN

And you're complaining about this?

GENIE

About thirty-eight...

MAN

(Interrupting)
Yes!

GENIE

(Realising) Ohhh... you think that's
a long time?

The MAN offers a 'duh' gesture.

GENIE

Interesting.

MAN

(Inspired)

Oh my last wish. I know what I want it to be.

GENIE

(Suddenly snapping out of it)
Wonderful! What is it?

MAN

Well, you've got me thinking about how much time I spend at work.

GENIE

I told you, I can't get you more time.

MAN

That's not what I want.

GENIE

Okay...?

MAN

Well, I was also thinking about how much time my boss doesn't spend at work. I mean, this morning he was on the golf course 'networking' he called it.

GENIE

So you want to be your boss?

MAN

No, no, no. I mean, he has the power to fire me if I don't jump to his every whim. So I end up working so that he can carry on playing golf.

GENIE

I'm lost. Do you want to play golf?

MAN

No. I want power.

GENIE

Power?

MAN

I want power over my boss. I want power over my colleagues. I want...

GENIE

Power, yes.

(He thinks for a while, weighing up pros and cons)

Okay. Fine. Make your wish.

MAN

Genie, I wish to have power over other people.

GENIE

Done.

There is a silent pause - even the birdsong pauses for a while.

MAN

(Looking around; looking at his hands, expecting, perhaps, sparkles of electricity)
Well?

GENIE

Well what?

MAN

Do I have power?

GENIE

I mean, if you have to ask...

MAN

(Annoyed) Genie

GENIE

(Chuckling) Relax, relax. Yes, you have power. Power over other people.

A random person walks past the bench and the MAN stares at them. They do nothing but walk past.

The GENIE watches the MAN, confused.

GENIE

What are you doing?

MAN

Trying to exert my power.

GENIE

Oh. (Beat) What are you doing?

MAN

I'm trying to make that person trip.

GENIE

Oh. (Beat) Why?

MAN

To exert my power.

GENIE

Oh. (Beat) What?

MAN

You gave me power over other people.

GENIE

(Realising) Ah.

MAN

So I'm trying that out. (Stares again). Nothing. (He chuckles) Why did I think it would work?

He looks at the GENIE

MAN

The cereal bar, the text messages. You're not a genie! Why did I even let myself believe?

GENIE

(Calmly) I am a genie. You wished for food; you got food. You wished to be rich; you are rich. Now, you've asked for power over other people - your boss in particular.

MAN

(Looks blankly at the GENIE)

GENIE

You got it.

MAN

(Gesturing to the now-gone random person as if to say 'well obviously I bloody don't, do I?')

GENIE

You didn't ask for superpowers. You asked for power over other people. You have that power.

MAN

I don't have...

He is interrupted by his phone ringing.

MAN

(Checking)

Oh great.

(Shows the GENIE the phone screen)

It's my boss. Probably phone to ask why I'm not back at the office, or to ask if I can complete another fifty projects by the end of the week.

GENIE

Say no.

MAN

What?!

GENIE

Say no. Tell your boss that you have all the work you can reasonably be expected to do. Tell him that, if he wants to give you extra work that is urgent, then he needs to take some of your current projects off your hands.

MAN

(Trying to interrupt)
I...

GENIE

(Holding up a finger)
Tell him.

MAN

(Answering the phone)
Nick! Hi, yeah I... Uh-huh. Yeah, the thing with that is... uh-huh. And that'd be due by? Uh-huh, Thursday. And that's... this Thursday, yep. Well...

The GENIE, slowly but deliberately, moves himself directly in front of the MAN and mouths the words: TELL HIM NO.

The MAN swats him away and continues the phone call, getting more and more uncomfortable and beginning to show the same signs of stress that he exhibited at the beginning of the play.

GENIE

(Audibly this time)
Tell. Him. No.

The MAN ignores the GENIE.

GENIE

Tell him.

MAN

(To GENIE, covering up phone mic)
Shush, this is my boss.

GENIE

Can you realistically do the work?

The MAN give a *what-do-you-think* stare.

GENIE

Tell him no.

The MAN continues his stressful conversation until the GENIE puts his hand on the MAN's shoulder. At this, the MAN suddenly stops talking with his boss and takes a breath.

MAN

Actually, Nick. If I'm honest, I can't really take on more projects at the moment. I need to get the Gwyneth work done by Friday and I've got meetings lined up with Joe and Sarah to follow up on the Barbara Eden thing. So I really don't have the bandwidth to give to this new project at the moment.

There is a pause at the end of which, the MAN smiles in surprise.

MAN

Yeah, yes, I think that sounds fair. Great stuff. I'll be back in soon. Thanks a lot, Nick. Bye.

GENIE

Well?

MAN

He listened. I said no and he listened.

GENIE

(Relaxing)
Imagine that.

MAN

He even thanked me for being up-front about how much time my existing projects were taking.

GENIE

You said no.

MAN

I said no.

There is a moment of reflective silence as the MAN takes stock of the whole conversation.

MAN

Well, time's getting on and...

GENIE

You have to go.

MAN

Yeah. It's been lovely chatting with you.

GENIE

You too.

The MAN goes to leave, then pivots Columbo-style.

MAN

Sorry, sorry. I just have to know.
Seriously, what's your name?

GENIE

(Holding up his hands)
You got me.

They both giggle.

GENIE

It's Gene.

MAN

Gene? That's not a name you hear
very often.

GENIE

It makes more sense when you hear
my last name.

MAN

And that is?

GENIE (with a smile) and **MAN** (with
a sigh)

Ie-of-the-Lamp.

MAN

Very funny.

GENIE

I liked it.

MAN

Well, Gene, thanks for listening.

GENIE

You feel powerful?

MAN

(Contemplating)
Yeah.

GENIE

Rich?

MAN

(Looking at his phone)
Yeah

GENIE

And less hungry?

MAN

(Chuckles)
Yeah.

GENIE

Then, mission accomplished. Ma'a
salama.

MAN

Yeah, see ya.

The man walks OFF STAGE and the GENIE remains on his bench,
arms spread, smiling and chuckling to himself.