

Choices



Morning Sun by Edward Hopper, 1952

by [James Como](#) (February 2022)

The jinn appeared in a flash, literally. A light bulb blew and there she was, a six-foot tall flame in the shape of a slender woman, smooth blank face and short hair glowing yellow, profile sizzling. The biggest burning matchstick you've ever seen.

Raylene, watching re-runs of *Sex and the City*, accustomed to such preternatural goings-on (by way of her mother, now one-hundred-and-ten years old but looking not a day over sixty), sipped her cosmo.

"I must speak with you," the jinn's voice sounding like boiling water.

Raylene kept her eyes on the TV. "Can you make it quick, please? I hate the heat."

"Your mother sent me with a question."

Raylene unfurled her spidery legs, stood, stretched, and turned on the AC that she had jammed into the one window high on the wall. She hated seeing the legs of people walking by and really did not mind the dark.

"What does she want?"

"That you make a choice."

"Will my choosing that she mind her own business do?" Raylene had backed away from the jinn to the farthest wall, like a boxer going to a neutral corner.

"The choice is simple. Either financial security with no money worries ever, or perfect health and fitness during a long life. Not a difficult choice, really."

"Both. I choose both, since clearly both are possible."

"They are not possible simultaneously, at least not for you. After a trial period you might reverse the original choice. Oh. And if you refuse to choose you get neither."

The jinn floated to the AC and shut it off, turning the apartment into a dry sauna.

"Can you at least tell me why mother is doing this?"

"To build your character, she says. She says choice is growth but that you never commit to one. You've been a man, now a woman. You've slept with both. You've lived the bohemian life, the punk life, the goth life, and now the bourgeois life. You live the anything-goes-all-is-fungible life. What you don't know, or care about, is the wreckage you leave behind in the lives of others. In other words, you play with

life.”

“This is mine. My life!” That was Raylene putting her foot down, promising a tantrum.

“Not quite, and remember, someone like your mother who, you know, can call *me* up, can also change her own mind.”

The Jinn voice was so annoying. “Well, please tell mother that my mind is made up.”

Slowly, slowly the jinn began to glide towards Raylene, who said, “are you going to burn me alive? Is that what you do?”

“No. I won’t have to. But first I must ask. I’m obligated. Are you sure – absolutely certain – of your decision?”

Shaken but still stubborn Raylene muttered “yes,” raising her chin heroically.

“Very well. In that case your mother is reversing a choice she once made.”

Raylene shouted. “I don’t need her allowance!”

“Oh,” whispered the jinn, showing a flicker of glee, “not that choice.”

“What then?” By now Raylene was drenched in sweat down to her thong.

“To not have had an abortion for her only pregnancy.”

Raylene had just enough time to gasp. Then she was gone.

The jinn changed the light bulb that had blown, and when the new one flickered on the jinn flickered off, and she too was gone.

[TABLE OF CONTENTS](#)

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