

The Three Wishes

ENGLAND



A poor woodcutter set out one fine morning to cut firewood to sell at the market. "Wish me luck, dear wife," he said, "that I might find some fallen tree in the king's forest. Only the fallen wood is free to poor peasants like ourselves."

As he marched into the forest with his sharp ax over his shoulder, he eyed the trees right and left. All were upright and healthy. Others had come before and scoured the ground of branches. "I'll get some wood by hook or by crook," he muttered. Finally, he stopped in front of a great oak tree. Leafy branches crowned its huge trunk, "Now here is a tree worth its weight in gold!" exclaimed the woodcutter. "I will make a fortune cutting it down for market!"

As he swung his ax high over his shoulder, a tree fairy appeared before him and said, "Stop! Spare this tree, for it has lived longer than you. Respect your elders!"

"But this tree is worth a great amount of money!" protested the woodcutter. "I am tired of laboring so hard, traveling to find broken branches to sell. This is good, hard wood, and I mean to make use of it!"

The fairy threw her arms around the tree and said, "If you give me your word that you will not cut down this ancient tree, I will grant you three wishes."

The woodcutter put down the ax and considered the proposal. "Three wishes?" he mused, thinking about vast wealth.

"If you promise that you will never cut down an old tree, the three wishes

will be yours," said the fairy.

"Very well," the woodcutter said. "A promise is a promise. I agree never to cut down an old tree. Besides, I will have no further need to cut wood. I will wish for wealth enough to retire!"

In a twinkling, the woodcutter's ax disappeared, and the fairy vanished. By these signs, the woodcutter knew that the fairy would grant his wishes. He ran home to tell his good wife.

Red-faced and panting, he burst in through the door. "Wife! Wife!" he cried. "We are rich beyond our wildest dreams!"

The wife blinked in disbelief. "How is it that you left this morning despairing of our poverty and you return tonight exclaiming our wealth?"

"I spared a tree in the king's forest," the woodcutter explained, "and a tree fairy said she would grant me three wishes for my kindness!"

"Then think carefully," said the good wife with glee.

"Well then," said the woodcutter, "I might wish for a fine house with a garden."

"Fool!" said the wife. "Think bigger! Wish for a palace!"

"What good is a palace without gold enough to maintain it with servants, cooks, and stable boys?" said the woodcutter. "I must wish for a bag of gold."

"You are not thinking big enough, Husband! Why wish for a bag of gold when you could have a cartload of it?"

"And a fine horse to pull the cart!" the woodcutter exclaimed.

"Don't waste your wishes!" cried the woman. "You could have a herd of horses!"

"All this thinking," said the woodcutter, "is making me very hungry. I wish we had some sausage."

In a blink, a huge chain of sausages fell into the middle of the room. "Oh no!" screeched the wife. "You've wasted a wish! What a fool you are. You could have had anything, and you think about your stomach!"

Unable to stand the tirade of his wife, the woodcutter said, "Oh, I wish those sausages were stuck to your nose!"

In as little time as it takes to tell it, the sausages stuck fast to the wife's

nose. Horrified, the couple tried to pull them off. The harder they pulled, the tighter they stuck. The wife fell to the floor sobbing so miserably that her husband said, "Well, I suppose there's nothing to do but to wish the sausages were off."

In a blink, the sausages were on a plate on the table. The woodcutter and his wife could do nothing but laugh at their own folly. Nothing good ever comes from arguing, they agreed. "At least we have a fine supper," the woodcutter said. And never a finer supper was shared.