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## **WISHES THREE**

*No one knows who first dreamed up a three wishes story. There are very many versions in traditions from around the world, some of them quite ancient, some of them much more modern or even futuristic. It's a popular theme for jokes too of course and there are famous wishing tales such as The Fisherman and his Wife from Grimm's Fairy Tales, the Swedish folktale of The Sausage or The Monkey's Paw by W.W.Jacobs.*

*Here is a set of contrasting stories from fairy tales and jokes to modern fantasies, all of which use wishes in different ways. They are taken from the repertoire of storyteller, Rob Parkinson. These are tales that will appeal to different age readers – some are written in ways children can enjoy, whilst some may appeal more to older readers, though experienced storytellers can adapt them to suit most ages. Some of the versions have purposely been made brief (for example, No 1. The King's Beard) brief, so that readers (especially, though not exclusively, young ones) can take the plot off the page more easily, to adventure with it to find their own versions, written or told. Which is perhaps one way of making wishes come true – by turning them into tales that feel true.*

*Notes with each story give some information about it and may suggest some ways to experiment with it creatively. At the end of the set are some notes about typical 3 wishes patterns, again for practical, creative purposes. Stories/versions and notes given here are copyright protected for publishing purposes, but may be reproduced in small quantities for any reasonable educational uses without reference to the copyright holder. The underlying wishes plots are of course*

*universals that no one should ever be allowed copyright and that anyone can use creatively – which is our main point.*

## **1. The King's Beard**

There was once a king who was given three wishes by a wizard.

Now this king was particularly proud of his beard, which was very long and bushy and black and glossy. All of the people at his court used to praise the royal and magnificent beard and say that it was the best, the most marvellous, the most wonderful in all of the world. But the king wasn't sure. Somewhere in the world, there might be someone with a bigger, finer beard. What if someone from his kingdom saw such a man and came and told his people? They'd say he only had the second best beard in all the world.

So when he was told he had three wishes, the first of them was easy. As soon as he was alone, he wished for a beard that was the very best and biggest in all of the world. At once, the magic worked and he was surrounded by an amazing beard that filled the whole room, the whole castle, the whole town and even most of the countryside beyond.

But the king wasn't pleased. He could scarcely move for the incredible beard that was all around him and if he tried to do so, it tugged and pulled at his skin and it hurt so much that he wanted to cry. "Help!" he screamed desperately, "I wish I'd never ever grown a beard!"

That was the second wish. As soon as the words were out of his mouth, his face was as smooth and pink as it had been when he was a baby. And that didn't please him at all. How would he look now, a king famed far and wide for his beard? Now he'd not even one whisker?

And so the king used his third and final wish to get his beard back again, just as it had been before.

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**Note:** This is a short version of the story elaborated at length and with 'style' on the Imaginary Journeys CD, *Will's Clogs* by Rob Parkinson (IJ102). It gives the main outline for re-telling and elaboration, perhaps using some of the games in *Yarn Spinning*, Book 2 of the *Natural Storytellers* series. It's useful to compare the 2 versions, to find out how much in the recording is elaboration and storytelling. It's possible to make an even simpler written version for young children to work around.

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## 2. Three Wishing Cells

Three travellers arrive at an enchanted castle. A witch explains that, if they go down into the dungeons and brave the damp and the stench, they can enter what seem to be cells. But if they say out loud what they wish to find there, they will find that very thing.

The first goes down into the dungeons, braves the dark and damp and foul smells and enters a cell, loudly saying 'Gold!' He finds the room full of gold and becomes rich.

The second follows him and finds a different cell and enters it, pushing aside all thoughts of the unpleasant sights and stinks and proclaiming 'Jewels!' He finds a room glistening with diamonds and rubies and pearls.

The third, who never really listens to anyone for long, still has a rough idea of what he has to do. He goes down into the dungeons which are now even darker and damper and more smelly, opens a cell door and, forgetting himself completely, says 'Poo!' Inside the cell he finds – a small stuffed bear wearing a red jumper.

**Note:** A lot of children already know a version of this one, with or without the final double joke. There is also the quite similar one where the witch (or fairy etc.) has them go down a slide into a pool, which will turn into whatever liquid they would most like. The first says whisky and is soon splashing about and having a great time. The second says beer and he's soon having fun too. The third, who didn't listen and doesn't understand what is going on, is just excited by seeing the others enjoying themselves and goes down the slide shouting, 'Weeeeeee!.. An interesting exercise is to compare notes on the different settings etc. (castles/ palaces/slides/ diving boards/ witches/fairies/wizards etc.) children know for these 2 jokes and others like them and to find the central plots, motifs and themes.

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### 3. The Three Wizards

Three wizards went to the Chief of Many Lands. 'We are the greatest wizards in all your lands,' they explained. 'Each of us has particular magical skills. You should employ all three of us at your court.'

The Chief shook his head. 'Three wonder workers is too many for me. I require only one. Which of you can read my mind and tell me what I want now?'

'It is very hot,' said the first wizard. 'You require the comfort of shade in these dry and dusty lands and I shall give it to you.' And he threw down a seed upon the ground, which at once grew and became a tree, making thick dappled shade to cool the chief.

The chief smiled, clapped lazily and lay back on the portable, leopard-skin covered divan on which his servants carried him. 'Very good! But now my desires have changed. Can you again satisfy them?'

The second wizard said, 'Yes indeed, your majesty. You are both hungry and thirsty.' And he threw a handful of dust over the tree and said a strange word. At once the branches were laden down with juicy fruits and the leaves were

dripping with clear, fresh morning dew even though the sun was high in the sky. The servants picked the fruit and gave it to the chief, who himself reached up and picked some of the leaves and sucked the liquid from them. 'Good... and better than good!' he said, beaming broadly. 'But now I am again thinking differently. What do I need now?'

'This!' exclaimed the third wizard. Before anyone could stop him, he'd taken a small but very sharp axe from his robe and had hurled it into the air, saying an even stranger word. The axe came down and chop! chop! chop! – the tree was gone, cut up into pieces so small that they blew away with the dust of the plains. The axe itself vanished and the third wizard bowed. 'Your majesty mistrusted the tree. After he had left it, this tree might shelter his enemies. Therefore I destroyed it. And now you have seen what we are each able to do, which one of us will you choose?'

The chief furrowed his brow and began to ponder. Which one should he choose or what should he do?

*based on a West African dilemma tale. Version © Imaginary Journeys 2007*

**Note:** This may be less instantly recognizable as a three wishes pattern, since there are no genies or fairies or witches and since the wizards offer their skills, which we assume can be repeatedly used in different ways. It is interesting to compare it with the final story in this set, *The Wish Fish*, also a dilemma tale. The pattern in this tale is very flexible and it's fun to make new tales about the 3 wizards (or similar figures) doing different things but still following the typical skill illustrated in the tale – the first of them creating something very practical in the 'real world' (trees/shade), the second building on the work of the first creatively (producing fruits and water) and the third destructive/politically aware. Indeed in African oral tradition, there are various comparable stories of three (sometimes two) wizards, each with rather different methods and principles.

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#### **4. For Better or Worse**

This boy goes to a very strict boarding school and his teacher is decidedly nasty. All pupils have to do horrible tasks whenever they so much as blink at the wrong time – scrubbing out the toilets, shovelling up unmentionable stuff and licking the head teacher's shoes clean after he has hiked through the neighbouring cow-pat covered fields.

Anyway, one day the boy is given, as a punishment, sprucing up the dark and dismal – and very scary – cellars of the school all by himself. Suddenly, as he is polishing an old bucket, a strange and ghostly figure appears out of nowhere. Of course he is very frightened, until the apparition says: 'I am the Spirit of Good School Times. Since you have summoned me, you may command me. Three things I can do to make your life at this school better!'

The boy thinks for a moment and then he says, 'Please could you make the school dinners ten times better, the school rules ten times kinder and my teacher twenty times nicer.'

'Your wish is my command,' says the ghost using the time-honoured formula of all such wish-granting beings. And then it disappears. The boy can hardly believe that he has not been dreaming, so to be on the safe side and keep out of further trouble, he finishes his chores before going back up the stone staircase to the dining hall to have dinner – which turns out to be a green sludge stew followed by stale biscuits and sour custard. 'Right!' screams a demon-headed dinner lady as the meal ends, cracking a whip over the children's heads. 'You know the school rules! All get down on your knees and no one goes out to play until every crumb you have dropped has been sucked up from the floor!' As he is finally leaving the dining hall, an ogre with one eye, black teeth and the stench of stale fish clinging to him bellows, 'All right you! You're not out of trouble yet! No play for you! Get back in our classroom and do 20 pages of hard sums and then write me a 10 page story!'

The boy smiles happily as he sets about this task. 'Wow!' he says to himself. 'Those wishes really worked!'

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**Note:** This joke is told in a version suitable for older children, though there are some much more adult versions - one of them is included in the second CD in the *Powerful Stories* double CD set from Uncommon Knowledge, available through Imaginary Journeys (UK/IJ1). The punch line is a little subtle and may need time. There are many ways to re-cast this joke and it's useful to contrast the way it uses the classic 3 Wishes pattern with other tales such as *The King's Beard*.

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## 5. The Black Rose

About fifty or sixty years ago, so the story goes, a young plant scientist working at the Royal Horticultural Society's gardens at Wisley in Surrey was researching the problem of the growing of a perfectly black rose. This was an age-old conundrum with which many great gardeners had grappled, but he had an unusual angle he wanted to explore. Colours, he reasoned, are not 'out there'; they are really part of the way human beings experience light waves, part of our minds. Perhaps there were ways of changing minds, altering the way people saw things.

With this in mind, he had trawled through many old books of lore and legend, works written in secret by people who claimed to be alchemists and workers of miracles, ancient texts from India and China, recipes for witches' potions and all sorts more, writings in which weird superstitions and old wives tales were mixed up with what seemed to be almost science. At last he discovered what he thought might be the answer in some ancient papyrus manuscripts a friend had brought back from Egypt before the war. He had carefully learned to translate the odd and rather rare hieroglyphs with the help on an Egyptologist. To begin with, it seemed just more hocus pocus, but as he studied it further and made all sorts of calculations and experiments, it seemed more and more possible. It did involve the making of a certain potion with precisely measured-out ingredients, which

made some sense from the point-of-view of plant biology, though the potion didn't seem to work by itself when he tried it. The extra bit, according to the text, involved fasting and chanting and reciting various bits of assorted nonsense for several hours. Meanwhile you would stir the pot a set number of times whilst visualizing very hard the result you wanted. After all that, you would have the force to change the way in which people saw colours within a certain range. This would follow the age-old, well established Rule of Three: three changes would be possible, but no more than three.

