

Sleep

The evening wind gently pressed the thin fabric of a young woman's dress against the curves of her lean body, as she twirled her dark brown hair in circles. She paused, letting the setting sun blush pink through the translucent fabric, warming her skin underneath. A sudden gust of wind through the open window of the tower caused her dress to flutter up against her thighs. Staring contemplatively at the warlock, she sat down in the middle of the summoning circle.

"You're standing so far away," she murmured. "Why don't you come sit beside me," she patted the marble floor alongside her.

The old warlock dropped the papyrus scroll he was reading in shock. Smoothing out his robes, he glared at me. "O evil being. How dare you take the form of my youngest wife!"

Pouting, I let my lower lip tremble. "I don't know what you're talking about. You can take a step closer, I'll even give you a little taste." I spun around, and inched closer to the curved white line separating us.

Wiping a speckle of drool from his mouth, the warlock shouted, "O Demon, you didn't *really* think that would work, did you?"

I sighed, then sat back down in the middle of the chalk circle. "What gave it away?"

"Your twisting, dragon-like tail. And Ra forbid, even a novice warlock would know not to cross over the summoning circle, especially from a malevolent, demonic spirit."

Frowning, I turned to look at my rear. "I knew I was missing something," I mumbled. Turning back to stare at the old dim-wit, I folded my arms. "Stop calling me evil or various derogative combinations of the word demon. The correct term is *genie*."

The warlock waved off my objection. My eyes followed his arms, making sure he never crossed over the circle. I felt my mouth water with anticipation.¹ “Silence devilish fiend! Now, you will do as I say...”

As he began listing off demand after demand, I took the opportunity to look around the room. Over the last three thousand years of my existence, every single summoner – shaman, warlock, or magician, whatever they may call themselves – had the same partiality for the dramatic: a dark room or tent smelling faintly of mildew, candles that erupted from every surface like a colony of mushrooms, and above all, those voluminous robes that were three sizes too big. Other than the elegant marble flooring, this old doofus was little different. The smell of burning wax infused the air, as long scrolls and their casings littered the floor. Against the walls of the tower circled a ring of teak scroll shelves. The only opening to the room was a large doorway that was flanked by two pillars, etched with ornamental hieroglyphics.

A spark of electricity sprung from the warlock’s fingertips, and I gave a yelp. “Are you listening, foul brute!” the warlock screamed, the speckles of his spit landing on my face. I gave a small nod, and wiped the spit off my face. “Now, devilish being. Do what I say correctly, and I shall set you free. If you don’t...” Another jolt of electricity made me dance and wail. He winked. “Worse may happen.”

“I shall do as you bid,” I whimpered. I gave a bow, and vanished.

East of Ancient Cairo, the deserts of Arabia stretched as far the eye could see, an unbroken sea of sand and stone. Underneath the moon-lit sky, one could almost pretend it was an actual silver-midnight blue ocean, each dune like a cresting wave. I felt my wings brush against the cold air, as I

¹ Eating humans is usually bad for genie digestion. Sometimes, I do it just to see the fear in their eyes before I chomp down.

glided towards my destination: the warlock's childhood town of Rocca. In Rocca, I was supposed to heal individuals who suffered from a recent outbreak of plague. Of course, the old warlock would claim all the credit, as has happened since the first shamans learned how to shackle us to the temporal realm. The little pigeon looked forlorn, as much as a pigeon could, and continued onwards.

Landing within the city square of Rocca, I transformed into the old magician. Smoothing out his large robes, I knocked on the first door, and began my rounds to the sick. With each patient, I felt my essence dribbling off and disappearing to destroy infected cells within their bodies. Healing disease was difficult work for a genie; by nature, we are beings of wind, and healing was usually better suited for water spirits.² By the time dawn broke and the last patient was seen, I could feel my form flicker as exhaustion caused my eyes to droop. Transforming back into a pigeon, I began my long journey back to the warlock's tower in Cairo. The great thing about birds – they can fly while sleeping. While sleep would do nothing to regenerate my lost essence, it would fight off the weariness that infused every inch of my body.

A sand-colored desert fox stumbled into the cave, its small paws creating uneven taps against the rough rocky floor. *Just need you to assassinate my enemies*, the warlock said. *Please irrigate thousands of acres of land*, the warlock said. *Just one last task*, the warlock said. The fox growled with righteous indignation. After a month of service, I had done everything the warlock had asked. Striking a stalagmite with a paw in frustration, I yapped, smarting from the hit. While possible for a genie to remain indefinitely in the temporal realm, use of magic – whether to heal or to destroy – left a spirit incrementally weaker until the genie was entirely and utterly defenseless. Using my hindlegs, I rubbed a bruised part of my torso in discomfort. I could still feel holes in my essence from a

² Water spirits like naiads, for instance.

thunderous³ battle with other genies protecting rival warlocks. Naturally, many a genie were forcibly trapped for long periods of time in this realm by confinement into small spaces, such as Greek vases or Chinese teapots, often by a cruel master as punishment. Dreadful as it was to be trapped inside a cramped object, at least it protected you from tasks that might further endanger your essence. It was possible, however, for a genie to become insane from the terrible dullness of doing absolutely nothing in a small teapot.

The fox trotted deeper into the cave. *Find a treasure as a gift for Princess Abbotep*, the warlock said. The fox sighed with a small whine. Grave robbing was not my forte, but I was growing desperate. Even changing forms became difficult these days. Small piles of gold lay ahead of me, as I scampered around looking for a small bauble to bring back to the warlock. Summoners such as the old warlock had used the services of genies for decades, pretending to perform magic when in reality it was the poor spirit helping them with their performance. This relationship, of course, was terribly one-sided. A genie was forced to complete tasks, unless the magician died or the magician released the spirit from his service.

There! I rejoiced internally. Atop a small mountain of gold was a gleaming, golden lamp – a perfect gift for a small girl. I clapped my tiny paws together in happiness. Trotting nearer to the lamp, I stopped about a foot away. The small lamp thrummed with old magic. An old incantation that made me drowsy – or perhaps it was my fatigue, I could not tell the difference. *Just a small nap*, I thought, as I used my small paws to gently open the lid and leapt in, curling up into a bun inside the lamp. With a small spark of blue, the lid of the lamp closed, just as my eyelids drooped. Deep slumber overtook me, and for just a moment, everything felt right in the world.

³ Non-warlocks often perceive fights between genies as *thunderstorms*.