OLD CYRUS

by

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FADE IN:

EXT. MOM AND POP STORE - DAY

It’s a hot, dog day afternoon.

A boiling sun shimmers overhead, blazing down on a desiccated landscape.

A dusty old track stretches before us. It leads to a large wooden shack, an old style mom and pop store.

The fading sign over the entrance reads “CYRUS’S GENERAL GOODS.”

An ageing figure, cap pulled low over a lined, parchment paper face, squints thoughtfully into the distance as he relaxes in a rocker, sipping beer.

An antique, oriental lamp stands beside him.

He drains the bottle of beer, puts it aside and reaches down for it.

CYRUS
Now then.

He pushes round rim spectacles up the bridge of his nose, regarding the lamp.

CYRUS (CONT’D)
Let’s see what we got ourselves here.

He traces a gnarled finger over the neck.

CYRUS (CONT’D)
Never seen anything like you before.

He pulls a rag from his dungaree pocket.

CYRUS (CONT’D)
Reckon you might make me a pretty penny or two. Yes siree.

He starts wiping the lamp, rubbing away grime and gradually revealing the intricate, ornate pattern beneath.

He hums an old blues tune as he works.

He doesn’t notice the shadow that forms in front of him, shaping itself into the outline of a man.

At least not until it blocks out his light.

Cyrus glances up.
We find ourselves looking at a most unusual individual; tall, lean and shaven headed with gold rings running around one of the ears.

The intelligent face carries the tint of a warm, eastern land.

The most striking thing about the figure though are the clothes; rich, embroidered and exotic, something we might expect a Sinbad or an Aladdin to wear.

Cyrus takes all this in with a leisurely, unhurried gaze. When he’s done he glances up and down the track, scratching the back of his neck.

Where on Earth did this guy come from?

Cyrus gives a nod of greeting.

Cyrus (CONT’D)

Afternoon.

The stranger smiles.

 Stranger

Greetings.

He looks around at the arid landscape.

 Stranger (CONT’D)

A most marvellous land.

Cyrus shrugs.

 Cyrus

Never heard Tolpa Creek called that before.

The stranger runs a bejewelled hand over his jaw as he continues to take in the scenery.

 Cyrus (CONT’D)

Guessing you ain’t from these parts.

 Stranger

Indeed no.

 Cyrus

So, what does bring you here, if you don’t mind me asking?

The stranger laughs.

 Stranger

Why, you did my friend.

He points towards the antique.
STRANGER (CONT’D)
By rubbing that lamp.

Cyrus frowns.

CYRUS
You some kind of crazy feller?

STRANGER
Not at all. You see I’m a Jinn.

CYRUS
You mean Injin? Your folks left these parts a long time ago.

STRANGER
No, I’m a Jinn, or rather as you call me in this part of the world, a genie.

He spreads his arms, waiting for an appropriately impressed response.

CYRUS
Genie, huh?

The old man blinks at him.

STRANGER
You have never heard of genies?

CYRUS
 Nope.

The stranger looks somewhat put out.

STRANGER
I see.

He claps his hands together.

STRANGER (CONT’D)
A genie is, well, I suppose you might say like an angel. You know of angels?

CYRUS
I read my bible young feller. Don’t take kindly to blaspheming either.

STRANGER
Such is not my intention, I assure you. I merely wish to elucidate. Jinn are very much like angels, the difference being instead of serving a higher power we serve those who possess the lamp. People like you Cyrus. You understand?
The old man regards the antique.

CYRUS
You're saying you're like my own personal angel?

STRANGER
That is a most fitting way to think of it, yes.

CYRUS
And 'cause I got this lamp, you'll do whatever I ask.

STRANGER
Quite so. I can give you three wishes.

Cyrus chews his lip thoughtfully.

CYRUS
Three huh?

STRANGER
Anything you want.

The old man puts the lamp down and leans back.