Now the young man was curious about all this. Of course chanting and reciting were hardly the sorts of things he'd be expected to do as a scientist, so he decided to stay on when everyone left in the evening, working in his makeshift laboratory/workshop near the greenhouses through the night and into the early morning. The manuscript said that these were the best times anyway. Feeling rather foolish to begin with, but determined not to be put off, he started his chanting and reciting around midnight, meanwhile mixing and stirring the potion and trying to picture the roses turned to black as clearly as he could. Several times, he almost dozed off at his work, but somehow he managed to stay awake and keep to the task and, by dawn, the dark, treacly mixture had been stirred exactly the right number of times with the right number of repetitions of each bit of mumbo jumbo. Still a little doubtful, he wearily picked up the cooling pot by its warm handle and made for the roses he had ear-marked for his experiment.

Now the instructions had warned against using too much of the potion, so he dabbed on a little of it around the petals and sepals of several flowers and waited. Nothing happened so he added a little more. Again nothing happened so he added more, then more, then more still. It was very disappointing – though very much as the sensible, scientific part of him would have expected. Not the slightest sign of an effect. Suddenly losing his temper, he hurled the rest of the foul brew onto the flower beds and stomped off sulkily to clear up the mess he'd left behind in the workshop. Half an hour later, thinking perhaps there'd be some cleaning to do around the greenhouses where he'd angrily hurled the slimy dark

concoction. Of course, it was then that he saw the blooms, black as coal, all around him. Perfect black roses dark as midnight, not a hint of blue or red or purple, just pure jet. His heart leapt with delight. Success! Until he looked beyond the roses, until he realized, until he searched here and there through all the greenhouses and the flower beds and all through the gardens. Then he knew that every single flower in sight was black. No other shades in sight. The magic he had made (because of course that's what it was) was much more powerful than he could have imagined. And much more disastrous.

There and then he would have to undo what he had done, get rid of all this black somehow. After all the recipe had allowed for more than one colour change. Concentrating hard, he began to chant again, focusing all his thoughts on draining away the black, sucking it out and channelling it away. Mentally he was stirring the pot again... and amazingly it worked. He opened his eyes to see in front of him the darkness leeching out of the petals of a rose bit by bit to leave... well, a strange bleached-out specimen, a curious looking flower that hardly seemed real at all, like a sketch made with weak light on thin air. Just as the black had been, this strangely neutral, almost ghostly look was repeated all around, all through the greenhouses and gardens. Another disaster! Very soon it would be no secret too, since the gardeners and the other workers would soon be starting their day's work. There was not much time.

He sat very still and concentrated very hard, thinking of all the flowers just the way they should be, the whole marvellous rainbow of tones a person could notice in a great garden. He thought about the way the light would vary each shade endlessly, about how one colour would mingle with another, how some were rich and dark and mysterious and others were light and airy and golden. He considered how each flower was different too... and surprising... and...

They found him dozing there in a hidden corner of the greenhouse at around 8.45 a.m. – which was certainly late enough by the garden's standards. 'Come

on now, wake up sunshine!' says one the gardeners. 'Can't have you dozing in here. We'll have the public coming in soon enough.'

Drowsily he got up. The garden looked the same as it ever did - the same and yet very different now to him. Every colour he saw seemed remarkable and very special, even though there was not a trace of pure unmixed black anywhere to be seen. Nor has there been since.

The young man is now an old one and tells his story sometimes. He became a leading expert on colour in plants, but never again tried to make a black rose.

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**Note:** This story is the classic 3 wishes pattern in a more modern disguise. The story can seem far-fetched and improbable on the page, but can even convince adult audiences when told orally, with the right amount of elaboration and plausible detail, plus a little 'scientific' reference – which of course needs to be trimmed down appropriately when the tale is told to older children. Readers may like to compare the tale with the following story.

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## **6. The Queen's Palace**

In a far off eastern land many centuries ago, there lived a great queen so the legend goes, a queen who had her subjects build her a magnificent palace. It was made from marble white as milk, embossed with pure gold in regular patterns that shimmered up and down each wall. Diamonds sparkled in gleaming patterns on painted panels here and there and everywhere. In the magnificent gardens, silvery fountains played and peacocks strutted and golden fishes swam in rich blue pools, whilst rainbows of flowers offered up their heady scents and bees buzzed and small birds sang melodiously. The palace was considered by many to be a foretaste of paradise upon this earth.

What was more, in the courtyards of this palace, all the wise philosophers of the land would discourse and all the great poets would recite and all the best musicians would play their finest music. Books containing all the knowledge then in the world lined the walls of her library. Fine embroideries hung from the walls, costly carpets covered the floors and each box and table and bench and screen was a marvel of the decorators' arts. All the greatest inventions of the day were contained in special rooms within the palace and there was always a welcome for those bringing new discoveries and new knowledge.

Amid all this beauty and luxury and wonder and learning, the queen was unmoved and less than happy. She was ambitious, proud and also knowledgeable. She knew that there were, at that time, many other monarchs in the world and that many of them flaunted their wealth as she did in palaces that might be just as fine as her own. She secretly wanted her own palace to be considered better than any other in the world and resented the thought that travellers might arrive in her lands with tales of greater wealth. Because of this, she lived in a state of secret worry and fear that made her always restless.

This queen also had storytellers who told her the legends of wishing, such as the great tale of the *The King's Magnificent Beard* and many other such magical yarns. From this she had formed her own ideas about how to cheat any giver of wishes into giving her greater power than should be given to any mortal being. And once she had formed this scheme in her mind, she naturally became more and more interested in putting her ideas to the test.

