

GENIE IN A DEPOT

by
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SETTING: The waiting area of a bus station. This can be realistic or as minimalist as four or five folding chairs facing the audience.

AT RISE: DEPOT CLERK's announcement stirs KARI to look up from her phone. Sitting on SR, she is a woman in her twenties. Her biker jacket and metal accessories are meant to intimidate. There's a duffle bag beside her. Meanwhile, on SL, ROLAND puts down his newspaper and looks around. He's in his early seventies and seems dressed less for a bus trip and more for the golf course (though not in a clownish way). He has no form of luggage at all. He begins to observe KARI.

DEPOT CLERK

Attention passengers. Those passengers heading south to Broken Wheel, Taffy, Phantom Junction, Marmosett, and all points beyond: we are awaiting information regarding the arrival of your bus and will inform you of its arrival upon further information. We appreciate your inconvenience.

KARI sighs deeply while massaging her neck.

ROLAND

(rises and approaches KARI)

Don't worry, it'll get here. When it comes to bus travel, the exception to the rule is the bus that arrives on time.

KARI quickly nods to ROLAND but rises and attempts to evade him by wandering US.

ROLAND

(following)

In fact! Hey, in fact, this is your lucky day!

KARI stops to give ROLAND a look of disbelief.

ROLAND

I'm going to grant you whatever wish you want granted! How's that? Any wish at all!

KARI

(with sarcasm)

Any wish at all?

(crosses to SL now, behind the chairs)

ROLAND

(still following)

Anything you want!

KARI

(now heading DS, she stops but doesn't look at ROLAND)

Anything?

ROLAND

(stops)

Anything!

KARI

Cool. I want a million dollars.

(continues crossing DS)

ROLAND

(resumes pursuit)

Well, come on. Seriously. I can't give you a million dollars. You know? It's funny how everyone asks for a *million* dollars. You'd think these days they'd go for a *billion*. But, no, when it comes to wishes, we seem to be stuck right at million.

KARI

Fine. Give me a *billion* dollars.

(now crosses SR in front of the chairs)

ROLAND

Well, come on, seriously! Any wish at all!

KARI

(stopping before the chairs to face ROLAND)

I just told you what I wanted! Either a million dollars or a billion dollars. Whatever's easiest.

ROLAND

(catching up to KARI)

See, now? How am I supposed to grant a wish like that?

KARI

You came up to me like you're some kind of a wizard, offering any wish at all! Now, you're not gonna grant it?

ROLAND

Obviously, I'm not a wizard!

(snorts at the very idea)

Besides, wizards don't grant wishes. You mean a genie.

KARI sits in her previous chair. She goes back goes back to her phone.

ROLAND

Ask me something *practical*. And don't say you wish I'd go away. That's what everyone says right after the million dollars. Come on, any wish at all.

KARI

But *not* any wish at all.

ROLAND

Well, it has to be reasonable.

KARI

See? You need to establish that up front, or people are gonna ask for the biggest thing they want, irregardless of it being reasonable!

ROLAND

(beat)

You know something? *Irregardless* isn't really a word. It doesn't make any sense. Think of *irregular*. It means not regular. So what does *irregardless* mean? *Not* regardless of it being reasonable? You mean *regardless*. Just *regardless*.

KARI

Whatever. Uhm. Go buy me a bag of chips. There's a reasonable wish.

ROLAND

That *is* a reasonable wish! *That* I can do! Be right back.

ROLAND rushes offstage.

KARI

Hey! Hey, I was just kidding! You don't have to buy me a bag of chips!

ROLAND

(offstage)

No, no! Your reasonable wish is my command.

KARI

But I got cookies in my bag here. I brought them from home. They charge so much for—

ROLAND

(pokes his head onstage)

I already put the money in.

(disappears again)

KARI

You can just push the return-my-money thingy. That little lever thingy.

ROLAND

(returning with a bag of chips)

So you want the chips or not?

KARI

No. You keep the chips.

ROLAND

You asked for a bag of chips.

KARI

I wanted to see if— You just spent, like, two bucks on a bag of chips for someone you don't even know!

ROLAND

I can afford it. Money's overrated. Hey, I'm Roland. What's *your* name?

ROLAND sits down beside KARI, who stares at him a moment—then goes back to her phone. He looks at the chips and opens them. He offers KARI the first one.

KARI

No. You keep the chips.

ROLAND

(helps himself to a chip)

Let's start over. If I could grant you *any* wish in the world, what would it be? Make it as crazy as you want!

KARI gives him a nonplussed expression that shows she's not going to reply.

As crazy as me!

(smiles crazily)

KARI

(grins slightly)

Wasn't gonna say anything. But, okay, you want to know the truth?

ROLAND

Yeah. Go ahead. Tell me the truth.

KARI hesitates, then shakes her head no.

ROLAND

You have one *ready*, don't you! You've thought about this *before!*

KARI

Ooookay. If I could ask for any wish at all—

ROLAND

(interrupts)

You can ask for any wish at all—the trick is getting it to come true.

KARI

(beat)

Can I talk now?

