

Wishing

T.R. Nunes

No harm ever came from a little wishing... Right?

I stared at the silver blade as I turned it slowly in my hands.

Occasionally the light from the corner lamp would catch on the bright metal, or along the edge of the razor-sharp blade, reflecting a flash of light back against my eyes. I knew what I needed to do, felt it in my rotting guts, felt it as a bitter cold shiver down my spine.

Still, I continued to turn the blade, losing myself in the bright flashes of light as my eyesight began to blur around the edges ... somehow causing me to remember back, far, far back ... to the first time I could ever remember

Wishing ...

The ball was beautiful.

Perfectly smooth plastic that felt soft to the touch, but that you knew would bounce better than any other ball. The outside of the ball was equally perfect, with patterns of red, white and blue going all the way around. As perfect as that ball was, it had one flaw. One horrible flaw.

It was my sister's.

Mom had given it to her that day, after buying it at the store. It was one of those balls that lived in the store cages, that my little five year old fingers would reach out to touch as my mother and I walked by, only to have my little hand slapped away. I was only five, but I'd wanted one of those balls, one of those pretty toy balls, for as long as I could remember.

Now it sat closer to me than ever before, and also further away, in the hands of my sister, sitting there on the grass before me, knowing I wanted what she held, yet refusing to share.

There was a moment, in my young rage, where, for an instant, I actually contemplated the unthinkable. I thought about going inside, getting a knife from the kitchen, and stabbing and destroying what my sister had, what I wanted.

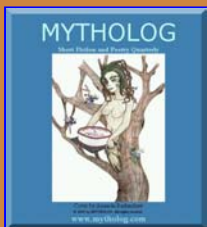
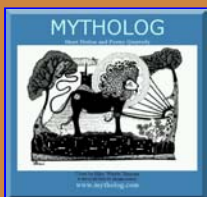
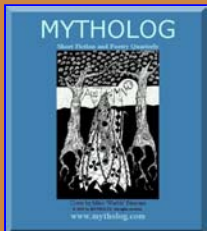
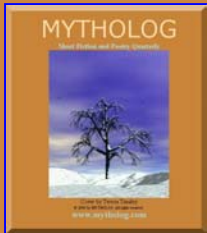
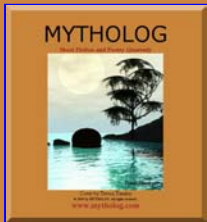
I didn't do it, though. Instead, I simply wished.

I wanted it, couldn't have it, so I wished she didn't have it either.

Which is when it happened. Maybe there was a flaw in the ball, or maybe my sister rolled it over a sharp stone or something. All I know is that the ball suddenly began to deflate, to lose its usefulness. It was no longer pretty or bounceable. It was just a deflated, useless hunk of colored plastic.

As my sister cried, I sat, no longer mad at her. She no longer had the ball.

Years later, I found myself out of college, stuck in a dead-end job and buried in bills, when my best friend from high school called me





completely out of the blue.

"Dude!" came the voice out of the phone receiver, a voice I hadn't heard since ... since the wedding, several years before.

I responded, glad to hear the voice, but also a little unsure. It'd been years, after all. "Wazzup?"

"Nothin' much, you know. Just workin' and shit. How 'bout with you?"

"Ah, you know... Same shit, different day. Still married, of course."

"Yeah..." For a second, I thought I heard a wistful tone, as if he somehow wished he were me... Happily married, without a care in the world. "How's the old ball an' chain doin'?"

I laughed. "Oh, she's fine. You seein' anyone?"

"Naw... just, you know ... workin' and stuff. Hey, you wanna get together? We could grab a few beers some time, share our war stories, what we've been up to these past few years. Whadda ya think?"

"Yeah, sure," I responded, trying to sound enthusiastic. And yet, I didn't feel enthusiastic. The job sucked. I hadn't done anything with my college degree. And there'd been that fight, just the night before, between my wife and me. Like all our fights, it'd been about something totally stupid, but I didn't want my friend to know. I wanted him to just go on wishing he was me; wishing he had everything he thought I had.

"Yeah, let's do that. Give me a call when you have the time, okay?"

As I hung up the phone, I knew I didn't want to see him. Not now, not with how things were going. Not until things were better, less complicated.

A month or two after that call, another friend called. My buddy was sick, she told me, real sick. I stopped by the hospital a few times to visit, but we never went out. Ever again.

"You just don't understand me!"

I winced at the strident sound of my teenaged son's voice. Of course I didn't understand him. What parents ever understood their teenaged child? What teenagers ever thought their parents understood them, felt what they felt, or understood what they were going through?

"I do understand, though I don't expect you to believe me. I didn't believe my father, and he probably didn't believe *his* father. But you're still not going."

"But why?!? All my friends are going! I'll be the only one in my class, the only one of my friends not there. Just because my dad's an asshole!"

"Now, you listen." I could feel myself losing my temper and knew I should just walk away, but... "I'm your father, and I won't tolerate your talking to me like that. And, as for your 'friends', we both know

that several of them were recently suspended for possession. So they're the last people I'd want a child of mine partying with."

"I'm not a child! When will you realize that?!? In a year or so, I'll be old enough to do whatever I want! And then nothing you say will stop me!!"

With the reverberating sound of my son's slammed bedroom door still hanging in the air, I once again wondered why I'd ever become a parent. I even wished, for one brief moment, with my teenager's curses still ringing in my ears, that I'd never gotten married and never become a father. That I'd never allowed my marriage to fall apart, forcing my wife to run away, leaving me to raise a teenaged son alone.

Then I went upstairs, slammed my own bedroom door, and tried to relax with a good book. I only made it through a few pages before I fell asleep, and had no idea my son had snuck out. At least not until hours later, after being awakened by a loud knock on the door, and finding the policeman with the sad eyes on my doorstep.

The funeral was finally over.

There was a point when I thought it would never end, that Mother Nature herself was mocking me. The sky was piercingly blue, like the picture off a postcard, with one or two perfectly formed clouds to add to its beauty. The air was warm, the sun bright, the grass green, the trees full of leaves. Everywhere I looked seemed filled with life. Everywhere that is, except...

I sat, watching the light flicker from the shiny metal, moving the edge back and forth between numb fingers.

I was wishing again.

My path had been smooth. I had always gotten what I wanted. After all these years, I wished an end.

I pressed down hard, felt the first bitter sting, and swiped deep and fast.

Feeling myself drifting away, I thought I could hear far off laughter.

My one last thought was that whoever (or whatever) it was wouldn't be granting me any more wishes.