She sent her servants and messengers out around her realm and beyond, in search of wise men and wizards, enchantresses and mystics, all for one purpose, which was the finding of one amongst them who understood the granting of the 3 wishes of which so many legends were told. At last an old woman was found, a doggedly wise lady who refused to be called a witch or a mistress of spells or anything of the sort. She it was who explained that the queen needed to revise her ideas. 'Your majesty,' she insisted, 'the stories of wishes have to be

interpreted. No magical being pops out and gives you exactly what you want. It's a question of the real desire of your heart.' She gave the queen an ordinary-looking little ring and explained that she should wear it and look at it as often as she could, bringing to mind her heart's desire as clearly as she could. But she warned, 'It works three times for any one person, just as in the legends – though you will need to be patient for it may take time. But still, three times and no more. No wish can give you god-like powers and no one can cheat this rule to get everything they could possibly want.'

'Of course,' said the queen, smiling to herself cunningly as she slipped the ring onto her finger. She could hardly wait. She began to think as much as she could of what she wanted, but nothing happened. Not for a whole day, nor for a whole week, not for a whole month. Still the queen went on trying, until one night as she sat in her room staring at the ring by candlelight and picturing as clearly as she could what she most desired in all the world, trying to touch it in her imagination, in a strange and magical instant she knew that something had shifted. There was no explosion, no smoke, no flash of bright and amazing light, nothing of that sort, only a feeling of knowing that it was working, that the thing she had wished for was coming into being then and there. A palace finer than any that ever had been or could be, a fabulous palace containing every kind of marvel and wonder known and unknown to man and woman, an infinite palace of endless joys and discoveries in which she would never age a minute, a palace she alone would rule – this was the creation with which she would beat the foolish wishing limits and live in perfect pleasure and power. This was what her heart's desires had indeed created.

Soon enough this queen was off and away and into that palace, which seemed to grow out of and extend the old palace that had once been such a marvel, though now it appeared to her to have been little more than a hovel. Along vast corridors paved with rubies and pearls and draped with cloth soft and delicate as the wings of angels she went, opening doors of solid gold to reveal delightful surprise and extraordinary wonder after delightful surprise and extraordinary

wonder. Were it possible to write down a tenth of what she saw and felt and experienced in those incredible rooms, it would fill a hundred large volumes each containing a million and more words. Perhaps it is possible in imagination to taste some of those tastiest tastes, to smell some of those subtle aromas, to hear some of that sweet music or to wonder at the brightness and power of the colours and the shapes and the patterns, though however imaginative a person might be, it is hard to create more than a pale shadow of the paradise the queen found herself exploring. From room to room she went, along corridor after corridor, finding new joy and fascinating new discoveries wherever she looked.

Whole days went by, whole weeks and months and perhaps even years, but the queen aged not at all. Whenever she felt hungry, fine foods would appear as if from nowhere, always new, always delicious. Whenever she felt that she might be bored, new entertainments would present themselves or new fascinations or new perspectives. Whenever she felt tired, beds softer than the finest down floated her through the sweetest of dreams. Whatever clothes she might wish to wear would appear all ready for the wearing. Indeed she soon put aside the formal royal clothes that had been expected of her at the old palace and dressed in the most unusual costumes she could think of – fabulous creations made of feathers and silks and furs and smothered with jewels of every description, parading herself in front of silver framed mirrors and loving what she saw with fierce pride. All this was her own creation, forged through the desires of her own heart.

And yet that heart was growing heavier within her. And yet there was something missing. The queen was so bound up in all that she was seeing and hearing and tasting and smelling that it took a very long time to notice this feeling growing inside, this weight tugging her down. Until it burst forth one day as a feeling of unexpected and devastating sorrow and the bitter tears coursed down her face, smudging the fantastic stage make-up her fancy had applied that day. It was a feeling hard to put a name to and even harder to believe in when she did: loneliness. She was desperately and incredibly lonely, she suddenly knew

that. There were people in all of the rooms of this fantastic palace, bowing and smiling and offering her this or that or whatever, different people with each room, handsome people, beautiful people. There were minions who would do whatever she said, entertainers who could enchant her imagination, singers and instrumentalists who could inspire and bewitch with silky, sinuous sounds, courtiers to flatter her and tell her she was wonderful, but in all the throng that surrounded her, there were no real friends, no one in whom she could confide, no one who understood her as a living, breathing human being. She had sealed herself into her own myth.

Recalling with difficulty that she still had the power to command, she dismissed the people who surrounded her. As they went, she had the strange feeling that they were in any case no more than empty phantoms. She found herself wishing with all her heart that she could see beyond them and the trap she had made for herself to something more sincere. Quite suddenly, the fabulous palace vanished and she found herself in the midst of a barren wilderness, with a rocky, dusty track winding away into the distance. She staggered along this track, for what seemed hours, tripping and stumbling and feeling increasingly desperate and abandoned. The strange and fantastic clothes she wore were soon torn and dusty and her face was stained with tears and smudged make-up. And then at last she saw a small village, clinging to the side of a rocky hill. When she reached it and found the ragged peasants who lived there, she announced haughtily, 'I am your queen! You must do as I say!'

'Yes, of course your majesty,' said the peasants. But she knew at once they were only humouring her, that they didn't believe her at all, this ragged, strangely painted mad woman arriving from the wild lands. However, they treated her kindly and with respect, offering her food and drink and rest and comfort. It was all very plain fare compared to what she had been used to - coarse peasant bread and cheese, cold spring water, rough sheets to lie on and untutored peasant talk with none of the fine phrases of the court. Yet she felt oddly much more nourished by it than all the grand banquets and courtly rhetoric.