ROLAND

Sorry. Sorry.

KARI

You've heard of Rosa Parks, right?

ROLAND

Thee Rosa Parks?

KARI

Thee Rosa Parks, who refused to sit in the back of the bus.

ROLAND

Sure, I've heard of Rosa Parks!

KARI

Seems like an admirable woman.

ROLAND

Certainly had the courage of her convictions.

KARI

(nods first to build suspense)

I want to go back in time and be on that bus.

ROLAND

(moves to the edge of his seat)

That's a *fantastic* wish!

KARI

To sit there and see the whole thing. I wouldn't want to—you know—I wouldn't want to interrupt!

ROLAND

Intervene.

KARI

(beat)

Wouldn't want to *interrupt!* Just sit there. And watch.

ROLAND

That's a fantastic wish! Ha! Fantastic. Not at all reasonable. You know—what with the time travel and that.

(moves back in his chair)

But, boy, I'd like to go with you if I could grant that one!

DEPOT CLERK

Attention passengers. Those passengers heading east to Nertown, Godot, Willingra, Monoton and all points beyond: we are awaiting information regarding the arrival of your bus and will inform you of its arrival upon further information. We appreciate your inconvenience.

KARI

What does that even mean—"we appreciate your inconvenience"?

(stands and starts to pace)

ROLAND

Believe me, I've consulted with them regarding it.

KARI

So. Apparently, I have some time. So. Where are you headed? Is that your bus headed east?

ROLAND

Oh. Well. I just stop by the depot from time to time.

KARI

Really? Why? To *grant wishes*?

ROLAND

(uncomfortably)

Yes. To grant wishes.

KARI

You suck at it.

ROLAND

Well. Well, I've lately been pondering my options.
(holding out the bag)

Chip?

The two share a laugh.

ROLAND

I'm Roland. What's *your* name? Why don't you sit down?

KARI

I've been sitting for hours now.

ROLAND

Where are you headed?

KARI

Nowhere. Just stretching my legs.

ROLAND

I mean the bus. Where are you headed on the bus?

KARI

Well—*nowhere* obviously. But I'm hoping to get to Atlanta eventually.

ROLAND

Atlanta! Great town, Atlanta. Never been there myself. I've often thought about going, though. Why are you headed to Atlanta?

KARI

To see my father.

ROLAND

Good for you! Great town, Atlanta. Often thought about going there. Your father's a lucky guy to live in Atlanta.

KARI

(stops pacing)

He's up for parole.

ROLAND

(awkwardly)

Parole. Probably doesn't get to enjoy the city very much, then, huh?

KARI shakes her head no.

Sorry. Very sorry.

KARI

It's nothing new. He's been in prison most of my life. I barely know him really. But, lately, I've been thinking it might be nice to have a dad. So I figured—if I was there to support him at this parole hearing—

ROLAND

(sees that KARI is done explaining)

Yes. Yes, I see. That's very admirable, going all that way for a man you barely know. And that *is* quite a distance. Are you connecting to another bus?

KARI

Yeah. Montgomery, Alabama. The ticket clerk's already booked me for a connecting bus that's much, much later than the one I was hoping for. I got a long layover there now. Turns out Montgomery, Alabama, is where Rosa Parks refused to sit in the back of the bus. I read about her on the Internet, looking for something to do there while I wait. That's what got me thinking about it.

ROLAND

It all makes sense now.

KARI

(pacing again)

Okay, your turn to share. What's the deal with this wish granting crap? Don't you have a job?

ROLAND

Well, actually, I'm retired.

KARI

No grandkids to spoil? No wife to drive nuts?

ROLAND

Hey, why don't you sit down? Pacing isn't going to get the bus here any quicker.

KARI crosses her arms and cocks her head at him.

ROLAND.

No. No grandkids. I had a wife. Once upon a time. In fact, she used to give me that look a lot.

(crosses arms and cocks head)

But you don't want to hear about that.

KARI

I tend bar for a living. I'm used to hearing about that.

ROLAND

Well. Interestingly enough, communication was on a *list* of reasons she left me for another man. A better man. A man who's communicative, she said. You see, I wasn't communicative enough for her. Women like men who are communicative. But this was some time ago.

KARI

You strike me as being pretty communicative there, Roland. Hell, you even correct how other people communicate.

ROLAND

Oh, she hated that, too. It's not communication, she said—it's *deflection*. Accused me of deflecting. Maybe she's right. I'm trying to change.

KARI

Fine, but why do you come here to grant wishes? Don't you have anything else to do with your time?

ROLAND

(takes a moment to find the right words)

You know what's a little bit worse than being diagnosed with cancer and having no one around to go through that with?

KARI

You were diagnosed with cancer?

(resumes her seat)

Is that why you come here granting wishes? Like—a final act of kindness or something?

ROLAND

No. I beat the cancer.

KARI

(standing up, a bit angry)

You *beat* the cancer?

ROLAND

I beat the cancer. Not unheard of these days.

KARI

(sitting back down)

Well, then. Congratulations? But now I don't understand. Why do you come here pretending to be a wizard?