CYRUS
You know, I met a lot of crazy folk in my time, but you just about take the prize. Sorry you're not right in the head and all, but reckon you should be on your way now.

The stranger places a hand to his chest.

STRANGER
I assure you, I am in earnest.

CYRUS
Maybe you are, but that don't stop you being loco. You have a nice day now.

He turns back to his lamp.

STRANGER
What if I can prove it to you?

Cyrus raises a quizzical eyebrow.

STRANGER (CONT'D)
Something simple.

He glances at the empty bottle resting next to the old man's chair.
STRANGER (CONT’D)
Have a drink.

CYRUS
Bottle’s empty.

The stranger shakes his head.

STRANGER
Please.

Cyrus picks it up, squinting at it in the sun. The bottle’s full.

STRANGER (CONT’D)
And am I right in thinking you’re planning to paint your store?

Cyrus nods as he takes a drink.

CYRUS
Been thinking about it, ain’t done much about it though.

The stranger gestures behind the old man.

STRANGER
Take a look.

Cyrus turns.

His eyes go saucer wide. The store now has a fresh coat of paint. Even the old faded sign gleams with new life.

The beer drops gently from his fingers.

He regards the stranger for a moment.

Then he feels about in a pocket for something.

He frowns, missing whatever it is he expected to find.

The stranger hands him a lit, rolled up cigarette seemingly from nowhere.

STRANGER (CONT’D)
I believe this is what you seek.

Cyrus takes the cigarette. His hand shakes ever so slightly.

CYRUS
Obliged.

He draws heavily on it.

CYRUS (CONT’D)
Maybe you ain’t so crazy.
STRANGER
Than I have your confidence?

Cyrus shrugs.

CYRUS
You got my attention.

STRANGER
And your interest I hope.

CYRUS
In those wishes?

STRANGER
Exactly.

CYRUS
Thing is...

He takes another draw on the cigarette.

CYRUS (CONT’D)
Your timing’s all off.

STRANGER
I do not understand.

CYRUS
I’m eighty two years old this fall and a been a widower more years than I care to remember. What you’re offering me, well reckon it’s kind of like winning the lottery (a beat) but I ain’t interested in that any more either. Truth is you came too late.

STRANGER
You consider yourself too old? That your time has passed?

CYRUS
Something like that.

The stranger flashes perfect teeth.

STRANGER
I see.

He places a boot on the porch, resting an arm on his raised knee.

STRANGER (CONT’D)
Well, you need not worry.
CYRUS
And why’s that? You can make me young again?

STRANGER
Not exactly.

Cyrus gives a “I guessed as much” look.

STRANGER (CONT’D)
That is, I can’t make you young again here and now. But I can send you back in time, to a moment when you were young. How does that sound?

He studies the old man’s expression carefully.

CYRUS
Been through some hard times in my life, not sure I want to go through them again.

STRANGER
But you’d be young once more, and you’d know what to do this time. Mistakes you made ...

He snaps his fingers.

STRANGER (CONT’D)
Never happened, because this time around you wouldn’t make them.

Cyrus nods.

CYRUS
Maybe you got something there.

STRANGER
Indeed I do. That could be your first wish. And for your second..

He rubs his cheek theatrically.

STRANGER (CONT’D)
Well, I could make you rich. That way you wouldn’t have to go through those struggles you just alluded to.

The old man mulls this over.

CYRUS
Never had much money.
STRANGER
This time you will. Now, the third wish.

He laughs.

STRANGER (CONT’D)
Actually, I already know what you would like, to be re-united with your beloved May.

The old man’s watery eyes flash fire.

CYRUS
How do you know about May?

STRANGER
I know everything there is about you Cyrus.

He sighs.

STRANGER (CONT’D)
How long were you wed? Fifty years, wasn’t it? An awful long time.

He looks at the old man.

STRANGER (CONT’D)
You must miss her terribly.

CYRUS
Feller, you got no idea.