The queen stayed with those peasants for months, getting to know each one of them and indeed becoming accepted as one of them herself. During the first weeks, she would intend every day to set off down the track to seek her own city and courtiers who might recognize her and treat her as what she was in truth, but as time went by her life as a queen seemed little more than a remote dream and she almost forgot about it. The life she lived now was a hard one and the villagers worked long hours simply to survive. Slowly she learned to make herself useful. Slowly she learned to enjoy the simple unsophisticated pleasures – the joys of company, exchanging gossip, telling old tales round the fire and singing old songs. But from the beginning, what she enjoyed most was the warmth and simple friendliness of these people. They were scarcely saints, but they told you what they thought when they reckoned you needed to hear it and that was something very new. And they also seemed to care about her, which was even better.

But then there came a terrible drought. Week after week there was no rain. The crops failed, the animals began to die and everyone starved, growing weaker by the day. The queen herself was quite unused to this kind of hardship and became feeble more quickly than the villagers, with scarcely the strength to stir from the straw mattress on which she slept each night. She felt that she would soon die, but before she did so she wanted with all her being to do something to help these poor people who had taken her in, expecting nothing in return. Curiously she had forgotten all about the ring upon her finger and the power of wishing until the very moment that this thought became clear in her mind. Looking at it now, she realized she had the power there, on her own hand and within herself, to escape all this and return to the palace from which this adventure had begun all those years before. Yet she put this thought aside and concentrated hard on the idea of rain and plenty for the village. It took a lot of effort, the very last reserves she had in fact. With what seemed her final breath, she uttered the words out loud: 'Save this village and all the people and the lands and the animals. Bring them health and happiness!' And then she sank

back. The very last sounds she heard were the crack of thunder and the first large drops of rain. Then she drifted into shadowy darkness.

Opening her eyes again after floating for what seemed like centuries, she thought for a moment she had gone to heaven, so bright and beautiful were the sights around her. But as she grew used to the light, she made out a scene that was somehow very familiar and finally recognized her own beautiful rooms in the original palace. Standing in front of her was the wise old woman who had explained the wishes and given her the ring. 'Well your majesty, how were your wishes?' the old woman asked with a twinkling smile.

The queen blinked and shook herself and then, thanking the old woman with all her heart, slipped the ring off her finger and handed it back. Later, she discovered that only three minutes had passed since she put it on, though she could never quite believe that fully. From that day on she never ceased to wonder at the marvels in her own palace and to use the treasures and the knowledge within it to benefit all of the people of her lands.

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**Note:** Although this tale is written here in a way that is intended to engage more mature readers, it can be adapted to suit almost any age. Note that the basic pattern of the tale is as simple as that of the first story, *The King's Beard* and is more or less the same. A lot of use is made in this telling of list technique, as described in *Yarn Spinning*, Book 3 of the *Natural Storytellers* series. Indeed one of the ways this and other stories in this series can be made to engage different audiences in oral telling is changing the lists to suit age, taste etc. For example, young children are less interested in treasures and knowledge than in unusual toys; they will happily contribute ideas about what they would reckon to be rooms in the palace filled with the best foods or the strangest costumes. This story also introduces another motif that is found in many traditional tales, that of the extraordinary, life-changing dream/fantasy that seems to last for years yet only takes a few moments of external time.

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## 7. The Wishes and the Greedy Boy

A greedy boy helped an old lady across a road. In return, she explained that she was not quite as she seemed and was really a fairy. To reward him for his kindness, she would give him three wishes.

Now the boy wasn't sure he really believed her but, since he was always very hungry, he asked for food, as much of it as he could get – chips and burghers and pizzas and ice cream and cake and all sorts more. 'Stop, stop, stop!' commanded the old woman. 'One thing at a time. What would you like first?'

'Umm... a pizza!' shouted the boy. And then after a pause, 'With lots of extra cheese and olives and pepperoni... please!'

The old woman produced from nowhere a small, rainbow-coloured sack. 'Reach inside this bag and you will see what you will see.'

The boy did... and he lifted out a steaming, tasty looking pizza, all ready to go in a cardboard take-away box. The boy tore it open and began to cram pieces into his mouth and munch away furiously. 'No need to hurry,' says the fairy (which of course is what she truly was), 'plenty more where that came from. This is a magic food bag. You can simply think of a dish and reach inside it and there will be your meal, all just as you like it.'

'Really?' says the boy. 'Oh thanks, that's really cool. Let me have another try now... Ice cream with a chocolate sauce.' He reaches into the bag and takes out a silver dish piled with different flavours of ice cream and smothered with thick, oozy chocolate sauce.

'Box of chocs for my mum... Curry !... Chinese!... Burgher!... Salad!...' Whatever he said, there it was until there was a whole banquet spread around him. 'Amazing! That's really really great!'

'This bag will never be empty,' says the fairy proudly. You can use it over and over again... and you can just put your leftovers and dirty dishes back into it and they'll be done with.... And that's just your first wish. Now, what would you like for your second and your third wishes.'

The boy looks up dreamily from his incredible feast and mumbles through his latest mouthful, 'Two more bags like this one, please!'

*Widespread joke. Version © Imaginary Journeys 2007*

**Note:** A version suitable for children of a joke made popular by the late Dave Allen giving an interesting take on the 3 wishes idea – the first wish seems so perfect that the wisher can imagine nothing better. This idea can be used creatively in all sorts of different settings, not necessarily as a joke.

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## **8. The Fisherman & the Genie**

There was once a fisherman named Khalifa who lived on the furthest shores of Arabia. Each day he would go and cast his nets. Some days he'd catch a lot and some days a little.

