

“Pete and The Persian Bottle” by Sarah Jackson

1. AN EXCELLENT FIND

Pete surveyed the bits of wood and metal he'd laid out on the garage floor. The Boney Ridge Regional Agricultural Show was in two weeks and Pete needed to get his entry for the go-cart race finished and tested before then. Even with the school holidays starting on Saturday he was against the clock. He needed more stuff, and fast.

Last year he'd come stone-cold last. Again. Pete always seemed to come last. Last in games; last in sports; his artwork barely rated a mention; and he was sure that his report card had been worse than all of his friends. Even Steve had managed to get an A for Sports. Why was he so average? Surely he must be good at something?

It was starting to get dark and he knew that his mum would be calling him in for dinner soon. He really needed a shower too. He was sure that he smelt like a dog's butt. Boney Ridge was always hot, dry and dusty this time of year. It was hot, dry and dusty all year, but that was typical of all South West Queensland towns. At least other towns were more interesting. Boney Ridge had no McDonalds, or KFC. In fact, aside from the Chinese restaurant and the burger bar at the Royal Hotel, there were no takeaways at all. All of the shops sold boring stuff like hardware and farming supplies. If it wasn't for the small games room at the local shop and the skate bowl in the park, there would be nothing to do at all.

CRASH! CLUNK!

Pete pricked up his ears. He could hear the clattering of metal as potentially valuable items hit the side of the garbage skip that was sitting in front of the house next door. Old Mr Peters had died a week ago and his children had been going through his things and chucking out anything they didn't want.

No consideration for go-cart builders in need of valuable supplies! Pete thought, as he crept out of the garage and hid behind the bush near the gate.

“Don't throw out the medals! They are worth something,” a woman's voice said.

“Don't keep that! Chuck that! That bottle is rubbish. He probably picked it up in a cheap Turkish Bazaar during the war,” added a man's voice.

Pete waited for the commotion to die down. When he heard a car start up and drive off, he rushed out to the skip. He looked around quickly to make sure that his mum wasn't looking and pulled himself up over the metal side. He landed in the bin with a soft thud.

“Oh yeah. Awesome!” He said, extracting an old pram from the mess.

“Wheels!”

He picked out a few choice bits of wood, and threw them and the pram out of the skip. He was just about to pull himself out when he spotted a funny-looking bottle poking out of some dirty sand.

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Pete pulled it out and held it up to the fading light.

“Pete! Where are you? Come inside. Dinner’s on.”

“Coming Mum!” He shouted back, quickly jumping out of the skip. He dragged his treasures back into the garage and went inside, taking the dirty old bottle with him. Once in his bedroom, he stuffed the bottle behind his computer monitor and promptly forgot about it until the next day.

Pete awoke at 7:30 the next morning. He rolled over to avoid the sun beating through the open window. He noticed that his mum had left his lunch box next to his school bag. He was pleased to see a five-dollar note attached to it. She worked at the local supermarket and farm supplies store and would have left for work hours ago. As she always said, “those cartons aren’t going to unpack themselves.” With his dad away at a muster he had the house to himself.

Pete lay in bed thinking about ways to avoid getting up. Not coming up with anything useful, he rolled over to get out of bed. That was when he noticed the grubby-looking bottle peeping out from behind the computer. He swung his legs out of the bed and leaned over to grab it.

He picked it up, turned it upside down, looked it over, and then tried with all his might to pull the stopper off the top. He was about to throw it in the corner, when he noticed something shifting inside the bottle. He shook it, held it to his ear, and tried the stopper again. He tried gripping the bottle with his pyjama top. No luck, although the bottle looked much nicer after a bit of a clean. He grabbed his handkerchief and rubbed the side of the bottle.

WHOOSH

The air filled with a strange-coloured smoke and funny-looking sparkles. Pete coughed and spluttered, and waved his arms about to clear the air. As he looked up, he saw a very puzzled-looking greenish man floating in front of him.

“Oh wow! You gotta be a genie! My very own genie! Do I get three wishes? Man what do I want to ask for?”

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The genie stared at Pete, trying to work out what he was saying.

“Hello,” it said. “My name is Farouk.”

“You’re a genie right? I’m Pete. I got you out of the bottle, so I get three wishes right? Like in Aladdin?”

“Genie? I am a Djinn. My name is Farouk, not Aladdin,” the genie said in unsteady English. “Where am I? This is not Persia.”

Peter looked confused. He always thought that gin was a drink for adults, and he had never heard of Persia. Did he mean the cat? It was a Persian, maybe they were from the same place. Nah, that couldn’t be right, the cat came from a farm near Rockhampton. They didn’t have any genies in Rockhampton as far as he knew.

“You’re in Australia. Oz-stray-lee-ya,” Pete said slowly seeing the genie’s puzzled look. Pete frowned slightly and then went to the computer and turned it on. He went into Google Earth and pulled up a world map and pointed to Australia and roughly to where Boney Ridge would be.

The genie shimmered and flicked in front of the computer. He seemed a little uncomfortable and backed away a little.

“Where is Persia?” the genie asked.

“Dunno. Never heard of a place called Persia. Let me look it up.” Pete opened up another page and typed “Persia” into the search engine. Pete took a few moments to read the information on the screen. He pushed his chair back and looked at the genie.

“Um,” he said slowly. “No Persia. No more. Now it’s Iran and Iraq.”

He reopened the map and pointed to Iran. He pointed to Australia with his other hand. The genie seemed to be getting the message. Pete then opened a news website showing the conflict in the Middle East.

“You don’t want to go back there. All wars and it’s really dangerous. You can stay with me and be my genie.”

Farouk looked a little shocked and also a little angry. Pete started talking excitedly about wishes again. The genie didn’t seem to be getting a lot of what he was saying, but what he did understand he didn’t seem to like.

“Wow! Having my own genie will be fantastic! That’ll show that Glenn. I can win the go-cart race for sure now! Can that be a wish? How about those wishes?”

The genie looked confused.

“Wishes! I want to be different. Special!”

“I make you special!” The now angry genie raised his arms and swished them about. The whole room suddenly disappeared into big colourful spirals, and strange pink smoke curled around Pete. After a few moments the smoke cleared.

“What just happened? Why am I on the floor? Oh heck why is everything so big?”

Pete looked up. The ceiling fan seemed miles away. He caught his reflection in the cupboard mirror.

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“Rat!” he shouted, running away as fast as he could. He saw the rat moving in the mirror, and stopped. The rat in the mirror stopped too. He lifted his leg. The rat in the mirror lifted its leg.

“Oh no! It’s me!”

He could see the genie furrow his brow and flicker wildly as he looked at the images of his war-torn homeland on the computer screen.

“Hey! You! Turn me back. Help me!”

“Shh,” hissed the genie as he looked at the screen. It motioned for him to go away.

“I demand that you turn me back!”

The genie turned to look at Pete, accidentally knocking a pile of books onto the keyboard. The computer starting making loud beeping noises. The genie jumped back in fright and sped off out the open window.

“Wait! Come back! I’m sorry! Farouk is it? Come back!” Pete scrambled up the curtain and out the window after him. As he fell to the ground he could see the genie disappear into a shimmering mess and float off through the park.

Now what was he going to do!

Are you ready for an adventure?

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