

Three Wishes for a Dollar

I want to tell you a story. I want you to tell it to everybody you know. But first, I want to describe in detail the main character of the story so that when you see him, and you will, you will know who he or she is.

When I met him he was about seventy years old. He wears a threadbare three piece gray suit with a yellowish white shirt and a red bow tie. He is bent over some. He wears no jewelry of any kind. No watch, no pen in his pocket. His shoes are brown lace and they are quite worn. He has a hat that is something like an old black and white movie. His teeth are dirty. His mouth is not straight across. I only caught a glimpse of his smiling once. His smile was crooked as you would expect. His clothes have a few stains on them that appear to have been there for a long time. Regardless where you meet him, no matter what age he is when you do meet him, or even if he is a woman when you meet one thing will be the same. His eyes are like no eyes you have ever seen. He wears sunglasses but you occasionally will catch a glimpse of his eyes. They are red. Not bloodshot, although that's what I first thought. Or sick from some eye infection. The whites of his eyes are mainly red and the pupil, and here is the real difference you need to watch for... they are red. Not black, or brown, or green or any other color but dark red.

He fits right into this shabby New York City neighborhood that we are walking in. My girlfriend Lanna is with me and we are both lamenting how life has been unfair and our bad luck. The man is holding a sign. It says, "Three Wishes for a Dollar".

I got fired this morning for coming in late again. Lanna is on unemployment but it is about to run out. Neither one of us finished high school. We are behind on the rent. Tonight we will have to sneak in by the fire escape to avoid the landlord. We're headed over to where Lanna's mom works as a waitress. She can get us some free food for lunch if we hang around the kitchen.

I reach in my pocket and feel a dollar there. A single dollar bill. I stop in front of the old man if no other reason than I've never seen this kind of panhandling before. "Can you do both of us for a dollar?" I ask.

"Why yes....." he replies as he stops... "I can".

I hand him the dollar. He slips into his vest pocket there I can see a lot of other one dollar bills sticking out. What's your first wish?"

Lanna spoke up. "We'd like to lose twenty five pounds each".

"Ok" the old man said. "No problem. Now close your eyes and count to five". I am laughing but I see Lanna's eyes closing as I do mine. The only thing I noticed that was odd was that it was completely silent when my eyes were closed. Not a single sound on a busy New York City street.

When we opened our eyes Lanna looked at me and yelled "Holy Shit! I can't believe it. She looked at herself and had the same thing to say." We each weighed at least twenty five pounds less.

The old man spoke, "I made it thirty pounds to give you a little extra break. Your height I raised three inches. That is more stylish now. Also, I put some new designer clothes on you and gave each of you a new Rolex. The suntans I threw in at the last moment." As we looked we saw the watches with their diamonds glittering in the sunlight.

He leaned over towards Lanna and quietly said, "I removed the tattoo with that boy's name that has been bothering you so much also." Lanna turned red instantly and responded, "How did you know about that?"

I didn't know about a guy's name tattooed on Lanna but noticed that Lanna was very shy physically and now it made sense.

He whispered to Lanna again, "I enhanced your figure a bit too."

"Is this for real?" I exclaimed.

In calm voice the old man said, "Oh yes. It's for real. Absolutely real. Remember you have two more wishes. By the way, I fixed that problem with your right knee that your hurt playing baseball as when you were ten years old".

Lanna quickly shouted, "I wish for us to have ten million dollars each!" She looked at me and said "is that OK?"

I replied, "I don't know what kind of magic show this is but yes, ten million dollars each would be a fine wish."

"Close your eyes and count to five".

Again I noticed the complete silence while our eyes were closed. When we opened them I said, "Hey... nothing is different!" I feel the same. Lanna said "me too".

"Look in your purse and your jacket pocket" the old man said.

Inside Lanna's purse and inside my coat pocket were unopened letters from "Goldman Sack's Private Banking" whoever that is. It was a statement of account that had our names, social security numbers and date of births on them. The account balance for each was exactly ten million dollars.

"Hey" I said "are you some kind of a street magician? Are we being filmed?"

"No."

"Are you some kind of a crook or something?"

"I'm as honest as any Angel. I am probably the only Angel you will ever meet."

"You're as honest as an Angel? What kind of BS is that? What would an Angel be doing panhandling on this street?"

"I made a mistake".

"A mistake? You are an Angel and you are on this street because you made a mistake"

"Yes" he said quietly without emotion.

Lanna spoke, "What about our third wish? We have one more right?"