On the particular day of this tale, he was having no luck at all. Casting his net for a last time, he prayed to Allah to bring him at least something. He pulled in the net but the only thing in it was an old bottle. Curious about what might be inside it, he pulled the stopper out. At once there was a flash and a bang and a puff of coloured smoke and an enormous genie appeared.

Now there are good genies and bad genies. Maybe with any genie, it depends whether you catch them in the right mood. Anyway, this one was an evil creature, sealed into the bottle by King Solomon himself a thousand and more

years before. Instead of offering wishes and all the things he could have granted, he immediately announced that he was going to kill the fisherman.

Khalifa tried to hide his terror and said that if he must die he must. But, by way of a last wish, couldn't he just know how such a huge being could fit into a small bottle. It didn't seem possible.

The genie was flattered by the way he asked and glad of the chance to show off his magic after all those years. He puffed himself up until he was huge, and then shrank so that he was as tiny as a pebble. Then he jumped into the bottle. Quickly, Khalifa corked it up tightly. He was about to throw it back into the sea when the genie began to beg to be let out. It promised to grant as many wishes as Khalifa might wish. It could bring him gold and palaces, princesses and crowns, power and fame, anything at all.

Storytellers tell this story differently from this point. Some say this and some say that. Some say he threw the bottle back into the sea, some say he took his chance and opened it up to get the wishes, some say he kept it and did this or that. If you were that fisherman, what would you have done?

*Adapted from The Thousand and One Nights. Version © Imaginary Journeys 1999 & 2007*

**Note:** This well-known plot has many forms in world traditions. Sometimes it might be a farmer who traps the devil in a bag, sometimes it could a wife with a wicked fairy in a box, but one way or another, the 'power' is tricked back into the bottle/net/bag/box etc. and the fisherman/farmer/wife etc. is presented with the same choice: keep the genie in the bottle or let it out or.... The story is told as a dilemma tale here, though in the many variants of the story from different traditions, the fisherman figures often do make choices, perhaps throwing the bottle back into the sea (or whatever equivalent), perhaps letting the genie (etc.) out, perhaps even going in search of a wise genie specialist to tell him what he should do for the best. The dilemma presentation is good for introducing and discussing the wishes theme, whilst the story is also easy to transpose to different settings, ancient or modern, as explored in Book 4 of the Imaginary Journeys *Natural Storytellers series, New Lamps for Old in the Genie in the Bottle* game. With a little ingenuity, a version of this story makes a good frame for a three wishes tale.

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## **9. The Princess's Hair.**

There was once a spoilt princess, who had become very used to having her own way. Her father was the king, after all; hence all she had to do was to stamp her little foot and pout and the king would order his servants to bring for her whatever she wanted. Whether it was jelly and ice cream for breakfast or a new pony to match her latest colour scheme in designer riding clothes, she had it. Otherwise her father felt the full power of her most spiteful of sulks.

Now this princess was very proud of the golden hair that rippled and flowed down her back, all the way down to her knees. Each day, her maids would brush it out with gold-backed brushes and tie fine pink and silver ribbons in it and tell her how beautiful she looked. Each day she would stare at her own pretty little face in the mirror and admire the way the way her beautiful hair shone and glowed like a halo around it. Each day she would impatiently look at that hair to see how much longer it had grown. For this princess had an ambition and this was that her hair should grow right down until it touched the floor.

One day as she gazed admiringly at herself in the mirror, she suddenly thought to herself, 'Why should I wait?' And then she thought a bit more and she said to herself, 'I should not have to wait.' And after that she sobbed aloud, 'It's not fair! Making me wait.'

Well the long and the short of it was that she ended up as usual in front of her father the king, reproaching him and waving an accusing finger. 'It's all your fault daddy,' she screeched at him. 'You should have helped me before!'

'What is my fault,' the king protested innocently.

'My hair of course! Why doesn't it touch the floor yet?'

The king tried to explain that he couldn't command hair to grow, but she was having none of that. Soon she had slammed the door and gone off in a major sulk to her bedroom. Bullied as he always was by his daughter's behaviour, the king called in the court magician and told him to make a wishing spell for the princess. 'As soon as you can, please,' he added. 'I don't want her in one of her dreadful moods all day.'

The wizard went off to his magical workshop and blew the dust from weighty, leather-bound tomes filled with spells. The three wishes spell, he soon recalled, would take at least three days, even if he had all of the ingredients he needed, which he did not. However, there was a spell for a one-wish mirror, which should do the job nicely.

'Your majesty,' the wizard explained as he handed over the hastily enchanted looking glass that evening, 'your daughter may look into this and wish once only. To protect her from using her wish without enough thought, she will have to compose a little rhyme. For example, if she wanted to be fairest of them all, she would put the mirror on the wall to make the rhyme and say: *Magic mirror on the wall, Make me the fairest of them all!*'

'I see,' said the king. 'Of course she doesn't want that because she already is the fairest of all, but I get the principle.' He thought his daughter truly was beautiful and clever, you see. Anyway, he rewarded the magician with the customary bag of gold and took the mirror up to his daughter, who emerged from her room, her face swollen and red from crying. When she heard how the mirror worked, she snatched it away and slammed the door in her father's face. She could hardly wait.

