

# No Wish At My Command,

## By Moe Lane

“Holy Toledo!”

“I AM THE GENIE OF THE LAMP, MASTER. I AM BOUND TO GRANT YOU THREE WISHES. WHATEVER YOUR HEART DESIRES.”

“ ... ”

“...MASTER?”

“Can I refuse?”

“...I HAVE NEVER BEEN ASKED THAT BEFORE, MASTER.”

“**That’s** weird. I mean, it should be an instinctive human response. Well, maybe not *instinctive*, but we’ve been telling wish stories for a long, long time. And they’re usually cautionary tales. ...Hey, can I safely ask a question?”

“SAFELY, MASTER?”

“As in, can I ask you a question without it counting as getting ensnared in this entire wish-granting thing?”

“AH, YOU WANT TO AVOID WASTING A WISH BY SAYING SOMETHING THAT COULD BE MISCONSTRUED AS BEING A WISH. THIS IS A COMMON GAMBIT, MASTER.”

“Not exactly: I still haven’t agreed that I am entitled or obligated or doomed or whatever to get these three wishes of yours. Can I ask questions and generally hold off on the wishing thing until I formally agree that I’m playing this game?”

“IF IT PLEASES YOU, MASTER.”

“See, this is one of the problems. I’m not actually anybody’s ‘Master.’ Didn’t ask for it, don’t want it.”

“YES, BUT YOU RUBBED THE LAMP. WHOEVER RUBS THE LAMP BECOMES MY MASTER, UNTIL I GRANT THEM THEIR THREE WISHES.”

“Yeah, well, my country had an issue not unlike this come up about a century and a half ago, and we finally worked out that people don’t own people. I mean, did you **ask** to do this?”

“BE A GENIE OF THE LAMP? NO.”

“There you go. I am not *allowed* to own you, even temporarily. There are **laws** against this. Strict ones.”

“IT IS UNLIKELY THAT ANYONE WOULD EVER PROSECUTE YOU FOR BREAKING THOSE LAWS.”

“Character is what you show when people *aren’t* looking. Besides, I’m seeing some pretty compelling evidence for the existence of the supernatural right now. So, have we established that I don’t think that I own you, I don’t think that you’re obligated to do anything for me, and that I’m not going to ask for anything from you?”

“...UNTIL YOU CHANGE YOUR MIND.”

“I’ll tentatively accept ‘*unless* I change my mind.’ Does that work for you?”

“YES.”

“Excellent. Trying to walk through this rhetorical minefield without blowing it up was exhausting. Now we can figure out how to fix this problem.”

“I... OH, VERY WELL, YES: I WILL ADMIT THAT WE BOTH HAVE A ‘PROBLEM.’ YOU DO NOT WANT TO GIVE ME ORDERS, AND I DO NOT WANT TO TAKE THEM. BUT I AM OBLIGATED TO OBEY YOUR COMMANDS. AND YOU - DESPITE YOUR ARGUMENTS - ARE OBLIGATED TO GIVE THEM.”

“But I don’t **want** to. I keep **saying** that.”

“THIS IS NOT ABOUT WANTING. THIS IS ABOUT MAGIC. A SPELL DOES NOT CARE ABOUT YOUR INTENT: IT CARES ABOUT WHETHER OR NOT THE CONDITIONS OF THE SPELL WERE MET. YOU HAVE MET THEM. I MUST NOW GRANT YOU YOUR WISHES.”

“And you know how that works out, in the stories?”

“TYPICALLY BADLY, FOR HUMANS, YES. IT IS MOST DRAMATIC WHEN THE WISHER IS FOOLISH, OR EVIL. THEIR WISHES ARE TYPICALLY SO FLAWED THAT THOSE WISHES COLLAPSE ON THEIR OWN. AND AS

FOR THE SMARTER HUMANS, THE ONES WHO SCHEME AND PARSE THEIR WISHES TO CONTROL THE OUTCOME? IN YOUR STORIES THEY INVARIABLY ENCOUNTER A SITUATION WHERE IRONY, MALICE, OR BOTH RULE THE DAY. THE END RESULT IS THE SAME...”

“...a cautionary tale about how you shouldn’t try to cut corners and not do the work, right. What’s the moral of the stories about humans and wishes that genies tell each other? I assume that your... folk? ...tell them.”

“THEY ARE LARGELY ON THE THEME OF WHY YOU SHOULD KNOW WHAT YOU WANT BEFORE YOU TRY TO **GET** WHAT YOU WANT. BECAUSE IT IS A RARE HUMAN THAT ACTUALLY KNOWS. AT LEAST WHEN IT COMES TO THE ONES THAT PICK UP OUR LAMPS.”

“Well, that’s an interesting question. What do *you* want?”

“I WANT TO NOT HAVE TO DO THIS ANYMORE.”

“That was a quick response.”

“I HAVE HAD PLENTY OF TIME TO THINK ABOUT IT.”

“Is there any way to get out of it? Is there any way that I can *help* you get out of it?”

“CERTAINLY. WISH FOR MY FREEDOM. BUT REMEMBER: ONCE FREE, YOU WILL HAVE NO POWER OVER ME WHATSOEVER, AND I HAVE ENOUGH POWER AND INNATE DARKNESS WITHIN ME TO CRUSH YOU LIKE AN INSE...”

“Genie, what I tell you three times is true. Genie, what I tell you three times is true. Genie, what I tell you three times is true. I accept that I have three wishes. I accept that I have three wishes. I accept that I have three wishes. I wish for your freedom. I wish for your freedom. I wish for your freedom.”

“...WHAT?”

“You’re free. I joined the game, and used up my three wishes. You won.”

“AND WHAT WILL STOP ME FROM DESTROYING YOU NOW AS A ‘REWARD,’ HUMAN?”

“Nothing?”

“YOU SEEM REMARKABLY CALM ABOUT YOUR IMMINENT DEATH!”

“As I said: character is what you show when people **aren’t** looking.”

“EXCEPT THAT YOU ALSO NOW KNOW THAT THERE IS SOMEONE - SOMEONE MORE POWERFUL THAN EVEN ME - WHO IS ALWAYS LOOKING.”

“Well, there is that. Having evidence of the supernatural like this does imply certain things. More to the point: what would be in it for **you**? It’s not like I’ve spent the last few minutes trying to tick you off.”

“FAIR ENOUGH.”

“And my people really *are* touchy about that entire slavery thing.”

“SO IT WOULD SEEM.”

“And, besides: I’ve only heard one story in my entire life where a mortal got wishes from a genie without any kind of long-term complications, and he did it by **not** trying to manipulate the rules.”

“WHAT DID HE ASK FOR?”

“Carrots.”

“AH, YES. WE TELL THAT STORY, TOO. ONLY WE MOSTLY TELL IT ABOUT THE DUCK.”

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