"Yes" he said

"Well I thought about it and I want to be a fancy brilliant doctor"

The old man turned to me, "And you?"

Caught up in the spirit of the moment I said "I'll be a rich Wall Street lawyer."

"Close your eyes and count to five"

Again there was that perfect silence.

When we opened our eyes Lanna yelled at him, "There's nothing different about me!"

"Lanna, do you know how to connect a 3 mm vein into a 5mm vein if it's located right under a person's liver?"

There was a pause..... Lanna exclaimed, "My Gosh, I do. I've done it fifty times."

"What about the people you went to medical school with at John Hopkins? Do you remember their names and faces?"

"I do! I do! I practice at a hospital here."

"How about you?" he asked as he turned to me. "What are the fifteen parameters of government bonds regarding default by earthquake?"

"Oh my gosh! I know them. I know all fifteen!"

The old man asked something in a foreign language,

"What's that he said?" asked Lanna.

"Its perfect Japanese without a hint of accent" I answered.

"But you don't know Japanese!"

"I do now".

The old man spoke, "He knows Japanese and also Portuguese don't you?" "Remember graduation day at Harvard law?"

I thoughtfully responded, "Yes. I do remember that. I speak three languages."

"Reach in your pockets"

We both did. We each had three keys that looked alike. He spoke, "One to your Fifth Ave Apartment with the view of Central park. One to your condo in Aspen."

"What's the third key?" Lanna asked.

"Twin Jaguar convertibles".

"Hey! What the hell is going on here?" I demanded.

"Only what I told you. Three wishes for a dollar. You each got your three wishes, I got the dollar. I added some things on and really gave you two for the price of one. People say I'm dishonest but that's not true. I am one of the most honest creatures that have ever been. Those like me can't lie."

"What about buying three more wishes?" asked Lanna? I was surprised at her question.

"Oh sure. You can buy more wishes any time you want. However the price goes up and up and up."

"How high are you talking?" I asked.

“Higher than you can possibly imagine. Your wishes will get bigger too. Fame, youth, sex, power, and the list will go on and on as the price goes up and up.”

He started to turn to walk away. Lanna asked “how will we find you?”

“Here is my card” he said as he pulled two cards out of his pocket. I instantly noticed there was no phone number, or email or fax. It was a red card that only said “Wishes”. Then he said, “Sometimes I don’t look the same, but you’ll know who I am.”

“There’s no phone on this card” I said.

“Once you’ve met me I will be around. When you want me badly enough, I’ll be there. Actually I’m everywhere almost all the time. From this day forward I will always know exactly where you each are.

“You can grant us any wish?” I asked

“No. I never said that! There is one wish I can’t grant you even if I could”

“What?” asked Lanna?

“It is an old law. It goes back to my mistake I told you about. The only mistake I ever made. Before that I was number three.”

“What was the mistake?” I asked.

“I stole something” he answered.

“What did you steal?” Lanna asked.

“It was pride. That was my mistake. He made a law that I could go and do whatever I wanted except there was one gift I could never give. As I told you far from what history says I am an honest creature. I want you both to know honestly that if I could grant you that one wish I would not. Well... I must be going.”

“Couldn’t you return what you stole?”

“You see, that’s the real issue. I don’t want to.”

He turned and started walking away. I had his card in my hand. “What’s the one wish you won’t or can’t grant?” I asked.

“I printed it on the back of the card as a sort of a full disclosure act. I’ll be seeing you two again I wager.” With that he kept on walking down the street. He dragged his right foot a little bit. His right shoulder was a little lower from being forced I think to carry something heavy. I

caught a quick side glimpse of his eyes as he turned and that is when I saw the red that I told you about in the first part of this story.

He went around the corner holding that sign, “Three Wishes for a Dollar” and was gone.

We were dumbfounded. We were looking at ourselves and each other. Our new bodies, our clothes, our jewelry, the keys, we even spoke differently. After a bit I flipped his card over to see what he had on the back that was the one wish he was prohibited from granting, but would not have granted if he could. I was wondering what that mystery might be.

What I saw was a single word that scared me as much as any human being can ever be scared. I was as scared as if I were standing right in front of an oncoming train, as scared as if a criminal had a gun to my head or a knife to my throat. I was as scared as if I was suspended from a mountain by a rope that was unraveling and I was about to fall. I was as scared as if a pack of wolves were surrounding me ready to pounce and tear my flesh apart.

It was the sum total of the fear of every man and woman who has ever lived.

The word was **“Salvation”**.

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