It did take a little time to work out where to put the mirror – she had never been much good at rhymes or indeed at anything else that needed a little thought or imagination. She knew that she wanted her hair to touch the floor, so she could see that the window and the bed and the ceiling and the table were all no

good. At last, after holding it up here there and all around the room, she realized that she could hang it on the door. As soon as it was there, she gazed proudly at herself long and hard in the glass, once again marvelling at the glorious hair that bushed down her back and tickled her knees. With the bossy, demanding she always used to scold the servants or call for extra helpings of dinner, she recited the spell she had eventually worked out:

*'Mirror, mirror on the door  
Make my hair touch the floor!'*

It worked! There was a loud bang and a puff of smoke and an instant later, her hair touched the floor – because her legs fell off.

*Joke. Adaptation & setting © Rob Parkinson 1990 & 2007*

Note: This joke pattern looks a little cruel on the page, but works well with older children given the right amount of elaboration. There is only one wish, as is supposed to be the case in *The Fisherman & the Wish Fish* below, with which tale this one makes a useful contrast. The plot can be adapted in all sorts of ways – some adults may recall a rather rude version of the joke for example. New versions created from this one don't have to be jokes, incidentally.

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## **10. The Fisherman & the Wish Fish**

In a far of land in a far off time, a fisherman caught a talking fish. 'Let me go,' the fish advised him, 'and you can ask me to grant one wish!'

'What!' protested the fisherman, who had heard many tales of wish fishes, though he'd never met one before. 'Isn't it supposed to be three wishes?'

'Dear me, no,' says the fish, 'you've been listening to too many fishermen's tales. Now, come along, tell me what you want?'

'Well, let me think...' The fisherman was a shrewd fellow and he'd pondered this one before. 'A lot of ideas come to mind of course but I don't know which one to choose... I know that wishing for endless wishes is cheating and ruins everything, so I'll not try that one... And I also know that whatever a man wishes for, it never turns out quite as he imagines.... Hmm, well since I am not versed in such things, I'd really want to ask your advice first.'

'Very good!' said the fish. 'That's almost wise. Most people reckon they know straight away and that's where they go wrong. But I can't advise you about what's in your own mind, only show you.'

'How do you mean?'

'Half-wise fisherman who wants to be wiser, I shall give you a wishing dream. You can dream your way through three of your own stray notions and see where they will lead you. After that you must make the real choice. So tell me now fisherman, what is the first idea that comes into your mind when wishes are offered?'

The fisherman smiled greedily. 'Oh that's easy. What does any poor fisherman think of each day, casting his nets into these seas? Hidden riches, that's what. Beneath the waters of the ocean, as everyone knows, there are many treasures in sunken ships and flooded cities. That I should wish to own all of those treasures, that's what my first notion was?'

No sooner had the words left his lips than there was a strange rushing sound. On all sides, the sea was belching up chests and sacks and golden vases filled with pearls, until stacked high around him were riches that would have made King Croesus look like a beggar. But then came another sound, a thumping, thundering sound that the fisherman eventually recognized as the beat of the hooves of many horses, galloping at full tilt down the track that led to the sea shore. On their backs were desperate looking riders waving swords and spears

and knives. As they arrived at the treasure mound, they leapt from their horses and began to seize sacks and boxes and all sorts for themselves. Soon fights broke out amongst them as to who should have this or that. When the fisherman protested that the treasure was his, they turned their blades on him and would have killed him. But the fisherman hissed at the fish, 'No, not this one!'

The scene faded and the fisherman found himself alone with the fish again. 'Did you learn anything from that?' the fish asked with a sly fishy grin.

'Treasures attract envy and bring troubles, though I thought I knew that already. All the stories tell you it – you lose the treasures unless of course you have the power to protect them. I'm a poor fisherman with no power. Even my wife and my children never do as I say. I've often wondered what it would be like to to command...'

Suddenly all was changed. The fisherman was no longer on the shore, he was in a lofty palace on a golden throne, wearing a crown and a gorgeous robe. A respectful minister led him from the throne to a balcony, where he waved to a cheering throng. Returning to his throne, he felt elated and proud and larger than he had ever felt in his life before. Now the minister, again very humbly and with head bowed, inquired, 'Are you ready for me to read them to you now, your majesty.'

'Read what?'

'Why, the petitions and entreaties from all your loyal subjects gathered in the square outside, of course your majesty.'

'Of course,' echoed the fisherman-king, feeling much more uncertain than he sounded. 'Do begin at once.'

And the minister did begin... and then he went on... and then on, and then on again. This person wanted that, that group demanded this, these powerful merchants required those laws to be passed, those beggars requested that these things should be done, the finance officers and bankers believed that this strategy was the correct one, the priests had some quite different and vitally important ideas.... At length the minister paused, since the king's attention seemed to have wandered. 'Would your majesty care to make the decisions now or would you like a little time to think. Or then again, perhaps we should tell the soldiers to drive them all away at the point of a bayonet and rule by the sword as your late father did...' He peered earnestly at his monarch, awaiting a firm response, but the fisherman felt even more confused than he had been when thinking about wishes and he wanted to scream out that he didn't know and wasn't even sure that he cared. Instead he simply said, 'Not this one!' again and found himself alone with the wish fish on the seashore again.

'Did you enjoy that?' the fish said, with a twinkle in its fishy eye.

'Not much,' the fisherman confessed, 'apart from the cheering of course. I liked that bit. But I didn't know what to say to any of those questions and petitions. I'm just a fisherman, not a king. I don't have the background – nor the knowledge... I wonder what it's like to have knowledge, to really know everything there is to know....'

This time, the scene didn't change, not exactly – although in other ways, it changed completely. The sea was still there, but it was not just the sea it was all sorts of other things too, waves and ripples and troughs and channels and currents, each with its own meaning and purpose and pattern. The shingle beneath his feet was still there, but each pebble beneath his feet was crying out with a different voice and telling its story, whilst all the fossils in the rocks around him were fascinatingly filled with their own legends and the seagulls above his head seemed to be bundles of extraordinary flying discovery. Wherever he looked, there were more and more exciting things to be learned and understood

and taken in... and then replaced by more exciting and incredible and wonderful understandings, and more and more, until he realized that everything he'd always taken for granted was an extraordinary marvel to which he'd been blind, that the whole world was a book of incredible knowledge to be read by anyone who could read in the right way. And yet at the same time he also knew that he couldn't hope to hold on to more than a tiny fragment of the wonders whirling before his eyes. His mind simply was not big enough and he heard himself say to the fish, 'Not this one!' and once again found himself looking at a wish fish on the edge of an ordinary ocean, lapped by ordinary waves.

'Now,' said the fish severely, 'that is all I am able to show you and the wishing-dream is over. You must choose your actual wish and let me go.'

The fisherman still hesitated, because he knew that even after all this he didn't know and, if anything, was now even more confused. In fact, since he afterwards never told anyone what he did do and only told his story as far as that point, there are storytellers who insist that he simply turned away and left the fish, deciding that wishing could bring him no good at all and that he'd best get on with his life as before. But it's more likely that he did make a choice, perhaps choosing riches modest enough to hide away or power he could understand and use, or perhaps even knowledge and understanding that he could hold on to and that would be useful for him in his own life. The question is, therefore, how should this story end?

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**Note:** Another traditional-style dilemma presentation of the 3 wishes using the device of the magic fish, which recurs in folklore, most famously in *The Fisherman and his Wife* from Grimm's. Like *The Queen's Palace*, it brings out some of the dimensions in the 3 Wishes plot that could appeal to more mature (or maturing) minds. As with that story, it can still be told to quite young children in a suitably adapted oral form. Indeed, some six and seven year olds, for example, can be extraordinary perceptive about the fisherman's dilemma, suggesting that the story way of educating young minds about life and its possibilities really needs to be re-explored more fully – something that may be unlikely to happen whilst stories are considered either mere entertainments or targets to be 'achieved' and ticked off on a list.

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## Working with Wishes Plots

'Be careful of what you want because you may well get it!' - this old saying more or less summarises many traditional wishes plots, including the majority of the stories given above. Two well known versions of the 3 wishes plot not given here but mentioned in the introduction are *The Sausage*, a Swedish folktale and the horror classic by W.W.Jacobs, *The Monkey's Paw*. These two very different stories have quite a lot in common with the pattern given here in *The King's Beard*, *The Queen's Palace* and *The Black Rose* (which, incidentally, is the same as the pattern of a rather indecent story from *The Thousand and One Nights*.) Reduced to the kind of story frame explained in *New Lamps for Old*, Book 4 of the *Natural Storytellers* series, this is:-

1. *Someone gets three wishes*
2. *The first wish is used to satisfy a desire without much real thought.*
3. *The wish is granted but the wisher realizes that the result is not what he or she really wants – or can stand.*
4. *The wisher uses the second wish to change that result but, when it is granted, the wisher is unhappy with this result also.*
5. *The wisher uses the third wish to go back to normal.*

This frame, with the example of the stories in the set and any other wishes stories known, can be used to guide the making of new tales. Each stage can be fleshed out, perhaps by imagining it through and discussing it, perhaps by using questioning games from *Yarn Spinning*, No 3 in the *Natural Storytellers* series (for example, No 1. *Embroidery*). Fairly obvious questions come up at each of the stages anyway. For example, at Stage 1, who gets the wishes and how do they get them? Is it the traditional genie or fairy or magic ring or something or someone rather different? At Stage 2, why does the wisher wish so unwisely? Is it

because he or she has some very strong desire (as in *The King's Beard*, *The Queen's Palace* or *The Black Rose*)? If so, can this be flagged up in the opening part of the story, before the wishing theme is introduced (as in *The Queen's Palace* or the extended CD version of *The King's Beard*) or is there another way of doing this? Going through the stages of the frame and thinking coming up with as many questions about each of them as possible helps the story to grow.

Another way of making the tale stretch is by developing interesting and imaginative lists of the effects of any one wish, so that they become very vivid for the listener or reader. This is done in *The Queen's Palace* and *The Fisherman and the Wish Fish* for example. Games around list technique and the Rule of Three in *Yarn Spinning* can be very helpful here.

Some frames for variant patterns in the set above that can also be used to make new wishing stories are:-

As in *The 3 Wizards and 3 Wishing Cells*

1. Scenario for 3 wishers of wish granters (king or chief and wizards; witch and travellers).
2. The first spectacular wish.
3. The second spectacular wish.
4. The third spectacular or ludicrous wish that a) in the joke versions, goes wrong because the wisher ignores the instructions and gets carried away or b) in more serious versions, undoes the work of the first 2 wishes or wish granters.)
5. (Optional) Presentation of a question about the story characters and what they should (or should have) done.

As in *The Greedy's Boy's Wishes*, *The Princess's Hair* and various other jokes, both clean and rude:

1. *Someone gets the chance to make three wishes.*
2. *He/she wishes and either*
  - a) *The granting of the first wish is so marvellous to him/her that the next 2 wishes are wasted*
  - or b) *The wishes are all given instantly, but he/she/we are made to realize the silly/nasty etc. consequences in a punchline. (This is done with just one wish in *The Princess's Hair* in the set and is perhaps the most common version in rude jokes around the pattern.)*

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