

## The Best Wish

by Sir George Webbe Dasent  
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Once on a time there were three brothers; I don't quite know how it happened, but each of them had got the right to wish one thing, whatever he chose. So the two elder were not long a-thinking; they wished that every time they put their hands in their pockets they might pull out a piece of money; for, said they:

'The man who has as much money as he wishes for is always sure to get on in the world.'

But the youngest wished something better still. He wished that every woman he saw might fall in love with him as soon as she saw him; and you shall soon hear how far better this was than gold and goods.

So, when they had all wished their wishes, the two elder were for setting out to see the world; and Boots, their youngest brother, asked if he mightn't go along with them; but they wouldn't hear of such a thing.

'Wherever we go', they said, 'we shall be treated as counts and kings; but you, you starveling wretch, who haven't a penny, and never will have one, who do you think will care a bit about you?'

'Well, but in spite of that, I'd like to go with you', said Boots; 'perhaps a dainty bit may fall to my share too off the plates of such high and mighty lords.'

At last, after begging and praying, he got leave to go with them, if he would be their servant, else they wouldn't hear of it.

So, when they had gone a day or so, they came to an inn, where the two who had the money alighted, and called for fish and flesh, and fowl, and brandy and mead, and everything that was good; but Boots, poor fellow, had to look after their luggage and all that belonged to the two great people. Now, as he went to and fro outside, and loitered about in the inn-yard, the innkeeper's wife looked out of window and saw the servant of the gentlemen upstairs; and, all at once, she thought

she had never set eyes on such a handsome chap. So she stared and stared, and the longer she looked the handsomer he seemed.

'Why what, by the Deil's skin and bones, is it that you are standing there gaping at out of the window?' said her husband. 'I think 'twould be better if you just looked how the sucking pig is getting on, instead of hanging out of window in that way. Don't you know what grand folk we have in the house to-day?'

'Oh!' said his old dame, 'I don't care a farthing about such a pack of rubbish; if they don't like it they may lump it, and be off; but just do come and look at this lad out in the yard; so handsome a fellow I never saw in all my born days; and, if you'll do as I wish, we'll ask him to step in and treat him a little, for, poor lad, he seems to have a hard fight of it.'

'Have you lost the little brains you had, Goody?' said the husband, whose eyes glistened with rage; 'into the kitchen with you, and mind the fire; but don't stand there glowering after strange men.'

So the wife had nothing left for it but to go into the kitchen, and look after the cooking; as for the lad outside, she couldn't get leave to ask him in, or to treat him either; but just as she was about spitting the pig in the kitchen, she made an excuse for running out into the yard, and then and there she gave Boots a pair of scissors, of such a kind that they cut of themselves out of the air the loveliest clothes any one ever saw, silk and satin, and all that was fine.

'This you shall have because you are so handsome,' said the innkeeper's wife.

So when the two elder brothers had crammed themselves with roast and boiled, they wished to be off again, and Boots had to stand behind their carriage, and be their servant; and so they travelled a good way, till they came to another inn. There the two brothers again alighted and went indoors, but Boots, who had no money, they wouldn't have inside with them; no, he must wait outside and watch the luggage. 'And mind', they said, 'if any one asks whose servant you are, say we are two foreign Princes.'

But the same thing happened now as happened before; while Boots stood hanging about out in the yard, the innkeeper's wife came to the

window and saw him, and she too fell in love with him, just like the first innkeeper's wife; and there she stood and stared, for she thought she could never have her fill of looking at him. Then her husband came running through the room with something the two Princes had ordered.

'Don't stand there staring like a cow at a barn-door, but take this into the kitchen, and look after your fish-kettle, Goody', said the man; 'don't you see what grand people we have in the house to-day?'

'I don't care a farthing for such a pack of rubbish', said the wife; 'if they don't like what they get they may lump it, and eat what they brought with them. But just do come here, and see what you shall see! Such a handsome fellow as walks here, out in the yard, I never saw in all my born days. Shan't we ask him in and treat him a little; he looks as if he needed it, poor chap?' and then she went on:

'Such a love! such a love!'

'You never had much wit, and the little you had is clean gone, I can see', said the man, who was much more angry than the first innkeeper, and chased his wife back, neck and crop, into the kitchen.

'Into the kitchen with you, and don't stand glowering after lads', he said.

So she had to go in and mind her fish-kettle, and she dared not treat Boots, for she was afraid of her old man; but as she stood there making up the fire, she made an excuse for running out into the yard, and then and there she gave Boots a table-cloth, which was such that it covered itself with the best dishes you could think of, as soon as it was spread out.

'This you shall have', she said, 'because you're so handsome.'

So when the two brothers had eaten and drank of all that was in the house, and had paid the bill in hard cash, they set off again, and Boots stood up behind their carriage. But when they had gone so far that they grew hungry again, they turned into a third inn, and called for the best and dearest they could think of.

'For', said they, 'we are two kings on our travels, and as for our money, it grows like grass.'

Well, when the innkeeper heard that, there was such a roasting, and baking, and boiling; why! you might smell the dinner at the next neighbour's house, though it wasn't so very near; and the innkeeper was at his wits' end to find all he wished to put before the two kings. But Boots, he had to stand outside here too, and look after the things in the carriage.

So it was the same story over again. The innkeeper's wife came to the window and peeped out, and there she saw the servant standing by the carriage. Such a handsome chap she had never set eyes on before; so she looked and looked, and the more she stared the handsomer he seemed to the innkeeper's wife. Then out came the innkeeper, scampering through the room, with some dainty which the travelling kings had ordered, and he wasn't very soft-tongued when he saw his old dame standing and glowering out of the window.

'Don't you know better than to stand gaping and staring there, when we have such great folk in the house', he said; 'back into the kitchen with you this minute, to your custards.'

'Well! well!' she said, 'as for them, I don't care a pin. If they can't wait till the custards are baked, they may go without--that's all. But do, pray, come here, and you'll see such a lovely lad standing out here in the yard. Why I never saw such a pretty fellow in my life. Shan't we ask him in now, and treat him a little, for he looks as if it would do him good. Oh! what a darling! What a darling!'

'A wanton gadabout you've been all your days, and so you are still', said her husband, who was in such a rage he scarce knew which leg to stand on; 'but if you don't be off to your custards this minute, I'll soon find out how to make you stir your stumps; see if I don't.'

So the wife had off to her custards as fast as she could, for she knew that her husband would stand no nonsense; but as she stood there over the fire she stole out into the yard, and gave Boots a tap.

'If you only turn this tap', she said; 'you'll get the finest drink of whatever kind you choose, both mead, and wine, and brandy; and this you shall have because you are so handsome.'

So when the two brothers had eaten and drunk all they could, they started from the inn, and Boots stood up behind again as their servant, and thus they drove far and wide, till they came to a king's palace. There the two elder gave themselves out for two emperor's sons, and as they had plenty of money, and were so fine that their clothes shone again ever so far off, they were well treated. They had rooms in the palace, and the king couldn't tell how to make enough of them. But Boots, who went about in the same rags he stood in when he left home, and who had never a penny in his pocket, he was taken up by the king's guard, and put across to an island, whither they used to row over all the beggars and rogues that came to the palace. This the king had ordered, because he wouldn't have the mirth at the palace spoilt by those dirty blackguards; and thither, too, only just as much food as would keep body and soul together was sent over everyday. Now Boots' brothers saw very well that the guard was rowing him over to the island, but they were glad to be rid of him, and didn't pay the least heed to him.

But when Boots got over there, he just pulled out his scissors and began to snip and cut in the air; so the scissors cut out the finest clothes any one would wish to see; silk and satin both, and all the beggars on the island were soon dressed far finer than the king and all his guests in the palace. After that, Boots pulled out his table-cloth, and spread it out, and so they got food too, the poor beggars. Such a feast had never been seen at the king's palace, as was served that day at the Beggars' Isle.

'Thirsty, too, I'll be bound you all are', said Boots, and out with his tap, gave it a turn, and so the beggars got all a drop to drink; and such ale and mead the king himself had never tasted in all his life.

So, next morning, when those who were to bring the beggars their food on the island, came rowing over with the scrapings of the porridge-pots and cheese-parings--that was what the poor wretches had--the beggars wouldn't so much as taste them, and the king's men fell to wondering what it could mean; but they wondered much more when they got a good look at the beggars, for they were so fine the guard thought they must be Emperors or Popes at least, and that they must have rowed to a wrong island; but when they looked better about them, they saw they were come to the old place.

Then they soon found out it must be he whom they had rowed out the day before who had brought the beggars on the island all this state and bravery; and as soon as they got back to the palace, they were not slow to tell how the man, whom they had rowed over the day before, had dressed out all the beggars so fine and grand that precious things fell from their clothes.

'And as for the porridge and cheese we took, they wouldn't even taste them, so proud have they got', they said.

One of them, too, had smelt out that the lad had a pair of scissors which he cut out the clothes with.

'When he only snips with those scissors up in the air he snips and cuts out nothing but silk and satin', said he.

So, when the Princess heard that, she had neither peace nor rest till she saw the lad and his scissors that cut out silk and satin from the air; such a pair was worth having, she thought, for with its help she would soon get all the finery she wished for. Well, she begged the king so long and hard, he was forced to send a messenger for the lad who owned the scissors; and when he came to the palace, the Princess asked him if it were true that he had such and such a pair of scissors, and if he would sell it to her. Yes, it was all true he had such a pair, said Boots, but sell it he wouldn't; and with that he took the scissors out of his pocket, and snipped and snipped with them in the air till strips of silk and satin flew all about him.

'Nay, but you must sell me these scissors', said the Princess. 'You may ask what you please for them, but have them I must.'

No! Such a pair of scissors he wouldn't sell at any price, for he could never get such a pair again; and while they stood and haggled for the scissors, the Princess had time to look better at Boots, and she too thought with the innkeepers' wives that she had never seen such a handsome fellow before. So she began to bargain for the scissors over again, and begged and prayed Boots to let her have them; he might ask many, many hundred dollars for them, 'twas all the same to her, so she got them.