STRANGER
Well, you could be with her again. Just think, both of you in the first bloom of youth, wealthy and with the whole world before you.

CYRUS
And all I got to do is make those wishes huh?

STRANGER
Well, there is one very small thing first.

He produces a piece of paper from nowhere.

STRANGER (CONT’D)
I’d need you to sign this.

CYRUS
What’s that?
STRANGER
Oh, nothing important, a token of our mutual good will.

CYRUS
Looks a whole lot like a contract to me.

The stranger looks a little uncomfortable.

STRANGER
If you want to call it that, but it sounds so formal.

He holds up a gold pen. Like the sheet of paper, it seemingly appears out of thin air.

STRANGER (CONT’D)
Just sign your name and all will be yours.

He passes the pen to Cyrus.

CYRUS
Mind if I take a look?

STRANGER
That shouldn’t be necessary.

CYRUS
One thing I learnt being in business is always read a contract.

The stranger grimaces and passes him the paper. Cyrus studies it, muttering to himself as he does.

STRANGER
(Impatiently) I trust you are satisfied.

Cyrus grunts.

CYRUS
Well, lots of fancy words here, not sure I can figure them all out. Take this one.

He taps a line a third of the way down the page.

CYRUS (CONT’D)
It says here, “I pledge my ethereal self in exchange for these wishes.” Mind telling me what that means?

STRANGER
Well, ethereal simply means your (a beat) non-corporeal form.

(MORE)
STRANGER (CONT'D)
I’m glad I could explain. Just sign there if you please.

CYRUS
Afraid you’re going to have to do better than that. We use plain English round these parts.

STRANGER
Well, non corporeal means non physical. It’s something you won’t even know is gone, trust me.

He waves an impatient hand at the paper.

STRANGER (CONT'D)
Now, if you please.

The old man puts pen to the paper then stops.

STRANGER
(Grimacing) Something wrong?

CYRUS
Reckon there is. See, you ain’t no genie. And this antique here ain’t no magic lamp neither.

The stranger stares back astounded.

CYRUS (CONT'D)
In fact there’s only one feller I heard of who makes deals where you sell your soul. And that’s what your non-corporal self amounts to I reckon. Like I told you, I read my bible.

Anger flashes across the dark face.

STRANGER
You would be wise not to turn down my offer.

CYRUS
Nope, reckon I’d be plumb crazy to accept it.

STRANGER
You think you’ve led such a good life do you? You think that when your time comes you’ll meet your darling May again?

He raises a finger.
STRANGER (CONT’D)
Up there? Let me tell you old man, you could just as easily go to the other place.

He rotates the finger so that it’s pointing downwards.

CYRUS
Well, we’ll see about that, but I ain’t making no deals with the likes of you.

The stranger glares at him.

STRANGER
You shall regret this.

CYRUS
Don’t reckon I will.

The stranger’s face colors.

STRANGER
Pray that we do not meet again.

CYRUS
Always say my prayers.

Cyrus reaches down for his half spilt beer and takes a drink.

When he looks up the stranger’s gone.

He goes back to polishing the lamp.

CYRUS (CONT’D)
Now, let’s see if we can’t get you all nice and shiny.

CUT TO:

EXT. MOM AND POP STORE - DAY

Time’s passed, the sun no longer dominates the sky but rather hangs low and swollen on the horizon.

A WOMAN walks lazily down the track, light cotton skirt blowing in the gentle breeze.

She raises a hand in greeting as she spies Cyrus sitting on his rocker.

WOMAN
Hello Cyrus. How you been keeping?

She stops at the porch, regarding him.
WOMAN (CONT’D)

Cyrus?

The old man doesn’t reply.

She steps up onto the porch and kneels beside him.

The old man’s eyes are open, looking down at the lamp in his hands, yet the life has left them.

The woman lays her hand gently on his lids and closes them.

WOMAN (CONT’D)

Goodbye Cyrus. Be sure to say hello to May for me.

FADE OUT: