

OLD CYRUS

by

James McCormick
jimbostories@hotmail.com

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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: