

THE LAMP

By

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FADE IN

EXT. ANTIQUE STORE - DAY

An urban street.

Hurried people rush by, checking watches and muttering anxiously into mobile phones.

A small, self contained classical structure sits serenely in the center of this frenetic activity.

A faded sign proclaims it to be Klauer Antiques.

INT. ANTIQUE STORE - DAY

ART KLAUER (60) immaculately dressed in a striped suit, silk tie and pocket handkerchief holds up an ornate, small chest before a FEMALE CUSTOMER.

The Customer, cotton candy hair, thick make up and draped in a fur coat, scowls at the proprietor.

CUSTOMER

Mistake!

She pulls her fur around her, shielding herself from the present indignity.

ART

A common one, I'm afraid.

He turns the item around in his hand.

ART (CON'T)

An authentic Louis 14th would be slightly larger and less ornate around the base.

He invites the Customer to take a closer look.

ART (CON'T)

Do you see?

She turns her head aside, refusing to do so.

ART (CON'T)

I'm afraid this is merely a copy. Quite a good one however, and it does have some modest value as a vintage item.

(CONTINUED)

CUSTOMER

I will have you know Mr. Klauer I had this examined for insurance purposes.

ART

I'm sure you did, madam.

CUSTOMER

My expert assured me it was genuine, an antiquity he called it.

ART

I imagine your 'expert' came cheap.

The woman snorts rather than choosing to answer.

ART

An' antiquity' you see refers to something far older, ancient Rome or Greece for example. Items which are more recent, in this case from the seventeenth or eighteenth centuries, would be termed antiques.

He takes his handkerchief from the suit pocket and dabs his brow. He's looking a little flushed.

He takes a moment to compose himself.

ART (CON'T)

However, this is not even a genuine antique.

CUSTOMER

Preposterous.

ART

Would you like me to give an assessment of what I believe its real value to be?

The Customer looks him up and down.

CUSTOMER

Very well. I made the trip out here after all.

Art takes a pencil and scribbles on a notepad.

He tears the leaf free and hands it to the woman.

(CONTINUED)

ART

I believe that figure represent
what you could hope to obtain for
it, in monetary terms that is.

The woman doesn't speak but the rage on her face is all too clear.

She snatches the chest back.

CUSTOMER (CON'T)

Good day to you.

She marches towards the door.

ART

And a good day to you Madam.

He watches the door slam after her.

The little bell above the frame rings softly for a moment then falls silent.

With the Customer gone the extent of Art's poor state of health becomes evident. He mops his brow once again and slumps down on the stool behind the counter. His breathing is labored. He seems exhausted by the encounter with the unhappy Customer.

His attention goes to a photograph just in front of him. It shows a thirty year old version of himself and a pretty brunette of similar age, perhaps ever so slightly younger.

ART

Ah, Diane.

He picks up the picture and traces a finger across her delicate face.

Suddenly he winces, placing a hand to his chest.

The picture drops from his fingers and crashes to the floor.

He takes a bottle from inside his jacket and pops a couple of tablets into his mouth.

He reaches for a wine bottle and pours the last of the contents out, a generous measure of red, into a glass.

He drinks the wine in a single gulp.

He takes deep, difficult breaths. For a moment he appears to grow worse but then gradually he starts to recover.

(CONTINUED)

He notices the picture on the floor. The glass is cracked down the middle, separating the young couple.

He picks it up and restores it to its rightful place on the desk in front of him.

ART

Now, where was I?

He turns to a muslin covered object at his elbow.

ART (CON'T)

Ah yes.

He pulls the cover aside to reveal a large, oriental style lamp.

His eyes glitter with excitement.

He begins to study it from over pince-nez spectacles.

ART (CON'T)

Let's see if we can't determine exactly what you are.

He traces a finger over the lamp.

ART (CON'T)

Hand forged bronze, certainly. Origin, well, there seems to be a blending of designs here. Etruscan perhaps with late Ptolemaic Egypt.

He clips a jeweler's magnifying lens to his glasses.

ART

It could belong to either. Or even, yes, early Byzantine.

He studies the depictions running around the middle of the lamp. Dust and grime partially obscure them.

He takes the cloth and rubs the area carefully.

ART (CON'T)

Now, this is an antiquity.

A gently breeze blows through the store, ruffling his hair.

Art glances up.

And finds himself 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 his clothes, rich and exotic. He's not exactly dressed as someone from the Arabian nights, but he isn't so far off.

Art regards the individual for some moments.

When the spell breaks he glances from the newcomer to the bell over the door.

ART (CON'T)

I'm sorry. I didn't hear the bell.
Have you been here long?

The Stranger smiles.

STRANGER

I do not need doors my friend.

The old man arches a curious eyebrow.

ART

Really? I find them indispensable
myself.

The Stranger bows.

STRANGER

The warmest of greetings to you.

Art nods his head.

ART

Pleased to meet you. Forgive me if
I refrain from superlatives.

The stranger waves a hand behind him, indicating the street outside.

STRANGER

A marvelous land.

ART

It does hold a few charms. I assume
you're not a native of this land?

STRANGER

Indeed no. I am from a place far
away.

ART

And might I asks what brings you to
our humble city?

The Stranger laughs.

STRANGER

You did my friend.

He indicates the lamp.

STRANGER (CON'T)

By rubbing that vessel just now.

He spreads his arms theatrically.

STRANGER (CON'T)

You see I am the genie of the lamp.

Art goes to pour some more wine but then remembers it's
empty.

ART

Let me see if I'm correct. You're
stating that you're a being from
Arabian folklore? Traditionally
imprisoned within a bottle or oil
lamp, and capable of granting
wishes when summoned?

The Stranger nods enthusiastically.

STRANGER

That is correct.

ART

Interesting. You do realize of
course that the word "genie" is of
Latin origin and refers to a
tutelary or guardian spirit
assigned to each person at their
birth. Why, I wonder would you use
that mistranslated term and not the
more accurate "Jinn?"

The Stranger's smile falters.

STRANGER

I merely sought not to confuse you.
That is all.

ART
And which element do you represent?

The smile drops away.

STRANGER
Element?

ART
Yes, the four elements.

STRANGER
You must forgive me. I don't quite follow your meaning.

ART
Well, if you are one of the pre-Islamic Djinn's as you profess, and therefore not malign

Art peers at him over his glasses.

STRANGER
No, I am most certainly not.

ART
Then you draw your powers from one of the four classical elements; earth, fire, air or water.

The smile returns.

STRANGER
I am a being of air, a being of dreams.

ART
I see.

Art looks about to ask another question.

The Stranger jumps in before he can do so.

STRANGER
But let us not waste time on trifles Mr. Klauer. You must think of me as your personal angel.

ART
You do realize ...

The Stranger groans.

ART (CON'T)
That 'angel' is of Greek origin, a translation of Hebrew in fact, meaning messenger.

The Stranger is at a loss how to reply.

ART (CON'T)
Or maybe you were just trying not to confuse me.

STRANGER
What I'm trying to do Mr. Klauer, is to make your dreams come true.

ART
You're referring to the three wishes motif popularized in Western translations of The Arabian Nights.

The Stranger rubs a hand over his chin.

STRANGER
I must say, you are a most learned individual.

ART
Reading is a passion of mine.

He indicates a row of dusty old books behind him. They cover mythology, ancient history, art, religions of the world and a dozen other topics.

ART (CON'T)
Now.

He indicates the door.

ART (CON'T)
I do not wish to be impolite, but if you aren't here to make a purchase, I believe it best if you were on your way.

STRANGER
You wish me to leave?

ART
Quite so. I can recommend a good psychiatrist if you wish.

The Stranger places a hand to his chest.

STRANGER
But I am in earnest.

ART (CON'T)
I'm certain you are. And I
sincerely hope you're able to
obtain the professional help you
need.

The Stranger looks indignant, even angry.

Art's hand slowly reaches for an antique, ivory handle
pistol behind his desk.

ART
If you'd be so kind.

STRANGER
You do not need your weapon. It is
old anyway, and you only fired it
once, to check it worked when you
bought it two year ago.

Art's hand stops.

The Stranger's confidence returns. He can see he's impressed
the the old man.

STRANGER
Allow me to give a small
demonstration of my powers.

ART
Very well.

The Stranger glances at the empty bottle.

STRANGER
Something simple. Why don't you
have a drink Mr. Klauer?

ART
The bottle's empty.

STRANGER
Please.

Art picks up the bottle.

ART
My goodness.

STRANGER

I think you will find it full.

Art pours himself a drink and takes a sip.

STRANGER (CON'T)

And that broken picture of you and
your beloved. I think you'll
discover it as good as new.

Art glances at the photograph. The crack has disappeared.

ART

I must have had too much wine.

The Stranger holds up a finger.

STRANGER

And one more. That special letter
Diane wrote you, the one you've
been trying to find for almost a
week now.

ART

How could you know about that?

STRANGER

Reach inside your waistcoat pocket.

Art does as instructed and pulls out an envelope. He slips
the letter out and looks it over.

Tear well up in his eyes.

ART

It seems I may have been a little
rash in my judgment of you.

He takes another drink of wine.

STRANGER

Then I have your confidence?

ART

I would say you have my attention.

STRANGER

And your interest too, I hope.

ART

In those wishes?

STRANGER

Exactly.

ART

I'm afraid we have a problem there. You see, if indeed you are who you say, your arrival is somewhat belated.

STRANGER

I do not understand.

ART

I'm sixty years old.

STRANGER

That is not old.

ART

Maybe not, but my health is failing me.

STRANGER

You consider that an issue?

ART

Wouldn't you?

The Stranger flashes his teeth, positively beaming.

STRANGER

This is no problem.

ART

No.

STRANGER

I can make you well again. In fact I can grant you robust health, equal to a man half your age. Does that sounds appealing?

ART

Perhaps, yes.

STRANGER

Excellent.

He claps his hands excitedly.

STRANGER (CON'T)

So, we have your first wish.

He glances round the store.

(CONTINUED)

STRANGER (CON'T)

Forgive me, but your health is not the only thing failing, is it not? Business is not what it once was I fear.

ART

Not for some time.

STRANGER

Well then, allow me to make you wealthy beyond your wildest dreams. If you wish I could even make you famous, a celebrity expert I believe the term is. Antiques are your passion after all. Would you like your own channel? I could make that happen.

ART

That won't be necessary. So, health and riches so far?

STRANGER

Tempting?

ART

Tempting? Yes, I can't deny their appeal.

Art looks at the photo of his wife.

ART (CON'T)

There's something missing from all this.

STRANGER

You do have one wish left.

ART

Diane.

STRANGER

Your beloved.

ART

Nothing's the same without her.

STRANGER

Of course, how long has she been in the hospital?

(CONTINUED)

ART

Nearly four months now.

STRANGER

And there is no hope?

ART

Not much.

STRANGER

Is that why you hide your own heart condition from her?

ART

She needs all her strength to fight this. I can't let her worry.

STRANGER

Of course, how long have you been married, more than thirty five years, isn't it. A long time.

ART

Could you make her healthy again?

STRANGER

Alas, one can only make wishes that relate to oneself.

He snaps his fingers.

STRANGER (CON'T)

Although.

ART

I'm listening.

STRANGER (CON'T)

It would be possible to send you back in time to when you first met.

ART

Live our lives all over again?

STRANGER

Think of it. A chance to start afresh. You and she would both be young once more. And you'd be rich. Imagine all the things you could do, the places you could see. Life would be truly blessed.

Art is silent for some moments, his mind racing with the concept.

(CONTINUED)

ART

And all you require me to do is to make those three wishes?

STRANGER

That is all.

ART

That does sound most appealing, I must say.

STRANGER

Excellent. Then let us proceed.

He raises his arms, about to perform this miracle but then stops.

STRANGER (CON'T)

Actually, before we proceed there is one small matter.

ART

Oh?

He indicates Art's hand.

STRANGER (CON'T)

I would be grateful if you to sign this.

Art glances down. There's a piece of paper in his hand.

ART

May I ask what this is?

STRANGER

Nothing really. Let us consider it merely a token of our mutual good will.

Art looks at it.

STRANGER (CON'T)

Please, you need not trouble yourself with the contents.

ART (CON'T)

It looks like a contract to me.

STRANGER

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

He indicates Art's other hand.

(CONTINUED)

STRANGER (CON'T)

Please.

Art is suddenly holding a pen.

STRANGER (CON'T)

Just sign your name and all your wishes will become reality.

ART

Perhaps so, but do you know the most important thing I've learned in business over all these years?

STRANGER

(Sarcastically) No, Mr. Klauer. Why don't you enlighten me.

ART

Something Diane reminded me of constantly. It's that one must always read the contract first.

The Stranger throws up his arms in frustration.

STRANGER

If you must.

Art looks it over more closely. He mutters to himself from time to time as he reads.

The Stranger looks increasingly impatient.

Finally Art looks up.

STRANGER (CON'T)

Are you satisfied?

ART

With the wording, most certainly not. Overly verbose, too many subordinate and conditional clauses. The result renders much of the meaning ambiguous.

He taps one of the lines.

ART (CON'T)

It says here for example, "I pledge my ethereal self in exchange for these wishes."

(CONTINUED)

STRANGER

It does.

ART

Would you be so kind as to elucidate.

STRANGER

Well, 'ethereal' simply means your non-corporeal form. I'm glad I could explain. Just sign there if you please.

ART

So that would mean my non-physical self?

STRANGER

Well, yes.

He lets out an exasperated sigh.

STRANGER (CON'T)

It's something you won't even know is gone. Trust me, there's nothing to worry about.

He waves a hand at the paper.

STRANGER (CON'T)

If you please.

Art clicks the pen, retracting the writing nib.

STRANGER (CON'T)

Is something wrong?

ART

I believe that would be a fair assessment. Tell me, have you used this routine before.

STRANGER

Routine?

ART

This performance. I would imagine not by the way it has been so poorly executed.

STRANGER

I'm afraid I have no idea what you're talking about.

(CONTINUED)

ART

Come now, as someone of intelligence you should know better than to insult mine. You're no Djinn. And this here...

He lays a hand on the lamp.

ART (CON'T)

Well, this is no magic lamp either, is it? It belongs to the wrong place and era to be that. To be who you claim this lamp would be of Persian origin. Whereas in actual fact ...

The Stranger raises a hand.

STRANGER

Please, spare me a tedious lecture on artwork.

ART

Very well. Then lets talk about your 'pitch' for want of a more suitable term. Mythology and folklore are replete with magical deal makers. But to my knowledge, and I have read a good deal as we've already established, there is only one who asks the individual to sign their soul away.

STRANGER

I never mentioned that word.

ART

Of course not. But come now, what else could non- corporal self refer to?

The Stranger shrugs.

ART (CON'T)

Early Christian and medieval writings warn many times of your wiles and temptations.

He gestures towards the door.

ART (CON'T)

You will have no business with me. Good day to you.

(CONTINUED)

Anger flashes across the Stranger's face.

STRANGER

You would be wise not to turn down my offer.

ART

I beg to differ. I would consider it most unwise to do so.

STRANGER

You think you've led such a sinless life do you Mr. Klauer? You've drunk the last year of your life away in an attempt to mask your ill health and deal with that pathetic heart break of yours. You've also neglected your business, spending time instead sitting beside your wife's bed. One might view these two behaviors as examples of sloth and gluttony.

ART

You may view things as you wish.

STRANGER

Do you believe when your time comes you will be together with your beloved once more?

He raises a finger.

STRANGER (CON'T)

Up there? Let me tell you, it is much, much easier to go to the other place.

He rotates the finger so it's pointing downwards.

STRANGER (CON'T)

Pray we do not meet again.

ART

You can be assured I'll be saying my prayers from now on.

He pours himself out another glass of wine.

ART (CON'T)

Thank you so much for the wine by the way.

(CONTINUED)

He's about to raise a glass to the other figure but he's disappeared.

Art glances at the door. The bell is motionless.

He heaves a sigh and picks up the lamp.

ART
Yes, Byzantium.

He continues to polish it.

ART (CON'T)
A marvelous specimen.

CUT TO:

INT. ANTIQUE STORE - NIGHT

The shop is now lit with artificial lights whilst the world outside rests in night's velvet embrace.

The bell over the door rings.

A BRUNETTE (Late 50's) walks in. Well dressed and wearing expensive jewelry, she obviously someone of means.

She's in extremely good spirits and moves like someone in the peak of good health.

She passes under the main light.

As she does we realize we've seen her before. She's from the Art's photograph, taken three decades earlier. Although older, she's clearly the same person.

She goes round the counter and sees Art, sat on his stool. His head rests on his chest.

The photograph sits below the counter in front of him. The letter is beside it.

The Brunette kneels beside him.

She notices Art's hand dangling near the floor, just above a spilled wineglass.

BRUNETTE
No.

She feels for a pulse on his wrist.

Then she does the same with the side of his neck.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

20.

BRUNETTE (CON'T)

Oh Art.

She lays her head to his chest.

Tears fill her eyes.

FADE OUT