ROLAND

(starts to correct her, but stops himself. Instead, it's *his* turn to rise and pace)

You know what's a little bit worse than being diagnosed with cancer and having no one around to go through that with? *Beating* cancer—and having no one around to go through *that* with. I was given a gift, you see. A wonderful gift.

KARI

And you need to *share* that gift?

ROLAND

(nodding)

Imagine getting a birthday cake, but having it delivered to your door like it's a pizza. And there's no one there to eat it with you. There was a cancer-patient group at the hospital, but *now* I feel pretty awkward there. So, instead, I joined a mystery novel discussion group that meets once a month. Turns out, I honestly don't care *whodunit*.

(spins and points at KARI with both hands as if to cue her laughter)

KARI

(ignoring the joke)

Still—somehow—I bet that being told you *have* cancer is worse than being told you *beat* cancer. Regardless of the circumstances. *Regardless!* Did ya catch that?

ROLAND

(chuckling and resuming his seat beside KARI)

I caught that. And you're probably right. But being diagnosed with cancer didn't make me want to grant wishes. The diagnosis just made me wish someone would come and offer *me* a wish.

They share a quiet moment.

KARI

I'm Kari.

ROLAND

Nice to meet you, Kari. I'm still Roland.

They shake hands.

KARI

Hey, Roland. Know what's funny?

ROLAND

What's funny?

KARI

Your wife left you because you weren't communicative. And then you got a disease that's not communicative.

(chuckles)

ROLAND

Do you mean to say not *communicable*?

KARI

Dammit, stop *deflecting*!

(stands)

Hey. Hey, stand up a second. I got a question for you.

ROLAND

(standing)

Oooh, one of those standing-up questions, is it?

KARI

Yeah, a standing-up question.

(puts her hands on his arms)

Look. It's weird that I'm actually going to say this—but you beat cancer. You! Beat! Cancer! How about you and I go spend a day in Montgomery, Alabama? I'll go on to Atlanta, but you can spend the day there. Come back when you get bored.

ROLAND

You and me? Together?

KARI

Well. You know. Not *together* together.

ROLAND

No, no—of course not. But do people go on a day-trip to Montgomery, Alabama, because they beat cancer?

KARI

They do if they want to ride the *very same bus route that Rosa Parks rode*! That's my wish! You and I ride the very same bus route that Rosa Parks rode.

ROLAND

(nodding)

That—would be—that *would be* about as close as we could come to fulfilling your wish! Your crazy, unreasonable wish! And we can actually manage that! But, now, why would you want *me* there?

KARI

Because *hello*! It's like having a birthday cake delivered to your door like it's a pizza! It'd be weird to do it alone. Come on, let's go get you a ticket.

KARI tugs on ROLAND in the direction of the TICKETS area, and he allows himself to be tugged—incrementally.

ROLAND

(pulling back enough to stop her)

But I don't have a change of clothes. I haven't made any reservations for a place to stay.

KARI

It's the capitol of Alabama! They sell clothes there! Lots of places to stay! Look, if you can afford to buy snacks at a bus station, you can afford this.

(tugs on him again)

ROLAND

Money *is* overrated.

(pulls back and halts)

But you barely know me, Kari. What if—what if I have—*responsibilities*?

DEPOT CLERK

Attention passengers. Those passengers heading south to Broken Wheel, Taffy, Phantom Junction, Marmosett, and all points beyond: this is the first call for boarding the delayed 1:45 bus. Please proceed to the boarding area. Kindly have your ticket ready for the driver. Again, this is the first call for boarding the 1:45 bus heading east to Broken Wheel, Taffy, Phantom Junction, Marmosett, and points beyond.

KARI

That's the bus! I know you don't have any wife or grandkids, and you sit here at the bus station, trying to grant wishes. Well, this is *my* wish!

KARI increases her pull on ROLAND, but he still resists.

ROLAND

Kari, there's a fella comes in here each morning. His name is Wade, and he's homeless. He only has *one* wish. Always the same. That I buy him a cup of coffee. What's he gonna do if I'm not here?

KARI

Each? *Morning*? You come here *every* day? Look, I don't know what'll happen to your homeless guy. Maybe he'll try something *different* for a day or two! Maybe that'll be *good* for him!

(pointedly)

Breaking out of his routine, I mean.

ROLAND

(nods first, but then suddenly)

No, this is too all-of-a-sudden! I need some time to mull this over.

KARI

(taking a more serious approach)

Look. The Internet says Rosa Parks didn't mull it over. She was ordered to move to the back of the bus—and she refused! All-of-a-sudden! And she made history! It's not like I'm asking you to make history here, Roland.

ROLAND

You're not, are you? No, you're not. You're just pretending like you're some kind of a—like you're some kind of a *wizard*.

After a moment, ROLAND offers forth his arms for KARI to start pulling again. She takes him up on the offer.

ROLAND

(being pulled offstage toward the TICKETS area)

But you'll be going on to Atlanta, huh? Great town, Atlanta. Never been there myself. Often thought about going there, though.

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF PLAY)