



Genie

“

- Step 1. Close door: Carefully.*
- Step 2. Put down keys*
- Step 3. Walk over to kettle*
- Step 4. Switch kettle on and start whistling
(preferably a nice piece of Gershwin,
although Beethoven also seems to go
down well).*
- Step 5. Approach urn.*
- Step 6. Caress, lightly.*

“Hello Genie.”

”

Genie

He'll be back again soon. He's very regular, and I like that.

At first, he tried to catch me out - sneaking up in the middle of the night, or taking me out in the open - The Open (can you believe), But he soon realised that there was no way I was going to let him get away with that.

Well, by 'soon', I mean eventually - Because of course I couldn't say outright why all his wishes kept on going a little bit... well... wrong.

Anyway: Nowadays he just keeps nice and regular: he sticks to the same routine; my nerves rest easy; and he gets his wishes pretty much as he thinks he's going to get them.

* * *

David

My eyes go immediately to the strange little urn, as soon as I walk in through the door. I resist the urge to run over and shake the blessed thing. No: Shaking does not work. Slowly, carefully, monotonously, that works.

Step 1. Close door: Carefully.

Step 2. Put down keys

Step 3. Walk over to kettle

Step 4. Switch kettle on and start whistling (preferably a nice piece of Gershwin, although Beethoven also seems to go down well).

Step 5. Approach urn.

Step 6. Caress, lightly.

"Hello Genie."

"Good evening, David," her voice is wistful: Wistful, not lonely, not craving excitement, not desirous of escape.

"They had my favourite sandwiches in the canteen today."

"Did they? Did you enjoy them?"

"Yes, thank you." I keep my voice calm, appreciative. "I brought some back, if you'd like to try some. They'll be a bit old, by now, though."

"Thank you," she sounds uneasy, as she always does when I mention things from 'Outside'. "Perhaps next time."

"Next time, yes," It's always next time.

"Would you like your favourites tomorrow, too?"

"That would be nice, thank you." Nice. Everything is nice, now that Genie is around. "Genie..."

"Yes, David?"

"You do have to do anything I ask, don't you?"

"Yes, David. But..."

"Yes, I know: I'll be careful," I smile, carefully. "Don't worry."

I wander back over to the kettle, whistling Rhapsody in Blue as I pour water into the cup that has miraculously appeared while my back was turned. Earl Grey, says the paper tag: My favourite.

I smile faintly as I squeeze the bag against the side of the cup, dropping it, still steaming, into the garbage bin beneath the sink - The miraculous, never full garbage bin. I have reason to believe the family next door has a satanic, ever full garbage bin, forever loaded with rubbish they've never brought home.

Things don't just suddenly appear and disappear into thin air, Genie has explained, but they can be moved. Everything can be moved: Everything but Genie.

Genie hates being moved. She hates loud noises, hates surprises, hates temper tantrums and most certainly hates anything at all that ruins her routine.

I wonder what she does all day: Tidies, probably. Not that there can be much to tidy in there, except her own reflection. I like to imagine her polishing away at her own, mirrored face. What am I saying? The thought has turned me to drink before now. I hate to imagine her polishing away at her own, mirrored face, with nothing else to do.

But this is where it gets interesting, because I can imagine her doing that polishing, right down to every

slightest detail, including what she looks like. Which is interesting because, as far as I can remember, I've never once seen Genie. Not once. But somehow, about four months ago, I suddenly knew quite clearly what Genie looked like.

And I've puzzled over it every waking moment since then: Since that morning when I first had a face to put to her beautiful, wistful voice. And I've dreamt about that face every single night; and found my gut clenching unexpectedly as a memory of it flitters before my eyes, just when I think I've managed to forget about her for a few moments.

"Do you have to tell me the truth, Genie?" I am still standing by the kettle when I ask, and I speak the question too loudly.

"I cannot tell you a lie, David."

Which is not the same thing at all, but from the sound of her voice, she isn't going to expand upon the matter.

I sip at the tea, which has gone cold, already – as is to be expected. At least it doesn't have salt in it, this time. I put the cup down carefully, and walk slowly over to the urn once more.

"Genie?" I almost whisper her name, my voice catching as I try to be careful.

"Yes, David?"

"I would like some help preparing supper."

"What would you like?"

"I'm not sure... What do you think I should make?"

"You're going to make supper?"

"Well... I don't like to make too many demands..."

"David," she chides me. "Your wish is my command. Just tell me what you would like."

"I'd like a romantic meal," I start, unable to stop a slight smile as I hear her slight intake of breath. "I'm hoping to have company, you see."

"I see. Female company?"

"Yes, female, and I don't know where to begin – I'm not very good at this kind of thing – Could you make some suggestions?"

"You want me to make some romantic suggestions?"

"Would you? I was thinking maybe spaghetti..."

"You want to both have sauce on your best clothes?" She hesitates. "I mean, wouldn't you rather have something light, for a first meal at home?"

"Light, yes, that's a good idea... What about candles? Do you think I should have candles?"

"Should you have candles? Of course you should have candles!"

"What about flowers? And what about the table, should I use a cloth, or –"

"David?"

"Yes, Genie?"

"I think your tea is hot again, would you like to go and drink it, while I prepare your dining room for the love of your life?" Her voice sounds... peculiar.

"Thank you, Genie."

"Your wish is my command, David."

Ouch.

* * *

Genie

My heart is breaking, but I'm not going to let him see it.

First he goes and shouts – shouts! Across the room at me – not even asking me anything new, just that same old 'truth' question he always asks, and then – then! He announces that he's going to have 'company' around for supper.

And I didn't know! Why has he never mentioned this 'company' to me before? Why hasn't he asked my help to win her? Why hasn't he asked me to make sure she is single, and not deranged, or diseased, or sworn to celibacy? Why hasn't he asked me to make him? ... Oh! He has! 'Genie, do you think I'm attractive?' He has asked that...

Well.

Fine.

If he wants to win over the love of his life, then I'll do everything I can to help.

...Besides, I can't wait to see who she is... I wonder if she's nice? I hope she's nice... I wouldn't want David to fall for someone horrible... She'd change him, I know...

Get him to ask for stupid things... and then of course, I'd have to leave.

He doesn't know I can leave.

He thinks I'm bound to him, or something.

Which I suppose I am, kind of.

But I can tell you now; I won't be hanging around if some kind of she-witch turns up at his door. No way, not me. I would be out-of-here!

Anyway, back to the task at hand: Romance.

Now, let me see.

Flowers.... No, wait a minute. This whole room's wrong. What we need is a veranda... a clear sky... less traffic noise... Some night-flowering stock in the window baskets... and passion flowers on a trellis... some champagne in a cooler... some crystal glasses... Okay... and inside... inside we have. Hmmm... None of this lot! Some nice lighting, some comfortable chairs, some attractive artwork and a nice collection of books... no, wait: I'd better make those some of his real books, or she'll get quite the wrong idea. And... some music...

And food... Oh sandstorm! How am I supposed to know what she'd like?

It doesn't matter. I'll just put it in the oven, for him to bring out, once she's arrived.

I hope she's nice, I really hope she's nice.

"Genie?"

Goodness, I should have made that tea hotter.

"Yes, David?"

"I'm worried, Genie."

Worried? His voice is so lovely. If I were his date, I wouldn't need any of this stuff to make me fall for him. Just his voice would do.

"What about?"

"I... Well, the thing is, it's been so long since I had anyone around for supper... You know... I haven't since... Since..."

"Since you found me?"

"Yes, since then."

He's so funny, when he's talking to me. He never knows quite where to look. Sometimes he just stares straight at the urn, as though there is a little tiny version of me, just sitting inside, looking back.

"Would you like me to soothe your shoulders?" It's the least I can do. Poor man, he really is very tense, now that I notice it.

"No!"

Oh.

"I mean, no, I don't think that would help, but thank you."

"It's all right." By which I mean, of course, that I will forgive him for shouting, because he's so tense. So tense, in fact, that he's pacing up and down in front of my urn, which he never does.

"Genie, I think it would help if I could practise things to say."

"Good idea."

"With you, I mean."

"You want to practise what to say, with me?"

Goodness. What on earth will the poor woman think, when he tells her?

What am I thinking? Of course he won't tell her.

"Yes, please."

This is very unusual. I've never heard of a genie role-playing before. But then, I haven't been socialising a great deal, lately.

"Okay..."

"You'll do it?"