'No! sell them I won't', said Boots; 'but all the same, if I can get leave to sleep one night on the floor of the Princess' bedroom, close by the

door, I'll give her the scissors. I'll do her no harm, but if she's afraid, she may have two men to watch inside the room.'

Yes! the Princess was glad enough to give him leave, for she was ready to grant him anything if she only got the scissors. So Boots lay on the floor inside the Princess' bedroom that night, and two men stood watch there too; but the Princess didn't get much rest after all; for when she ought to have been asleep, she must open her eyes to look at Boots, and so it went on the whole night. If she shut her eyes for a minute, she peeped out at him again the next, such a handsome fellow he seemed to her to be.

Next morning Boots was rowed over to the Beggars' isle again; but when they came with the porridge scrapings and cheese parings from the palace, there was no one who would taste them that day either, and so those who brought the food were more astonished than ever. But one of those who brought the food contrived to smell out that the lad who had owned the scissors owned also a table-cloth, which he only needed to spread out, and it was covered with all the good things he could wish for. So when he got back to the palace, he wasn't long before he said:

'Such hot joints and such custards I never saw the like of in the king's palace.'

And when the Princess heard that, she told it to the king, and begged and prayed so long, that he was forced to send a messenger out to the island to fetch the lad who owned the table-cloth; and so Boots came back to the palace. The Princess must and would have the cloth of him, and offered him gold and green woods for it, but Boots wouldn't sell it at any price.

'But if I may have leave to lie on the bench by the Princess' bed- side to-night, she shall have the cloth; but if she's afraid, she is welcome to set four men to watch inside the room.'

Yes! the Princess agreed to this, so Boots lay down on the bench by the bed-side, and the four men watched; but if the Princess hadn't much sleep the night before, she had much less this, for she could scarce get a wink of sleep; there she lay wide awake looking at the lovely lad the whole night through, and after all, the night seemed too short.

Next morning Boots was rowed off again to the Beggars' island, though sorely against the Princess' will, so happy was she to be near him; but it was past praying for; to the island he must go, and there was an end of it. But when those who brought the food to the beggars came with the porridge scrapings and cheese parings, there wasn't one of them who would even look at what the king sent, and those who brought it didn't wonder either; though they all thought it strange that none of them were thirsty. But just then, one of the king's guard smelled out that the lad who had owned the scissors and the table-cloth had a tap besides, which, if one only turned it a little, gave out the rarest drink, both ale, and mead, and wine. So when he came back to the palace, he couldn't keep his mouth shut this time any more than before; he went about telling high and low about the tap, and how easy it was to draw all sorts of drink out of it.

'And as for that mead and ale, I've never tasted the like of them in the king's palace; honey and syrup are nothing to them for sweetness.'

So when the Princess heard that, she was all for getting the tap, and was nothing loath to strike a bargain with the owner either. So she went again to the king, and begged him to send a messenger to the Beggars' Isle after the lad who had owned the scissors and cloth, for now he had another thing worth having, she said; and when the king heard it was a tap, that was good to give the best ale and wine any one could drink, when one gave it a turn, he wasn't long in sending the messenger, I should think.

So when Boots came up to the palace, the Princess asked whether it were true he had a tap which could do such and such things? 'Yes! he had such a tap in his waistcoat pocket', said Boots; but when the Princess wished with all her might to buy it, Boots said, as he had said twice before, he wouldn't sell it, even if the Princess bade half the kingdom for it.

'But all the same', said Boots; 'if I may have leave to sleep on the Princess' bed to-night, outside the quilt, she shall have my tap. I'll not do her any harm; but, if she's afraid, she may set eight men to watch in her room.'

'Oh, no!' said the Princess, 'there was no need of that, she knew him now so well'; and so Boots lay outside the Princess' bed that night. But



if she hadn't slept much the two nights before, she had less sleep that night; for she couldn't shut her eyes the livelong night, but lay and looked at Boots, who lay alongside her outside the quilt.

So, when she got up in the morning, and they were going to row Boots back to the island, she begged them to hold hard a little bit; and in she ran to the king, and begged him so prettily to let her have Boots for a husband, she was so fond of him, and, unless she had him, she did not care to live.

'Well, well!' said the king, 'you shall have him if you must; for he who has such things is just as rich as you are.'

So Boots got the Princess and half the kingdom--the other half he was to have when the king died; and so everything went smooth and well; but as for his brothers, who had always been so bad to him, he packed them off to the Beggars' island.

'There', said Boots, 'perhaps they may find out which is best off, the man who has his pockets full of money, or the man whom all women fall in love with.'

Nor, to tell you the truth, do I think it would help them much to wander about upon the Beggars' island pulling pieces of money out of their pockets; and so, if Boots hasn't taken them off the island, there they are still walking about to this very day, eating cheese-parings and the scrapings of the porridge-pots.