

Fish



By Velina Derilova

Unbelievable. Unfathomable even. You catch a fish, but it's not simply a fish. It's the magic fish. She begs you to let her go; she implores. You tell her you won't. And it's a lying fish, too. It's only one wish you can ask for, she says. But you know better. You caught the fish and now you want not one but three wishes fulfilled. She tries to settle for two, but when you threaten to leave her dry to death in the sun, she agrees. Don't ask for money—she warns you—it doesn't bring happiness. A friendly advice, she calls it. She's seen it ruin other men before you, be their demise. *Of demise and men!*, the fish says and laughs with a fish's laughter. You don't think it's funny and you want to get down to business.

Of course you'll ask for money. Money, they say, is the shitty fertilizer which makes flowers grow big and pretty. And you want a huge garden. One with beautiful exotic

flowers people can only find in distant places, if she knows what you mean. You give the fish a little wink just to make sure she does know what you mean. She rolls her eyes. She gets it all right. She's been in the wish business f-o-r-e-v-e-r-r-r.

So you tell the fish you want ten enormous piles of money. You know, the sort of money that will take all your troubles away and for good, too. And you want it in cash; banks are not to be trusted these days. She looks at you with a judgmental look and gives a fish's sigh. Some things never change, she concludes. And then, next thing you know, there's money all around you. Ten hills of dollar bills that even a trained mountaineer would have difficulties climbing.

You're as happy as hell. Your eyes are full of tears and you wish your mamma was alive to see you finally made it. And you made it big. You jump into the green pile of bliss and swim like it's the Olympics. The fish looks at you with her fish's eyes and you can see she's impatient. If she had a fish's watch, she'd be looking at it in frustration. So you get out of the money ocean and you spit out a one-hundred-dollar bill you almost swallowed. What's your second wish, the fish wants to know. She's a busy fish.

You stroke your chin like the wise man that you are and you tell the fish you want her to be your wife. The fish almost laughs her tail off. She hates to be the one to break this down for you but fish and men don't make for good families. And she laughs on. No, no, you tell her; she doesn't get it. She's going to turn into the most beautiful woman in the world and you're going to marry her. The fish is numb and you're afraid she might have swallowed her fish's tongue. A deal is a deal, you tell her and she has nothing else to say to you.

In a moment, you're standing next to the most gorgeous female specimen a man could ever lay his eyes on. The fish is no longer a fish but the stunning woman you're going to marry. Her arms are crossed and she's nervously tapping her right heel on the ground. Come on now, honey, you tell her, don't sulk. I'll be a good husband. I promise. You take her by the hand and you kiss her forehead. You'll make her happy, you say, help her forget her fish's past.

What's your third wish, your wife-to-be wants to know. That's a good question, you observe. I knew I made the right choice with you, you tease. Don't be a smart ass, she snaps. She wants to hear the wish. Since I'm not a selfish guy, you begin, my final wish is not about me. It's about you, my dear, you and our babies. Your fiancé looks at you with her big beautiful eyes and blinks. That's right, you go on. You bet she knows how people get foolish when they have a lot of dough and you don't want your offsprings to fall into the trap of greed. So what's the connection, your soul mate wants to know.

And then you give her the plan. She's going to be immortal. That's right, you say, she's never going to die. So she is going to be always there, watching over your babies, and over their babies and over their babies, too. She looks at you and wants to cry. Why her, she wants to know, why isn't your wish for you to live forever? Life is no life if it has no end. You look deeply into your sweetheart's eyes and tell her why. She is the wish-come-true machine, not you; she'd make for a better immortal. After all, she's been in the wish business f-o-r-e-v-e-r-r-r.