"I think so?"

"Yes or no, Genie?"

"Yes?" My, he is nervous.

"Come out, then."

"What?"

"Come out! I can hardly practise talking to thin air, can I?"

He winces as his cup turns ice cold. I love that trick, it's very satisfying.

"I'm sorry, I don't think I understood your request."

There, that should be stern enough.

"Genie, please, I'm begging you, please come out and help me."

His voice – Oh, his voice! He sounds so soft, and caring and... well, desperate, if I'm honest.

I can't help it: I relent.

"Fine."

There is a moment's silence.

"Genie?"

"Yes, David?"

"I can't see, Genie."

"I know, David."

"Are you there?"

"Yes"

Another moment's silence: I watch him carefully. He isn't moving. He is, in truth, being very calm, considering that I've just struck him blind.

"And how is this better than you being thin air?" His voice is still calm, still trusting, still...

This moment of silence is different. Because, in this moment of silence, I am suddenly struck by madness.

I move forward, then I stop just short of him, and I hold my breath so that I can feel the warmth of the air as it passes from his lungs onto my skin – my skin! – And then I lean forward, and I kiss him.

And I say: "That is how it is better."

And he says: "I see."

And there is another moment's silence.

* * *

David

She kissed me.

She didn't need any encouragement, I didn't need to use any of the excuses I'd spent months planning; she just struck me blind and kissed me.

I have to admit, the blindness thing is a set back, but I'm sure it's only temporary.

I reach for her, but she's backed off again.

Strangest thing: I know she's there - I can feel her.

"Genie?" I struggle to keep my voice calm, knowing that anything I say now is going to be really, really important.

"David?" Her voice is faint. I almost laugh out loud – she sounds, well – embarrassed.

"You're right, Genie: It is better."

She hesitates before replying, "thank you."

I am in a quandary now. What I really want to say is: It would be even better if I could see. But I know that if I

push her too hard, she'll just disappear into that urn, and I'll have to fabricate some reason why my date doesn't show.

* * *

Genie

I am so embarrassed! I have never done such a thing before in my life! I mean, I just went straight up and kissed him – what if he'd pushed me away? What if he'd been disgusted?

What does he think?

His breathing is shallow, as though he is concentrating, and I realise he is using every sense he has to try to work out where I am.

Could he be scared?

"David," I hesitate, not sure what to say. "It's only temporary, you know: I've not struck you blind forever."

"Oh," he says, his voice catching. "I wouldn't mind."

"You wouldn't mind?" I confess this throws me.

"Not so long as you keep demonstrating why it is better," his voice is so smooth, so calm, so reassuring that I almost don't catch his words.

Then I really hear what he said, and I'm very glad he can't see, because I must be bright pink.

"Oh," I whisper, unable to think of another response.

"Show me again?" He asks, a faint smile on his lips.

What can I do? His wish is my every command.

I kiss him again.

And he moves so slowly, I'm not scared at all as he reaches up and cups my face. And I'm not scared when he begins to kiss me deeper, his tongue warm and gentle as he tastes me. And I'm not scared at all when his hand moves down my throat, then circling the back of my head and pulling me in closer.

Then he steps forward, pressing against me.

And then I am scared, because then I realise how close he is.

I tense, I feel him hesitate, and I know that he knows that I'm scared.

"Genie?" He pulls his lips away from mine to speak, and his voice is broken and husky when he does.

"David."

I wish he would let me go. I wish I hadn't done this.
But a genie can't make her own wishes come true.
"It's all right, Genie."

His voice is back to normal: Calm, reassuring, comforting. My David, my calm, regular, monotonous David.

I remember, absently, to breathe, and pull in a deep breath. It would be very easy to just disappear into my urn, but I have to admit that I started this, and so I must end it properly, and that involves breathing.

"You don't need any more practise, David." I keep my voice calm, hoping he can't hear the tremble I know is in there.

He lets out a half-laugh. I'm still pressed against him, and I can feel as the laugh starts out in his belly and echoes out into the room.

I can't help it, I press closer, wanting to feel it again.

He draws a breath.

I freeze.

"Genie?"

"Yes, David."

"Yes?"

"Yes."

He kisses me again. I kiss him back, and this time it's my tongue doing the exploring, my hands tracing the surface of his skin, my body that presses close against him, my breath that is coming in fits and starts.

"Genie," he shudders as I run a hand under his shirt, feeling my way through the soft hairs of his chest. "There isn't a date, Genie."

"I know," I whisper. I know now, I should have said, if I were honest. But a genie can never give out the whole truth, and besides, he doesn't seem to care that much either way... Oh my...

* * *

David

I know, she said.

Oh my god. She knows.

"Genie," I breathe in as I speak, the scent of cinnamon following in the air as it passes her by, "Genie."

I can't think of anything else to say. She is so warm, so soft, so perfect... so... floating....

She's floating.

I can't help it, I freeze.

"David?" Her voice sounds surprised and a little hurt. She tugs away from me, just slightly.

I swallow, and decide honesty is the best policy.

"You're floating, Genie."

"Yes."

Her voice says: Yes, you idiot. I'm a genie and I float, what did you expect?

I swallow.

"You're wonderful," I murmur. It's true, and I can't think of anything else to say.

The next thing I know, I'm staring at the wall, while Genie's urn rattles like a minor whirlwind's ended up inside it.

It's good to see again, but things could be better.

"Genie?"

The urn rattles louder.

I sigh. The last time she did the rattling thing, I'd just got off telling the telephone company exactly what I thought about being billed for premium rate calls made before I even moved in. You could say I spoke clearly while demonstrating a superior understanding of colloquialisms in the workplace. Or you could say I swore a lot, and loudly. In any case, she didn't stop rattling for a week.

I wander over to the kettle.

Then I realise I have no idea where the teabags live anymore. Or even if I have any. So I wander back to the lounge and sit watching her rattle for a bit.

* * *

Genie

He hates me! He's repulsed and he hates me!

What does he think I am, some kind of magical woman? Does he think one moment I'm a puff of smoke and then next I have two feet, two arms, a job and the strange desire to start a family?

What kind of fantasy world is he living in?

And can you believe this place gets so dirty so quickly? I wasn't even gone for more than a few moments! You know, you just don't appreciate dry heat until you live somewhere so humid things tarnish.

"Genie?" He sounds apologetic.

Good.

I ignore him, and polish harder.

I can, of course, see him as he walks through to the kitchen. I quickly move all the teabags next door, and gain some slight satisfaction as I hear him opening all the cupboard doors in turn.

He gives up, and walks back through, and sits down.

And then he just watches me - Or rather, the urn.

It's very distracting:

I polish harder.

* * *

David

The rattle becomes strangely soothing, after a while. In fact, I have the strangest feeling she may be dancing, not polishing, hurricaning, or whatever, after all. Not exactly a slow dance, mind... But definitely rhythmic, in a kind of off-beat, random kind of way... A bit like rain on leaves... but faster, much faster...

I settle back on the sofa, watching as the evening sun glints off the urn.

Beautiful.

I must fall asleep, because the next thing I know, I'm lying on my back with my eyes closed, and I'm suddenly aware that she's here.

I concentrate on breathing.

"David, are you asleep?" Her voice is a whisper, scarcely even that.

"Mmmm" I risk replying, twisting slightly as though I might awake at any second.

She hesitates. I know she hesitates, because I can feel the air go still around her, and I can smell the cinnamon that says she hasn't gone yet.

I draw in a deep breath, and let it out in a kind of snore, and then wish to hell I hadn't, because she giggles and it's all I can do not to smile.

"Oh David, you're such a slob." There's a faint hiss of fabric as she moves a little closer, and the smell of cinnamon grows a little stronger, and stronger, and then all of a sudden...

My shoulders don't ache any more.

I hadn't realised that they'd been aching, if I'm honest, but now... Well, now I feel as though I could do somersaults on Brighton Rock and still feel relaxed.

Did I forget to mention? She's lying here with me.

Lying

Here

With

Me

On the sofa.

Only just, mind, just barely touching; her bottom just snuggled up into me, her back just touching my chest, the silk of her hair just tickling as it falls down over my hand, her toes just tucked up and under my shins.

Only just.

I resist the urge to reach out my hand to stroke her hip.

I resist the urge to breath deep from her hair.

I resist the urge to pull her close against me.

But I'm damned if I'm going to resist the urge to open my eyes.

* * *

Genie

He feels so warm. He smells so real. He fits so.... well.

It's only for a little while.

It's only while he's sleeping.

It's not like we're going to get any closer, not like before.

And besides, there's only so much polishing a girl can do.

"Mmm" he mumbles, in his kind of half snore he seems to be working on, tonight. It's probably the angle of the sofa. It doesn't do to sleep with your head at a funny angle. Or so I've been told.

"Mmmmm - " and then he snorts.

Silly man.

Snort. Again.

Again? I carefully ease my toes out from under his legs, suddenly wondering if he is, in fact, asleep. Not even David would keep this still, would he?

I lift myself away from him, and I think I've done it, too: Until I feel that tug on my hair.

He's holding on.

He's holding on to me.

"David?" I whisper, dreading any kind of answer he could give.

"Genie?" His voice is quiet, but he's definitely awake.

Definitely awake: What am I supposed to do now?

"Let go of me, David."

He draws in a deep, shaky breath before he answers: "No."

"Please, David."

"I don't think I can, Genie."

My heart starts pounding, then. Does it happen to other things too, then? Could it be his hand –

"Your hand –" I manage to choke out. "Does it hurt?"

And then he laughs, damn him – laughs!

"There's nothing wrong with my hand, Genie."

I bite my tongue. If I say anything – even a single word – It will either be to blast him to hell and back, or to break down in tears because his hand is okay.

"Genie?" Now he sounds worried. Worried! As if he knows what to be worried about.

"Close your eyes and let go of my hair, David."

"Turn around, first"

"I can't"

"Yes, you can."

"No, I can't"

Stalemate.

At least, I think it's stalemate. It might be checkmate; I've never really grasped the difference, and right now I can't really think about it, because David is singing at me.

Yes: singing.

I can't believe he's singing! I hate it when people sing, let alone sing at me, with their hearts full of feeling and their voices... oh my, their voices...

His voice dips dangerously low, and I start to panic. I must get him to let go of my hair. I'm not sure if I can take

this any longer: At least, not if I'm going to stay in control of the situation.

"Oh yeah, she loosens my ba-ack"

Were those the original lyrics? I'm sure those no song ever had that in the lyrics. Is he trying to be clever? Oh gods, his voice is so beautiful...

Right. That does it.

I tug hard on my hair, wincing as I feel a great chunk of it trying very hard to leave my head in order to stay in his hand, and I move as quickly as I can to get away from him.

Not fast enough.

I will never, ever know how he did it, but the next thing I know, he's caught a hold of my leg and we're striking a pose that would make Michelangelo proud – me being the angel, of course, while David is the poor sinner stuck below, desperately clawing at my robes.

And it looks like artwork is all we're going to be good for, because the next thing I know, I'm looking straight down into his eyes.

* * *

David

She is so beautiful.

Her eyes are so beautiful

* * *

Genie

"David?"

Oh no.

It's happened again.

Oh no, not again!

A stomach-deep, heart-wide wail breaks loose from me, the sound growing louder and louder as my stomach contracts so hard that it hurts.

"David, not my David, not my David, not my David," I repeat, frantically, as I haul myself free and start spinning around the room, unable to leave but unable to stay still as the horror of it all strikes me again. The teacup is the first

thing to fall crashing to the floor. Then so many things start falling; I don't even hear him at first.

"Genie?" His voice is fainter than I've ever heard it before. "Genie, you're so beautiful, please calm down."

"Calm down?!" I shout at him before I realise the significance of what I've just heard. When I do, I stop sharp in my tracks and the room sighs with relief as the little maelstrom I've whipped up settles back down again.

"David?" I know it's me speaking, but the voice echoing around the room sounds unfamiliar.

"Genie?" His voice sounds normal, but... He still hasn't moved.

"David?" I repeat again, stupidly. "Can you... That is... Are you okay?"

"Am I okay?" He sounds vaguely amused. "Genie, at this moment, I am sitting here scared to my bones that if I move an inch you are going to strike me dead, or spin the house into the Pacific, or say you'll never come out again."

I consider this statement briefly.

"Is there any order to those fears?" I ask, tentatively, then: "I mean, you could move, should you want to?"

"If you promise you'll not turn me into stone?" He smiles, carefully.

He moved. His face moved: I sink down to the floor in relief.

He has no idea! He has no idea what he's talking about.

Also, he hasn't turned to stone.

How is that possible?

I stare blankly at him for what seems like a century, although of course it can't be that long really.

"David?" I ask, and then start giggling hysterically. "'David? Genie? David? Genie?'" We sound like such a pair of idiots!" I laugh louder, "and my name's not even Genie!" I fold over, my stomach now aching from laughing, rather than wailing, and sink down alongside him on the sofa.

David doesn't seem to get the joke. When I look up, he's frowning slightly.

"What is your name, then?"

"Bertha," I tell him (it's a lie of course).

"No it's not."

"Okay, it's Agnes."

"No."

"Okay, it's – anyway, how do you know they aren't my real name?"

He simply frowns back at me, as though he's trying to remember something. While he's thinking, I'm thinking too, although I blurt out the next question without much thought at all. "And why didn't you turn to stone when I looked at you?"

"What?" He lifts his head up, startled. "Should I?"

"You normally do."

"I do?"

"Oh don't be daft, not 'you', I mean, 'You' – people, humans, you know."

"You thought I would, too?"

"I knew you would too. Are you human?"

" 'Am I human?' – Of course I'm human!"

"Are you sure?"

"Of course I'm sure."

"As sure as you were that genies didn't exist?"

"Surer," he assures me, his tone almost convincing, and his eyes...

I forget to breathe for a moment, as I look into their dark, brown depths. A girl could drown in those eyes, following the specks of gold as they glint down into the darkness.

"Miriam," he suddenly says. "Your name is Miriam."

I swallow, hard.

He is right, but how can he know?

I suddenly feel very, very cold, and very, very scared.

The thing is, I can't tear my eyes away from his.

"David?" I mouth, not even certain if the sound has left my lips.

"Miriam?" He blinks, and suddenly I can breathe again. But it's too late: I'm dizzy and maintaining a correct posture is too much to ask. I slump forward, and feel very embarrassed: I never slump, and I'm quite certain it makes my belly look bigger than it really is. The only consolation is that David – my David – has edged along the sofa so that he is sitting right next to me: Right next to me – I can feel his leg against mine.

"Miriam?" He asks again, his fingers just touching the soft skin under my jaw, where I suspect he thinks he should find a pulse.

"'m-fine," I mumble, keeping my eyes closed. "Bit confused, though."

"Shhhh, shhhh," he calms me, stroking my hair back away from my forehead so softly, so tenderly that I am very, very tempted to open my eyes again.

I need to think.

I must remember I'm a genie. I'm quite certain that genies can think at the same time as being stroked, even if I am finding it inordinately difficult right now.

Think, Miriam, think!

* * *

David

"Hush, hush," I comfort her, smoothing down her hair, trying to move as slowly as possible so as not to scare her.

She's rocking, slightly, back and forth, her eyes crushed tightly shut and refusing to look at me. But she hasn't gone back into the urn. And that has to be a good sign.

Hasn't it?

"G- I mean, Miriam?" I blush, stumbling over her name.

"Yes David," she's still rocking.

"I think it's okay to look at me. I've looked at you before. Before today, I mean."

Her rocking momentarily falters. "You have?" She asks, with a bite of curiosity in the otherwise despairing tones of her voice.

"Yes... I think it was at night..."

"At night?" She's gone stock still, now, frozen in place.

"Yes... you were there, weren't you? It wasn't a dream?"

The room is so quiet; I can hear her swallow, quite clearly.

"Genie?"

"Miriam." She corrects me, absently. "You looked, before? Where were you?" She's testing me, I know.

"In bed: Pretending to be asleep."

"Ah."

"It was you, wasn't it?"

"Yes," she whispers.

She draws a deep breath, lets it out, then draws and even deeper breath, and turns to me.

Oh. My. God.

* * *

Miriam

Oh. My. God.

I'm looking into his eyes and I'm falling, headfirst – heartfirst – down and down and further down, following the shimmers and glimmers, following something elusive, something just barely out of sight, down and down and further down.

There.

A woman.

Oh!

It's her: The beautiful woman, her face so perfect, so beautiful, her temple so magnificent, so awe-inspiring, and her sisters so, so angry.

Why are they angry?

And I can see me – or rather, my urn, sitting on the floor, skulking with the other tarnished knick-knacks and once-shiny treasures they collected and hid from view, from daylight. I felt quite safe there, I remember. Nothing much happened. No one much came. I wrote some poems, to pass the time. They weren't very good.

Oh dear.

I suddenly realise what I'm seeing.

The First Young Man.

My heart starts pounding, and I'm vague aware of David's thumb running up and down mine as he holds my hands.

He was very handsome, the First Young Man. So young, and so handsome... I was just itching for him to rescue me, so I could grant him any wish he wanted.

He went marching straight up, straight up to the mound of tarnished metal, straight up to my beautiful urn, his stride so confident, his sheathed sword clanging faintly against his, well, frankly marvellous thighs as he walked.

Then he looked at me, and then he froze.

I try to close my eyes as I remember what happened: The half formed scream, the last look of panic in his eyes as he stared at me in horror, his flesh hardening and losing its colour as I watched.

I try to close my eyes, but I can't. There's something in David's eyes that's got a hold of me and I can't look away, even though I'm trembling and trying desperately to look away.

I hear, rather than feel my breathing becoming shallow and uneven as I remember... Remember staring back at The First Young Man's greying face, remember the pounding of my heart, remember repeating again and again: I'm sorry, so sorry... Remember the welcome sound of her approach, her shout of anger, her violent rage as she tore down upon his poor statue, blowing the figure to the floor in a cloud of dust, freeing me from that terrible, terrible stare...

I take a deep breath.

I can handle this: It is, after all, only a memory.

I brace myself, and actually look at what I'm being shown. And then, realisation hits me. Because seeing it now, after all this time... It doesn't look as though he was really staring at my urn... It looks more as though he's looking behind the urn.

Behind: Where she came from....

Could it have been?

I can't remember.

Could it really have been her, all along?

I try to think back, but the thing is, I really can't remember. After that day, every time anyone went in, I just went into such a panic; I never thought to check that it really was me they were looking at...

But she couldn't have been there every time, could she?

I suppose she could...

Suddenly I'm convinced: I was her. It was never me.

All this time, I've been thinking that I did it, and I didn't!

I suddenly feel short of air, and I realise that tears have been flowing down my cheeks while I've been watching, and David's thumb has stopped rubbing my hands and he's just staring into my eyes as though he, too, is seeing something.

Hang on.
How is this possible, anyway?
How can I be seeing what happened, in David's eyes?

* * *

David

You know when there is a very faint star in the sky, you can't see it when you look directly at it – you can only see it if you look to one side. It's a bit like that... When all I can focus on and think about is the beautiful colours in Genie's eyes, that's when I see me - Not the real me, but some kind of Clash-of-the-Titans style man who looks just like me, with leather sandals and a sword and stuff.

But when I try to focus on that image, all I see is Genie... Which isn't a bad thing, let me hasten to add, but I am really curious about that man in Genie's eyes, with the sword and the sandals.

In my palms, Genie's... Correction: Miriam's hands tremble slightly, and I rub my thumbs up and down on her soft skin, as much to reassure myself as to calm her. I wonder what she is seeing... Or if she is seeing anything at all... maybe this is another 'Genie thing', maybe she is deliberately showing me a past life, or something...

There he goes, sword in hand, walking into a gloomy building, looking like someone's strange notion of a Greek hero. Up ahead, there's some kind of altar and, before it, mountains and mountains of bric-a-brac and metalwork, looking kind of old and tarnished.

Hey, I wonder if it's a dragon's hoard.

Hey, wouldn't it be cool if I were Saint George, in a previous life?

I try to peer a little closer at the bric-a-brac, looking for the tell tale signs of a dragon (as if I know what they are).

Oh.

I've concentrated too hard again, looked too closely: You'll have to bear with me while I just admire Genie's face for a little while... So beautiful... her eyes, so bright and loving... Ah, there he is again: Walking up to the hoard, picking up this and that... There's some nice stuff there, too.

Oh, cool! One of the pots looks like Genie's urn!

Oh, shit! What's that?

The man in Genie's eyes is holding up a big dish of some sort, at this point, and behind him, there's some kind of monster woman – oh! Cool! It's Medusa!

Holy crap! He's being attacked by Medusa!

"Medusa!" I speak the name out loud, even as I watch my previous incarnation swing his sword in a great big arc about his shoulders, towards Medusa's neck.

* * *

Miriam

"Medusa?" David's voice startles me back into reality, and I repeat the word back at him stupidly. Sensation comes tumbling in: The warmth of his breath, the gentle grip of his hands around mine, the hard muscle of his legs... Oh, my.

He starts, suddenly, as if he too has been watching the past, and there is a deafening silence as we stare at each other, the word hanging in the air as though waiting for us to recognise it.

David tilts his head and looks at me, curiously, a faint smile on his lips.

"Medusa, you know, the one with gorgons for sisters? Turned men to stone when they looked at her?"

"Medusa?"

"Yeah... Come on, you're the one that's lived a billion years: Weren't you there?"

"There?" I swallow, and suddenly feel nauseous. It's unpleasant. I don't do nausea that well at the best of times, let alone at a time like this. Not that there is as best time to be nauseous. Oh dear, this is just terrible.

Or possibly, wonderful.

"Yeah... I saw you, didn't I?"

"What?"

"With Medusa... with the rest of the hoard. Saw your urn?"

"What?" I am getting a very, very uncomfortable feeling in my chest, and I start trying to tug my hands away from his as panic starts to kick in, pushing away any stupid ideas about this nightmare being 'wonderful'. "Listen

David, I don't know what's going on here, but I don't like it: I shouldn't be here. You shouldn't be looking at me. And you certainly shouldn't be showing me nice little pictures from my past, thank you very much."

"Me showing you? And what about you showing me?"

"What?"

I am aware that I am saying 'what' far too often. Surely I should be the all-knowing, all-powerful, all-wise one here? I tug a little harder, and think I've managed to get free, but David reaches out, grabs me by the waist, pulls me down, and I just don't have the heart to blast him to pieces, or retaliate in any way.

And so... we just lie there, leaning back into his sofa.

Just David and me: Me, staring at the ceiling. David: staring at me.

It's bloody uncomfortable.

"What did you see?" I ask, eventually.

"You didn't do that?"

"I don't think so."

"Oh." He hesitates, as though considering this new bit of information, before continuing. "I saw me. Or rather, someone like me, from the past. I mean, really, really in the past, because you know, Medusa was there."

I wince, aware of my ignorance, but thankfully, he continues without noticing.

"He walked into this big building, and up to a load of gold and stuff, and then Medusa was there and he swung his sword around and that's when I...when we... Well: here we are."

He breaks off, uncertain.

"He killed her." I state the words hesitantly.

"I think so."

There is another long pause, and without thinking about it, much, I turn and cuddle up to him, burying my head in his shoulder, my shoulder under his arm, avoiding his gaze the whole time.

"He killed her." I state the words again, a little more confidently. "I didn't see it, but after he'd gone, I crept out, and her body was just lying there. He took her head."

"That's..."

"Disgusting: It was disgusting."

"Yes... What happened to you?"

"Oh... I'm not sure... it was pretty quiet in there, for a long time." I didn't tell him about the stench of her rotting body, which I have to say lists high upon the List of Things I Wish I'd Never Experienced.

David holds me close for a moment, before letting his arm relax again, his hand moving gently, stroking me as he speaks.

"You thought you were turning people to stone, didn't you?" He asks, softly, and I am suddenly so cast down by how stupid I've been, by how many years I've been hiding, by all the wasted opportunities, that I can't even speak to say 'Yes'.

"Oh Genie... Miriam..." He sighs, so heavily I wonder if he has caught some of my stupid melancholy.

My stomach rumbles: I did say I don't do nausea very well, didn't I? It wears off and I get very, very hungry.

It rumbles again, and David starts laughing.

Then I start laughing, and then my stomach rumbles even more, and even louder.

"Listen, Genie, about that meal..."

The End

Thank you for reading!

*

You downloaded 'Genie' from

<http://www.lulu.com/content/192296>

If you enjoyed this story, please leave a review or rating

First published by:

www.enchantedramblings.net

If you are a budding writer, go and peek in. You'll find a lovely group of writers in various stages of being published, in genres from sci-fi to erotica. As a non-profit organisation, donations are welcome.

Genie

© 2005 by Thirzah Brown. All rights reserved.