

DON'T RUB ME THE WRONG WAY

ACT I

[This play had a staged reading with the Gay Performance Company in NYC in 1991 and also with the Phoenix Theater in San Francisco in 1996.]

CHARACTERS:

SAM ABERNATH, a good-hearted man of conservative appearance,
45-70

GENE, a genie of somewhat exotic and sinister appearance, any age

CATERINA, a flamboyant poet, any age

PRISCILLA, a reluctant swinger, any age

HERMAN, a tattooed heavy-breather, any age

PLICK, a foreign gentleman of no known country, any age

DOG, any breed, any age, either a real one or a person in a costume

SETTING: It is the living room of SAM ABERNATHY'S apartment, which is in considerable disarray because the occupant is moving: rolled-up rugs, displaced furniture, etc. There is one functioning door upstage which should be on a slant so the audience can't see anyone who is there until the person enters. The telephone should be equipped with a speaker so that the callers' voices fill the room.

TIME: The present

AT RISE: It is mid-morning. The telephone on its table rings several times. No one answers. It stops ringing.

SAM (entering carrying a box of junk.) Was that the phone? (checking the answering machine.) Wish they wouldn't just hang up like that. I spent a ton of money on all this equipment. (bending, joking.) Talk to me! (He sets the box down, pushes some furniture closer to the door.) Might as well make it easier for the movers. Apparently I'm not going to be able to sell this stuff! (Notices a lantern in the box.) Hey! (Picks it up.) So that's where this has been! . . . Marrakech twenty-five — no, twenty-six years ago! Dianna bought it from that wizened, little merchant in that smelly bazaar. He said it was a 'magic' lantern. Ha! Somehow it got misplaced before we even had a chance to try it. And it's been in that closet all this time. Sorry, Dianna. Guess we should have used it when you were sick . . . But we didn't, did we? (mourns Dianna a moment.) Well, let me make a wish now, then! What have I got to lose! (Rubs the lamp.) May I have as much love and affection in the last part of my life as I had in the first part with Dianna! (daringly.) Maybe even more! (Waits for some sign.) What, no genie? (Doorbell rings.) Just a minute! (Goes to door.)

PAPERBOY (offstage) Collect for the paper!

SAM Oh, I thought you were the movers! (paying.) Here you are, young man. You'd better check with the new tenant to see if they want the paper delivered.

PAPERBOY (offstage) You're one of my best customers, Mister Abernathy. Sorry you're leavin'

SAM Here's a little something for being such a good paperboy.

PAPERBOY (offstage) Gee, thanks! I wish all my customers were as nice as you are! Bye!

SAM (entering with newspaper.) Goodbye! (opening the newspaper.) Guess I got it in too late, or I would've had more calls by now. (finding his ad.) What? They forgot to mention furniture! (reading aloud.) "Real Good Bi." They've spelled "Buy" B-I! This paper — they can't anything right! For god's sake, I'm not bi! I'd better call them and get it changed before my number gets out to who knows who — (Immediate telephone ring. SAM hesitates, then decides he's worrying over nothing, picks up the receiver or turns on the speaker.) Hello!

HERMAN (heavy breathing.)

SAM Hello?

HERMAN Is this you-know-who?

SAM Is it about the ad?

HERMAN Get it out!

SAM Beg pardon?

HERMAN Get it out. Mine's out.

SAM Who is this?

HERMAN Have you got yours in your hand?

SAM (lightly.) Afraid not. Just the paper!

HERMAN Put yours up next to the phone. Mine is.

(Sam makes a face and moves the receiver away from his ear.)

SAM I'm afraid you have the wrong number.

HERMAN Aren't you the 'real good bi'? I'm one!

SAM I'm afraid there's been a mistake in my ad. It should've read 'Buy,' as in Good Buy . . . Also as in 'goodbye.' (Sam starts to hang up.)

HERMAN Wait! Don't hang up! I just spent my last quarter!

SAM So?

HERMAN Couldn't you help me out a little?

SAM By doing what?

HERMAN You know. Talk to me. (He pants.)

SAM I'm afraid that isn't my scene.

HERMAN Ever tried it?

SAM . . . Well, no . . .

HERMAN It's fun! Why don't you unzip?

SAM (looking around.) Among other things, isn't it a little bit . . . impersonal?

HERMAN Yeah, I suppose. But it cuts way down on, you know, communicables.

SAM The telephone company should advertise this fact.

HERMAN (gnawing on the receiver.) Aren't you horny?

SAM Well . . .

HERMAN Don't be bashful. Whip it out! (SAM looks around to see who may be overhearing this.) Is it out yet?

SAM (unaccountably feeling compelled to go along but of course only pretending.) Well, it's . . .

HERMAN So is mine. I've got a big one. Don't you think?

SAM (Reacts to telephone.)

HERMAN Do you got a big one?

SAM I've had my share of compliments. Are you about finished?

HERMAN Why? You going somewheres?

SAM Yes, I'm moving. This place is a little too big for me, now that my wife is gone.

HERMAN Me — I got an old lady too! Only she kicked me out. That's why I'm calling up these ads. But I don't like to rush, you know. I like it more . . . caring, you know?

SAM I see . . . Are you through now?

HERMAN I've been having this real big crisis in my life. By the way, what's your name?

SAM Sam.

HERMAN I'm Herman! Nice to meet you. What do you look like?

SAM Well . . . I'm considered handsome by some people.

HERMAN How tall are you? And so on.

SAM (actor supplies height, weight, a flattering detail.) And so on.

HERMAN Any moles?

SAM No.

HERMAN No? Too bad. I like moles. Colorful, you know.

SAM (unable to resist.) What about you? What do you look like?

HERMAN Me? Oh, I'm interesting-looking. Sort of hard to describe. I've got great big eyes — sort of like a trout's, only nice, you know what I mean? More like a goldfish's. Can you picture it?

SAM (his lip curling.) I think so . . .

HERMAN Anyway, Sam, I really appreciate the way you didn't hang up on me. My old lady stopped putting out after I got these tattoos.

SAM Tattoos?

HERMAN Yeah, all over my body. Snakes and scorpions and owls, in all colors. But some of them turned all splotchy last week. That's why I'm in the hospital.

SAM You mean you're in the hospital right now?

HERMAN Yep, I sneak down to the lounge here and call out. I can't call from my bed 'cause I'm in a ward.

SAM I'm sorry to hear about your . . . blotchy tattoos.

HERMAN Splotchy, not blotchy. They're more splotchy.

SAM Is there a difference? Thanks for the clarification.

HERMAN This has been real nice of you. You wouldn't believe how many hang up on me! Guess they've got 'hang-ups,' huh? (Laughs.)

SAM Actually I've got quite a few things I ought to be doing myself —

HERMAN Wait! (Goes away.)

SAM Is anything wrong? Hello?

HERMAN Whew, that was a close one! That big, black nurse just went by and almost caught me! I closed my bathrobe just in time. She's a mean one!

SAM Well, it's been . . . charming talking to you, but I must —

HERMAN WAIT! I'm almost there. Let me turn and face the side of the booth.

SAM What?

HERMAN I don't like to make a mess. It's easier to wipe up if it goes on the glass.

SAM I'm sure the staff there is grateful.

HERMAN Hey, I'm getting there! It's getting there! Are you getting there?

SAM Oh, what the hell! (playing along.) Nearly!

HERMAN Let's get there together, okay?

SAM Anything you say!

HERMAN Oh, oh, oh, ah, ah, AH AHHHHHHH! (Climaxes noisily.)

SAM . . . Did you get there?

HERMAN (No answer.)

SAM Herman?

HERMAN I'm back! Thanks for helping me out in my crisis. I can't express my appreciation. I'll call you again sometime, Sam. You're a real buddy!

SAM No, I'm really going to be moving away! Word of honor! And I don't know my new number yet!

HERMAN That's a shame. I suppose I could give you this number in the booth, but I'm not here all the time. You can't call me in the ward. Got that, Sam!

SAM Got it.

HERMAN Maybe I can get your new number if I call this old one —

SAM Yes. Yes. So long, Herman! I've got to go now. Bye! Good luck with your . . . splotchy tattoos. (Puts the telephone down with an exhalation of breath, then looks at the receiver and shakes his head and smiles.) (He picks up the "magic" lantern and holds it aloft.) Could it be . . . ? (Tosses it back into the box. Nonsense! Genies! What next!

(The doorbell rings, then rings twice more. When Sam answers it, a man with an earring and workman's blue overalls comes rushing into the apartment. GENE should convey a sense of the playful and the sinister.)

GENE I hope you'll forgive me!

SAM Who are you?

GENE I'm Gene.

SAM Gene? Gene who?

GENE Didn't you call me?

SAM Aren't you the movers?

GENE You want to move your furniture, furniture moved it will be! (sweeping a chair up in his arms.)

SAM Hey! How do I know you aren't stealing my furniture?

GENE You've got to be kidding! If I were you, I'd dump all this. (Waves at the entire apartment, sitting on sofa.)

SAM My wife and I had these things for years. I've grown very attached to them.

GENE I've become attached to something too; however, I think it's just somebody's gum. (pinching the gum off the seat of his overalls and flicking it away.) Yours?

SAM Oh, that's where that went to! Sorry.

GENE Gum isn't good for you. Gets the teeth. Been having some problems with my wisdom teeth. Back here! Must be because I'm so wise. (reaching into his mouth to massage his gums.)

SAM (about the over-familiarity.) Do I know you?

GENE I heard you were looking for a handyman.

SAM I'm afraid I can't afford a handyman.

GENE I'm cheap — and that's not a comment on my moral behavior! Or maybe it is. (Smiles.)

SAM (unsure if GENE is flirting.) Ah . . . I'm not —

GENE Just like to help people. That's what I'm into. Can't seem to help it. (Gestures at the "magic" lantern.) Nice lamp you've got there.

SAM Yes . . .

GENE If I had one of those, boy, the wishes I'd make! Goddamn! Goddamn! (A look of covetousness and anger shows.)

SAM Like what?

GENE Believe me, you don't want to know.

SAM Sure I do.

GENE I wouldn't work for anybody else, that's for sure. And I'd have — (Catches himself and stops.) I'm not supposed to want things. Just help others get what *they* want.

SAM Oh, this is not really a magic lamp. It's — (pulled in.) What would you like? I'm curious.

GENE I could get punished for saying this. But maybe I can tell you. (Smiles.)

SAM Yes?

GENE A Big Mac!

SAM A Big Mac?

GENE Eaten alone in a rundown McDonald's in a plastic chair on Christmas Day.

SAM Is that the best you can wish for?

GENE Different strokes for different folks! I'm — shall we say — eccentric. But goddamn, I'm not allowed to want. (slamming his fist.) (moving the sofa.) I'm a working man! So I'd better get this stuff moved, right?

SAM (at window) I don't see any moving truck out there. Are you sure you're —

GENE It's there. Trust me!

SAM I think maybe you should leave. (Gestures vaguely.)

GENE Have faith in people, man, or where will we all be?

SAM I've heard of people pretending to be moving men and coming in and taking valuables.

GENE (amused.) I don't want your furniture. Sam, I promise! (looking at the lantern with incontestable longing.) Still, if you want to get rid of this, I might take it off your hands. (He seems to want to pick it up but doesn't dare.) (Touches it, burns his hand.) Hot stuff!

SAM (picking up the lamp protectively.) It's not for sale.

GENE You're just going to toss it out and let it lie around for who knows how long? Going to waste in a box somewhere, for ages and ages? I'll give you a receipt, how's that? (Takes out a receipt pad from his rear pocket.) That way, it'll be all official and everything. An official change of ownership — to protect you, of course.

SAM (nervous, but unsure why.) I think . . . I think I want to hang onto it for a while.

GENE You said it's nothing but a piece of junk! How much do you want for it? The other people who've owned it over the years — did they do anything worthwhile with it? I'm sure I can do better than they did! (Holds his hand was out, eager.) Okay?

SAM Well, I don't suppose I'll really need it . . .

GENE Sign it over to me then! (scribbling on the receipt pad, then holding it out.) Come on.

SAM (Doubtful, then shrugging, just about to sign.) (The telephone rings.) (answering.) Yes?

PRISCILLA (over the speaker.) I saw your ad in the paper. Do you like me yet?

SAM I'm afraid I'm just selling used furniture.

PRISCILLA (after a pause.) Of course you are. May I come over? My name is Priscilla.

SAM As long as there's no misunderstanding. (with a nod in Gene's direction.)

PRISCILLA (trying to overcome shyness.) None at all.

SAM Good. I live at 87 Pacific Grove Boulevard. What kind of furniture are you looking for?

PRISCILLA (after taking a breath.) Big . . . Is your furniture big?

SAM I'm afraid I'm leaving the stove and the refrigerator — the largest pieces — but there's a big bed I might sell.

PRISCILLA (after another intake.) Well, let me come over and see what you've got then.

SAM All right.

PRISCILLA By the way, are you married?

SAM Not any longer.

PRISCILLA Oh, good. By the bye, I'm bi too! Although I'm a virgin.

SAM A *bi* virgin? . . . Well, who isn't? Oh, incidentally, I have one very nice night-stand still for sale.

PRISCILLA (incensed.) You're looking for a one-night stand?

SAM Not a one-night stand. A night-stand!

PRISCILLA Well, believe you me, I'm not coming all the way over there if it's just a one-night stand!

SAM It's just furniture, miss! F-u-r —

PRISCILLA I know your type! They always want to show you the bed first. Or the couch! You wouldn't believe how many couches I've been cornered on. But I want to warn you I carry a hatpin. Dipped in poison! The kind New Guinea pygmies use!

SAM I believe there's been some misunderstanding here —

PRISCILLA All right, how tall are you?

SAM Miss!

PRISCILLA How tall? Come on, don't lie to me. They always lie! I'm going to take charge of this situation!

SAM (Gives his real height.)

PRISCILLA Weight?

SAM (He lies, making himself seem thinner, but guiltily.)

PRISCILLA And how old are you?

SAM Miss, I really think there's —

PRISCILLA I'll give my statistics in a moment; however, I've learned never to meet in person until I'm sure of what I'm getting.

SAM (to Gene.) Sorry it's taking so long. Won't be much longer. (into Priscilla's ear.) I'm _____ (Gives a much younger age than he is.)

PRISCILLA That's a good age. Are you an extravert or an intro?

SAM In-between.

PRISCILLA Do you have any disgusting habits? Come now, be honest!

SAM I chew my fingernails.

PRISCILLA I can live with that.

SAM You can? Well, sometimes I chew other people's fingernails.

PRISCILLA I'm sure that's a joke. Anything else? Any disgusting perversions?

SAM I talk on the telephone to perfect strangers.

PRISCILLA Nobody's perfect, not even me. You sound satisfactory.

SAM Thank you. Anything more?

PRISCILLA Do you smoke, drink to excess, or use sex enhancers?

SAM No, no, and no.

PRISCILLA Do you swear you're telling the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth?

SAM So help me God!

GENE (Flaps his receipt book invitingly.) Could you sign this, Sam?

SAM (to GENE.) When did I tell you my first name? I don't recall doing it.

GENE If you don't want me to call you by your first name, it shall be undone! (Bows.)
I assumed too soon that you and I were friends. We're just employer and employee.
Pardon me for presuming on your openness.

PRISCILLA Are you there?

SAM I'm here. Just a sec!

GENE (holding out receipt.) What do you say, Mr. Abernathy?

SAM (to GENE .) Just a sec!

PRISCILLA You still there? You've passed the first phase of my little questionnaire. You can't
be too careful these days!

SAM Did I get an A?

PRISCILLA B+ . . . Now for me — I'm a woman of independent means and maturity, my exact
age unimportant. I'm only doing this because I'm taking a course in 'Being the Real
You.' I like to cook, but I like to dine out as well, but I refuse — absolutely refuse —
to eat in revolving restaurants. I admire neatness, punctuality, and serious political
discussions, nothing flighty. I am trying to have firm opinions, but I'm more than
willing to listen to yours if they're not expressed too often. Furthermore, I'm not sordid
— *not* sordid — just because I'm calling you up like this. I'm discreet and I —

SAM Thank you, miss, but I believe this is getting out of —

PRISCILLA Moreover, I don't French kiss on the first date! Sometimes not even on the second.

GENE She doesn't French?

PRISCILLA Is there someone else there with you? Who is that?

SAM Just an acquaintance.

GENE (Bows ironically to SAM.) Thanks a lot.

PRISCILLA I most certainly don't participate in or-gees! (She pronounces it 'orgees'.) I may be
bi, but I'm not kinky! I happen to be in my man phase right now.

SAM There's no *or-gee* here.

PRISCILLA I won't come over if there's a crowd.

SAM Miss —

PRISCILLA Shall we say within the hour?

SAM Miss, I don't believe we've been properly introduced!

PRISCILLA (hurt.) Don't you like me? You don't want me to come over?

SAM It's not that I don't like you. It's just that I'm —

PRISCILLA I sort of like you. Don't you even want to meet me? What is it about me? This is the seventh call I've made today, and I can't get anybody to invite me over! (Weeps.) I'm tired of being a virgin!

SAM Now, now, don't cry!

PRISCILLA I'm a very nice person! If people would only take the trouble to look at my soul!

SAM I can tell that.

PRISCILLA Then why don't you invite me over? I don't smoke, drink, or bite other people's fingernails. What more could you want?

SAM I didn't mean to hurt your feelings.

PRISCILLA Was it something I said? My voice?

GENE (trying to grab the telephone.) Goodbye!

SAM It was nothing you said. It's —

PRISCILLA I call them up and call them up, and all I get are rejections!

SAM (shrugging, being a nice guy.) Well, come over if you like. You're entirely welcome.

PRISCILLA Now you won't take advantage of me, will you? I'm vulnerable. And I'm not cheap!

SAM Solemn promise!

PRISCILLA I know ju-jitsu!

GENE To say nothing of your pygmy hatpin!

PRISCILLA You weren't lying to me about being short, were you? I don't really like pygmies, only their poison.

SAM I promise I'm taller.

PRISCILLA You're sure it's all right for me to come over? It's so hard these days to find somebody really nice!

SAM Why not! Why the hell not! (Hangs up.)

GENE You seem to be having quite a day, aren't you, fella?

SAM (picking up the lamp.) If I were superstitious, I'd say it all started when I rubbed this. (Slaps his cheek.) But that's foolish!

GENE (unconvincing.) Without question. I'm amazed at how primitive modern human beings can be. What good is all their education if they believe nonsense like that!

SAM (pouncing.) Why do you want this lamp then? There's something going on here!

GENE A mere bauble! A nothing. A figment. An illusion. . . . Shall I go on?

(They stare at each other for a moment, with SAM picking up odd vibrations from GENE.)

SAM How are you? . . . I don't suppose you'd like to own this so you could be the one in control?

GENE Control? What are you talking about?

SAM Magic lanterns and wizards and . . . genies. Ever hear about genies, Gene?

GENE (evasively.) Can't say that I have, but then I didn't have much of a childhood.

SAM Genies are spirits that dwell in bottles.

GENE Really? Spirits in bottles, huh? (smirking.) Sure you don't need to see a man about A.A.?

SAM These genies have been put under a spell and have to do the bidding of whoever owns the bottle — or lamp. (Holds up his own lamp.)

GENE And then the big bad wolf huffed and he puffed and he blew the house down.

SAM You don't believe?

GENE (snorting.) This is the twentieth century, isn't that correct? (in a darker mood.) But if I did believe in genies, I'd want to free those imprisoned against their will. (with a big grin.) Wouldn't you?

SAM I've heard that genies can be pretty dangerous if set free.

GENE Funny, you don't strike me as the kind who'd approve of slavery. Aren't you what is known as a 'liberal,' witness your behavior on the phone with that obnoxious woman. Bleeding hearts, or is it bleeding ulcers?

SAM Sometimes both. Still, we have to be careful what we unleash.

GENE I'm surprised at you! You'd better be careful or folks will say you've gone a little ding-dong. (Points to his head.) You know what I mean?

SAM (intimidated.) Of course I don't believe in it myself.

GENE Good! Only believe in what you can see. Hey, I'd better get to this furniture. I am a working man, aren't I? I'll carry something extra-heavy from the bedroom so get your money's worth. Is it through here? (Starts to exit.)

SAM Please be careful with the lamps in there. I want to keep those.

GENE (as he exits to offstage bedroom.) What is this thing you have for lamps, Mr. Abernathy? (Laughs and disappears.)

(At once SAM begins looking for a place to hide the lantern, frightened and feeling foolish at the same time. He shoves it underneath the sofa but then realizes the sofa will be moved. He goes to the built-in bookshelf, but that doesn't seem right either. Finally he forces himself to stop and look squarely at the lantern in his hand. He'll test it! Of course! He hesitates a few moments and then rubs the lamp hard.)

GENE (immediately entering from bedroom carrying a lamp.) Do you want something? (harshly.) What is it?

SAM I-I-I —

GENE I heard you call.

SAM No, I didn't call.

GENE You're sure?

SAM Positive.

GENE Sorry, my fault. (gesturing.) Why are you holding onto that lamp so hard?

SAM (fumbling.) Why are you holding onto that one?

GENE Just moving it. (Sets it down, too casually.)

SAM Me too. (Tries to set the "magic" lantern down as casually.) By the way, who sent you again?

GENE The Masters Moving Company. Didn't you call us?

SAM I'd forgotten the name. They sent only one of you to move all this?

GENE I'm real strong.

SAM (vaguely threatened.) Ah, can you get the throw rugs in the bedroom? And the mattress?

GENE I think I can manage. (Exits.)

(SAM grabs the "magic" lantern immediately and peers at it from all angles. He is about to rub it again when Gene's voice carries into the living room.)

GENE Hey, can you come and help me for a minute?

SAM (choking.) Help you?

GENE (calling.) You're not still playing around with that old lamp, are you?

SAM Certainly not! (Looks around for a place to hide it.)

GENE (calling.) This mattress is a little clumsy. I could use a hand. Could you come in here?

SAM (calling.) Just a minute! (Finally hides the lantern under a sofa cushion.)

GENE Are you coming?

SAM (exiting to bedroom.) (offstage voice.) Here, let me help.

GENE (still offstage.) You take that end of the mattress. And I'll take this one.

(Sounds of movement.)

SAM It's a little bulky.

GENE I'll get a dolly. Won't be a minute.

(GENE comes back on stage quickly, obviously searching for the hidden lantern, but he can't find it.)

SAM (calling.) Need any help out there?

GENE Never mind! Everything's fine! (Opens the door and closes it to make SAM think he's gone outside for the dolly.) (Searches more frantically, behind the bookcase.)

SAM (entering.) Anything the matter in here?

GENE (very cool.) I dropped a dime.

SAM Behind the bookcase? . . . I can give you a dime to replace yours.

GENE That's very kind of you, Mr. Abernathy.

SAM You may call me Sam!

GENE May I?

SAM I didn't mean to imply earlier that I'm your superior or something. I just didn't know you that well.

GENE And now you know me better, right, and we're practically brothers?

(SAM sits down on the cushion under which he's hidden the lantern, to see if he can feel it without seeming to check. He can tell it's there through the cushion.)

GENE You tired?

SAM . . . a bit.

GENE Maybe you should lie down for a while. In the bedroom — while I move the stuff out here.

SAM I'm not that tired. Just sitting here is enough.

GENE That sofa looks uncomfortable. You know — lumpy.

SAM It's fine. (Wiggles up and down on the cushion, which is obviously uncomfortable.)

GENE (reacting against his will to the rubbed lantern.) Yes? . . . YES?

SAM (noticing that GENE reacts when SAM moves his rump.) It's so hard to get comfortable on modern sofas, have you noticed? (He deliberately moves his rump, thereby rubbing the lantern underneath.)

GENE (smarting.) Did you want something?

SAM Who me? Not that I can think of.

GENE (trying to hide his rage.) Goddamn it! Goddamn!

SAM I beg your pardon? (He wiggles his rump again, not truly sure that he is controlling GENE by doing so.) I've got an itch, but it's not polite to scratch, is it? (He slides back and forth energetically on the cushion.)

GENE Oh, God! What do you want? What?

SAM Just my furniture moved.

GENE (angry.) You —! You —! (controlling himself.) It shall be done, sir! (Hurries offstage.)

SAM (snatching the lantern from under the cushion.) I guess I'd better hang onto this! (Stuffs it into his pocket or under his shirt.) How you doing in there? Need any help?

GENE (entering, lugging the mattress.) Not necessary. I've been in this line of work for a long time.

SAM You sound like you don't care for it.

GENE I don't!

SAM Why don't you quit then?

GENE Why don't you fire me? Oh, no, you wouldn't want to put me through the agony of job re-training at my age!

SAM You don't seem that old.

GENE You'd be surprised. (with a hint of the dangerous.) I take care of myself.

SAM I'll bet you do . . . I'll just bet you do . . .

(They stare at each other, until SAM began to feel irritated at the insolence in GENE'S eyes.)

GENE What? . . .

(Fortunately the telephone rings, and SAM grabs it.)

SAM Yes?

PLICK Magga-magga!

SAM I beg your pardon?

PLICK Dorren doffen duba. Lagga dee-gee?

SAM I'm sorry I don't understand your language. You must have the wrong number.

PLICK Bogga-nitti! Ista? Bonda-bonda.

SAM Sir, I can't understand a word you're saying. Do you speak English?

PLICK Magga-magga!

SAM (louder.) Do you speak English? Speaka the English?

PLICK No English! Magga-magga. Hello?

SAM Hello! What language is this?

PLICK Kirki-kirki. Alta-remboso. Yes?

SAM (to Gene.) Do you speak any foreign languages?

GENE Not me!

SAM I'm sorry, sir. I'm going to have to hang up. Bye-bye.

PLICK Bi-bi, yes. Magga-magga! BI!

SAM What number are you calling?

PLICK (very clearly but in broken English.) 'Real good bi'?

SAM Oh, I guess you do have the right number. But it's really the wrong number. I mean —

PLICK Hubba-hubba! Yes?

SAM I didn't realize there were so many bi's in this world. Hubba-hubba — no!

PLICK I ding-dong, yes?

SAM You ding-dong, no.

PLICK Garun-gee. Garun-gee. Ista bista nomen-nanna?

SAM I don't understand you, sir.

(GENE comes over, leans down, and speaks past SAM into the mouthpiece.)

GENE It's 87 Pacific Grove Boulevard!

SAM What did you do that for?

GENE I thought you wanted lots of love and affection.

SAM (suspicious.) I didn't tell you that.

GENE Sure you did.

SAM I told the lamp that.

GENE You told me too.

SAM Just what's going on here?

PLICK Magga-magga?

SAM Magga-magga. I mean hello! Don't come over here! We don't speak your language.

PLICK Name Plick. See ad. Millionaire.

SAM What?

PLICK Me millionaire. No English. Big money!

SAM How big? (He is ashamed of himself at once.) I didn't mean that!

PLICK Pilos-to! Yes!

SAM I don't know what's going on here, but I'm putting a stop to all this.

GENE All you have to do is rub the lamp and make another wish.

SAM This is all nonsense. The lamp has nothing to do with anything!

GENE Suit yourself. (Grins.) Just want you to be happy, Mr. Abernathy.

SAM I said to call me Sam!

GENE (singing softly, moving furniture.) "I dream of Jeanie with the light brown . . . nose!"

SAM Just what are you up to?

GENE (half-seriously.) A plot to take over the world, what else!

PLICK Magga-magga?

SAM Yes, I'm still here, Mr. Plick. Or is Plick your first name? Never mind. (very precisely.) Good . . . bye. You understand? 'Good-bye.' Yes?

PLICK Me good bi, yes! 'See you soon!' Magga-magga!" (Hangs up.)

SAM Oh, no! (wearily.) Magga-magga. (slams telephone down, to GENE.) I don't suppose you had anything to do with that one either?

GENE Me?

SAM That telephone hasn't rung for weeks. And now suddenly . . .

GENE (with straight face.) We wouldn't want you to be lonely.

SAM I don't imagine it's because you want this lamp! (Holds out lantern.)

GENE Why would I? I don't want love and affection.

SAM Maybe it's a valuable antique!

GENE I doubt it's worth more than a few dollars. May I see? (Holds out his hand.)

SAM (on guard.) I . . . don't think so.

GENE Suit none but yourself! It belongs to you. Position is nine-tenths of the law — no matter how silly you may look protecting your 'treasure.'

SAM I suppose if this lamp became enough of a nuisance for me I'd want to give it up, wouldn't I? I mean, if it gave me far more than I needed — like too many phone calls, too many . . .

GENE You look at me so oddly. Careful, I'm not bi!

SAM I'm not bi either!

GENE You really shouldn't go around squinting at people. They might get the wrong impression.

SAM You're the one who looks odd, my friend! All I've tried to do is make you feel welcome in my home. And what do I get for my trouble? Nothing but . . . threats. You're not going to intimidate me! I could be holding the secret of happiness in my hand right this minute. (Clutching the lamp.)

GENE Is that happiness, Sam? But then how would I know? I've never been — happy, that is.

SAM That's a trick! You're trying to get his lamp way from me!

GENE Sam, you'd better get a grip on yourself.

SAM What did you mean you've never been happy?

GENE Oh, don't worry about me. I'm just here to serve. We in the 'helping professions' just love to serve.

SAM Don't you ever get any time off?

GENE No. Plus lots of overtime! But I don't want to burden you with my troubles. That's the way the world is, apparently. Some get, some don't. Some worry about fending off too many lovers. Some are quite . . . solitary. Ours not to reason why. Ours but to do and — I guess happiness isn't something everybody is supposed to have, and I just happen to be one of those.

SAM (fighting feeling guilty.) How do I know you're sincere? How do I know you won't take this lantern and wreak havoc with it?

GENE Do I look like an arsonist?

SAM Surely this lamp isn't enough to make you happy?

GENE Probably not.

SAM I don't want anybody to be miserable if I can help it!

GENE Words are very easy. I wish I were as glib.

SAM How do I know I'm not doing the wrong thing?

GENE The Good Samaritan who stops to help the stranded motorist might of course get maimed by a hit-and-run bicycle. The gentleman who interferes when that old lady is raped might get his coat dirty.

SAM And there's a sucker born every minute, with a con man to take advantage of him!

GENE People always manage to justify their indifference to the pain of their fellow men somehow, don't they? And of course magic lanterns are the stuff of enchanted tales. Not hard, cold facts like you're used to, Sam.

SAM Oh, you're crafty! Very crafty.

GENE Sam, there isn't an ounce of guile in my body!

SAM But maybe a gallon? If you want his lamp so much, why don't you just steal it? You could grab it out of my hand and disappear out the door in a flash.

GENE What good is a gift that's forced? It has to be freely given or it's nothing to me.

(The telephone rings.)

SAM (answering.) What?

CATERINA I am Caterina the poet! Did you place an ad for me?

SAM (sighs.) No.

CATERINA I want to read you a poem of mine! (recites.) “I am proud of my glands! The deep, aromatic richness of my armpits! O wonder! O joy! I carry the world on my back. O world! O joy!” Well, what do you think? I think it’s vital to celebrate the body, don’t you?

SAM Well, yes . . .

CATERINA Isn’t it a wonderful poem? I wrote it just five minutes ago. It’s my way of introducing myself.

SAM (tongue-in-cheek.) How do you do.

CATERINA Did you catch my use of alliteration?

SAM I must have missed that.

CATERINA You did? Well, let me read it again then —

SAM That’s all right! I remember now — wonderful alliteration! Wonderful!

CATERINA It’s a haiku.

SAM Isn’t it a little long for a haiku?

CATERINA Caterina is not held back by tradition! Caterina breaks down barriers. In verse — and in sex! That’s why she is calling you to ask for a date. What do you say?

SAM Ah . . .

CATERINA Are you hesitating?

SAM Well, ah . . .

CATERINA Oh, good! I get turned on by hesitant men! Hesitate some more, okay?

SAM (not intentionally.) I — I — I —

CATERINA That’s it! I love that! Can I come over? I’ll read you some more of my poems to turn you on.

SAM That isn’t necessary.

CATERINA You don’t like my poems?

SAM I’m sure they have their audience.

GENE (calling.) Invite her over! I love poetic armpits!

SAM Don’t you interfere!

GENE Go ahead. The more the merrier!

CATERINA Are you still there? Who is that with you?

GENE His brother-in-love!

SAM I'm still here, caller.

CATERINA Call me Caterina! What is your name? You have a nice voice.

SAM (flattered against his will.) Do I? My name is Sam.

CATERINA I don't believe in beating around the proverbial bird.

SAM Huh?

CATERINA If I like a man — or a woman — I say so!

SAM I bet you do!

CATERINA Don't you like strong women?

SAM Ah . . .

CATERINA Do you or don't you? Don't stammer. I myself am ready for a second marriage now. I like hesitant men, but not *too* hesitant!

SAM I just want to sell my furniture!

CATERINA Furniture?

SAM (semi-sweetly.) I'm going to hang up now.

CATERINA Hang up? Can't you handle a strong woman?

SAM Maybe. Maybe not.

CATERINA Oh, I like that tone in your voice, Sam. It does something to me. I might write a poem about it in fact — right here on the phone! My creative juices are flowing!

SAM Please don't!

CATERINA What?

SAM I mean, I'm still savoring the beauty of the last poem.

CATERINA (pleased.) Are you? What's that address? I may drop by.

SAM I really don't care to give out my address —

CATERINA What's that number? Out with it!

SAM Really, I —

CATERINA Out with it! Out with it!

SAM It's 87 Pacific Grove Boulevard. But —

CATERINA You can expect me soon. If you are to my taste, which is impeccable, we can proceed from there.

SAM I'm not sure I want to be a sex object.

CATERINA We may marry and be very happy — without any sex at all and you will get to hear all of my poems! Every one of them. I've written over five thousand!

SAM Let's not be hasty now!

CATERINA Here's another poem I wrote! "Ode to a Strong Woman." "Men are rotten. Men are creeps. O, down with men! O down! O down!" How do you like it? Isn't it great?

SAM It's . . . lovely.

CATERINA Isn't it! I thought you'd like it. I wrote that one yesterday. I'm very prolific.

SAM I bet you also write a lot.

CATERINA By the time I get there, I may have written a new one. Can you wait to hear it?

SAM Ah . . .

CATERINA Oh, good, you're hesitating again! You don't know how much that turns me on. I'm glad I noticed this ad in the paper. You'll like me too! You have such good taste!

SAM You sound quite sure of yourself.

CATERINA I am together and forceful!

SAM Didn't they used to call that rudeness?

CATERINA Oh! Caterina feels the rhythm coming on! A new poem is lurking in her occipital lobe — she can feel the throbbing that can only be a poem!

SAM (to GENE.) Why don't I just hang up on these people?

GENE Because you're a nice fellow, everybody's friend. Or so you'd like to think. Or is it merely that you don't want anyone to think ill of you, Sam, not even a bozo like her?

SAM (Reacts to the slap.) Hey.

CATERINA Are you into masculine or feminine rhyme?

SAM Huh?

CATERINA I'll write a poem just for you. "Ode to Sam"! "O, Sam! O hesitant one! O Sam — "

SAM Oh, Christ!

GENE You seem to be a hit today.

SAM Are you behind these calls or aren't you?

GENE I'm behind you ever inch of the way, my friend.

SAM Who are you? If you're a moving man, then where's your goddamn truck?

GENE Come here. (Leads Sam over to the window and points.) See it down there?

SAM It wasn't there before.

GENE Sure it was. Your eyesight's not failing, is it, Sam?

SAM Maybe a little. Perhaps I should ask the lamp for new eyes.

GENE What will they think of next! New eyes! I'd be careful. Isn't there an expression — beware of answered prayers —

SAM I could finally get everything I want!

GENE Why is it human beings always want something for nothing? Some lottery! Or they find some old lamp and expect it to give them what they were never able to earn for themselves!

SAM People have a right to dream!

GENE Ha!

SAM Don't you believe in miracles?

GENE Some Superman swooping in at the last minute to save the toppling bridge? Very likely!

SAM (quoting, not singing.) "When you wish upon a star, makes no difference who you are."

GENE I'm surprised at you, Sam. A man of your age acting like a child!

SAM But what if I have something wonderful right here and I don't take advantage of it? (Excited, holding the lamp carefully with both hands.)

GENE After the new eyes, what then, Sam? New elbows?

SAM Why not? Why be a victim?

GENE Why not indeed! Start from scratch. A young man full of piss and promise. Starting your career all over again. What is your career, Sam?

SAM I'm a bookkeeper.

GENE Yes, a bookkeeper! All those figures! All those years!

SAM Only this time I'll have a career I really like!

GENE An ice skater? A movie star? Sam, the poverty of your imagination!

SAM Well, you wanted a Big Mac!

GENE By myself on Christmas Day. Don't you think that's original? Wish for something original, Sam!

SAM How about a castle in Scotland?

GENE (Gags.)

SAM How about immortality?

GENE Have you ever really thought about what immortality means?

SAM Sure . . .

GENE All your friends die. But you keep on. You have a wife or lover and they die. Then more wives, more lovers. And your heart keeps cracking off with each death. But you go on — because you're immortal. You eat everything you want. You have sex. Every position you can think of — and several that you couldn't if left on your own. You have fame! Then you demand peace and quiet. And then you have them all over again. And again! You try to vary the patterns. But there are only a few little things that human beings can dream up to make themselves happy. And so the years wear into centuries. And then millennia. And then eons. And then eternity, eternity stretching onward before you, Sam, for billions and billions of years, with each billion separated by a billion billion more . . .

SAM Stop it!

GENE Don't you want to hear the truth? Of course not. Nobody does.

SAM You're making it seem bad so I won't use the magic lantern — so that I'll let you go! I've figured you out!

GENE What's gotten into you, Sam? Next stop the old folks home!

SAM (throat tight.) You are evil, aren't you?

GENE Me? I'm just a working man. (A look of hatred, then:.) Well, I suppose I ought to be working then, getting all this stuff out to the truck —

SAM Wait!

GENE What?

SAM I'm going to rub the lamp!

GENE Sam . . .

SAM I am! (Holds his hand near it, not yet rubbing it.) I insist that you tell me the truth!

GENE (shrugging.) Whatever you say, Sam the Man!

SAM Is this really a magic lantern?

GENE Of course, Sam.

SAM Is it or isn't it?

GENE (maddeningly ambiguous.) I'm telling you it is. Would I lie?

SAM How many wishes do I get? As many as I want?

GENE I believe the usual number is three.

SAM And how many have I had so far?

GENE Two.

SAM Two?

GENE You wished for love and affection, which actually was counted only as one. And you wished to have your furniture moved. That leaves one more wish.

SAM What should I wish for?

GENE Is that a request for advice?

SAM No!

GENE Make your last wish a real good one. Of course if you ask me anything, that'll be your last wish.

SAM Can't you answer a simple question for free?

GENE Ah, Sam, why — why — why should I give anything away for free?

SAM How did you get imprisoned in this lamp?

GENE Is that your last request?

SAM No, damn it! You think you're clever, don't you?

GENE I'm too modest to brag. Maybe you should wish for cleverness!

SAM And wind up where it got you?

GENE Don't sneer, Sam. It's an honest living.

SAM I think I'm beginning to understand why you were locked up in here.

GENE I can hear you explaining it to everybody. 'I have a wicked genie in my lamp! A wicked, wicked genie! You must believe me!'

SAM Sit down!

GENE Is that a wish?

SAM Just hospitality, Gene. You've been working so hard for so long. Why don't you rest up! (Waves the lamp toward the sofa.)

GENE (sitting but nonchalant.) Why not let me make the wish for you?

SAM I bet it would be a lulu!

GENE I've never been allowed one wish in my whole life!

SAM What would you really wish for? Dare I ask?

GENE (simply.) Maybe I'd wish for death.

SAM Death?

GENE Maybe that's happiness. Have you thought of that? . . . Not being!

SAM I want to continue being!

GENE Ah, you disappoint me. So run-of-the mill.

SAM What if I made a wish that included the genie? Is that possible?

GENE (interested.) Like what?

SAM I presume this answer will be free?

GENE (Bows slightly.)

SAM Something that will give me happiness and give the genie happiness too.

GENE How touching, Sam. You'll throw in a little happiness for the little old genie — as long as it doesn't interfere with yours, naturally.

SAM Well, what do you expect? I don't know you! You walk into my apartment and upset my whole life, and now you want me to give you my last wish too! (trying to be honest.) I don't know what to do. I don't want to exploit anybody.

GENE Not even a genie, now that he's gotten to know one! What a sweetheart!

SAM You can't expect me to give up my last wish! It may be the last chance I ever get!

GENE If you're to be happy, someone must slave for you. Why should I ask you to be any better than millions of others?

(SAM stands there, torn between wanting to do the right thing and making a terrible mistake with this sinister man.)

(The telephone rings.)

GENE Saved by the bell! Shall I get it? (Picks up the receiver. SAM doesn't stop him.)
Hello? Love and Affection Center!

MALE
VOICE Did you place an ad in the newspaper?

SAM NO!

MALE
VOICE You're sure? I'm bi!

SAM Positive! Don't come by. And don't come, bi! (To GENE.) Hang up! Hang up!

GENE (hanging up.) Sam, what spunk! See, I've had a good influence on you.

SAM I'm getting just a little tired of my hospitality being taken advantage of by every Tom, Dick, and . . .

GENE Gene?

SAM Every Tom, Dick, and Plick in the world!

GENE You ought to be more careful about what you think you want.

SAM They're my wishes! I'll make them! I'm going to wipe that fucking smirk off your fucking face! It's my magic lantern now! (The doorbell rings.) What's that?

GENE I wouldn't know.

SAM Do you think I should open it?

GENE I never interfere, unless specifically instructed to do so.

SAM Goddamn you — you imp! (Rushes over and opens the door.)

PRISCILLA (creeping in.) Are you the gentleman I talked to on the phone?

SAM Which one are you?

PRISCILLA I'm Priscilla. I want to make it abundantly clear that I don't do this kind of thing!

SAM Are you an illusion too?

PRISCILLA (noticing GENE.) Oh, there's a third party here. I told you I absolutely refuse to participate in or-gees on a first date!

GENE Just passing through!

PRISCILLA You can't expect me to do it with transients!

SAM Miss, I think —

PRISCILLA (checking him over.) So you're the real good bi, huh?

SAM Well . . .

PRISCILLA Not bad. Not bad.

SAM Miss —

PLICK (popping into the room.) Magga-magga! Me Plick!

SAM Oh, no!

PLICK Duba don dista? This is place, bomba?

SAM Apparently everybody thinks so!

PLICK Yes? No?

GENE Come on in! We're having a party!

SAM I'll try to explain the misunderstanding. It started when —

PRISCILLA (about PLICK.) Who is *this* gentleman and just what is my relationship to him expected to be?

PLICK Ooof! (Makes gesture that he's not too thrilled with PRISCILLA either.)

SAM Miss! Sir! Now I can explain everything —

CATERINA (dramatically entering.) Caterina the poet is here!

SAM Oh, no!

GENE And guess what!

CATERINA She has brought her poems with her! (Brandishes a sheaf of papers.)

SAM Please! It's getting crowded in here!

GENE Come in, everybody! We don't turn anyone away — not for love and affection!

SAM This is getting out of hand. You've got to leave!

PRISCILLA /
CATERINA /
PLICK How dare you! / What's the meaning of this? / Rogga-rogga!

SAM Please! Let me explain! It's all very simple.

(The voices grow louder, ad lib, with GENE leading them on.)

SAM Please, will you listen to me!

HERMAN (entering.) Oh, goodie, people! Hi, everybody! I'm Herman! I snuck out of the hospital!

(The din grows cacophonous as HERMAN begins to breathe heavily and seems about to expose himself to any interested party, CATERINA recites her poetry aloud with elocutionary gestures, PLICK bows and shrieks in his unknown language, PRISCILLA clucks that she won't be taken advantage of and threatens to call the police, and GENE incites all four of them to greater and greater heights of mayhem.)

SAM (shouting.) Gene, what are you doing to me!?

GENE (shouting.) Make a wish, Sam! That's all you have to do!

SAM (shouting.) Oh, no you don't! I'm on to your tricks! Not my very last wish!

GENE (shouting.) Save yourself!

(The telephone rings.)

SAM (about telephone.) My god! Who can that possibly be? I don't need any more lovers!
(Lifts the receiver.) HELLO?

DOG'S
VOICE WOOF! WOOF! (followed by some suggestive panting noises.)

SAM I know! I know! (hyperventilating.) You're bi!

HERMAN First come, first served!

(HERMAN at last opens his robe and flashes all the others, who are shocked; they freeze.)

BLACKOUT

END OF ACT I.

ACT II

AT RISE: The lapse of time is only a few moments since the end of ACT I.

SAM (on the telephone to dog.) And I mean it! (Slams telephone down.)

GENE Quite a little mess you've gotten yourself into, my friend.

SAM Have I? I'll get it straightened out, don't worry.

GENE You should let me do it. I'm a very good organizer — really!

SAM People aren't the same as furniture, Gene!

GENE Don't be too sure!

SAM Hey, everybody! May I have your attention, please!

PRISCILLA No, we've been discussing this, and no matter what you may have in mind, none of us is willing to participate in white slavery!

(The other visitors grunt their approval.)

SAM It's all been a mistake.

PRISCILLA I have a friend at the Better Business Bureau, and you're going to be in big trouble!

SAM I'm merely trying to sell my furniture, miss. The newspaper, as William Shakespeare said, 'screwed up.' (Light dawning as he looks at Gene.) At least I think it was the newspaper's fault.

GENE No comment.

HERMAN (to SAM.) You dragged me out of my sick bed and forced me to come over here!

SAM I didn't want any of you to come over here!

CATERINA Is there something wrong with us?

SAM I'm sure you're all perfectly fabulous. It's just —

PRISCILLA What gives you the right to make us come over here, and then send us back simply because you aren't satisfied! Who do you think you are anyway!

SAM I don't think I'm anyone! I mean —

PRISCILLA It's all right for us to sit at home, poring over the ads in the newspapers, hoping against hope to find someone out there. Finally we take that chance. We circle that ad — one of the few that seems right for us. In trepidation we call. We make what we think is a date. And what happens! We're rejected when we show up! Rejected! (Weeps.)

SAM You haven't been rejected, miss!

PLICK Klippin-shotnot?

SAM No, no, keep your klippin-shotnot to yourself!

GENE Perhaps you'd better ask them to stay.

SAM Whatever for?

(The visitors are incensed at once, taking it as an insult. They get huffy.)

SAM I didn't mean it that way!

GENE I've got it! Why don't you all look at Sam's furniture and see if there's anything you need? We'll make it into a social! Sam, can't you get out some big dishes of ice cream with butterscotch topping and sprinkled nuts?

CATERINA (noticing the mattress.) Actually I could use a mattress. I need a change. I've been sleeping on my head for fourteen years!

HERMAN I could use a good mattress myself, now that I'm out of the hospital. (hurries over.) Is it clean?

GENE Anybody else? Don't let them get ahead of you!

PRISCILLA Is this lamp for sale? (referring to the bedroom lamp that GENE carried in earlier.)

GENE (mischievously.) That one, but not the special one Sam has.

PRISCILLA Which one is that?

SAM Never mind! (Tries to hide the magic lamp under his arm.) Never mind!

PRISCILLA (undeterred.) What is that you have? (Comes closer to him.)

SAM It's personal property!

PLICK (spying the lamp too.) Prista! Sansonee! (Pointing at it.)

SAM I'm sorry this one's not for sale. Not!

HERMAN /
CATERINA What's not for sale? Why isn't that one for sale?

PRISCILLA How much do you want for it? (The others crowd around.) I was here first!

SAM Everything else in the place can go. Everything else!

HERMAN But I like that item the best!

PLICK (Pointing to himself.) Me-gu-tu!

CATERINA I rather fancy it myself. Let me look at it!

SAM It's not for sale. N-O.

CATERINA I just want to look at it!

SAM No reason to look since it's not —

GENE Sam, don't be rude to your guests! Are you afraid to let the silly old lamp out of your possession for even a moment?

SAM Shouldn't I be?

GENE It sat unused in your closet for years! How can a few more moments hurt?

PLICK Gluff, yes? (Grabs for the lamp.)

SAM Touch, no! (sidestepping them all.) Wouldn't want to waste my last wish by accident, would I, Gene?

PRISCILLA You're acting like it's a magic lantern or something!

HERMAN He sure is! Hey, let me take a gander at that. I won't get any germs on it!

SAM (clutching it tighter.) Let's just say it has sentimental value, and I can't bear to part with it.

GENE Give them a feel. We can all use a good rub now and then!

PRISCILLA (pushing through.) I made the first offer on it!

CATERINA Like hell you did! I saw it out of the corner of my eye ages ago!

HERMAN I have first refusal!

PLICK (jumping up and down.) Herkon-herkon!

PRISCILLA Get back, you bitches!

CATERINA You shits! How dare you!

PLICK (viciously.) Magga-magga, you pista-coggahs!

HERMAN I'll get my blotches all over you!

(All four of the motley crew begin pushing and pulling at each other.)

SAM Help!

GENE Did I hear a cry for assistance? (cupping his ear.) But why are you folks turning on each other? Sam's the one with the lamp.

(The others advance on SAM, start to surround him, blocking his escape.)

SAM (holding the lantern high over his head, his free hand making them keep their distance.) (to GENE.) I can handle this myself! (Breaks through the line and runs to the other side of the room.) Stay where you are! This is my lamp!

(SAM stands alone, hands out; the four visitors, as a surly group, turn toward him, teeth bared.)

GENE What a pretty picture you folks make!

(The four shout at GENE: Get away, weirdo! Don't you help him! Back off, crud head! Ga-ga! Ga-ga!.)

GENE Such bitterness! And after all I've done for you.

PRISCILLA Yeah, but what have you done for us lately?

GENE Your wish is my command. Isn't that the expression?

CATERINA (to SAM.) All right, I know what you want! I bid two nights with me in Reno, Reno, the biggest little city in the world — all expenses paid!

HERMAN Wait! I bid four nights with me in exotic Monte Carlo. I'm a close personal friend of the prince there!

SAM This is not an auction!

PRISCILLA Wait! I'll give you head for it!

SAM What?

HERMAN I'll give you butt! (Points to his.)

CATERINA Ear! I'll give good ear! (Points to hers.)

GENE I love it! I *love* it! But it's not enough! What cheapskates! Up your bids, everybody! Up them!

ALL FOUR UP YOURS!

(They knock GENE down and start to hit him, pulling him, swearing at him ad lib.)

PLICK (suddenly out-shouting everybody, getting their attention.) One million dollar!

SAM (flabbergasted.) One million?

PLICK Pantin-frok!

SAM Are you really that rich?

PLICK (taking his wallet out of his inside pocket, showing large bills.) Ista morget-lina!

GENE (on the floor, bruised.) Well, Sam, are you going to take his offer?

SAM I'm not sure if I want to sell it or use it myself.

GENE The lamp might be a fake, Sam. Can you risk turning down all that money?

SAM Maybe I'll fool you — and wish for another lamp — one with an unlimited supply of wishes!

GENE What's happening to you, Sam? Your eyes are positively green. All your eyes are!

PRISCILLA I'm a clean person. I'd take excellent care of the lamp.

CATERINA Like hell she would!

PRISCILLA I don't recall asking for your opinion!

CATERINA Well, you got it just the same, priss-lips!

HERMAN Ladies, please! It's clear that I should have the lamp since I've been so sick.

PLICK Million dollar!

SAM Do you even know what you're bidding on?

GENE You can use the cash to retire on!

SAM This is the first time I've ever had an opportunity like this. A chance to change my life!

GENE Then choose wisely. Choose wisely.

HERMAN (suddenly has a breathing attack and then collapses on the floor, face down. Makes noises.)

SAM (going to him, kneeling beside him.) What's wrong?

HERMAN (flipping over and seizing the magic lantern out of Sam's hands, then jumping up.) Nothing a magic lantern won't cure!

SAM It's not yours! Give me that! (Chases HERMAN, who jumps up on the sofa.)

HERMAN Stay where you are, or I'll empty my nasal cavities on you!

SAM That belongs to me!

GENE You don't deserve it any more than he does. It was just an accident the lamp fell into your hands.

SAM Shut up, you bastard! (Takes a swing at GENE but misses.)

HERMAN Fair's fair! (hopping up and down on the sofa springs.) I'll use it for good — like getting rid of my tattoo blotches! No more curled lips when I make a pass at someone. No more screaming nurses. I'll be handsome again . . .

(But CATERINA takes advantage of Herman's dreams to sneak up behind the sofa and tip it backwards, spilling the man and snatching the lamp out of his hand at the same time.)

CATERINA Ha! Now the lantern belongs to me! At last the world will listen to my poetry! No more snide remarks. No more deaf ears to the greatest user of language since Rod McKuen himself!

(Then SAM runs over to the door, slams it shut, and blocks it with his body.)

SAM Nobody's getting out of here until that lamp is restored to its rightful owner . . . Gene, get me that lamp!

GENE Is that your final wish, my lord and master?

SAM Never mind. I'll get it myself. (stalking CATERINA.) I want that lamp!

CATERINA Stay back, fart-sucker! Or I'll use it! (Places her hand a few inches above the bowl of the lamp.) I'm warning you!

SAM You wouldn't dare. You don't even know how it works.

CATERINA I can learn soon enough!

SAM (thinking fast.) "I am proud of my glands. The deep aromatic richness of my armpits! O wonder! O joy!"

CATERINA My poem? Did you actually recite my poem?

SAM Give me that lamp and I'll recite another one.

CATERINA You will?

SAM You have my word.

GENE (Makes a dismissive noise with his lips.) Yeah.

CATERINA No one except me has ever recited a poem of mine before! Not even my ex-husband.

SAM (moving in for the kill.) "O, down with men! O down! O down!"

CATERINA Oh, that's so beautiful! So beautiful! (swooning.)

(PRISCILLA leaps in and snatches the lantern from CATERINA before anyone else can.)

PRISCILLA And now guess who it belongs to! (Cackles, quite nastily.) And don't think for one minute that any of your wiles are going to work on me. (Snarls.) With this I'll never be lonely again! I'll have friends — tasteful friends. I'll place an ad in the paper and make people come to me! (stamping toward the door.) Out — out of my way. I know I'm shy, but I'm leaving and taking this!

VOICES Stop her! Oh, no you don't! Etc.

(HERMAN, PLICK, and CATERINA block the door.)

PRISCILLA Get away from there! (waving the lamp at them like a deadly weapon.)

GENE Is that your wish? (coming nearer.) You have to rub it first. Here, let me show you how to operate it.

(PRISCILLA, disconcerted, seems to be considering GENE's offer.)

SAM Don't let him have it! He'll be destructive!

GENE Sam, such unkind remarks. Please, Priscilla, permit me to show you?

PRISCILLA Stay over there! Just tell me!

GENE It's better if I show you.

PRISCILLA I said stay there, asshole! (searching lamp.) Why don't they include a set of directions with these things? My friend at the Better Business Bureau is going to hear about this!

GENE Batteries are not included either! (Laughs.)

PRISCILLA I'm getting out of here! Clear that doorway, or I'll use this on all of you! (The group reluctantly starts to move.) You can kiss this goodbye! (Places her lips on the lamp as she reaches the door and throws it open.)

PLICK Lamp big dirty! (Makes vile kissing faces and points at the lamp.) Big germ-germs!

(Startled and squeamish, PRISCILLA screams and throws it down.)

(There is a furious scramble, and then the new owner emerges triumphant.)

PLICK MAGGA-MAGGA!

GENE (as though he understands.) Magga-magga!

PLICK Blooster mee-gee-non. Usta!

GENE Usta!

SAM What did he say?

GENE He just wants to be ‘happy,’ like the rest of you.

SAM But he’s got money!

GENE (tskking.) But money can’t buy happiness, Sam!

SAM But a magic lantern can!

GENE (slyly.) I never said that either.

PLICK (Hugs the lamp.) Bulita! Bulita!

SAM What’s he wishing for?

GENE He hasn’t made a formal wish yet, but he seems to want to be able to speak English. He’s failed several classes.

PLICK Grondowsk umbalano. (croons to the lamp.) In-to trusco bakka.

VOICES What’s he saying? Stop him! It’s not fair!

GENE He says he’s willing to have everybody in the world learn to speak his language instead.

VOICES NO!

SAM Listen! Me friend!

PLICK Gaa! (shaking his head, hugging the lamp.)

VOICES It’s mine! Mine! Etc.

SAM I’m entitled to one more wish! And no one’s going to stop me, even if I have to kill somebody. Or kill you all! I want it! I want it! I want it! I want it! I want it! I want it! I WANT IT!

(Here SAM should throw such a tantrum, kicking at people, throwing things, revealing his savage side that the others are amazed and freeze, staring at him.)

(He looks up at them staring at him.)

(The telephone rings.)

GENE Who could that be?

(SAM answers.)

SAM Yes?

FEMALE
VOICE Hi, I saw your ad in the paper, and thought —

SAM Sorry, my dance card is all filled up! (Hangs up.)

GENE Well, will anybody ever make a wish or not?

PLICK Grondsk (making a big to-do with the lamp, holding it out, then rubbing it with his fingers away from himself as he says: Frimp! Homp! Frimp! Bink-gee-ki!

(The others hold their breath in intense anticipation, looking from one to the other. But nothing happens.)

SAM Did he do it right?

(The others regain their breath, thrilled that it hasn't worked for PLICK.)

HERMAN Give us a chance now!

PLICK (cursing.) Frimp! Homp! Frimp! Bink-gee-ki!

SAM He rubbed it the wrong way! (lunging for the lamp and managing to wrestle it away from the disappointed PLICK.) I've got it! I've got it!

GENE Sam, what's gotten into you! You were so nice before.

SAM I don't enjoy behaving like this! It's not the real me!

GENE Who is it then?

SAM I suppose if you had the lamp you'd give it to an orphan!

GENE I would, Sam! . . . I'm an orphan.

SAM I'll bet! What did you do — kill your parents?

GENE (turning to the others.) You folks don't seem to realize you could get the lamp and share it if you stuck together and got it away from Sam instead of fighting among yourselves!

HERMAN You know something, he's right! Let's beat this guy's head in.

CATERINA We'll worry about who owns the lamp after we rip him apart!

(All FOUR nod and begin to advance on SAM.)

SAM Now wait! Let me say something!

(The others grumble and continue to advance.)

SAM Let me speak!

(They hesitate.)

SAM I'm just an ordinary man trying to sell his furniture! I didn't ask for any of this, but since it's come my way, I'd be a fool to let it slip away. Who wouldn't do what I'm doing if they had the chance?

GENE (after a beat.) Not bad, Sam. Not eloquent, though.

SAM (newly inspired.) Listen, most of you came here today because you're looking for love and affection. Isn't that correct? (Others concur.) Exactly! Well, what if I arranged it so you all get what you came for?

(Uncertain mutterings.)

GENE What do you have up your sleeve, Sam?

SAM (the plan crystallizing in his mind.) I don't know all your names, so help me out.

PRISCILLA I'm not sure I'll go along with all this!

SAM Miss —

PRISCILLA My name is Priscilla.

SAM Have you met this fine gentleman here, whose name is — ?

HERMAN Herman.

SAM Herman! Why don't you two go have lunch in a nice little cafe somewhere?
There's one two blocks over!

PRISCILLA Well, I'm not sure. . . .

HERMAN Me neither.

(They eye each other.)

SAM You'd be perfect for each other. And you, the poet!

CATERINA Caterina!

SAM Have you been introduced to this gentleman with all the money? Whose name is — ?

PLICK Plick.

SAM Plick it is! Quick as a Plick you two would make a lovely couple! Don't you
think? Two lovely couples! . . . Romance!

(The four check each other out, general disdain in their expressions.)

SAM Priscilla and Herman! Caterina and Plick! It's like music. Why don't you at least try
it? Herman, tell Priscilla about your hobbies!

HERMAN (Laughs in his nose and plays with the belt of his bathrobe.)

PRISCILLA How disgusting!

HERMAN Oh, she's just like all the rest! A real prune!

SAM No, no, you two! Give it a try! And, Plick, wouldn't you like to hear Caterina's
poems?

PLICK Pironski-rilli.

CATERINA What? He wouldn't understand a word I read to him!

PLICK (angry.) Tirenski and-derosta! Polunka! Botee-tee! (Jabs his finger at Caterina,
indicating that she blabs too much. She jabs her finger right back at him.)

CATERINA Oh, yeah! Who asked you! Prick!

PLICK Plick!

(Then PRISCILLA and HERMAN begin poking in the air at each other.)

HERMAN I don't like her.

PRISCILLA I don't like him.

GENE (to SAM.) Seems your little plan has gone awry. Why don't you just give me the lamp and I'll leave you, and you can all go back to the way things used to be, and start from there.

SAM Hold on! How about this? (Grabs PRISCILLA's arm and moves her physically.) Have you been introduced to Plick?

PRISCILLA I don't believe I have, officially.

SAM Priscilla, this is Plick. Plick, Priscilla.

PRISCILLA (stiffly.) How do you do?

PLICK (stiffly.) Magga-magga.

SAM You two would be a charming pair. Loads in common. . . And, Caterina, have you met Herman? Herman, this is Caterina. (Shoves the two within an inch of each other.)

HERMAN (stiffly.) Enchanted, I'm sure!

CATERINA (stiffly.) Likewise.

SAM There! That wasn't so difficult! (takes a shallow breath.) Now, I must say so long. It's been very nice meeting you all. (Opens door and holds it open invitingly.)

PRISCILLA One moment now! (gesturing at PLICK.) I don't know his language!

(PLICK catches the meaning and makes a sour face, letting it be known that he thinks PRISCILLA is not much of a catch herself.)

PLICK Boo-poo-pa! Boo-poo-pa!

SAM Now, now, you'll work it out. That's what marriage is for!

CATERINA And I must say I have my doubts about Herman here. I don't think he's a verse lover. What could be verse than that?

SAM Sure he is!

HERMAN And how do I know she won't write a poem about my splotches!

CATERINA Pardon me, but I hardly need your splotches for inspiration!

HERMAN I don't like her either!

SAM Now, wait just a minute!

(But the newly made couples turn their backs on each other.)

GENE Can't seem to do anything right, can you, Sam? Might as well hand over that lamp. (Holds out his hand.) It's no good to you.

SAM (trying harder, sweating.) I've got it! Everybody's bi, right? (The visitors agree.) Well then, how about this! Herman, have you met Plick? Plick — Herman. (rearranges the four.) And, Caterina, say hello to Priscilla!

(The new couples size each other up.)

SAM Plick could learn English from Herman.

HERMAN And in exchange Plick could pay for my medicine so I can get rid of my splotches once and for all!

SAM Perfect!

CATERINA (to PRISCILLA.) Do you like strong poetry?

PRISCILLA As a matter of fact I do.

CATERINA Might you be interested in mine?

PRISCILLA I'm willing to consider it.

GENE (not liking developments.) But, Priscilla, what will you get out of the relationship? Besides the fascinating poetry, I mean.

PRISCILLA (after a little thought.) Caterina will bring me something I've never had in my life.

GENE What's that?

CATERINA (seizing PRISCILLA's hand and kissing it feverishly.) (wildly.) Passion!

PRISCILLA Oh yes, my darling!

(They hug.)

SAM (relieved, aimed at GENE.) At last I've done it!

GENE And you said people weren't like furniture!

SAM Is everybody happy now? (trying to usher them all out of the apartment.)

PRISCILLA But you get to keep the lamp?

(This does not sit well with the others either, grumbling.)

SAM I have only one wish remaining. (turning to GENE.) By the way, what happens to the lamp after I make that one?

GENE I'd imagine it would revert to what it was and await its next owner, whoever that 'lucky' person might be.

HERMAN Why doesn't one of us get it after Sam's through with it?

GENE He and the lamp might be millions of miles away after his wish.

PRISCILLA Why couldn't you include me in your wish, Sam? All I'd ask for is a love that will last forever!

HERMAN Me too! Include me too!

CATERINA Couldn't you include me as well? And how about throwing in the Nobel Prize for Literature?

PLICK Duba-Duba —

SAM I know! You want eternal love.

PLICK No, big dick. B-i-i-ig! (meaning for his own body.)

GENE May I speak up on my own behalf, like these others?

SAM It's a free country.

GENE No, it's NOT! How would you feel if you were a genie against your will? Would any of you put up with being a prisoner in a lamp for thousands and thousands of years? No life of your own. Confined until someone else lets you go! Your only purpose to make others happy. Fetch this! Fetch that! And what's in it for the genie? Nothing! I ask you, by the standards of your 'free' society, is it right that you thrive at the genie's expense?

SAM There must be a reason why the genie was put in the lamp in the first place! He did something and had to be punished.

GENE What did he do? Name it!

SAM I don't know, but I sense his danger. . .

GENE You judge me because of my appearance?

SAM I don't know . . .

GENE Let me tell you the facts. All right? I once served a wizard, when I was a human being, many, many years ago. He was not a good man, and I was not a good servant. I forget exactly what I did to displease him the last time. Perhaps I burnt his supper or kissed his daughter. The reason doesn't matter. It didn't amount to much — in the history of the universe. But the wizard decided to inflict a lingering punishment on me, and so he gathered his secrets together and used them. He enchained me with one of his curses, and, as I lay there powerless, he burned this mark of slavery into my palm. (Holds up a black mark on his hand, unseen till now.) He burned it into flesh so that it would never go away. And

then guess what? Shall I show you? (Gene begins to slide his overalls down his hips.) Shall I show you what he did to me down here?

(The others watch, unable to speak or take their eyes away.)

GENE He said he would make my life miserable for as long as he could. He would give me unending life and power as a genie, but a life of debased servitude at the mercy of the owners of the lamp, a life with not one pleasure in it, not one. For I would, you see, have no need of food or drink or . . . love. (Gene's overalls fall to the floor.) And so he cut away my testicles, first one, and then the other, until they were no longer there. . . (Starts to show under his undergarments where the testicles have been cut away, but the others stop him.)

VOICES NO! Please! You don't have to show it!

GENE (pulling up his pants.) So if I'm sometimes difficult to deal with, or if I seem overhasty in my desire for the lamp, perhaps you'll at least understand, even if you don't sympathize, as I'm sure you don't. (Glares at them, then smiles.) And now what can this ball-less eunuch do for you?

SAM (feeling the man's pain.) And yet for all that, I must not unleash you. I feel it!

GENE Yes, keep me as I am. It's to your advantage.

SAM You may be lying, playing on our sympathies.

GENE Sympathies? I don't detect any.

SAM You're making this decision very difficult.

GENE Nobody said it was going to be easy, Sam!

SAM I may be releasing a terror on the world.

GENE What could I possibly do that you inhabitants haven't done to it already?

SAM You'd say anything to get your way, wouldn't you? Anything!

GENE Just like you, Sam? The way you sank a few moments ago? You would have murdered us for a lamp!

SAM (not happy with himself.) . . . You're right. I would have. For a lousy lamp.

GENE But it's not up to me. It's you who have to decide if you're going to do the moral thing or not.

SAM (agonizing.) Why are you forcing me to this?

GENE I keep forgetting that human beings like their choices neat and simple. Up or down. Back or forward. Comedy or tragedy. Good or evil . . .

SAM If I let you free, will you promise to . . .

GENE To be a good little genie? Of course, Sam. What would you like me to swear on? My honor? (Grins.) Do you think I have honor?

SAM Stop it! Stop this!

GENE (to the others.) You'd think he'd never made a moral choice before in his life! Not a real one, right here in front of everybody.

SAM What do you other people think? Should I let him go?

(They look at one another, silent, uncertain.)

GENE It's not up to them, Sam. It's up to you.

(SAM looks from Gene to the lamp, feeling himself shaking.)

SAM (after an effort.) All right! I've made my decision!

(The visitors look at him, curious.)

GENE We're dying to know!

SAM . . . I'm giving you the lamp. (Holds it out.) I'm freeing you.

(Gasps and mutters from others.)

GENE You're sure now, Sam?

SAM I'm . . . sure.

GENE I'm sure you've made the right moral decision. (taking the lantern from SAM's hands.)

VOICES Why did you give it to him? I've had a pretty tough life myself! Etc.

GENE Shut up, all of you! SHUT UP! (The sheer volume of his voice makes the others quiet down.)

SAM I've given you your freedom.

GENE You've given me nothing. I tricked you into it.

SAM But you'll keep your —

GENE You made the right moral decision. Only it was the wrong practical one. Sam, you were correct. I am 'evil.' And now I've got the lamp! (Smiles.)

SAM You wouldn't —

GENE I would!

HERMAN You wouldn't hurt us?

GENE I told you to shut up! I haven't decided what I'm going to do to you yet. But it will be delicious!

SAM If I were you, I'd just take the lamp and go!

GENE But you're not me! Okay, who shall I deal with first?

(No one speaks.)

GENE Speak up! You were all so fucking hot for the lamp before! Me, me, me!

SAM Gene, I trusted you.

GENE You're talking to me about morality? Good doesn't necessarily bring good in return, my friend. Trust? Trust? It's not my fault you happen to be a sentimental fool!

HERMAN Jump him, somebody!

GENE Do you want me to obliterate you? (aiming the lamp in Herman's direction.) It's one way of getting rid of your splotches!

HERMAN (cringing.) No, no, don't hurt me!

(PLICK stands between HERMAN and GENE, his face white.)

PLICK Dista! Hukkla!

GENE How touching! He's protecting the man he loves! (to PLICK.) Blocken kutcha?

(PLICK'S face grows even whiter, and he clutches his own hands.)

PLICK Ick-og!

SAM (to GENE.) What did you ask him?

GENE I merely said I'd spare his 'boyfriend' if he'd take his place.

SAM You truly are evil!

GENE I just call human beings on their bluffs.

PRISCILLA Caterina and I haven't done anything to hurt you!

GENE Just your being around hurts me. How about that?

PRISCILLA Let us go and we won't trouble you or anyone else ever again.

CATERINA That's true!

GENE You just want to run away and forget about your friends here?

CATERINA They're not friends. We just met them!

GENE Oh, I see. You want to be with your 'loved one.' But don't you understand that you'll get sick of Priscilla's prissiness, and you, Priscilla, will get bored with her terrible poetry. You two will break up within the year.

CATERINA /
PRISCILLA Not true!

GENE It is true! I've seen more of life than you have. I don't have to lie anymore. I'm free. I'm free!

SAM Use the lamp to help them, Gene. Don't . . .

GENE Don't what?

SAM Give something to someone else — freely. Just once in your life. Of your own free will. We should learn something from the selfish way we've all acted today.

GENE I swore I wouldn't go on the way I had for all those years. I swore I'd outsmart the next one who got the lamp. As I lay there year after year, fully awake but unable to move even an eyelid, I swore it! And I did it! You think you're so goddamn generous because you gave me the lamp! No, you gave it to me because you thought I'd be so moved I'd give you anything and everything out of gratitude!

SAM That wasn't what I thought.

GENE You're just like all the human beings I've ever encountered anywhere, anytime! Total greed! Little burning balls of hoggish, covetous smallness, every single one of you!

SAM Is it asking too much for people to have some love in their lives? To have a cure for disease? To have a little security? Some poems? Some friends? Most people don't get much out of life. They really don't.

GENE Just as soon as you have what you think you want, you want something else! I've seen it happen for thousands of years. It never changes! Never!

SAM Don't you have any compassion at all?

GENE No, the wizard forgot to program me for it! You should have used the lamp while you had it, Sam. You'll never get another chance like that one. You blew it. (Blows on the lamp.)

SAM Some sticklers might say I haven't yet received what I asked for, and you haven't completed the task assigned, and thus you're not free yet.

GENE What do you mean?

SAM Where's my love and affection? (Points to the others.) They got theirs. Somehow I got overlooked.

GENE Don't think you can get me on some technicality. If you screwed up, that's just too bad. (Looks scared, tries to bluster.) And think of all the things you could've asked for too!

SAM There's nothing I want that badly.

GENE Not even your wife back? Why didn't you think of that? A little rub, and she could have come back to life. But you didn't even think of her once.

SAM Perhaps I'll meet her later, on the other side.

GENE Don't count on it!

SAM You won't give even a crumb, will you? (shaking his head, sickened by the hate he can feel in GENE.)

GENE I wouldn't piss up the human race's butt if your whole world was on fire.

CATERINA Why are we all standing here taking this abuse? I don't think that lantern is magic at all!

HERMAN It's just some old wives' tale.

PRISCILLA (bolder.) We can probably walk right out that door, and he won't even be able to stop us!

GENE How much you want to bet?

CATERINA It's like voodoo! If you don't believe in it, it won't work!

GENE If you people are trying to kill me with disappointment in you, I think you may succeed!

CATERINA Let's all just walk out that door, slowly. Don't believe in him for one more second!

(The two couples start to inch toward the door.)

GENE It seems I must exert myself. Lamp, give them a little taste (Rubs the lamp.)

(The couples and SAM began to twirl like gyroscopes.)

VOICES What's happening? Help! Stop! Etc.

GENE How are you feeling, gang?

SAM (spinning.) You're going to use up all your wishes like this!

GENE I'm not worried about running out. It's my power! It's just as powerful as I make it! (Walks among them.) Come on, you dancing fools! Hop! Hop!

(The others now begin to hop like hot grease as GENE laughs.)

SAM (hopping.) Does this make you happy?

GENE Murders, tortures, destruction! After all the preposterous things you people have made me do over the centuries, I've only just begun to laugh! (Laughs viciously.)

SAM We've driven him . . . crazy.

GENE You all want to be happy! Well, aren't you jumping for joy?

SAM Let us choose our own form of happiness!

GENE Keep moving. That way you'll think you're happy! All right, stop!

(The others stop hopping at once, then collapse and lie helpless, trying to catch their breath, etc.)

SAM Are you finished with us now? We've been taught a lesson.

GENE No, you haven't. All you did was jiggle your body parts!

SAM Are *you* happy now, Gene?

GENE (with a warning finger.) Don't start! That claptrap won't work on me! You think you can soften me up by showing me how unhappy I am deep down. And then you'll give me a hug and a kiss-off and escape. Well, don't try it. It rubs me the wrong way!

HERMAN What will it take to stop you then? What will it take?

GENE A stake through my heart? A virgin's tear?

SAM How about a Big Mac? You said if you could wish, that's what you'd wish for.

GENE Only human beings eat those things — or would!

SAM Have you ever had one? Maybe it would —

GENE You've got the story mixed up, kid. I'm not Pinocchio, and a human being is the last thing I ever want to be! Yikes! The things you creatures believe!

SAM You're not happy being a genie either, are you?

GENE What is this?

SAM Are you?

GENE Nothing gives me more pleasure than twisting little *homo sapiens* into knots.

SAM I don't believe you. I don't believe you want to eat a Big Mac in a rundown McDonald's alone on Christmas Day. I think you're deeply, deeply hurt, and I don't blame you. If any part of what you've told us is true, you have every right to be angry and bitter with human beings. But you let your hatred fester in you, Gene. You have let humanity corrode your soul. You have dragged yourself down to our level.

GENE (realizing this for the first time.) . . . Know what? You've knocked the wind out of me. You're absolutely right and I didn't even know it. It almost makes me want to spare the human race because of the few like you. . . . But of course I'm going to!

SAM You aren't?

GENE Didn't I mention it? I'm going to blow up this planet and all the creatures on it. There won't be any more people. I hate you, and I hate myself, and I don't want to be anywhere, not anywhere. These few pitiful moments of niceness aren't enough to make me forgive you or accept you or pray for you or hope against hope that you will improve. I have seen you at your best and I have seen you at your worst, and so I hold no hope whatsoever that you — or I — will ever be any different from the rapacious, irredeemable creatures that we are.

(The room has become quiet. Even GENE seems to have been subdued by his words.)

SAM (trying humor.) Before we go!

GENE Yes?

SAM Would you consider one last wish?

GENE For what?

SAM Not to destroy us, but to change us. To something else. If you have that much power, why not use it to change all of us here to something happy, something better!

(GENE doesn't seem to be breathing, just holding himself rigid in the middle of the room.)

GENE (accepting the thought.) Right! But no! No! More! Yes, change the world!

VOICES I don't want to be changed? Changed to what? Magga-Magga!

SAM Do it, Gene! It's the only way to free us! I have met myself and I don't like what I've seen.

GENE (sweating, eager.) I'm not sure I have that much strength. (looking at the magic lantern, trembling.) Not just me, not just the people in this room. But the whole world! The whole goddamn universe! Start over — only do it right this time! A world where there is no viciousness, no starvation, no greed, no loneliness. A world unlike this one. Not just a new continent or a new solar system to carry the same old contagions to! A new and better world, chemically, biologically, fundamentally and irrevocably! There must be a better world than this one! I'll do a more professional job than your God did with this one! . . . But what if I fail?

SAM You won't fail, Gene! You won't! You can make any world you want!

(GENE is sweating fiercely now, his palms moistening the lamp.)

GENE Not just one little sniveling, selfish wish after another! Enough of psychiatry and therapy and counseling! Good riddance to prayer and philosophy and political shifts and promises. Screw you to meditation and dedication and television entertainment! Because nothing is ever really going to change until we change our very nature! My one, final great act of service! (Looks at SAM.) Yet we could all be destroyed in the attempt. (Smiles, truly smiles, for the very first time.) But what a fabulous way to go! (Looks at the others.) What do you say? Oh, why the fuck am I asking you! Nothing great ever came about that way! (Wipes his wet hands on his overalls and holds the lantern out in front of himself.) Let me have the necessary strength — and the wisdom — to do this right. Come on, baby, we can do it! (Whispers to the lamp.) Come on! (to others.) Wish me well!

SAM Go, Gene, go!

(Slowly the other four join in one by one, not knowing what else to do: "Go! Go! Go! Go! Go! Go! Go! Go! Go! Go!" they cry, all holding hands.)

GENE All right, people, here it goes! (summoning all his power; he puts his hand on the lamp and rubs it with one clean sweep.) May this universe and every creature in it change its very soul, to make everyone and everything happy — for now and for all time!

(There is a terrifying flash of light, as if some atom has been severed, and everyone in the apartment shakes to his or her very soul, then faints dead away.)

(When the lights return, they look the same. They begin to stand up, to touch their bodies, unsure what has happened, if anything.)

GENE (exhausted.) Did it work?

SAM (touching himself.) I can't tell. What about you?

CATERINA I don't know.

HERMAN Are my tattoos fading?

PRISCILLA What is it I feel? (touching herself.)

GENE (standing, feeling for his testicles.) I do feel . . . different. (Shakes the lamp.) I think this is completely used up. (Tosses it away, and no one moves toward it.)

SAM How soon will we know if the world — if we — have changed?

GENE I guess we'll just have to wait and see, won't we? It may take some time.

PLICK (in perfect English.) Of course we may not have changed at all.

SAM Plick!

(The others turn and look at him, amazed.)

(The doorbell rings, and everyone turns to the open door. A dog runs into the apartment and jumps right into SAM'S arms and begins licking his face as if he's never loved anyone as much in his life.)

SAM Hey, what's this? Are you the bisexual dog who called earlier? . . . Are you, at last, my love and affection? (Hugs the dog.)

GENE I'd say at least it's a good omen. A very good omen. And, as a former genie, I ought to know, oughtn't I?

BLACKOUT

THE END

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